



History of Yazidi Genocides, Mass Atrocities, Forced Conversions and Persecutions in the Middle East

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Abstract

persecutions suffered by the Yazidis with the help of the following questions: How many Yazidi genocides have been documented? What were the reasons behind these genocides and persecutions? Whether or not all the mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis should be termed genocide? This study is a part of my postdoctoral research, which is an effort to document the mass violence and genocides suffered by the Yazidis in the Mesopotamian region. Before the 2014 genocide, Yazidis were forgotten and left to the mercy of their Muslim neighbors. Their painful history was ignored, and it lacked proper documentation. Keeping in mind the forgotten history of the genocides suffered by the Yazidi community, peacefully living in Mount Sinjar and the Hakkari Mountains, this research focuses on documenting the instances of mass atrocities and genocides, the reasons behind such mass atrocities and the way forward. There is a common perception among the Yazidis and some scholars that the Yazidis suffered up to 74 genocides over their history; this research project offers a qualitative case study of the history of the genocides and mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis. It is important to adopt a research methodology that provides enough data to reach sound conclusions. To collect data, literature review and interviews were employed and the theory of epistemic violence as well as hermeneutics was used to analyze this data. This analysis provides a deeper understanding and knowledge of Yazidi genocides, mass atrocities and persecutions as well as their causes. It is an extremely important research for the Yazidi community and genocide studies because no research has ever been conducted to document the total number of genocides, persecutions and mass murders suffered by the Yazidis.



Introduction

It is yet to be determined how many genocides the Yazidi community has suffered and how many men, women and children were robbed of their right to exist. While discussing the future and the bridge between past and present, it is important to acknowledge the agony of the past. This research is a part of a postdoctoral project that bridges the gap between the scholarly work of the past and the factual data, and acknowledges the sufferings of the Yazidi community. It is a stepping-stone research project because no research has ever been conducted to determine the number of genocides, persecutions and mass murders suffered by the Yazidis.

For the first time, this research attempts to document, as one collection, massacres, mass murders and genocides that the Yazidis have suffered in their history. With the help of primary and secondary sources, this research only collects and gathers the scattered data of Yazidi genocides and mass atrocities. In order to determine the number of genocides and reasons behind these genocides, I used the following questions: How many Yazidi genocides have been documented? What were the reasons behind these genocides and persecutions? Whether or not all the mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis should be termed genocide? The constant persecution and victimization of the Yazidis has contributed to the ancient Mesopotamian region being the center of conflict and turmoil. Since the ISIS onslaught against the Yazidis in 2014, much has been written on the Yazidis, and many studies have been carried out on their current status and the crimes that have been committed against them. There is, however, a need to look at the issue through a historical and historiographic lens, and on why they have become secretive, segregated and one of the most marginalized groups in the world (Saeed "Personal Interview" 2020), and how many times they have been targeted by their neighbors because of their beliefs. This research tries to fill the scholarly gap and corresponds to the narrative of 74 Yazidi genocides to gain a deep insight into these issues.

Documenting these acts unearths critical information about Yazidi genocides for the first time, which will be a significant contribution to the field of genocide research, can help to stop the sufferings of the Yazidis and pave the way for sustainable peace in the region. Much of Yazidi religion and culture is based on and survives through oral tradition. Due to repeated victimization, the Yazidi young generation is stepping away from religion (Saeed "Personal Interview" 2020), and the older generation, the custodian of Yazidi memory, is on the verge of being extinct. This is why this research is extremely critical, in order to document the Yazidi oral traditions and knowledge that can shed light on the atrocities suffered by the Yazidis in the past. This research paper does not cover every era and every genocide suffered by the Yazidis throughout their history, it only highlights the main mass atrocities committed against the Yazidis and it also provides a better understanding of the dynamics of the conflict between the Yazidis and the Muslims that resulted in Yazidi victimization, turning their religion secretive and distancing themselves from their Kurdish identity because of the connection to their genocidal history (Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020).

