Terrorism and Genocide

The Islamic State and the Case of Yazidis

Jenni Porkka

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Abstract

The Yazidi religious minority was a subject to extreme violence perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Iraq in 2014. This thesis argues that the violence was genocidal in nature and aimed to destroy the Yazidi group as such. Using theories from sociology, it seeks to explain how the violence caused a tremendous social change within the Yazidi community. The study further revises concepts of terrorism and perpetrators of genocide and demonstrates that the perpetrator does not necessarily need to be a state, but another kind of strong organization can be capable of committing such atrocities as well.
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Introduction

“Modern genocides have been a deliberate attempt to change the identity of the survivors by modifying relationships within a given society.”¹ Genocide is not only killing, but other heinous acts as well, such as changing group identities by making life conditions harder, preventing births, and taking children away from their families. Moreover, the changed identity and social relations might not show up during the genocidal violence and the killing phase, but later among survivors. Therefore, “genocide and social reorganization are closely connected.”²

To continue, modern terrorist organizations with strong leaders and army equipment are able to commit genocidal acts. For example, the Islamic State’s “violent extremist ideology, its terrorist acts, its continued gross systematic and widespread attacks directed against civilians, abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including those driven on religious or ethnic ground, its eradication of cultural heritage and trafficking of cultural property, but also its control over significant parts [of land] … across Iraq and Syria”³ may amount to a genocide against the religious Yazidi minority in Iraq. The number of Yazidis killed during violent attacks in August 2014 was rather small, only some hundreds or thousands of deaths, compared to other genocides like the Holocaust with millions of victims or the Rwandan genocide with 800,000 deaths. However, the violence might amount to a genocide, especially when looked from the sociological perspective focusing on social change prompted by the violence within the Yazidis’ group identity.

The Islamic State’s violence against Yazidis reorganized the Yazidi society in several ways. The aim of this thesis is to look at how the social change resulted from IS genocidal policies and actions. The goal is to discuss how the violence was used to change Yazidi society and patterns of their daily life. The forced social change made Yazidis endure a new way of life characterized by fear of total destruction of their religious and cultural identity. The social change and even social death of the survivors happened through killing some of the members of the group, dehumanization, driving

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¹ Feierstein, Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Junta, 12.
² Ibid., 1.
Yazidis out of their original homelands, and causing serious mental harm to individual Yazidis. The extreme situation drove the group to fight for their existence.

**Research problem and aims**

This thesis presents a case study of mass violence against Yazidis in Iraq perpetrated by the Islamic State (IS) in 2014. The main question is to find out whether the case should be regarded as a genocide or something else, such as ethnic cleansing. The thesis will discuss the case in the light of social change in the Yazidi group, rather than concentrate on legal or political viewpoints. This case study aims to bring a new perspective to study this particular case, which has been mainly studied previously from the legal point of view.

The case study will also contribute to the more general academic discussion of connecting genocide and terrorism. Scholars of genocidal violence generally agree that the perpetrator of genocide needs to be a state since any smaller entity does not have the capacity of such destruction. However, in this case study, the perpetrator IS is not purely a state or a terrorist organization. So, it is compelling to consider whether or not another kind of organization than a state can commit a genocide.

**Disposition**

The study is divided into three chapters: theory and method, empirical study, and conclusion. The theory and method chapter starts with an overview of previous research about the Islamic State and its violence against Yazidis. Next, the chapter moves into a theoretical discussion about the concepts of genocide and terrorism and provides the sociological framework that is used in this case study. Moreover, the research aim is reformulated into more specific research questions on the theoretical basis. At the end of the chapter, the methodology behind the research and primary sources are introduced.
The empirical analysis is divided into three main parts. The first part constitutes a brief analysis of IS violence and how IS has become such a violent state-like organization. The next part is a brief introduction of who the Yazidis are and how they have been treated by other ethnic groups before the IS attacks in 2014. The main part of the analysis addresses genocidal violence against Yazidis, taking into consideration the intent of IS, killing members of the target group, changing their life conditions, preventing births, transferring children from their families, and causing serious bodily and mental harm to Yazidis. The discussion runs in connection with the defined sociological framework.

Finally, the study concludes with a summary of the main findings and discussion about possible future research on the topic.
Theory and Method

Previous research

The connection between terrorism and genocide has become into a deeper discussion in recent years. For example, Adewunmi Falode has argued that modern terrorism can be genocidal in nature because it targets religious, ethnic, and racial groups. Moreover, terrorism has moved beyond its traditional conceptualization in the 21st century. According to Falode, terrorism has traditionally involved low scale violence such as kidnapping, assassinations, hijacking, and suicide bombings. Today, terrorists are more violent than ever before, including asymmetric warfare and conventional military tactics. Terrorists further use new forms of violence, such as cyber warfare, to destroy their target groups.4

Research on IS has generally focused on the historical development of the terrorist organization. Comparative studies have concentrated on Al-Qaeda, from which IS separated to become its own organization through several steps.5 Previous research on IS includes doomsday vision to create a pure Muslim state, characterized by human trafficking, oil sales, kidnappings, seizing industrial assets, and the use of military.6 Researchers have also talked about how IS has managed to establish itself as a powerful organization, including the mastery of internet and social media.7 Further, there is research on how IS recruits soldiers and other supporters, such as doctors, engineers, and military wives, to fight for their cause and to line up in a perfect Muslim state.8 Religious aspects of IS ideology, Islamic fundamentalism and religious war (jihad) have gained attention from scholars. Laurent Murawiec’s book The Mind of Jihad

4 Falode, “Terrorism 4.0: A Structural Analysis.”
8 Atwan, Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate.
discusses the issue that all jihadi groups are bloodthirsty and they have a God-given
mission to destroy all non-believers of Islam. The book shows that the basic ideology
existed among radical Muslims before IS came into power. Thus, the religious
ideology, jihad, and Islamic fundamentalism have been discussed within the IS
framework. Islamic radicalism, jihad, and the use of terror are the basis to restore the
historical Islamic caliphate.

Researchers seem to agree that IS is not just like any other terrorist organization;
it is something more. It is very powerful and capable to commit extremely heinous
crimes. “ISIS is an organization of a different nature, and the threat it poses to Middle
Eastern countries, as well as to Europe and North America, is different – and
significantly more dangerous.” IS might not even be a terrorist organization. It “boasts
some 30,000 fighters, holds territory in both Iraq and Syria, maintains extensive
military capabilities, controls lines of communication, commands infrastructure, funds
itself, and engages in sophisticated military operations. If ISIS is purely and simply
anything, it is a pseudo-state led by a conventional army.”

There are some studies about Yazidis, mainly descriptions about what has
happened to them throughout the history without so much theoretical analysis. Research
shows that targeting Yazidis is not just something that IS did in 2014. Instead, some
researchers argue that genocidal violence against them has continued for centuries by
different perpetrators, such as the Ottoman Empire and Al-Qaeda, because of Yazidis’
religion. Furthermore, Basci highlights the fact that “studies on Yazidis have
accelerated within the last few years and most of these studies” concentrate on cultural
anthropology. Mullaney further focuses on the role of the USA and its allies to stop
the genocide before it is too late.

