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The Response of Teacher Education to the Syrian Conflict: Teacher Education from Conflict to Peacebuilding and Positive Peace Culture?

By

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DEDICATION

To my late mother, the beacon who enlightens my path all the time, and to my brother, Mudar, whose life was cut short by this ugly war.

To my father, whose love and passion for education always motivated me to keep going.

To my wife Sarah, daughter Emily, my brothers and sisters, Samer, Samar, Rim and Maher, and their families. To all my friends in the UK and Syria; in particular Yamen and Hiba. I owe my gratitude for your love, support and encouragement. Without you, this thesis would have not been possible.

ABSTRACT

Premised on Galtung's (1969) theory of 'positive' peace, this thesis provides an analysis of the Syrian government's post-war peacebuilding initiatives to promote a culture of positive peace, and what role, if any, is attributed to education and teacher education in this process. This examination is underpinned by a theoretical framework that considers forms of indirect violence, drawing on Bridge's (1999) theory of truth, and the concepts of silence and securitisation (Waever, 1995). The thesis draws on critical theory to offer a meta-analysis in order to link constructed themes to wider societal and hegemonic issues. Data is obtained from semi-structured interviews with twelve participants consisting of senior government officials and teacher educators from a public university and the equivalent of pre-service and in-service training centres within a government held area in Syria.

The study demonstrates that the current educational response to the conflict is dominated by fragmented, individual initiatives that are not linked to wider strategies aimed at promoting a culture of 'positive peace'. Research findings reveal that the government's current approach to reconstruction is based on a negative concept of peace as an absence of violence (Galtung, 1969), as reflected in focusing the reconstruction of the education sector on rebuilding its physical aspects and on bringing it back to 'normal' as it was before the conflict. This study also reveals that the role of education and teacher education in 'post-conflict' peacebuilding is jeopardised by current structural efforts to impose polices of silence and securitisation that are implicated in issues of hegemonic reconstruction and future representations of the conflict. The study concludes that it would be naïve to approach the current state of relative peace achieved across major cities as an indication of the conflict moving into a 'post' conflict stage, as it is developing from militarised and direct forms of violence to less visible forms as demonstrated through the application of silence and securitisation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NCCD	National Centre for Curriculum Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Development of the Syrian conflict:

The Syrian conflict is reported to have begun in March 2011 in the South of Syria in the city of Dara'a, where security and Intelligence forces allegedly shot dead demonstrators after arresting a group of children for writing anti-government slogans (Human Rights Watch: 2015). This incident sparked nationwide unrest and demonstrations demanding democratic political reforms. However, these demonstrations quickly escalated to turn into what is known as the Syrian Revolution against President Al Assad, which developed in later stages to an armed conflict across the country.

Although the Syrian conflict is commonly described as a civil war, there is more to this conflict than meets the eye as reflected through the array of external powers that are directly or indirectly involved in the conflict and in the formation of coalitions from the state and non-state actors in addition to various regional and international powers. The involvement of external powers has been fluid, varying from having direct military presence in the country and carrying out military operations independently or in collaboration with government or opposition forces, something which has added to the division of Syria into different regions of power according to the dominance of the newly-formed coalitions. The Syrian conflict is complex and multi-dimensional as it represents an internal conflict on one hand, and a fulcrum of regional and international contestations on the other hand (Khouri, 2018).

1.2 Background to Research:

Education as an arena for political and ideological 'struggle' is not a new topic in academic literature, where it has long been described as part of an 'ideological state apparatus' required to create 'false consciousness' and to ensure the domination of ruling power structures

(Althusser,1970). This ideological role, however, is also perceived as a tool for self and social empowerment where education has the potential to play a fundamental role in enabling individuals to interpret and transform their social realities (Freire, 2005). This ambivalent role of education is evident during violent conflicts, where education is described as having the potential to be either an ideological 'weapon' to legitimise violence or an essential tool for successful peacebuilding and developing a sustainable peace culture. It becomes important when examining a violent conflict, such as the Syrian one, to analyse the role of education in light of its ability to perform one of its 'two faces', either in having a 'socially constructive' or 'destructive' 'impact on intergroup relations' (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000:9).

Examining current academic literature about the Syrian conflict in light of the 'two faces' of education shows that the wealth of studies that currently exist tend to focus more on its 'destructive face' and its application by conflicting parties to justify violence against the 'other, and in contributing to social fragmentation of the country' (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). What remains under-researched is how the role of education in Syria can be transformed from a 'panacea' for 'social ills' to having a 'socially constructive impact' contributing to peacebuilding and developing a positive peace culture (Bush and Saltarelli, ibid). For instance, the social and political fragmentation caused by the conflict is reflected in an education system which has been divided into 'systems' during the conflict as different emerging power structures have adopted different curricula advocating their conflicting ideologies and national identities.

Such a situation raises an important question about the future of education in post-conflict Syria as whoever wins will have to face the challenge of 're-assembling' these opposing systems and addressing its ideological legacies. This question is of vital importance at the present time as the power scale seems to be tilting in favour of the government and its allies, especially after 2018 as their forces have regained control over considerable parts of the

country including main cities and strongholds of the opposition, as demonstrated in the maps below. At the beginning of the conflict, the government lost its complete or partial control all over the country, as demonstrated in the map showing the different areas of control in 2015. The second map shows the change in the country's power scale, where the government and its allies have regained a considerable part of the country. The blue areas of the map are relatively safe in terms of absence of direct violence, and they are referred to in this study as representing a state of 'relative' peace. The map also demonstrates the fluidity of the Syrian conflict as represented by the change of main powers dominating the country, which are currently the government and the Kurdish forces. There are currently no large-scale military operations between the government and the Kurdish forces, something which has contributed to the de-escalation of direct violence in the country.

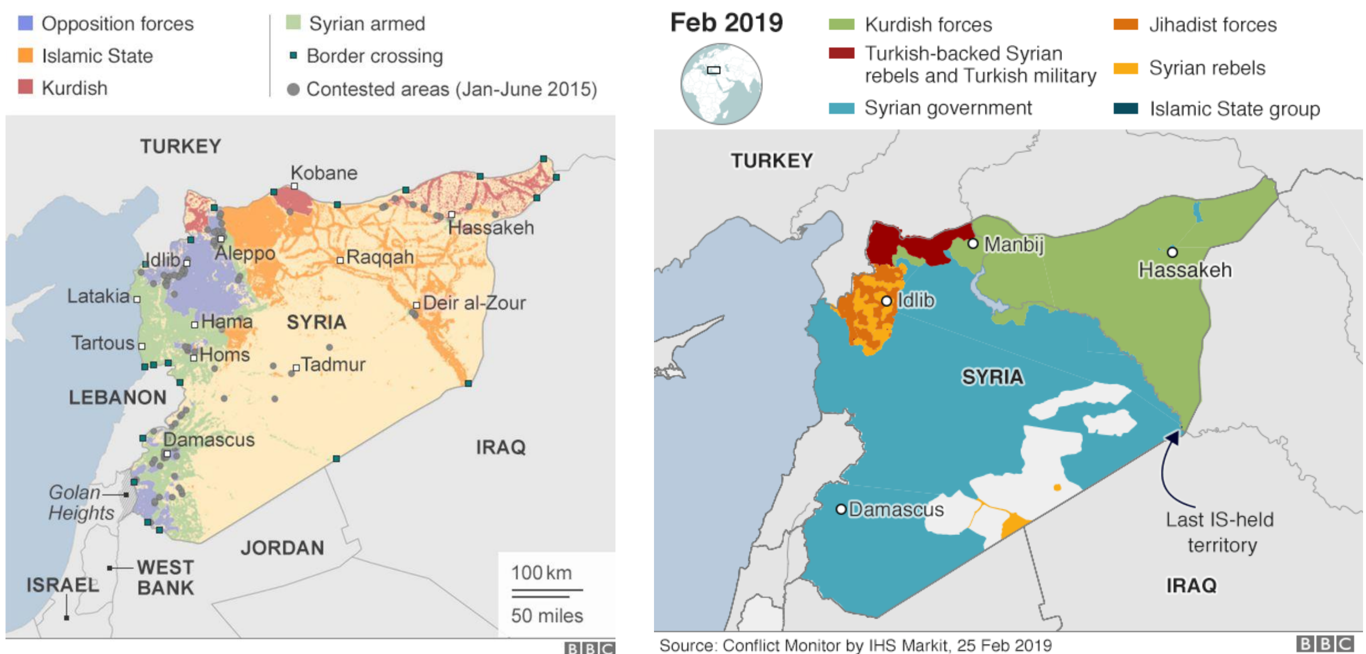

Illustration 1.1 - Syria's Area of Control Maps (Left: July 2015 - Right: February 2019) - BBC

In this study, I am aware that the term 'post-conflict' reconstruction might seem a far-fetched concept particularly in the West, where dominant grand narratives depict a picture of total collapse in Syria to the extent that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to imagine aspects of 'normal life' such as schooling to be functioning there. On the other hand, the Syrian

government presents a contradictory picture of complete 'normalcy' and 'business as usual' with an increasing reference to 'post-conflict reconstruction', as reflected by the Syrian President Bashar Al Assad who states that:

> Reconstruction is the title of the economy for the coming period. We need to concentrate our collective efforts on this area and should work…to restore all other sectors that will be complementary to reconstruction...The reconstruction process and the associated economic recovery should not be linked in timing to the end of the crisis. In fact, the state has already started to create the necessary legislations and regulatory framework that will facilitate and encourage investment in this area (Al Assad, 2014).

This rhetoric of reconstruction is reflected in practice through the government's efforts to bring life back to normal through rebuilding destroyed infrastructure and re-opening schools. For instance, the Ministry of Education (MoE) reported that 4,400,000 students, referred to as *'the Generation of Hope'* (MoE, 2020), attended schools in 2018/19. The Ministry refers on its website to its efforts to prepare what is required to proceed with the educational process, starting from school buildings, textbooks, teaching staff and learning resources in order to achieve 'educational construction' and 'defending the country through education itself' (MoE, ibid).

The political and ideological aspect of reconstruction is also present in the government's narrative, as the President refers to what he calls 'real reconstruction' in reference to the need to rebuild the country's 'destroyed and destructive intellectual structure' (Al Assad, 2019). As a result, Al Assad has emphasised that the biggest challenge in the reconstruction process is not rebuilding the country's physical infrastructure but rather 're-building and reforming the minds' (Al Assad, ibid). However, what needs illuminating is what plans, if any, are in place to deal with this side of reconstruction and if, or how, education and teacher education has responded in order to contribute to this process.

Between these two narratives, I have realised through my regular travel to the country since the conflict began in 2011 (which has always been within government-held areas) and daily telephone contact with my family and friends, the complexity of understanding 'what is going on' in Syria. This complexity comes from the difficulty of limiting the situation in Syria to a simple choice between either complete collapse or normalcy as both 'co-exist' in incomprehensible ways. I have witnessed this on one occasion when joining a busy queue at a local restaurant while watching 'martyrs' convoys' (funerals of soldiers who died in the conflict) passing by and firing celebratory gunshots.

I am also aware of the naivety of approaching the current de-escalation of violence and increasing rhetoric of reconstruction as representing the end of the conflict. However, I also recognise the importance of approaching this state of 'relative peace' as representing a 'window of opportunity' to develop an initial understanding of the government's approach to peacebuilding through examining its current initiatives to reconstruct the education sector. Such an understanding is important as there is little we currently know about the road to peace in Syria, and what current initiatives, if any, are directed towards developing a more 'constructive' role of education in that process. Peace research in Syria, therefore, 'has so much to learn, so much to take, to receive. Perhaps we shall also in due time have some contributions to make' (Galtung, 1990:303).

Contributions, such as the one sought by this study, are of crucial importance because failure to address the long-term legacies of the conflict might leave the country trapped in self-reinforcing cycles of violence and educational disadvantages inhibiting successful post-conflict reconstruction and promoting a sustainable peace culture. It is important to point out that the contributions of this study are not aimed at providing an 'impact' assessment of current government initiatives but rather they are motivated by an urge to 'understand what is going

on' and how the government is translating its rhetoric of 'post-conflict' reconstruction in practice within education and teacher education.

1.3 Scope of Study:

When I started the Doctorate in Education programme, I had a broad interest in examining how education's current role in the development of the Syrian conflict could be transformed into a constructive one directed towards supporting peacebuilding and sustainable peace. Although I have been informed from the beginning of my research journey by critical knowledge that seeks to change the status quo, I have become aware of the difficulty of changing a reality that we cannot 'name', 'divorced from what has been taken for granted' (Mezirow, 1991:2). As a result, the idea of this research has become more about generating a type of 'knowledge for understanding' rather than seeking to change current practices or dominant ideology. However, I acknowledge that the process of generating such knowledge is not an 'impartial' process as it involves feelings, perceptions and understanding, something which cannot be achieved without 'listening to people, interpreting what they are saying, observing what they are doing and trying to understand their actions' (Thomas, 2017:12). Rather than claiming to present an objective account of the situation in Syria, this research aims to 'illuminate' and 'interpret what is going on' within government-held areas regarding current initiatives to reconstruct the education sector.

1.4 Research Problem and Questions:

The research problem in this study stems from understanding post-conflict reconstruction as a process that starts by highlighting those structural efforts that have 'exacerbated' violence between conflicting parties in order to transform the role of education from a socially destructive to a constructive one that positively contributes to the process of peacebuilding. The government's increasing rhetoric on 'post-conflict' reconstruction,

including the rebuilding of the country's 'intellectual' and 'structural' infrastructure, makes it important to examine the role of formal education in shaping individuals' understanding, attitudes and behaviour. The contribution of the study comes from examining whether the government's reconstruction initiatives are linked to long-term peacebuilding strategies and what role, if any, is attributed to education and teacher education in this process. As a result, this research will be based on the following questions:

1. To what extent has teacher education in government-held areas responded to the conflict? What plans, if any, are in place to respond to a post-conflict situation?
2. To what extent are current initiatives to reconstruct the education sector and train teachers linked to a wider process of peacebuilding and promoting a positive peace culture in post-conflict Syria?
3. How are current initiatives linked to the country's wider political, power and hegemonic structures?

1.5 Justification of Research:

Examining the role of education in conflict and post conflict settings is not unique to this study, as academic literature provides a wealth of studies that examine such issues (Pherali and Millican, 2020, Pherali and Magee, 2019). However, each conflict has its unique internal and external factors that affect its development, which in turn means it is fundamental to examine the process of peacebuilding as context specific. As a result, this study aims to contribute to academic literature by locating our understanding of local initiatives to reconstruct the education sector in Syria within their unique political, ideological and cultural context, seeking to examine if these initiatives are integrated with overarching policy frameworks linked to promoting sustainable peace culture and what implications this has for teacher education.

The importance of this research comes from viewing Syria as currently being at a crossroad where current ‘post-conflict’ reconstruction initiatives, including those of education, are going to either lead to a reproduction of the conflict or contribute to a peaceful rebuilding of the country. Consequently, this is a crucial time to raise the question of what is worth fighting for in education (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998), and to examine how or if education can be turned from a contributor to violence into a tool for peace. The underlying principle for this examination is based on the view that if people can learn to accept or apply violence as a means to resolve conflicts, they can also learn peace if involved parties deliberately seek to end peace-destroying initiatives, deconstruct structures of violence and positively contribute to the nurturing of tolerance and disarming history (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

As an educator and a native Syrian, this study is also part of an ‘obligation’ to develop an understanding of ‘what’s going on’, as it will impact upon the future of generations to come. My attachment to the research context is another aspect of this study’s unique contribution which comes from being ‘part of the social world’ I am examining (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:14). This ‘belonging’ to the research context is important as this study is not about ‘some random people’ but rather it is about my family, friends and neighbours. The deaths and lives of those I know and do not know deserve a moment of reflection to ensure their sacrifices do not go in vain. This study is best perceived as only one step of a long and challenging journey, but which is definitely worth embarking on towards contributing to building a peaceful future for all Syrians.

1.6 Research in Practice:

Field work took place in a city within government-held areas by conducting semi-structured interviews with twelve participants who were selected to represent main stakeholders overseeing and implementing educational initiatives: namely, government officials, pre-university learning (school education) and Higher Education. These interviews

took place in the summer of 2018 in addition to follow-up interviews with three of the research participants in the summer of 2019. To inform this study, I interviewed senior government officials in order to develop an understanding of the government's approach to reconstructing the education system and whether this process was linked to wider peacebuilding strategies. I also interviewed teacher educators from both school education and Higher Education sectors as well as a counsellor, with the aim of getting an insight into how education and teacher education responded to the conflict and what role, if any, was attributed to education in the process of promoting sustainable peace.

Although my initial aim was to rely on interviews to generate data, this study was also informed by written documents and textbooks, as some participants preferred sharing documents to discussing interview questions, which I respected as part of my commitment to conducting ethical research and respecting participants' decisions regarding the way they wanted to participate in this study. I used these documents to cross check themes I constructed from analysing interview data, and to provide examples of how these themes are reflected in the educational provision.

In this study, I chose thematic analysis as a conceptual framework to analyse generated data from both interviews and written documents, where I adopted an exploratory approach to code and theme development to ensure I maintained a balance between remaining focused on the purpose of this study and being open to exploring unanticipated concepts. In this process, I assessed constructed themes based on their ability to provide patterned meaning not only about research questions but also about larger societal issues. My aim was to focus on linking the frequency and forcefulness of constructed themes to issues of hegemony, dominant political, social and educational discourses in the research context. I sought to analyse data by examining participants' shared experiences in light of research questions while simultaneously seeking to

link this analysis to ideological and power structures that influenced the process of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

The relationship between academic literature and data was complex and dynamic. In some cases, I started field work with previously examined concepts, such as the concept of truth development, while in other cases I constructed themes that I did not consider before engaging in data analysis. These themes represented a major learning curve in my journey as a researcher, where I developed an understanding of concepts that I did not consider before conducting my research.

In this field, the interruption-resumption model I developed to describe the response of education and teacher education to the conflict represents one of these key learning moments. Also, developing an understanding of the concepts of silence and securitisation as structural forms of violence is another key learning moment, which has made me realise how these concepts are implicated in issues of hegemonic reconstruction and future representations of the conflict. This realisation has led me to conclude that, despite the current state of relative peace, the Syrian conflict is developing into a different form of violence rather than progressing into a 'post-conflict' stage.

1.7 The Researcher and Positionality:

My attachment to the research topic and context makes me feel like I am a surgeon operating on a family member, something which sets my positionality from the very beginning as I acknowledge that I do not claim objectivity or being uninfluenced by my feelings and perspectives. I am aware that I am approaching the research topic from a certain position, so I cannot claim that this study and the actual writing of it to be an 'innocent practice' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:256). While I recognise that neutrality is not possible in this study, I defend the stance that my position does not equate to surrendering to my personal values. It rather asks

the researcher to transparently question these values and to strive to understand the complexity of their roles in relation to others (Bolton, 2016).

As a result, I aim to ensure high levels of criticality by locating my context on research design, data generation and evaluation (Gough, 2003). For example, I chose a personalised writing style and revealed my positionality in the data analysis chapter, so the reader can be clear about the analytical processes I applied in this chapter. As a result, I deliberately sought to turn reflexivity into an active, purposeful, deliberate cognitive and affective process, something which was not possible without examining my underlying concepts of epistemology and ontology (Hatton and Smith, 1995). At the core of this process has been the realisation of the need to take action to maintain hope and to mobilise available forces to claim education as a 'societal priority of utmost importance' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998:138).

1.8 Structure of Thesis:

Although I have tried to adhere to the requirements of a conventional thesis, the evolution of the structure of this thesis has been a dynamic process of moving between different sections and stages of the study. Although I have been trying to focus on the academic requirements of a doctoral thesis and answering my research questions, I have also been 'evolving' as a researcher and modifying both aspects as I progressed with the actual writing of the thesis. As a result, the way I have structured this thesis aims to provide the reader with a sense of direction regarding the 'build up' of the study's 'narrative story' rather than following a chronological order of its development.

The first part of the thesis covers pre-data generation chapters where I first set the scene for the reader describing the pre-conflict landscape of education and outlining the government's main initiatives that shaped educational provision during that period. I also situate research questions into relevant literature addressing gaps in current literature, which is

followed by examining my understanding of the philosophy and application of my adopted research methodology and methods. The second part of the thesis starts by providing the reader with a reflective account of my field trip and the lessons drawn from that experience. This chapter is fundamental in this study as it illustrates to the reader the contextual constraints that contributed to shaping the scope and nature of this study. Before discussing constructed themes, I examine the application of thematic analysis as a framework to analyse generated data, outlining to the reader the adopted strategies to construct codes and themes. In the following chapter, I present data analysis in relation to answering my research questions, linking this analysis to wider societal issues affecting peacebuilding and developing a sustainable peace culture in post-conflict Syria. In the final chapter, I present my concluding remarks and highlight this study's main contributions to knowledge development and future research.

1.9 Key Terms and Definitions

In this thesis, key terms such peacebuilding, violence and peace are 'difficult to conceptualise' in regard to the current situation in Syria, as they lack 'agreeable definition' among conflicting parties (Grenwal, 2003:1). Also, the terms teacher education and teacher training are often used interchangeably and synonymously, and their connotations will differ between the UK and my research context. The aim of defining these terms is to address the complexity and fluidity of these concepts and to facilitate an understanding of how these concepts are approached in this study.

1.9.1 Violence:

The concept of violence in this study is based on Galtung's (1969) typologies of violence, in which Galtung distinguishes between direct, structural and cultural violence. In this framework, violence is direct where 'there is an actor that commits the violence' (Galtung,1969: 170-171). This type of violence is characterised by being 'intended', 'quick'

and can be ‘discovered since the person who was very much alive a second ago is now dead’ (Galtung, 1985:146). Direct violence can be reflected, for example, through the number of people killed or injured during a violent conflict.

The second type of violence, structural or indirect violence, is where an ‘actor’ cannot be detected as violence is built into social structures and ‘shows up as unequal power’ and as ‘unequal life chances’ (Galtung, 1969: 170-171). As the subject-object relation is not evident in this type of violence, structural violence is less obvious and harder to identify. Galtung provides an example to distinguish between direct and structural violence where he illustrates that:

> When one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are no concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another (Galtung, 1969:171).

If the ‘triangle’ of violence ‘stood on its 'direct' and 'structural violence' feet’, cultural violence functions as ‘the legitimiser’ of these types of violence (Galtung, 1990: 294). This type of violence refers to ‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence’ that can be used to ‘justify or legitimize direct or structural violence’, making them ‘look, even feel, right - or at least not wrong’ (Galtung, 1990:291). Cultural violence and this process of legitimisation take place in ‘the arena of culture, in the realm of beliefs, attitudes, and symbols’ (Galtung, 1969). Galtung’s typologies of violence exposes violence as a ‘human phenomenon’, that poses ‘not only a ‘physical or existential problem’ but also ‘a problem of meaning’ as it needs to be ‘justified or legitimated’ (Galtung, 1969:171). The distinction between these three types of violence has implications for studies of violence which need to examine ‘the use’ and ‘legitimation’ of violence.

1.9.2 Peace:

The concept of peace can be described based on an analogy derived from medical science where ‘health can be seen as the absence of disease’ or something more ‘positive’ as ‘the building of a healthy body capable of resisting diseases, relying on its own health forces or health sources’ (Galtung, 1985:145). In the same way, peace can be ‘negative’ when it is perceived as an ‘absence of violence’ or ‘positive’ when it is related to building harmony, cooperation and integration. The difference between these concepts of negative and positive peace can be explained in terms of a ‘dissociative approach’ where ‘parties are kept apart, relations are broken’ and an ‘associative approach’ where ‘parties are brought together’ and ‘peaceful relations are built’ (Galtung, 1985:151).

As a result, a ‘sustainable’ concept of peace is perceived as a process that transcends negative peace, as it needs to be ‘structural’, requiring the development of a ‘critical analysis of’ and ‘efforts to transform structures pregnant with violence into less violent ones’ (Galtung, 1985:146). It also includes the concept of 'cultural peace', which refers to those ‘aspects of a culture’ that serve ‘to justify and legitimize direct and structural peace’ (Galtung, 1990: 291). As a result, a culture can be referred to as a 'peace culture’ when deliberate and diverse efforts to promote positive peace can be identified in aspects of a specific culture (Galtung, ibid).

The concept of peace in this study is approached as a process that continues after, rather than ends with, a ceasefire, since it is perceived as a ‘transformation process’ that aims to address both root causes and manifestations of violence through aiming to build bridges’ rather than ‘barriers’ between conflicting parties (Lambourne, 2004:4). Peace, according to this stance, becomes a complex, dynamic process of ‘becoming’ and not just an ‘end state’ (Jarstad et al, 2019:2).

1.9.3 Peacebuilding and Post-conflict Reconstruction:

Peacebuilding in this study is perceived as a process that aims to incorporate the goals of both negative and positive peace by seeking to identify those 'structures' that 'remove causes of wars' and have the potential to offer 'alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur' (Galtung, 1976: 297). Peacebuilding becomes a process that underpins peacemaking (the settlement of armed conflicts) and peacekeeping (the interposition of external forces to separate between conflicting parties). In light of this perspective, discussion of the concept of peacebuilding in this thesis is based on its description as:

> A comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords. Metaphorically, peace is seen not merely as a stage in time or a condition. It is a dynamic social construct (Lederach, 1997: 84–85).

Post-conflict reconstruction becomes a process that aims to develop 'coherent' strategies with 'carefully prioritised' and 'sequenced' sets of tailored activities that aim to not only bring life to normal but also reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into violent conflicts. Reconstructing the education sector in Syria, therefore, needs to develop as 'systemic' rather than being 'fragmented' and 'compartmentalised', where this process encompasses physical (rebuilding destroyed infrastructure), ideological (democratisation of education and re-training teachers) and psychological (addressing issues of psychological and mental health such as stress, trauma and depression) aspects of reconstruction (Smiths and Vaux, 2003:45). Therefore, a successful reconstruction of the education sector in Syria would benefit from being underpinned by the 4Rs model (Novelli et al, 2019), as this process needs to be directed towards ensuring a 'redistribution' of resources so that all learners are provided with equitable access to educational opportunities, a 'recognition' of diverse perspectives and identities in the national curriculum, 'representation' of different stakeholders to ensure a fair and transparent

allocation of responsibilities and decision-making, and ‘reconciliation’ to ensure that education encourages debating the past and its relevance to students’ present and future (Shah and Lopes Cardozo, 2019:61). The importance of this theoretical framework comes from placing a greater emphasis on the link between positive peace and social development, as the former is unlikely to develop without transforming the structures that sustain and reproduce root causes of violent conflicts such as social injustice and inequality (Novelli et al, 2017).

As a result, this study approaches current reconstruction initiatives in government-held areas from a post-war rather than a post-conflict perspective as the latter needs to be the long-term aim of such initiatives. However, the distinction between the terms post-war and post-conflict is not easily defined in the research context, where the term post-conflict is predominately used by government officials and research participants. Therefore, I occasionally use the term post-conflict, especially in my discussions with research participants as terminology is key in establishing trust and building good relationships.

1.9.4 Teacher Education and Teacher Training:

As I approach education as an ideological and political act, I aim to examine teacher preparation and development beyond the concept of ‘teacher’s vocational training’, and the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of job performance (Rowntree, 1981). As a result, I deliberately used the term teacher education in this thesis as it reflects wider and more complex aspects of learning that contribute to the teacher’s ‘growth as a person’ regardless of its link to job performance (Rowntree, 1981:313). The distinction between the two terms is based on the principle that education is linked to:

> [d]eveloping the capacity to inquire sensitively and systematically into the nature of learning and the effects of teaching. This is an approach to knowledge production…that aims to empower teachers with greater understanding of complex situations rather than to control them with simplistic formulas or cookie-cutter routines for teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000:170).

Teacher training is approached in this study as related to the issue of applying knowledge to improve the practice of teaching and learning, while teacher education is related to the issue of knowledge development and situating teachers' experiences in their broader social, political and economic context. Rather than perceiving these two concepts as separate processes, teacher training is best seen as part of teacher education to achieve its broader aims (Sharma, 2016). From this perspective, teacher education transcends methodological skills and practices as it directly seeks to examine the 'politics of knowledge' (Kelly, 2009:43), and the problematic relationship between theory and practice. By using the term teacher education, I emphasise that this process is an 'ideological and political terrain' out of which 'dominant culture' produces its 'hegemonic certainties (McLaren, 1995:43).

Chapter Two

SETTING THE SCENE: PRE-CONFLICT EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONFLICT

Introduction:

In this chapter, I will set the scene by providing a description of the pre-conflict landscape of education in Syria, something which will also be required in a later stage of the study to examine how or if education and teacher education has responded to the conflict. This description is based on a number of official policy documents, which I collated during my field work. These documents are developed by the MoE, and they provide an insight into the rationale, theoretical frameworks and aims of pre-conflict educational reforms. This section along with the other parts included in this chapter are important in unfolding my thinking behind approaching the current de-escalation of violence as representing a 'glimpse of hope' that deserves attention from the academic field.

2.1 Pre-conflict Education and Teacher Education in Syria:

Before the conflict, Syria was well known in the region for its advancement in the field of education with records of healthy basic education, as an estimated 97% of primary-age children and 67% of secondary-aged students were attending schools (UNICEF, 2013). Literacy rates were high at over 90% for both men and women, surpassing the regional average, and education was accessible to all school-aged children with gross enrolment rate in primary education at 126% in 2007 (UNICEF, ibid). Higher Education was thriving and going through a major phase of change (Millican, 2020), as the number of public universities grew from four to eight, including the Syrian Virtual University, which started in 2002 as the first virtual university in the Middle East, providing both partnership and domestic programmes to its

students. In the same period, twenty-two private universities had opened since President Al Assad took power in 2000.

Available documents, such as *Pre-university National Developed Curriculum in Syrian Arab Republic: Aims and Criteria*, prepared by Dr Alhosry (Assistant to Minister of Education at that time), demonstrate that the years of 2008 and 2009 were cornerstones in the process of reforming education and teacher education. During these two years, the MoE in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) started a large-scale project to reform the national curriculum and upskill school teachers. The aim of these reforms was to address the 'weaknesses of the current educational curriculum', which was described as largely theoretical, reliant on rote learning and assessment strategies that encouraged memorisation (Alhosry, 2008:4). These changes aimed to keep the Syrian education system up to date with international developments in education in order to 'benefit from the experiences of advanced countries' (Alhosry, 2008:22). For instance, these changes were linked to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's recommendations (UNESCO), which stressed the ineffectiveness of curricula and teaching methods that encouraged memorisation in light of the epistemological developments and expansions of knowledge (Alhosry, ibid).

In order to encourage 'active learning', the MoE developed a document aimed for subject specialists and educational supervisors on the subject of *Thinking Skills*, (Suleiman, 2008). In this document, developing thinking skills is based on a number of models including Bloom's taxonomy, which differentiates between basic, higher, cognitive and meta-cognitive thinking skills, such as problem solving, decision making, creative and critical thinking (Suleiman, 2008:5). The document also refers to the concept of critical thinking based on Watson and Glasser's (1984) five domains of inference, deduction, interpretation, recognition of assumptions, and evaluation of arguments.

In another document entitled *Effective Methods and Ways of Teaching* (Al Abdullah, 2008), teacher education aimed to encourage teachers to diversify their teaching methods based on a sound knowledge of principles underpinning theories of teaching and learning. These strategies emphasised the importance of placing learners at 'the centre of the entire teaching and learning process', allowing them to 'contribute to' and 'participate in' identifying learning aims 'at their own pace' (Al Abdullah, 2008:13). In this vision, the teacher's role needed to change from the owner and transmitter of knowledge to a 'planner, guide, facilitator' of learning.

To develop this role, the MoE developed another document entitled *Effective Classroom Management* (Al Ahmad, 2008). A key principle advocated in this area was the differentiation between managing physical and psychological classroom environments, which was based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, such as providing 'a safe classroom environment' and 'developing the feeling of belonging' (Al-Ahmad, 2008:13). Teachers were also encouraged to apply techniques based on Marzanow's framework (no date is provided in the original text) such as addressing students by their own names and respecting learners' responses.

The overall framework for these proposed changes was based on the concept of 'standard-based education' as a means to develop thinking strategies and practical skills. Teacher education, as a result, focused on developing teachers' skills to write content, value and skills standards, and to write learning outcomes in light of Bloom's taxonomy's three domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor). It also focused on how to plan lessons and write lesson objectives. Teachers were provided with examples that illustrated the application of standard-based learning to lesson planning, as illustrated in the example below which shows how to write lesson plans for an English lesson (Alhosry, 2008:27).

Grades 1-4 مثال (٤) اللغة الإنجليزية

Domain	Standards	Outcomes
Reading	- understand short, simple texts containing the highest frequency familiar vocabulary. May need to re-read.	- recognize familiar words, names and phrases on simple notices & signs in common everyday situations. - understand short, simple messages (e.g. postcards). - find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material (e.g. days of the week). - identify specific information in simple texts (e.g. short letters). - understand short, simple written instructions with visual support.
Written production	- write simple isolated phrases and short sentences.	- write simple phrases and short sentences about themselves, family & friends, school & home, basic shopping & food, possessions, likes/dislikes & daily routines.
Written interaction	- ask for or give very simple personal details in written form. - write very simple formulaic notes on areas of immediate need & interest.	- write a short, simple postcard, note & message on familiar areas & immediate needs (e.g. family, friends, home, school, routines, food/drink, likes/dislikes, and possessions). - write simple numbers, ages, own name, names of family & friends (characters in textbooks).

Illustration 2.1 – An Example of Writing a Lesson Plan According to Standard-based Education.

The process of upskilling school teachers is also outlined in *The Ministry of Education's Projects for Educational Development in Syria* (Al Mutalik, 2009). Some of the projects referred to in this document include a project to upskill primary school teachers from associate degrees towards a university degree through government-funded Open Learning programmes. The Ministry also aimed to enhance in-service teacher training by encouraging teachers to study a Post Graduate Certificate in Education through online learning. This project was funded by the MoE and teachers who were awarded the Diploma received a 3% increment as an incentive.

Regarding the wider political, economic and social context, the proposed changes were described as a translation of the President's vision to 'reform and develop educational, learning and media institutions' in a way that 'serves our national interests and reinforces our educational heritage' (Alhosry, 2008:3-10). In this vision, the national curriculum was approached as a 'pillar for national security', and a 'fundamental foundation' to develop learners' skills in relation to national identity, unity, belonging to the country, accepting the

other and denouncing all forms of intolerance (Alhosry, ibid). The wider context also presented its own challenges especially as the higher standards of living and the inflated wages in the public sector raised expectations and created a gap between actual market wage rates and expected wages, accompanied with higher rates of unemployment reaching 20% in 2010 (World Bank Group, 2017).

This situation was further complicated by a skills mismatch between the job market and the educational sector, which made many Syrians seek alternative employment options, some of which were considered illegal, like street trade, depriving these citizens of financial and social services. In addition, economic reforms during this period disproportionately benefited a group of elites that were in, or close to, power (Philips, 2015), which impacted on widening the distribution of income between urban and rural areas. One of the main pitfalls of economic growth in this phase was, therefore, the inability to translate that growth into economic and political inclusion and in improving civil liberties, as Syria's ratings on freedom of expression and assembly were low even when compared to other countries in the region (World Bank Group, 2017).

The overall picture before 2011 indicates that although Syria witnessed a glimpse of hope after 2000 to reform its educational sector, the implementation is described to have given precedence to quantity at the expense of quality. As a result, some of these ambitions were 'largely unrealised', and education continued to be controlled by the state and security 'apparatuses' limiting political autonomy and causing a 'brain drain' among educated and skilled Syrians (Dillabough et al, 2019:45-55). Combined with high levels of perceived corruption and low levels of trust in public institutions, many Syrians and, in particular, the youth became dissatisfied, something which was reported to be at the centre of the unrest that started in 2011.

