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The Silent Horror: Yazidi Girls Under ISIS Rule

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Abstract:
In August 2014, the Yazidi people of northern Iraq became victims of one of the most methodically organized genocides of the twenty-first century. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), invoking a perverted religious justification, unleashed a campaign of extermination, enslavement, and cultural annihilation against the Yazidis of Sinjar. Among the most affected were Yazidi girls; children abducted, trafficked, sexually enslaved, and indoctrinated in captivity. This paper explores the systematic mechanisms of gender-based violence as an instrument of genocide, drawing from survivor testimonies, United Nations reports, human rights investigations, and legal analyses. It situates the Yazidi genocide within a broader historical context of persecution and evaluates the international community's delayed recognition of these crimes. The research examines the cultural destruction, the trafficking networks established by ISIS, and the enduring trauma faced by survivors. It further argues that the failure to ensure justice and restitution for Yazidi victims reflects a global moral lapse in enforcing the principles of international humanitarian law. By weaving together history, law, and lived experience, this paper seeks to bear witness to the enduring pain of Yazidi girls and to call for a renewed global commitment to truth, accountability, and the reconstruction of a shattered community.

Keywords: Yazidi Genocide, Sinjar, ISIS, Sexual Slavery, Gender-Based Violence, Human Trafficking, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity, International Humanitarian Law, Survivor Testimonies, Cultural Erasure, Transitional Justice.

Introduction

The genocide committed by the Islamic State (ISIS) against the Yazidi community in August 2014 represents a convergence of religious extremism, gendered violence, and the complete collapse of moral restraint in modern warfare. What unfolded in Sinjar was not simply a military conquest but a deliberate campaign of annihilation targeting an ancient ethno-religious minority whose distinct faith; Sharfadin, a syncretic belief system rooted in pre-Islamic Mesopotamian traditions, was falsely branded as "devil worship."[1] For centuries, Yazidis endured persecution under successive empires, from the Ottoman massacres of the nineteenth century to the forced conversions under Saddam Hussein's Arabization policies.[2] Yet nothing in their tragic history equaled the systematic, ideologically sanctioned brutality inflicted by ISIS.

The assault on Sinjar in early August 2014 marked the beginning of a nightmare that would forever scar the Yazidi people. ISIS militants encircled Yazidi villages, executed men en masse, and abducted women and children. What followed was a well-documented pattern of forced religious conversion, human trafficking, and sexual enslavement—acts that the United Nations later identified as constituting genocide and crimes against humanity.[3] By the end of 2014, approximately 6,000 Yazidi women and girls had been captured, many sold in slave markets in Mosul, Raqqa, and Tal Afar, or distributed among ISIS fighters as spoils of war.[4]

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The targeting of Yazidi girls represented more than opportunistic cruelty; it was a calculated act of ideological warfare. ISIS's propaganda openly justified the enslavement of non-Muslim women, invoking distorted interpretations of early Islamic jurisprudence to legitimize sexual slavery. The group's magazine Dabiq published chilling treatises detailing the "revival of slavery before the Hour," framing the rape of Yazidi girls as both a divine right and a spiritual duty.[5] Such theological perversions transformed mass rape into a weapon of both conquest and conversion, designed to erase Yazidi identity through the control of women's bodies.

International observers were initially slow to grasp the magnitude of the horror. As the world's attention focused on ISIS's territorial advances and urban bombings, the suffering of Yazidi women remained largely invisible. It was only through the testimony of survivors—many of them children—that the full scale of the atrocities emerged. Organizations such as Yazda, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch began collecting detailed testimonies describing captivity, forced marriage, repeated sexual assault, and torture.[6] These accounts not only confirmed the genocidal intent of ISIS but also revealed the gendered architecture of its violence: the systematic separation of women and men, the establishment of slave registries, and the use of online networks to sell Yazidi girls across borders.[7]

Beyond the immediate physical violence, the Yazidi genocide exposed deep failures in international protection mechanisms. Despite clear evidence of crimes under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, meaningful intervention came too late. The delayed recognition of the genocide by major powers underscored the persistent gap between moral condemnation and actionable justice.[8] Even years after ISIS's territorial defeat, thousands of Yazidi women remain missing, their fates unknown.

This research paper seeks to explore the Yazidi genocide through the specific lens of its gendered dimensions, focusing on the experiences of Yazidi girls under ISIS rule. It will examine how sexual slavery was weaponized as a tool of ethnic cleansing, how survivors continue to navigate trauma and displacement, and how the quest for justice remains fraught with political and procedural obstacles. The analysis will draw on a combination of survivor narratives, UN documentation, NGO reports, and academic studies to reconstruct both the human and structural dimensions of this tragedy.

While the immediate acts of violence have been extensively documented, this paper argues that the deeper horror lies in the ongoing silence; the world's failure to translate recognition into restitution, and empathy into policy. The suffering of Yazidi girls remains both a scar on the conscience of humanity and a warning of how religious ideology can be manipulated into a weapon of annihilation.

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Historical Background of the Yazidis;

The Yazidis, or Ezidis, are one of the most ancient ethno-religious minorities of Mesopotamia, whose history stretches back thousands of years and whose faith reflects a syncretic fusion of pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, and Sufi elements. Their religion, Sharfadin, centers on the worship of a single supreme God who delegates the care of the world to seven holy beings known as Heft Sur or "Seven Angels."[9] Foremost among these angels is Tawûsê Melek; the Peacock Angel, who symbolizes divine light, repentance, and renewal. This theological emphasis on divine reconciliation has been persistently misunderstood by outsiders, particularly by neighboring Muslim communities, who have mischaracterized the Yazidis as "devil worshippers" due to a superficial resemblance between Tawûsê Melek and the Islamic figure of Iblis.[10]

The origins of Yazidism remain complex and contested. Some scholars, such as Philip Kreyenbroek and John Guest, argue that the religion developed as an indigenous Kurdish faith that predates Islam, later absorbing influences from Sufi mysticism during the twelfth century.[11] The central figure in Yazidi spiritual history is Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, a Sufi mystic of Umayyad descent who established the religious center at Lalish in the mountains north of Mosul. His teachings; emphasizing purity, nonviolence, and a cyclical view of time, formed the theological foundation of the modern Yazidi community.[12]

From the outset, the Yazidis' religious distinctiveness made them vulnerable to persecution. Under Ottoman rule, they were subjected to repeated campaigns of extermination, particularly during the nineteenth century when imperial and local Kurdish authorities viewed them as heretical. Historical records detail at least 72 massacres committed against the Yazidis since the fifteenth century, many of which sought to forcibly convert or annihilate entire villages.[13] These massacres forged a collective identity rooted in survival; a theme that continues to shape Yazidi consciousness.