12 Cronin, “ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group: Why Counterterrorism Won’t Stop the Latest Jihadist
Threat.”
13 Basci, “Yazidis: A Community Scattered in between Geographies and Its Current
Inevitably Eliminate an Ancient Culture Unless the United States Employs Military and
14 Basci, “Yazidis: A Community Scattered in between Geographies and Its Current
Immigration Experience,” 341.
Culture Unless the United States Employs Military and Diplomatic Intervention.”
Previous research on genocidal violence against Yazidis has focused on the legal perspective of genocide, taking different aspects into account. For example, Craig Whiteside uses the United Nations frameworks for the prevention of genocide to evaluate the risk of genocide against Yazidis and Shia Muslims perpetrated by IS. According to Whiteside, IS has clearly proved, through its media campaign, its intent to destroy Yazidis. IS has also claimed sectarian attacks against Yazidi civilians without fearing possible negative consequences for IS itself. Moreover, he argues that IS has a state-like capacity to commit genocide. It acts as a non-state with powers associated with weak states, but IS “is [further] moving ever closer to meeting Weber’s (1919) famous definition of a state, that of an entity that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force in a geographic area.” Through the legal reasoning, he concludes that the acts of IS constituted a genocide against the Yazidi population. Nathan Lee takes a very different perspective for the legal definition of genocide. He discusses the case from the perspective of religious conversions and argues that forced religious conversions fit into the UN Genocide Conventions’ protections. Forced conversion is a result of transferring children to another group and preventing and restricting births within the Yazidi community. He highlights that “protecting against forced religious conversions safeguard the very existence of certain human groups and endorses elementary principles of morality. By including religious groups within the Convention's protections, the drafters reveal their intent that protecting religious beliefs is of paramount importance.”

Islamic State’s propaganda has been discussed as well in the light of genocidal violence. Atwan argues in his book *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (2015) that IS is a digital caliphate that uses media, especially social media, extremely well to gain local and international support. Furthermore, it has been argued that IS propaganda and spreading hate messages against religious minority groups, especially against Yazidis, can be used as an evidence of their intent to annihilate the Yazidi minority. For example, Mohammad E. Badar discusses in his article *The Road to Genocide: The Propaganda Machine of the Self-declared Islamic State (IS)* (2016) about Islamic

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17 Ibid., 243.
18 Ibid., 245.
20 Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*. 
fundamentalism, IS ideology and aims to destroy ethnic and religious minorities because they are not accepted according to Islam. The article analyzes hate propaganda that IS has published in its online publications, such as Dabiq. He argues that the hate propaganda amounts to direct and public incitement of minority groups, such as Yazidis, which can constitute a genocide.\textsuperscript{21}

Research on the Yazidi victims has concentrated on gender-based violence and the victimization of women. Sexual harassment, rape, and sexual violence as a weapon of war and genocide have been researched by several scholars in the case of Yazidis. For example, Sali Bitar argues that IS uses religion and Koran to justify the use of sexual violence and sexual slavery of Yazidi women. Strategic rape aims to dishonor and shame Yazidi women and also men since the men believe that they failed to protect their women from rape.\textsuperscript{22} IS has used sexual violence and rape as a cheap weapon of war to gain hegemony and to conduct ethnic cleansing and vast destruction.\textsuperscript{23} Atrocities toward Yazidi women definitely constitute a crime against humanity, and should even be regarded as a genocide.\textsuperscript{24} IS seems to terrorize Yazidis “on both a physical and psychological level, while knowing they are reaching the whole group by targeting the women this way.”\textsuperscript{25}

Psychological trauma has also been researched. The articles about sexual violence show that the women are still suffering from the captivity, even though they have managed to flee. Women are traumatized by the rape and torture they had to face under IS control.\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, researchers have found psychological and psychiatric problems and post-traumatic stress disorder among Yazidi children who are currently in refugee camps. Not knowing anything about their family members, being threatened with death, having faced the loss of important people, and living in harsh camp conditions have caused children psychological and psychiatric problems.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{21} Badar, “The Road to Genocide: The Propaganda Machine of the Self-Declared Islamic State (IS),” 410.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Bitar, “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq,” 63–65.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Hassen, “Investigating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War and a Tool of Genocide against Indigenous Yazidi Women and Girls by ISIS in Iraq,” 87.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 97.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Bitar, “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq,” 65.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 64; Hassen, “Investigating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War and a Tool of Genocide against Indigenous Yazidi Women and Girls by ISIS in Iraq,” 94.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ceri et al., “Psychiatric Symptoms and Disorders among Yazidi Children and Adolescents Immediately after Forced Migration Following ISIS Attacks”; Nasiroglu and Ceri, “Posttraumatic Stress and Depression in Yazidi Refugees.”
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To summarize, the research on IS has mainly focused on the organization’s historical development and the nature of the organization, their recruitment process, and religious ideology. The academic research on Yazidis has also concentrated on the history of this vulnerable group. Genocide scholars have taken mostly the legal view to see whether the case fits into the Genocide Convention or not. IS as a propaganda machine has attracted some scholars as well to debate how big is the role of hate speech in IS genocidal violence against all targeted minority groups, including Yazidis. Another view has been to look at the case through the perspective of gender-based violence and feminism highlighting the suffering of Yazidi women. Psychological trauma has also been connected to women’s suffering and children who have survived IS atrocities.

Social destruction and social change within the Yazidi group has not been considered in the discussion of genocidal violence. Because the research has focused on the legal and feminist views, it is important to bring up the situation in different perspectives. Even though most of the killed Yazidis in 2014 were men, all the survivors were not women since only small part of Yazidi men were killed. Therefore, the survivors include women, men, and children. Genocidal violence against Yazidis has definitely changed their social group identity. Social death is as important as physical death in the overall genocide discussion, and the case of Yazidis is a good example of this phenomenon.

Theoretical framework

“Ethnic, national, and religious groups have been frequent victims of mass killing”\(^\text{28}\) in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Yet, there is no generally accepted terminology “to describe the intentional killing of large numbers of noncombatants.”\(^\text{29}\) In this section, I am going to give a brief overview of the genocide definitions, which are relevant to the topic of this thesis. I am going to use the UN Genocide Convention as a base of my case analysis to look at different acts that IS has perpetrated against Yazidis. I will further use some sociological scholarly definitions since the legal definition alone cannot explain the social change, caused by the violence, within the Yazidi community.

\(^{28}\) Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, 152.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 9.
To continue, I will also avoid, for example, purely political definitions of genocide since they cannot explain this particular case. Furthermore, I am going to explain the concept of terrorism and how it is connected to genocidal violence. After that, the theoretical discussion will continue to explain the concept of social change regarding this case study.

**Defining genocide**

The legal definition of genocide comes from the United Nation’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention), which was adopted in December 1948, and which came into force in January 1951. According to the Article II of the Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Convention “entails a collective activity aimed at the destructive goal” since “a single human being is not capable of destroying one of the groups protected by the rule against genocide in whole or in part.” Further, it has been agreed that the intent to destroy must be realistic and it requires “more than a vain hope.” The word “destroy” can be either physical or social since both kinds of acts are included in the Convention’s Article II. However, current “customary international law limits the definition of genocide to those acts seeking the physical and biological destruction” and leaves out psychological and social violence. Moreover, destruction cannot be limited to the acts during a genocidal campaign, but must also consider the results after the campaign. Both physical and mental consequences of genocidal violence will follow the victims the rest of their lives and cause further harm to them, such as suicides. To continue, the

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32 Ibid., 472.
33 Ibid., 486.
34 Ibid., 487.
Convention does not explain what destroying “in part” means. On the other hand, international case law seems to have settled “that the part must be a substantial part of the group,” which is not a very concrete definition either since the substantial part can vary a lot between different cases. For example, most of the European Jews, including men, women, and children, were killed during the Holocaust, but only thousands of men were killed in Srebrenica.