2.2 The Conflict's Impact on the Country:

The impact on human lives and demographic displacement remains the most dramatic consequence of this conflict as it is reported that approximately 500,000 people have been killed due to the conflict (IAmSyria, 2020), in addition to 1.88 million injured people. In other words, 11.5% of the population in Syria have either been killed or wounded as a direct result of this armed conflict. According to United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the conflict has also caused the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War leading to the world's single largest refugee crisis for almost a quarter of a century (UNHCR: 2015). Syrians now form the largest forcibly displaced population in the world, with 13.4 million people at the end of 2019, which is more than half of the Syrian population. There are 6.6 million Syrian refugees distributed among several countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and across Europe. In addition, there are 6.7 million internally displaced Syrians and about 1.1 million unregistered refugees in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Many of these refugees live in difficult circumstances and in locations that are challenging to reach. This refugee crisis has also created demographic changes that have profoundly undermined 'social cohesion and frayed the Syrian national social fabrics' (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016:13).

The situation for Syrians who are still in the country is not much better as the unemployment rate is estimated to have risen from 14.9 per cent in 2011 to 57.7 per cent by the end of 2014. There were 3.72 million unemployed people in 2014, out of which 2.96 million had lost their jobs during the conflict. This situation has impacted on the welfare of 12.22 million dependents (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016), and has led to the expansion of an economy of violence, leaving Syrians with limited options apart from joining various networks to engage in conflict related and illegal activities. Division in Syrian society has also widened with the emergence of a large group of people who are forced to live under a state of

exception, estrangement and alienation with massive social, political and economic disadvantages as compared to those who are involved in the institutions of violence. This has resulted in the emergence of widespread illegal and violence-related activities that are managed by international and national financial networks that have diverted resources from productive to destructive activities.

This conflict has caused an equally devastating crisis in the education sector as it has been reported that at least a quarter of schools have been damaged, destroyed, used for military purposes or occupied by displaced people. Some schools have been deserted as parents keep their children at home for fear of bombings and arbitrary attacks. It is estimated that 45.2% of school-age children did not attend school during the 2015/2016 academic year (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). In addition, almost one quarter of the country's teaching personnel (approximately 52,500 teachers and 523 school counsellors) have left their posts since the beginning of the conflict for a variety of reasons, including becoming refugees and fleeing to safety. Those Syrian teachers who have become refugees in other countries have faced other obstacles which prevent them from working, for example, not having permission to work or not speaking the native language of the host country.

The conflict has further complicated the situation for students and teachers who have been able to attend schools, due to over-crowded classes with the number of students sometimes reaching one hundred in one class. To put this into perspective, some of the senior teacher educators I met during my field work explained that school buildings in Syria were still being constructed according to the same design which has been followed since 1962. Some of the teachers I met also described such schools as 'prisons, surrounded by high walls and fences'. In order to envision such a situation, I took the photos below during my field work, which show the layout of a typical classroom in public schools, which usually have the same building structure and layout:

Illustration 2.2 – Photos of a Typical School Classroom in Syria.

Working in these classrooms, teachers are asked to integrate internet and computer technology into the learning process, although there is no access to such facilities in the majority of schools. In the absence of teaching aids, English Language teachers, for example, are asked to use their own personal smart phones as a learning tool for listening activities, which ignores the daily financial hardships teachers are experiencing as a result of the conflict. In this situation, some students and teachers have to find a second job as waiters or taxi drivers in order to support their families. I met a teacher who cannot even afford public transport to go to work while some students fall asleep in the classroom as they have to do evening shifts to earn money. There are, however, other long-term consequences affecting the education sector that require thorough examination.

2.2.1 The Long-term Legacy of the Syrian Conflict: Impact beyond Statistical Data:

The direct impact of the conflict on the country's infrastructure, economy and human life is no more than the tip of an iceberg as there are other long-term consequences that are harder to capture through statistical data. It has become evident that the conflict in Syria is not only destroying the country's infrastructure but also the hopes and ambitions of Syrians and in particular children, depriving them of education opportunities and hindering human development of the whole nation. The conflict has also impacted upon the mental health of individuals, especially children, who are unlikely to achieve their potential for learning due to

the trauma, insecurity and displacement that they have experienced as a result of the conflict (UNESCO, 2011). These impediments to children and individuals' healthy development can inhibit efforts to promote peacebuilding and could lead to decades of poverty and unrest (Sirini and Roger-Sirini, 2015), especially as the concept of psychological and mental health is an emerging field in Syria, which has not yet 'come to grips' with mental health support (Hedar, 2017). Before the conflict, for instance, Syria did not have any licensed clinical psychologists, and medical students were generally not interested in psychiatry, due to the stigma attached to this field (Hedar, ibid).

The 'destructive' role of education as an ideological weapon is another aspect of the conflict's long-term damage as represented by the systematic attempts of conflicting parties to use education for the purpose of promoting violence, spreading fear and hatred against the other. This has created a subtle but equally devastating war in the classroom, turning schooling into a platform to promote a 'kill-or-be killed' culture and to dehumanize the other, misrepresent history and promote political agendas (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000:5). These long-term consequences are destroying the education sector due to the systematic and tireless efforts of all parties to direct education towards promoting violence, spreading fear and hatred against the other. Schooling and education have been turned into platforms to transmit language, culture and social organisation that reinforce a particular social identity (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

Assembling these effects together, a larger picture of the damage on the country starts to emerge, in which it becomes clear how the conflict has torn apart the country's diverse social fabric leading to a process of fragmentation and disputation of national identity. Even symbolically, the country is torn between different symbols such as flags, alliances, discourses and grand narratives about the conflict. This fragmentation is also reflected in the Syrian educational system as indicated by the development of different school systems and curricula

that promote the ideologies of the fighting parties. Despite this bleak picture, there have been some positive developments in the conflict, as reflected by the de-escalation of direct violence across major Syrian cities.

2.3 'Promising' Developments in the Syrian Conflict:

Since 2018, there have been some 'promising' developments towards ending the violent conflict in Syria, as there has been a de-escalation of violence across major cities. The involvement of international powers, and in particular Russia, has helped the Syrian government and its allies to regain control over a considerable proportion of the country including major cities such as the capital city Damascus as well as Aleppo, Homs and Dera'a where the conflict originally started. All these developments have led to a decrease in military operations and a decrease in the number of casualties, with the lowest number of casualties being recorded in 2018.

There have also been several international peace negotiation initiatives such as the UN-led negotiations in Geneva, and the Russian and Turkish facilitated talks in Astana. The Russia–Turkey–Iran collaboration is also a new alliance that is overseeing the negotiating process in Astana and Sochi, and they meet regularly to evaluate the situation in Syria. These initiatives have allowed conflicting parties to use dialogue for the first time as a way of resolving this conflict. Despite slow progress, four de-escalation zones have been set up during the sixth rounds of negotiations in Astana since 2018 which has helped decrease the intensity of the armed conflict.

During my last visits in 2018 and 2019, I witnessed signs of 'normal life' that had completely disappeared as a result of the conflict. Young men were being discharged from the national service and reserve army, and several army checkpoints had been removed across different cities. This situation encouraged people to resume travel again between cities after it

had ceased for years. Also, the education sector was showing signs of 'recovery', for instance, the MoE announced that 14,600 schools enrolled 4,400,000 students in government held areas during the 2018/19 academic year.

With this de-escalation of violence, the government has increased the rhetoric of reconstruction in its official and social media sources, which regularly emphasise a commitment to bring life back to 'normality' through rebuilding destroyed infrastructure as soon as its forces regain a new territory. This increased rhetoric is regularly re-stated by the President who has announced that reconstruction is going to be the focus of the 'economy of the next phase' where efforts will be directed to rebuilding sectors that are 'complementary and supportive' to this process (Al Assad, 2014). It is important to point out that the official narrative has implied a potentially positive approach to reconstruction especially when the President has referred to 'real reconstruction' that goes beyond rebuilding physical infrastructure to 'deal with the destroyed and destructive intellectual structure' (Al Assad, 2019). These developments represent an invaluable opportunity to examine education's potential role in peacebuilding and to shed light on the government's strategies to prepare teachers for such a role in post-conflict Syria.

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

The short and long-term impact of the conflict on the very core of the country's social fabrics demonstrate the complex role which education is required to play in order to promote sustainable peace in post-conflict Syria. The situation outlined in this chapter reinstates the position I proposed in the introduction in which I emphasised the importance of approaching Syria as currently being at a crossroad where post-conflict reconstruction initiatives, including those of education, are going to either lead to a reproduction of the conflict or contribute to a peaceful rebuilding of the country.

In the following chapters, I will unfold my research journey and the different stages I have undergone in order to develop my understanding of the response of education and teacher education to the conflict, and what plans, if any, are in place to transform education's ideological role from a contributor to violence into a tool for peace.

Chapter Three

SITUATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Introduction:

In this chapter, I will critically review academic literature in order to situate my research questions in academic literature and develop my understanding of current scholarship about the examined topic. It is important to point out that the primary aim of this review is to focus on examining the role of education in promoting peacebuilding rather than on its role in issues related to access in humanitarian situations. As a result, this chapter focuses on examining the politics of education rather than education in emergencies so that this examination can illuminate whether current reconstruction initiatives place more emphasis on 'protection and reconstruction', or on the 'transformation' of political, economic and social structures that promote violence (Pherali: 2016:199).

This chapter is written in two stages as I developed the first part before I conducted my field research, and it includes concepts that helped me situate my research questions in relevant academic literature and provided me with a theoretical framework while conducting my research. The second part of this chapter is about concepts that I did not consider before conducting field research but rather were informed by the themes I developed after data analysis. In this part, I aim to situate constructed themes into academic literature with a focus on the role of silence and securitisation in post-conflict peacebuilding and the role of education in this process.

It is important to emphasise these two parts did not develop sequentially in isolation of each other, as my understanding was developing as I progressed with my writing and had to make changes to both parts accordingly. In both parts, I have maintained the same approach in which I have attempted to review academic literature from the perspective of the 'interacting'

reader who constantly seeks to better understand the main theoretical concepts that influence, and are influenced by, my values, experiences and intentions (Ball et al, 1992).

3.1 Situating Research Questions in Academic Literature:

When reviewing literature in the area of conflict development, it becomes evident that there is a tendency to draw a causal link between conflicts, poverty and lack of education (Samura, 2013). Also, the causes of civil conflicts are usually related to ethnic, religious or internal political differences, minimising the role of any external influences which accelerate these conflicts (Ali and Mathews, 1999). While this might be true in some cases, the Syrian conflict has presented a different situation where the link between a lack of education, poverty and conflict seems simplistic. As discussed in chapter two (see section 2.1), pre-conflict Syria was well-known in the region for its advancement in the field of education, and its economy was fast growing. This growth was also accompanied by fiscal stability, low debt and reasonable levels of foreign reserves (World Bank Group, 2017). During the period between 2000 and 2010, Syria was one of only two countries in the region achieving high efficiency scores in public spending in health and education (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2016).

In addition, military intervention of many regional and international powers has demonstrated that the Syrian conflict transcends internal politics as it has developed into a regional and international conflict, interwoven with processes of regional and global transformation. As a result, researchers need to be cautious about inferring such simplistic causal links and to raise questions about whether ethnicity, religious or political affiliations are being mobilised to generate or escalate armed conflicts rather than being their fundamental causes (Leach and Dunne, 2007). This stance does not ignore the role of internal factors in civil conflicts nor does it completely apportion blame on external ones; it rather acknowledges the complex mix of internal and external factors influencing the Syrian conflict and its resolution (Ali and Mathews, 1999).

This complexity requires distinguishing between ‘root’ and ‘secondary’ causes of violent conflicts (Smith and Vaux, 2003:13), which makes it indispensable to expand our concepts of violence to better understand the links between education, violence and peace. In this regard, Galtung’s (1969) distinction between direct, structural and cultural violence provides a useful framework to examine the role of education in post-conflict Syria, as it extends our perspective of violence from focusing on its direct, evident manifestations such as number of deaths to include those indirect and more problematic aspects that come from political, economic, cultural structures and educational institutions. Our focus becomes directed towards not only the visible manifestations of violence but also on the process of legitimising and internalising violence, which helps turn it into a natural phenomenon like ‘the air around us’ (Galtung, 1969:173).

Equally important, this framework does not only point out the complexity of the concept of violence but also exposes it as a deliberate act caused by human agency (Farmer, 2004). By demonstrating that individuals can learn to adopt violence as a strategy to resolve conflict and protect the ‘self’, it should be possible then to theorise that they can learn peace as an alternative strategy (Vriens, 2003). This learning process is unlikely to be implemented effectively without digging deep into the ‘symbolic sphere’ of our existence encompassing media, ideology, education and language, which justifies and legitimises direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1990:291). In this process, peacebuilding becomes part of wider deliberate efforts to transform culture from the ground on which violence is based, to the soil in which mechanisms of conflict resolution will sprout (Lederach, 2000).

Approaching violence as consisting of different interactive cycles has a considerable impact on our understating of peace, which risks being fragile if the ultimate goal remains restricted to abolishing aspects of direct violence. Promoting sustainable peace needs to be approached as a complex process in which disarming aspects of cultural and social structures

that legitimise and mitigate violence is perceived as an essential prerequisite to promote structural and cultural peace. Sustainable peace, therefore, needs to be approached as an ongoing process rather than a 'one-time' intervention, as it is underpinned by values, attitudes and proactive measures that aim to reinforce social structures and institutions that are capable of addressing root as well as secondary causes of violence (International Peace Institute, 2017). Sustainable peace in this way emphasises the importance of developing more harmonious relationships, in which the ultimate value is the unconditional and infinite worth of human life.

In order to move from a fragile to a more sustainable vision of peace, it is important to examine the de-escalation of violence across many Syrian cities as an opportunity to develop educational initiatives that are part of comprehensive, systematic and long-term strategies that aim to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violence. Such a shift is unlikely to develop without examining the Syrian conflict beyond direct manifestations of violence.

3.3.1 The Syrian Conflict beyond Direct Violence: Truth Claims as Underpinning Ideological Weapon:

One of the ways to illustrate the process of legitimising violence in the Syrian conflict is examining the employment of the concept of truth as an ideological weapon, as such examination can help identify those 'regimes of truth' that determine the boundaries of dominant discourse and influence individuals' perceptions and behaviour (Foucault, 1976:145). In this study, the aim of this examination is not to assess the truthfulness of different truth claims about conflict development in Syria but rather to analyse the mechanisms of truth production, distribution and circulation in order to gain a wider understanding of how truth claims in a particular context are produced, and how knowledge is legitimised.

In this regard, the Syrian conflict is underpinned mainly by three prevailing truth claims put forward by the main internal forces in this conflict, namely, the Syrian government, secular and Islamic oppositions. Truth claims put forward by the Syrian government describe the conflict as being part of a global 'conspiracy' prepared by the enemy which works 'systematically and scientifically' to destabilize Syria through supplying 'criminals' with money, arms and training to carry out that conspiracy aimed at making Syria a 'follower' rather than a free and sovereign nation (Al Assad, 2013, Al Assad, 2011). The Syrian government insists that it is fighting terrorism and defending its citizens from a war that is facilitated and exploited by external powers. The struggle is represented to be between those who are patriots and liberal against those who are traitors and Islamic extremists.

On the other hand, the secular opposition claims that the conflict started as a peaceful uprising to overthrow a corrupt and tyrannical regime in order to establish a democratic and pluralistic country (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, 2020). This opposition links its movement for freedom and democracy to the so-called Arab Spring that has spread in many Arab countries since 2011 in the form of protests against oppression, and which has managed to change political leadership in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. According to this narrative, these peaceful demonstrations have turned into an armed conflict only as a result of the 'brutal force' used by the government. It is claimed here that those negative aspects of the conflict are attributed to a conspiracy plotted by the government to protect its existence and discredit this 'revolution'. Despite turning into an armed conflict, secular opposition insists that the conflict remains a 'struggle' against Al Assad's regime with the aim of establishing a 'democratic' and 'pluralistic' Syria, where there is no 'room for sectarianism or discrimination on ethnic, religious, linguistic or any other grounds' (National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, ibid).

The Islamic perspective is represented by groups such as Al Nosra Front, and the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), who share the same goal with secular opposition to topple President Al Assad but only to establish an Islamic state based on Islamic Sharia Law. The Syrian conflict has become a holy war between believers and infidels; a re-enactment of past battles between Muslims and non-believers. This narrative is based on a combination of principles derived from the period of the Islamic empire, ruled by a caliphate, following the death of Prophet Mohammad. It is also based on teachings derived from key Islamic scholars such as Ibin Taymiyya and Imam Al Khazali, who have legitimised the extermination of some sects in Islam such as Alwaite and Druze on the ground of their apostasy (Ibin Taymiyya, 2004, Al Khazali, 1964).

The common pattern emerging when analysing these truth claims is their ability to cohere with an already established system of historical, cultural or religious beliefs, something which has helped create a completely rounded truth system (Lynch, 2001). These established coherent belief systems have created new social groups on the basis of holding the same belief system paving the way for the emergence of new social agreements or consensus (Bridge, 1999). This situation has even impacted on the demographics of the country as individuals had to relocate if their belief systems were incompatible with the ones dominating their environment, as questioning the dominant version of truth will lead to social isolation, possible torture and imprisonment.

These truth claims have created their own authoritative knowledge which is now naturalised as common sense and absolute truth; as part of nature itself (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003). The Syrian conflict cannot be examined in isolation of this war between different realties, which are trying to impose their versions of truth as an all-or-nothing version (Owen et al, 2009). The discussion above demonstrates how truth claims about the conflict in Syria have developed in several stages, starting from cohering with an already existing belief

system, developing into a consensus among different social groups and, finally, being established as an accurate reflection of the 'actual state of affairs' (Bridge, 1999:601). In the latter stage, individuals develop a fixed and certain 'picture of the real' and the validity of a truth claim relies on its ability to correspond with that picture (Ewing, 1951:54-55). To reflect this perspective of truth development, the following model has been developed as an illustrative but not comprehensive tool to demonstrate the development of political messages in the Syrian conflict:

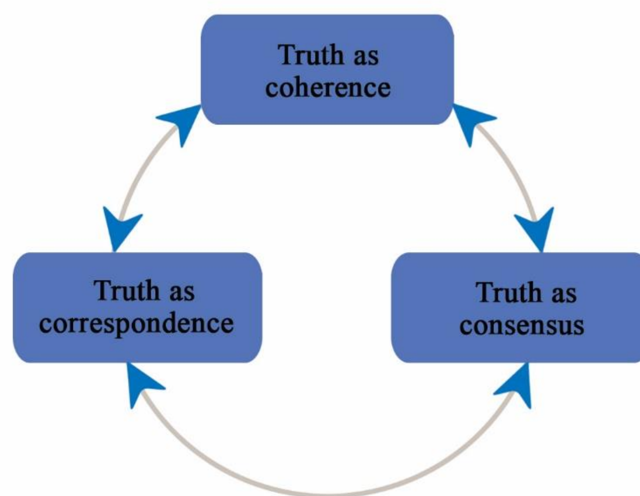

Illustration 3.1 – Development of Truth Claims about the Syrian Conflict

As illustrated above, the three conflicting parties have not just created different truth claims but have also laid boundaries of interpretation through which individuals will perceive truth about the conflict. These ontological and epistemological boundaries have formed an episteme (Foucault, 1976), in which individuals are positioned in self-perpetuating cycles preventing them from grounding their perspectives outside these boundaries (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003). Consequently, truth depends on the individual's socio-political context and their prior belief systems, so it is important that the concept of truth is interpreted as culturally and historically constructed since human experience and perception is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically (Willing, 2008).

In this regard, it is important to be aware of how this war for truth has contributed to the fragmentation of Syria, leaving no space for a shared sense of truth among individuals and eliminating any sense of shared identity. This situation has contributed to the polarisation of the nation into two groups: a supreme 'self' and a satanised 'other' reduced to an 'it', void of any kind of humanhood (Galtung et al, 2000). In the presence of an 'us' and 'other' dichotomy, a 'friend-foe' doctrine, trust among different groups is lost and tolerance is replaced with fear, fight for survival setting the stage for any type of direct violence (Hart, 2000:165). One of the manifestations of these new power relations is reflected through the development of a 'system of gatekeepers' in each group who have the power to define who the patriot or traitor is and provide 'friend or 'foe badges' (Epp, 1996:163).

As a result, the relevance of the concept of truth to the Syrian context is not limited to its role in fuelling the conflict but also to its future role in post-conflict Syria as any initiative for peacebuilding cannot avoid tackling this war of truth. Truth reconciliation will be vital in the process of constructing a common culture and language, a shared interpretation of history and establishing foundations for a society that is based on tolerance and respect for differences (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). As long as each party is trying to impose their version of truth on the rest of the society, there is a risk of alienating other members of the society, something which might lead the country to be trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of violence.

This fragmentation process has also impacted upon the educational system as reflected by the development of opposing school curricula; each is seeking to promote a particular version of truth and incite violence and hatred. Schools have been turned into battlefields for truth; arenas for the construction, mobilization and politicisation of dividedness required to fuel the conflict (King, 2005). This situation poses a risk for post-conflict reconstruction as whoever emerges as the winner might attempt to 'define' the 'national story' regarding the truth of the conflict (Smith and Vaux, 2003:19), which makes it essential to examine potential implications

of truth claims not only on the development of the conflict but also on its future representations and their impact upon reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.

One of the primary implications of this stance for this research is the need to examine the concept of truth as interpretations that could be distorted by ideological forces and structural constraints, and not as externally given, objective, or uninfluenced by human interests and values (Banks, 2006). Our concepts of truth, therefore, need to be examined as culturally, politically, socially and historically meditated, which hide ideological-generative mechanisms and ideological colonisation of the concept of truth (Finlayson, 2005). It becomes necessary to acknowledge that there is no neutral, or non-theoretically loaded method of describing social reality or an individual account of that reality (Griffiths, 1995). This concept is of vital importance to me as a native Syrian as I need to examine the direct, indirect, conscious and unconscious influence these claims have had on my understanding of the conflict and the role of education in post-conflict Syria, something which is unlikely to develop without identifying those deeply-held, taken-for-granted truths and examining the way participants and I approach our shared realities.

The establishment of different truth claims in the Syrian conflict does not only pose challenges to my stance, attachment and objectivity in the research process, but also leads to logistical challenges caused by newly formed social memberships and alliances. For example, it would not be possible for me to access individuals from a particular group if those individuals felt I had opposing political views. In addition, political differences are reflected regionally as each area is prominently dominated by one group and one version of truth. Even in the areas that have been regained by the government, the tension between different truth claims has become like a ‘dormant volcano’, as on the surface it is imperative to conform with the government’s ideologies and version of truth. The impact of these social and geographical

boundaries, however, go beyond determining the scope of my field research to include the prospects of building sustainable positive peace.

3.2 From Fragmentation to Unification: Silence as a Policy to Create Assimilationist Education and Hegemonic Representations of the Conflict:

After engaging in data analysis, it has become evident that the relevance of the concept of truth to this study is not limited to its role in conflict development but also extends to its future representations as they will constitute narratives of a past that is 'lived' and has significance for the present and the future (Igreja, 2008:550). Developing sustainable positive peace in Syria, especially in the current fragmentation of the country, requires approaching post-conflict reconstruction as a phase in which the country needs to undergo a process of 're-membering' in order to reconstruct itself culturally, physically and ontologically (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000:31). However, one of the considerable risks facing such a process comes from whoever emerges as the winner of the conflict might aim to counter the current fragmentation of the society by seeking to create 'unifying hegemonic narratives' of the conflict and to develop assimilationist education structures (Ahonen, 2014:77).

Post-conflict reconstruction in this case can become focused more on employing resources to assimilate a fragmented country into one dominant societal culture, placing more emphasis on unification than on encouraging 'historical inquiry' into past events in the name of 'let's forget to forgive' (Idris, 2016:6). Namibia, for instance, presents an example of such a scenario where the government placed more emphasis on unification than on historical inquiry in tackling the legacy of the country's civil conflict (Idris, ibid). This lack of historical inquiry is also described as impeding the process of reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the history of the conflict has become a taboo in the presence of 'little' official acknowledgement of the past conflict, and no 'substantial' social and political changes (Coles, 2011:37).

Such a scenario is problematic in the case of Syria where an effective role of education in post-conflict reconstruction requires enabling successive generations to understand the conflict and potentially contribute towards future peacebuilding. It becomes essential to examine if current reconstruction initiatives are systematically directed towards countering dominant polarised and hegemonic discourses of the conflict or towards reinforcing the demonising of the 'other', functioning in this way as a disincentive to promoting sustainable positive peace (Smyth, 2007). Abolishing structural and cultural aspects of violence in post-conflict Syria will be hindered if this process is dominated by a monolithic version of history that highlights the role of one group at the expense of others and legitimises the dominance of a singular national identity that suppresses all other alternatives (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Such a process is problematic because the structures applied to promote a particular version of truth fundamentally requires the 'occlusion' of other truth claims (Russell, 2018:66). This link stresses the entangled mechanisms between truth development and the concept of silence since imposing a singular hegemonic representation of the conflict requires the silencing of other truth claims that oppose it. As a result, dismantling 'polarised thinking' requires shattering the walls of silence that are created as a result of excluding other truth claims (Vandeyar and Swart, 2019: 154).

Lessons could be learned from previous conflicts such as the one in Guatemala where textbooks produced after 1986 did not discuss the country's armed conflict, and the MoE demonstrated 'no effort' in providing learning materials when some schools attempted to teach about the conflict (Oglesby, 2004:17). In Mozambique, an 'amnesia approach' was also adopted to deal with the conflict choosing to forget the past of the conflict in its entirety (Obika and Ovuga, 2018:4); an approach which is not uncommon in Syria itself where a political uprising in the city of Hama in the late 1970s is not referred to in official textbooks. I learnt

about the Hama conflict from 'unofficial' sources, friends and family, and I indirectly learned it was not a topic to be discussed in a public forum like schools.

In order to shatter these walls of silence, examining the concept of silence needs to expose its problematic, systematic and active nature, as the core of such a policy implies 'the silencing of other people or the silencing of a particular truth' (Russell, 2018:1). Such a perspective urges us to be mindful of attempts in post-conflict reconstruction to promote a policy of silence as a strategy to 'avoid provocations' on the basis of 'let's forget to forgive' and 'let's leave the past behind' in order to be able to look ahead and focus on rebuilding the country (Igreja, 2008:545). Although silence could be an individual means of 'healing and dealing with pain', such policies could also be employed as a tool to create 'regimes of silence' that 'define the space for what can be said and must be withheld' (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012:504-506).

In this project, the problematic nature of silence comes from its systematic imposition from the 'silencing' party as part of the politics of selective memory in legitimising a new hegemonic narrative (Russell, 2018:1). Silence is interlinked with developing a 'monopoly' over the production and reproduction of the 'official narrative' of the conflict (Igreja, 2008: 545), which makes silence fundamentally part of a strategy to legitimise official control over the mechanisms of engaging with the past and writing the national narrative of the conflict. The concepts of silence need to be examined as interwoven with structural efforts that aim to impose 'a uniform national grand narrative' and to develop an 'ideologically uniform nation-state' (Ahonen, 2014:84), something which further problematises the concept of silence as it is also entangled with issues of power and hegemony.

Such policies of collective silence create a 'politics of oblivion' and 'collective amnesia' that provide 'fertile ground' to continue the polarisation of the country (Bentrovato,

2017:44-45). It becomes naïve to draw a simplistic correlation between silence and forgetting because the two are not synonymous, as the former is more than just a psychological mechanism to heal past wounds. On the contrary, this silence gives violence more presence and turns its omission into an 'absent presence' that is fully implicated in the political and educational strategies (Apple, 1999:12). Promoting positive peace becomes about developing the courage to place violence 'squarely in front of us' in order to challenge and change the structures that legitimise its application, especially as these structures 'get a good deal' of their power through their 'very hiddenness' (Apple, ibid). Rather than seeking to impose a policy of silence, education for peacebuilding needs to engage teachers and learners in critical debates about the causes of and solutions to the conflict (Pherali, 2016). This type of education explicitly aims to introduce 'turbulence' into official narratives of history and encourage questioning rather than 'obedience' to these narratives so that the conflict can be understood from multiple voices (Davies, 2019:78).

It becomes fundamental to expose silence as an ideological apparatus, in which silence is a rich and multifaceted form of 'social communication' (Eastmond and Selimovic, 2012:505). In this form of social communication, silence needs to be examined as part of a wider 'purposive' project aiming at 'constructing a new ideology, creating new institutions and organising new networks to confront the present' (Igreja, 2008:545). A regime of silence is inextricable from the political system that is responsible for its production, where this cyclical relationship between silence and power becomes a necessary means to comprehend both 'the power and life cycle of silence' (Russell, 2018:7). This stance has implications for post-conflict reconstruction, as this process can become a stage to rebuild power structures and hegemonic forces.

3.2.1 Post Conflict Reconstruction as Rebuilding of Power Structures: from Militarisation to Securitisation:

Despite the conflicting truth claims about the development of the Syria conflict, a fundamental aspect of this conflict remains about the justification and application of 'instrumental' violence in order to achieve particular political, social and economic visions (Krause and Jutersonke, 2005:459). This violent struggle is multi-faceted as it entails not only challenging 'established' social, political and hegemonic institutions but also a violent pursuit between competing ideological groups, where each group aims to establish itself as 'the highest authority' within a specific territory (Schmidt, 2007:260). In other words, the conflict at its core is an arena for 'the pursuit of power' whether internally, regionally or internationally, which makes it necessary to examine studies of violent conflicts 'in tandem with restructuring power systems and hegemonic ideologies' (Milliken and Krause, 2002:756).

Post-conflict reconstruction needs to be examined as a phase in which a particular form of power seeks to establish itself as 'legitimate' for its citizens by reclaiming its ability to monopolise 'the legitimate use of violence' in the enforcement of its order (Weber, 1964:154). The focus of reconstruction becomes about establishing a new 'political authority' that is in control and capable of enforcing the rules and regulations that bind its citizens (Lambach 2007:33), making reconstruction focused more on the emerging power system, its institutions and symbols of recovery rather than on those who fought the war and will determine the sustainability of peace (Igreja, 2008). From this perspective, successful recovery gives precedence to abolishing aspects of direct violence rather than developing an understanding of the population's experiences of the conflict and on the need to reconstruct new forms of social ties between fragmented social groups. This 'bricks and mortar' approach to reconstruction which ignores individuals' 'hearts and minds' is not uncommon in post-conflict settings as

demonstrated by the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, where such an approach is described as a threat to sustainable peace and reconciliation (Coles, 2011:33).

In the current fragmentation of Syria, a project of establishing a new legitimate power system cannot be achieved without 're-engineering' the concept of national identity in order to establish links between this new identity and the newly formed power representatives (Milliken and Krause, 2002:759), which further complicates the role of truth, silence and future representations of conflict as they are all linked in cyclical relation with 'the systems of power that produce and sustain' them (Russell, 2018:7). With this in mind, we need to be mindful that reconstruction might not happen in a 'post conflict' setting but rather in an ongoing and transformed form of conflict. As a result, there is a risk that the current de-escalation of violence in Syria might not be a signal of the end of the conflict, which can develop into a new phase where direct, militarised forms of violence are replaced by indirect, less visible forms that aim to control individuals and transmit new knowledge, values and ideologies (Davies, 2016).

To achieve this, emerging powers might seek to 'securitise' the social contexts of their citizens, including education, in order to impose the policies of exceptional measures as a legitimate paradigm to govern the population. This scenario poses a direct threat to promoting structural peace in Syria as post-conflict initiatives may become dominated by the application of a 'discourse of danger' as a social strategy to ensure the development of a collective identity in response to the current fragmented social fabric of the country (Campbell, 1992:312). The problematic nature of this discourse of danger lies in being a systemic project that supports the self-other dichotomy and provides 'a new theology of truth' about who we are or are not and what we have to fear (Campbell, ibid). As a result, it is fundamental to approach the world of threats and intentions as constructed and subjective, something which exposes the two faces of security as it is not primarily about protecting lives but also about 'the protection and

production' of particular ways of life in which some 'deaths are deemed necessary or inevitable' in order to protect 'the self' (Bourne, 2014:2).

This stance demonstrates that the issue of security has problematic implications for post-conflict reconstruction as it can entail an exclusionary and structurally violent logic, which approaches those who stand outside the social parameters identified by power systems as representing a potential or an actual threat. Security becomes inherently about power competition and modes of behaviours that exclude compromise, which necessitates examining this concept as floating on 'a sea of unvoiced assumptions' and an array of theoretical issues in relation to 'what and whom the term security refers to' (Krause and Williams, 2016:34).

In this field, the theory of securitisation (Waever, 1995) provides a useful framework as it demonstrates that security is not simply about protecting the sovereignty of a state but rather a problematic process in which the logic of 'existential' threats is applied as a justification to shift an issue from the realm of 'democratic politics' to the realm of 'exceptional politics' of secrecy and urgency (Buzan et al, 1998:23). The core principle is the need to differentiate between state security related to the issue of sovereignty, and political or societal security which is concerned with issues of competing ideologies and national identity (Waever et al, 1993). This differentiation does not indicate that there is a need to develop a new sector with new policies (Rhinard, 2021), but rather emphasises the duality of security and the need to expand the referent object of security from solely focusing on the state to include the 'identity of community' and the security of individuals (Shanks, 2019:16).

This perspective transcends an 'exclusive stress on territorial security', 'threats and use of control of military force' to an approach of multiple securities, which aims to foster 'human security' through supporting sustainable human development (UNDP, 1994:456). As a result, the state's security should not be sought at the expense of the well-being of individuals, and

that effective security measures should aim to abolish the threat of direct and indirect violence against individuals (Krause and Jutersonke, 2005). In this way, it is important to approach positive peace as being synonymous with human security, because structural peace is about 'disassembling' the very discursive foundations' which sustain exclusionist security (Maas, 2013:26).

The theory of securitisation alerts us to the danger of strategies which enable power systems to elevate an issue from the realm of normal politics to the sphere of 'panic politics' (Buzan et at, 1998:34). In this study, securitisation is approached by examining the structural efforts that aim to justify the application of military strategies and exceptional measures to tackle political and societal security. Securitisation becomes a process in which issues of identity and competing ideologies are treated as 'existential threats' to a valued 'us', something which requires the application of 'emergency measures' that are outside the 'normal bounds of political procedures' (Buzan et al, 1998:34). Lessons can be learned from the Kurdish experience in the region where various governments have applied exceptional measures to suppress the Kurdish identity, leading in some cases to systemic cleansing (Hama, 2020). In this way, not agreeing with a particular truth claim will be treated in the same way as a military threat to authority and will be met by extreme measures, such as imprisonment, torture and sometimes death.

As a result, an effective approach to peacebuilding explicitly examines how issues of societal and political security can be addressed by applying a militarised threat-defence logic (Waever, 1995), in order to legitimise deploying extraordinary measures against the enemy 'other' (Browning and McDonald, 2011:241). In a post-conflict reconstruction setting, it is necessary to examine how or if issues such as sovereignty and national security are applied as justifications for the use of official institutional resources against the political 'other', and for

turning the claims of ‘citizenship’ into the ‘justification’ for violence (Krause and Williams, 2016:44).

However, we need to be mindful that the same mechanisms that are used to give an issue a priority status can be used to de-politicise or silence another issue. This stance further problematises our understanding of the concept of securitisation as it is linked to politics of urgency and exceptional measures on one hand and policies of silence on the other. In both cases, examining the concept of securitisation needs to highlight how this process contributes to reinforcing exclusionary attitudes and policies that divide the society into a threatening ‘other’ and a harmonious ‘us’. This examination also needs to focus on how securitising procedures prioritise ‘obedience’ to dominant power structures, restrict security practices to power competition and modes of behaviours that exclude compromise (Buzan, 1991), something which has considerable implications for peacebuilding and the role of education in this process.

