Gender, Sexuality, and the Yazidi Genocide: How Gendered Ideology is Utilized in Genocide and its Impacts on Survivors

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Abstract: The study of gendered and sexuality-based violence is a recently-emerging yet important sub-category in the field of genocide studies. The immense majority of mass atrocity cases involve instances of violence reated to gender divisions, gender-based discrimination, and sexual abuse. Some notable examples would be the Armenian genocide, Indigenous genocides in North America, the Herero genocide, and the Bosnian genocide. Because of the continued prominence of gendered violence in conflict, a comparative analysis of prior and current genocides through a gendered lens enables us to better assess the evolving realities of genocidal processes. With this aim, we will focus specifically on the Yazidi genocide that took place in 2014 in areas of Iraq, and compare its tactics to those of previous genocides. Specifically, we will look at the gendered aspects of genocide in the Yazidi case, namely rape, sexual enslavement, forced marriage, gender-based violence, and forced religious conversion. We will inquire how ISIS leveraged pre-existing perceptions of gender and sexuality to shape its extermination of the Yazidi populations, and explore the the modern-day aftermath of these killings and genocidal tactics.

Terminology and Methodology

For the purposes of consistency and clarification, this paper will define some important key terms and definitions. Firstly, this paper uses the United Nations' definition of gender-based violence against women. The UN declared that gender-based violence includes "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life".[1] Therefore, this definition encompasses rape, coerced sexual activity, partner or familial violence, child abuse, and other similar traumatizing acts. In this line, we also use the United Nations' definition for genocide. The United Nations General Assembly Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as the following:

> "[A]cts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."[2]

It should be noted that some cases have been legally declared as genocide through international courts or tribunals. There are also many contested cases that meet the criteria for genocide but have not been legally declared as such. In addition, other contested cases occurred before the Convention in 1948, but cannot be legally prosecuted due to the principle of retroactivity. The cases discussed in this paper have been legally confirmed cases or are considered by scholars to

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[1] United Nations General Assembly (1993, December 20), *Declaration on the elimination of violence against women,* Article I. Proceedings of the 85th Plenary Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women.

[2] United Nations General Assembly (1948, December 9), *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Article II. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide-convention.shtml.

be genocidal. As such, this paper will refer to all utilized cases as 'cases of genocide', regardless of legal ruling.

Introduction and Case Background

The Yazidis are a Kurdish-speaking, ethnoreligious minority group who are indigenous to the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Although the first mention of Yazidi populations dates to around the 7th century A.D., Yazidis trace their heritage back to the 14th century B.C., making this religion potentially one of the oldest in the world.[3] Yazidis were degraded and looked down upon by radical Muslims for several centuries, and have been subject to conversion efforts and violence from both Muslim and Christian missionary groups.[4] These attacks dated back to the Arab Invasion of the Near and Middle East in 637 A.D., while other documented cases included attacks sponsored by the Ottoman Empire in the 13th, 15th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Historical research suggests that as many as "74 genocides against the Yazidi have been carried out in the past 800 years by Islamised groups and states", with the data estimating that "some 1.8 million Yazidi have had to convert and some 1.2 million Yazidi have been killed".[3] Radical Middle Eastern Islamic groups have targeted several other minority religious groups in the area besides the Yazidi populations, including oriental Christians, Shabaks, Feylis, and ethnic Kurds.[4] Extremist groups – such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – continue to discriminate upon and attack these minority groups even today.

Since the mid-2000s, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, more commonly known as ISIL or ISIS, has committed dozens of mass atrocity crimes and genocide against the Yazidi population. During the 2014 Yazidi Genocide, ISIS militants invaded Sinjar, a predominantly

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[3] Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, "The Yazidi—Religion, Culture and Trauma," *Advances in Anthropology* 07, no. 04 (2017): pp. 333-339, https://doi.org/10.4236/aa.2017.74019, 335.
[4] Christine Allison, "The Yazidis," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, January 25, 2017, https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-254?mediaType=Article, 5.