Since the Genocide Convention does not explain the prohibited acts or underlying offenses, clarification of what is included in the convention is needed. As stated by the legal scholar Claus Kress, killing means “causing the death of another person.”

Causing serious bodily and mental harm seems to include serious physical internal and external injuries, inhuman suffering, and “degrading treatment and the deprivation of rights as a form of causing serious mental harm.” These may include torture, rape, and sexual violence. Mental harm means both “permanent impairment of the mental faculties brought on through drugs, torture or techniques similar thereto” and “attacks on the dignity of the human person not causing lasting impairment” but requiring “a grave and long-term disadvantage to a person’s ability to lead a normal and constructive life.”

The third act, inflicting the life conditions to bring physical death to the targeted group members includes “confining the group members under extremely unhygienic or otherwise inhuman conditions, subjecting them to a subsistence diet, reducing essential medical services available to the group below minimum requirements, or destroying collectively worked fields or harvests, leaving (part of) the group without food.”

Forced deportations do not fit in this category. Imposing measures to prevent births include “sexual mutilation, the practice of sterilization, forced birth control, separation of the sexes and prohibition of marriages.” Imposing measures means that at least an order to conduct such acts must have been made. Forcible transfer of children means that children are taken to another location outside of the realm of his or her original group.

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35 Ibid., 490.
36 Ibid., 480.
37 Ibid., 480.
38 Ibid., 481.
39 Ibid., 482.
40 Ibid., 483.
41 Ibid., 483–84.
The first definition, by Raphael Lemkin, appeared in 1943 before the UN Genocide Convention. It included more target groups than the later legal definition: political, social, cultural, economic, biological, physical, religious, and moral groups. Lemkin highlighted the issue of multiculturalism and the importance of different people. “The diversity of nations, religious groups and races is essential to civilization because every one of these groups has a mission to fulfill and a contribution to make in terms of culture.” In Lemkin’s words, it is not necessary to kill people in order to commit a genocide. “The end may be accomplished by the forced disintegration of political and social institutions, of the culture of the people, of their language, their national feeling and their religion. It may be accomplished by wiping out all basis of personal security, liberty, health and dignity.” Lemkin highlighted the mental and social aspects of genocide rather than physical killing of the victims. The aspects of multiculturalism, targeting social institutions, and wiping out victims’ personal security and dignity are extremely important, especially, when talking about it in the perspective of social change and mental destruction.

At the same time, some genocide scholars agree that genocide needs killing of the target groups. For example, historian Frank Chalk and sociologist Kurt Jonassohn define genocide as “a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.” According to them, a genocide can occur “to eliminate a real or potential threat to society”, “spread terror,” gain economic wealth, or “to implement a religious belief, scientific theory, or an ideology.” While Chalk and Jonassohn argue that killing is an essential part of genocide, genocidal goals can be achieved through other means as well. For instance, the perpetrator can gain economic wealth by different tax policies and laws. Similarly, spreading scientific theories in today’s world is better implemented by education rather than killing ideological opponents.

Helen Fein, a sociologist, was one of the first scholars who talked about genocides from the sociological perspective. Fein defines genocide as “sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained...”

44 Chalk and Jonassohn, The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analysis and Case Studies, 23.
45 Feierstein, Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Junta, 40.
regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.”

There must be several attacks against the targeted group with intent to destroy the group. Destruction can be either direct murder and calculated physical destruction, or indirect destruction by preventing births and “systematically breaking the linkage between reproduction and socialization of children in the family or group of origin.” Moreover, she claims that “genocide is the calculated murder of a segment or all of a group defined outside of the universe of obligation of the perpetrator by a government, elite, staff or crowd representing the perpetrator in response to a crisis or opportunity perceived to be caused by or impeded by the victim.”

Fein highlights genocidal social annihilation while international law focuses on physical destruction. Yet, it is interesting that Fein does not directly connect causing serious mental harm to her idea of social reproduction, even if the mental suffering of many individuals can affect the whole society and lead to social reproduction. However, she underlines the role of children in the social change, which is an extremely important point because children are generally much easier to socialize into new groups than their parents. Particularly small children tend to learn new things and habits very quickly.

The sociologist and historian Vahakn Dadrian describes genocide as “the successful attempt by a dominant group, vested with formal authority and/or with preponderant access to the overall resources of power, to reduce by coercion or lethal violence the number of a minority group whose ultimate extermination is held desirable and useful and whose respective vulnerability is a major factor contributing to the decision for genocide.” According to Dadrian, genocide can occur as a cultural genocide, genocide by assimilation, as a byproduct of war, to punish minority groups challenging the dominant group, to gain control or economic wealth, or to totally exterminate the targeted population. An important point here is that lethal violence is not always needed to commit a genocide since it can be done through coercion as well. Therefore, assimilation of the target group into the perpetrator’s social group can amount to genocide. Moreover, he sees genocide as a function of social restructuring. The perpetrator perceives “that there is an unacceptable incompatibility between itself

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50 Feierstein, *Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Juntas*, 41–42.
and the minority.” 51 The perpetrator wants to create ethnic and national homogeneity in the society. Genocide is used as a radical device to resolve this intergroup conflict. However, “the resolution of the conflict itself may be considered as a means to still another end,” 52 such as gaining economic wealth or to end a war, rather than just to get rid of the minority group. Building a homogeneous nation, race or ethnic group is connected to Erik Weitz’s view on revolutionary genocide. Genocide occurs when the perpetrator has “powerful visions of the future” and seeks “to create utopia in the here and now.” 53 The idea of utopia in genocidal violence can be evident when the perpetrator attempts to create a new, homogeneous society.

Daniel Feierstein, a sociologist and social scientist, has brought up a new theory in the genocide field called “reorganizing genocide.” The theory aims “to ‘reorganize’ society by breaking down ‘relations of reciprocity’ among its members … and replacing them with new forms of political, economic, ideological, and cultural power” inside an existing nation-state. 54 It seeks to destroy both material and symbolic social relationships, especially peer relationships. 55 Genocidal social engineering tries “to destroy social relationships based on autonomy and cooperation by annihilating a significant part of the population” 56 and “to use the terror of annihilation to establish new models of identity and social relationships among the survivors. … the disappearance of the victims forces the survivors to deny their own identity.” 57 Therefore, social and political effects of genocide go beyond the killing of victims and continue after genocidal violence ends. Once society is reorganized at the social level, victims are not able to return their past and continue their lives as before because their autonomy and identity are destroyed. Instead, they are forced to adapt into new identity on both personal and group level.