3.3 Implications for Peacebuilding and the Potential Role of Education in the Syrian Conflict:

Approaching the concepts of violence and peace as complex and multi-faceted asks us to re-evaluate our understanding of the role of education in this process, transcending simplistic causal links between a lack of education and violent conflicts to acknowledging the ‘highly complex’ relationship between education and violent conflicts (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2008:478). Lessons can be learned from previous conflicts such as the one in Rwanda where it has become evident that the education system has played a more negative role in intergroup relations (King: 2014). Rather than focusing on ‘the quantity’ of education, research needs to examine how the content of schooling itself contributes to feeding grievances and undermines intergroup trust (Mundy and Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

The real issue is not related to what ‘quantity’ of education is required as much as to how it is directed to legitimise violence and normalise military solutions, paving the way for the emergence of ‘biased or militarised’ curriculum and reinforcing the self-other dichotomy (Davies, 2011). From this perspective, examining the role of education in post conflict settings is not only about ‘how much’ education is provided but also about ‘what type’ of education is required to contribute towards peacebuilding.

In post-conflict Syria, education and teacher education will either contribute to maintaining the status quo as a ‘reflection of normality’ or to systematically aiming to ‘interrupt’ politics of fear and fragmentation (Davies, 2011:36-37). Linked to the point advocated in the introduction that education in Syria is currently at a crossroad, I developed the following model to illustrate this stance by showing the ‘two faces’ education can play in post-conflict reconstruction:

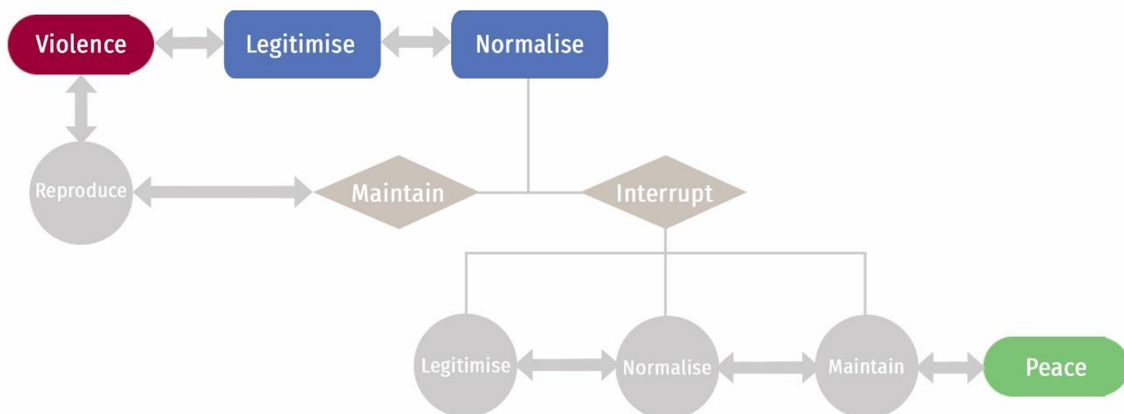

Illustration 3.2 – The Role of Education from Violence to Peace

According to this model, education in Syria can either continue contributing to the process of legitimising, normalising and maintaining the reproduction of violence, or interrupting the continuity of violence in order to contribute to legitimising an alternative paradigm based on structural peace. In order to promote sustainable peace, education in Syria

needs to ‘rupture’ the societal conditions that maintain and reproduce structural violence and systemic inequality (Pherali, 2019:12).

In light of this complex and multidirectional relationship between education and conflict, it is inappropriate to examine education as the sole cause of the conflict or as the ‘magic solution’ that could turn people into peace lovers (King, 2005:914, Vriens,1997: 58). What is important is to assess the role of education as part of wider, long-term political and social strategies in order to understand its full potential in contributing to the process of rebuilding social cohesion and conflict resolution. This holistic examination is pivotal to ensure that reconstruction initiatives are not reduced to a number of short-term fragmented initiatives, something which poses a considerable threat to peace. Lessons could be learned from the experience of Guatemala where efforts to deal with legacies of armed conflicts, such as the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Committees, had ‘little social impact’ as they were not part of a comprehensive strategy directed towards promoting sustainable peace (Oglesby, 2004:13). Even the Truth Commissions themselves ‘formally dissolved’ immediately after presenting their final reports (Oglesby, ibid).

A comprehensive understanding of the role of education cannot develop in isolation of the political, economic and social dimensions that affect the context within which the conflict is developing (Smith and Vaux, 2003). Therefore, current educational intervention in Syria will be ineffective in the long term in relation to creating sustainable peace if this intervention is implemented as compartmentalised humanitarian initiatives isolated from any long-term strategic response. A strategic response of education requires its reconstruction to go beyond physical aspects such as the reinstitution of the educational system before the conflict, rebuilding schools, employing teachers or providing books, as this approach ignores the psychological and ideological aspects of education reconstruction (Smith and Vaux, 2003). Approaching peace in Syria as merely an absence of violence, might make the ultimate

objective of peacebuilding confined to rebuilding the country's physical infrastructure so that life can get back to 'normal' as it was before the conflict. Such an approach, for example, ignores that peace requires Syrians to co-exist despite their conflicting ideologies, losses and memories of war.

Although it is expected to prioritise resuming normal life after years of conflict, peacebuilding will be jeopardised if reconstruction is interpreted as merely returning to the way things were before the conflict (Machel, 1996), as this approach ignores that rebuilding destroyed communities involves creating new webs of relationships between individuals who have been enemies. Relationships, after all, are the context in which cycles of violence have occurred and where peace will occur (Lederach, 2000). As a result, terms such as post-war and post-conflict in this study do not indicate that the conflict is approached as a linear process with predictable sequential stages but rather to examine if the relative peace that has been achieved is being utilised to develop a comprehensive strategy, where each component, including education, is 'infused with an intention to develop sustainable peace' (International Peace Institute, 2017:3).

Post-conflict peacebuilding in this sense refers to examining if reconstructing the education system is part of a long-term, holistic and multi-disciplinary strategy that aims to respond to both causes and manifestations of violence (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000), something which makes education's role two-fold. On one side, education has curative responsibilities to tackle the mental and psychological needs of students and teachers. On the other, it has preventative duties which revolve around conflict prevention and a contribution to the development of a sustainable positive peace culture. Such a role is inevitable in promoting sustainable peace as the conflict has demonstrated that the development of direct violence is interwoven with a 'culture-bound' system of learned rules and actions that are made, reinforced and changed through human interaction (Nordstrom, 1998:8). The development of direct

violence requires a conceptual paradigm that normalises violence as a strategy to manage change and resolve conflict between different groups. The essence of education for peace is then to counter this paradigm of violence by proposing an alternate system based on entirely different assumptions and relationships, in order to create a paradigm shift capable of countering the naturalisation of violence as an epistemology and ontology. Rebuilding the education system in Syria is not possible without promoting a new conceptual system that legitimises structural peace.

Such a holistic role of education requires diverse and more complicated responsibilities on the part of teachers, bringing the role of teacher education in peacebuilding to the forefront. This issue is key in Syria where teachers and their education have not yet gained the attention they deserve as the most critical resource in education reconstruction (Buckland, 2005). In this research, focusing on teacher education reflects an emphasis on teachers' critical role as the 'life blood' of any education system, and as one of the most important factors in mediating the educational curriculum, and the values it conveys (Buckland, 2005:18). This focus is intended also to be a warning that a failure to support teachers to carry out their expected responsibilities in post-conflict education limits the potential role of education in peacebuilding.

The development of effective and comprehensive teacher education strategies becomes a fundamental pre-requisite for the successful reconstruction of the education system, which makes examining teacher education in Syria an appropriate start for my research. It is critical at this stage to examine what kind of support is provided to these 'wounded healers', who have to go through the same painful process of working through their experiences of trauma, violence and hatred as their students (Ezati et al, 2011:200). Besides, teachers who are unable to perceive their own biases cannot be expected to identify or help others identify structural violence embedded in their cultural, political and educational contexts (Epp, 1996). Sustainable peacebuilding in Syria requires teacher education that is not shy of acknowledging education

as an ideological and political terrain that reciprocally produces and is produced by dominant culture and hegemonic certainties (McLaren, 1995).

In light of this perspective of teacher education, teachers cannot be reduced to technicians or education to training where the aim of this process is restricted to promoting academic forms of success (Giroux, 2016), but rather it explicitly considers questions about what or how to teach as an expression of political interests, and as reflections of different political ideologies. Promoting sustainable peace requires the development of teacher education that is committed to providing equitable access to all learners, and encouraging dialogue as a tool to discuss causes of and solutions to the conflict (Pherali and Lewis, 2019). The quality of education and teacher education can no longer be defined or assessed in relation to learners' performance, but rather it needs to be linked to approaching the role of teachers as 'agents' of sustainable peace (Novelli and Sayed, 2016:15).

As a result, teacher education that aims to promote a positive peace culture in Syria needs to be underpinned by a theoretical framework which conceptualises the role of teachers beyond the accommodating and hegemonic public servant (Aronowitz and Giroux:1993), who uncritically accepts and implements the educational, political and ideological content of the curriculum. On the contrary, it adopts the role of teachers as critical and transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988), who aim to enable their learners as well as themselves to question the status quo in order to reveal and transform structural and cultural aspects of violence. This theoretical framework has already been examined in relation to the Syrian conflict, where it has been proved to be an effective tool in capitalising on refugee teachers' local knowledge, professional experience, and creativity to create empowering learning spaces and to envision a better future (Pherali et al, 2020).

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

By illustrating how the concepts of violence, peace, truth, silence and securitisation are complex and subjective human conjectures, this chapter highlights the need to examine established social truths and knowledge of reality as open to readjustment rather than being a 'fixed commodity' (Philips, 1976:192). 'Objective' social realities, therefore, can only be approximated since we develop an understanding of them through our representations. Such a stance stresses that there can be no innocent eye that is capable of penetrating aboriginal reality (Bruner, 2004).

As a researcher, I cannot avoid bringing my social autobiography to the research process or describing examined social realities in a non-theoretically loaded way (Griffiths, 1995). It becomes important at this stage to examine the ontological and epistemological assumptions that I bring to this study.

Chapter Four

EXAMINING THE PHILOSOPHY, JUSTIFICATION AND APPLICATION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction:

In this chapter, I aim to examine the philosophy, justification and application of the research methodology and methods that I adopted in this study. I argue that this study and its adopted methods of enquiry are based on ontological and epistemological 'assumptions' including what are perceived as 'appropriate methods' to develop knowledge about examined reality (Punch 2014:14). This commitment to philosophical beliefs makes it necessary to explicitly examine the philosophical ideas that this study incorporates and to approach philosophical argumentation as a central feature of the methods and procedures of educational research (Carr, 1995).

4.1 Methodological Stance and Underpinning Values:

I approached research methodology in this study as a 'theoretical context' which allowed me to think and make sense of the examined context and data (Freire, 1970a:42), so it would be best to picture my adopted methodology as the tip of an iceberg hiding the researcher's personal biography, epistemological and ontological concepts (Bateson, 1972). In this regard, the more I reflected on my values and the systematic application of education in the Syrian conflict, the more I realised the need to adopt a methodology that allowed me to transcend 'mechanistic' examination of education in order to capture its 'complex totality' as an 'act of knowing' that cannot be delivered in a 'sterile' and 'neutral' environment' (Freire, 1970b:1).

Such a methodology is essential for the Syrian context where examining the development of different truth claims about the conflict illustrates how these truth claims can

develop to become unproblematic and 'common-sense' knowledge as if they are not influenced by people's interpretations or positions within their socio-political structures. This intersection between knowledge and power in creating 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1976:145) has illustrated to me the relevance of critical theory to this study especially as it is oriented towards identifying internalised dimensions of ideology which could appear as natural ways of understanding experience. To ensure a transparent application of a critical methodology, I will outline some of its key principles and how they are incorporated in this study.

4.1.1 Critical Theory: Development and Key Principles:

In its narrow sense, critical theory refers to a school of thought put forward by the philosophers and social theorists of what is known as the Frankfurt School, which is developed in contrast to 'traditional' theory with its 'naturalistic objectivism' of natural sciences (Morrow and Brown, 1994:14). By departing from this positivist approach, critical theory emphasises the need to examine social reality as a 'historical totality' rather than an 'aggregate of mechanical determinants or abstract functions' (Morrow and Brown, ibid). This theory is also distinguished from a 'traditional' theory by directing its aim towards emancipating individuals from enslaving circumstances and creating a world which 'satisfies the needs and powers of human beings' (Horkheimer, 2002:246).

As a result, critical theory is interested in not only examining the social world but also in directly seeking to change it through developing an understanding of what is wrong with a particular social context, outlining required strategies to trigger social change while explicitly describing the norms that underpin its proposed criticism and social transformation. Critical theory in this sense aims at identifying, challenging and changing the processes through which a 'grossly iniquitous society' applies 'dominant ideology' to make its inequity appear as 'a normal state of affairs' (Brookfield, 2015:418). A theory is, therefore, 'critical' if it meets the criteria of being explanatory, practical and normative, and in being 'progressive and

conscientious' of how power and knowledge are 'produced, 'disseminated' and 'linked' within our social contexts (Rexhepi and Torres, 2011:684). In this way, one of the main tenets of critical theory is shifting individuals' positions in the world from a 'spectator' to producers of their own 'historical form of life', and not abandoning hope of achieving our ultimate self-realisation (Horkheimer, 1993:21).

This interest in critiquing and transforming social realities is adopted by other philosophical approaches, something which has led to the development of 'critical theories' such as critical pedagogy, critical race theory and critical social work to name a few. What remains in common between these theories are their attempts to politicise social problems by 'situating' them in their historical and cultural context, and to 'implicate' the researcher in the process of collecting and analysing data (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002:52). Instead of seeking objective knowledge, these theories aim to question the social-historical conditioning of the individual and to contribute to uncovering the socio-political structures that benefit from that conditioning. At the centre of this project is an attempt to unmask the play of power in our lives and the ways it is used and abused through assessing available evidence to justify different beliefs or courses of action (Brookfield, 2005).

In this study, my application of critical methodology is informed by Paulo Freire, who I consider as my 'methodological mentor', as his concepts shaped my understanding and application of critical theory. As a result, I approached critical methodology as one that embraced human unfinishedness, encouraged epistemological curiosity and acknowledged education as a political process (Freire, 2012, 2005). The application of critical methodology in this study comes from its emphasis on examining people's historicity and their unique capacity to meaningfully exist in and with the world of history and culture; which they produce at the same time as their history and culture produce them (Freire, 1994). Individuals involved in this study, including the researcher, are approached as 'unconcluded, limited, conditioned,

historical beings' (Freire, 1994:100), who were involved in a constant process of becoming and intervening as subjects of the world. Seeing ourselves as being in the world, with the world and with others, changes our role from decontextualised observers to subjects who seek to intervene in what happens in the world (Freire, 2012).

Embracing our 'unfinishedness' and ontological incompleteness becomes an important pre-requisite to liberate ourselves from conditioning factors, and to trigger inside us a process of 'epistemological curiosity' and 'restless questioning' to unveil the world upon which and in which we act (Freire, 2001:32-35). In this way, the research process became part of an ongoing curious search in which I stepped back from myself and from the life I was leading in order to create my voice, position and social agency in the process of social construction and reconstruction.

Adopting this positionality was necessary in my research context, which is 'inherently political and shaped by multiple political positions' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002:6), and where education plays an important but currently destructive role in perpetuating certain political beliefs and reinforcing prevailing truth claims about the conflict. It was necessary to acknowledge in this study how education was implicated in concepts of power and history, and the impossibility of neutrality or impartiality of education in regard to reproducing dominant ideology and reinforcing truth claims. As an educator, I found myself facing an ethical question of whether I was with or against reversing the current role of education in Syria. What became important for me at this stage was to examine the implications of adopting a critical methodology for conducting my research.

4.1.2 Critical Methodology and Implications for my Research:

Adopting a critical methodology has ontological implications for this study as it entails approaching social reality and historical worlds as intentional, rule-governed and constituted

by the human mind (Carr, 1995). This stance indicates the inappropriateness of examining social realities in Syria scientifically or modelling them on any mechanical or organic system analogy (Willmott, 2002). As a result, this study seeks to develop more 'evocative' and 'compelling' insights as a way to 'sophisticate' our understanding of a particular social context through engaging with the world and humbly learning from others (Kincheloe, 2007).

Instead of perceiving our socio-political systems as self-evident, objective and beyond intervention, this study aims to question the passive acceptance of the 'way things are', the seemingly obvious and natural, through the application of our powers of reason. Therefore, I did not examine established knowledge or truth claims in Syria as 'externally given' or objective propositions, but rather as interpretations that could be distorted by ideological forces and structural constraints (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). I sought to examine those taken-for-granted social truths that the system sophisticated their application to the extent that it could impose them without employing 'coercive forms' of control (Brookfield, 2001:1). I focused on examining this 'sophisticated application' which integrated dominant social truths in every aspect of the individual's life, so they become part of the 'cultural air' they breathe (Brookfield, ibid).

Knowledge development in this study is approached as a human product that is socially and culturally constructed, rejecting claims that knowledge should be viewed as objective, uninfluenced by human values or interests. I approached knowledge of the social world as constituting a multiverse of ways of understanding that world, which stressed the complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of knowledge development. Acknowledging this 'epistemic fallacy' made me aware that there were different 'knowledges' about the examined topic, and that I needed to develop an open-minded approach to scrutinise my own perspectives of it (Collier, 1994:76).

The importance of adopting a critical methodology came from allowing me to reveal rather than deny the ontological, epistemological and axiological baggage I brought to the research process (Kincheloe and McLaren 2003), without avoiding the responsibility for critically scrutinising my values. This methodology gave me the opportunity to be 'anchored' to my values without undermining the development of 'intellectual ability' to analyse and produce both self and social knowledge (Bolton, 2016:16, Kincheloe, 2007:24). Reflexivity became an integral part of a strategy to develop social critique that could unmask complex political and ideological agendas hidden in every aspect of our life. The overall aim was always to locate examination of individuals (including my own) within a wider social, historical and political context and to identify how these beliefs were conditioned by language, history, and culture.

The quest to develop a meta-analysis of the situation in Syria places ideology critique at the heart of my efforts to understand our social world, as it made me realise the impossibility of breaking through the compliancy of the status quo without tackling the question of how we developed an understanding of reality that itself distorts our consciousness. In this study, I did not separate between the formation of hegemony and the production of ideology because hegemonic efforts to win individual's consent cannot be achieved without developing 'cultural forms', and the 'representations' that legitimise the status quo and individuals' position within it (Kincheloe, 2007:36). As a result, I became interested in examining the process of creating a false consciousness or a 'conceptual chameleon' that made what was man-made (in this case violence) appear fixed and natural (McLaren and Giarelli,1995:53).

The role of education in promoting sustainable peace cannot be separated from developing ideology critique as it is unlikely to occur unless individuals become conscious of and able to change 'ideology-generating mechanisms' that make them act against their true interests (Finlayson, 2005:23). Countering the paradigm of violence becomes about developing

educational practitioners and institutions that are capable of withstanding the ‘corrosive effect’ of ideological colonisation (Finlayson, 2005:15), and developing an individual’s ability to break through the veil of ‘ideological obfuscation’ in order to be able to name their social reality (Mezirow, 1991:3). The role of education and teacher education in interrupting the established paradigm of violence needs to be examined in light of their ability to cultivate anthropological perspectives among teachers and learners to view reality outside their cultural boundaries.

Promoting sustainable peace is thus about developing ‘conscientisation’ (Freire, 2005:67), which requires the individual to be critically aware of the premises of one’s beliefs and how they constrain the way they perceive the world. Sustainable peace needs to be approached as synonymous with empowering individuals to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to develop a critical awareness of the process of legitimising violence, dehumanisation and exclusion. Structural and cultural aspects of peace are unlikely to develop if the hidden structures of violence remain unrecognised and capable of reproducing their existence and their ‘regime of truths’.

All the principles advocated above informed my thinking about the application of research methods in this study, and the principles that underpinned my understanding of their role in enhancing my research.

4.2 Research Methods: Reflection and Underlying Principles:

Reflecting on my understanding of research methods at an early stage of this study, it becomes evident that I approached these methods more like a ‘shopping list’ of mechanisms that would enable me to unproblematically record data (Huberman and Miles, 2002:90). I became aware of the inappropriateness of such an approach as it reduced the actual research process to the mere gathering, documenting and presenting of information. In order to

transcend this ‘theoretical naiveté’ and ‘methodological spontaneity’ (Kvale,1996:12), I sought to critically examine the philosophical beliefs and ideas incorporated in this study and to place philosophical reflection and argumentation at the very centre of the topic of research methods.

Consequently, it became clear to me that I needed to examine the link between research methods and what I was trying to find out (Silverman, 2006), in a way in which these methods could enhance the application of research as a systematic process to generate, analyse and interpret data with the purpose of understanding a phenomenon within a particular philosophical framework (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001). In light of this perspective, I approached research methods as an integral part of the research process, and not just an add-on accessory, and as a means to answer my research questions and not as a transformation of them (Maxwell, 2005). Adopted research methods in this study, therefore, have no intrinsic value in themselves, and it is inappropriate to approach them as being either true or false, but rather as more or less useful in enhancing data generation (Silverman, 1993).

As a result, the primary criterion to evaluate research methods in this study was based on their ‘fitness for purpose’ (Cohen et al, 2007:354), their appropriateness to what I was examining and their ability to generate qualitative data and meaningful relations that could be interpreted. I was required, for example, to select research methods that were responsive to the unique characteristics of the research context, which is strongly oral and where emphasis is usually placed more on informal social settings than on formal business styles. I therefore needed to adopt methods that could incorporate building trust and personal relationships as part of the data generation process. This dimension cannot be ignored in a country like Syria where years of fighting has fragmented the country, and it has made people mistrust each other.

I also sought methods that could help me make the 'known' and taken-for-granted unfamiliar in order to overcome the effects of my personal and cultural assumptions, attitudes

and evaluations. As a researcher, I was aware of the need to seek research methods that had the ability to consider the cluster of theoretical backgrounds all involved parties bring to the process of data generation and analysis (Flinders and Mills, 2013). Such an awareness was of particular importance to me considering my personal attachment to the research context, as a native Syrian, something which required me to demonstrate the application of rigorous methods in order to enhance the quality of craftsmanship in the research process (Flick, 2018). Validity, from this perspective, became a process of constant questioning, examining and interpreting throughout all stages of knowledge development, and not merely inspection at the end of the research process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002).

4.2.1 The Application of Interviews in this Study:

In light of this understanding of the philosophy of research methods, I selected qualitative interviews as a research method as they could allow the researcher and participants to bring their concepts, theories and identities to the research process (Edwards and Holland, 2013). In this way, my rationale to select qualitative interviews was based on their ability to help the researcher examine the participants' 'private' and 'incommunicable' social worlds (Qu and Dumay, 2011:255), which allows the researcher to examine individuals' feelings, attitudes and values, and to access those 'layers of mystery' (Holiday, 2002:4), that might not be reached through other research methods. My aim was to apply interviews as an 'inter-view' (Kvale,1996:11), where I could co-construct knowledge through the interaction taking place between the researcher and research participants. I also realised that such a perspective of interview application marked a shift from seeing participants as simply manipulable, and data as external to them, towards approaching knowledge and data as generated between humans through conversations (Kvale, 1996). Interviews in this way became a co-elaborated act; a social, interpersonal encounter rather than simply being a data collection technique.

I did not approach interviews as a simple choice between being subjective or objective but rather as inter-subjective since they could help all parties involved to describe their interpretation of the social environment in which they lived and created at the same time. Consequently, the term data 'generation' will be used in this study to replace data collection to indicate the wider range of relationships between involved parties, and to stress that interviews are a productive site of reportable knowledge and not merely a neutral conduit or source of bias (Gubrium and Holstein, 1995).

Being subjective or inter-subjective, however, does not mean, or justify, being biased but rather it implies not claiming interest in nomothetic knowledge that seek universal causal relationships. As a result, interview subjective and inter-subjective accounts in this study can neither be considered as representative of an absolute truth nor can they be examined simply as unmediated confessions despite being granted a 'culturally honoured status of reality' (Miller and Glassner, 1997:100). What remained key for me was not to 'lift' interview data out of the context in which it was generated (Fontana and Frey, 1998:663).

This stance is particularly important in this study where participants' perceptions about the development of the conflict and its settlement need to be situated in the wider political and socio-cultural context. For example, most participants in my research came from a government-held region so it was expected that their points of view would or 'had to' reflect those of the government. Also, I needed to be mindful of the language used in interview exchanges as certain terms have social and political connotations; for instance, terms such as 'revolution' or 'conflict' reflect if one supports the opposition or the government. Within opposition itself, terms such as 'revolution' or 'Jihad' (holy war) reflect 'secular' versus 'Islamic' opposition. This stance further problematises the application of interviews as generated data is not simply subjective or inter-subjective but rather implicated in political, cultural and historical forces affecting interview interactions.

4.2.2 From Subjective, Inter-subjective to Critical Interviews:

In developing my understanding of the application of interviews, I became aware of the risk of approaching interviews as a means to explore only subjective and inter-subjective perspectives, as such an application could strip interview accounts of their socio-political context. It became important for me to examine interview data in light of broader social, institutional and representational contours. I attempted in this study to strike a balance between approaching interview data as reflecting subjective or intersubjective accounts and broader social phenomena. After all, both researchers and participants do not communicate in a socio-cultural vacuum (Silverman, 2006), and they all participate in the interview process from historically grounded biographies as well as disciplinary perspectives. My stance in this area developed towards examining individuals' inner experience as constituted socially and culturally and not only as reflections of individual forms of inner beliefs.

Therefore, the application of qualitative interviews in this study is directly linked to its critical methodology, which views individuals as inevitably bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), and as entangled in a world of meaning that is ideologically mediated. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to experience social dynamics in an objective sense of reality since these dynamics operate within cultural and ideological categories of that society (Denzin, 1997). Interview data in this study was examined in relation to and as a reflection of the ideological, political, cultural context of all participants including the researcher, so the interaction between participants and I became a representation of wider ideologies and meaning-making mechanisms. This holistic approach to interview application seeks to create a balance between focusing on participants' own views of the world while simultaneously considering individuals' historicity and their unique capacity to meaningfully exist in and with the world of history and culture (Freire, 1994). After all,

social phenomena do not exist independently of individuals' understanding of them and those understandings need to be examined as having a critical generative role (Hammersley, 2007).

An important characteristic of this approach is situating the research process in an interpretive paradigm since I am actively interpreting the research context, data and myself. Simultaneously, this approach recognises the need to relate this interpretivist process to its wider social, historical and political development in order to illustrate the political and cultural framework within which this process operates (Hammersley, 2013). This balanced approach is necessary to ensure that the research focus does not shift from public issues to pre-occupation with personalities (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997), something which represents an important pre-requisite to a study like this with its commitment to the promotion of wider issues of a political nature.

In light of this perspective, the researcher's role develops to be a key research instrument (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), which makes it necessary to critically examine this role and its impact on data generation and analysis.

4.2.3 Interviews and the Role of the Researcher:

In examining the researcher's role in data generation, I adopted Kvale's (1996) distinction between the researcher as a miner and traveller as a conceptual framework to illustrate the impact of that role upon data generation. This framework distinguishes between data or knowledge as residing within subjects and waiting to be unearthed, uncontaminated by the 'miner' researcher, and data generation as a journey instigating a process of self-reflection and understanding between the researcher and local inhabitants. In the latter approach, data does not simply exist out there independently of the researcher's interpretations and perspectives.

The concept of the researcher as a 'traveller' is essentially about adopting an explanatory orientation (Hammersley, 2013), which aims to develop an understanding of participants' perspectives and the patterns that constitute their behaviour. In this way, the traveller researcher abandons claims of 'procedural objectivity' and aims to strike a balance between understanding the unique cultural character of their participants' beliefs and practices, and the need to rely on our human capacity in order to understand others 'from the inside' (Hammersley, 2013:26-27). This stance requires the researcher to develop a high level of 'qualified naiveté' (Kvale, 2007:12), in order to be sensitive to what is or is not said, and to be critical of their own presuppositions.

However, I was mindful of the risk of reducing the image of the researcher as traveller to a concept of an 'intellectual tourist' (Griffiths, 1998:143), who is only interested in short-term visits, deliberately or unconsciously selects cultural snapshots, and may fail to challenge their own perspectives (Brinkman, 2018). This sense of travelling is inappropriate to my research especially when my background and links with the research context are considered. I was also aware of other challenges presented by my research context to the concept of researcher as traveller since the conflict has fragmented the country and created social memberships that cannot be easily accessed especially by a stranger. Access was not simply an issue of availability but involved how I was perceived by participants ideologically, culturally and politically. For example, an awareness of the issue of truth development was vital in this process as such awareness represented a social code in order to access a particular group. This access was essential to conduct interviews in the first place and not least to be able to access the more hidden, less straightforward aspects of the examined phenomenon.

This sensitivity to the context needed to be reflected in my choice of language where certain phrases such as 'revolution' or 'conflict or crisis' represent key social 'passwords' as they indicate different political orientations in the conflict. Interview questions also needed to

be carefully worded in order to avoid asking participants any questions in which they needed to disclose any politically sensitive material or to reflect political opinions about the conflict, especially those that could place them in conflict with the mainstream version of truth. It was key to be aware that participants might not be willing to disclose information if they felt such information might cause a threat to their safety or careers. As part of my commitment to research ethical standards, I made it clear to all participants that they could choose not to answer any question without having to provide any explanation. Equally important was the issue of sampling and which strategies I adopted in this regard, something which needs to be clearly outlined in this study.

4.3 Sampling and Representational Issues:

Developing my understanding of the complexity of conducting qualitative interviews made me aware of the importance of identifying the parameters of research participants and making sampling strategies explicit. I approached sampling in this study as a purposive process in which participants needed to be strategically selected based on their ability to shed light on the larger forces and processes under investigation, allowing the comparatively small group of selected participants to answer the research questions (May, 2002). While developing sampling strategies, the underlying principle was always to ensure that such strategies enhanced the application of interviews so that generated data reflected larger trends in societies and not just the idiosyncrasies of the selected group that participated in the interview process (May, ibid). I sought to select a carefully targeted sample, which included individuals who had knowledge relevant to the research questions and would be willing or had a motive to reveal what they knew.

An important part of the sampling process was outlining how the selected participants were the best ones I could approach based on their ability to give informed insights into the proposed research questions. In this regard, my interview participants belonged to two distinct

categories**.** The first category included senior government officials who were involved in decision-making as part of their strategy development positions. The rationale behind selecting this group was to explore the inner workings of political processes and how the role of education in a 'post-conflict' situation was viewed and responded to within the political machine. All the senior officials interviewed in this study were in positions which involved overseeing education, Higher Education and teacher education.

The interest in interviewing this category was also partly related to a lack of publicly available policy documents that could help identify the government's vision and strategies in relation to education and teacher education. It was also important that participants from this group would be accustomed to being interviewed regarding the government's stance, strategies and future plans since a large number of humanitarian, international and media sources are currently present in the research context. However, I was mindful that interviewing this group would be challenging because of their expertise, busy schedules and the possibility they had their own interest in using such a platform to spread a particular message (Darbi and Hall, 2014).

In order to develop a 'fuller' picture of the multiple realities and the complex situation of the Syrian conflict, I also aimed to interview teacher educators, educational supervisors and counsellors who were the ones at the forefront of teacher education, implementing the government's strategies and had first-hand experience of teachers' needs and their possible role in a post-conflict situation. This group of participants would also allow me to examine if or how they had any influence on the development of education and teacher education strategies. In both categories, I was aware of the importance of identifying the right gatekeepers who would introduce me to interview participants and would ensure I was not perceived as an outsider or a threat to the social circle I was examining. After all, although I am Syrian, I still

live in a foreign country that is currently viewed as an enemy in the areas where I was conducting my field research.

It is important to point out that interviews in this study were approached as theme and not person-oriented, since they were used to help establish common themes around the participants' life-world that were of relevance to them and to the researcher. Being theme-oriented, the interviews in my research were intended to give participants the scope to articulate more fully their responses and describe their accounts, while keeping interview exchanges focused on the research's central themes. In this way, the researcher could prioritise flexibility and discovery of meaning to standardisation and comparability (May, 2001).

This understanding goes in line with the concept of 'qualified naiveté' (Kvale, 2007:12), and aims to emphasise my interest in genuinely learning about these themes rather than reinforcing pre-prescribed conceptions or misconceptions. As a result, I used semi-structured interviews because of their flexibility especially when it comes to seeking clarification and elaboration on interview interchanges, and to be responsive to the context and participants in a less pre-determined manner (Cohen et al, 2007). By adopting semi-structured interviews, I aimed to give participants the opportunity to answer interview questions on their own terms, raise issues that were relevant to them and provide them with a greater flexibility to describe their accounts within their own frames of reference (Bryman, 1988).

This stance brings to the forefront the 'politics of evidence' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018:16), and problematises the representation of interview data especially as it has been argued in this paper that interview data cannot be viewed as a mirror of reality, nor do they grant us direct access to participants' experiences. Instead of providing us with scientific-like facts about individuals' experiences, interview data provides us with indirect representations of those experiences. This stance emphasises the importance of the researcher's role in the

interview process, as this role is not confined to generating data but it also extends to its interpretation. It becomes important to acknowledge that it is not only data that is constructed but also evidence is produced, constructed and presented (Morse, 2013). This stance urges us to direct attention towards the process of meaning assembly and representation, and to subject the role of the researcher to critical examination as a part of the process of knowledge production (Griffiths, 1998).

The question that cannot be ignored is 'whose meaning' the interview process highlights and the researcher reports (Seidman, 1998). Facing such a question is a daunting task as it requires acknowledging that the describer is value-laden on one hand without making this an excuse to read data from our own values and belief systems (Boyatzis, 1998). The interviewer cannot avoid acknowledging and dealing with the complexity of representation, nature of language and writing, the inseparability of knowledge and researcher (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Although language is used in this study as a way to construct and not mirror the reality I am examining (Alvesson, 2003), I am still responsible for ensuring I am doing my utmost to be disciplined to delve deeper, so I could truthfully capture and represent the 'meaning' of what is being said (Rubin and Rubin 1995:7). I became aware that the research process needed to be underpinned by a conscious and consistent effort to view the subject matter from different angles to avoid the prior privilege of a single favoured angle and vocabulary.

To reflect this conscious effort, the analysis of interview data was also paralleled by a process of examining relevant documents such as learning materials, curriculum documents and educational strategies, which became a source of data generation in this study. By focusing on their relevance, quality and not quantity, document examination in this study aimed to complement interview data and cross reference my interpretation of this data. Although these documents are generally produced regardless of the research objectives, their interpretation still

relied on me as the agent who brought meaning to them, especially when searching for the ‘unwitting’ evidence supported by the examined documents (O’Leary, 2014).

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

Although I have been attempting through this chapter to develop a close link between my research questions, methodology and methods, these attempts do not aim to prove ‘methodological correctness’ or to guarantee truth in my research (Giroux, 1983), but rather to develop an understanding of the theoretical and pragmatic relationship between my research questions, methodology and methods. I am aware in this study of the importance of differentiating between the truth claims and philosophical nature of those claims and the veracity and truthfulness of my research findings since it is explicitly or implicitly implied in this study that any type of knowledge, including the one claimed in this paper, is essentially incomplete (Freire, 2012).

Therefore, these attempts are about reflecting my commitment to be explicit about what I am trying to do, what I am claiming to be doing and more importantly matching the two with what I am actually doing to develop a rigorous and systematic method that is in agreement with the way I conceptualise the subject of this research (Reicher and Taylor, 2005). Finally, acknowledging that the assumptions underlying my research are culturally and historically situated, implies that they should constantly resist stagnation by being subject to critical examination (Yanchar et al, 2005), which will be ongoing even after the completion of my thesis.

Chapter Five

RESEARCH FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: REFLECTIVE REMARKS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY FIELD EXPERIENCE

Introduction:

In this chapter, I will reflect on my field experience in Syria where I travelled in the summer of 2018 to conduct my research, and I will highlight the lessons I have learnt from this experience regarding the complexity and unpredictability of conducting qualitative research. I will also illustrate the contextual constraints that have contributed to shaping the scope and nature of this study and have also contributed to my development as a researcher.