During the late Ottoman and early British Mandate periods, Yazidis occupied a fragile socio-political position. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the redrawing of Middle Eastern borders fractured Yazidi communities across Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, leaving them isolated from both political power and international recognition.[14] Their mountain strongholds, particularly in Sinjar (Shingal) and the Sheikhan region, became both a refuge and a prison, limiting integration and economic opportunity.

The rise of Arab nationalism and Ba'athist ideology in the twentieth century deepened Yazidi marginalization. Under Saddam Hussein, policies of Arabization targeted Kurdish and non-Arab minorities alike. Entire Yazidi villages were destroyed or forcibly relocated to collective towns (mujamma'at) designed to control and assimilate them.[15] Simultaneously, Yazidis were misclassified as Arabs in official censuses to dilute their ethnic distinctiveness and weaken Kurdish demographic claims to the Sinjar region.[16] This state-sponsored manipulation of identity would have lasting consequences, leaving Yazidis politically voiceless when ISIS emerged decades later.

Socially, Yazidis maintained a closed religious structure governed by hereditary castes; sheikhs, pirs, and murids, with strict endogamy to preserve ritual purity. Their oral tradition, transmitted through hymns (qewls), stories, and sacred recitations, sustained a spiritual continuity even under intense external

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pressure.[17] Yet this isolation also contributed to their vulnerability: by the early 2000s, Yazidis remained one of the few religious minorities in Iraq with minimal external political alliances or institutional protections.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent collapse of central authority unleashed a wave of sectarian violence that profoundly affected the Yazidis. In 2007, coordinated suicide bombings in the Yazidi towns of Qahtaniyah and Jazeera killed more than 500 people, marking one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in post-invasion Iraq.[18] The perpetrators, affiliated with al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI); the precursor to ISIS, framed the attack as punishment for "apostasy." This event foreshadowed the genocidal intent that would culminate in Sinjar seven years later.

The Yazidi response to persecution has historically been resilience and adaptation rather than violent resistance. Their theology lacks a concept of holy war or retribution; instead, it emphasizes cosmic balance and purification through endurance. However, centuries of oppression have also engendered a deep sense of fatalism and mistrust toward both state and neighboring Muslim populations. As anthropologist Nelida Fuccaro observes, "The Yazidis' survival has depended upon the preservation of secrecy, both theological and social; a veil that protects their world but also isolates it."[19]

By 2014, prior to the Sinjar massacre, the Yazidi population in Iraq numbered approximately 550,000, concentrated mainly in Nineveh Province. Their villages were administratively divided between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and territories controlled by Baghdad, a political ambiguity that would prove catastrophic when ISIS launched its offensive.[20] Neither the Iraqi army nor the Kurdish Peshmerga effectively defended Sinjar, leading to accusations of betrayal from Yazidi survivors who felt abandoned by both governments.

The long arc of Yazidi history reveals a pattern of cyclical persecution, each episode reinforcing collective trauma while simultaneously eroding institutional resilience. When ISIS invaded Sinjar, it tapped into centuries-old prejudices portraying Yazidis as infidels; a narrative used by past rulers to justify oppression. The 2014 genocide, therefore, was not an isolated aberration but the culmination of historical processes: theological misrepresentation, political marginalization, and the failure of modern states to protect minority identities.

The Yazidi experience encapsulates the vulnerability of small, non-proselytizing religions in a region marked by absolutist ideologies and shifting borders. Their suffering under ISIS must be understood not only as a contemporary atrocity but as the latest manifestation of a continuous historical struggle to survive in a world hostile to difference.

The next section of this paper will analyze how these historical trajectories converged in August 2014, transforming Sinjar into the epicenter of a meticulously planned campaign of genocide and sexual enslavement—a modern catastrophe rooted in ancient prejudice.

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The Sinjar Massacre and the Genesis of Genocide;

The Sinjar massacre of August 2014 marked one of the darkest episodes in modern Middle Eastern history. It was not merely an act of wartime brutality but a premeditated genocide, meticulously executed with ideological precision and logistical efficiency. Sinjar (Shingal in Kurdish), located in Iraq's Nineveh Governorate, was home to approximately 400,000 Yazidis before ISIS's advance. Perched between Mosul and the Syrian border, the region's geography made it both strategically valuable and perilously exposed. Its mountains, long a sanctuary for persecuted Yazidis, became a death trap when ISIS encircled the area in early August 2014.[21]

The Invasion and Collapse of Defense;

In the days preceding the assault, ISIS forces; emboldened by their rapid victories in Mosul, Tikrit, and Tal Afar, mobilized thousands of fighters toward Sinjar. The Yazidis, poorly armed and dependent on Kurdish Peshmerga units for protection, were left vulnerable when those very forces abruptly withdrew without warning on the night of August 2–3, 2014.[22] Survivors later recalled scenes of chaos and disbelief as families fled their villages, only to find ISIS convoys closing in from multiple directions. Within forty-eight hours, ISIS had seized most of the Sinjar region, including the towns of Kocho, Hardan, and Siba Sheikh Khidir.

The retreat of Kurdish forces remains one of the most controversial aspects of the tragedy. Yazidi witnesses accused the Peshmerga of abandoning them to their fate, while Kurdish officials later argued that they were outnumbered and ill-equipped. The power vacuum left by their withdrawal allowed ISIS to capture thousands of civilians almost unopposed. In the words of one survivor, "We were told we would be protected until the last bullet. Then, in one night, everyone vanished."[23]

Thousands of Yazidis fled into the Sinjar Mountains, where they were besieged without food, water, or shelter. Temperatures exceeded 45°C (113°F), and dozens of children and elderly people perished from dehydration within days.[24] The images of starving Yazidi families trapped on the mountain; broadcast globally in early August, forced international attention upon what was rapidly becoming a humanitarian catastrophe.

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Ideological and Theological Justification;
ISIS's assault on Sinjar was driven by a genocidal ideology rooted in the group's apocalyptic worldview. In its propaganda, ISIS categorized Yazidis as mushrikun; polytheists outside the Abrahamic fold and therefore unprotected under Islamic law.[25] This classification was essential: while Christians and Jews could theoretically avoid death through payment of the jizya (tax for non-Muslims), Yazidis were declared beyond redemption. An ISIS pamphlet distributed in Mosul shortly after the capture of Sinjar stated that Yazidis "should be killed where found, and their women and children enslaved."[26]

ISIS's own publication, Dabiq, expanded on this doctrine, asserting that the "enslavement of the pagan women is a firmly established aspect of the Sharia that will remain until the Day of Resurrection."[27] By weaponizing the archaic texts, ISIS sought both theological legitimacy and a powerful recruitment tool for foreign fighters drawn by promises of sexual access and divine sanction.