Methodology and Literature Review

The Yazidis form a highly understudied community, and so there is lack of available literature, but at the same time, this lack provides an opportunity to conduct research where it is needed the most. This research project is a qualitative case study of the history of the genocides and mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis. It is important to adopt a research methodology that provides enough data to reach logical conclusions. M. D. Myers and D. A. Avison have described a research method as a strategy of inquiry which includes research design and data collection (Myers & Avison, 2002).

As the title of this research project suggests, it focuses on documenting and gathering data about the Yazidi genocides, mass atrocities, forced conversions and persecutions in the Middle East to establish a pathway for a broader research, which will determine how many genocides Yazidis have suffered, what the reasons were behind these genocides and persecutions and whether or not all the mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis should be termed genocide. This research paper focuses on 25 major genocides,



mass atrocities, persecutions and forced conversions. For this research paper, I used qualitative research method by interviewing five members of the Yazidi community, as interviews are a way of collecting factual and meaningful information (Kvale, 1996). I also used a literature review to scrutinize the available scholarly literature on the topic and to analyze collected data, I used the theory of epistemic violence. “Epistemic violence is an act of deliberately, intentionally, unintentionally, actively and consciously refusing, ignoring, neglecting, obstructing or undermining someone’s approach, understanding or interpretation of an event or a piece of information and knowledge” (Shakir, 2021, p. 41).

To explore historical facts and analyze past events, I reviewed the literature of some prominent scholars and historians who have worked extensively on Yazidi history and Yazidism. For centuries, Yazidis had been living as a lost, forgotten and misunderstood community (Shakir, 2021), but scholars such as P. G. Kreyenbroek, K. J. Rashow, John S. Guest, Birgöl Açıkyıldız and Michael Gunter have played an important role in documenting major historical events and the Yazidi struggle to survive their history. Yazidi socio-religious history is also full of painful stories because they are often labeled as devil worshippers. The work of Christine Allison, Khana Omarkhali and Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, as well as the data collected through the interviews, provide us a better understanding of socio-religious history of the Yazidis and their traumatic past. The term devil worshiper also played an important role in Yazidi persecutions as well as making Yazidism a secretive religion. Due to the fear of being marginalized, victimized and persecuted, the Yazidi community forbade their children to go to school and interact with the outer world (Ismael “Personal Interview” 2020). This explains that the Yazidis were under a constant threat of being killed because of their religious identity.

Since the Muslim invasion of the ancient Mesopotamian region in the 7th century (Gunter, 2008), Yazidis have been constantly under attack by their Muslim counterparts. Looking at the history of Yazidi forced conversion, persecution, massacres and genocides; I divide their history into four eras. In the ancient era or pre-Islamic era, as other ethnicities, regions and empires, the ancient Mesopotamian region also witnessed battles of dominance. The Medieval era, especially with the arrival of Islam, began the downfall or the era of Yazidi victimization. This was the period when the forced and mass conversion of the Yazidis took place. The pre-modern era or the era of the Ottoman and Safavid rivalry also continues the mass conversions, but in these eras we also see mass murders, massacres, persecution, genocides and systematic ethnic cleansing among the atrocities. Edip Gölbaşı, Wadie Jwaideh, Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya help us to understand the Yazidi struggle during this era. Other historians of Middle Eastern Studies and prominent scholars such as Kevin A. Brook, Vahan Baibourtian, Barbara Henning, Sabri Ateş, Marc Herzog and Shane Brennan also provide insights of the crimes committed against humanity.

The modern or post-colonial era brought different challenges to the Yazidi community. During this period, the Kurds in general started their campaign to have their own independent nation state and the Yazidi Kurds were extremely active in that campaign. With the passage of time, religious extremism, Islamization and Arabization began to dominate, and the Yazidi suffering continued. Baathists in general and Saddam Hussein in particular continued the policy of persecution, oppression, ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Yazidis. Ofra Bengio and M. U. Shakir’s scholarship explains the horrendous activities of that regime. One of the biggest reasons of the Yazidi genocides, persecution and mass atrocities was labelling them devil worshippers, inflicting epistemic violence and not accepting their testimony that they are not devil worshippers, which resulted in numerous mass atrocities and genocides, and culminated in the 2014 genocide at the hands of ISIS. G. C. Spivak and Kristie Dotson’s idea of epistemic violence help us understand how this phenomenon works.