5.1. Field Work can be Planned but not Engineered:

When I started my field research, my initial plan was to start my research by conducting pilot interviews before interviewing senior participants in order to have an opportunity to refine research questions and become more familiar with the process of conducting qualitative interviews. However, contrary to this plan, the first interview I had to conduct was with a senior government official who was directly involved in overseeing education strategies in Syria. This interview was confirmed at short notice and the participant did not want a list of questions in advance. Instead, he only asked for a briefing about the aim of my research before we conducted the interview.

I had to be flexible and change my plans in response to the availability of participants. There were also unexpected changes to some gatekeepers' jobs; for example, one of the key gatekeepers resigned from their university post, where I was planning to conduct my research, shortly before my trip, while another gatekeeper's contact migrated to a different country. In addition, my trip to Syria coincided with Eid Al Adha, which is usually a four-day religious celebration but that year the government extended this holiday over a period of nine days.

During this period, all schools, universities and government centres were closed, which impacted upon the availability of gatekeepers and participants.

Reflecting on my initial experience, the unpredictability of field research should have come as no surprise since it is acknowledged that this type of research happens in a natural setting (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), or as I prefer to call it, an authentic setting. During my field experience, I was required to demonstrate a high level of flexibility in the face of unpredictable conditions, and to acknowledge that this type of research could not be subjected to rigid procedures or fixed roles (Burgess,1984). As a result, flexibility and adaptability were essential pre-requisites to ensure I was conducting field work effectively, to be able to respond to the particular social setting I was examining, and to enhance participants' cooperation in the process of data generation; a process which I found to be far from predictable and straightforward.

5.1.1 Access and Cooperation: Bridging the Gap between Physical and Social Access:

The unpredictability of field research became more evident when I tried to access research sites and meet potential participants, as in every case I experienced different reactions to my presence and requests for access. In one of these experiences at the faculty of education, I managed to arrange a meeting with a senior Director at the faculty through one of the gatekeepers. The Director was briefed over the phone about who I was and the purpose of my visit, and he informed the gatekeeper that he would be willing to assist me in discussing some of the research questions and in introducing me to academic staff. However, when I met him, he was very formal and asked at the very beginning of our meeting for further information and administrative processes as a condition to cooperate with me. Some of these requirements were to provide a letter from my university in England to prove I was a doctorate student and to submit a written request to the President of the university to approve this research.

Having previously worked at a university in Syria, I was aware that such a process would take a considerable time that would exceed the period I was staying in the country. I was also aware that such a request was not required since I was not asking for financial or confidential information, and the type of research I was conducting usually happened informally as was the case in the other interviews I conducted in this study. It became evident to me that these procedural barriers, requests for further information and shifting responsibilities were no more than resistance tactics employed by the Director to avoid cooperation with me.

This experience illustrates the importance of not assuming that gatekeepers' approval will automatically guarantee cooperation, and that being granted physical access does not guarantee social access in terms of gaining social acceptance among research participants (Clark, 2010). So, a researcher might access the research site or meet potential participants, but it cannot be assumed that this process will automatically lead to cooperation and access to materials and information required for data generation (Miller and Bell, 2013). This highlights a fundamental conceptual principle in research that asks the researcher to differentiate between access and cooperation as representing two distinctive processes that cannot be used in the research process interchangeably (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

I needed to bridge between access and co-operation in order to work with research participants and acknowledge reasons that might impede this process, something which made the point of entry into field research a complex process and anything but straightforward. Consequently, it was important not to approach the concept of access as simply a single decision or event, but rather as an ongoing process that might take considerable time and effort to negotiate before its settlement (Delamont, 2002). Social access was further problematised as it was being sought in a research context that was fragmented, highly politicised and securitised, so any activity or issue could be easily labelled by security agencies as a matter of

national security allowing them to take action without going through normal processes or being held accountable. This ever present nature of security in all aspects of life in the research context made me realise that the social access I was seeking could not be approached as either granted or withheld at one particular point in time (Geer, 1970), but rather as an on-going organic process that involved negotiations and renegotiations, a ‘continuous push and pull’ between the researcher and gatekeepers and participants (Van Maanen, 1998:144, Burgess, 1984:45).

It remained essential to relate this process of pushing and pulling to the issue of compliance with research ethical standards, as I needed to ensure that I did not confuse complying with standards with being coercive. This required an acknowledgement that obtaining access should never overrule participants’ autonomy to refuse participation in the research process, respecting their attitudes, context-specific influences and their perceptions of the research aims. It was important not to approach fieldwork structural challenges as personal ones (Delamont, 2002), and to genuinely respect the participants’ decisions not to cooperate, as was the case with my experience at the faculty of education.

Thus, it became clear that the concepts of access and cooperation could not be separated from my commitment to ethical standards, informed consent and my ability to be flexible in the research process. Research ethics had to be approached as transcending being a ‘one-off bureaucratic exercise’ to an on-going process in which it was essential to develop the capacity to negotiate, evaluate, and make decisions while in action without disregarding the historical, political and social particularity of my research context. In this way, I started to recognise the emerging nature of research ethics as subject to the research context rather than being governed by universal rules (Shaw, 2008). In order to be able to balance between ethical and practical considerations of my field research, and to maintain my commitment to prioritising the interdependence of individuals and their responsibilities to each other, it was essential in this

study to adopt 'situational ethics' in order to consider the unique characteristics of the Syrian conflict and the social fragment I was researching while simultaneously maintaining commitment to 'ethics of responsibility' and 'care' to those involved in the study (Flyvbjerg, 2001:130).

After all, as I have argued previously, research is not only a subjective process but also an inter-subjective one, that requires the researcher to expand their horizon beyond the self to examine how participants perceive them, and how these perceptions might impact upon their cooperation and the process of data generation. Engagement in research cannot after all be a passive process, and the researcher needs to be aware of what factors affect participants' participation and what makes them develop relationships with the researcher (Clark, 2010). This stance is of particular importance to a qualitative study like this, as part of its 'qualitativeness' is reflected through carrying out research with participants and not on them (Reason and Bradbury, 2008).

5.1.2 It is not always about the Researcher: Participants' Perceptions, Cooperation and Data Generation:

It became apparent during my field experience that I could not approach the issues of social access, cooperation and reciprocity in isolation of participants' perceptions of me (Dickson-Swift et all, 2007); a process that was not only determined by how I presented myself but also how I was perceived by gatekeepers and participants (Kawulich, 2011). This understanding highlighted that my positionality and others' perceptions of me could not be solely controlled by me as these concepts entailed what was ascribed to me by participants (Reeves, 2010). An integral part of conducting effective research relied on examining my positionality in every interaction, the way the participants were positioning my individual identity and affiliations, and the factors influencing participants' perceptions of me, something which required developing my ability to be vigilant in every meeting of how I was perceived,

and how these perceptions impacted upon data generation, the formulation of power relations and the production of knowledge.

Reflecting on my interactions with research participants, I have realised that their perceptions of me were not static or uniform, but rather they varied from one experience to another, forming a spectrum that can be outlined as the following:

- A stranger who might have a hidden agenda, or it was not clear how the research agenda might be interpreted by security agencies, something which created a high level of mistrust as well as fear of facing repercussions with official authorities.

- An inspector or a person linked to senior government officials whose feedback to these officials might affect participants' jobs and future promotion opportunities.

- A listener to offload personal and everyday life challenges that were not widely reported including financial difficulties, the frustration these participants were experiencing and the way these challenges were handled or mishandled. Research for these participants was more like a therapeutic opportunity for self-expression in matters that were of relevance to them (Clark, 2010).

- A mediator who could help raise awareness among 'others' outside the country regarding what participants deemed as truthful representation of the conflict to counter the 'misrepresentation' of the conflict in international media. It was important to those participants to have a mediator that could help highlight to people outside Syria some of the challenges teachers were facing in Syria and their efforts to deal with them.

- A loyal citizen and an academic who did not 'cut off' his roots to the country despite living abroad. Participants were appreciative that I was interested in the challenges they were facing as a result of the conflict.

In the process of examining participants' perceptions of me, I realised the importance of looking inward to examine those personal characteristics and impressions that I brought with me to the research process, and which could positively or negatively affect participants' perception of me. Some of the factors that helped me conduct my research effectively could be identified as the following:

- It was important that I was from the same city as the participants, and from a relatively large family which made it easier for participants to trust or associate with me as they could identify where my family came from and position me politically, socially and culturally. It was important to be associated with the same social fragment I was examining in order to gain social membership.
- Working previously as a university lecturer and a school teacher in Syria helped me gain physical access to meet former colleagues. This also helped in sharing common ground with participants as someone who worked in the same field and not just someone with ideas 'imported' from a different context.
- My association with respected gatekeepers in senior positions assured participants that I was a 'friend', and their cooperation with me was not going to cause any personal or professional 'troubles'.
- My regular travel to the country as I have been travelling to Syria at least once a year since I moved to the UK in 2007 even after the conflict had started. This regular travel has helped me maintain personal contacts and assure others that there were no security concerns around me otherwise I would not have been allowed to visit the country. For others, this frequent travel was a sign of loyalty to the country and to the community, which was highly valued among some of the participants.

- Despite my regular travel to Syria and my personal attachment to the research topic, living abroad and the critical reflective journey I have embarked on since starting the Doctorate in Education programme have helped me examine this topic as both familiar and strange at the same time (Burgess, 1984). Living abroad has allowed me to distance myself from the grand narratives that dominate my research context, to meet people who hold opposing political values to these narratives. Such an experience has enhanced the process of critical reflexivity without claiming detachment of my personal ontological and epistemological concepts.

On the other hand, it was equally important to be aware of the characteristics that hindered participants' collaboration, and negatively influenced the process of data generation. The following are some of the factors I outlined in this area:

- Tight security procedures and fragmentation of the country created a high level of mistrust, fear and reluctance to get involved in any process of investigation, which made the issue of whom I worked for, whom I represented and how I was perceived by security forces as a major concern for some participants.
- Being associated with senior government officials raised suspicion among some participants that I could have been sent as an inspector to check on the quality of their work.
- Living abroad made my time in Syria restricted which did not give me, in some cases, enough time to build personal relationships with relevant participants.
- It remained vague or suspicious for some participants as to why someone who lived abroad, in a 'highly regarded' country like the UK, was interested in examining issues related to Syria and the war while people there were trying to escape the country.

- Although working in a UK university gave me social and academic kudos, it brought other challenges with it too as one participant responded that I was more of an expert on the examined topic because I worked in the UK and that they would need to learn from me, not vice versa.

Being aware of these different perceptions and underpinning factors was an integral part of developing trust and rapport with participants, so I needed to take enough time to assure participants that I was not an enemy, and to show consideration for their concerns. It was necessary to provide those participants with direct and indirect assurances, offering them insights into my personal and professional backgrounds and naming common contacts before clearly explaining the aims of the research process and the expected role of the potential participants. In other cases, I had to accept the way I was perceived and its impact on data generation, adopting a more pragmatic approach in collating what was being offered in terms of documents such as training materials rather than insisting on getting insights into their perceptions and experiences. In one of the cases, it was evident that the participant was addressing me as an inspector which affected the process of data generation, confining it to collating training materials and an illustration of the efforts organised by the department to train teachers, without being able to access the participant's own interpretations of the role of education in post-conflict.

Such experiences made me re-evaluate my understanding of the concept of rapport as transcending being simply a strategy to manage relationships to a fundamental pre-requisite to conduct an effective and ethical research (Reeves, 2010). In this strategy, building rapport with research participants was essentially an ongoing process of negotiating relationships between the researcher and participants and their shifting roles in the research process (Reeve, ibid). These dynamics again had to be related to research ethics by always respecting participants' concerns and not pursuing any collaboration regardless of its impact on data generation; an

issue that needed to be emphatically approached as secondary to participants' informed consent and welfare.

A key learning moment was realising that the concept of data generation and collection could not be approached as a dichotomy of options but rather as a spectrum that I had to employ according to each situation, participant and their perceptions. This was essential because in some cases, like when I was perceived as an inspector, the interactions were ringfenced to protect the individual aspect and to only reveal what was required. Therefore, it was important to acknowledge that the intersection between me and the participant's individual values, perceptions and interpretations was unattainable in some cases.

In order to reflect the way participants' perceptions impacted on the process of data generation in my experience, I have developed the following spectrum to illustrate that process:

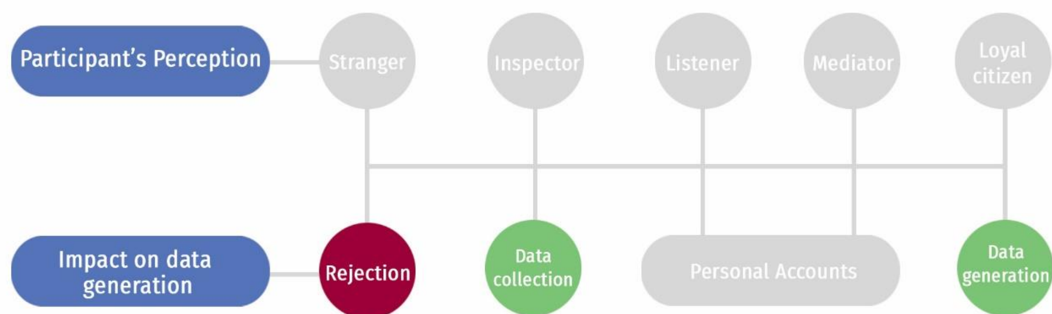

Illustration 5.1 – The Impact of Participants' Perceptions on Data Generation

Following this mode, I approached the concept of data generation as an ideal principle that was not attainable in all situations, which again required me to show flexibility and adaptability in managing interviews. This model made me realise the importance of constantly making decisions while in action to ensure I was using the most appropriate styles tailored for the particular situation I was involved in. This model also helped me realise the importance of respecting participant's decision not to reveal the 'private', and the need to adopt negotiation techniques to manage others' perceptions of me without employing coercive methods.

The issue of flexibility did not only apply to the matter of interview techniques but also to recoding data efficiently and unobtrusively (Kawulich, 2001); for instance, recording interviews was not possible in all cases as some participants showed reluctance to being recorded on account of strict security, while others expressed their unease about being recorded when discussing their personal interpretations of the examined concepts. After all, recording is not a common practice in the research context and people have become more suspicious of such procedures after the conflict and the dominant security policies. In other cases, I made the decision not to record interviews to maintain an informal nature or because I realised from the participant's body language that they were not comfortable being recorded although they verbally expressed otherwise.

To deal with such situations, I felt it was more appropriate in this study, when recording was not possible, to take notes while the interview being conducted. I always ensured that the participants could see what I was writing so that they could feel assured that what was written reflected or literally recorded what they were saying. I also felt such a procedure was a sign of openness and that there was nothing to hide from participants. When recording of interviews was possible, I made it clear to participants that we could stop recording whenever they wished, offering the option of note taking as an alternative if preferred by them.

The data generation options discussed above also made me realise that it was not only my relationship with research participants that impacted upon their perception and participation but also it was influenced by the role of gatekeepers, something which requires a thorough examination of their engagement in the research process.

5.1.3 Enhancing the Role of Gatekeepers from Passwords to Local Experts:

The argument put forward above highlights the inappropriateness of approaching the role of gatekeepers as static**,** arguing for a more critical and complicated one in which the

relationship with and roles of those gatekeepers evolve throughout the research process. I became aware of the importance of developing required skills in order to constructively engage gatekeepers in the research process while being aware of their possible concealed interests and preconceived ideas of the proposed research topic (McAreavey and Das, 2013). These contrasting potential roles of gatekeepers made negotiations with them a delicate act rather than being a matter of simply granting or preventing access to research sites or participants. In addition, adopting Kvale's (1996) distinction between the researcher as a miner and a traveller as a theoretical framework made me realise the inappropriateness of adopting an 'instrumental' approach to the role of gatekeepers in which they are viewed as merely passwords to grant access to research sites (Riese, 2019:670).

Therefore, my aim was to seek methods that could encourage a more active and collaborative engagement of gatekeepers in the research process without ignoring the constraints they might bring to the research process (McAreavey and Das, 2013), so that they were engaged as local experts and critical friends whose contributions needed to go beyond the issue of granting access to how they could contribute to developing the research journey and enhance its effectiveness. Such a role was difficult to achieve without developing relationships with those gatekeepers on the principles of open, deep and consensual negotiations, rather than simply providing them with a description of data required or a list of required participants.

It was important for me during my field research to realise that the role of gatekeepers could not be assumed to automatically lead to research participants, as in some cases I found myself dealing with different tiers of gatekeepers before being able to contact research participants. In this way, some of the gatekeepers that I approached directed me to another tier of gatekeepers before being able to meet participants, which made it important to differentiate between these tiers of gatekeepers as each tier required different negotiation skills and levels of engagement due to the different relationships and perceptions we had of each other.

For instance, a major concern for many second-tier gatekeepers was if I had approval from ‘relevant authorities’, directing such questions to me as ‘who do you work for?’, ‘who do you represent?’ and ‘did you ask the authorities (in reference to security forces) before you came here?’ Such questions and my relationship with first-tier gatekeepers were more important than the purpose of my research or questions to be discussed. The priority in these interactions was to be perceived as a ‘friend’ more than a researcher (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008). Between these different tiers of gatekeepers, negotiations became similar to walking a fine line as it was fundamental to be conscious of what information was required to engage different gatekeepers in the research process and to assure them I did not represent any security concerns.

My familiarity with the social context and my previous professional experience working as a school teacher and as a university lecturer in Syria allowed me to have a wide range of potential gatekeepers that I could directly approach. Therefore, it was necessary to be clear about the characteristics I was seeking in those gatekeepers, and to explicitly outline the criteria that affected my decision to approach them in order to develop well-balanced and collaborative relationships with those gatekeepers, which can be summarised as the following:

- I selected individuals I knew on both personal or professional levels to ensure that we shared common professional and educational values. Having such a personal and professional relationship with gatekeepers was necessary to ensure they recognised the intrinsic values of this study, which I wanted to be part of the reason they decided to actively engage in the research process.
- I selected individuals who are well-respected in their social and professional communities and are known for their integrity and honesty. This criterion was important because the process of data generation would ultimately take place in the ‘shadow’ of

the relationship with gatekeepers (Campbell et al, 2006:117). I was aware that my affiliations with these gatekeepers would impact upon how I would be perceived by research participants.

- Individuals who came from different professional backgrounds were selected in order to enrich their input into the research process and the diversity of potential participants to be engaged in this process. In light of the current political and security situation of the research context, I realised the importance of having at least one gatekeeper who was a senior government official, something which proved to be pivotal in assisting me in gaining the status of a 'friend' and not a 'suspicious stranger' or 'foe'. This issue cannot be ignored in a fragmented society like Syria which is divided into social groups as a result of the conflict, and it is important that I selected a social group that I could be politically and socially associated with. Being in a mainly pro-government area, it was essential that I was associated with a gatekeeper from the government, as it became evident how second-tier gatekeepers and participants were trying to situate me politically, and to investigate if there were any hidden political agendas behind my research. This process of testing the investigator (Kawulich, 2001) was a key cornerstone in building rapport with research participants, determining the level of access and cooperation I could be granted, and either strengthening or weakening my efforts to establish rapport and patterns of reciprocity.

Based on the above, I approached three first-tier gatekeepers who all had educational backgrounds despite working in different sectors: one of those gatekeepers worked as a senior official in the government, the second one was a teacher educator and director of a public pre-service teacher training centre, and the third one was a former lecturer who is currently a Journalist and Media Analyst. From the early stages of my field research, working closely with these gatekeepers helped me refine my understanding of the different sectors I needed to

involve in the research process, which helped maintain balance between approaching sampling as a purposive process and an activity of snowballing as in some cases one contact could lead to another in a way that was not predicted by the researcher. Keeping a margin of flexibility was a daunting task in field research as it was essential to maintain a balance between allowing gatekeepers to facilitate the research process without controlling it, or being unaware of how they might control access. One of the required skills while conducting field research was to have a margin of flexibility without losing sight of the purpose of this journey, and to constantly examine gatekeepers' roles and influence on the research process. In this regard, being familiar with the research context and the organisational structure at the university and Directorate of Education was critical in helping me manage my relationship with gatekeepers, scrutinise their influence on the research process and ensure I was guided and not misguided in this process.

Through my close work with gatekeepers, I became aware of the importance of examining my research topic through the different stages of the learning journey in Syria from school to university and examining teacher education strategies in both categories. Between these two stages, the role of the government remains pivotal as the funding, legislative and policy-making authority. In this way, the research questions were examined using different perspectives from the different players who influenced the teaching and learning strategies in Syria. As a result, I organised conducted interviews to cover the three identified groups as outlined below:

Government perspective: I interviewed a senior member of the government, Nabil, who had responsibilities for overseeing educational policy in the country before the conflict and in government-held areas after it. I met Nabil at his home through a mutual contact, and the meeting lasted for approximately two hours. Nabil was welcoming and friendly and I felt comfortable to ask challenging questions about the concept of truth in the conflict and the government's vision of the role of education in post-conflict Syria. During the interview, I

experienced a high level of criticality, openness and transparency regarding the conflict and its management although these critical views, as will be discussed in data analysis, were a reflection of a personal rather than an official perspective.

My understanding of the government's approach was also influenced by the discussions I had with Hasan, one of the main gatekeepers and a senior government official with an overview of the educational, humanitarian and official approach to managing the conflict and its impact in one of the cities under the government control. I have known Hasan for over twenty years, which allowed us to have open and transparent discussions. I met Hasan several times at his home and in my family home and our discussions were informal.

Pre-university Learning: This area is managed by the MoE, which has a directorate in each city that oversees educational provision and the implementation of the Ministry's policies. In this area, I conducted the following interviews:

- **Director of Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development**: This meeting was held at the Directorate of Education, Office of Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development, and it lasted for approximately an hour. This interview was not an exchange of views but rather a process of collating documents, training resources and developing an understanding of the Ministry's initiatives to deal with the challenges which teachers faced as a result of the conflict. The atmosphere remained formal but still welcoming and cooperative.
- **Centre of Teacher Guidance**: This centre is part of the Directorate of Education and consists of subject specialists and supervisors, who carry out training and inspection for school teachers in their subject areas. I managed to interview two supervisors in one of their offices for approximately an hour. Nora was the one that contributed most to our discussions and I managed to stay in touch with her after this interview as I arranged a

follow-up meeting at one of the centres where she was delivering training to school teachers. During this meeting, Nora provided me with important documents about the provision of psychological support to learners and teachers, which I will further discuss in the data analysis section of this thesis.

- **Centre for Pre-service Teacher Training**: This centre is part of the Directorate of Education. I visited the centre where I had a discussion with the Director, Faheem, along with four teacher trainers. The meeting took place in the Director's office and lasted for more than an hour. I also managed to interview the Director at my own home, which lasted for approximately forty-five minutes. In addition, I had a number of informal and unrecorded discussions with Faheem during my visit to the centre that contributed to developing my understanding of the development of teacher education prior to and after the conflict.
- **National Centre for Curriculum Development (NCCD)**: I interviewed Mo, a maths teacher who also worked with the NCCD, which was established by the MoE in 2013 to oversee the development of the national curriculum adopted in public schools. The interview was held in a café and lasted for sixty-two minutes. The interview was arranged by Ya, a mutual contact, who also contributed to our discussions. Mo demonstrated passion, critical evaluation and confidence in putting forward his view of the topics under discussions.
- **University Learning (Higher Education):** Teacher education is mainly provided by the faculty of education, which exists in every public university. In this field, I interviewed Dr Fa, a lecturer at a faculty of education and a manager of a centre for providing psychological support to locally displaced people. Fa was also a director for a centre for National Reconciliation. I met Dr Fa in her office and the interview lasted

for approximately an hour. Dr Fa was inspiring in her passion, knowledge and commitment to promoting critical thinking and hope through education.

In addition, I met Mariam, who works as a counsellor for a non-government organisation. Prior to this job, Mariam had worked as a school counsellor and at a centre for internally displaced families when she worked with the UNICEF. The interview took place in Mariam's office and lasted for approximately an hour, with a focus on the provision of counselling and the challenges facing the development of an effective provision of psychological support. The table below provides a summary of the research participants' backgrounds, levels of experience and involvement in education and teacher education:

Table 5.1 Summary of Research Participants' Backgrounds.

Participant	Gender	Position	Professional experience	Involvement in education and teacher education
Elia	Male	Director of Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.	Over 30 years.	Overseeing in-service training of school teachers in a government-held city and contributing to the MoE's training policies.
Fa	Female	Senior Lecturer in a faculty of education and a Director of a centre that offers counselling services	10 years.	Development and delivery of teacher training and counselling modules. Managing the provision of counselling services provided to

		to locally displaced individuals.		locally displaced individuals.
Faheem	Male	Director of a pre-service teacher training centre.	Over 25 years.	Development and delivery of teacher training strategies in the centre and contributing to the MoE's training policies.
Hasan	Male	Senior government official.	21 years.	Involvement at a senior level in overseeing and implementing government's strategies in one city including educational and humanitarian initiatives.
Nora	Female	Subject specialist and educational supervisor.	Over 10 years.	Delivery of in-service training to school teachers and conducting inspections of learning and teaching in public schools.
Mariam	Female	Counsellor.	8 years.	Providing psychological counselling to school students, and to women in a non-government centre.

Mary	Female	Teacher trainer.	Over 30 years.	Development and delivery of pre-service teacher training.
Mo	Male	Teacher and curriculum developer.	Over 15 years.	Teaching maths in a public school and contributing to the development of national curriculum for maths.
Nabil	Male	Senior government official.	Over 35 years.	Overseeing government policies in education, higher education and teacher training.
Ya	Male	Journalist and interpreter.	20 years.	Writing about political and media issues in the Middle East in particular about the development and resolution of the Syrian conflict.

As I adopted semi-structured interviews, I prepared two lists of guiding questions. One list was for interviewing educators, while the second one was for interviewing senior government officials (see Appendices 1 and 2 for a full list of questions). However, I did not rigidly or sequentially adhere to these lists as my aim was to encourage a type of focused discussion rather than a question-answer format. In addition to the interviews outlined above, data generation and analysis in this study is informed by a number of documents that I collated during my field research. These documents are examined in light of the data generated from

interviews in order to cross-check themes I constructed from analysing interview data (see Appendix 3 for a list of main documents included in this study).

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

Reflecting on my field experience, I have realised the importance of developing my learning about the application and justification of research methods, as illustrated in the previous chapter. This experience has emphasised the need to approach research methods as an integral part of the research process that can develop its application as a systematic process to generate, analyse and interpret data.

It has proved beneficial that I identified thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as a theoretical framework to analyse data before conducting my research, as this gave me a level of confidence to start data analysis while generating data. In this way, data generation and analysis were far from being a linear and mechanistic process. This examination has also helped me be aware of my 'active' role not only in data generation but also in the process of identifying, selecting and presenting themes, something which makes it necessary to outline the conceptual framework underpinning the process of data analysis.

Chapter Six

FROM FIELD WORK TO MEANING MAKING: APPLYING A CRITICAL AND REFLEXIVE MODEL OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Introduction:

Contrary to my initial assumptions, I found data analysis to be one of the most complex stages of this study, which has shown me the importance of giving this crucial part the thoughtful elaboration it deserves (Nowell et al 2017). In this chapter, I will describe my approach to applying thematic analysis as a conceptual framework to analyse data with the aim of outlining the underpinning philosophy and theories that have shaped its application in this study. In order to ensure that I am conducting thematic analysis systematically and communicating it transparently to the reader, I will outline the various steps I undertook in the process of meaning-making and categorising data into codes and themes.

6.1 Concepts Underpinning the Application of Thematic Analysis: The Need for a Reflexive and Critical Approach:

My interest in thematic analysis sprang from my approach to interviews as theme-oriented as I applied interviews as a means to establish common themes around the examined issues (see section 4.3), so I sought to adopt a theme-oriented analysis method that would allow me to develop a level of patterned meaning within data in relation to my research questions. As a result, I selected thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as an appropriate method to develop a transparent and rigorous report of themes identification and analysis. However, I was aware that developing rigorous and transparent analysis was not possible without addressing a critique of this method, which is described in some cases as a poorly demarcated concept despite its wide application in qualitative studies (Boyatzis, 1998).

In this field, I approached this critique to be related more to how thematic analysis is applied by the researcher than of the method itself, as poor demarcation was more the result of the researcher's failure to outline the pragmatic process adopted to conduct a trustworthy thematic analysis. I realised that my application of thematic analysis would be subject to critique if I failed to present 'emerging' themes within data without providing a detailed and complex account of that process, or without demonstrating how it was systematically conducted and transparently analysed (Malterud, 2001). However, being systematic did not mean following the steps of this method like applying 'a recipe that must be followed precisely', as this would make me risk 'prioritising procedure over reflexivity' (Braun and Clarke, 2019:589). It became clear to me that a rigid adherence to 'prescribed' steps would reduce this method to a linear and mechanical process, in which themes could 'automatically emerge' if the researcher worked hard and persistently.

This stance was important to me as my experience of data analysis illustrated that I was not able to detach myself from the process of data analysis, in which themes were 'constructed' by me rather than 'emerging' from repeated readings of data. After all, data did not reveal themes by themselves; it was my responsibility to make judgements about coding, developing themes, decontextualising and reconceptualising data (Starks and Trinidad, 2007). It is important to emphasise that themes in this study did not 'spontaneously fall out or suddenly appear'; but rather they were systematically 'extracted' by the researcher (Germain, 1986:158).

Therefore, themes and their analysis in this study need to be examined as 'creative and interpretive stories' that reflect considerable analytic work and are actively created by the researcher at the 'intersection' of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves (Braun and Clarke, 2019:594). Embracing reflexivity when applying thematic analysis problematised the use of the term 'emerge' as it could imply that themes were within data waiting to be discovered by the researcher. Therefore,

I used the term data 'construction' to emphasise that I approached data analysis from the perspective of the 'interacting individual' who was involved in the production and presentation of analysis (Denzin, 2010:16).

This approach has implications for this study as data analysis cannot be approached as an objective representation of 'what is going on' in Syria since this analysis is the outcome of applying my intellectual and conceptualising processes required to transform and interpret data. The outcome of data analysis cannot be examined, therefore, as being objectively true or false but rather as being strong or weak (Terry et al, 2017), based on my ability to systematically and transparently describe the various stages involved in data analysis from coding, theme development to analysis so that the reader is able to judge whether the findings are rooted in the generated data (Ryan et al, 2007). The depth of data analysis in this study needs to be assessed based on its ability to answer my research questions and what sense I made of data (Braun et al, 2014).

This personal involvement also made me realise the complexity of the concept of immersion and familiarisation with data, as I could not naively assume that repeated readings of data would automatically lead to code and theme development. This realisation was important to avoid reducing data familiarisation to a mindless process, and to stress the importance of the researcher's analytical lenses which they engaged throughout this process (Braun et al, 2014). I found this process to be particularly complex especially with the analytical tension I experienced as a result of trying to immerse myself with data while paradoxically attempting to de-familiarise myself with data in order to examine taken-for-granted elements (Boyatzis, 1998).

As a researcher and a native Syrian, this paradoxical reading of the data was fundamental in order to develop my ability to scrutinise data, read between the lines and reach a higher level of abstraction (Vaismoradi et al, 2016). This process required me to be both close

and distant from data in order to increase criticality and reduce any 'premature and incomplete data analysis' (Vaismoradi et al, ibid). As a result, I found that reading documents, transcripts or listening to interviews included various cognitive and conceptual levels combining the literal, interpretive and reflexive (Mason, 2002), moving constantly back and forward between the entire data set.

This constant movement was not taking place in a theoretical vacuum but rather in the realm of my epistemological, ontological, methodological perspectives and the kind of knowledge sought in this research (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Realising thematic analysis cannot be atheoretical, it was important to maintain methodological consistency by deliberately attempting to draw explicit links between my application of this method and the adopted research methodology. As a result, I adopted not only a reflexive but also a critical approach to thematic analysis in order to examine generated data in light of the links between individual experiences and larger structural ideological and institutional influences directly or indirectly embedded in data.

Codes and theme development in this way became more a process that involved reflecting, interacting with and thinking about data (Savage, 2000), so that all the different stages I went through from immersing myself with data to developing codes and themes aimed to delve deeper in data, identify patterns that underlie codes and consciously construct themes (Attride-Striling, 2001). I found myself applying different processes while analysing data ranging from 'domain summaries' focusing on the explicit meaning of data, 'domain of discussion' attempting to examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations, and finally the critical where I sought to link these assumptions to wider societal issues of power and hegemony. At the centre of this back and forth movement, it was always my thinking, reflection and development, as a researcher, that shaped the final narrative and analytical story of examined data.

To reflect my approach to make sense of data and construct themes, I developed a model of thematic analysis building upon the spectrum of criticality discussed by Lawless and Chen (2018), which illustrates how I approached this process as a range of different levels of engagement with data that would impact upon the depth of analysis. To demonstrate this understanding, I developed the following spectrum as a tool to illustrate the journey of developing Critical Reflexive analysis:

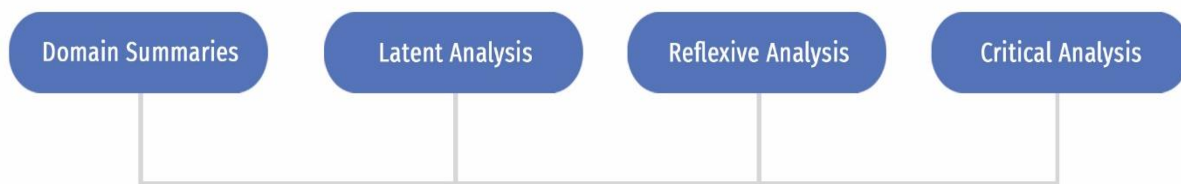

Illustration 6.1 – The Application of Reflexive and Critical Thematic Analysis

According to this model, I did not approach thematic analysis as a simple choice of 'either/or' between different types of analysis but rather a dynamic and complex process that encompassed different levels of analysis in order to capture meaning beneath the surface of the data. In this way, although during the initial stages I engaged with data at a surface level to get a sense of the data set, I was aware of the importance of not limiting or reducing analysis to 'domain summaries' which would reduce 'analysis' to providing a descriptive summary of data and simply reiterate participants' statements (Clarke and Braun, 2018). What distinguished critical thematic analysis in this study was its ability to unearth intersecting macro-forces that shape individual or shared discourse in generated data, with the aim of exposing the work of power and embedded ideologies to reproduce the status quo or reinforce hegemonic understanding of the issues under investigation (Lawless and Chen, 2018). This critical model was of great importance as it helped me maintain methodological consistency, provide me with interpretive lenses to link participants' shared experiences with wider ideological forces.

6.1.1 The Process of Meaning-making and Developing Initial Codes in Data:

As a developing researcher, I found it beneficial that I adopted thematic analysis as a framework to analyse data before conducting my field work as this helped me have a level of confidence and knowledge to engage in data analysis while it was generated instead of conducting them as sequential processes where analysis would start after data generation was completed. This approach helped develop data generation and analysis as a cyclical and iterative process where data generation was facilitating initial analysis which in turn shaped the generation of further data. As a result, I started to organise data from early stages in a way that facilitated final conclusions to be drawn and verified (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The process of meaning-making started from the first interview I conducted as I started to notice patterns of meaning and 'issues of potential interest', which also provided me with an opportunity to further examine these issues in later interviews. These initial patterns of meaning were essential in developing my understanding, as the key statements I noticed during my initial interviews were more like 'spring-shoots' which grew into a more mature form of analysis and understanding. This early engagement in data impacted upon the process of immersing myself in data, which developed as an active search for meanings and patterns, developing ideas about what was included and what was interesting about them (Nowell et al, 2017).