The psychologist and genocide scholar Israel Charny has stated that the genocide definition should include all cases of mass murder, even without the same ethnicity, race, or religion of targeted people. It means “the mass killing of [a] substantial number

52 Ibid., 164
54 Feierstein, Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Juntas, 48.
55 Ibid., 60.
56 Ibid., 14.
57 Ibid., 14
of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defenselessness and helplessness of the victims.”58 Yet, Charny argues that different types of genocide need to be categorized. For example, genocidal massacre means mass murder on a smaller scale than generally proposed in genocide definitions.59 Intentional genocide means “ideological and operational commitment to destroy … a specific targeted victim group … in whole or in substantial part.”60 Intentional genocide can be committed against “a specific victim group,” “more than one specific victim group at the same time or in closely related or contiguous actions” or “against numerous races, nations, religions, and so on.”61 I do not agree with Charny that all cases of mass murder should be regarded as genocides because then the genocide concept would lose its meaning as the worst-case scenario. However, categorizing genocides makes it easier to analyze different types of genocidal violence since all cases are special, even though they can be similar. On the other hand, categorizing might be dangerous since it is very easy to claim that some genocides are worse than the others due to the different categories.

In contrast to Charny, historian Mark Levene argues that genocides cannot be categorized absolutely. He defines genocide as a state-organized “partial or total extermination of perceived or actual communal groups.”62 “The victim group wields a political, cultural or even spiritual, and hence demonic, power which poses a clear and present danger to the state, demanding that the state defends itself accordingly.”63 “Latecomer states” use genocide as a tool to assert independence and integrity of the society in a system that has been created and operated by its forerunners. Therefore, genocide often occurs during a civil or an interstate war.64 It is interesting that genocides tend to happen during wars. At the same time, the targeted populations have not been the actual threat during the wars since the victims of genocidal massacres are civilians, but the conflicts have given states a chance to attack unwanted minorities at the same time. For example, Nazi Germany claimed that Jews caused the WWII, so they manufactured a reason to destroy the Jews, while they also had to fight at the actual

58 Charny, “Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide,” 75.
59 Ibid., 77.
60 Ibid., 78.
61 Ibid., 78
62 Levene, “Continuity and Discontinuity in the Historical Record,” 198.
63 Ibid., 199.
64 Ibid., 201.
war fronts against other nations. Another example is the Armenian genocide, in which Armenians had nothing to do with the WWI. In this case, the genocidal violence also continued after the war and did not end together with the international conflict.

To explore whether the case of Yazidis should be regarded as a genocide or not, the thesis is going to combine the UN definition and sociological genocide definitions. This thesis is taking the acts of genocidal violence from the legal definition, as explained by Claus Kress. For this thesis, genocide does not mean only physical annihilation, but also social restructuring and the reproduction of the target group, like Fein, Dadrian, and Feierstein agree. I agree with Feierstein that reorganizing social order through genocidal violence can include both material and symbolic destruction of social relations. Genocidal social restructuring occurs when the perpetrator feels the targeted population to be undesirable and unacceptable, like Dadrian describes. However, contrary to Chalk and Jonassohn’s assertions, the target group does not necessary need to be a threat to the perpetrator. Like Levene explains, genocide can be used as a tool to integrate the perpetrator’s society or even to create a totally new society by destroying minority groups. I agree with other scholars that intent is needed in order to commit a genocide.

Because the terms genocide and ethnic cleansing are often mixed, it is important to define ethnic cleansing as well. Moreover, the historian Henry Huttenbach noted already in 1988 that “too often has the accusation of genocide been made simply for the emotional effect or to make a political point, with the result that more and more events have been claimed to be genocide to the point that the term has lost its original meaning.”

Ethnic cleansing is a much newer term than genocide. It came into our consciousness in 1992 when Serbs attacked Bosnian Muslims in order to drive them away from their homes and land during the Bosnian war. Ethnic cleansing means “policies characterized by a combination of massacres and expulsion, deliberate acts of terror and looting, social humiliation and mass rape” and forced deportations. According to the historian Norman Naimark, the intention of ethnic cleansing is to drive victims away from a concrete territory, which the perpetrators claim to be theirs. In

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65 Huttenbach, “Locating the Holocaust under the Genocide Spectrum: Towards a Methodology of Definition and Categorization,” 297.
other words, the goal “is to get rid of the ‘alien’ nationality, ethnic, or religious group and to seize control of the territory they had formerly inhabited.”68 Forced deportations are usually accompanied by murderous violence because victims do not want to leave their homes and abandon their roots. Perpetrators often rip people from their homes and villages violently and kill those who try to stay. Therefore, forced deportations often become genocidal practice. “Even when forced deportation is not genocidal in its intent, it is often genocidal in its effects,” including genocidal killing, hunger, and sorrow.69 Ethnic cleansing has a huge potential to escalate into a genocide.70 While ethnic cleansing can escalate into a genocide, an unsuccessful genocide can also end up being ethnic cleansing. If the genocidal violence only manages to drive the target population away from their home areas, the case might not amount into a genocide, at least according to the UN definition of genocide. On the other hand, Jacques Séminel, who is a political scientist, argues that ethnic cleansing can be categorized as a genocide because of intent. However, everyone’s ultimate fate is concerned in genocide, while some are let to flee in ethnic cleansing.71

The sociologist Michael Mann argues that “since ethnic groups are culturally defined, they can be eliminated if their culture disappears, even if there is no physical removal of persons. People can change their cultural identity.”72 He claims that “the danger zone of murderous cleansing is reached when (a) movements claiming to represent two fairly old ethnic groups both lay claim to their own state over all or part of the same territory and (b) this claim seems to them to have substantial legitimacy and some plausible chance of being implemented.”73 These claims are often based on ancient hatred,74 which means “long-standing historical enmities among ethnic groups.”75 Hatred is primarily based on linguistic, cultural, racial, and religious ties of individuals, which move from generation to generation.76 Truly murderous ethnic cleansing “is unexpected, originally unintended, emerging out of unrelated crises like

69 Ibid., 4.
70 Ibid., 15.
71 Séminel, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, 316.
73 Ibid., 6.
74 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
war.” On the contrary, “genocide is intentional, aiming to wipe out an entire group, not only physically but also culturally.” The question of intent is very debatable since murderous ethnic cleansing cannot be totally unexpected. Like Naimark assures, targeted populations rarely leave their homes willingly and violence and the threat of violence are needed to complete an ethnic cleansing.

Benjamin Valentino, a political scientist, describes ethnic cleansing as “a process that sometimes but not always involves mass killing.” Ethnic cleansing can lead mass killing because physical slaughter is often required to make civilians to leave behind their homes, belongings, and ways of life. Also, relocated people, including children, elderly, and sick people, are usually put into inhospitable conditions. Even though perpetrators might not aim to exterminate the victims actively, they do not usually do anything for the victims’ basic welfare or survival. Sometimes, “deportation and relocation of large numbers of people is impractical or impossible.” Then, mass killing appears to be the only practical means to get rid of the unaccepted ethnic group.

In comparison, genocide does not necessarily need active destruction either. Indirect genocidal violence includes inhospitable living conditions without basic welfare. Without basic needs, the victims will eventually disappear because they cannot survive. Moreover, if killing is the only available option to get rid of the target group, it cannot be anything else than intended destruction, and therefore it amounts to a genocide.