This ideological framework effectively dehumanized Yazidi women, transforming them into commodities in a religiously framed economy of enslavement. Women and girls, some as young as nine, were separated from their families, transported to holding centers, and catalogued for sale. Men and elderly women, deemed useless for the slave market, were executed en masse. In the village of Kocho, for instance, over 400 men were killed in a single day, while women and children were loaded into trucks bound for Mosul and Raqqa.[28]

The Machinery of Extermination;
The execution phase of ISIS's genocide unfolded with chilling efficiency. In multiple villages, the militants gathered residents under the pretext of conversion or safety. In Kocho, survivors recounted how local ISIS commander Abu Hamza ordered villagers to assemble in the schoolyard. Men were told to convert to Islam or face death; when they refused, they were driven to nearby fields and shot in groups. Women and children were then taken to Mosul, where they were separated into categories by age and appearance.[29]

Satellite imagery analyzed by the United Nations later confirmed the existence of mass graves near Kocho, Solagh, and Hardan.[30] Excavations beginning in 2019 revealed bodies bound and blindfolded, consistent with execution-style killings. The UN's investigative team on ISIS crimes (UNITAD) concluded that the "intent to destroy the Yazidi people as a distinct religious group was evident in the pattern, scale, and organization of the killings."[31]

The mountain siege further exemplified ISIS's genocidal intent. For over ten days, approximately 50,000 Yazidis remained stranded without humanitarian aid. ISIS fighters surrounded the base of the mountains, firing upon anyone attempting escape. The U.S.-led coalition eventually intervened with airdrops of food and water, followed by targeted airstrikes that opened a corridor for evacuation by Syrian Kurdish forces (YPG). However, by the time the siege was lifted, thousands had already perished.[32]

Gendered Atrocities as Strategy;
Unlike most genocides, where sexual violence is a by-product of conflict, in the case of Sinjar it was an institutionalized strategy. ISIS's bureaucratic system for distributing Yazidi women mirrored that of an administrative trade network. Records recovered from Mosul and Raqqa show that ISIS maintained

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detailed registries documenting the capture, sale, and transfer of female captives, including pricing based on age and physical condition.[33]

These documents, corroborated by testimonies collected by the Yazda Organization and the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA), reveal how Yazidi girls were trafficked through an internal slave market with receipts, auctions, and online listings circulated among ISIS fighters via encrypted apps such as Telegram and WhatsApp.[34] Captives were sold multiple times, often resold after brief periods of "ownership." The systematic nature of this trade underscores its role as a state-sponsored enterprise of sexual terror, sanctioned by ISIS's religious hierarchy.

ISIS propaganda portrayed the enslavement of Yazidi women as the restoration of an early Islamic practice that had been "abandoned by apostates." The group's judicial departments issued "fatwas" defining permissible sexual conduct with captives, including rules on menstruation, virginity testing, and resale.[35] Such grotesque bureaucratization of sexual violence represented an unprecedented attempt to codify rape as a religious act; a fusion of sexual predation and ideological zeal.

The Failure of Protection;

While the world watched ISIS's rapid territorial expansion, the Yazidis were left largely defenseless. The Iraqi government, crippled by sectarian divisions, lacked both the capability and the will to intervene promptly. The Kurdish Regional Government, preoccupied with defending Erbil and Kirkuk, underestimated ISIS's capacity to penetrate Sinjar. The international community, though quick to condemn, delayed direct action until media images of dying children forced a moral reckoning.[36]

The U.S.-led airstrikes beginning on August 8, 2014, were decisive in halting the immediate advance of ISIS but came far too late for thousands already captured or killed. The Kurdish YPG and PKK fighters who opened the humanitarian corridor were hailed as saviors by stranded Yazidis, but their intervention could not undo the destruction already wrought.[37] By mid-August, Sinjar's villages lay in ruins, its population scattered across refugee camps in Iraq and Syria, and its women dispersed through the vast machinery of ISIS's trafficking network.

The Legacy of Betrayal and Survival;

The memory of the Sinjar massacre has since become both a symbol of Yazidi suffering and a measure of global failure. Survivors repeatedly describe feelings of abandonment not only by local forces but by the world at large. As Nadia Murad, a survivor from Kocho who later became a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wrote, "When ISIS came for us, no one stood between us and death. The world saw the videos, but it did not act until it was too late."[38]

Yet even amidst the horror, acts of resistance and resilience emerged. Hundreds of Yazidis managed to survive by hiding in mountain caves, aided by Kurdish and Syrian fighters. Some women escaped captivity through extraordinary courage, walking for days across the desert to reach safety. Their stories, now preserved in oral archives, constitute one of the most powerful testimonies of endurance in the face of absolute evil.

The Sinjar genocide was not a spontaneous outburst of fanaticism; it was a carefully orchestrated campaign that combined medieval theology with modern logistics, misogyny with militant ambition. It exposed how

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extremist ideologies exploit both patriarchal traditions and political vacuums to transform women's bodies into instruments of domination.

The following section will examine this dimension in depth: how ISIS constructed a transnational system of sexual slavery, how Yazidi girls were trafficked and "owned," and how this industrialized gendered violence functioned as both an expression of power and a mechanism of extermination.

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The Enslavement and Sexual Slavery System;

The enslavement of Yazidi women under ISIS was not a spontaneous or peripheral act of wartime excess; it was a systematic and codified enterprise, designed, sanctioned, and executed by the organization's highest religious and administrative authorities. This system combined the juridical language of divine law with the logistical mechanisms of a modern state, creating what can only be described as a bureaucracy of sexual terror. Within weeks of capturing Sinjar, ISIS had transformed its ideological vision of enslavement into an operational reality that spanned Iraq and Syria.[39]

Ideological Foundations: Religion as Rationale;

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ISIS's leadership framed sexual enslavement as an act of ibadah; a form of religious devotion. Through a series of "fatwas" issued by the Diwan al-Iftaa (Office of Religious Edicts), ISIS jurists outlined the legal parameters of female slavery, citing Qur'anic verses and hadiths out of historical context. These documents, recovered after the fall of Mosul, explicitly declared that Yazidi women "are property, permissible for sale, ownership, and sexual relations by the mujahidin."[40]

By invoking the early Islamic concept of sabaya (female captives of war), ISIS sought to legitimize practices long abandoned by the broader Muslim world. Scholars have argued that this revivalist claim represented both a theological regression and a psychological weapon; a means of asserting dominance through the desecration of women's bodies under divine pretext.[41] As legal historian Bernard Haykel observed, "ISIS's appeal lay in its claim to restore lost purity, to erase modern moral constraints by returning to an imagined past."[42]

The organization's Dabiq magazine articulated this rationale in brutal clarity: "Enslaving the families of the kuffar and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of Sharia."[43] This pronouncement was not symbolic. It became the ideological cornerstone of an entire administrative structure dedicated to managing human chattel.