In my development as a researcher, it was also beneficial to focus the process of meaning-making at initial stages of data analysis on research questions, as this provided me with 'the best defence' against data overload (Miles and Huberman, 1994:55). This focus was also necessary to develop my understanding of the context and keep the study focused on answering research questions before engaging in critical analysis of data. Keeping an eye on research questions, I read the notes I took during the first interview (since it was not recorded) in addition to my reflective notes, highlighted sentences every time I read these notes. These

sentences were then translated and separated from the main text labelling these sentences according to their relevance to my research objectives. These extracts along with attached labels formed the first steps in this research towards forming provisional meaningful groups of the data and developing my understanding of the examined issues, as illustrated in the table below:

Table 6.1 – Provisional Meaning Groups of Data

Statement	Label
The government and people have to prepare for the post-conflict phase as its impact might be more dangerous than the war itself. What is destroyed and what lies within individuals requires systematic, enormous and diverse efforts to overcome the implications and legacies of this unjust war on Syria. The government considers rebuilding the education sector to be of high importance as it allocates huge budgets to the Ministry of Education in this regard. The priority is to rebuild schools as an initial step and to provide purely pedagogical training to teachers. The government also has appointed thirty thousand teachers.	Approach to reconstruction.
There is an awareness of the need to transcend physical aspects of reconstruction, currently this is not one of the state's priorities due to the huge scale of destruction and costs of rebuilding the education sector. There is currently no teacher training that goes beyond the pedagogical perspective.	Priority of rebuilding education sector.

There is a psychological counsellor in every school, but their role is not active. There is a lack of education for the need of psychological support. The priority is for living matters, even their families were not aware of the importance of such support. Sometimes the economic factor played a negative role as families did not have the financial means to cover transportation fees for their children to get to the centres providing psychological support.	Provision of psychological support.
The current problem lies in the domination of individual work, as each ministry works independently of the other.	Lack of comprehensive strategies.
If we have the courage to search for the truth, we do not have the courage to disclose it…As long as exclusion, apostasy, theological curses chasing Muslims from all sections as each section considers itself to own the absolute truth… there is no future for our nation at all but rather we are going to wait for the next war. There is an escape from facing current problems through creating red lines. Who wins imposes their vision. The government's vision and ideology will be imposed especially in comparison with extremist ideologies, destroying government institutions and killing individuals.	The concept of truth.

The development of this table marked my initial thoughts about how to organise data into categories according to significance, and to move from unstructured data to the development of structured and systematic concepts about what was going on in the data (Morse and Richards, 2013). In this way, each interview helped develop my understanding and refine

questions in further interviews as my thinking was developing during my field research; for instance, I developed the following list of questions as a result of the above table:

- What pedagogical approaches are currently advocated in teacher education?
- Is the government's focus on physical reconstruction a matter of priority or related to approaching peace as an absence of direct violence?
- What are these 'created red lines', and how are they manifested in the educational process? Who creates these lines?
- What is the role of school counsellors? What factors impede an active role of those counsellors?

I followed the same approach with each interview conducted during my field research. When I managed to record interviews, I listened to them repeatedly as I saved them on my mobile phone. To maintain confidentiality, I secured my mobile phone through applying a fingerprint lock, so it would not be possible to for someone else to access these interviews. In later stages, I listened to each interview using the bookmark feature which enabled me to highlight parts of each interview that were of interest to me and that would require further examination. After that, I listened to the bookmarked sections of each interview before transcribing and translating the parts that I found relevant to my research questions. I deliberately selected this method instead of verbatim transcription, as I sought to keep this process focused on the generation and interpretation of meaning from data rather than reducing it to a 'simple clerical task' (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006:40).

In order to reflect the purposive sampling method I adopted in this study, I structured data analysis in a way that reflected the three main sample sources for data generation: government perspective, pre-university and university learning. This structure enabled me to examine data within and across different categories in later stages in order to compare and

contrast patterns underpinning selected segments of data. I examined dataset searching for underlying concepts that are relevant to research questions identifying in this process important sections of data and attaching labels to index them as they relate to a pattern in the data (King, 2004). The different techniques I employed in the process of code and theme development such as attaching labels to categories and using colour coding were a manifestation of that meaning-making process and a mechanism to assist me in the construction of themes. For instance, I used the colour red to indicate 'the concept of truth', green indicated sentences linked to the provision of psychological support while yellow indicated the government's response to the conflict approach to reconstruction.

By following this strategy, I developed a table of initial codes in which I included extracts from each interview, attached with relevant codes so that similar or contrasting labels could be retrieved and examined together. This method allowed me to review the whole set of data as it was growing by identifying its most significant meaning, while at the same time making connections between different parts of data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Initial codes, therefore, developed through applying a rigorous inductive analytical process that included both within and across data examination.

I also assessed the validity of meaning developed from engaging with interview data through cross-checking emerging patterns with document examination. I followed the same strategy I adopted in examining interview data. I highlighted sentences of interest, separating those sentences from their main text for further examination and development of initial codes. I developed a separate table of initial codes as a result of examining collated documents that I read, re-developed on several occasions with the aim of revising identified codes and constructed themes. Below are extracts from the main tables I developed at this stage (see appendices 4 and 5 for full tables of initial codes), which will provide an example of how data was categorised as this stage of data analysis:

Table 6.2 – Development of Initial Codes

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
Government	The government and people have to prepare for the post-conflict phase as its implications might be more dangerous than the war itself. What is destroyed and what lies within individuals requires systematic, enormous and diverse efforts to overcome the implications and legacies of this unjust war on Syria. The government considers rebuilding the education sector to be of high importance as it allocates huge budgets to the Ministry of Education in this regard. The priority is to rebuild schools as an initial step and to provide purely pedagogical training to teachers. The government also has appointed thirty thousand teachers. There is awareness of the need to transcend physical aspects of reconstruction, currently this is not one of the state's priorities due to the huge scale of destruction and costs of rebuilding the education sector. There is currently no teacher training that goes beyond the pedagogical perspective.	Physical and Pedagogical reconstruction.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	It was suggested to provide psychological support to children who were kidnapped but there is a lack of education for the need of psychological support. The priority is for living matters, even their families were not aware of the importance of such support. Sometimes the economic factor played a negative role as families did not have the financial means to cover transportation fees for their children to get to the centres providing psychological support.	Perspective of psychological support.
	The current problem lies in the domination of individual work… our problem lies in individual work as each Ministry works independently of the other. The logic of corruption dominates current practices. There is a need to deal with each area to identify challenges faced by its people socially and educationally instead of applying the same strategy to all areas. Current strategy is like a bazaar dominated by corruption which forms a state of social inter-dependency.	Lack of systematic response.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	There is no management of the crisis; there is a management crisis.	
	There is an escape from facing current problems through creating red lines. Who wins imposes their vision. The government's vision and ideology will be imposed especially in comparison with extremist ideologies, destroying government's institutions and killing individuals. If we have the courage to search for the truth, we do not have the courage to disclose it…As long as exclusion, apostasy, theological curses chasing Muslims from all sections as each section considers itself to own the absolute truth… there is no future for our nation at all but rather we are going to wait for the next war.	The concept of truth.
Higher Education and counselling	Curriculum now is not that different from the one before 2011. The difference is reflected in teaching methods as the number of students increased as a result of students migrating from other cities. Teaching practicum had to be moved from schools to labs within the university due to the security situation and crowded schools. The difference is also reflected through adding some	Response to the conflict.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	modules that focus on the results of the conflicts especially in seminars, graduation projects and Master's dissertation topics. Counselling itself is a new programme. I mean it started few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed.	
	There is effective work and huge efforts but there is no government sponsorship. These efforts are all individual and fragmented; there is no organisation that oversees the efforts. There is no clear training guide. There is a clear gap between university and reality. Initiatives rely on teacher's efforts, their educational background and their commitment to national issues.	Lack of systematic response.
	We suffer from the phenomenon of educational violence among teachers as teachers' efforts could be attributed to political and sectarian dimensions which could lead to catastrophic consequences on the teacher's professional future.	Censorship of education.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	There are instructions not to refer to the conflict in educational process. There is a module on critical thinking but there are no systematic efforts or subject matter to promote critical thinking.	
	[Cases that have increased after the conflict are] social maladjustment, stress, depression, anxiety… social maladjustment comes from changing environments moving from an extremely conservative environment to a more liberal one here. They [locally displaced people and refugees] had their own habits and traditions and now they want to take on new ones that do not suit them… regarding violence what has increased in refugee centres specifically are sexual assaults in addition to economic violence since they had to seek refuge. Among children, the cases of fear, anxiety such as bedwetting.	Impact of conflict on mental wellbeing.

Table 6.3 – Developing Initial Codes from Examined Documents

Document	Extract	Initial Code
Techer's Guide in Socio-psychological Support 2017	Institutions that are concerned with social, educational and psychological education have to exert more effort to support children in communication and reinforcing self-esteem; embed psycho-social support into the learning process in order to overcome shocking experiences and negative impact. This makes the teacher bear considerably large responsibility as they are the first line of support for parents in helping the child overcome crises and challenges that they face on the psychological, educational and social levels especially in the current circumstances that the country is undergoing…. The teacher's responsibility towards the child is very important. Educationally, the teacher plays an important role in preparing the learner for life through developing their abilities and through accommodating to the surrounding environment. Ethically, the teacher contributes to developing the learner's ethical sense. Socially, the teacher has a role in supporting the learner to respect the law, form friendships and interactive	Official perspective of education and psychological support.

Document	Extract	Initial Code
	work. Emotionally, the teacher has a main role in accepting their feelings and in turn positively accepting their peer's feelings and expressing these feelings more accurately and elaborately.	
	This unjust war on Syria has targeted the individual, civilization and identity, and children were the largest social group affected by it, something which has led to social and psychological disorders. The booklet aims to provide guidance and simple/direct advice in social and psychological support to teachers in addition to sample required activities that can be used by the teacher to reduce psychological stress. (Teacher's responsibilities): • From an educational perspective: prepare learners for life through developing their abilities, preferences and positive adjustment to the surrounding environment. • From a moral perspective: support in developing moral sense among learners: principles, love, tolerance.	Truth and conflict. Aims and principles of psychological support.

Document	Extract	Initial Code
	• From a social perspective: develop social sense among learners: collaboration, respect laws and regulations, forming friendships, collaborative work. • From an emotional perspective: understanding and accepting learners' feelings and supporting them in identifying, naming and expressing these feeling/accepting and understanding others' feelings. General principles for psychological support: • Promoting human rights, no discrimination and equality for all affected individuals. • Participation of all affected individuals in activities and organised events. • Not causing harm, mutual learning, openness, cultural sensitivity. • Development based on available resources and abilities, developing available resources, support self-help. • Provide open and non-threating classroom environment and encourage learners to take part in activities that provide them with the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts. From an emotional perspective: understanding and accepting learners' feelings and supporting them in identifying, naming and expressing these feelings, accepting and understanding others' feelings. Repetition	

Document	Extract	Initial Code
	General principles for psychological support: • Promoting human rights, no discrimination and equality for all affected individuals. • Participation of all affected individuals in activities and organised events. • Not causing harm, mutual learning, openness, cultural sensitivity. Provide an open and non-threatening classroom environment and encourage learners to take part in activities that provide them with the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts. Learning can be a primary means in helping societies rebuild their life through: Ensuring the child's feeling of safety socially, emotionally and educationally and in providing support in every aspect of their life at home, school, the classroom.	

I found the process of separating data and developing initial codes to be problematic as I was aware that I was actually de-contextualising these parts from their original text and context. Such an awareness placed more responsibility on me as I was aware that an important element of data analysis would require re-contextualising these parts in order to construct themes, while keeping the relationships between these different parts intact (Hitchcock and Hughes, 2002). I recognised the complexity of data analysis as the process of meaning-making required not only separating dataset but also re-contextualising these different parts in order to construct a story in which themes cohered together meaningfully, with a clear and identifiable distinction between themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The daunting task remained about constructing a holistic picture of this systematically fragmented data while remaining faithful to participants' accounts (Smith and Firth, 2011). The process of re-constructing fragmented data started by re-organising data included in the table of initial codes, categorising data not according to its source but rather according to the identified initial codes so that data segments from different sources were brought together according to meaning and their link to each code.

I was also aware that constructing a holistic story about data required developing initial codes in light of, but not inclusively of, research questions. As I progressed in data analysis, I attempted to ensure that reading data in light of research questions did not mean approaching data analysis with a list of pre-set codes, but rather being open to modifying and developing new codes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Therefore, I attempted in this process to strike a balance between being mindful of the purpose of my study and the need to be open to explore unanticipated concepts to remain as close as possible to generated data, avoid imposing data into pre-determined list of codes, examine the inevitability of selectivity and its impact on data analysis (Wolcott, 1990, Braun et al, 2014).

To achieve this balance, I adopted an exploratory approach to data analysis as I attempted from early stages to actively read generated data, and examine it to explore

relationships, patterns and meanings that help outline data analysis. This process allowed me to develop an understanding of the concepts that were not included in research questions or examined before engaging in data analysis. To reflect this process, I differentiated between codes and themes that I developed in light of research questions and concepts that I examined before conducting field research, and those that I developed as a result of adopting an exploratory approach to data analysis, as illustrated in the tables below:

Table 6.4 – Constructing Interpretive Codes

Codes developed in light of research questions	Interpretive codes
1- Dominance of physical and pedagogical approach to reconstruction. 2- Dominance of negative concept of peace. 3- Lack of systematic approach to re-construction. 4- Continuation of pre-conflict education initiatives. 5- Provision of psychological support.	1- The policy of red lines and educational violence. 2- No reference to conflict. 3- Imposing government version of truth.

Table 6.5 – Constructing Interpretive Themes

Development of themes in light of research objectives	Interpretive themes
1- The dominance of a negative perspective of peace, and physical reconstruction of the education sector. 2- Interruption-resumption model of responding to the conflict through education and teacher education. 3- The provision of psychological support.	1- From fragmentation to unification: the development of 'ideologically-uniform' state and unifying hegemonic narratives of the conflict. 2- The role of truth claims in developing singular representations of the conflict. 3- Reconstruction as rebuilding new hegemonic structures. 4- The continuation of the Syrian conflict: from militarisation to securitisation.

As a result, it is important that codes identified in this study are read as organic and subject to change as I progressed in my research, as codes development was not the ultimate goal in itself but rather to create meaning and develop understanding of the examined topic (Guest and McLellan, 2003). Similarly, the development of themes was a progressive journey that started from a basic description and organisation of observations moving to a higher level of interpretation to form an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Boyatzis, 1998). The construction of themes was thus the result of on-going analytical and mental processes that aimed to 'put the pieces together' through systematic analysis (Leininger, 1985:61), where the validity of themes was based on their ability to reflect meaning embedded in entire data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It became important to focus on the development

of themes that go beyond providing a summary of data, where their construction was based on a strategy of meaning-making and not truth-making (Vaismoradi et al, 2016).

In the process of developing a higher level of interpretation, I became aware of the need to prioritise developing themes that could help link personal accounts with broader social issues in order to draw links between micro and macro levels. To achieve this, I applied 'closed coding' which involved interlinking data extracts and identified codes with social issues, hegemony and ideologies (Lawless and Chen, 2018:7), in order to elevate data analysis to analytical lenses that constructed a wider conceptual framework of meanings (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). Through applying critical examination of data, I started to identify patterns and connect the saliency and forcefulness of these patterns to larger social ideologies. At this stage, I looked back at the entire data set and re-examined developed codes assessing how each statement contributed to the development of understanding examined issues and the predominant themes constructed from data analysis. I started to connect developed codes in order to construct themes and underpinning patterns in data (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), where the aim of theme development was to capture the various patterns identified in data analysis and unify them into a meaningful whole that would develop understanding of the concepts under investigation (King, 2004).

I organised data generated from interviews and document examination according to their relevance to revised codes and constructed themes. For instance, I grouped data, which was relevant to the theme of the interruption-resumption model (See Appendix 6 for full table). In the final stage, I developed a table of constructed themes along with their relevant data segments, as indicated in the table below:

Table 6.6 – Data Presentation

Theme	Key statement
Dominance of negative approach to peace/physical rebuilding of education and lack of comprehensive strategy.	The government's priority remains rebuilding schools as an initial stage and providing training to teachers. There is currently no teacher training that goes beyond the pedagogical perspective. If the gunshots stop, this means the conflict has finished, we open schools, and students are back. Each Ministry works independently of the other… it is more like a bazaar than a strategy. The current problem lies in the domination of individual work…there is a need to move to collective work. They are trying with their personal efforts. Everyone works alone. There is no collaboration. There is no management of the crisis; there is a management crisis. The conflict imposed a challenge without having many solutions apart from the individual teacher and their skills as a person, so things are left for the teacher.

Theme	Key statement
	We are not aware of what plans the government is developing regarding the role of psychological support in post-conflict reconstruction or whether there will be an emphasis on that role at all.
Interruption-resumption model:	Teaching or learning in Syria generally underwent a fundamental change in 2008-09 and afterwards … From the curriculum side, there was an on-going development … [the conflict] has interrupted the implementation of these educational reforms. Teacher preparation started in 2009 ... In 2018, the process of curriculum development is continuing. Training materials have been in place since before the conflict. There was a plan to develop curricula and we are still continuing it. They have not changed anything because of the conflict. The current learning materials used in the psychology model have been in place since before the conflict. The same curriculum has been taught since 1983.

Theme	Key statement
	Counselling itself is a new programme. I mean, it started a few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed. Standard-based education.
Integration of Psychological support: principles and challenges	There is a lack of education for the need of psychological support. There is a counsellor in every school, but their role is not active. Parents did not recognise the importance of this type of support or would be ashamed as people who require this type of support are still considered as kind of mad. Teachers and management personnel do not value the role of mental health intervention in schools. Counselling [with a tone that indicates something is trivial] why did you come here… [Counselling is associated with being] an easy job, nothing to do. I have not seen a counsellor. I mean, I used to deal with problems although it is not my job.

Theme	Key statement
	We are not aware of what plan the government is developing regarding the role of psychological support in post-conflict reconstruction or whether there will be an emphasis on that role at all. They are trying with their personal efforts. Everyone works alone. There is no collaboration. The great importance of psycho-social support. Psychological support and of active learning.
Truth, conflict representation	Who wins imposes their vision … the government's vision and ideology will be imposed especially in comparison with extremist thoughts, destroying government's institutions and killing individuals. The government's theory and vision are correct. The stakes to divide Syria and the collapse of its regime have failed. Creating a national memory, defining who the Syrian is…This is a confrontation that we cannot avoid, and it will move to the educational process.

Theme	Key statement
Silence and securitisation	If we have the courage to search for the truth, we do not have the courage to disclose it. There is an escape from facing current problems through creating red lines. There is a letter from the Minister of Education; we are not allowed to discuss anything in class outside the topic of study [laughter indicating cynicism] It is not the Minister who issued the letter. In class, I avoid talking about this [the conflict]. Sadly, this might have repercussions. The phenomenon of educational violence. The student receives information, but to critique it, no. Uniform education … everyone needs to understand in the same way, at the same level and at the same time. The teacher and the textbook are the complete source of knowledge that cannot be critiqued.

Developing these tables of constructed themes and linking them to relevant data segments helped structure the next chapter, as these themes informed the way I structured and presented my analysis of generated data.

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

The argument put forward in this chapter demonstrates the complexity of applying thematic analysis, as it places responsibility on researchers to ensure that this method is applied rigorously and methodologically (Attride-Stirling, 2001). I found this responsibility to be an invaluable opportunity to outline the different analytical stages I undertook in order to provide a detailed account of that process of developing themes in a way that was systematically conducted and transparently analysed.

In this learning journey, I was aware that organising data in this chapter was one part of an on-going process to develop my understanding of the research topic, where in the next stage I needed to unify these segmented parts of data into a coherent narrative that contributed to enhancing our understanding of the examined topic and situating this understanding in the study's wider socio-political context.

Chapter Seven

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction:

In this chapter, I aim to re-contextualise the interlinking data extracts that I have systematically de-contextualised in order to 'put the pieces together' and construct a holistic picture of the research topic (Leininger,1985:61). I will analyse data applying the reflexive, critical model of thematic analysis (see section 6.1), so data analysis will be more like a spectrum of different levels of engagement with data combining summary domain, latent, reflexive and critical analysis. The structure of theme analysis is informed by the themes I constructed in the previous chapter, and the way I organised data accordingly.

In order to reflect my active role in data analysis, I have deliberately situated myself in this process and selected a personalised writing style to indicate my involvement in data generation and analysis. This deliberate choice of positionality and writing style was essential to conduct a 'quality reflexive' thematic analysis, which aimed to highlight 'the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement' with their data and its analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594).

7.1 The Government's Approach to Re-building the Education Sector:

The focus of data analysis in this section was on examining to what extent the government's initiatives to reconstruct the education sector were linked to a wider process of peacebuilding and promoting a positive peace culture.

At the beginning of my interview with Nabil, a senior government official, he reinstated the government's stance that 'war in Syria is heading to the end' and that the 'stakes to divide Syria and the collapse of its regime have failed'. Nabil started talking about the 'political and military victory' achieved by the 'resistance axis' (Syria, Iran and Hezbollah) and Russia; a

victory which 'will lay the foundation for a new phase that might change history and countries' strategies regionally and internationally'. As the war was 'approaching its end', the concept of post-conflict reconstruction was the next issue Nabil referred to, as he stressed that:

> The government and people have to prepare for the post-conflict phase as its implications might be more dangerous than the war itself. What is destroyed and what lies within individuals requires systematic, enormous and diverse efforts to overcome the implications and legacies of this unjust war on Syria.

Nabil's reference to the need for 'systematic, enormous and diverse efforts' to overcome the 'implications and legacies' of the conflict allowed me to raise the issue of reconstructing the education sector and what plans the government had in this regard, where Nabil stressed that:

> The government considers rebuilding the education sector to be of high importance as it allocates huge budgets to the Ministry of Education in this regard. The priority is to rebuild schools as an initial step and to provide purely pedagogical training to teachers. The government also has appointed thirty thousand teachers.

I referred back to Nabil's first statement about the need for systematic efforts to address what 'is destroyed and lies within individuals' to shift discussions to ask about the government's plans to transcend physical reconstruction of the education sector to rebuild the 'individual'. Nabil pointed out that although his discussions with senior officials at the MoE and the MoHE reflected their 'awareness of the need to transcend physical aspects of reconstruction, currently this is not one of the state's priorities due to the huge scale of destruction and costs of rebuilding the educational sector'. I focused here on exploring what type of training was provided to teachers as that would give an insight into educational priorities and potential teachers' roles in this process, to which Nabil emphatically indicated that 'there is currently no teacher training that goes beyond the pedagogical perspective' something which will be discussed in more depth in later stages of data analysis.

Although it was not surprising that such an emphasis was placed on physical reconstruction after years of violent conflict, there were elements in Nabil's views that raised questions about whether this focus was a matter of priority imposed by the country's reality, or related more to approaching peace as merely an absence of violence and bringing life back to normality (Galtung, 1996). For instance, when following up Nabil's statement about the need for 'systematic' and 'diverse' efforts to prepare for the post-conflict reconstruction, Nabil indicated that currently there was a lack of systematic strategies, as he stated that 'the current problem lies in the domination of individual work… problem lies in individual work as each ministry works independently of the other'. Due to this 'lack of systematic coordination', Nabil described current reconstruction efforts to be more like a 'bazaar than a strategy' where 'the logic of corruption dominates current practices'. Nabil referred to this state of corruption as 'internal rot', stressing that corruption was ingrained in the core of these strategies.

The same picture was depicted during my discussions with another senior government official, Hasan, who summarised his evaluation of the management of the crisis and current co-ordination between different ministries as 'there is no management of the crisis; there is a management crisis'. Hasan reinstated Nabil's statement about the lack of co-ordination between different stakeholders overseeing the process of reconstruction, giving an example of a situation where authorities in another city sent them a large number of locally displaced people, who were under a long-term siege imposed by an extreme Islamic group, without prior notification or preparation. Hasan suddenly found himself with hundreds of people including children and elderly who needed immediate housing, medical care and psychological support.

The way research participants described their responses to the conflict was another element that made me question whether this focus on physical reconstruction was a matter of priority, as these participants indicated that their responses to the conflict were dominated by individual initiatives rather than being part of a wider strategy. The overall description of the

response to the conflict, as Fa, a university lecturer in a faculty of education, illustrated, currently consisted of ‘fragmented initiatives’ that had no ‘clear training guide’ and operated without ‘government sponsorship or management’. When asked if current teacher education initiatives were part of a wider official reconstruction strategy, Fa stated the following:

> There is effective work and huge efforts but there is no government sponsorship. These efforts are all individual and fragmented; there is no organisation that oversees these efforts. There is no clear guide…there is no clear training guide.

This statement resonated with the stance presented by other teacher educators I met such as Faheem, who described how the conflict had ‘imposed’ a challenge ‘without having many solutions’, apart from ‘the individual teacher and their skills as a person, so things were left for the teacher’. One element that I interpreted as a reflection of the dominance of individual initiatives was the way research participants were more elaborate in describing their own ‘personal vision’ and ‘personal opinion’ as compared to describing an official or ‘government’ approach to reconstruction. Research participants were also detailed in describing pre-conflict education and teacher education strategies while they tended to become less elaborate when asked to discuss ‘post-conflict’ strategies. This frequent reference to personal visions and pre-conflict strategies could be interpreted as an indication of a lack of strategic response to the conflict. For instance, when Nabil was talking about post-conflict reconstruction, he kept describing what the government ‘should’ and ‘needed to do’ rather than what ‘currently is’ or ‘planned’. Nabil also gave a detailed description of the various steps he thought were necessary to ensure adopting an effective approach to reconstruction, which went in line with concepts examined in academic literature. In his personal vision, Nabil talked about the need to ‘reassess the education system from primary stages to Higher Education’, ‘shift from the current security state to reinforce cultural security’, ‘encourage citizenship education’,

‘develop one shared national memory to define the Syrian, and to ‘develop a sense of patriotism so that each citizen feels they belong to the country’.

I directly asked Nabil if such steps represented an official plan to which Nabil stated that was his ‘own personal vision’ of ‘what should be’ implemented and he confirmed that it did not represent an official stance. What caught my attention was the considerable time Nabil spent describing his own vision while his tone became less positive when talking about the official approach to reconstruction. Nabil did not hide his pessimism when evaluating the current approach to post-conflict reconstruction as he directly stated that ‘it was a matter of time before the country would relapse in another cycle of violence’. Observing the difference between the ‘personal’ and ‘official’ made me mindful in later interviews of this shift between the personal versus official, elaborate versus less detailed and confident versus less positive.

What remained unclear for me at this stage was the contradiction between this absence of clear training guidance and the information provided to me by Elia, Director of Teacher Training and Preparation in a Directorate for Education, who informed me that currently the MoE was providing government-funded teacher training programmes to upskill teachers and build their capacity to deal with the conflict across all government-held areas. To illustrate the large-scale nature of these programmes, Elia informed me that 6500 teachers were trained in one city during July and August 2016. This contradiction raised an important question about why teachers felt they were left alone to deal with the conflict when the government had provided such large-scale teacher training programmes. At this stage, I realised that the key to examine this contradiction was to develop an understanding of the ‘pedagogical perspective’ that Nabil referred to as dominating current teacher training initiatives and to focus on answering the question of how or if teacher education has responded to the conflict.

7.2 The Response of Teacher Training to the Conflict: What is the Difference?

When asked to describe how teacher education responded to the conflict, Faheem provided a detailed description of the changes that took place in the years of 2008 and 2009, where he referred to the 'fundamental change' that education in Syria underwent during these two years. Faheem's description in this field went in line with pre-conflict strategies described in chapter two (see section 2.1), as he talked about the shift from relying on 'instruction', 'memorisation' to the 'new curriculum' which 'tried to make the teacher a guide and facilitator', and 'the student is the one that needs to do the work'. For Faheem, these initiatives shaped education and teacher education until the beginning of the conflict, which, as he described, had 'interrupted' the implementation of these educational reforms.

What was noticeable about our discussion was the considerable time Faheem spent discussing pre-conflict initiatives while talking about what happened after the conflict required a high level of prompting from me. During the interview, I first tried to shift Faheem's attention from pre-conflict initiatives by asking him to describe some of the challenges imposed on education as a result of the conflict, so that I could ask him later about how these challenges were addressed in teacher education. After giving Faheem time to describe such challenges, I asked him about how they were addressed in teacher education, where there was a pause and a change in Faheem's tone as he suddenly sounded hesitant and less sure, stating that:

> In general, there was not much addressing [pause] I mean [pause] as they say the situation was imposed and there were not many solutions apart from the individual teacher and their skills as a person… things were left for the teacher as it was difficult to find a solution…it was difficult to find collective solutions.

This pattern dominated our conversation as whenever I asked about changes after the conflict, I found Faheem focusing on solely pedagogical issues and taking us back to the 2008/09 initiatives. Thirteen minutes after we started the interview, I prompted Faheem again to shift from pre to post-conflict initiatives, asking him whether the 2008/09 initiatives were

still followed in 2018, or if there was a review after the conflict to start new education and teacher education strategies. Faheem's answer remained focused on the 'physical curriculum' and constant efforts to change school textbooks, as he referred to the work of the NCCD, which was founded after the conflict. In this regard, Faheem stated the following:

> The centre [NCCD] is constantly working, I mean they started asking teachers in all stages at the end of every school year, what observations do you have about the curriculum? As educational supervisors, we used to collect these observations and send them to the Centre for Curriculum Development. So many things were amended like typos, or an idea or if a piece of information that is higher than the student's level…there is constant assessment to develop curriculum and approximately since five or six years till now if you compare the textbook published in 2013-14-15 you will see there were amendments every year… from the curriculum side, there has been constant development.

I prompted Faheem to talk about changes beyond the curriculum itself to focus on how education and teacher education responded to the conflict and its legacies, where he stated that:

> Not much was different, when the conflict happened, its legacies, or its impact on the classroom, not much was different apart from adding the topic of psychological support.

The same happened when I prompted Faheem to describe the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction where he described to me the experience of 'Schools for Outstanding Students', which were designated for high achieving students. Although Faheem went on later to state the importance of rebuilding 'the human before building the stone' and teachers' vital role in this process, he was vague when it came to describing that role. The lack of systematic strategies to link education and teacher education to peacebuilding became evident when I asked Faheem if his description of their role was based on an official strategy, to which he confirmed that 'what I said is a personal opinion'.

At this stage, I interpreted Faheem's elaboration of pre-conflict strategies as compared to the vague description of post-conflict initiatives as an indication of a lack of official

strategies, especially as his description of pre-conflict initiatives resonated with the examination provided in chapter two. However, I was aware of the importance of approaching this stance as an initial position that required further examination rather than allowing it to form a pre-judgement or a final conclusion. I further examined this position with Mo, a maths teacher and a Curriculum Developer. During our interview, Mo referred to the 'radical change' in teaching that took place from 2014 onwards, and when I asked Mo 'in what way it was radical' he stated the following:

> [The curriculum] does not rely on memorisation, it depends on discussions, it depends on more practical work, more exercises, debate … we have always been used to the book being closed and the teacher lecturing. Now the book is open, and the student is having discussions with the teacher.

Mo went on to provide a detailed description of the chronological development of the maths curriculum according to this 'new method'. However, when I asked Mo whether there were any efforts to go beyond these pedagogical issues to use education to promote peace in the post-conflict phase, there was silence and a change in his tone, indicating a less positive attitude as he stated that '[silence] umm…[silence] there are currently no efforts…there are not'. I asked Mo if he thought there was an official recognition of the role of education in the post-conflict phase to which he replied 'no, no, they [the government] are continuing on the basis if gunshots stop then the conflict has finished', which in turn made post-conflict reconstruction a matter of 'we open the schools, and students are back'. The dominance of individual initiatives and lack of strategic response was clearly indicated by Mo who stressed that currently:

> There is no sponsored programme; it is all personal efforts [tap on the table], it is all personal effort [tap on the table] … it is all individual initiatives, there is nothing systematic or sponsored financially at all. They are personal initiatives like a kind of help.

Although Mo expressed an awareness of the importance of the role of education in promoting peacebuilding in the post-conflict phase, Mo, similar to Faheem, was vague in describing that role as compared to his illustration of pedagogical issues which all went in line with the 2008/09 initiatives. I started to make links between the lack of conceptualisation and the absence of official strategies that teachers and teacher educators could refer to in order to describe their understanding of the complicated role of education in post-conflict reconstruction, as was the case when they were describing pre-conflict strategies.

I observed an important aspect about the role of the 2008/09 initiatives during my interview with Nora, a Teacher Trainer and Educational Supervisor, who indicated that these initiatives did not only shape pre-conflict educational provision but also 'continue' to shape this provision after the conflict. In this regard, Nora indicated that current teacher education strategies were a 'continuation' of the 2008/09 initiatives, as she stated the following:

> Teacher preparation started in 2009 when curricula was changed and the project to prepare teachers was started. In 2018, the process of curriculum development is continuing, which is accompanied with training teachers through a number of teacher training workshops, which is for five days, on ways and new strategies that go in line with the proposed criteria such as active learning…As for dealing with the conflict, teacher training is continuing in light of the 2009 plan. Some topics have been added but there has been no radical or comprehensive change to deal with the conflict.

The last part of Nora's statement above made me think for the first time of whether she was describing a situation or stating a position in which there was no need for a radical or comprehensive change since plans were in place before the conflict. This seemed like a valid question because seeking radical change in educational policies did not seem to be a priority if the role of education was approached purely as a pedagogical process. This question was of vital importance while interviewing Nora, as she was addressing me from the position of a

person who had 'the knowledge' of best pedagogies that were up-to-date and applied internationally.

This stance became more evident when I asked Nora for an elaboration of how teacher education changed after the conflict, where she referred to 'pedagogical changes' to integrate methods that encouraged 'research, debate, inquiry-based and collaborative learning' instead of 'brainstorming and problem-solving'. The aim of this change, according to Nora, was to encourage students to use 'higher thinking skills'. This description resonated with the rationale provided for pre-conflict initiatives that emphasised the need to move from rote to student-centred learning. An example that Nora provided to illustrate how teacher training changed after the conflict was related to Bloom's taxonomy as the focus became on the 'modern version' of Bloom's taxonomy, which 'focused on creation rather than evaluation, as was the case before the conflict'. I found out later on in my field work that this reference to the 'modern version' of Bloom's Taxonomy was included in training documents (which I will elaborate on in a later stage of data analysis). Again, this took me back to the opinion I developed after interviewing Faheem and Mo that participants were able to provide some kind of elaboration where there was a form of strategy they could refer to, otherwise they resorted to personal opinions or could not provide a conceptualisation beyond what was already included in those strategies.

The question of whether change was needed or what type of change was needed to address the legacies of the conflict became more prominent after my interview with Elia, who responded to my question about how the Department of Teacher Training and Preparation addressed the current situation by stating that 'training materials are in place before the conflict', so the way teacher education responded to the conflict was by 'maintaining' pre-conflict strategies while 'adding some topics to deal with the conflict such as intensive learning programmes (which are referred to as curriculum B) and teaching over-crowded classes' in

addition to the issue of psychological support. However, when I asked Elia about describing how psychological support was incorporated into teacher education, his response was I needed to explore this issue with another department as it was not within the remit of his department.

This pattern crosscuts with the situation in Higher Education where the curriculum provided in the faculty of education I visited was also described as 'not that different from the one used before the conflict', as Fa stated here that:

> The curriculum is not different from the one before 2011. The difference is reflected in teaching methodology as the number of students has doubled as a result of students' displacement from one city to another. Teaching practicum was also moved from schools to labs within the university. The difference was also by adding new topics which are related to the conflict to the Psychological Counselling module, such as social integration, psychological disorders among children, women, the injured and refugees which have been integrated into seminars, graduation projects and Master's dissertations.

I asked Fa if the new topics that were added to the curriculum were part of a policy in the faculty, to which she indicated that this partial change was based on 'individual initiatives' and that lecturers did not have to make such changes unless they personally felt they were required. Fa's description cross-cuts with the written records of lectures in the same faculty, which I collected during my field. I deliberately selected documents that covered different modules across a number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The content of these documents is theoretical and does not include any evidence of linking between theoretical concepts and the current situation in Syria.

What remained important at this stage was to examine how psychological support to learners and teachers was integrated within education and teacher education, especially as this area was repeatedly referred to by research participants as one of the main topics that was 'added' after the conflict.

7.3 Examining Adopted Strategies to Provide Psychological Support to Learners and Teachers:

When discussing this area with research participants, I started by exploring how the conflict impacted upon learners and teachers' psychological wellbeing as a way to develop my understanding and at the same time as a way to lead discussions to how this provision was integrated in education and teacher education.