Whether ethnic mass killing escalates into a genocide or not, it “is not simply the result of perpetrators’ bitter hatred of other ethnic groups, or of a racist ideology that calls for the extermination of these groups as such. The ethnic mass killing has deeper roots in perpetrators’ fears than in their hatreds.” Fear can be based on perpetrator’s ideological ethnic, religious, or national beliefs or a real threat. Ethnic mass killing is caused by an effort to reorganize a society fundamentally by transforming ethnic, religious, or national composition. The goal is not just to eliminate unaccepted ethnic minorities, but also to create a new, harmonious society.

78 Ibid.
79 Valentino, Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century, 155.
80 Ibid., 155–56.
81 Ibid., 157.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 75.
84 Ibid., 76, 153–54.
Whether a case of mass violence is said to be a genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, the different terms used have a variety of effects on the targeted society and individuals. Similarly, the term defines how terrible or even evil, the perpetrator has been. “Genocide is a crime on a different scale to all other crimes against humanity and implies an intention to completely exterminate the chosen group. Genocide is therefore both the gravest and the greatest of the crimes against humanity.”85 However, the term genocide is widely used today to describe different situations of mass violence from Holocaust to Yazidis.

The term genocide can be used, or decided not to use, for different purposes. Using the term can be understood as sympathizing with the victims, while using other terms of mass violence instead of genocide can be regarded as sympathizing with the perpetrators. The genocide term can also be applied “as a propaganda tool by becoming a hinge for a venomous rhetoric against a sworn enemy.”86 Moreover, victims, perpetrators, and bystanders often have very different views of the magnitude of the violence.87 From the legal perspective, states and other governmental actors often like to use other terms than genocide for mass atrocities, especially while the situation is ongoing, because the Genocide Convention forces states to take action against perpetrators of genocide.88

Defining terrorism

Both genocide and terrorism are “temporary incarnations of evil in politics, [and] they both partake of the propaganda rhetoric used by the actors in conflict.”89 Terrorism means intentional violent acts against “civilian non-combatants with the goal of furthering some ideological, religious or political objective.”90 The most important causes of terrorism are economic, ethnic, racial, legal, political, religious, and social grievances. Targets can be individuals, groups, institutions, or categories of people.91 Terrorism means total destruction, like genocide, but on a smaller scale than states can commit. Terrorists aim to create fear to achieve their goals by targeting everyone.

86 Sémelin, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, 289–90.
89 Sémelin, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, 318.
90 Borum, Psychology of Terrorism, 4.
91 Ibid., 25.
everywhere at any time. On the other hand, many terrorists have become leaders of states throughout the history. So, maybe the word terrorist refers to everyone “who fail to conquer power, all of [the] history’s losers.”

People often “fail to distinguish between the words ‘terror’ and ‘terrorism’. Acts which involve terror … do not necessarily fall within the category of terrorism.” The word “terror” has several synonyms such as propaganda by the deed, direct action, destructive and terrorist activity, neo-partisan warfare, the armed deed, and the Russian method. Terror works as a weapon of war or conflict. In modern terror, “those to be judged and destroyed are not public figures or rulers, but the social order in its entirety, the economic establishment, the absolutist or foreign rule. … The motivation is not necessarily personal but rather ideological or strategic.” A violent act constitutes terror only if the target group is different from the immediate victims of the violence. The idea of terror is to create extreme fear or anxiety among the targeted group. “The incentives to resort to mass terror probably exist in most major conflicts, particularly for the weaker side.” On the other hand, terrorism and terrorist mass killing have “remained relatively rare compared to the number of conflicts waged in the last century.” “Terror will be terror in the true sense of the word only if” it uses revolutionary and modern warfare and technology at any moment. “Terrorism is not genocide because the victims are not targeted solely because of their identity or status and the act is not carried out in order to annihilate all or significant portion of victims of the same type or identity.” Moreover, genocide is not terrorism, even though it involves ultimate terror.

In order to create massive terror, terrorist groups often use coercive mass killing as their tactic. The idea is to attack civilians hoping to coerce them without the need to defeat the enemy’s military directly in an armed conflict. Therefore, coercive mass

92 Sémelin, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, 319.
95 Ibid., 13.
97 Valentino, Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century, 86.
98 Ibid.
killing occurs when combatants do not have conventional military capabilities to win the war, but they are capable of killing a large number of civilians. The goal is not to exterminate whole civilian populations, but to “use massive violence and the threat of even greater violence to coerce large numbers of civilians or their leaders into submission.” Moreover, terrorists believe that targeting civilians will break the enemy’s morale, destroy their economic productivity, and even create rebellions among the enemy population. “Coercive mass killing can escalate to the genocidal targeting of suspect ethnic groups or the enemy populations of entire geographical regions.”

Another tactic used by terrorist organizations is guerrilla warfare, which can be seen in almost any unconventional and revolutionary conflict. “Guerrilla tactics seek to avoid decisive set-piece battles in favor of prolonged campaigns involving hit-and-run attacks, assassinations, terror bombing, and sabotage” aiming to increase the enemy’s political, economic, and military costs. It can be a very powerful weapon that has been proved to be “extraordinarily difficult to defeat even by the most advanced Western armies.”

The Islamic State is an interesting case for the terrorism discussion because it is often understood to be a terrorist organization. Yet, it actually seems to be something more than just a classical terrorist organization. As Cronin argues, traditionally terrorist organizations have only up to hundreds of members, attack civilians, and control neither territory nor army. On the contrary, IS has a complex administrative structure, an army with tens of thousands of fighters, it engages in military operations, can support itself economically, and controls infrastructure and communication lines. IS sees itself as a working state. They collect taxes, provide security, pay more income salary to oil workers than Iraq or Syria, and they have a good economy, and a strong and replaceable army, even though the international community treats them as terrorists. While terrorists would fight against civilian non-combatants, IS also fights against Iraqi and Syrian governments and western armies in the Middle East. They are not targeting only

103 Ibid., 81.
104 Ibid., 84.
105 Ibid., 81.
106 Ibid., 197.
107 Ibid., 198.
civilians, even though, in the case of Yazidis, their target group was civilians instead of armies. IS’ overall goal, like terrorists’ goal, is to create fear in order to further their ideological, religious, and political objective – to create a pure Muslim state where all believers are warmly welcome. IS uses terror as a weapon of war to destroy the current and to create a new social order within their territory. Iviansky claims that terror will be true terror only if modern technology is used. Therefore, IS uses real terror because they use modern warfare, including modern weapons and cyber warfare. Moreover, IS uses coercive mass killing as one of their weapons. Their overall goal is to destroy all non-believers by killing men and enslaving women and children. Yet, IS does not believe that they use coercion, but the victims accept Islam voluntarily.

**Sociological concept**

Genocide “has been a very successful method [to transform societies] during the twentieth century.” Perpetrators of genocide do not only try to annihilate their victims by killing but also by making the memory of their existence to disappear. “The main objective of genocidal destruction is the transformation of the victims into ‘nothing’ and the survivors into ‘nobodies.’”