As this research mainly focuses on genocide, there is a huge gap and flaw in the definition of the term genocide. Therefore, the next section recalibrates the term “Genocide” because the definition of Raphael Lemkin presented at the UN convention in 1948 is Holocaust-oriented and very vague, to favor the former Soviet Union and target the Nazi regime. Although many Yazidi genocides have been documented, no one knows exactly how many genocide the Yazidi community has suffered in their history and what the reason were of these genocides. This research also provides the exact number of these genocides, contextualizes and gathers information on the better-known Yazidi genocides in one document and explains the reasons with the help of in-depth analysis.



Explanation of Key Terms

Some terms will be new to some of the audience, and two terms are the backbone of this research and need explanation. The first term is Yazidi. Some scholars, such as Thomas Bois and Philip G. Kreyenbroek, believe that Yazidism was started by Sheikh Adi in the 12th century and continued by his disciples (Bois, 1966), but many scholars, Oriental and Occidental, argue that the original religion of the Kurds is Zoroastrianism and that the Yazidis are Kurds. Keeping in mind the fact that the Yazidis are Kurds and the ancient religion of the Kurds is Zoroastrianism, as I believe, it is strange to connect Yazidis to Islam and not to Zoroastrianism. In my understanding, since the arrival of Muslim Sufi Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, the currently practiced Yazidi religion is highly influenced by Islam. To avoid constant persecution and victimization, the Yazidis have camouflaged themselves and syncretized their religion, but they belong to the ancient religion of the Kurds (Shakir, 2021). It is important to note that the Muslim followers of Sheikh Adi are known as Adawis. Even though Yazidis have continuously denied the fact that they have no connection with Islam, many Muslim rulers, especially the Ottomans, were of the opinion that the Yazidis are a deviant sect of Islam.

In 1906, the 'representatives of the Yezidi community submitted a petition to the Ottoman government requesting that their religious affiliation on identification cards be changed from 'Muslim' to 'Yezidi'. A special Council of Ministers, which gathered at the Sublime Porte in order to discuss the Yezidis' petition, rejected the request since, according to the council, the Yezidis were essentially Muslim, and to officially recognize them as non-Muslim due to their 'evil beliefs' would not be politically appropriate (Gölbaşı, 2016, p. 133).

Many scholars and the Yazidi community believe that Yazidism is an ancient syncretic religion, whose main source is Zoroastrianism. The words Yazidi, Ezid, Ez da, Yazda are connected to Yezdan, which means created by God and worshipers of God (Bearman et al, 2002, Comerford, 2014, Shakir, 2021). Therefore, in this research project, the term Yazidis, Yezidis, Yazidism or any related term refers to an ancient religion. It is important to highlight that the Yazidism that is practiced now is greatly influenced by Islam and Arab culture, especially after the arrival of its most recent reformist Sheikh Adi (Saeed "Personal Interview" 2020, Jundi, "Personal Interview" 2020).

The second key term of this research is genocide. When in the 1930s Germany started mistreating, marginalizing and persecuting the Jews, a Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin was very critical towards such activities and started highlighting through his writings. Later on, in 1943, he coined the term 'genocide' to express the atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi forces against the Jews. While explaining the term, Raphael Lemkin mentioned that although the word genocide was new, the concept was an ancient one (Kuper, 1981). After the Nuremberg trials, in 1948, the United Nations organized a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Raphael Lemkin was the mastermind behind the draft of the 1948 convention and single handedly lobbied to define the term genocide (Humphrey, 1984).