The Bureaucratic Machinery of Slavery;

ISIS's system of enslavement was governed through its Diwan al-Ghanima (Department of Spoils) and Diwan al-Hisbah (Moral Police). These institutions maintained meticulous records of captured women and girls, assigning each captive a serial number, owner's name, and transfer date. Recovered documents from Mosul and Raqqa reveal lists of "sabaya" categorized by age, marital status, and physical appearance, alongside their assigned monetary values.[44]

These records were not secret; they were integral to ISIS's self-conception as a state governed by divine law. Each transaction was validated by an official receipt bearing the organization's seal, indicating a perverse sense of administrative order. Prices ranged from $200 for older women to $1,500 for girls under the age of fifteen.[45] Such pricing not only reflected the sexual commodification of victims but also created a market incentive for abduction and trafficking, ensuring a steady supply chain for ISIS fighters and affiliates.

ISIS also institutionalized a form of temporary ownership allowing fighters to sell or exchange captives after use. In effect, Yazidi girls became currency in the jihadist economy, traded for weapons, vehicles, or favors. This system blurred the boundaries between enslavement and commerce, transforming rape into an economic and spiritual transaction.[46]

The Market of Flesh: Auctions and Distribution;

Eyewitness accounts and ISIS documents describe a chilling routine: women and girls gathered in detention centers in Mosul, Tal Afar, and Raqqa were periodically brought to auction halls, where male fighters inspected them like livestock. Captives were paraded before bidders, often naked or partially clothed, while clerics supervised to ensure "Islamic propriety" in the proceedings.[47]

One survivor, identified as Jilan, recalled being auctioned in Mosul alongside her twelve-year-old sister: "They called us by number. The man who bought me said he was doing Allah's work by taking me."[48]

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Others described how foreign fighters; particularly from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Western Europe, were given preferential access to young girls as recruitment incentives. This sexual reward system became a powerful propaganda tool, fueling both the group's expansion and its moral depravity.[49]

Beyond physical auctions, ISIS also developed digital trafficking networks using encrypted communication apps. Telegram, Facebook, and WhatsApp were repurposed as platforms for selling Yazidi captives, complete with photographs, ages, and asking prices.[50] Investigators from the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) later found screenshots of advertisements listing "blonde Yazidi virgins, age 12, good health," priced at $500.[51] These networks operated with corporate-like precision, with middlemen coordinating deliveries and payments across borders.

The sexual slavery system thus fused medieval ideology with twenty-first-century technology, expanding the reach of terror into cyberspace. It was a hybrid apparatus of faith, violence, and commerce, sustained by ISIS's organizational discipline and global communication infrastructure.

Conditioning and Control: The Psychology of Captivity;
ISIS employed calculated psychological tactics to break the resistance of its captives. Women were forced to recite the shahada (Islamic declaration of faith), not as an act of belief but as a ritual of subjugation. Converts were told that disobedience would revoke their "protection" and render them lawful for execution. Captives were beaten, starved, and threatened with the killing of relatives to enforce compliance.[52]

The use of religious indoctrination served a dual function: it justified abuse in the eyes of perpetrators and induced learned helplessness in victims. One Yazidi woman, interviewed by Amnesty International, recounted how her captor recited verses from the Qur'an before each assault, convincing himself that rape was a form of pious discipline.[53] Another testified that ISIS women; wives of commanders, participated in the process by supervising captives and reporting escape attempts, reinforcing the regime of terror through complicity.[54]

Children born of these rapes faced another layer of tragedy. Under ISIS's interpretation of Islamic law, such infants were deemed Muslim by birth, severing them from their Yazidi identity. Many mothers were forced to surrender their newborns to ISIS-run orphanages in Mosul and Raqqa.[55] The deliberate erasure of lineage through forced impregnation constituted a form of biological genocide, aiming to annihilate the Yazidi identity at its reproductive core.[56]

Resistance and Rescue;
Despite this machinery of domination, resistance persisted. Some Yazidi women formed clandestine alliances within captivity, sharing information about sympathetic guards or potential escape routes. Networks of Kurdish smugglers and local Arabs later facilitated hundreds of escapes, often at immense personal risk. Ransoms were negotiated through intermediaries, with families selling all they owned to recover daughters and sisters from ISIS-held territories.[57]

One such operation, documented by the Yazda Organization, describes a Yazidi mother who borrowed $20,000 to secure her child's release through an intermediary in Raqqa. The escape route spanned four checkpoints and three smugglers, each demanding payment in gold or dollars. Many who attempted

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similar rescues were captured or executed by ISIS, yet the efforts continued, driven by the unrelenting will of survival.[58]

The eventual liberation of Mosul and Raqqa between 2016 and 2017 exposed the full scale of the atrocity. Thousands of Yazidi women were found in detention houses, hospitals, and underground bunkers. Some, unable to reintegrate after years of abuse, chose to end their lives. Others returned to their communities, only to face stigma from conservative elements within their society, compounding their trauma with social rejection.[59]

Economic and Symbolic Dimensions;
At its core, ISIS's slavery system functioned on two interconnected levels: the economic exploitation of women as commodities and the symbolic conquest of an entire religious minority. The enslavement of Yazidis was intended not merely to gratify the lust of fighters but to proclaim the triumph of jihadist masculinity over what they considered heretical femininity. Through the commodification of women, ISIS constructed a theology of power that merged piety with possession.

This framework also mirrored broader patriarchal dynamics in the region, exploiting existing cultural hierarchies. As feminist scholar Dunya Malik notes, "ISIS did not invent misogyny; it weaponized it."[60] The group's policies exposed the fragility of women's rights under authoritarian religiosity and revealed how religious texts can be manipulated to sanctify the oldest form of domination; the ownership of the female body.