When I asked participants to describe the manifestations of the conflict's impact on teachers and learners' psychological wellbeing. For example, Faheem referred to different types of 'phobias' among children as a result of the conflict, where he stated that:

> When he [a student] hears a lorry driving by, he thinks it is a tank… he experiences a difficult mental state. Sometimes with martyrs' convoys, there are gunshots. There are some children that hide under the desk and no one can get them out.

The level and complexity of these types of phobias differed according to learners' experiences, as some of these learners directly experienced in the conflict. This situation was reflected by Faheem who indicated that some students witnessed 'a murder in front of them, they saw beheadings, lived under siege… they were hungry, and their family were hungry or died next to them'. Whether directly or indirectly witnessing such experiences through watching scenes of violence on TV or social media, Mariam, a Counsellor, indicated that this situation led to a sharp increase in the number of depression, anxiety and stress cases among adults and children. In addition, Mariam referred to cases of 'sexual' and 'economic violence' that she dealt with during her work at a centre for locally displaced people, and in particular among children. Mariam was referring to the financial hardships and standards of living these individuals were experiencing, which made women and children in particular victims of sexual assault and human trafficking.

Mariam's experience in this centre highlighted another aspect linked to the country's demographics that further complicated the experience of locally displaced people, as Syria consists of socially and culturally distinct social groups encompassing nomads, urban and tribal communities. These groups have different habits, customs and costumes, and do not usually integrate with each. In this regard, Mariam referred to the challenge of 'social maladjustment' faced by these individuals as a result of 'changing social environment', coming from 'a very conservative' to a 'more open' one. For Mariam, this change of social environments impacted upon the psychological wellbeing of individuals as 'they have particular habits and traditions' and after moving to their new social environments 'they started to follow new habits and traditions that do not suit them so they broke with what they were accustomed to'.

Mariam also referred to how her work as a counsellor was affected by this mix of environments as she was facing 'unfamiliar cases' such as early marriage among young girls and domestic violence, which Mariam believed to be more dominant in 'other' communities as compared to where she grew up. Mariam also referred to how this mix of different social groups led to an increase in cases of 'sexual abnormalities' among school students, which Mariam linked to people coming from particular cities as she stated that:

> In other environments, there might be something like this [sexual abnormalities] but here in our environment there were not such cases… now it is increasing among students in schools as a result of mixing… we started to hear about it after people from other cities came here.

This phenomenon of 'social maladjustment' was also reflected in education where classes, after the conflict, consisted of socially, educationally and politically distinct groups making the class, as Mo described it, more like a 'little Syria'. Mo described how learners coming from different social environments were 'immediately met with negativity…bullying'. The experience of such learners was exacerbated by the disparity in the quality of educational provision between different parts of the country. This disparity was indicated by a number of

participants such as Faheem and Mariam who described how learners coming from eastern or northern parts of Syria often found themselves academically disadvantaged compared to their peers from Western parts. Mariam described how in some cases teachers had to 'downgrade' a number of learners from the seventh grade down to the third or fourth grade, which created, as Mariam stated, a number of emotional and educational challenges to these learners and their families.

Mo also indicated that the de-escalation of violence across many Syrian cities helped reveal a 'psychological crisis' especially among those who were directly involved in the conflict, including teachers and learners, as indicated in the following statement:

> You have a huge problem among those who participated in the war and now they are back. If those are not treated psychologically, they might affect their family's life. They have seen lots of incidents… terrifying… they have seen terrifying scenes.

For Mo, these 'terrifying scenes' had scarred individuals who no longer were the same people they had been before the conflict, so Mo referred to how people, including himself, were wearing 'masks'. Mo stated that 'I could be wearing a mask now, how do you know what is going on inside me?' I was interested in finding out how 'what is going on inside' learners was manifested in their behaviour and attitudes within the learning process, and what masks they had to wear as a result of internalising their experience of these different types of violence. Mo described how such experiences had led to the development of a 'violent mentality' among students, which he believed would have a considerable impact upon the post-conflict phase when he stated that:

> In my opinion, the next phase is more dangerous than the conflict itself and especially for children…They need a programme of psychological support as they have seen a lot… They have developed a kind of violent mentality. They have violent thinking. They have also become indifferent. They do not want education. They do not care about anything. What is important is money and work.

This statement echoed an overall individual awareness of the conflict's impact on the psychological wellbeing of learners and teachers, and at this stage of data analysis it became important to examine how education and teacher education responded to this unprecedented level of psychological challenges in order to prepare for the 'next phase'.

7.3.1 Educational Response to the 'Psychological Crisis':

In this study, developing an understanding of the educational response to provide psychological support to learners and teachers took two different strands. The first strand was direct through analysing interview data while the second one was based on examining documents which I collated during my field work.

I discussed the response of teacher education to the current 'psychological crisis' during my visit to a centre for pre-service teacher training, where one of the trainers, Ab, informed me that 'current learning materials used in the psychology module were in place before the conflict', and that they remained the same after the conflict. When I asked about the objectives and the content of this module, Ab pointed out that current curriculum focused on 'training teachers on different learning styles among different age groups and the appropriate teaching methods for each age'. I asked Ab about the changes within this module to address learners and teachers' psychological needs, to which he stated:

> There will be a change in teacher training modules through adding some modifications to address the impact of the conflict such as considering trainees' individual differences to avoid rote learning and memorisation.

I found the word 'will' problematic as it indicated that the change had not happened as of yet, seven years after the conflict began. Secondly, I stopped at the word 'modifications' as, by definition, it indicated 'the making of a limited change in something', which could be interpreted as maintaining an already existing structure while adding 'limited change'. In addition, the use of words such as 'rote learning' and 'memorisation' reminded me of Nabil's

statement about the focus of current training on 'pedagogical perspective' and resonated with the concepts included in the 2008/09 initiatives.

I realised there was more about this 'change' and 'what has changed' when the tutor of the Psychology module, Mary, walked into the Director's office where I was sitting along with other five teacher trainers. Unlike the other trainers, Mary explicitly expressed her extreme frustration because the curriculum had not changed, not only after the conflict, but also since 1983. Mary stated that she had received no training on how to deal with the conflict and its impact on learners and teachers. Mary described the current provision of teacher education and psychological support as a 'crisis within this crisis'. I expected this might trigger a discussion among the trainers in the room which would help me gain more insight into this issue. The room, however, was silent as the other trainers neither openly agreed nor disagreed with Mary. I thought of the reasons that could be behind this silence, such as being a sign that the other trainers knew what Mary said was right but they did not want to discuss it in front of a stranger or for other reasons related to the current security situation, something which I will further explore in a later stage of data analysis.

I realised my experience at this centre was not an isolated incident but rather part of a bigger picture as the situation of teacher education in Higher Education was not different. This became evident during my interview with Mariam, who also stated that the curriculum in the faculty of education did not change after the conflict, giving the example of a Counselling module which 'itself is a new programme. I mean it started a few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed'. I frequently stopped at the use of 'a new programme' because this description could reveal not only that 'nothing has changed' but also a lack of awareness for the need to change anything at all, something which could be an explanation for the way education and teacher education responded to the impact of the conflict.

It became essential to explore if at a strategy level there were any systematic efforts, even in the future, to address the impact of the conflict on learners' and teachers' psychological wellbeing. I discussed this issue with Mo as I asked him whether he was aware of any strategies or systematic efforts in this regard. Mo's response was an emphatic 'no, not at all' and then he started talking about 'what should be done' to tackle this situation referring to the need to develop collaboration between different ministries as the scale of this task required 'the efforts of more than one ministry'. This situation was also confirmed by Mariam who reported that 'each one works alone' and that there was a lack of collaboration between the different stakeholders overseeing this provision.

The lack of systematic response was evident through the domination of personal efforts and initiatives in this field, as indicated by Ya who described this provision as relying on 'personal efforts; there is nothing systemic', so 'if you are a good teacher… you like your students and provide them with psychological support but there is no systematic programme'. Similar to how Faheem had stated previously that things were left for the individual teacher, Mo echoed a similar stance when he indicated that providing psychological support was left to the teacher's 'conscience' as 'there are people who deliver the session and leave, they do not care about the psychology of the student; it is the least of their worries'. Based on this concept, I prompted Mo to articulate his conceptualisation of psychological support, where he stated the following:

> In general…we are very emotional, so we provide it [psychological support] based on personal efforts, no one tells you to do it. For example, you see a very poor or displaced child, for sure you are not going to treat them like another student.

The importance of Mo's statement came from its similarity with Faheem's, who also used the same adjective 'emotional' when I prompted him to articulate his conceptualisation of psychological support, which he described as the following:

> As people we are emotional…there is no teacher I think that has a student who is suffering a problem from this kind who does not inform their students that this student needs to be considered or something like this, but they are trying with their personal efforts.

I reflected on the use of 'emotional' by both Mo and Faheem and tried to dig deeper to develop an understanding of its relationship to the provision of psychological support. I started to observe an important underpinning perspective affecting the provision of psychological support, which was approached as being 'emotional', showing 'empathy' or 'sympathy' and providing basic necessities to learners. This became evident when I asked Mo about the psychological support provided to students coming from areas directly affected by the conflict, which he described as distributing stationery, school bags, milk and biscuits to students. He also gave an example of the support provided to a student who was injured after an extreme Islamic group attacked her village on the same day she was due to sit an exam:

> I remember once they attacked an area, Al Nusra Front… during the exam period. One student had her arm broken, came to sit the exam as she wanted to pass… the student is very smart. Despite this, she did sit the exam, but we did show her mercy. I mean, we sat next to her. She was nervous. Do not be scared. We are with you now. The girl is smart and now she is studying her second year at Medical School. But the girl was in a terrible situation, her arm was wounded but she wanted to sit the exam. She was nervous she would not pass it, so the psychological support provided to her gave her strength.

Such a statement presented a good example of the current understanding of what constituted psychological support, which in this case was sitting next to the student and trying to comfort her. My discussions with Mo also revealed another important issue affecting the provision of psychological support, which was the role of school counsellors in this process where he said that:

> There is a counsellor in every school… I have not seen a counsellor. I mean, I used to deal with problems personally although it is not my job professionally… I more than once have dealt with problems in this regard although it was based on personal experience, but not scientifically. But I was not sure if it was or was not effective, that is not my job in the end.

It became clear from Mo’s description that as a teacher he felt that he was not supported by school counsellors, who were ‘at least supposed to have a list of students’ names and their problems and provide this to the teacher so that they could deal with it’. Nabil provided a similar description of the counsellors’ role as he explained that ‘there is a counsellor in every school, but their role is not active yet’. However, I realised examining the counsellors’ role was more complex, especially when Nabil referred to wider social and economic factors that impacted negatively on psychological interventions due to ‘the lack of education for the need of psychological support’. Nabil gave an example of an attempt to provide support to some children who had been kidnapped during the conflict, but they did not receive any support because their parents did not recognise the importance of this type of intervention. In some cases, parents could not afford the costs of transport to send their children to the centres to access the relevant support.

I followed up the counsellors’ role with Mariam, a counsellor herself, and discussed what factors were impacting upon that role. Firstly, Mariam referred to the stigma attached to people who required this kind of support, as they were still considered as ‘kind of mad’. For Mariam, one of the main factors impeding developing the provision of psychological support was people’s ‘wrong perception’ of counselling; ‘after all we are not for mad people’. However, this stigma was not only directed towards people who required such support but also towards counsellors who, according to Mariam, were not perceived as ‘doctors to prescribe medication’, but rather were perceived as people who ‘sit and listen to people talking’, so ‘pressure mounts on you from all sides. It causes you something like burn out’.

Mariam also described how this social attitude to psychological support impacted upon the counsellor’s role within schools, where teachers and management staff ‘do not value the role of mental health intervention’. Mariam indicated such an attitude to be one of the main

challenges that undermined the role of school counsellors, which Mariam experienced directly during her work as a school counsellor in partnership with UNICEF, where she stated:

> The headmaster, superintendents and teachers would first ask me 'What you are teaching here?' I would say counselling. 'Counselling? [in a tone indicating something is of no importance] Why did you come here? Go, stay at home'… I would say that I would like to give students a session of counselling and the headmaster would answer 'Miss, let them have an Arabic session, isn't that better than this counselling?' They consider it as not important at all. In their opinion, teaching other subjects such as Arabic, English, Maths are more important than counselling. Even when a student wants to leave class to see a counsellor… they consider the student to be wasting their time or trying to get out of the session.

In addition to this social attitude that considered this type of support to be of 'no importance', there was a professional attitude within the teaching community where choosing school counselling as a career was associated with pursuing an 'easy job' with 'nothing to do'. This job was considered in some cases to be for the 'spoilt' ones, 'who did not want to do any work', which made people, like Mariam, become demotivated and want to stay at home rather than providing this much needed support to learners.

What caught my attention was that Mariam, as she was describing her experience as a school counsellor, did not refer to a booklet described by a number of research participants as 'the main training guide' for providing psychological support through education. For instance, Elia described this booklet as 'the main guide' for training teachers regarding concepts of psychological support, and that it included learning activities that teachers and teacher educators could adopt in the learning process. The same stance was repeated by Nora who referred to this booklet and provided a similar description of its importance. Despite regular references to this booklet, there seemed to be a lack of awareness of its content, where and how it could be integrated in the educational process. In order to develop an understanding of this booklet and how it was integrated in the learning process, it was important to go beyond interview data to examine relevant documents I collated during my field work.

7.3.2 Understanding Psychological Support beyond Interview Data:

The booklet described as the main guide for outlining the provision of psychological support was produced in 2017 by the MoE in collaboration with the UNESCO office in Lebanon under the title *Teacher's Guide to Psychological Support.* In its forward, the aim of this booklet is described as enabling teachers to be familiar with 'basic principles of psycho-social support', 'manifestations of ill-health among learners', 'suitable teaching methods to reduce the conflict's negative implications on children's psychology' and help them 're-adjust to the school environment' and 'positive integration' in the learning process (Suleiman et al, 2017:5).

In its introduction, the Minister of Education at the time referred to how this 'unjust war' caused 'social and psychological instability' among individuals and in particular children. As a result, the former Minister stressed the importance of embedding 'psycho-social support into the learning process in order to overcome shocking experiences and negative impact'. The former Minister stressed how 'the teacher bears a considerably large responsibility' as 'the first line of support for parents', and as 'the most capable to understand the child, their personality development and their abilities, which is required to 'positively build their personalities and consequently build a healthy Syrian society' (Suleiman et al, 2017:3).

The former Minister described teachers' services in this process as 'preventative and remedial', which aimed to achieve a more advanced level of 'social and psychological compatibility' among learners, improve their learning achievements and 'reach suitable psychological adaptability'. The way teachers could provide this type of 'psycho-social support' was through their 'effective contribution' to supporting children to 'better adjust to the pressure they are facing, informing them of the methods required to face these events' (Suleiman et al, 2017).

The concept of psycho-social intervention is explained in this booklet as a type of teaching in ‘emergency situations’, which consists of ‘systematic, appropriate and supportive activities’ that help provide learners with ‘a safe and stable environment, reinforce their feeling of reassurance, preserve their dignity and their psychological wellbeing’ (Suleiman et al, 2017). In order to achieve this, the booklet covers the following topics:

- General definition, principles and rationale for applying psycho-social support.
- Implications of crises and conflicts on teaching and learning.
- Manifestations of ill-health among learners.
- Mechanisms of psycho-social analysis in the educational process which include feelings and learning, communication and listening, self-esteem and role of play in learning.
- Recommended strategies that teachers could use to provide psycho-social analysis such as stories, music, dancing, drawing, acting and drama.
- The role of the teacher in dealing with losing a family member, which provides advice on what to do in the classroom to deal with such a situation, from encouraging the learner to continue their daily routine, discussing the concept of death inside the classroom so that other learners can understand the feelings of that particular learner, encouraging expressions of sadness and crying, holding hands, arranging meetings with family, seeking assistance from the school counsellor and facilitating participation in activities that encourage ‘emotional discharge’, recalling events. The booklet also stresses the importance of not forcing the learner to suppress their feelings and to avoid using statements such as ‘do not worry, the conflict will end’, ‘do not cry, you are a man’ and ‘do not worry everything will be fine’ (Suleiman et al, 2017:31).
- Managing conflict between the teacher and learners.

- Behavioural issues and recommended strategies. An issue included in this booklet is 'lack of motivation' which the teacher can address by searching for the reasons behind the lack of motivation, assigning challenging but achievable tasks, diversifying teaching methods, dividing tasks into smaller parts and seeking assistance from a specialist if required (Suleiman et al, 2017:33).

An example of the type of guidance provided to teachers through this booklet can be illustrated through the steps recommended to teachers in order to deal with learners' behavioural challenges as a result of living through 'difficult circumstances' and experiencing the conflict (Suleiman et al, 2017:26), which includes the following:

- When these learners come to school, they need an atmosphere of safety and to get used to the school routine.
- The teacher needs to be familiar with the backgrounds of those learners.
- Entertaining and collaborative activities should be supported.
- It is useful when there are learners from different areas in one classroom to engage in discussions about life in their areas and their traditions, even learn songs and dances in order to focus on the positive aspects of life in their areas.
- Assign responsibilities to learners, which will support their integration.
- Organise activities in collaboration with the local community.

The booklet has one page discussing the concept of 'self-care for teachers', and acknowledging that 'teachers experience the same human, physical, emotional losses, and the same pressures that learners and their families experience' (Suleiman et al, 2107:35). As a result, it was recommended that teachers and other members in the field of education management need to feel safe and have a decent standard of living to enable them to perform their duties psychologically and physically. It also recommends that teachers receive training

to address the different types of pressure their learners are experiencing so that they regain stability in their life. In light of this concept of self-care, teachers are recommended to follow a number of strategies during the conflict, such as:

- Keep a diary to record everyday activities in terms of how teachers have felt, what they have done, especially ‘good things’ such as ‘how many times you heard thank you’.
- Follow required steps to improve physical and emotional wellbeing such as healthy food, exercise, relaxation and reflection.
- Develop an emergency plan for their own families as this helps make the teacher feel ‘ready to face crises’.
- Participate in social activities.
- Maintain a daily routine that specifies the duties of the teacher and their families.

The gap between theory and practice was apparent as it remained unclear how teachers were expected to implement the above recommendations in light of their current financial difficulties and what kind of ‘emergency plan’ one could develop in a situation like the one teachers in Syria were experiencing. In addition, some of these recommendations do not take into account the cultural background of teachers in Syria, as the practice of writing diaries, for instance, is culturally an uncommon practice in Syria.

Although this booklet was described by a number of research participants as the main source for teacher training in providing psychological support, this concept is addressed in other written documents such as the *Reference Guide for Active Learning (2016),* which was developed by the MoE and UNICEF. Psychological support is linked to the concept of active learning, and it is addressed in terms of explaining the concept of psycho-social support, principles of psychological support and non-violent communication (MoE, 2016:30). This

section focuses on the need to develop an awareness of psycho-social support, which stresses the relationship between the individual's social and psychological dimensions as this process involves the individual's family and social network (MoE, ibid). The underpinning framework for this approach is Maslow's hierarchies of needs, which is applied as a framework to enable teachers to differentiate between feelings and needs, and to discuss their own feelings.

According to this type of support, teachers are encouraged to apply a model based on the principles of 'look, listen and connect' (MoE, 2016:34), where teachers are asked to 'look' for signs in individual learners which might indicate a need for psychological support, 'listen' to these individuals and then 'connect' them with a social network and available psychological support. Teachers, however, are reminded that their role in this area is focussed on providing psychological support and not therapy, so it is important that they refer cases such as severe depression or being a threat to one's self or others to counsellors or specialised doctors.

Reference to the concept of psycho-social support also features in a different booklet developed by the MoE entitled *Training Guide for Complementary Courses 2017/2018.* The role of teachers in providing psychological support is defined in terms of providing learners with opportunities to 'express their feelings', and providing them with 'behaviours' that help them adapt and minimise the implications caused by conflicts (Mohamed et al, 2017:45). Based on this approach, teaching practices need to include methods that help provide psychological support such as communication skills, asking open questions that help to 'offload' and expose 'unbalanced ideas' and using playing, drama and art as a way to express feelings (Mohamed et al, ibid).

An example of a learning activity is the 'Feelings Circle' (Mohamed et al, 2017:50), which aims to help learners identify and express their feelings as well as understand the feelings of others. In this activity, teachers ask each student to draw a circle, dividing it into four parts

based on feelings of happiness, fear, sadness and anger. Learners are then asked to work in groups to discuss what they have included in each group. Similar to the guide discussed above, the role of teachers in this area is illustrated as support rather than being a therapist. Teachers are advised not to try to support learners with severe mental health needs if they are not trained to do so, but rather they should seek external support or refer learners to those who are more qualified.

It is important to mention that the national curriculum now includes learning activities that help provide psychological support, as is the case in the National Education textbook for the 7th grade, where there is a unit entitled 'Spotlight on Youth Problems' (National Education, 7th Grade:110). Students featured in this unit are exposed to issues such as 'school violence' and it shows how the school counsellor can be involved to resolve conflicts among students. In this unit, there is a class activity about conflict resolution, which is based on a case study of two students where:

> Samer and Amer quarrelled in the schoolyard, so the extra-curricular supervisor interfered to stop this quarrel and to resolve the conflict between them. However, each one of them insisted on their stance towards the other so the extra-curricular supervisor sent them to the school counsellor, who listened to both of them at the beginning and then asked them if they wanted to find a solution themselves; to which they said yes (National Education, 7th Grade, ibid).

Then the counsellor asked a mutual friend to play the role of a mediator to resolve the conflict, after giving him a number of questions to ask both of them, such as 'Tell us what happened?', 'How did you feel when that happened?' and 'What would you like him to do instead of what he did?'

Another example of a learning activity is included in a Social Studies textbook for the 5th grade, which has a section on 'I control my Anxiety', where learners are exposed to descriptions of anxiety symptoms (Social Studies, 5th grade:20). The first part of this activity

provides a description about a boy called Rami who had 'stomach cramps before he went to sit his exam although he did not have any physical pain'. This description is followed by a question 'How did Rami feel? And when?' The second part of this activity refers to a girl called Amal whose grades 'have dropped noticeably and is experiencing sleeping difficulties'. Her mother informed the teacher that the family is going through a period of stress due to the absence of the father'. This description is also followed by a question about 'What is the reason Amal's grades were dropping? What is she suffering from?'

Learners are also provided with examples of behaviours and diets that could help reduce anxiety and stress. There is an activity asking learners to choose a behaviour that could help to reduce their anxiety. The list provided includes the following options: 'exercise', 'spending enough time with family and friends' and 'allocating enough time for reading'. This activity also refers to 'types of food that help reduce tension and anxiety' such as fish, dairy products, vegetables (potassium) and dates, red meat, milk and cheese (Vitamin B6, B3, B12). The scope of this study did not allow me to examine how these lessons are implemented and what 'emphasis' was given to such lessons in light of the current professional attitude towards providing psychological support to learners.

Despite the presence of these different resources that aimed to provide psychological support to learners and teachers, there was an evident lack of connection between these sources on one hand and between these sources and teacher education on the other, something which was pointed out by Mo when he stated that 'we [teachers] have not been exposed to this [psychological support] at all. No one told us'. Mo mentioned that this type of support 'is referred to' in teacher training through reminding teachers of the 'need to consider the learner's situation, to consider their emotions, not to shock them. They [trainers] say something like this'. Mo's statement took me back to what I mentioned previously about the tendency to approach psychological support as showing sympathy and kindness. Also, using 'referred to'

did not match the scale of the 'psychological crisis' that both learners and teachers were experiencing as a result of the conflict.

At this stage, I realised that the current response to the conflict was more complicated than being merely a matter of priorities or theories but rather related to the absence of a political 'mindset' required to assess and develop educational strategies to address the legacies of conflict. I started to get an insight into this situation when Ya indicated that one would expect a country, which experienced a conflict such as the Syrian one, to go through a 'change in mentality… at all levels', but for Ya the situation was different in Syria, as he stated that:

> Till now, till this moment when we are sitting and talking to each other, there is no change of mentality and nothing seems like it is going to change [Mo agrees]. There is no consideration of anything… I feel there was a plan to develop learning in Syria, and they [the government] are still continuing it. The conflict happened or did not happen, there was a plan to develop curriculum and they are still following it. They have not changed anything as a result of the conflict.

The use of the word 'mentality' was key because Ya was not only referring to educational strategies but also to the political and ideological structures embedded into these strategies that had not changed after or as a result of the conflict. For Ya, the situation in Syria was like conducting an experiment under the same conditions which made it unlikely to reach a different result since the same pre-conflict political institutions were still adopting historic ideologies and policies to govern the country. For Ya, reforms required a change in the mechanisms and institutions of policy and decision making, something which Ya thought was still missing in Syria.

Ya's statement was a reminder that developing an understanding of educational and teacher education strategies was not possible without situating these strategies in their political, ideological, economic and social context. Data analysis, as a result, needed to focus on linking the educational response to the conflict with this 'change of mentality', which could not be

developed without examining generated data in light of the wider ideological, political, cultural context of the study, and to link the constructed themes to wider power and social systems that has the potential to impact upon the future of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

7.4 Education, Teacher Education and the Wider Socio-political Context: The Role of Truth Claims in Post-Conflict Syria:

The lack of a 'change of mentality' Ya referred to was a reminder of the importance of situating post-war educational initiatives within their wider socio-political context. In this regard, I directed my attention to re-examining the concept of truth as a way to explore whether there was a 'change of mentality' towards using this ideological tool from violence to promoting reconciliation and promoting positive peace.

The concept of truth was an important aspect of my discussions with Nabil, where I noticed a contradiction between his 'personal stance' as compared to the 'official' one. On a personal level, Nabil demonstrated critical awareness of the role of 'absolute truth' in conflict and post-conflict development, as he affirmed that 'our nation has no future as long the phenomenon of exclusion and atonement dominates us on the basis that each group has the absolute truth'. Thus, the role of truth was fundamental in Nabil's 'personal vision of reconciliation' which was based on the need to 'respect the other without seeking to abolish' them. For Nabil, the role of truth was not confined to conflict development but also extended to 'post-conflict' reconciliation which required a process of creating 'a national memory', 'defining who the Syrian is', so that 'a sense of national spirit' could be developed where 'everyone can feel they are part of this country; any achievement or destruction is for everyone'. The question of 'memory' was critical to Nabil especially in the presence of 'electronic memory', in reference to social media which can be used to 'archive images and events of the conflict more accurately than the human memory'. Nabil approached the question

of memory as ‘a confrontation that we cannot avoid’, and ‘it will move to the educational process’.

In focusing on the concept of ‘absolute truth’, I directly asked Nabil, as a representative of the government rather than an individual, about the concept of truth in post-conflict reconstruction and which version of truth about the conflict was likely to dominate that phase. Nabil confirmed that ‘who wins imposes their vision. The government’s vision and ideology will be imposed especially in comparison with extremist ideologies, destroying government’s institutions and killing individuals’. Besides, for Nabil, the way the opposition openly dealt with the country’s ‘traditional enemy’ like Israel and some Western countries proved that the ‘government’s theory and vision are correct’.

As an official figure, it was evident that Nabil was approaching the concept of truth from the perspective of the ‘strong’ and ‘victorious’, which was clear from the very beginning when Nabil referred to the ‘political and military victory’ achieved by the government and its allies, and that ‘the stakes to divide Syria and the collapse of its regime have failed’. This sense of triumph increased after the numerous military ‘victories’ through which the government regained its authority over many cities and areas that were strongholds for the opposition forces such as Al Ghouta near Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Dara’a, the city where the conflict started.

The process of ‘imposing’ the government version of truth in the post-war phase started to materialise through current boundaries of what was allowed to be discussed or critiqued regarding the conflict and its development. For instance, when I discussed the concepts of ‘absolute truth’ and ‘critical thinking’ with Nabil, he was direct in indicating that current ‘boundaries’ would allow critique against anti-government ideologies and in particular the ‘killer religious heritage’, referring to extreme Islamic groups such as ISIS. This summed up my experience with research participants who would only be ‘more open’ about critiquing the

government's stance after recording stopped. Nabil was not shy in acknowledging this situation when he stated that 'if we have the courage to search for the truth, we do not have the courage to disclose it', which in turn would make it difficult to 'have the courage to examine and refute the taken-for-granted that appears as sacred'. As a result, Nabil indicated that this critique against the government's truth claims or representation of the conflict 'is currently implicit and not explicit'.

Defining the boundaries of critique was reflected, as Nabil indicated, through current 'official strategy' which 'adopts the policy of creating red lines around discussions of the conflict in order to escape from facing problems'. I became interested here in examining how this policy of creating 'red lines' was reflected in the educational process. I explored this question during my interview with Mo, who revealed a problematic issue that would have long-term impact upon the role of education in post-conflict reconstruction, as he informed me that there were instructions from the Minister of Education to 'ban' discussions about the conflict in the classroom. Mo referred to an official letter from the Minister of Education in this regard, as he stated the following:

> In the area of critique, there is a decision from the Minister of Education banning discussions about anything in the class outside the topic of study. It is forbidden through a letter from the Ministry of Education, under the supervision of the headmaster, to ban discussions of any topic outside the specialised topic of study. There is a decision from the Minister of Education, signed, registered and disseminated to all schools.

Mo made it clear that he was aware of the implications of this letter in terms of avoiding raising the controversial topic of the conflict inside the classroom, something which demonstrated the manifestations of the policy of creating 'red lines' in the educational process. Another problematic aspect became clear when Ya commented on Mo's statement by saying 'this is not the Minister's decision [laughter indicating cynicism] I mean it is not him. He is the one who signed it'. Although none of us directly commented, I felt that we all recognised the

message behind Ya's noticeable cynicism, which was referring to security forces which had 'absolute power' to control all aspects of life including education. This situation became clear when I asked Mo how he would react if a student asked him about his perspective of the conflict, to which Mo was clear that 'in class, I avoid talking about this. Sadly, this might have repercussions'.

The situation in Higher Education was not different from the one Mo described, as Fa also indicated that there were 'instructions not to refer to the conflict in the teaching process'. The policy of creating 'red lines' and its impact upon the educational process became clear when Fa referred to 'the phenomenon of educational violence' among lecturers, in which 'political and sectarian interpretations can be attributed to their teaching practices and that might lead to catastrophic consequences on their professional future'. This phenomenon of 'educational violence', for Fa, contributed to the creation of an 'oppressed' and 'deprived-of-will' nation, where academics 'face problems and threats only to encourage critical thinking', something which Fa had personally experienced.

The phenomenon of 'educational violence' and the fear of 'repercussions' were clear obstacles that impeded attempts to encourage critical thinking especially in relation to the conflict. For Fa, this situation left Higher Education 'with no subjects or systematic efforts to encourage critical thinking'. Even when Fa planned activities in which students were asked to link between learning activities and the conflict, she described how learners' answers reflected only 'memorisation'; 'void of any constructive critique'. The same practices were also dominant in pre-university learning which was dominated by social and political 'red lines' which created a situation described by Mo:

> The student receives information, but to critique it, no…there is no such thing. I do not even know if anyone has the courage…very difficult…I cannot even imagine it.

The problematic issue with this type of learning was not limited only to issues of rote learning or encouraging memorisation but also, as Ya put it, to developing a type of 'uniform education' which aimed to maintain the 'teacher and the textbook' along with their embedded ideologies as 'the complete source of knowledge that could not be critiqued'. This 'uniform education' reflected structural efforts to encourage a type of learning where, as Ya described, 'everyone needs to understand in the same way, at the same level and at the same time'. Ya's reference to 'understanding' revealed a problematic aspect of previous and current 'mentality' whose aims were to develop 'uniform' understanding not only of school subjects but beyond that to include the conflict in terms of how it developed, would be narrated and remembered in the future.

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

Although data analysis was one of the most complex stages of writing this thesis, I found it to be one of the most informative stages that allowed me to develop an understanding of the response of education and teacher education to the conflict, and to situate this response within the country's wider socio-political context. Engaging with data analysis was thus an important learning curve in my personal, professional and research journey, during which I was 'always thinking, learning and evolving' (Braun and Clarke, 2019:592). In this way, the ultimate aim of this process was no more about reaching a final destination, but rather it was about 'journeying' and 'not arriving' at a point where there is nothing new to learn (Braun and Clarke, ibid).

At this stage of my journey, the chapters that I had written so far seemed to me like pieces of a jigsaw that I needed to bring together to construct a new meaningful picture. In this new picture, the different knowledge threads that I developed as a result of engaging with academic literature and data analysis needed to be interwoven in order to illustrate how this

study has answered research questions and at the same time situate its findings within the larger field of research and knowledge development.

Chapter Eight

CONSTRUCTED THEMES: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction:

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the implications of data analysis for generating a type of knowledge for understanding that helps to 'illuminate' 'what is going on' in Syria regarding the government's approach to reconstructing the education sector, and to examine if or how this process is systematically linked to wider peacebuilding strategies. In this discussion, I will weave theoretical concepts derived from reviewing academic literature together with the themes I constructed as a result of data analysis, in order to develop a new coherent meaning that contributes to answering research questions and to knowledge development in the wider academic field.

8.1 Dominance of Negative Peace and Physical Reconstruction of the Education Sector:

One of the main aims of this research is to approach the current state of 'relative peace' achieved across major Syrian cities as representing a 'window of opportunity' to develop an initial understanding of the government's approach to peacebuilding and what role, if any, is attributed to education and teacher education in this process. The focus here is to assess whether current initiatives to reconstruct the education sector are part of wider, long-term political and social strategies in order to understand education's full potential in contributing to the process of rebuilding social cohesion and conflict resolution (Gill and Niens, 2014, King, 2005).

In this regard, data analysis reveals that current reconstruction initiatives consist of mainly fragmented individual efforts, as described by many participants who have indicated 'the domination of individual work' and 'lack of coordination' between different ministries including the MoE and MoHE. This lack of a systematic approach is further illustrated by the

way a number of research participants were more detailed in describing their own 'personal vision' and 'personal opinion' as compared to describing an official approach to reconstruction. Other participants, such as Nabil, also described what the government 'should' and 'needed to do' rather than what 'currently is' or 'planned', which could be an indication that there is a lack of strategies that address the conflict and its legacies. This situation has left current reconstruction initiatives, as described by Nabil, being more like a 'bazaar' than a strategy reflecting a 'management crisis' regarding conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

The dominance of short-term and fragmented initiatives to respond to the conflict reflects a missed opportunity to utilise the current state of relative peace in order to develop a comprehensive strategy, where each component, including education, is 'infused with an intention to develop sustainable peace' (International Peace Institute, 2017:3). Although the scale of destruction and the high costs of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure are currently presented as a justification for the government's reconstruction approach, data analysis reveals this approach is more than 'a matter of priority' imposed by the large scale of destruction. This situation is clearly indicated by Mo, who, in response to my question if there are systematic efforts to apply education to promote peace in a post-conflict phase, stated '[silence] umm…[silence] there are currently no efforts… there are not'.

Such a statement could be an indication of long-term challenges as there is no evidence, through data analysis, of the government's intention to approach the current state of peace as an opportunity to develop wider and long-term strategies, which aim to develop education's full potential in contributing to the process of rebuilding social cohesion and conflict resolution (Gill and Niens, 2014, King, 2005). The absence of long-term, holistic and multi-disciplinary strategies that aim to respond to both causes and manifestations of violence makes it difficult to describe how current initiatives can contribute to preventing an outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violence. Such a situation has implications for peacebuilding

and promoting sustainable peace, as both are unlikely to develop without systematic efforts to direct education and teacher education to promote a new conceptual system that legitimises structural peace, and effectively contributes to the process of psychological and ideological reconstruction of the educational sector.