Yazidi-populated Iraqi town. Approximately 3,000-5,000 Yazidi men and women were killed during this invasion, while the survivors – men, women, and children – were subject to rape, forced conversion, beatings, torture, captivity, and slavery.[5] Genocide scholars, activists, and the international community established this case constitutes genocide against religious groups of the area, by way of mass killings and the infliction of bodily and mental harm.[6] Several genocidal tactics present in the Yazidi genocide echo previous historical cases of genocide. The means utilized include sexual enslavement, forced religious conversion, and genocidal birth control methods, such as forced pregnancies and attempts to terminate pregnancies. We proceed to a comparative historical analysis to trace the development of these gendered mass-atrocities.

Historical Analysis

Sexual Violence and Rape

Two of the most prevalent means employed by ISIS against Yazidi women – human trafficking and sexual slavery – was also widely documented a century ago during the Armenian genocide. In both of these cases, rape and sexualized violence were used to physically dehumanize women belonging to the target group.[7] This genocidal enslavement was based on ideologies of male domination; specifically, that women are property and their bodies are vessels of reproduction for the perpetrators. For example, sexual slave markets were key factors in both the Armenian genocide and the Yazidi genocide. By trafficking victims, the perpetrators further dehumanized the victim group by implying they were property. In a startling parallel between the two cases, "Armenian women were lined up naked in marketplaces for trade and purchase,

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[5] Valeria Cetorelli et al., "Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey," *PLOS Medicine* 14, no. 5 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297, 3.

[6] Vicken Cheterian, "Isis Genocide against the Yazidis and Mass Violence in the Middle East," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 4 (2019): pp. 629-641, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1683718, 632.

[7] Mary Connellan, Christiane Fröhlich, and Nikki Marczak, "A Century Apart: The Genocidal Enslavement of Armenian and Yazidi Women," in *A Gendered Lens for Genocide Prevention* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), pp. 133-162. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-60117-9_7, 135.

(…) ISIS now displays Yazidi women and girls, tags them with prices and photographs them for potential buyers".[7] In the eyes of the perpetrators, these women were spoils of war, something that could be bought, bargained, and traded.

Relatedly, rape as a tool of genocide was perhaps the most recognized elements of the Yazidi genocide. We can find similitudes to the Yazidi case in genocidal rape during the Bosnian genocide of 1995, as the goal was to produce pregnancies under the perpetrator group's identity. In both Bosnian and Yazidi societies, identity is patrilineal – defined by the ethnoreligious identity of the father rather than the mother.[8] Subsequently, this gendered notion of lineage and identity was utilized by perpetrators in both cases to rape and impregnate women. Perpetrators 'tainted' Bosnian reproductive lines by destroying the birth identity of this community. In an analysis of the Yazidi genocide, Nikki Marczak discussed the roles of gender and identity in cases of genocidal rape and sexual violence as follows:

> [G]endered beliefs about the perpetuation of identity form the basis for cultural and biological attacks, in particular that 1) ethnicity and religion are patrilineal; 2) women's bodies can be appropriated as vessels for reproducing the perpetrator group; and 3) women's own identities are easily transformed through conversion and assimilation.[7]

These gendered beliefs of genocidal rape were made evident in Bosnia. Serb militants used their knowledge of Bosniak gender, culture, and identity as a genocidal weapon against the group, seeking to impose their ethnicity through rape and erode the ability of Bosnian Muslims to create future generations.[8] Both cases also saw the use of reproductive control methods as a means of destruction, either by forcibly aborting babies belonging to the victim group or by prohibiting abortions for babies belonging to the perpetrator group. Yazidi survivors reported brutal sexual abuse, even whilst pregnant with Yazidi babies. Similarly, Bosnian survivors reported being

[8] Todd A. Salzman, "Rape camps as a means of ethnic cleansing: Religious, cultural, and ethical responses to rape victims in the former Yugoslavia," *Human Rights Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1998): pp. 348-378, https://www.jstor.org/stable/762769, 352.