In a society, people can act similarly forming their social structure, which means “patterned regularities” that characterize and shape the possibilities for most human interaction between the members of the society. Even though “societies are differentiated entities,” abstract social boundaries, such as ethnic, class, or power structure, can crosscut all societies. Moreover, “a group becomes a group in the sense of being perceived as having common characteristics or a common fate only because other groups are present in the environment.” One’s social identity, meaning “part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that

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113 Ibid., 38.


115 Ibid., 66.

membership”117, is formed through social relations and social categorization. Social categorization is “a process of bringing together social objects or events in groups which are equivalent with regard to an individual’s actions, intentions, attitudes and systems of beliefs.”118 In other words, society is a network of individual members, institutions, and traditions of the group. We form our social world through relations with both privileged and dis-privileged individuals around us. Moreover, societies evolve at the time, and their needs change according to the stage of this evolution.119

Besides forming the social identity by oneself, it can be done through other people. Socialization is “a process by which the new-comer … becomes incorporated into organized patterns of interaction”120 with the help of other people. Socialization can also be forced, for instance, through obligatory cultural assimilation. This is linked to a social change that means “situations in which, for whatever reasons, passing from one group to another is very difficult or impossible.”121 Forced socialization can lead to a social death of the victims on both societal and individual levels when they face “subjection or personal domination, excommunication from the legitimate social or moral community, and relegation to a perpetual state of dishonor.”122 In cases of genocidal violence, this can happen through moral sanctions and exclusion, especially through dehumanization because “dehumanized victims lose their moral standing”123 and are not able to ask for moral and humane treatment anymore. Dehumanization means categorizing victims as inhuman by treating them as animals or nonhuman creatures, like demons. There is both physical and linguistic dehumanization that are often ritualistic processes making victims be something less than full persons.124 Genocidal dehumanization is often related to ethnic and racial others who “have been represented … as barbarians who lack culture, self-restraint, moral sensibility, and cognitive capacity.”125 Value-based dehumanization can happen when perpetrator sees the victim group having different value systems than their own, and they can be

117 Ibid., 69.
118 Ibid.
120 Stryker, Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version, 63.
123 Ibid., 247.
“perceived to lack shared humanity.”\textsuperscript{126} Last, gender-based dehumanization, also during genocidal violence, can be different while talking about male and female victims. When it comes to genocidal rape, “pornography is said to dehumanize women by representing them in an objectified fashion, by implication removing women from full moral consideration and legitimating rape and victimization” through instrumentality, ownership, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, and denial of subjectivity.\textsuperscript{127} In the case of rape, the perpetrator instrumentalizes instead of dehumanizes the victim, denies his or her autonomy, and treats the victim as someone whom it is allowed to violate. In rape, desires to humiliate and exercise power need a human being as a target.\textsuperscript{128} The social identity of individuals and whole groups comes from the reality of daily life, which “maintains itself by being embodied in routines.”\textsuperscript{129} When the old reality is taken away from the victims and replaced by a new reality, social change will happen within the group.

Social death of victims can happen in extreme situations, where victims of genocide and genocidal violence can easily find themselves. According to Volpato and Contarello, extreme situations are situations where the following conditions are met:\textsuperscript{130}

1. Finding oneself in a completely unknown situation without any precedent in one's previous history
2. When other human beings are responsible for the suffering
3. Undergoing aggression which, being legally justified, creates guilt feelings in the victim
4. Undergoing almost unendurable physical and psychological pain
5. Being a constant eyewitness to fatal torture and deliberate killing Social psychology of extreme situations
6. Being left in complete isolation, separated from one's family without any knowledge of their fate
7. Undergoing a complete change of environment
8. Perceiving no temporal limit to the existing situation
9. Undergoing a total loss of human and legal rights
10. Having no chance to react against the aggressors

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 255.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 253.
\textsuperscript{128} Lang, “Questioning Dehumanization: Intersubjective Dimensions of Violence in the Nazi Concentration and Death Camps,” 236.
\textsuperscript{130} Volpato and Contarello, “Towards a Social Psychology of Extreme Situations: Primo Levi’s If This Is a Man and Social Identity Theory,” 241–42.
(11) Being obliged, in order to survive, to behave in ways which would be unthinkable in normal times.

Extreme situations do not allow victims to use positive strategies to improve their social identity. Instead, victims need to concentrate on their mere survival, and therefore the “identity processes are reduced to the minimum.”131

When people are driven out of their home territories, they feel that their ethnic group identity is destroyed, especially if they have been living in the area for centuries. “Controlling territory is of great importance to ethnic groups and to states because both actors believe their survival depends on it. … For ethnic groups, territory is often a defining attribute of their identity, inseparable from their past and vital to their continued existence as a distinct group.”132 Victims of genocidal violence use identity narratives, which are based on the location and group dynamics where they come from, to try to restore the meaning of life by using “familiar historical, territorial, cultural or religious references.”133 The past will always follow on the background in the victims’ lives.134 Therefore, driving people out of their homes and changing their identities and social group structure, instead of killing them, is a crucial element of discussion about genocide from the victims’ perspective.

Research puzzle

On the theoretical basis, this thesis is going to look at the case of mass violence against Yazidis in Iraq perpetrated by IS. The main question is to find out whether the case should be regarded as a genocide or something else, such as ethnic cleansing. Another aim is to participate in the discussion about terrorism and genocide: can an organization, which international community treats as a terrorist organization, commit a genocide. The thesis will take a sociological perspective, and will discuss the case in the light of social change in the Yazidi group, rather than concentrate on the numbers of killed people, legal, or political viewpoints. However, I will use the Genocide Convention

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131 Ibid., 253.
133 Sémelin, Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, 27.
Article II as a base to discuss the violent acts and their effects on Yazidis. I assume that the IS violence against Yazidis was genocidal with intent to destroy the ethnic and religious group as such. However, I am not sure whether the actions and results of the violence amount into a successful genocide or not. The case might be an attempted genocide, a partial genocide (which did not wholly succeed), or even amount into an ethnic cleansing instead of a genocide. That is what I want to find out.

Even though the thesis will concentrate on the victims, the perpetrators’ intent needs to be established since the intent is one of the most important questions while defining a case as a genocide. So, the first sub-question is to look at why IS wanted to get rid of Yazidis, and did they have an intent to destroy the group as such.

Then the puzzle will move to the social change within the Yazidi group. I will discuss about the killing of Yazidis and see if the small number of killed people, who were mostly men, is enough for the crime of genocide from the sociological perspective. Moreover, I will try to find out how the number of killed Yazidis affects the existence of the whole Yazidi society as such.

Because genocide definitions do not include only direct killing but also indirect destruction of the target group, I will continue to discuss other material elements of genocide. I will look how IS has inflicted on the group conditions of Yazidis to physically destroy the group. This question is also well-connected to preventing births among Yazidis and transferring children from the Yazidi group to another group, which is IS in this case.

At last, I will connect the whole discussion about the violence into causing serious bodily and especially mental harm to Yazidi survivors. The discussion throughout the thesis will lead to a conclusion whether the physical and mental damage and social change of Yazidis perpetrated by IS should be regarded as a genocide or not in the sociological point of view.

Methodology and source criticism

Due to the ongoing violence and conflicts in the Middle East and Iraq, there is a lack of available data and primary sources for the topic in English. It is extremely hard, or even impossible, to go to the region to conduct interviews and field research. Therefore,
this thesis needs to rely a lot on material that is produced by someone else, such as original reports from the UN-based organizations and human rights organizations.