Another factor that can help demonstrate that this lack of strategic response is more than 'a matter of priority' is linked to approaching peace as solely an absence of violence (Galtung, 1996). The priority in Syria remains focused on bringing life back to normal as it was before the conflict, as indicated by Mo who described the government's approach to post-conflict reconstruction as being based on the principle of 'if gunshots stop, then the conflict has finished', which in turn made post-conflict reconstruction a matter of 'we open the schools, and students are back'. Such an approach can jeopardise peacebuilding because interpreting reconstruction as merely returning to the way things were before the conflict ignores that rebuilding destroyed communities involves creating new webs of relationships between individuals who have been enemies. After all, relationships are the context in which cycles of violence have occurred and where peace will occur (Lederach, 2000). It can be concluded that current reconstruction initiatives fail to address the abolition of structural and cultural aspects of violence, something that cannot be achieved without systematically directing education and teacher education towards countering dominant polarised and hegemonic discourses of the conflict.

Approaching peace as an absence of violence has another implication for peacebuilding, which can be reduced through this approach to a 'one-time' intervention rather than being an ongoing process underpinned by proactive measures that aim to reinforce social structures and institutions that are capable of addressing root and secondary causes of violence (International Peace Institute, 2017). A negative approach to peace ignores the complexity of promoting sustainable peace, in which disarming aspects of cultural and social structures that

legitimise and mitigate violence are perceived as an essential prerequisite to abolish structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1996). Data analysis in this regard indicates that current reconstruction efforts cannot be described as directed towards promoting sustainable peace due to the lack of emphasis on developing more harmonious relationships and integrating 'human society', in which the ultimate value is the unconditional and infinite worth of human life (Galtung, 1964).

Within these initiatives, what requires illumination is the way education and teacher education have responded to the conflict and what implications this might have for the future of Syria.

8.2 Educational Response to the Conflict: An Interruption-Resumption Model:

In examining if or how education and teacher education have responded to the conflict, the more I engaged with data analysis, the more I realised the importance of the way Faheem described the conflict to have 'interrupted' the implementation of 2008/09 strategies to reform education in Syria. Its importance comes from realising that interruption is correlated with resumption, which in a way reflects the response of education and teacher education to the conflict. This interruption-resumption model is evident in the way research participants, such as Nora, described the way teacher education had changed after the conflict, where 'teacher training is continuing in light of the 2009 plan' and 'there has been no radical or comprehensive change to deal with the conflict'. This stance is similar to the one described by Elia whose account clearly sums up this model of change as he indicated that the content of teacher education had not changed after the conflict since 'training materials have been in place before the conflict'.

This model implies that the response of education and teacher education to the conflict is currently based on maintaining pre-conflict strategies while adding new topics such as

psychological support and providing intensive learning programmes that enable learners to complete two academic years in one to compensate for missed learning. Pre-conflict strategies thus continue to shape education and teacher education after the conflict, or as Ya has indicated 'there was a plan to develop learning', which is 'still continuing' regardless of whether the conflict has happened or not. For Ya, it was clear that there is an official state of 'self-denial' regarding the conflict, acknowledging its impact and directly addressing the impact. This takes us back to Ya's original statement about the lack of 'change of mentality' within official institutions and decision-making positions.

The interruption-resumption model is also evident in examined documents such as the *General Framework of National Curriculum for the Syrian Arab Republic* (NCCD, 2016). Similar to pre-conflict strategies, this document outlines that 'the process of developing educational curricula is based on standard-based education' (NCCD, 2016:34). The resumption of pre-conflict strategies is also evident in the *Training Package for Developed Curriculum for Pre-University Learning in Syria 2018-19,* which as described by Elia, is the primary source that shapes the provision of government-funded teacher training. The similarities between pre- and post-conflict strategies are reflected in training topics included in this package, which are divided into four categories as the following (Barada'ee et al, 2018):

Table 8.1 – Topics and Learning Objective of In-service Teacher Training

Topic	Themes	Learning Objectives
Standard-based Learning.	Standards and performance indicators. Flipped Class.	To enable the trainee to develop standards and their learning outcomes.

Topic	Themes	Learning Objectives
	Analysing a learning unit from develop curricula.	To enable the trainer to employ standards in learning. To enable the trainer to teach a lesson according to standard-based learning.
Methods of Applying Standard-based Learning.	Analysing a lesson from the develop curricula. Teaching four lessons from the developed curricula for the eighth grade. Teaching four lessons from the developed curricula for the eleventh grade.	To enable the trainee to teach a lesson according to learning strategies adopted in the developed curricula.
Employing Technology for Teaching and Learning Purposes.	Employing social media sources in the learning process. Using the electronic curriculum.	To enable the trainee to employ technology for teaching and learning purposes.

Topic	Themes	Learning Objectives
	Employing multi-media in learning outcomes. Internet skills that a teacher needs to have.	
Assessment Methods and Tools.	New assessment tools in line with the developed curricula. Developing different assessment activities.	To enable the trainee to design tool to assess activities included in the developed curricula.

This document illustrates the continuity of the main themes that shaped pre-conflict education and teacher education, which still revolve around advocating the centrality of the learner's role in the learning process, active learning methods and the need to tailor learning to different learning styles (Barada'ee et al, 2018). Although at a policy level there is a reference to the political and social role of education, this is not reflected in topics covered in the examined document as the practice of teacher development remains focused on knowledge transfer and application at the expense of knowledge construction.

It is important to point out that this training package provides examples not only of the interruption-resumption model but also of my observation that participants were able to provide detailed descriptions when there was a strategy they could refer to. For instance, examining this document crosscuts with Nora's reference to the concepts of 'modern version' of Bloom's taxonomy, as this training package refers to the two versions of Bloom's taxonomy (Barada'ee et al, 2018:86). In the first version, the document refers to the six domains included in Bloom's

taxonomy; remember, understand, apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate, whereas in the modern version, called 'Knowledge Domains According to the Modified Version of Bloom's taxonomy', the sixth domain refers to 'create' rather than 'evaluate'.

At this stage, developing a comprehensive understanding of the role of education and teacher education within the interruption-resumption model requires situating this role within the wider political, social and ideological context.

8.3 The Development of a Singular Representation of the Conflict: Truth, Securitisation and Silence:

One of the main issues examined in this study that poses a risk for a successful post-reconstruction, is the attempt by emerging power structures to define the 'national story' regarding the conflict and its development (Smith and Vaux, 2003:23). This risk cannot be ignored in the Syrian situation especially as it has become clear from Nabil's description that the government is approaching the 'post-conflict' phase as a 'winner' who has achieved 'military' and 'political' victories. This sense of 'triumph' becomes evident when discussing issues such as truth claims about the conflict and whose version is likely to dominate the post-conflict phase, as Nabil directly stated that the government's vision will be 'imposed' based on the logic 'who wins' a conflict will 'impose' their ideology.

This war for truth continues to be manifested in education where the national curriculum is still being employed as a tool to reinforce the government's version of truth claims regarding the conflict. This is evident, for example, in the introduction to the *Training Guide for Complementary Courses 2017/2018,* which clearly reinstates the government version:

> The armed terrorist groups have sought through the war, which the Syrian Arab Republic has suffered from for about eight years, to spread a culture of ignorance through destroying schools, preventing children from learning and

> spread their ideology that incites killing in addition to targeting students with missiles in safe areas while they are at their desks in order to influence their personalities and create feelings of fear and anxiety among them…this has led to many implications such as the emergence of complete or partial educational losses among students which has impacted negatively on their learning levels and has led to their failure in their classes (Mohammed et al, 2017:4).

This introduction resonates with truth claims put forward by the government at the beginning of the conflict, which present the conflict as a struggle between a legitimate government and terrorists; between patriotism, stability and prosperity against treason, insecurity and destruction. This dichotomy of good versus evil; destruction versus stability continues to be reinforced through learning activities included in the national curriculum. For instance, in the following activity included in National Education for the 7th grade, learners have to categorise images according to what ‘Acts reflect the strength of national belonging’, and ‘Acts that reflect the weakness of national belonging’. An example of this is shown in the images pictured below, which show the Syrian flag, a symbol of the government, being held by a student in a school, while the other image shows a statue of a famous poet before and after it was destroyed by opposition groups. The embedded message in this activity can be read as the government is associated with education and progress while the opposition is associated with destruction and destroying the country’s heritage. In this way, images are employed in the national curriculum in a way that helps reinforce this juxtaposition of alternatives and to

النشاطُ الرّابعُ: أتأملُ وأجيبُ

أتلفه شُلّت يمينك خلّه   لمعتبر أو زائر أو مسائل

للشاعر أبي يعلى عبد الباقي بن أبي حصين المعري «بتصرف»

Illustration 8.1 - A Sample of Indoctrination through Learning Activity

determine the parameters of defining key concepts such as patriotism, belongingness and citizenship, which are all presented from the perspective of the proclaimed winner of the war.

It is important to examine the long-term impact of the concept of truth which is developing its focus to include not only truth claims regarding the conflict but also its future representations, something which will impact upon the development of national identity, reconciliation and sustainable positive peace. This is also evident when examining national curriculum, where students learn about topics such as 'My Country that I Love', 'My Country that I Defend', 'the Land Defenders', 'The State's Authorities' (National Education 7th grade textbook). These topics are all presented from the government's perspective, and define the concepts of citizenship, martyrdom, loyalty and belongingness accordingly.

These definitions are implied indirectly through the images that are incorporated into textbooks as indicative symbols that reinforce the same truth claims. The image below has been taken from a National Education 7th grade textbook, and shows the Syrian flag, a symbol of the government, surrounded by interlocking hands in an indication of unity. This image is used in a unit entitled 'My Country that I Defend', which discusses the issue of 'resistance' and its different types. The curriculum is again used to promote the government's ideology, where it reinforces its policy of adopting 'resistance' against colonial forces. The government becomes the gatekeeper to protect the country from these 'invading' forces. The image used in this unit remains problematic as there are Syrian people, including teachers and learners, who do not associate with

Illustration 8.2 - A Sample of Indoctrination through Learning Activity

this flag and do not perceive it as a sign of unity. This situation is further complicated with the policy of ‘red lines’, which makes these teachers and learners unable to debate such images and the controversies embedded in them.

Such examples represent considerable risks for promoting sustainable peace, something which cannot be achieved without systematically countering the role of education as a disincentive to promoting sustainable positive peace (Smyth, 2007). The current adopted approach in Syria does not systematically aim to abolish structural and cultural aspects of violence in a post-conflict phase, as current reconstruction initiatives continue to be controlled by a monolithic version of history that highlights the role of one group at the expense of others, and legitimises the dominance of a singular national identity that suppresses all other alternatives (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

The risk to promoting sustainable peace becomes evident through focusing current reconstruction initiatives on establishing a new ‘political authority’ that is in control and capable of enforcing the rules and regulations that bind its citizens (Lambach 2007:33). Reconstruction becomes focused more on the emerging power system, its institutions and symbols of recovery rather than on those who fought the war and will determine the sustainability of peace (Igreja, 2008). This link between reconstruction and establishing a new political authority is reflected in the national curriculum where linking the state to prosperity, future stability and security are recurrent themes, and are always linked with the state and the ‘Home Guards’ (the Syrian Army). Such concepts are evident in textbooks such as a Social Studies textbook for the 6th grade, where the link between the state, a stable life and a progressive future is clearly indicated, as illustrated in the following extract:

> Developing the state relies on a number of principles that ensure citizens are provided with a safe and stable life and guarantee a prosperous and progressive future for them. Defending the Syrian Arab Republic is considered one of the priorities to build the state especially as Syria’s geographic location,

> its civilised history and its national and regional role have made it a target for all forms of colonial forces … the Army and Armed Forces are national institutions responsible for defending the country and its regional sovereignty and they serve the interest of its people, protect its goals and national security (Social Studies, 6th grade:136).

Another example that demonstrates such systematic efforts to reinstate the government power structure is included in a National Education 7th grade textbook, which covers topics such as the power structure in Syria. These attempts to reinstate the government's power structure need to be examined as structural efforts to re-establish the government as 'legitimate' for its citizens and to reclaim its ability to monopolise 'the legitimate use of violence' in the enforcement of its order (Weber, 1964:154). This emphasis makes the process of reconstruction focussed more on establishing a new 'political authority' that is in control and capable of enforcing the rules and regulations that bind its citizens (Lambach 2007:33).

It can be concluded that current strategies adopted in education and teacher education are problematic because the structures applied to promote a particular version of truth fundamentally requires the 'occlusion' of other truth claims (Russell, 2018:66). These structural efforts to 'silence' the 'other' are also evident in data analysis, which shows that current education and teacher education provision is dominated by a policy of creating 'red lines' and official instructions to ban any reference to the conflict within the learning process. Instead of initiating a process of 're-membering' to enable the country to reconstruct itself culturally, physically and ontologically (Nordstrom, 2004), current policy in Syria is directed towards initiating a process of 'forgetting' through imposing not only its version of truth but also a policy of silence towards the conflict and its future representations in the educational process.

Examples of this process of constructing a policy of silence can be found in examined documents such as the *Training Package for Developed Curriculum for Pre-university*

Learning in Syria 2018-19, in which the conflict does not feature as a main element in developing its training framework and vision of education. According to this document, the 'biggest challenge' for education in Syria at present is described pedagogically in terms of avoiding teaching methods that 'pump' 'pre-identified' knowledge into learners' minds (Barada'ee et al, 2018:45). Reference to the conflict in this document remains indirect, as it describes the 'loss of national identity' and a 'weak sense of national belonging among a large proportion of the Syrian society' as the main challenge affecting the process of curriculum development (Barada'ee et al, ibid). The lack of connection between education, conflict and post-conflict goes in line with the description provided by research participants, including Mo who indicated that 'we [teachers] have not been exposed to this. No one mentions that'. This also resonates with Nabil's description of current teacher training, which only focuses on 'pedagogical issues'.

The same pattern can be noticed in *The General Framework of National Curriculum Document* (2016), where the conflict does not feature as a main element in developing this framework. The main reference to the conflict in this document is included in the introduction where the Minister of Education at the time points out that:

> There is near-consensus among Syrians today that the main reason that made some get involved in destroying the country is ignorance. The most dangerous foundation on which the conflict is built on is 'the lack of morality' (NCCD, 2016:4).

After attributing 'ignorance' and a 'lack of morality' to anti-government forces, the conflict 'disappears' again within educational strategies, where the focus of educational policies after the conflict is described as 'supporting learning for life, employment and citizenship' (NCCD, 2016:7). According to this framework, the main aim of pre-university learning after the conflict is 'preparing youths to enter the job market' and to embed 'life skills'

into the curriculum without drawing direct links between these skills, the conflict and post-conflict reconciliation.

This structural effort to impose a policy of silence is further illustrated through 'deleting' this phase from history textbooks such as the one used in the 12th grade. In a unit discussing the modern history of Syria, there is a section titled 'The Continuation of Modernisation' which refers to the period when Bashar Al Assad took power after a national referendum following the death of this father, President Hafez Al Assad. This section focuses on highlighting the modernisation process initiated by President Al Assad, starting from his effort to develop 'the mechanisms of political and administrative process', using 'the language of dialogue with national forces' and providing requirements of 'national defence to face the Zionist project and the domination of occupation' (History textbook, 12th grade:146). This unit ends without any reference to the conflict, its development or future resettlement.

The 'modern era' of Syria is also discussed in a history textbook for the 9th grade, where there is a similar reference to the period when Bashar Al Assad became President after a national referendum in 2000. There is an indirect reference to the conflict in this section, which is presented from the government's perspective as it refers to the conflict as an 'external pressure' and 'crisis', as illustrated in the following extract:

> When Syria faced external pressure in 2011, the Syrian Arab people affirmed their awareness and solidarity through maintaining the continuity and stability of the operations of state institutions. They also rallied around the figure of the leader [reference to the President] to overcome this crisis, as Syrian people are accustomed to throughout their long history (History textbook, 9th grade: 77).

These examples along with other elements indicated by data analysis from the policy of 'red lines', a letter from the Minister of Education and instructions in Higher Education not to refer to the conflict reveal how silence is developing in Syria as a structural, deliberate and purposeful project. It becomes essential to examine these different elements as part of wider

policies of collective silence. Such policies are problematic as they can make post-conflict reconstruction dominated by 'politics of oblivion' and 'collective amnesia', making the post-conflict phase a 'fertile ground' for the continuation of the polarisation of the country (Bentrovato, 2017:44-45). Such a scenario has considerable implications for peacebuilding as these structural efforts to impose a policy of silence will continue to use education and teacher education as a tool to impose 'a uniform national grand narrative' and an 'ideologically uniform nation-state'.

Silence as a structural and purposeful project is further problematised through current practices that aim to treat issues of identity and competing ideologies as 'existential threats' to a valued 'us', something which justifies the application of 'emergency measures' that are outside the 'normal bounds of political procedures' (Buzan et al, 1998:34). The phenomenon of 'educational violence' and 'serious repercussions', indicated by Mo and Fa, can be interpreted as manifestations of how societal and political issues of security are treated the same as the military security giving power systems the legitimacy to place these issues in the realm of exceptional measures. As a result, there is a risk that issues of societal and political security in post-conflict Syria can be addressed through applying a militarised logic of threat and defence (Waever, 1995), in order to legitimise deploying extraordinary measures against the enemy 'other' and turn this logic into a 'perfect scripture' that cannot be questioned, 'suffocating' the individual's capacity or right to think for themselves (Manji, 2004:42).

These policies of silence and securitisation will hinder the process of truth reconciliation and impede the construction of a shared culture, language and interpretation of history, something which in turn will negatively impact upon the process of establishing foundations for a society that is based on tolerance and respect for differences (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000:6). Instead of promoting sustainable peace, such policies risk alienating other members of society and leading the country to become trapped in self-reinforcing cycles of

violence (UNESCO, 2011:131). Current educational policies in Syria, therefore, can be described as seeking to create ‘unifying hegemonic narratives’ of the conflict and to develop assimilationist education structures (Ahonen, 2014:77). Post-conflict reconstruction becomes focused more on employing resources to assimilate a fragmented country into one dominant societal culture, placing more emphasis on unification than on encouraging ‘historical inquiry’ into past events in the name of ‘let’s forget to forgive’ (Idris, 2016:6). Such a scenario is problematic as an effective role of education and teacher education in post-conflict development requires enabling successive generations to understand the conflict and potentially contribute towards future peacebuilding (Smyth, 2007).

In conclusion, current education and teacher education strategies urge us to be mindful that, despite the de-escalation of violence across many cities, Syria is not heading towards a ‘post’ conflict phase but rather the conflict is shifting from using direct, militarised forms of violence to indirect, less visible forms such as ‘educational violence’. Instead of promoting peace, reconciliation and tolerance, there is a risk that education and teacher education will continue to be ‘securitised’ by the emerging power system, something which will undermine a ‘constructive’ role of education that aims to interrupt the continuity of violence, politics of fear and a culture of fragmentation in order to contribute to legitimising an alternative paradigm based on structural peace and peacebuilding.

Reflection and Concluding Remarks:

This chapter has been crucial in my learning journey, as it helped me to develop an awareness of new concepts that I had not considered before becoming involved in data analysis. Developing the interruption-resumption model and examining the concepts of silence and securitisation were cornerstones in this learning journey, as they enabled me to construct meaning beyond the search to answer questions. These concepts were also fundamental in

developing a meta-analysis of generated data, where I developed an understanding of how current reconstruction initiatives pose a considerable risk to promoting sustainable peace.

Chapter Nine

RESEARCH FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

9.1 Research Findings:

In answering the research question about the response of teacher education to the conflict, I have argued that this response is currently based on an interruption-resumption model where I have demonstrated that the pre-conflict strategies developed by the MoE are currently maintained in government-held areas. The response to the conflict is reflected through adding new topics to the pre-conflict strategies such as intensive learning programmes (what is called Curriculum B) and teaching over-crowded classes. Data analysis also demonstrates that the interruption-resumption model prevails in Higher Education, where the pre-conflict curriculum is also maintained. The response to the conflict currently relies on individual initiatives of a number of educators who have added some topics linked to the conflict and its impact on society. The dominance of individual initiatives reflects a lack of an official long-term peace-building strategy that systematically assesses the impact of the conflict on education and teacher education and their role in promoting sustainable peace. In the absence of such a strategy, these individual initiatives remain 'fragmented' and are implemented without official 'management' or 'sponsorship'.

In this way, the interruption-resumption model reflects deeper issues linked to peace building and promoting sustainable peace as data analysis reveals that the government's current approach to peace is built on a negative concept of peace (Galtung, 1969), which focuses on ending violence and bringing life to 'normal' as an end goal by itself. Reconstruction efforts are thus focused on rebuilding physical aspects of the education sector with no clear evidence through data analysis of systematic efforts to address the ideological and psychological aspects of this process. The lack of present or future plans to transcend the physical aspects of

reconstruction makes teachers' roles directed towards bringing the educational process back to 'normal' as it was before the conflict, raising the potential of keeping teacher education focused on 'pedagogical' issues de-contextualised from the wider socio-political context.

Data analysis also demonstrates that the MoE's current training strategies do not directly seek to promote a new conceptual system that legitimises structural peace (Galtung, 1990), or aim to interrupt the current paradigm that legitimises, normalises and maintains violence as a strategy to resolve conflicts. This approach restricts post-war reconstruction efforts to abolishing aspects of direct violence and the symbols of recovery, such as re-opening schools, without seeking to promote sustainable peace through proposing an alternative system that is capable of creating a paradigm shift in order to counter the naturalisation of violence as an epistemology and ontology.

These findings have implications for peacebuilding and promoting sustainable peace, as ending hostilities in many Syrian cities is currently not approached as an opportunity to develop comprehensive, systematic and long-term strategies that explicitly seek to prevent the continuation and recurrence of violence. I have argued that data analysis does not demonstrate systematic efforts aiming at moving from the current state of negative peace to a state of cultural and structural peace. The risk is that this state of negative peace could be approached as a 'one-time' intervention that fails to reinforce structures and institutions that are capable of addressing manifestations and root causes of violence. Therefore, there is currently a missed opportunity to develop or link current initiatives to long-term, holistic and multi-disciplinary peacebuilding strategies, making these initiatives based more on a 'bricks and mortar' approach to reconstruction, similar to the one adopted in Bosnia-Herzegovina along with the considerable threats this approach has posed to promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation in the long term (Coles, 2011:33).

It can be concluded that it would be naïve to approach the de-escalation of violence in many Syrian cities as an indicator of the beginning of a 'post' conflict phase, as I have argued that the conflict is rather developing from direct militarised forms of violence to a state of securitisation in which different forms of violence are being employed. The Syrian conflict is best described as entering a 'transformed' phase of violence rather than a 'post' conflict one. As a result, education continues to be employed as a tool to create 'unifying hegemonic narratives' of the conflict (Ahonen, 2014:77), and to develop a monolithic version of history that reinforces the 'us' and 'other' dichotomy, and the dominance of a singular national identity that suppresses all other alternatives (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000).

I have argued that re-engineering the concept of 'national identity' needs to be linked to a deliberate project to establish new legitimate power structures in which education becomes one of the tools to develop links between this reinforced concept of national identity and the newly formed power representatives (Milliken and Krause, 2002). I have also pointed out that such a project to develop 'a uniform national grand narrative' and an 'ideologically uniform nation-state' is problematic especially as the structures employed to develop such a state are fundamentally based on the 'occlusion' of other alternatives of historical and ideological narratives (Russell, 2018:66).

In this regard, I have demonstrated that current educational provision is dominated by policies of silence and 'monopoly' over the production and reproduction of the 'official narrative' of the conflict (Igreja, 2008: 545), legitimising in this way official control over the mechanisms of engaging with the past and writing the national narrative of the conflict. I have argued for the importance of examining the concept of silence in post-conflict Syria as being entangled with issues of power and hegemony (Ahonen, 2014:84), and to problematise calls to 'forget to forgive' as part of assimilative efforts that see 'unification' as a strategy to address the fragmentation of the country.

9.2 Research Limitations:

Despite all the efforts to ensure this research is conducted rigorously, I acknowledge that it is limited by a number of factors that future researchers can avoid. One of the main factors affecting this research is the process of social fragmentation and securitisation that has impacted upon my ability to access different social groups and geographical areas. This research was conducted in a government-held area and thus fails to reflect the multiplicity of perspectives that constitute the different social realities in the research context. This research is also limited by current policies of securitisation that have complicated the process of access and engagement with research participants. Issues of access and engagement are further complicated by ethical obligations that I need to adhere to as a student in a UK university while conducting the actual research in a different cultural and academic setting that follows less formal and standardised procedures for conducting educational research.

This situation also meant that I was only able to conduct my field research during one period rather than across different visits to the country as negotiating access would have been needed every time. I was conscious that repeated requests for entry might be misinterpreted by gatekeepers and research participants as something 'suspicious', something which would further complicate field research. This situation has also impacted upon adopted research methods. This study could have been enhanced by adopting other research methods such as observations of learning and teaching which can allow the researcher to have first-hand experience of the educational, socio-cultural and political background of their research themes. Adopting observations as a research method could have further developed this study and allowed the researcher to be part of the social context they are examining (Adler and Adler, 1994). Building upon Morrison (1993), observations can be applied in this study to focus on the overall social context where the study is conducted, so it can examine the actual physical environment as well as the human and interactional dimensions of the context.

9.3 Contributions to Knowledge Development:

Reflecting on the contributions of this study to knowledge development, I have approached this question on two levels, where I have first reflected how this study has 'illuminated' my understanding of 'what is going on' in Syria with a focus on those concepts that I have developed as a result of data analysis and did not consider previously. Secondly, the value of this study will be derived from how it fits with and expands on previous work, so its contribution is best perceived according to how 'effective, analytical and original' its assessment of previous studies (Jesson and Lacey, 2006:140).

In this regard, developing the interruption-resumption model to describe educational change to the conflict is one of the main contributions of this study. This model is developed as a result of engaging with data analysis and represents a vital moment in my development as a researcher where I have applied my analytical ability to construct themes. Developing this model has been important in situating the educational response to the conflict within the wider socio-political context, where it is linked to issues of silence and securitisation. I have demonstrated the need to approach silence as a purposive project in Syria implicated in issues of hegemonic reconstruction and future representations of the conflict. I have emphasised the need to expose the problematic, systematic and active nature of silence, as it implies 'the silencing of other people or the silencing of a particular truth' (Russell, 2018:1).

In the field of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, this study brings to the forefront the concept of critical security and contributes to enhancing our understanding of the concept of securitisation and its impact upon promoting sustainable peace. It also calls to redefine the concept of securitisation to directly examine structural efforts aimed at legitimising the application of exceptional militarised measures and to address issues of societal and political security. This study approaches the application of a militarised threat-defence logic to

control societal and political security as a continuation of violence, something which will hinder the process of peacebuilding and promoting a sustainable peace culture.

Operating within this complex environment, the study also contributes to our understanding of conducting educational research in securitised contexts, where I have examined the role of access and cooperation in this process highlighting the need to link these concepts to the researcher's commitment to ethical standards. In this field, I have emphasised the need to transcend research ethics as a bureaucratic exercise revolving around how or what to include in consent forms so that it becomes an on-going process that is difficult to subject to universal rules (Shaw 2008, Hemmings 2006). This argument highlights the need to review current research ethics processes adopted in UK universities so that they can accommodate the needs of a more diverse body of researchers and research contexts, where present practices such as consent forms might not only be culturally inappropriate but can also jeopardise the safety of the researcher and research participants. As a result, research ethics processes need to transcend this focus on bureaucratic exercises to include the researcher's capacity to negotiate, evaluate, and make decisions while in action, without disregarding the historical, political and social particularity of their research contexts.

This study also contributes to knowledge development through applying Bridge's theories of truth (1999) to the Syrian conflict to construct a model of truth development. The model is applied to demonstrate how the concept of truth has contributed to the formation of new ontological and epistemological boundaries, which define 'the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Foucault, 1994:168). I have demonstrated how the formation of different 'epistemes' have been reflected in the formation of new concepts of national identity, and new systems of 'gatekeepers' who control the distribution of friend-foe badges (Epp, 1996:163). This study has contributed to enhancing an understanding of the link between the concept of truth and post-conflict

reconstruction, which transcends forming Truth committees to include concepts of silence, future representations of the conflict and securitisation.

Through situating current post-war reconstruction initiatives in Syria in their social and political context, this study emphasises that these initiatives cannot be examined as 'bracketed off' from their wider context (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2008:483), and it contributes to exposing the macro-systemic factors that have developed and perpetuated the structural and cultural aspects of violence in the Syrian conflict. By adopting a critical methodology, this study contributes to revealing the dynamics of power, 'invisible' mechanisms and the 'complex interplay' between education, socio-political and economic structures that have helped fuel the conflict and hinder the development of a positive peace culture (Lopes Cardozo and Shah, 2016:518). In other words, this study on one hand develops an understanding of post-war reconstruction initiatives in Syria as embedded within a complex and structural systems, while on the other hand exposes how these systems currently operate to undermine any attempts to promote an equitable and peaceful post-conflict reconstruction.

As a result, this study contributes to future peace research in Syria by offering 'the contextual and conceptual resources' required to examine the 'structural impediments' to advance the possibility of peace (Bajaj, 2019: 66). For example, this study demonstrates the need to substantially review educational strategies and national curriculum in Syria in order to remove elements that impede the development of a positive peace culture. In addition, this study contributes to demonstrating that a constructive role of education in promoting positive peace in Syria is possible, provided that emerging power structures are willing to 'bear their peacebuilding responsibilities' and have a 'strong political commitment' to develop 'transformative' policies aimed at promoting a positive peace culture (Pherali, 2019:13).

The contributions of this study will also be affected by the fluid development of the conflict where, at the time of writing, the government is currently continuing the process of regaining its control across the country. For example, in February 2020 the government regained complete control over the city of Aleppo in the North of Syria from opposition groups after regaining the towns and villages surrounding the city for the first time since 2012. This progress is further reinforced through the progress achieved in the city of Idleb in the North-West of Syria which is still on-going at the time of writing this chapter. This progress has heightened the importance of the government's role in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction as it continues to reinstate itself as the major power in this process.

Therefore, this study is best approached as one step of a long journey towards peace, which requires further examination and scrutiny, making this thesis a 'process' rather than a final 'product' that ends with its completion (England, 1994:82). This process involves constant 'reflecting on' and 'learning from past research experiences' and others' interpretation and scrutiny of the study (England, ibid). After all, the 're' in the word research refers to 'searching again', so the contribution of our writing is best perceived as an attempt to raise questions to further examine our ever-evolving social realities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions for Teacher Educators

1. Can you describe some of the challenges teachers face as a result of the conflict and how teachers are directly or indirectly affected by the conflict?
2. What challenges in turn has this situation created for you as a teacher educator?
3. In your opinion, do you think teacher education has responded to this conflict? Can you give an example of this response or of the changes you have made to teacher education as a result of this?
    a. If not, do you think there is a need to respond differently and how do you envision this response?
    b. As a teacher educator, how would you describe the way teacher education changed after 2011 to respond to the conflict to respond to its impact on learners and teachers?
4. From your perspective, do you consider the work you do as a teacher educator to have any direct or indirect impact on the efforts to rebuild the country and promote peace?
    a. If yes, how is it contributing to this process? Or as a teacher educator, do you think teacher education could or should attribute to this process?
    b. If no, what role do you think education and teacher education should play in post-conflict Syria?
5. There are reports that refer to the way education is used by extreme Islamic groups to promote their ideologies and justify violence. What plans, or are you adopting any plans to reverse this role of the education so that it could be applied to promote peace and

reconciliation? Is this something addressed by current initiatives in education and teacher education?

6. Do you see current efforts to develop teacher education as part of a comprehensive national plan to reconstruct the education sector and promote peace in post-conflict Syria? If yes, could you please describe the priorities of this plan, how does teacher education contribute to this plan and which departments or ministries are involved in this plan? If no, do you think there is a need to make these efforts part of a holistic plan to rebuild the country and promote peace? Why?

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions for Senior Officials

1. The education sector is one of the areas that is largely affected by the conflict. What is the government's plan to rebuild this sector?
2. In one of his speeches, the President referred to 'real construction' that goes beyond rebuilding physical infrastructure to rebuilding individuals' ideologies and concepts. How is this reflected in the government initiatives to reconstruct the education sector?
3. Do you consider rebuilding the education sector as an important step in promoting peace in post-conflict Syria? If yes, are current plans to rebuild the education sector linked to an overall process of promoting peace? If no, what role do you think education should play in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding?
4. Do you consider teachers and their education to have a crucial role in promoting peace in post-conflict Syria? If yes, how is this reflected in government's strategies and policies? If no, what role do you think teachers need to play in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding?
5. In many areas, like the ones controlled by extreme Islamic groups, children and adults were subjected to a type of education that helps promote the ideologies and practices of these groups. What is the government's plan to address this role of education?
6. A large number of children and adults have experienced different types of trauma and stress because of the conflict. What is the government plan to support these children and adults through education? Or do you think they could be supported through education? Or what is your vision for the role of teachers and their education in post-conflict Syria?
7. Some of these adults are teachers, who in general are required to play a complex role in the classroom and face different challenges as a result of the conflict. What support

is provided to teachers to be able to face these challenges? Do you think these teachers require a different type of teacher education as compared to the one provided before the conflict?

8. There are several and conflicting accounts regarding how the conflict developed into a violent one. What is the government plan to address this situation as we are moving into post-conflict reconstruction?

APPENDIX 3

List of Examined Documents

Document	Source	Outline
Teacher Training Package for Pre-university Developed Curricula 2018-19.	MoE	This document outlines aims, training topics, time frames and training activities for pre-university learning. This document is described by a number of participants such as Elia and Nora as the main source for outlining teacher training after the conflict.
General Framework for National Curriculum (2016).	NCCD	This document outlines the general aims, vision and development mechanisms of pre-university learning after the conflict. It describes educational policies, developed after the conflict, aimed at developing and implementing the national curriculum.
The Ministry of Education's Projects for Educational Development in Syria, 2009.	MoE	This document describes the Ministry's approach to develop the education sector prior to the conflict, and it outlines the number of projects the MoE undertook in order to achieve its vision.
Pre-university Developed Educational	MoE	This is one of the main documents that outlines the rationale for developing educational curriculum and policies

Document	Source	Outline
Curriculum in Syrian Arab Republic: Its Aims and Criteria, 2008.		prior to the conflict. This document outlines principles underpinning educational policies and proposed educational reforms.
Thinking Skills, Training Workshop for Educational Supervisors and Specialist (2008).	MoE	This document is part of the ministry's plans to reform educational policies prior to the conflict. It aims to enable teachers to define thinking skills and incorporate them in the teaching and learning process.
Classroom Management, Workshop for Educational Supervisors and Specialist (2008).	MoE	This document outlines training to develop classroom management including managing the psychological environment of the classroom.
Lesson Planning, Implementation and Assessment: Workshop for Educational Supervisors and Specialist (2009).	MoE	This document is part of the ministry's plans to upskill teachers in developing effective skills in lesson planning which includes writing behavioural objectives, learning strategies and assessment methods.

Document	Source	Outline
Effective Means and Methods of Teaching: Workshop for Educational Supervisors and Specialist (2008).	MoE	This document focuses on the concept of active learning and how to enable teachers define and select teaching methods that enhance active learning.
Competencies of a Successful Teacher: Workshop for Educational Supervisors and Specialist (2009).	MoE	This document outlines the competencies of successful teachers in line with the ministry's vision to reform education.
Lectures from the faculty of education.	Faculty of education	These documents are written records of lectures across different subjects and years at a faculty of education, which includes lectures for a whole academic year for the Post Graduate Diploma in Education. Usually, these can be purchased from bookshops which sell written records of lectures for all subjects and years, although some bookshops might be 'specialised' in certain subjects.