denied abortions after being impregnated by Serb militants. Beyond this, forms of more indirect reproductive control were aso deployed: Yazidi women were subjugated to "physical and psychological torture; starvation; denial of food, water, and medical assistance, which in turn led to many miscarriages and infanticide cases".[9] These examples of reproductive control were genocidal because abortions actively prevented births, while prohibited abortions mentally and often physically harmed the victim groups and their children. According to survivor testimony of the Yazidi genocide, Yazidi women were brutally raped several times a day and severely beaten for refusing sexual activity or religious conversion. Radical Islamic groups have historically perceived Yazidi populations as inferior. Consequently, ISIS fighters believed that "raping these women and slaughtering their children [was] morally acceptable".[9] ISIS militants justified their actions by claiming that these women were enemies of Allah, so torturing and killing Yazidi women and children served their religion. Essentially, Yazidi victims deserved the punishment and abuse because they were not proper Muslims.

Religious Conversion

Another genocidal tactic used against Yazidi populations during the genocide was forced religious conversion. Religion is vital to the Yazidi community, as the Yazidi identity itself is both an ethnicity and a religion. Forced conversion, therefore, was aimed at destroying the Yazidi family unit and the Yazidi identity as a whole, as one inherently based on and influenced by religion. ISIS militants, in particular, believed that the Yazidi people were *kuffar*, which translates to 'infidels' or 'devil worshippers'. Yazidi men and women were both targets of religious conversion, with many forced conversion efforts involving fasting during Ramadan, praying the Islamic Shahada, and chanting prayers in Arabic – even though Yazidis speak

[9] Suha Hazeem Hassen, "Investigating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War and a Tool of Genocide against Indigenous Yazidi Women and Girls by ISIS in Iraq," *Oregon State University Graduate Thesis* (2016): pp. 1-112, https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/m613n119r, 93.

Kurdish.[3] Perpetrators used these methods of of cultural assimilation to erode at the communal and religious Yazidi identity. Gendered aspects of genocide were also present in these cases of forced conversion. For example, ISIS perpetrators often separated the men from the women, threatening to enslave, sell, and sexually abuse the women if the men did not convert. Yazidi survivors also agreed to convert to Islam to protect family members. In the testimony of a female Yazidi survivor, she agreed to convert to protect her young children.[10] Even after Islamic conversion, Yazidi women reported continual beatings, humiliation, and abuse from their captors, as they were still *kuffar* and not proper Muslims in the eyes of ISIS. These militants essentially believed that the Yazidi identity, specifically the identities of Yazidi women, were changeable through cultural assimilation and religious conversion. If ISIS captors remained unconvinced of Yazidi prisoners' Islamic dedication, they used whatever methods possible to weaken their victims into submission. Through this cultural assimilation, the perpetrators fully intended to invalidate and destroy the Yazidi religion and identity.

Other cases of genocide have documented the use of religious conversion as a way to erase and destroy identities. For example, centuries of physical and cultural genocide decimated Indigenous populations in North America. During the 20th century, the Catholic church supported dozens of residential schools, which kidnapped Indigenous children and forced them to attend as a means of cultural assimilation. At these schools, they were required to forsake their native language, convert to Christianity, and abandon contact from their families.[11] This assimilation physically destroyed the family unit and culturally destroyed their Indigenous way of life. Similarly, ISIS captors forcibly converted Yazidi prisoners to dehumanize them and

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[10] Payam Akhavan, et al., "What justice for the Yazidi genocide?: Voices from below," *Human Rights Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1-47. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/747390, 30.
[11] Katherine Ellinghaus, "Indigenous assimilation and absorption in the United States and Australia," *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 4 (2006): pp. 563-585, https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2006.75.4.563, 567.

destroy their religious identity during the genocide. Victims were manipulated and coerced into conversion as a survival tactic, or for the sake of protecting their family unit.