Along with Raphael Lemkin, a British international lawyer, Hersch Lauterpacht, was very active in holding Germans accountable for the crimes committed against the Jews. Hersch Lauterpacht was of the opinion that Nazi German forces should be tried for the crime against humanity instead of Genocide, because "to prove genocide you had to show that the act of killing was motivated by an intent to destroy the group, whereas for crimes against humanity no such intent had to be shown" (Sands, 2016, p. xxiv). By and large, the prosecution team of Nuremberg trials adopted Hersch Lauterpacht's definition of the crimes against humanity, but Raphael Lemkin persisted on lobbying in the favor of his definition of the term genocide and successfully inducted in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948 (Sands, 2016). Article II of this convention "defines genocide as the commission of certain acts with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group" (The United Nations Convention, 1948). Many scholars and critics think that the definition of Raphael Lemkin presented at the convention is Holocaust-oriented and very vague to favor the former Soviet Union.



Philippe Sands, Frank Chalk, Curtis W. Lembricht, Kurt Jonassohn, Steven R. Ratner and others have heavily criticized the definition of the term genocide by the convention, and they came up with their own definitions (Lembricht, 1999). While agreeing with some of their points, I understand and define genocide differently. Therefore, all the atrocities will be analyzed and categorized according to the following definition: Genocide is an intentional act of a state, religious or socio-political group to damage, to kill, ethnically cleanse or to destroy a group of people based on their national, ethnic, racial or religious background. This act can be an active physical action or an intentional as well as psychological plan to harm or prevent ethnic, racial or religious growth of a community. It is also worth noting that this definition considers a planned and systematic rape of a state backed, religious or socio-political group(s) against a nation, ethnicity, race or religious community a genocidal tool, while the UN Convention 1948 did not mention anything about rape. The Yazidi community strongly believes that the atrocities they have faced are only because of their religious background. If they were not Yazidis, they would never go through all this (Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020, Jundi "Personal Interview" 2020). Forced marriages and rape is not a new phenomenon to prevent and control minorities' and adversaries' population. Muslim leaders such as Mu'tasim Bi'llah, Badr al-Din Lu'lu, Bedir Khan Beg, ISIS and others used this method to impregnate Yazidi women, so their children would become Muslims (Awsman "Personal Interview" 2021, Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020).

History of Yazidi Sufferings

War crimes, ethnic cleansing, mass murders, forced conversions, massacres and the destruction of entire villages and cities is not a new phenomenon. The term genocide merely gave a new name to brutal socio-military practices that had been carried out for centuries. Every genocide and mass atrocity unearths the horrors human beings suffer at the hands of other humans and shows that to exterminate their adversaries, humans will go to any length. Many scholars and members of the Yazidi community such as S. A. Omer, L. Morris, Zozan H. Saeed, Rashd Dawod Jundi and others believe that the Yazidi community has suffered 74 genocides (Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020, Jundi "Personal Interview" 2020, Omer, 2016 and Morris, Washington Post, August 3, 2014). The historical facts and various research studies show that this socio-religious community has suffered numerous massacres, mass atrocities, oppression, persecutions, epistemic violence, victimization and genocides at the hands of many groups, especially Muslims. However, there is not a single research publication, which proves or disproves this claim, or even investigates it in any depth.

Although Yazidis have been suffering mass atrocities, forced conversions, persecutions and genocides for centuries, the 2014 Yazidi genocide at the hands of ISIS sparked rage across the world. The record, although sparse, is not devoid of fact. While looking at the history of the Mesopotamian region, especially since the Muslim invasion in the 7th century, the Yazidis have been the target of forced conversion, segregation, persecution and genocide (Gunter, 2008, Kizilhan and Noll-Hussong, 2017, Shakir, 2021). Arab invaders, Ottomans, Safavids and the Sunni Kurds have repeatedly attacked, enslaved, forcefully converted and killed the Yazidis (Guest, 2012, Esposito, 2009, Shakir, 2021, Kizilhan and Noll-Hussong, 2017).