APPENDIX 4

Development of Initial Codes

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
Government	The government considers rebuilding the education sector to be of high importance, as it allocates large budgets in this regard. The government has employed 30 thousand teachers. Priority is to rehabilitate school buildings as an initial stage and prepare teacher training from a purely pedagogical perspective. Although there is awareness from both Ministries of Education and Higher Education of the importance of rebuilding the individual, but this is currently not a priority due to the large scale of destruction and huge costs of rebuilding the education sector. It was suggested to provide psychological support to children who were kidnapped but there is a lack of education for the need of psychological support. The priority is for living matters, even their families were not aware of the importance of such support.	Physical and Pedagogical reconstruction Perspective of psychological support

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	Sometimes the economic factor played a negative role as families did not have the financial means to cover transportation fees for their children to get to the centres that were providing psychological support.	Lack of systematic response
	The problem currently lies in individual work. There is a need to move to collective work…Our challenge is the dominance of individual work as each Ministry works independently. There is a need to deal with each area to identify challenges faced by its people socially and educationally instead of applying the same strategy to all areas.	
	The current strategy is like a bazaar dominated by corruption which forms a state of social inter-dependency. There is no management of the crisis; there is a management crisis. There is an escape from facing current problems through creating red lines.	The concept of truth

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	Who wins imposes their vision, the government will impose its vision and ideology especially if compared with that of the extreme ideology that led to destroying government institutions and killing individuals.	
Pre-university learning	One of the main challenges teachers face as a result of the conflict is the problem of overcrowded classes where the number ranges between 70 and 80 students. In some cases, this number reached a 100 students. The other challenge is the mental health of students and teachers. There are attempts to develop the curricula, but they are not realistic, derived from developed countries where there is internet and other requirements. Here, schools are built in 2018 following the same structure since 1962. The school building itself encourages dictation: small classes only prepared for theoretical lessons on the basis of the sender and receiver. The building itself limits the teacher's ability to encourage active learning. Teachers' financial situation is another factor that needs to be considered as they are not able to keep up to date with research, publications and getting access to the internet.	Challenges caused by the conflict.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	Some teachers give private lessons or work as taxi drivers or in shops. Some teachers deliberately fall short in their work to encourage their students to take up private tuition… no respect, bad salaries and no protection. There is another factor that increases pressure on teachers as legally they are not allowed to take on another job besides teaching… which illustrates the gap between reality and the law. [After the conflict] problems focused on large numbers of students in the classroom…. Environments were mixed; you have rural environment for example and city and nomad environments. These have different mentalities even their academic levels are different, so you have now a challenge in dealing with your class not only in terms of number or you have a good student or a weak one. You have a very weak student you need to start with them from A-B and a student who is very good. How would you bring them together? You feel there is no motive or desire among teachers to teach; it is like performing a duty. From a human perspective… there is a lot of care for human cases and they are	Psychological support

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	particularly paying attention to those learners who are coming from places where there were more problems… the financial situation, high costs of living, low salaries… the teacher needs to have an extra job before or after their teaching so they do not have enough time to prepare their lessons; they do not have time to look after they students…as a teacher I need to provide my children with food. I have to do more than one job. In my opinion the teacher is destroyed psychologically; when my wife and I, both are teachers, and our salaries reach 100 thousand while a family of 5 people would need 500 thousand this month [September, in reference to opening of schools]. You are living reality as an uncomfortable truth. The teacher does not have a psychological problem; their problem is financial. In the worst cases, the teacher is well balanced psychologically... adapted and understands the situation. The psychological problem is more with students as they have a kind of fear. He [a student] hears a lorry driving by, he thinks it is a tank… he experiences a difficult	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	mental state. Sometimes with martyrs conveys, there are gunshots. There are some children that hide under the desk and no one can get them out. In my opinion, the next phase is more dangerous than the conflict itself and especially for children who are currently in their adolescence. They need a programme of psychological support as they have seen a lot. They have developed a kind of violent mentality. They have violent thinking. They have also become indifferent. They do not want education. They do not care about anything. What is important is money and work. [Those] who participated in the war and now they are back. If those are not treated psychologically, they might affect their family's life. There have been lots of incidents… terrifying… they have seen terrifying scenes. Students [coming from a different area] are immediately met with negativity… bullying. [About provided psychological support] the UNICEF distribute school bags, stationery and things like that, and they distribute to all students milk and biscuits. As for students, for course we take into account their feelings. I remember once they attacked an area, Al	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	Nusra Front… during the exam period. One student had her arm broken, came to sit the exam as she wanted to pass… the student is very smart. Despite this, she did sit the exam, but we did show her mercy. I mean, we sat next to her. She was nervous. Do not be scared. We are with you now. The girl is smart and now she is studying her second year at Medical School. But the girl was in a terrible situation, her arm was wounded but she wanted to sit the exam. She was nervous she would not pass it, so the psychological support provided to her gave her strength. There is nothing systematic, no, no… the provided programmes are designed individually, no one tells to do it, for example, if you see a very poor or displaced child, for sure you are not going to treat them like other students…. [counselling is associated with] easy job…nothing to do. Psychological cases are dealt with based on individual initiatives… sadly there is a counsellor in every school, but they are kind of clerks I mean I have never seen a counsellor. I used to deal with psychological problems personally although it is not my area professionally. They [counsellors] have no role. I have dealt with cases in this	Response to the conflict

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	area… individually… based on personal skills but not scientifically. I am not sure if that was or was not effective. [Regarding the link between psychological support and teacher training] we (teachers) have not been exposed to this at all. No one told us. As people we are emotional…there is no teacher I think that has a student who is suffering a problem from this kind who does not inform their students that this student needs to be considered or something like this, but they are trying with their personal efforts. Psychology tutor showed anger and frustration due to the failure to respond to the situation caused by the conflict. Tutor was not happy with the course she is teaching, which is making student unsatisfied and uninterested [which she described as deformed]. There are discipline issues among students.	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	There will be changes to teacher training curricula through introducing changes to deal with the results of the conflict that aim to consider learners' individual differences in order to avoid memorization and rote learning. There was a plan to develop learning in Syria. They are still continuing it. I mean the conflict happened or did not happen. There was a plan to develop curricula and we are still continuing it. They have not changed anything because of the conflict. There have been no changes to psychology curriculum; the same curriculum is being taught since 1983, There have also been no training courses to deal with the conflict. On the ground, there is a crisis within the crisis. One cannot even think of training teachers to deal with latest developments within this situation. [Change in tone indicating hopelessness}, in general not much was done. As they say, a situation was imposed and there were not many solutions apart from those relying on the teacher's skills and personality. Things were left for the teacher as it is difficult to find a solution. Collective solutions were very hard.	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	There was progress but the conflict destroyed too much. It hindered the progress of developing schools. As for psychology in education, this topic is already included in the curriculum which includes general education and psychology… these curricula focus on learning styles of different age groups and suitable teaching methods of each age group. Training materials have been in place before the conflict, but some topics have been added to deal with the conflict such as teaching overcrowded classes. Teacher training is of high importance to us as we have trained 6500 teachers in this city alone between 1/7 and 1/8 of 2016. The situation did not differ much, when the conflict happened… they only included the topic of psychological support meaning they provided training for psychological support to students who witnessed a crime or beheading and things like that or life under siege or was hungry and their families were hungry or died etc in this cases their mental health was really bad.. in general we are emotional people, if there is teacher who has a student	Censorship of education.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	who suffers like this they would ask students to show empathy but it is all individual effort. Curricula were changed and teacher training project started in 2009. The process of curriculum development continued in 2018, which was accompanied by continuing the process of teacher training though providing a number of teacher training courses…in line with proposed requirements such as active learning, Bloom's taxonomy, flipped class and ICT. As for dealing with the conflict, teacher training strategy continued in line with the 2009 plan. New modules were added but there was no radical or comprehensive change to deal with the conflict. The radical change was in 2008-09 and onwards as the curriculum relied on rote learning. The classroom in all our schools relied on lecturing, students were receivers and teachers were senders. Practically, skills focused on listening and memorization... After 2008, new	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	curriculum attempted to make the teacher as a guide, the student works and the teacher is the supervisor and guide. A sort of change started but what did not help was the infrastructure of schools as they are all simply classes as we do not have labs… and if they exist, they are not used effectively. The teacher was not qualified to teach the new curriculum. [Training sessions] were not enough to prepare a qualified teacher. The second question I directed to the Minister: we are implementing curricula that require advanced technology. We need in every class data show, electronic board, sound systems, projectors etc. that is from one side. Secondly, the curriculum depends on active and collaborative learning, so I need to have groups in the classroom. If I have these wooden desks that cannot be moved at all, how I would I form a group. The Minister of Education issued written instructions to school asking teachers not to discuss or allow students to discuss the conflict the classroom. …. [Laughter indicating cynicism… it is not the Minister who issued this letter.	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	The student receives information, but to critique it, no… there is not such a thing. I do not even know if anyone has the courage… very difficult … I cannot even imagine it. The teacher and the textbook are the complete source of knowledge that cannot be critiqued…everyone needs to understand in the same way, at the same level and at the same time.	
Higher education and counselling	Curriculum now is not that different from the one before 2011. The difference is reflected in teaching methods as the number of students increased as a result of students migrating from other cities. Teaching practicum had to be moved from schools to labs within the university due to the security situation and crowded schools. The difference is also reflected through adding some modules that focus on the results of the conflicts especially in seminars, graduation projects and Master's dissertation topics. Counselling itself is a new programme. I mean it started few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed.	Response to the conflict Lack of systematic response.

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	There is currently effective initiatives and huge efforts but there is no government support. These efforts are individual and fragmented. There is no source that oversees these efforts. There is a clear gap between university and reality. Initiatives rely on teacher's efforts, their educational background and their commitment to national issues. There are instructions not to refer to the conflict in educational process.	Censorship of education
	We suffer from the phenomenon of educational violence among teachers as teachers' efforts could be attributed to political and sectarian dimensions which could lead to catastrophic consequences on the teacher's professional future.	Impact of conflict on mental wellbeing.
	There is a module on critical thinking but there are no systematic efforts or subject matter to promote critical thinking.	
	[Cases that have increased after the conflict] the case of social maladjustment, stress, depression, anxiety… social maladjustment comes from changing environments moving from extremely conservative environment to a more liberal one here. They [locally displaced people and refugees] had their own habits and traditions and now they want to take on new ones that do not suit them… regarding violence what has increased in	Challenges impeding effective provision

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	refugee centres specifically are sexual assaults in addition to economic violence since they had to seek refuge. Among children, the cases of fear, anxiety such as bedwetting. These are all caused by the conflict. There have also been an increase in schools [silence, hesitation caused by being shy] in the cases of sexual abnormalities as in other social groups there might have been something like this but here we did not have sexual abnormalities. The cases are increasing among school students because they are mixing. We have heard about this here after they started coming here. I worked with UNICEF for a period of time in which I visited schools as a counsellor for two months. The headmaster, superintendents and teachers would first ask me 'What are you teaching here?' I would say counselling. 'Counselling?' [in a tone indicating something is of no importance] 'What did you come here? Stay at home'… I would say that I would like to give students a session of counselling and the headmaster would answer 'Miss, let them have an Arabic session, is not that better than this counselling?' They consider counselling of no importance at all. In their opinion, teaching other subjects such as Arabic, English and Maths are more important than counselling. Even	

Perspective	Interview data	Initial code
	when a student wants to leave class to see a counsellor…they consider the student to be wating their time or trying to get out of the session. People have wrong idea about counselling, we are not for crazy people... They have wrong understanding like if one visits the counsellor then they are crazy. The counsellor is facing pressure from the cases they are dealing with and from the society which considers this job to have no significance of value… if you are a counsellor this means that you are doing anything like you are not a doctor to prescribe medicine. You are not doing anything, like you are joking with those people. Pressure comes from all sides causing something like burning out.	

APPENDIX 5

Examining documents and initial codes

Document	Extract	Initial code
Pre-university Developed Curricula in the Syrian Arab Republic: Aims and Criteria 2008	Weaknesses of current educational curricula: Lack of connections and integration between study models included in the curricula. Domination of theoretical content in school textbooks. Lack of interest in effectively employing knowledge, skills, values included in curricula in the learner's life. The presentation and design of school textbooks are not up to date with international criteria for school textbooks. Lack of investing external knowledge sources and limited them to school textbooks. Domination of instruction and transmission in teaching school subjects due to their theoretical nature and content.	Pre-conflict educational challenges

Document	Extract	Initial code
	Assessment methods are limited to assessing memorization and understanding in best cases. Through the modern aspirations of the modernization process led by Mr. President Bashar Al Assad, the primary aims of the educational curricula in the Syrian Arab Republic represented in preparing the Syrian Arab citizen who has a sense of citizenship and belongingness, equipped with knowledge, skills and values, capable of self-development, practicing democracy, and being responsible in all walks of life, scientific thinking and high productivity, creative, can take initiatives and able to control and solve life problems, can use available opportunities to achieve progress. As a result, it becomes possible to identify the general aims of pre-university curricula as the following:	Pre-conflict education: aims and dominant. ideology

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Achieve balanced development of the learner's personality ethically, cognitively and skill-wise that is capable of positively interacting with life and society. - Enable the learner to be aware that the world consists of a group of systems that work, develop, change and interact with each other. - Enable the learner to be interested in issues that affect life in societies. - Enhancing the feeling of belonging to the country, Arab nation, adopting its just causes and defending them. - Be proud of Arabic Language as a carrier of Arabic culture and use it in all fields in addition to taking interest in foreign language in order to interact with the world. - Develop the learner's awareness of the importance of their role in the society and its development; and developing their ability to be	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	responsible and strengthening the principle of respecting the other; developing their flexibility while maintaining their rights and doing their duties. - Strengthening learning skills in practicing democracy in all aspects of social life and working with civil society organizations. - Enhancing learner' values and behavioral practices that support respect for public and private properties and preserving infrastructures, sustainability and all resources, protecting the environment locally and internationally. - Develop the learner's ability to respect the positive role of educational and cultural diversity in developing the human society. - Develop the learner's ability be open to other civilizations and benefiting from them. Principles underpinning curricula:	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Social. - Psychological and educational - National: emphasizing national belonging and be proud of the country and concern for its interests, developing its position among other nations and take responsibility in developing and defending the country. Being interested in the achievements, current and historical victories and highlight national figures and symbols. - Functional. Standard-based education	
Ministry's Projects for Educational Development 2009	Learning is a cornerstone in preparing the individual and motivating them to meet the needs of the society. Aims to evaluate the three components of the education process: inputs, processes and outputs. It is developed in light of Al Assad's vision and guidance. Aims:	Pre-conflict education: aims and dominant ideology

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Developing a well-balanced individual who is creative and proud of belonging to their nation, capable of acquiring knowledge and investing it. - Developing school environment to provide educational atmosphere to enhance learner-centered learning and their participation in the learning process. - Contribute to the development of human resources to be competitive and to for the learning process to be an effective source in the social and economic development. - Improving the quality of learning to reach the levels achieved by developed countries. - Prepare a comprehensive assessment system for the components of the educational systems. In light of the 5-year national plan, the educational aims were reflected as the following:	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Develop a plan for poor areas to improve their social and economic situation. - Special education needs. - Women's rights. - Strategy to improve youth social, economic, educational and political situation. Embedding technology in learning	
General framework for national curriculum 2016	The integration of life skills within the texture of our educational syllabi is considered the ultimate solution to provide learners with tools necessary for confronting challenges and shoulder their way in the world with all due confidence. Based on 3 main aims of learning to develop: - Critical thinking and innovation. - Communication with others. - Feeling of social responsibility.	Aim of education after the conflict.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	The educational policy in Syria aims to support learning for life, work and citizenship. Vision: The realisation of ethical, epistemological, physical, social and aesthetic development of learners; the buttress of national affiliation and human values of life which emerge from the heritage of the Syrian society; support health and physical development and provision of sound minds to learners to shed light on the importance of new generations and the development of their abilities so that they can positively contribute to the building of society and the development of their abilities for the rebuilding of Syria; and provision of learners with skills, knowledge, and values for conducting research or establishing their future careers necessary for the realisation of sustainable development and lifelong learning. The priorities of the educational policy are to contribute to the provision of a peaceful and prosperous future for the country through the development of the	Indirect reference to the conflict.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	learners' knowledge, skills and orientations in an inclusive way that improves their personalities, supports the rich heritage of the country, reinforces the values of citizenship and aspirations of living peacefully with each other, and confronts the challenges of the present being a gate to the future for building a more interconnected world. The first requirement of the educational system in Syria is represented in teaching the youths to be prepared to enter the job market while focusing on social, academic, cultural and intellectual development for the formation of a learned generation marked with citizenship and efficiency in building its own society. National curriculum aims to achieve: - Develop active life-long learners. - Reduce illiteracy in various aspects of knowledge and social life. - Develop learners ethically. - Develop active citizens.	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	The aims of learning in Syria are based on three primary foundations: - Development characteristics of learners' different age groups. - Social, cultural and value requirements. - Keeping up with latest technical and cognitive developments. Competencies: - Communication and interaction skills and information which include reading, writing, communication skills, ICT and ethics of communication. - Creative learning skills and critical thinking. - Self-development and discipline. - Active citizenship. - Life and work skills. - Global awareness and cultural exchange skills to participate/contribute to self-development.	Conflict and truth Challenges after the conflict.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	There is semi-consensus that the main reason that led some of the Syrians to destroy the country is ignorance. The most dangerous reason on which the conflict is built is the lack of ethics. It has been clear throughout the past two decades that Syria cannot achieve proper and balanced development as long as education, in its current form, causes brain drain of qualified Syrians to more developed societies, which further their status at the cost of the backwardness of our developing societies. On another hand, there should be a new method of teaching that may enable new generation of finding suitable solutions for their communities' problems in order to reach social and economic stability through the sustainability of resources and integration with their surroundings and human society	

Document	Extract	Initial code
Training Package for Pre-university Learning Developed Curricula 2018-2019	General aims: - Enable pre-university teachers to implement developed curricula based on adopted methodologies. - Enable trainees to employ some of the mechanisms to embed technology for learning and teaching purposes. - Enable trainees to apply assessment methods and tools according to the requirements of developed curricula. Training Topics: - Standard-based learning. - Learning methods according to standard-based learning. - Employ technology for learning and teaching purposes. - Assessment methods according to developed curricula. The biggest challenge facing the educational process nowadays is moving through the developed curricula from pre-made cognitive formula that was and is still pumped into learners' brains to developing learners' cognition	Aims and framework for teacher training after the conflict. Educational challenged after the conflict and

Document	Extract	Initial code
	and bodily progress… the process of curriculum development starts from placing the learners at the centre of the educational process inside and outside the classroom and changing the teacher's role to a facilitator of learning to enable the learner achieve their learning objectives according to a harmonious vision of society based on the welfare of both the individual and the country. Main challenges facing the society and which impact upon the process of developing educational curricula: - Weak national belonging and the loss of national identity among a lot of social groups. -Weak values, motivation and desire for work and appreciating its importance in life due to ignorance, underdevelopment and lately because of the conflict.	dominant ideology Aims of learning after the conflict and dominant ideology

Document	Extract	Initial code
	-Teachers not being accustomed to using scientific methods of thinking, problem solving, prepare scientific plans and taking decisions in their daily practices. The Ministry based its efforts on the following principles: - Current curricula is theoretical and intensive exhausting both learners and their families. Knowledge has become accessible in all forms regardless of time and place. -In the age of knowledge, the whole world seeks at present to develop the educational process to enable the learner develop their skills through learning activities to develop their personalities, ability to communicate, reinforce principles of citizenship and focus their attention to meet demands of sustainability. -In todays' world, societies aim to develop learners' higher thinking skills so they become able to analyse/solve problems, take decisions that can improve	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	their life and the lives of those around them through benefiting from available sources of knowledge. -Social and economic developments of society require developing learners' life skills in different fields such as collaboration, sympathy, managing emotions, and dealing with pressure. General aims of developed curricula: - The realisation of emotional, bodily, mental, psychological, social and ethical, development of learners. -Develop learners' sense of pride of his country,Syria, and reinforce their loyalty to the country and reinforce national unity. -Develop independent-learning skills. -Acquire technical skills and employing them in their daily life. -Acquire work skills and its positive habits and respect the value of time. --Acquire effective social communication and interaction skills and work in a team.	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	-Be aware of rights and duties and respect diversity and differences.	
Techer's Guide in Socio-psychological Support 2017	Institutions that are concerned with social, educational and psychological education have to exert more efforts to support children in communication and reinforcing self-esteem; embed psycho-social support into the learning process in order to overcome shocking experiences and negatives impacts. This makes the teacher bear considerably large responsibility as they are the first line of support for parents in helping the child overcome crises and challenges that they face on the psychological, educational and social levels especially in the current circumstances that the country is undergoing…. The teacher's responsibility towards the child is very important. Educationally, the teacher plays an important role in preparing the learner for life through developing their abilities and through accommodating to the surrounding environment. Ethically, the teacher contributes to developing the learner's ethical sense. Socially, the teacher has a role in	Official perspective of education and psychological support. Conflict and truth

Document	Extract	Initial code
	supporting the learner to respect the law, form friendships and interactive work. Emotionally, the teacher has a main role in accepting their feelings and in turn positively accepting their peer's feelings and expressing these feelings more accurately and elaborately. This unjust war on Syria has targeted the individual, civilization and identity, and children were the largest social group affected by it something which had led to social and psychological disorders. The booklet aims to provide guidance, simple and direct advice in social and psychological support to teachers in addition to sample activities that can be used by the teacher to reduce psychological stress. Teacher's responsibilities: - From educational perspective: prepare learners for life through developing their abilities, preferences and positive adjustment to surrounding environment.	Aims and principles of psychological support.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- From moral perspective: support in developing moral sense among learners: principles, love, tolerance. - From social perspective: develop social sense among learners: collaboration, respect laws and regulations, form friendships, collaborative work, take initiatives, etc. - From emotional perspective: understanding and accepting learners' feelings and supporting them in identifying, naming and expressing these feeling/accepting and understanding others' feelings. General principles for psychological support: - Promoting human rights, no discrimination and equality for all affected individuals. - Participation of all affected individuals in activities and organized events. - Not causing harm, mutual learning, openness, cultural sensitivity.	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Development based on available resources and abilities, developing available resources, support self-help. - Provide open and non-threating classroom environment and encourage learners to take part in activities that provide them with the opportunity to express their feeling and thoughts. From emotional perspective: understanding and accepting learners' feelings and supporting them in identifying, naming and expressing these feeling/accepting and understanding others' feelings. General principles for psychological support: - Promoting human rights, no discrimination and equality for all affected individuals. - Participation of all affected individuals in activities and organized events. - Not causing harm, mutual learning, openness, cultural sensitivity.	Contradiction with instructions not to refer to the conflict, fragmentation of society.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Development based on available resources and abilities, developing available resources, support self-help. - Provide open and non-threating classroom environment and encourage learners to take part in activities that provide them with the opportunity to express their feeling and thoughts. learning can be a primary means in helping societies rebuild their life through: - Ensuring the child's feeling of safety socially, emotionally and educationally and in providing support in every aspect of their life at home, school, the classroom, playground, street and surrounding environment so that the child can continue the learning process. - Strengthening the child's inner immunity against signs of displacement, seeking asylum and experiences of shock, support self-evaluation, develop their ability to adjust and regain ability to continue learning and living	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Learning can provide psychological and social support to a large number of children. - Acquiring knowledge through prioritizing communication mechanisms and the ability to delivering knowledge to others and increasing communication skills with learners in order to build the personality of the learner. - Developing skills in assessing the behavior of children affected by conflicts and ways of dealing with and developing their capabilities. - Developing sentimental empathy with others and strengthening principles of respect, collaboration, love, tolerance, peace, accepting others and promoting their principles. - Creating a safe and supportive environment and finding ways to prevent school-drop out and help learners overcome loss and change. Making schools a centre for care and support through embedding psychological and social support in the learning process which help achieve	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	success in dealing with displaced and refugee children and teenagers who suffer from hard signs of refugee and displacement. Learners who have lived through difficult circumstances and have experienced the conflicts come to school with a lot of painful experiences which will be reflected in their behaviour and relationships with others. What can a teacher do to help these learners? - When these learners come to school, they would need an atmosphere of safety and get used to school routine. - The teacher needs to be familiar with the backgrounds of those learners. - Entertaining and collaborative activities should be supported. - It is useful when there are learners from different areas in one classroom to exchange discussions about life in their areas, their traditions, learn songs/dances and focus on positive sides of life in their areas.	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	- Assign responsibilities to learners which will support their integration. Organize activities in collaboration with local community.	
Training Guide for Complementary Courses 2017/2018	The armed terrorist groups have sought through war which the Syrian Arab Republic has suffered from for about eight years to spread a culture of ignorance through destroying schools, preventing children from learning and spread their ideology that incites killing in addition to targeting students with missiles in safe areas while they are on their desks in order influence their personalities and create feeling of fear and anxiety among them. The decline in living standards for many of their families, the inability to settle in one area and the decline in the quality of learning due to the large numbers in the same class all this has led to many implications such as the emergence of complete or partial	Conflict and truth Principles of psychological support.

Document	Extract	Initial code
	educational losses among students which has impacted negatively on their learning levels and had led to their failure in their classes. Socio-psychological support Role of teacher in providing psychological support to students: schools and teachers play a primary role in providing psychological support to students and in providing them with opportunities to express their feelings equipping them with behaviours that could help them to adjust and reduce the damaging effects resulting from conflict, violence and wars. This could be achieved through following learning activities that provide children with psychological support, some of which are: - Communication skills with students and good listening to them. -Asking open questions that could help the process of offloading and exposing imbalanced thoughts. -Using playing, art and drama to express emotions. Recommended methods teachers could use:	

Document	Extract	Initial code
	1- Therapy through playing. 2- Therapy through expression and communication. 3- Therapy through stories. 4- Therapy through music and dancing. 5- Therapy through arts. Therapy through acting and drama.	
Training Guide for Active Learning 2016	psychological support and active learning: 1- Concept of socio-psychological support. 2- Socio-psychological support: when, who, when and where. 3- Principles of psychological support: Look/Listen and Connect Model. 4- Psychological support: communication skills when providing psychological support.	Framework and content. Link to pre-conflict education.

Document	**Extract**	**Initial code**
	5- Teachers’ roles in psychological support. Maslow’s Hierarchies of Needs.	

APPENDIX 6

Revised Codes and Constructed Themes

Data	Revised code	Theme
The government considers rebuilding the education sector to be of high importance as it allocates huge budgets to the Ministry of Education in this regard. The priority is to rebuild schools as an initial step and to provide purely pedagogical training to teachers. The government also has appointed thirty thousand teachers. Priority is to rehabilitate school buildings as an initial stage and prepare teacher training from a pedagogical perspective. Although there is awareness from both Ministries of Education/Higher Education of the importance of rebuilding the individual, but this is not currently the priority due to the large scale of destruction and huge costs of rebuilding the education sector.	Approach to post-conflict reconstruction. Lack of systematic/strategic response to the conflict,	Dominance of negative peace and individual initiatives in responding to the conflict.

Data	Revised code	Theme
The problem now lies in individual work. There is a need to move to collective work. Our challenge is the dominance of individual work as each Ministry works independently. There is a need to deal with each area to identify challenges faced by its people socially and educationally instead of applying the same strategy to all areas. Internal contamination: the current strategy is like a bazaar dominated by corruption which forms a state of social inter-dependency. There is no management of the crisis; there is a management crisis. There will be changes to teacher training curricula through introducing changes to deal with the results of the conflict that aim to consider learners'' individual differences in order to avoid memorization and rote learning. There was a plan to develop learning in Syria. They are still continuing it. I mean the conflict happened or did not happen. There was a plan to develop curricula and we are still continuing it. They have not changed anything because of the conflict.		

Data	Revised code	Theme
[A change in tone indicating being less positive] in general not much was done. As they say, a situation was imposed and there were not many solutions apart from those relying on the teacher's skills and personality. Things were left for the teacher as it is difficult to find a solution. Collective solutions were very hard. There is currently effective initiatives and huge efforts but there no government support. These efforts are individual and fragmented. There is no source that oversees thee efforts. There is a clear gap between university and reality. Initiative rely on teacher's efforts, their educational background and their commitment to national issues. There is currently effective initiatives and huge efforts but there no government support. These efforts are individual and fragmented. There is no source that oversees thee efforts. There is a clear gap between university and reality. Initiative rely on teacher's efforts, their educational background and their commitment to national issues.		

Data	Revised code	Theme
There have been no changes to psychology curriculum; the same curriculum is being taught since 1983, There have also been no training courses to deal with the conflict. On the ground, there is a crisis within the crisis. One cannot even think of training teachers to deal with latest developments within this situation and strategies adopted by the Ministry. training materials have been in place before the conflict, but some topics have been added to deal with the conflict such as teaching overcrowded classes. teacher training of high importance to us as we have trained 6500 teachers in this city alone between 1/7 and 1/8 of 2016/. As for dealing with the conflict, teacher training strategy continued in line with the 2009 plan. New modules were added but there was no radical or comprehensive change to deal with the conflict. The radical change was in 2008-09 and onwards as the curriculum relied on rote learning. The classroom in all our schools ---relied on lecturing, students were receivers and teachers were senders. Practically skills focus on listening and memorization…	2008/09 as cornerstones in pre-conflict education Continuation of pre-conflict initiatives/partial response to the conflict.	Interruption-resumption model

Data	Revised code	Theme
After 2008 new curriculum attempted to make the teacher as a guide, the student works and the teacher is the supervisor and guide. Curriculum now is not that different from the one before 2011. The difference is reflected in teaching methods as the number of students increased as a result of students migrating from other cities. Teaching practicum had to be moved from schools to labs within the university due to the security situation and crowded schools. The difference is also reflected through adding some modules that focus on the results of the conflicts especially in seminars, graduation projects and Master's dissertation topics. Counselling itself is a new programme. I mean it started few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed. Teaching or learning in Syria generally underwent a fundamental change in 2008-09 and afterwards…From the curriculum side, there was an on-going development …[the conflict] has interrupted the implementation of these educational reforms. There was progress but the conflict caused a huge damage; it destroyed a lot. I mean the conflict impeded the process of reforming schooling.		

Data	Revised code	Theme
Standard-based education. Aims of education pre/after the conflict. The situation did not differ much, when the conflict happened… they only included the topic of psychological support meaning they provided training for psychological support to students who witnessed a crime or beheading and things like that or life under siege or was hungry and their families were hungry or died etc in this cases their mental health was really bad.. in general we are emotional people, if there is teacher who has a student who suffers like this they would ask students to show empathy but it is all individual effort. counselling itself is a new programme. I mean it started few years before the conflict, so it is new. From that time till now nothing has changed.		
In my opinion, the next phase is more dangerous than the conflict itself and especially for children who are currently in their adolescence. They need a programme of psychological support as they have seen a lot, whether in hot areas or in areas with no conflict. They have developed a kind of violent mentality. They have violent thinking.	Provision of Psychological support	Integration of Psychological support to learners/teachers

Data	Revised code	Theme
They have also become indifferent. They do not want education. They do not care about anything. What is important is money and work. He [a student] hears a lorry driving by, he thinks it is a tank… he experiences a difficult mental state. Sometimes with martyrs conveys, there are gunshots. There are some children that hide under the desk and no one can get them out. [those] who participated in the war and now they are back. If those are not treated psychologically, they might affect their family's life. There have been lots of incidents… terrifying… they have seen terrifying scenes. Students (coming from a different area) are immediately met with negativity… bullying. [Cases that have increased after the conflict are] the case of social maladjustment, stress, depression, anxiety… social maladjustment comes from changing environments moving from extremely conservative environment to a more liberal one here. They [locally displaced people and refugees] had their own habits and traditions and now they want to take on new ones that do not suit them… regarding violence what has		in light of interruption-resumption model.

Data	Revised code	Theme
increased in refugee centres specifically are sexual assaults in addition to economic violence since they had to seek refuge. Among children, the cases of fear, anxiety such as bedwetting. These are all caused by the conflict. There has also been an increase in schools [silence, hesitation caused by being shy] of sexual abnormalities cases as in other social groups there might have been something like this but here we did not have sexual abnormalities. The cases are increasing among school students because they are mixing. We have heard about this here after they started coming here. I worked with UNICEF for a period of time in which I visited schools as a counsellor for two months. The headmaster, superintendents and teachers would first ask me 'What are you teaching here?' I would say counselling. 'Counselling?' [in a tone indicating something is of no importance] 'What did you come here? Stay at home'… I would say that I would like to give students a session of counselling and the headmaster would answer 'Miss, let them have an Arabic session, is not that better than this counselling?' They consider counselling of no importance at all. In their opinion, teaching other subjects such as Arabic, English and Maths are more important than		

Data	Revised code	Theme
counselling. Even when a student wants to leave class to see a counsellor…they consider the student to be wasting their time or trying to get out of the session. People have wrong idea about counselling, we are not for crazy people... They have wrong understanding like if one visits the counsellor then they are crazy. The counsellor is facing pressure from the cases they are dealing with and from the society which considers this job to have no significance or value…if you are a counsellor this means that you are doing anything like you are not a doctor to prescribe medicine. You are not doing anything, like you are joking with those people. Pressure comes from all sides causing something like burning out. The UNICEF distribute school bags, stationery and things like that and they distribute to all students milk and biscuits. As for students, for course we take into account their feelings. I remember once they attacked an area, Al Nusra Front… during the exam period. One student had her arm broken, came to sit the exam as she wanted to pass… the student is very smart. Despite this, she did sit the exam, but we did show her mercy. I mean, we sat next to her. She was nervous. Do not be scared. We are with you now.	Challenges impeding effective provision	

Data	Revised code	Theme
The girl is smart and now she is studying her second year at Medical School. But the girl was in a terrible situation, her arm was wounded but she wanted to sit the exam. She was nervous she would not pass it, so the psychological support provided to her gave her strength. There is nothing systematic, no, no… the provided programmes are designed individually, no one tells to do it, for example, if you see a very poor or displaced child, for sure you not going to treat them like other students…. [counselling is associated with] easy job…nothing to do. Psychological cases are dealt with based on individual initiatives… sadly there is a counsellor in every school, but they are kind of clerks I mean I have never seen a counsellor. I used to deal with psychological problems personally although it is not my area professionally. They [counsellors] have no role. I have dealt case in this area more once individually… based on personal skills but not scientifically. I am not sure if that was or was not effective.		

Data	Revised code	Theme
It was suggested to provide psychological support to children who were kidnapped but there is a lack of education for the need of psychological support. The priority is for living matters, even the family were not aware of the importance of such support. Sometimes the economic element was a negative factor as families had have the financial means to cover transportation fees for their children to get to the centres providing psychological support. we (teachers) have not been exposed to this at all. No one told us. as people we are emotional…there is no teacher I think that has a student who is suffering a problem from this kind who does not inform their students that this student needs to be considered or something like this, but they are trying with their personal efforts.		
There is an escape from facing current problems through creating red lines. Who wins imposes their vision, the government will impose its vision and ideology especially if compared with the that of the extreme ideology that led to destroying government institutions and killing individuals.	Truth, dominant ideology and censorship of education.	Concepts of silence and securitization.

Data	Revised code	Theme
If we have the courage to search for the truth, we do not have the courage to disclose it. The Minister of Education issued written instructions to school asking teachers not to discuss or allow students to discuss the conflict the classroom [Laughter, indicating cynicism] it is not the Minister who issued this letter. The student receives information, but to critique it, no… there is not such a thing. I do not even know if anyone has the courage… very difficult … I cannot even imagine it. The teacher and the textbook are the complete source of knowledge that cannot be critiqued…everyone needs to understand in the same way, at the same level and at the same time. in class, I avoid talking about this [the conflict]. Sadly, this might have repercussions. There are instructions not to refer to the conflict in educational process. We suffer from the phenomenon of educational violence among teachers as teachers' efforts could be attributed to political and sectarian dimensions which could lead to catastrophic consequences on the teacher's professional future.	Self-censorship.	Truth and future representations of the conflict. Reconstruction as rebuilding new hegemonic structures. The continuation of the Syrian conflict: from militarisation to securitisation.

Data	Revised code	Theme
There is a module on critical thinking but there are no systematic efforts or subject matter to promote critical thinking. This unjust war on Syria has targeted the individual, civilization and identity, and children were the largest social group affected by it. The armed terrorist groups have sought through war which the Syrian Arab Republic has suffered from for about eight years to spread a culture of ignorance through destroying schools, preventing children from learning and spread their ideology that incites killing in addition to targeting students with missiles in safe areas…in order to….create feeling of fear and anxiety among them. No reference of conflict in school textbooks. There is near-consensus among Syrians today that the main reason that made some get involved in destroying the country is ignorance. The most dangerous foundation on which the conflict is built on is 'the lack of morality.		