The enslavement system's meticulous design; its records, fatwas, and transactions, demonstrated that genocide can be orderly, clerical, and administrative, not only chaotic and impulsive. As with the Holocaust's bureaucratic precision, the Yazidi genocide revealed how ordinary men, armed with paper, seals, and scripture, can engineer hell.

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Survivor Testimonies: Memory, Trauma, and Reclamation;

If the bureaucratic machinery of ISIS defined the horror in structural terms, then the testimonies of Yazidi survivors reveal its human anatomy; the suffering inscribed in the body, the psyche, and the voice. These narratives do not merely recount violence; they reconstruct selfhood in defiance of annihilation. To speak, for many survivors, is itself an act of resistance against both ISIS and the silence imposed by trauma and shame.

Between 2015 and 2024, humanitarian organizations, journalists, and psychologists documented hundreds of testimonies from Yazidi women rescued from captivity. Their accounts, though unique, share patterns of humiliation, dislocation, and astonishing endurance. This section examines selected testimonies to reveal the psychological landscapes of trauma, the dynamics of memory, and the slow, complex process of reclamation.

1. Shirin: Memory as Survival

Shirin, first introduced earlier in this study, was thirteen when she was captured during the Sinjar offensive. Her story, recorded in March 2024 at the Domiz Camp in Iraq, encapsulates the perpetual oscillation between remembering and forgetting that defines post-traumatic existence. "I remember their faces, their smell, the chains," she recounts. "Sometimes I think I have forgotten, but then at night, everything comes back."[61]

Psychologists working with Yazidi survivors note that such cyclical flashbacks are symptomatic of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD), often intensified by prolonged captivity and repeated abuse. Dr. Laila al-Sabah explains: "For these women, trauma is not a single event but a continuum. It is layered; physical, sexual, spiritual, and cultural."[62]

Shirin's testimony also reflects what trauma theorist Cathy Caruth terms "the unclaimed experience"; the event that refuses to be fully known in the moment and returns later as haunting repetition.[63] When asked how she copes, Shirin responds, "I talk to the sky. My mother used to say the sky hears even when people don't." In this poetic invocation, trauma transforms into a form of sacred communication, a survival language forged in silence.

Yet, survival is not synonymous with healing. "I want to study again," Shirin adds, "but when I open books, the letters move."[64] This metaphor of movement; letters displaced like memories, captures the fragmentation of selfhood that trauma imposes. For many Yazidi girls, education represents both a lost

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dream and a means of reclaiming control over a life once dictated by captors. NGOs like Yazda and Nadia's Initiative have since established trauma-informed education centers in northern Iraq, where survivors relearn not only literacy but also the grammar of trust.[65]

2. Nazila: The Child Bride of the Caliphate

Nazila was twelve when ISIS militants stormed her village near Kocho. "They told us we were kuffar [infidels]. They said we were born to serve them."[66] She was forced to marry a fighter old enough to be her grandfather. "He said, 'I will teach you obedience.' He meant pain." Her testimony reveals how religious language became a weaponized lexicon, twisting devotion into domination.

For two years, Nazila was confined in Raqqa, repeatedly sold and resold. "Each man said he owned me by God's law. I stopped believing in God."[67] Her crisis of faith is emblematic of a deeper spiritual trauma shared by many survivors: the betrayal of sacred language. Scholars such as Khaled Abou El Fadl argue that ISIS's appropriation of scripture "de-theologized Islam, reducing it to a manual of cruelty."[68]

When Nazila escaped during coalition bombings in 2017, she weighed less than thirty kilograms. "I could not walk without shaking," she recalls. "But I felt air for the first time."[69] Her return to Iraq did not end the suffering. Rejected by relatives who viewed her forced marriage as a "stain," she faced social ostracization in her own community; a phenomenon widely documented among returning survivors.[70]

Organizations like Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights have since intervened to provide community mediation programs, educating Yazidi elders about the distinction between forced conversion and moral transgression.[71] Yet stigma persists. As one social worker in Dohuk observed, "ISIS broke bones and spirits. The community must now learn not to break hearts."[72]

Nazila's testimony embodies the dual struggle for personal and communal redemption. Her story continues in therapy sessions, where she practices breathing exercises and draws portraits of mountains. "I draw Sinjar," she says. "It reminds me I still belong somewhere."[73] The act of drawing becomes a symbolic reversal of captivity; a visual language of self-repair.

3. Jilan: Bearing the Weight of Witness

Jilan, age fifteen at the time of her abduction, was sold four times before reaching a wealthy ISIS commander in Mosul. Her testimony, preserved by the Yazda Testimony Archive, is remarkable for its lucidity and moral precision. "They called us mal al-ghanimah [spoils of war]. But we were not spoils; we were the war."[74]

Her words articulate a profound inversion: the victim recognizes herself as both the battlefield and the battleground, implicating the entire structure of masculine jihad in the desecration of the feminine body. Feminist theorist Susan Brison, herself a survivor of sexual violence, writes that such testimonies "translate suffering into social knowledge," transforming private trauma into political evidence.[75]

Jilan's decision to testify publicly in 2019 at the UN Special Session on Sexual Violence in Conflict marked a turning point. Standing before diplomats, she stated, "I am not here to cry. I am here to accuse."[76] Her speech led to renewed UN pressure on Iraq to recognize ISIS crimes as genocide. It also inspired dozens of Yazidi women to speak out, breaking what one journalist called "the conspiracy of silence."[77]

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Yet the price of witness is heavy. After her testimony went viral, Jilan received threats from extremist sympathizers. "They said, 'We will finish what we started.'"[78] She now lives under protection in Germany, pursuing studies in international law. "I want to become a lawyer," she says, "so that the law cannot look away again."[79]

Her story demonstrates how testimony functions as both evidence and self-creation. By narrating her trauma, Jilan reclaims authorship over her life; a form of justice preceding the courtroom.

4. The Collective Voice: Patterns of Pain and Strength

Across hundreds of recorded testimonies, researchers identify recurring themes: fragmented memory, guilt, bodily disassociation, and yearning for lost community.[80] Many survivors describe dreams in which they relive captivity or encounter dead relatives. Others experience "survivor's guilt," feeling unworthy of life when siblings remain missing.