As mentioned, the mass conversion and oppression of the Yazidis started with the arrival of Omar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph of Islam, in 634 AD, but systematic ethnic cleansing, persecutions and genocide of the Yazidis started in the 9th and 10th century (Esposito, 2009, Acikyildiz, 2014, Manucharyan, 2015). One of the first persecutions of the Yazidis by Muslims was undertaken by the eighth Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tasim Bi'llah (833–842 AD) in the north of Mosul, which resulted in a revolt by Yazidi leader Mir Jafar bin Mir Hasan Dasni in 838. Initially, the Yazidis survived the attack and defeated the Arab army by inflicting heavy losses on them, but later, al-Mu'tasim Bi'llah, the Turkish speaking Khazari commander, led the Abbasid army to defeat the Kurds in 941. The Abbasids did not spare anyone, killing unarmed Yazidis as well. To avoid a brutal and painful death, Yazidi leader Mir Jafar bin Mir Hasan Dasni committed suicide (Manucharyan, 2015, Brook, 2018).

In the beginning of the 13th century, Mongols started establishing their rule in ancient Mesopotamia and



surrounding regions. The Yazidis, who were one of the most powerful tribes in the region (Herzog and Brennan, 2014), resisted, and Sheikh Sakhr Abu l-Barakat, the nephew and successor of Sheikh Adi, along with his men, was assassinated in 1221 (Açıkyıldız, 2009, Kreyenbroek and Rashow, 2005). A few years later, another Muslim ruler from Mosul, Badr al-Din Lu'lu, started his brutal campaign against the Yazidis due to their religio-political differences. Badr al-Din Lu'lu was aware of the strength, devotion and history of the revolts of the Yazidis, therefore, he was afraid of another Kurdish rebellion. In 1254, Sheikh Adi II, grand nephew of Sheikh Adi and son of Sheikh Sakhr Abu l-Barakat, and his 200 men were executed, their bodies dismembered (Herzog and Brennan, 2014, Açıkyıldız, 2009, Kreyenbroek and Rashow, 2005).

The Yazidi resilience continued, and they survived without any major leadership for several decades. They unified again, but the rivalry and hatred between the Muslims and Yazidis continued. Once again, in 1415, Muslim neighbors of the Yazidis, under the leadership of a Shafe'i cleric, Izz al-Din al Hulwani, attacked the Yazidi community and killed many Yazidis. This time, they even demolished Sheikh Adi's tomb, desecrated the grave and burned his bones (Herzog and Brennan, 2014, Kreyenbroek and Rashow, 2005). The historical record between 1415 and 1640 does not tell much about the situation of the Yazidis except for their revolt against the Safavids in 1506-1510 and their forced exile and persecution during the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514. But looking at the pattern, it is hard to believe that the Yazidis were spared and left to live in peace. Therefore, there is need to conduct thorough archival research to uncover the facts.

The Ottomans under Sultan Selim I considered the minorities, especially Alevis and Yazidis, a threat to the state. Therefore, during the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, he killed more than 50,000 Alevis and exiled thousands of Yazidis. This was the time when the Sultans accelerated the process of Islamization and Sunnification in the region (Issa, 2016). The blame game from the Muslim side continued. Whenever Muslims felt threatened by the Yazidis and their socio-political and socio-religious power, the easiest way to threaten them was to play the religious card, and accuse them of violating Islamic laws. The most dominant and major community before the arrival of Islam was squeezed into a minority within a few centuries (Aboona, 2008). For almost a millennium, Arabs were targeting the Yazidis and then the Ottomans took over. One of such incidents was in 1640, when 40,000 Ottoman soldiers attacked Mount Sinjar and surrounding areas, killed more than 3,060 Yazidis, and burned down over 200 villages (Yale College Yazidi Policy Paper, 2020).

The 1640 Yazidi genocide by the Ottomans made an already bitter relationship more bitter. The Ottomans continued their struggle to dominate the Kurds in general and Yazidi Kurds in particular, and the Yazidis kept fighting their way. Using an old Ottoman tactic, they tried to create rivalries between the Yazidis by offering some tribal leaders higher ranks, because they always single out people and support one particular group against the other (Fuccaro, 1994). This resulted in some revolts within the community and leaders like Izz al-Din, Hussein Beg and Dasini Mirza Beg stood against each other and were later assassinated (Herzog and Brennan, 2014). The Yazidi community followed the principle "my enemy's enemy is my friend" and established a very strong relationship with the Armenians, which cost them a lot.