The primary sources – the original reports from different organizations, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council – are based on interviews of civilians and targeted populations, like Yazidi survivors. I collected the interview information from the reports because it is not possible to conduct interviews myself. This thesis further uses the primary sources to study the topic from a new theoretical perspective, which is explained in the theory section. The Original reports based on interviews, which are produced by objective, international, and reliable organizations, should give a neutral view about what have happened during the IS attacks and how the genocidal campaign has affected survivors afterward. On the other hand, since these organizations are from the western world, they might tend to focus on issues of western interests rather than Islamic interests.

The main documents I use as primary sources, which are produced by the UN agencies, include Human Rights Council report A/HCR/32/CRP.2 “They came to destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis from 2016. The report was conducted on a UN mandate, and it is based on interviews of Yazidi survivors of the 2014 attacks. Another Human Rights Council report, which is used as a primary source, is called Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups (A/HRC/28/18) dated in 2015. The mission of this report was to collect information on bodily and mental harm caused by the violence. The report includes consistent accounts of Yazidi survivors and covers separate attacks and incidents. Besides the Human Rights Council Reports, also UN Security Council Resolution 2249 (S/RES/2249) from 2015 is used to gather reliable information about the case. The Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July – 10 September 2014 is published jointly by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is based on testimonies obtained directly from the victims, survivors, and witnesses of genocidal violence; and information and reports from reliable local sources. Other similar reports from the UN-based organizations are used to gain information for the thesis as well.

Reports from Amnesty International are also consulted for the research. I use as primary sources reports called Ethnic cleansing on a historic scale: Islamic State’s
systematic targeting of minorities in Northern Iraq (2014) and Iraq: Escape from Hell: Torture and sexual slavery in Islamic State captivity in Iraq (2014). I also use another human rights organization as a primary source. Human Rights Watch’s document Marked with An “X”: Iraqi Kurdish Forces’ Destruction of Villages, Homes in Conflict with ISIS (2016) will work as a counter argument against the possible genocide because it claims that IS is not alone responsible for all material destruction of Yazidi villages. Instead, it shows that Yazidis have destroyed houses and other buildings as well. Besides these official reports, I have also used several news articles from the websites of both human rights organizations. Since Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are worldwide human rights organizations, I assume that they do have reliable knowledge and information. They are the ones who are actually working on the ground, interviewing survivors and witnesses, and gathering information from local sources. Therefore, they know what has been going on and what is the current situation of the survivors. Moreover, because Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are non-governmental organizations, their views should not lean towards any state views. Therefore, their reports can be trusted.

After the official documents, I also looked at material produced by Yazidi organizations, namely Yazda and Yezidis International to gain more information from the targeted population. They have published testimonies, interviews, videos, and other documentation about the genocidal violence against Yazidis. What makes these sources problematic is that these kinds of organizations want to highlight the worst atrocities and gain justice. They, of course, feel that the attacks against Yazidis are the worst possible thing that can happen in the world. Therefore, information from Yazidi organizations can be biased towards genocide instead of other human rights abuses, and the organizations might ignore counterarguments against genocide on purpose. They also have limited knowledge to actually investigate the cases. For example, a report from the Yazda Documentation Project Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014 (2016) written by Matthew Barber includes research on mass graves on the ground and interviews with survivors and local people living near the murder sites. Yet, even the report itself underlines the fact that “Yazda is limited in its investigative capacity in that we cannot exhume the remains of bodies to count or analyze them—that next step is the purview of forensic experts. Due to our limitations, some errors can occur regarding some
presumed mass grave sites.” Because the research and interviews are mostly in line with my primary sources, I take also the information from Yazidi organizations into account in my reasoning.

Data from the IS side draws mainly on IS’s own online magazine Dabiq, which changed its name to Rumiyah in September 2016. The magazine is published monthly in several languages, including English. It focuses on IS group identity, honor and solidarity, the group’s objectives, including the establishment of the caliphate and fighting against their enemies, global jihad, the conduct of violence, Muslim society, allies of Allah, and quotations from the Quran and other Islamic books. The publication shows how IS views itself and boast its victories in holy war aiming to establish a glorious caliphate that will restore the golden age of Islam. This publication gives a very good picture of IS own worldview and ideology and how they manage to gain so much ideological support for their goals. Rumiyah and Dabiq releases give a very different view on IS than western media, which is against the Islamic State, does. However, we need to keep in mind that the propaganda magazine tries to give readers an image of a perfect, Islamic state where all Muslims want to go and fight for the real Islam underlining that all their own losses are sacrifices to Allah, which will be later awarded. Yet, it gives lots of evidence on how IS works on the ground and their socialization processes into violence and Islam.

Furthermore, I have consulted official IS documents, which I have found in English, to understand better the ideas and ideology behind IS and what they are doing for their victims. For example, Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves, produced by IS Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State in 2014, gives instructions how to handle women and sex slaves. That gives information from IS side about how and why they treat the women victims. I also looked some videos about IS training camps, that IS has produced and published online, to get information how they train and treat new soldiers. The videos are made to look like very good army training with fighting, gaining physical strength, and so on. The videos include a lot of religious education as well. However, the videos are made for propaganda purposes. Therefore, they are likely to include only material that makes the organization seem glorious with a very good army. On the other hand, they must have

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comparatively good training for fighting because they have managed to survive so long in the Middle East even against the most powerful armies in the whole world. The information directly from IS is also used in an original theoretical way to look at the Yazidi case. For instance, IS’ view on their army training is connected into the captivity of Yazidi boys who were taken from their mothers to serve in IS army. This information proves that IS tried to move the captured boys from the Yazidi group into their own religious terrorist group by forcing them to change their religion and fight for the Islamic cause.
Empirical analysis

Background of the IS violence and the question of its statehood

Political Islam is not a new issue in the Middle East. It has “existed in Iraq since the 1940s.” Zarqawi got the second chance to establish an Islamic state – the dream of Muslims – in Iraq in 2002 and early 2003, after establishing it failed in Afghanistan. Zarqawi’s goal was to impose a civil war in Iraq to defeat the Shia with the help of the USA since he believed that the USA will soon attack Iraq to defeat the Iraqi government. Accordingly, the USA invaded Iraq in March 2003. Furthermore, Zarqawi allied with al-Qaeda in December 2004 and started to train jihadists from all over the world in Iraq. The roots of IS were established. However, the Islamic State failed in three years. Other “al-Qaeda’s branches attempted but failed to establish Islamic governments from 2006 to 2012” in Yemen, Mali, and Somalia. At the same time, the Islamic State managed to gain power again, under the name of “ISI,” after the USA withdraw from Iraq in 2011.