Social Isolation

ISIS perpetrators also used social isolation and 'social death' as a genocidal tactic against these women. 'Social death' as seen in genocide has been defined as the "major loss of social vitality, (...) loss of identity and consequently a serious loss of meaning for one's existence".[12] For the Yazidi genocide, ISIS perpetrators essentially targeted the social vitality of the Yazidi identity. After the Yazidi genocide, social death was a common harm for female victims, as sexual 'impurity' in women goes against the deeply engrained notions of the Yazidi religion. That is, virginity was important to Yazidi females. In Iraqi and Yazidi culture, virginity was "a symbol of honor, power, and land, and taking a virgin girl is like claiming all of these".[13] Thus, women who were sexually assaulted by ISIS were stigmatized, forbidden from marrying, shunned by close friends and family, and experienced immense psychological trauma. In a recent study of formerly enslaved female Yazidi survivors, findings showed that women's "perceived social rejection in their community mediated the relationship between traumatic enslavement events and depression symptoms".[14] Essentially, this social death was genocidal because it prevented female survivors from returning to their communities, thus destroying their overall identity as a member of the Yazidi community. These psychological impacts of social death were very similar to that of female survivors of the Bosnian genocide, who also grappled with psychological issues, like post-traumatic stress disorder and depression after isolation. Discussion of mental illness was heavily stigmatized in Bosnian society, so female survivors

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[12] Claudia Card, "Genocide and social death," *Hypatia* 18, no.1 (2003): pp. 63-79. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40347,63.
[13] Hassen, "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence," 90.
[14] Hawkar Ibrahim, et al., "Trauma and perceived social rejection among Yazidi women and girls who survived enslavement and genocide," *BMC medicine* 16, no. 1 (2018): pp. 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-018-1140-5,1.

were socially alienated after the genocide. The victims, therefore, lost their social vitality, and felt unable to return to their previous livelihoods, just like Yazidi women in their social circles.[15]

Findings

Mental and Physical Trauma in Survivors

Most ISIS militant cells have since either been defeated or pushed back, with the international community having intervened to stop the genocide of the Yazidi. However, the impacts and legacies of the genocide still cause lingering issues across the community. One of the biggest impacts remains the mental and psychological trauma experienced by Yazidi women after years of sexual assault, rape, and sexual slavery. Yazidi women who have survived war atrocities report experiencing significant mental illness and trauma, such as displaying symptoms of generalized anxiety, depression, and PTSD as found in the DSM-5. The DSM-5, also known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition, is the standard diagnostic criteria and "the standard language by which clinicians, researchers, and public health officials in the United States communicate about mental disorders"[16]. This updated version of the DSM included a more accurate categorization of internalizing disorders – anxiety, depression, and trauma disorders – meaning that Yazidi females were diagnosed under the most professional diagnostic level. Research findings show that formerly enslaved female Yazidi survivors have a "significantly higher prevalence of severe mental distress, more severe levels of depression and general anxiety symptoms, greater rates of PTSD, and higher reported rates of suicidal ideation" than Yazidi women who were not enslaved.[17] Despite this, the Iraqi government and Kurdish

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[15] Lilijana Oruč and Pamela Bell, "Multiple rape trauma followed by delusional parasitosis A case report from the Bosnian war," *Schizophrenia Research* 16, no. 2 (1995): pp. 173-174, DOI: 10.1016/0920-9964(95)00039-o, 173.
[16] Darrel A. Regier, Emily A. Kuhl, and David J. Kupfer, "The DSM‐5: Classification and criteria changes," *World psychiatry* 12, no. 2 (2013): pp. 92-98, https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20050, 92.
[17] Perjan Hashim Taha and Shameran Slewa-Younan, "Measures of depression, generalized anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorders amongst Yazidi female survivors of ISIS slavery and violence," *International journal of mental health systems* 14, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1-10, https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-020-00412-4, 1.

forces have not provided sufficient access to mental health services for Yazidi survivors. Refugee camps are particularly lacking in mental health services, with most centers offering training in cooking, cleaning, and knitting instead of mental health counseling.[18] The primary reason for the lack of proper services is simply because of insufficient funding from the Iraqi government. The insufficient funding also becomes evident through the lack of specific services and qualified doctors. For example, some health services are too far away to be accessible for refugee camps and there is typically only one female doctor per refugee camp.[19]

Women also continue to suffer from the long-term physical impacts of surviving sexual abuse. These health concerns are particularly severe in their reproductive organs, as rape can generate drastic scars for young women. Mendy Marsh elaborated on the detriments of sexual violence for a woman's reproductive ability and health after sexualized violence:

> "Reproductive health outcomes alone include trauma to reproductive organs, including fistula; acquisition of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and unwanted pregnancies that can lead to unsafe abortions and other complications. Gaps in access to emergency obstetric care, which are commonplace in situations of insecurity, increase the risks associated with unwanted pregnancies. Young girl survivors of sexual violence are biologically at greater risk of acquiring infections and suffering complications of pregnancy."[20]

Inaccessible health care for Yazidi women exacerbated their health concerns: some women were physically unable to reproduce after the genocide. Also, other scars from beatings, torture, and abuse could not be erased from their bodies, further adding to the victim's shame and guilt. Better access and funding to health services from local governments could alleviate some of these physical scars and pain, and overall destigmatize the healing process for survivors.

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[18] Hawkar Ibrahim, et al., "Trauma and perceived social rejection," 2.
[19] Payam Akhavan, et al., "Voices from below," 21.
[20] Mendy Marsh, Susan Purdin, and Sonia Navani, "Addressing sexual violence in humanitarian emergencies," *Global Public Health* 1, no. 2 (2006): pp. 133-146, DOI:10.1080/17441690600652787, 136.

The Question of Return for Female Victims

There has also been significant debate about female survivors and the children born of ISIS fathers returning to Yazidi communities. Immediately after the genocide in 2014, many genocide scholars and members of the international community questioned if the Yazidi community would allow formerly enslaved and sexually abused women to return to their homelands and families. Yazidi culture isextremely male-dominated and community-oriented, so intimate or sexual relationships outside of the social and religious community were prohibited. Therefore, there were concerns that women who had been raped and enslaved by ISIS would be forced to leave their Yazidi communities. In an unprecedented move, however, the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Leader allowed female survivors to return to Yazidi society. Although it was a departure from their traditional conservative views, Yazidi families welcomed back their daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters who were abused by ISIS militants for years. Additionally, the Iraqi government recently passed the Yazidi Female Survivor's Law, which set forth reparations for women who were captured and abused by ISIS.[21] This law is one of the first attempts by the Iraqi government to redress the harms caused by the Yazidi genocide.

The Question of Return for Children with ISIS Militant Fathers

One concern, however, was that Yazidi women could not bring back the children born to them from ISIS militant fathers. Initially, the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Council ruled that children born of rape would be able to return with their Yazidi mothers; but they revoked this stipulation after receiving backlash from more conservative parts of the Yazidi community.[22] Therefore, many Yazidi women faced the impossible decision of returning to their communities

[21] Güley Bor, "Iraq's reparation bill for Yazidi female survivors: more progress needed," *Conflict Research Programme Blog* (2019): pp. 1-10, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102036/1/crp_iraqs_reparation_bill_for_yazidi_female_survivors.pdf, 3.
[22] Payam Akhavan, et al., "Voices from below," 26.

and families or remaining with their children. Women who kept their children were not allowed to return to their Yazidi communities, lest they risk having their children killed. Many women who opted to return to their families were incorrectly told that they would be able to visit their children. A majority of these children were placed in orphanages and safe houses, as their mothers struggled and fought in their hometowns so they might be allowed to keep them. Thus, Yazidi women survived the horrors of abuse and rape, only to grapple with an impossible choice: be with their families or be with their children.

Legal Rulings

Justice for the Yazidi genocide was also a concern, as there have been virtually no trials or rulings regarding the genocide. The international community and human rights activists encouraged both restorative and retributive justice methods, but these have been slow to develop. Many efforts for justice from the human rights community have "invoked victim suffering—and the suffering of female victims, in particular—to induce political will to do something while being largely oblivious to the voice of the victims".[23] Essentially, many advocates aimed to punish the perpetrators without consulting the victims first on their needs and struggles. However, progress has been made in recent years. In November 2021, a German court in Frankfurt issued the first legal ruling that convicted an ISIS member of genocide. Taha al-Jumailly, an ISIS militant since 2013, was prosecuted for crimes including the murder of a 5-year-old Yazidi girl and was found guilty of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and human trafficking.[24] Al-Jumailly's wife was also charged with crimes against humanity for her inaction to save the Yazidi girl. This first ruling confirming genocide against the Yazidis has given hope to Yazidi activists and survivors that more perpetrators will face justice for their

[23] Payam Akhavan, et al., "Voices from below," 4.
[24] BBC News, "Yazidi genocide: IS member found guilty in German landmark trial," November 30, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-59474616.

crimes. Although such rulings have been slow to develop, future legal reparations would greatly assist Yazidi survivors in their healing process.