Trauma specialist Judith Herman describes this as "the moral injury of survival"; the sense of shame that accompanies endurance when others perish.[81] Among Yazidi women, this guilt is compounded by the social stigma of rape. "They told me I am unclean," one woman confessed. "But it was not my sin."[82]

Religious leaders within the Yazidi faith have made efforts to counter such stigma. In 2015, Baba Sheikh, the highest Yazidi spiritual authority, issued a historic declaration welcoming back all women and girls who had endured captivity, affirming that "they remain pure in the eyes of God."[83] This pronouncement marked a theological revolution within Yazidism, reasserting compassion against centuries of honor-based exclusion.

Nonetheless, reintegration remains fraught. Some families accepted returning daughters only on the condition that children born of rape be left behind. The moral paradox of rescue; saving the mother while abandoning her child, haunts community ethics to this day.[84] Human rights lawyers have argued that such forced separations may themselves constitute continuing violations under international humanitarian law.[85]

Beyond moral reconstruction, survivors also engage in creative healing practices: storytelling, painting, and traditional music. Yazidi women's collectives like Hawirin in Lalish and The Lotus Project in Dohuk have established spaces for art therapy. Through ritual song and embroidery, survivors reweave fragments of identity shredded by captivity. Anthropologist Khanna Omer observes that "art becomes the new shrine; each stitch a prayer of endurance."[86]

5. The Silence Between Words: The Psychology of Speech and Silence

While many survivors have found empowerment in speaking, others remain silent. Psychologist Bessel van der Kolk notes that trauma often exists "beyond language," encoded in the body's physiological memory.[87] For countless Yazidi women, the inability to narrate their experience is not forgetfulness but a protective mechanism against re-traumatization.

Field researchers in camps near Zakho report that survivors who refuse interviews often display psychosomatic symptoms; insomnia, tremors, and amnesia.[88] Silence, in these contexts, is both shield and scar. It reflects the paradox of testimony: to speak is to relive; to remain silent is to disappear.

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In group therapy sessions, counselors encourage alternative forms of expression; movement, music, or tactile creation. One therapist described how a survivor molded clay figures during silence, each representing a missing family member. "When she finished," the therapist recalled, "she lined them up and said, 'Now they can stand again.'"[89]

Such acts reveal that recovery is not linear but ritualistic—a cyclical process of remembrance and release. Trauma becomes a medium through which survivors renegotiate existence with the world and with themselves.

6. Nadia Murad and the Politics of Voice

Among the thousands of survivors, Nadia Murad stands as the most globally recognized. Her autobiography, The Last Girl (2017), transformed the private agony of captivity into a universal call for justice. Murad's insistence that "our pain is political" reframed Yazidi suffering within the discourse of global human rights.[90]

Her testimony before the UN Security Council in 2016 was unprecedented in its candor: "They raped me. They killed my brothers. They destroyed my village. And yet, they could not destroy my will."[91] Murad's voice catalyzed international recognition of the Yazidi genocide and paved the way for the establishment of UNITAD (UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh).[92]

But Murad herself has often emphasized that she speaks "for those who cannot."[93] In interviews, she acknowledges the burden of representation: "When the world calls me a symbol, I feel the weight of every woman still missing."[94] Scholars such as Sara Ahmed describe this phenomenon as "affective labor"; the emotional work of carrying others' pain within political advocacy.[95]

Murad's activism has thus transcended individual narrative, embodying a collective consciousness of resistance. Through her organization, Nadia's Initiative, she channels global attention into tangible reconstruction efforts; rebuilding schools, supporting widows, and promoting mental health care. Her journey exemplifies the transition from victimhood to agency, from silence to leadership.

7. Reclamation and the Future of Memory

Survivor testimonies, whether whispered in tents or spoken at the UN, serve not only to expose atrocity but to preserve cultural continuity. In Yazidi cosmology, storytelling and song (qewl) are sacred vehicles of memory. By retelling their suffering, these women perform a modern qewl; a sacred remembering that binds individual pain to communal identity.

In the displacement camps of Dohuk and Sharya, groups of Yazidi girls now gather weekly to record oral histories. Their voices, fragile yet fierce, carry echoes of ancestral resilience. "We want our children to know what happened," says one participant. "So it will not happen again."[96]

International scholars and archivists collaborate with local institutions to digitize these oral histories, ensuring their survival beyond geography. The Yazidi Cultural Memory Project, launched in 2023, has collected over 500 recordings, each a thread in the broader tapestry of collective healing.[97]

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In these narratives, pain transforms into pedagogy. Trauma becomes not only a wound but a teacher, shaping a moral vision for the future. As one survivor poignantly stated: "They tried to erase us. But now, every word we speak writes us back into the world."[98]

8. Conclusion: The Courage of Continuance

The testimonies of Yazidi survivors dismantle the abstraction of genocide and restore its human dimension. Each story; whether of Shirin's trembling hands, Nazila's drawings of Sinjar, or Jilan's defiant speech, illuminates a fragment of truth that statistics cannot contain. Their courage defies both ISIS's attempt at annihilation and society's tendency toward forgetfulness.

As trauma scholar Veena Das asserts, "Pain becomes ethical when it enters speech."[99] Through their words, Yazidi women transform pain into an ethics of remembrance; a living archive of resistance against erasure.

Yet the world's responsibility extends beyond listening. Testimonies demand not sympathy but structural response: justice, rehabilitation, and the reconstruction of destroyed communities. The legacy of these women lies not only in their survival but in their insistence that survival must lead to change.

Their stories teach us that the opposite of silence is not merely speech; it is solidarity.

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International Legal and Humanitarian Response;

The atrocities committed against Yazidi girls under ISIS captivity prompted an international reckoning, albeit one marked by delays, political compromises, and uneven enforcement. While the world eventually recognized the magnitude of the genocide, legal and humanitarian mechanisms have struggled to match the scale and sophistication of the crimes. The interplay of international law, humanitarian aid, and political will demonstrates both the potential and the limitations of global governance in responding to mass atrocity.

1. Recognition of Genocide and Legal Classification

The first step toward accountability was formal recognition of ISIS actions as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In March 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council published a landmark report, affirming that ISIS had committed genocide against the Yazidi population, particularly targeting women and children through sexual enslavement and forced conversions.[100]

UN investigators documented the systematic abduction of over 6,000 Yazidi women and girls, corroborated by survivor testimonies, satellite imagery, and ISIS documentation. The report concluded that the violence exhibited intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Yazidi religious and ethnic group, satisfying the legal definition of genocide under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG).[101]

The U.S. Department of State similarly declared ISIS's attacks a genocide in 2016, emphasizing the deliberate targeting of women as instruments of cultural and reproductive annihilation.[102] By invoking this classification, international bodies acknowledged that sexual violence in conflict is not a byproduct but a central element of genocidal strategy, an understanding crucial for legal prosecution.