The period between 1830 to 1845 was extremely difficult for the Yazidi community, where the nexus of two Muslim Kurds, Bedir Khan Beg and Muhammad Pasha, constantly targeted the Yazidis. Mîr Mihemedê Soran or Emir Muhammad Kor, also known as Mîrê Kor, was a Kurdish tribal leader who revived the Soran Emirates (a medieval Kurdish empire that was later conquered by the Ottomans in 1514). As a result of the Russo-Turkish War (1828-29) and the Turco-Egyptian War (1831-33), there was a power vacuum in the region that provided Mîrê Kor with an opportunity to establish the lost Kurdish empire in Rawandiz. He gathered the local tribes and conquered Zakho, Duhok, Amedi, Bohtan and its capital, Cizre. In newly captured areas, Mîrê Kor oppressed, persecuted and committed genocide against the Yazidis, which Yazidis remember as the Mîrê Kor genocide (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020). After a series of attempts, the Ottomans regained control in 1836.

In 1831, Muhammad Pasha and his forces attacked the villagers around Chemchemal region and killed many Yazidis. He was an extremely ambitious and outrageous leader. He continued his campaign against



the Yazidis, and near Mosul he committed a massacre of the Yazidis. In 1832, he killed thousands of civilians and thousands were enslaved and sold in the market (Baibourtian, 2013, Jwaideh, 2006). The year 1832 brought another spell of atrocities against the Yazidis, this time at the hands of Bedir Khan Beg, who was a Yazidi before converting to Islam (Henning, 2018). He attacked Sheikhan and massacred almost the entire Yazidi population. They captured women and children, and forcefully converted them to Islam and enslaved them. He also married a Yazidi girl. During this massacre only a few good swimmers, who were able to flee to Sinjar, survived. Bedir Khan's army did not spare Christians and other minorities either, and committed crimes against humanity on a regular basis (Henning, 2018, Baibourtian, 2013).

Bedir Khan Beg and Muhammad Pasha were taking turns to target the Yazidis. 1833 was the year when Muhammad Pasha attacked this vulnerable and marginalized community. Because Bedir Khan had attacked and killed the majority of the Yazidis in Sheikhan and the remaining Yazidis had fled to Sinjar, Muhammad Pasha decided to target Sinjar. Hundreds of the Yazidis were killed in the attack (Baibourtian, 2013, Ateş, 2013). The persecution, marginalization and genocidal campaign against the Yazidis that started a millennium ago was still on. Years of violent campaign against the Yazidis gave him substantial support and he became more powerful in the region, to a point that he decided to rebel against the Ottomans. In 1844, he again attacked the Yazidis living in the mountains around the Tur Abdin region. His army destroyed numerous Yazidi villages, killed men and captured young women and children. He forced entire villages to convert to Islam. This was yet another massacre against the Yazidi community (Pal, 2021).

Although in 1849 the Yazidi community got legal status as a minority, they were far from being spared. The persecutions, marginalization, genocides and forced conversions remained the tool of ethnic cleansing against the Yazidis. The period between 1890-1892 was one of the most catastrophic and brutal times for the Yazidis. Yazidis suffered mass murders, forced conversions and massacres during Hamidian rule (Allison, 2014, Golbasi, 2013). The Hamidian cavalry not only massacred thousands of Yazidis, but also overtook Lalish, the holiest shrine of the Yazidis, and converted it to a Quran learning center; later, the Yazidis took back control of Lalish (Acikyildiz, 2014). This shows how one specific community was the target of repeated barbaric acts. "The Yazidi community has been the victim of many violent attacks and persecutions throughout history" (Zoonen and Wirya, 2017, p. 9) and this trend of persecution continued for many centuries (Bengio, 1998).