Discussion

The above-mentioned impacts of the Yazidi genocide – physical trauma, mental trauma, and social isolation for female victims and children born of rape have existed in the aftermath of other genocides. However, we can comparatively analyze the reparations used by post-genocidal societies to address their respective impacts.

Female sexual violence survivors in Bosnia and Iraq both experienced physical and mental trauma during the genocides. As mentioned previously in this paper, Bosnian society heavily stigmatized the discussion of mental illness and mental health among men and women. However, the post-genocide Bosnian government restructured its psychiatric care system, with an increased emphasis on mental health facilities. These new facilities include 74 community-based mental health centers, clinical centers in major cities, and nine full psychiatric wards, which help thousands of Bosnians.[25] Having a variety of mental and physical health facilities available increased healing and mental health awareness in Bosnia. In addition, studies confirm the efficacy of mental health programs among Bosnian survivors. Group therapy, individual counseling, self-help groups, and family counseling all have decreased anxiety and depression symptoms among survivors; however, post-traumatic stress symptoms have been the most difficult to treat.[26] Although post-traumatic stress is pervasive in post-genocide societies like Bosnia, mental health facilities in post-genocide societies have proven beneficial for genocide survivors. Therefore, similar mental health facilities should be emulated within Yazidi

[25] Che Jackson, "Mental health in Bosnia and Herzegovina," The Borgen Project (2022), https://borgenproject.org/mental-health-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/.
[26] Trudy TM Mooren, et al.,. "The efficacy of a mental health program in Bosnia‐Herzegovina: Impact on coping and general health," *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 59, no. 1 (2003): pp. 57-69, DOI: 10.1002/jclp.10118, 66.

communities and through increased resources from international organizations and the Iraqi government.

Women from both groups were shunned by society for being sexually assaulted or if they birthed children as a result of the sexual assault. Following the war, Bosnians emphasized the importance of family reunification and advocated for the return of survivors to their homes. This prioritization of return and reunification helped many survivors with coping and healing after the genocide.[27] However, a majority of children born of rape in Bosnia were given up by their mothers, and many of them grapple with social isolation and identity crises today as they come of age. Therefore, reunification should be promoted in Yazidi communities for both mothers and children, as it will be beneficial to female survivors and prevent the social isolation from reaching the children once they come of age.

Conclusions

ISIS perpetrators commited genocide largely through the use of sexual violence and gendered ideology to destroy the Yazidi people, religion, and identity. ISIS militants primarily targeted women, as female purity was vital to Yazidi culture, and employed genocidal tactics such as the separation of genders, sexual enslavement, sexual abuse, mass rape, forced pregnancy, and forced conversion. The goal of these tactics was to destroy the Yazidis through murder, torture, impregnating Yazidi women with 'Muslim' children, and causing 'social death' for Yazidi survivors. The genocide has left long-lasting impacts in the Yazidi community, especially for women, from psychological trauma, to physical and reproductive ill-health, and the question of return for survivors and children born of rape. The Yazidi community has found ways to heal, specifically allowing formerly enslaved and sexually abused women to return to

[27] Manuel Carballo, et al., "Mental health and coping in a war situation: the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 36, no. 4 (2004): pp. 463-477, DOI: 10.1017/S0021932004006753, 463.

their families and the introduction of retributive justice. However, there is still progress to be made. Survivors struggle with a lack of physical and mental health facilities, the impossible choice of joining one's family or staying with one's children, and justice methods that do not address the needs of survivors. As research on the Yazidi genocide grows, justice for the survivors must continue through the prosecution of ISIS militants, implementation of mental and physical health services, and laws protecting Yazidi women and their children.

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