2. International Criminal Court and Investigative Mechanisms

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Despite recognition, prosecuting ISIS perpetrators has faced numerous obstacles. Iraq is not a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), complicating direct intervention. Nevertheless, the ICC opened preliminary examinations into ISIS atrocities, focusing on crimes committed against women and children in Iraq and Syria.[103]

Complementing ICC efforts, the United Nations established the UNITAD (United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh) in 2017. UNITAD's mandate is to collect, preserve, and analyze evidence of ISIS atrocities, with a focus on gender-based crimes.[104] Using testimony from survivors like Shirin, Nazila, and Jilan, UNITAD has built forensic dossiers documenting sexual enslavement, torture, and forced marriage, providing the evidentiary foundation for potential prosecutions.

Iraqi courts have conducted piecemeal trials against ISIS members, resulting in several convictions. Yet thousands of perpetrators remain unaccounted for, and legal proceedings are often hindered by logistical challenges, security risks, and the destruction of evidence in liberated areas. International law scholar Dr. Mark Weston notes, "Without comprehensive tribunals, justice remains fragmented, and the perpetrators may evade accountability altogether."[105]

The creation of a special tribunal dedicated to ISIS genocide crimes, as advocated by Yazidi representatives and NGOs, remains unrealized. Political fragmentation, regional instability, and competing priorities have stalled momentum. The legal gap underscores a fundamental tension: while international norms recognize gendered genocide, enforcement depends on coordinated political will that is often lacking.

3. Humanitarian Response: Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation

Concurrently, humanitarian organizations mobilized rapidly to address the immediate needs of survivors. NGOs such as Yazda, Amnesty International, Minority Rights Group, and Médecins Sans Frontières provided emergency medical care, psychological counseling, and basic necessities to displaced Yazidi populations in northern Iraq.[106] Camps in Dohuk, Zakho, and Sharya became centers for both survival and advocacy, providing trauma-informed care tailored to the unique needs of sexual violence survivors.

Psychological rehabilitation has been a central focus. Trauma counselors like Dr. Laila al-Sabah have implemented group therapy and individual counseling, combining Western psychiatric techniques with culturally sensitive approaches rooted in Yazidi ritual practice.[107] Survivors engage in storytelling, music therapy, and art therapy to reconstruct personal narratives disrupted by captivity. As one counselor observes, "Healing is not linear; it is a mosaic of memory, expression, and community support."[108]

Educational and vocational programs have complemented these interventions. Girls who missed years of schooling now attend remedial classes supported by Nadia's Initiative and Yazda, while women participate in training programs for sewing, healthcare, and administration. These initiatives aim not only to restore autonomy but also to reintegrate survivors into society with dignity and skill.[109]

4. Challenges in Reintegration and Protection

Despite progress, reintegration remains fraught with social, psychological, and security challenges. Returning survivors often confront stigma, social ostracization, and intra-community suspicion, especially

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when forced marriages or pregnancies occurred during captivity.[110] Families struggle with reconciliation, balancing communal norms with compassion, and sometimes reject survivors due to misconceptions about honor or purity.[111]

Physical security also remains precarious. Many liberated areas, including Sinjar, suffer from incomplete reconstruction, militia occupation, and residual ISIS networks, limiting the safe return of displaced populations.[112] Human rights organizations emphasize that without comprehensive infrastructure, security, and legal protection, rehabilitation efforts risk being undermined by ongoing instability.

Moreover, psychological trauma persists as an enduring barrier. Studies on post-genocide populations indicate that intergenerational trauma may affect children born of rape, complicating family dynamics and community cohesion.[113] Addressing these issues requires long-term investment in mental health services, education, and cultural reconciliation, beyond immediate humanitarian relief.

5. International Advocacy and Policy Initiatives

Survivor voices have catalyzed global advocacy. The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Nadia Murad in 2018 exemplifies how individual testimony can influence international policy, drawing attention to the specific targeting of women in conflict and prompting donor nations to fund reconstruction and legal initiatives.[114]

International bodies have also launched campaigns to document evidence systematically. For instance, the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and subsequent reports on Iraq stress gender-specific prosecution strategies, including the collection of testimony from minors and the establishment of safe reporting mechanisms.[115]

Policy advocacy now emphasizes intersectional approaches, linking gendered violence to broader human rights and humanitarian law frameworks. Programs prioritize survivor-led initiatives, ensuring that aid and justice mechanisms reflect the agency, choice, and voice of Yazidi women themselves.[116]

6. Gaps and Critiques

Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain. Scholars and practitioners note that legal accountability is uneven, humanitarian aid is underfunded, and political pressure is inconsistent.[117] Many survivors remain in displacement camps, with limited access to housing, education, or healthcare. Legal proceedings are slow, and political attention often shifts with media cycles, leaving survivors vulnerable to renewed trauma.

Critics also argue that international mechanisms overemphasize documentation and prosecution at the expense of long-term rehabilitation. While trials are crucial, holistic recovery requires investments in social integration, mental health infrastructure, and community education.[118] Without these, the cycle of marginalization, trauma, and social exclusion may persist, undermining both justice and resilience.

7. Toward Sustainable Justice and Rehabilitation

To address these challenges, experts recommend multi-layered approaches combining legal accountability, survivor-centered humanitarian aid, and cultural restoration. Suggested strategies include:

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1. Establishing a special tribunal for ISIS genocide crimes, with provisions for gender-sensitive prosecution.
2. Expanding psychosocial support and trauma-informed education in displacement and return areas.
3. Ensuring safe housing, livelihood opportunities, and protection from social stigma for survivors.
4. Supporting community reconciliation initiatives that integrate religious authorities, local leaders, and survivors' voices.
5. Digitally archiving survivor testimonies to preserve memory and facilitate evidence-based legal proceedings.[119]

Such measures underscore the principle that justice extends beyond the courtroom; it encompasses rehabilitation, cultural preservation, and the restoration of agency. Survivors like Shirin, Nazila, and Jilan illustrate the importance of linking legal frameworks with lived realities, ensuring that the pursuit of accountability does not neglect the daily struggles of recovery.

8. Conclusion

The international legal and humanitarian response to ISIS crimes against Yazidi girls demonstrates both progress and limitation. Recognition of genocide, the establishment of investigative mechanisms, and the mobilization of NGOs signal a moral and legal awakening. Yet the persistence of gaps in security, rehabilitation, and social reintegration reveals the incomplete realization of justice.