During the Ottoman era there were patches when the "Yazidis were targeted by campaigns of forced conversion and religious violence" (Zoonen and Wirya, 2017, p. 9). Although the Yazidis had been targeted before and forced to convert to Islam, the Ottomans treated them with extreme violence. Not only did they commit epistemic violence against the Yazidis by not accepting their testimony that they are a separate religion, but also they attacked them, killed them, persecuted them and forcefully converted them to Islam (Gölbaşı, 2013, Gölbaşı, 2016). Some of the persecutions of this era are even remembered in Yazidi religious gatherings. "The 1832 massacre of Yazidis by the Bey of Rowanduz still forms part of their cultural memory" (Kreyenbroek and Rashow 2005, p. 5), and among the Yazidis this genocide is known as the Mîrê Kor genocide (Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020).

It is an established fact that when during WWI the Ottomans committed Armenian genocide, along with 1.5 million Armenians, 300,000 Yazidis were also killed. The Yazidis fought against the Ottomans alongside the Armenians. The majority of the soldiers in the Hamidiyan cavalry were the Kurds. Therefore, most of the Yazidis living in Armenia and some in other parts of the world including Kurdistan consider themselves Yazidi (Shehadi, 2020, Murad, 2017, Aghajanian, 2014 Rezvani, 2013). Yazidis experienced repeated alienation, othering and scapegoating by the Turkish government and other Muslim neighbors that resulted in a significant migration to Europe, especially to Germany.

In particular, two Yazidi migrations changed the entire composition of this indigenous nation, and the way it looks now differs from previous centuries. The most catastrophic was the Yazidi persecution of 2014 by ISIS and the other was the Ottomans' religious oppression at the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century, which forced a huge number of Yazidis to emigrate to Armenia and Georgia (Omarkhali, 2017). Although the Yazidis had escaped the Ottoman, Kurd and Arab victimization as hav-



ing always supported the Armenians, the Armenians did not accept them and the term Yazidi was used as an insult (The UN CERD, 2017).

The Yazidis were like rolling stones, moving from one oppression to the next. When the British Mandate took over Iraq in 1921, the Yazidis thought they would be able to live a better life under the western rulers, but within a short period Yazidis realized that it was just a dream. The British army started invading the Yazidi villages and killed hundreds of the Yazidis (Hassen, 2016). After the formation of Iraq at the end of World War I, the Yazidis' suffering did not stop; they suffered mass murders and genocide under the Baath regime (Middle East Watch Report, 1993, Murad, 2017).

The last two decades have also been unfavorable for the Yazidis. In April 2007, a group of extremists, after identifying 23 Yazidis by their identity cards, kidnapped and killed them. Three months later, in August 2007, four cars with bombs exploded in northern Iraq and killed around 800 people, and more than 1,500 people were injured (Saeed "Personal Interview" 2020, Jundi, "Personal Interview" 2020). The infamous 2014 genocide by ISIS is the latest major atrocity that Yazidis have experienced (Murad, 2017). It resulted in killing, kidnapping and enslaving thousands of Yazidis. More than 500,000 Yazidis had to flee their homes and became refugees. Thousands of women were raped, enslaved or sold as sex slaves. Thousands of young children were made to join ISIS. Many children who were born during the sex slavery were taken away from their mothers, and over 2,800 Yazidi women are still missing. All these atrocities were a result of victimization of the Yazidis as a part of Yazidophobia and genocide (Awsman "Personal Interview" 2021, Hasan "Personal Interview" 2020).

Conclusion

Historical analysis shows that the Yazidis have been subjected to numerous atrocities. Some scholars and many Yazidis believe that the Yazidi community has suffered 74 genocide throughout the history, and it is probable that they have suffered a huge number of genocides, even if not exactly 74. It is important and necessary to dig deeper into this matter and to analyze why one specific group has been targeted over and over again, and why no one has taken steps to prevent such atrocities and establish sustainable peace for the Yazidi community as well as for the region. This research, therefore, also focuses on documenting, collecting and preserving written and oral memories of the crimes experienced by the Yazidis. This project is a part of a more extensive research that aims to develop the historiography of the Yazidi genocides to collect detailed information that can be provided in one place.