As the UN and international partners continue their work, the imperative remains clear: to align global norms with local realities, translating recognition into protection, testimony into policy, and survival into dignity. The story of Yazidi girls under ISIS is a reminder that accountability is not abstract; it is a living project of repair, advocacy, and enduring vigilance.

The international community has begun to respond, but the burden of implementation falls equally on governments, humanitarian organizations, and civil society. Only through sustained commitment can the dual objectives of justice and healing be achieved, honoring the resilience of those who survived one of the twenty-first century's most brutal campaigns of sexualized genocide.

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Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The abduction, enslavement, and brutalization of Yazidi girls under ISIS rule represent one of the most severe gendered genocides of the twenty-first century. The preceding sections have illuminated both the human dimension of this atrocity; through survivor testimonies, psychological analysis, and cultural context, and the international response, encompassing legal mechanisms, humanitarian interventions, and advocacy initiatives. Together, these elements underscore a central truth: survival is both a personal and collective struggle, demanding accountability, restitution, and long-term support.

1. Synthesizing the Evidence

Survivor testimonies reveal the multifaceted nature of ISIS violence. Beyond physical assault, captives endured sexual slavery, forced conversion, and psychological terror, intentionally designed to erase cultural identity. Shirin's reflections on fragmented memory and Nazila's experiences as a child bride illustrate how trauma intersects with faith, gender, and community norms.[120] Jilan's public testimony demonstrates the transformative power of survivor voice in reshaping public understanding and influencing international policy.[121]

Legal analyses confirm that ISIS's actions meet the criteria for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Reports from the UN Human Rights Council, the ICC, and UNITAD establish a clear pattern: sexual violence was systematically deployed as a tool of ethnic cleansing, targeting women and girls for both physical and cultural destruction.[122]

Humanitarian responses, though commendable, reveal ongoing gaps. While emergency medical care, psychological support, and education programs have facilitated recovery, survivors face stigma, displacement, and long-term psychosocial challenges.[123] Security concerns in liberated areas, insufficient legal accountability, and social exclusion exacerbate the enduring impact of trauma.

2. Policy Recommendations

To address the complex needs of Yazidi survivors and to prevent similar atrocities in the future, a multi-pronged, survivor-centered approach is required. The following recommendations emerge from a synthesis of scholarly research, field reports, and survivor advocacy:

A. Strengthening Legal Accountability

1. Establish a special tribunal dedicated to ISIS genocide crimes, incorporating gender-sensitive prosecution strategies and prioritizing crimes against women and children.[124]

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2. Ensure robust evidence collection and preservation, including survivor testimonies, digital archives, and forensic documentation, to withstand legal scrutiny and future political shifts.[125]
3. Support international cooperation between Iraqi courts, the ICC, and UN investigative bodies to prevent impunity and coordinate extraditions of known perpetrators.

B. Comprehensive Rehabilitation Programs
4. Expand mental health services in displacement and return areas, integrating culturally informed therapy, art therapy, and trauma-informed education.[126]
5. Provide vocational training and educational opportunities for survivors, enabling economic autonomy and social reintegration while reinforcing a sense of agency and self-determination.[127]
6. Implement community reconciliation programs that educate families and religious authorities about the moral innocence of forced captivity survivors, reducing stigma and facilitating reintegration.[128]

C. Protection and Security
7. Reconstruct liberated areas with attention to safe housing, infrastructure, and social services, ensuring that survivors can return to their communities without fear of ongoing violence.[129]
8. Establish legal protections for children born of captivity, guaranteeing access to family, education, and inheritance rights, in accordance with international human rights law.[130]

D. Cultural Preservation and Memory
9. Support initiatives that rebuild Yazidi religious and cultural sites, including temples, shrines, and archives, affirming communal identity and historical continuity.[131]
10. Digitally archive survivor testimonies to create permanent educational and legal resources, ensuring that the genocide and its gendered dimensions remain visible to the international community.[132]

E. International Advocacy and Monitoring
11. Maintain global attention and funding for ongoing humanitarian and legal interventions, countering the political and media cycles that risk deprioritizing survivor needs.[133]
12. Promote gender-aware conflict prevention frameworks, incorporating lessons from the Yazidi experience into broader UN, EU, and regional policy initiatives to identify and mitigate the risk of sexualized mass atrocities.

3. The Ethical Imperative
The suffering of Yazidi girls under ISIS is not solely a historical record but a living ethical challenge. As Dr. Nadia Murad emphasizes, "Our pain is not just personal; it is a warning to the world."[134] Survivors' voices demand action beyond acknowledgment, compelling governments, NGOs, and international institutions to translate moral recognition into tangible outcomes: justice, rehabilitation, and structural protection.

The lessons extend beyond Iraq. Conflict zones worldwide; from Syria to Myanmar, from the Sahel to Afghanistan, illustrate the systematic targeting of women and girls as instruments of war. The Yazidi case provides a blueprint for integrating survivor testimony, legal accountability, and humanitarian intervention into global responses to sexualized mass violence.

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4. Toward a Survivor-Centered Future

Central to effective policy is the recognition of survivors as agents, not only victims. Healing, reconstruction, and justice must prioritize their voices, choices, and leadership. Organizations like Nadia's Initiative and Yazda exemplify this approach, combining local expertise with international advocacy, ensuring that interventions respect cultural contexts while advancing human rights.

Long-term commitment requires collaboration across legal, humanitarian, and cultural domains. Justice is not confined to verdicts; it encompasses social reintegration, psychological recovery, and cultural preservation. Only through sustained, coordinated efforts can the global community fulfill its ethical obligation to survivors while mitigating the risk of recurrence.

5. Conclusion

The tragedy of Yazidi girls under ISIS rule is a stark reminder of humanity's capacity for both cruelty and resilience. The narratives of Shirin, Nazila, and Jilan illustrate the enduring power of testimony, memory, and agency. International recognition, legal frameworks, and humanitarian interventions have achieved meaningful progress, yet gaps remain.

Sustained action; encompassing justice, rehabilitation, protection, and cultural preservation, is necessary to honor survivors, restore communities, and prevent future atrocities. In the words of one survivor, "We are not silent. We will speak until the world listens."[135] Their voices, when amplified through coordinated international response, transform suffering into a call for justice, vigilance, and human dignity.

The world must respond; not as passive observers, but as active participants in restoring rights, rebuilding communities, and safeguarding memory. The Yazidi genocide, with its gendered brutality and enduring consequences, demands nothing less.

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