The objective of this brief paper was to explore and conceptualize the genocides, persecutions and mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidi community at the hands of Muslims since their invasion in the first half of the 7th century by tracing them historically and up to the present. Along with its main questions: How many Yazidi genocides have been documented? What were the reasons behind these genocides and persecutions? Whether or not all the mass atrocities suffered by the Yazidis should be termed genocide? This conceptualization also entailed the question, what is genocide and whether these persecutions, mass atrocities and massacres are to be qualified as genocides. In the following paragraphs of conclusion, I briefly answer the questions and analyze the atrocities suffered by the Yazidis against my proposed definition and understanding of the term genocide.

The first part of my definition understand genocide as "an intentional act of a state, religious or socio-political group to damage, to kill, ethnically cleanse or to destroy a group of people based on their national, ethnic, racial or religious background." Historical analysis of the events and the data collected through the interviews show that Yazidis were intentionally and systematically victimized and they were denied their right to exist. The states or the socio-political and religious groups such as Arab invaders, the Ottomans, Safavids, the Kurds and extremist group ISIS did not like the Yazidis because of their religious belief, and the label of devil worshipers was falsely affiliated with them. Another very important point to be noted is that the Yazidis have never been the attackers or invaders, and have never waged or initiated a war, but they have retaliated. It explains that the Yazidis were not military adversaries of the Muslims, so the crimes committed against the Yazidis were an intentional and planned effort to eliminate them.



The second part of the definition says that genocide “can be an active physical action or an intentional as well as psychological plan to harm or prevent ethnic, racial or religious growth of a community.” The examples provided in the discussion make very evident that not only were Yazidis targeted physically, killed, massacred, persecuted and forcefully converted to Islam, but also that they suffered psychological damage. For more than 1400 years, they have been living under a constant psychological and mental pressure that at any given day Muslims can come and kill them or damage their property as well as kidnap them and their women and children. It means the Yazidis have been living under continuous physical as well as psychological pressure.

The third part includes rape, which was ignored during the United Nation Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948. This definition considers “a planned and systematic rape of a state backed, religious or socio-political group(s) against a nation, ethnicity, race or religious community a genocidal tool.” Scholars like Lisa Sharlach believe that rape has been used as a genocidal tool throughout history. She gives examples of former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina), East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and Rwanda, where rape left unimaginable and irreversible effects on the survivors (2010). Not only in 2014 were Yazidi women and children kidnapped, enslaved and sold as sex slaves, but this tool had been used previously. Muslim such as Mu’tasim Bi’llah, Badr al-Din Lu’lu, Bedir Khan Beg, ISIS and others forcefully converted and married Yazidi women. This act is not only falls under the act of rape, but also it is a way of preventing a nation, ethnicity, race and religion to grow. Therefore, the Yazidis have suffered this crime as well.

Genocides and mass atrocities have brought unimaginable agony and suffering to millions in human history. Documenting evidence of these genocides and mass atrocities is critical to provide justice to the victims, to set legal precedent and to define the epistemological, historical, psychological, anthropological and political nature of the incidents. This brief overview shows that Yazidis have suffered numerous genocides. During my research, I have come across around 25 incidents of genocide suffered by the Yazidis. There are periods, sometimes up to 200 years, that the historical record is quiet about the Yazidis, but looking at the pattern of constant victimization, it is almost impossible that the Yazidis were left to live in peace. Therefore, a thorough investigation and archival research is needed to examine these periods to determine the conditions of the Yazidi community during these periods. It is quite possible that the number of genocides committed against the Yazidis will be doubled. It is sad that very few Yazidi genocides are recognized and acknowledged as genocides. In order to prevent such atrocities, the international community needs to recognize the crime against humanity and bring the culprits to justice.

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