IS got another chance to gain “widespread Sunni support for its ambitious drive to establish a caliphate in the heart of the Middle East” while the political crisis escalated in Iraq through 2013-2014. Many former al-Qaeda fighters and commanders joined IS after the organization attacked the Abu Ghraib prison, which was a terrible place for prisoners. In the prison, hooded victims were given electric shocks, barking dogs haunted naked prisoners, and “first-hand accounts of rape and sexual humiliation were posted online.” Several jihadists and former members of Saddam’s military and security services met in another prison, Camp Bucca, as well. The place was also called the “Academy” since the dangerous inmates were brought together there. One of the former prisoners stated that they would have never been able

138 Atwan, Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate, 47.
140 Ibid., 69.
141 Atwan, Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate, 55.
142 Ibid., 44.
143 Ibid., 56–57.
to get together similarly in Baghdad or anywhere else. Furthermore, the leader of IS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was imprisoned in Camp Bucca, where he created his connections with military personnel.\textsuperscript{144} IS started to conquer land in the summer of 2013, and captured many cities very fast, especially in the summer of 2014.\textsuperscript{145} Many foreign Muslim fighters, or strangers as they called themselves, joined the group since they believed that the last grand battle will happen in Sham (Syria), and was ongoing in 2014.\textsuperscript{146} At the same time, Islamic State and al-Qaeda’s connection was broken in May due to disagreements on organizational issues and overall aims. While IS wanted to create a caliphate very soon, al-Qaeda wanted to gain popular Sunni support first.\textsuperscript{147} “On 29 June [2014], ISIL spokesperson, Abu Mohammed al-Adnani, announced the formation of an ‘Islamic Caliphate’ via an audio statement posted online, at the same time rebranding ISIL simply as ‘the Islamic State.’”\textsuperscript{148} Soon, on 1 July, ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself as “the caliph” and asked all Muslims around the world to obey him and move into the new caliphate.\textsuperscript{149}

The Islamic state has managed to gain a big territory, which is as large as the Great Britain, due to the “perfect storm of political, historical, cultural and technological circumstances.”\textsuperscript{150} “Part of the State’s success had to do with its style of governing. … It tried to provide public services, such as fixing potholes, running post offices, and distributing food. It even had a campaign to vaccinate its subjects against polio.”\textsuperscript{151} IS further rewarded its tribal allies by sharing the spoils of war to gain more support. On the other hand, IS used extremely harsh punishments for even small crimes, such as robbers lost their hand, and death penalties were public executions.\textsuperscript{152} Already at the beginning of IS, “Zarqawi believed that psychological terror was as important a weapon in the jihadist arsenal as the Kalashnikov,”\textsuperscript{153} whilst al-Qaeda believed that

\textsuperscript{144} McCants, \textit{The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State}, 75–76.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Atwan, \textit{Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate}, ix.
\textsuperscript{151} McCants, \textit{The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State}, 152.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Atwan, \textit{Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate}, 62.
they should win the hearts and minds of the locals. Because violence works to gain power, we tend to forget that this horrifying approach to state building has a striking track record throughout the history. Moreover, the Islamic State is the richest terror group in history due to its control of oil fields, looting and trading antiquities, and getting ransoms from kidnappings. It also has a reserved right to collect protection tax from other religious communities, such as from Christians, which is something that only a real Islamic state can do. To continue, IS controlled people by closing university departments and canceling subjects that were illegitimate according to the Shari’a. For example, IS closed the colleges of human rights, political sciences, fine arts, philosophy, and tourism management. Canceled subjects included, for instance, democracy, culture, and translation of English and French.

The former leader of ISI, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, already wanted ISI to be recognized as a state rather than a terrorist organization. By combining its government, careful planning, brutal tactics, and clever recruitment process, the Islamic State has “the manpower, money, and territory to make a credible claim to be a state.” To all IS’ intents and purposes, “it is a state with an army.” A declared state, which IS sees itself, means an entity that “must have a clearly defined territory, a permanent population and a government capable of exercising authority over the population, its territories and its resources.” According to western political criteria, “the Islamic State is the only insurgent group in the Middle East to have made a plausible claim” to be a state after the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, many Sunni Muslims living under IS rule do not see the authority as a state: “Before, there was some kind of security, some kind of state. It is incomparable to the current situation.”

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159 Ibid., 153.
161 Ibid., xi.
163 Ibid., 136.
state, which causes deaths of civilians, destroys property and cultural and religious sites, and undermines regional and global stability. It further reaffirms “that terrorism, including the actions of ISIL, cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, or civilization.”\textsuperscript{164} Besides wanting to be recognized as a state, IS declared itself as a caliphate that requires authority, manpower, and territorial control. The Islamic State fills all these requirements, even though its authority relies a lot on violence. On the other hand, the IS caliphate is illegitimate because a majority of Muslim leaders have not approved it. Even the majority of jihadist leaders have not recognized it. The only people who promoted Baghdadi as a caliph were senior leaders of the Islamic State itself.\textsuperscript{165}

When talking about genocidal violence, IS is an interesting actor since it sees itself as a state actor while international community sees it as a terrorist organization or an insurgent group. Some Muslims do believe the cause of the state, but many reject the IS brutal ideology and statehood. At the same time, IS has everything that is required from a state, including territory, money, working government, control over population and infrastructure, and a comparatively good army that has been very hard to defeat even by the superpowers. Because IS have not been recognized as a state either internationally or regionally, it is not a state in political terms. At the same time, it is something more than just a traditional terrorist organization. It seems to be a new kind of terrorist organization and insurgent group, which has been extremely powerful. It has all but the recognition to be a state. IS is a very special kind of organization that is not comparable to any other organization.

\textsuperscript{165} McCants, \textit{The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State}, 116, 128.
Who are the Yazidis?

“ISIS held me for over a year. I haven’t seen my husband since the day of the attack. I dream of him”, says a Yazidi woman, who IS held for 18 months and sold her twice. 166

Before the IS attacks at the beginning of August 2014, Sinjar region in northern Iraq was mainly populated by Yazidis. 167 Yazidis are one of the oldest ethnic groups in Mesopotamia. Around 400,000 out of total 600,000 Iraq’s Yazidis used to live in Sinjar district, while 200,000 Yazidis inhabited elsewhere in Ninevah and Dohuk provinces before the attacks. 168 A smaller number of Yazidi communities also live in Iraq’s Kurdistan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Russia, and Germany. 169 A small number of Arabs following Sunni Islam lived together with the Yazidis in Sinjar town and surrounding villages. Families from two distinct religious groups enjoyed friendly, neighborly relations, which had lasted for generations. 170

Yazidis are often regarded as an ethnic-religious group, especially when they are violently targeted, discriminated, or repressed by surrounding Muslim communities. An ethnic group is defined under the UN Genocide convention as a group “whose members share a common language or culture,” 171 and religious group as “whose members share the same religion, denomination or mode of worship.” 172 Many of the Yazidi communities “view themselves as ethnically Kurdish but followers of the Yazidi religion.” 173 In other words, Yazidis believe to “constitute a separate religious denomination, with distinct modes of worship.” 174 Yazidis are often considered to be between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq due to the ethnic reasons. 175 Yazidi religion is thousands of years old tradition, with 4,000–6,000 years old cultural background. 176

Yazidi religion is a synthetic combination of several other religions, including pagan, Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim elements. Yazidism is a

166 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 5.
167 Ibid., 6.
168 Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”
170 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 6.
171 Ibid., 20.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yazidis.”
dualistic religion. They believe in a passive Creator God and the Peacock Angel, which is an executive organ of divine will.\textsuperscript{177} The Peacock Angel “defies God and serves as [the] intermediary between man and the divine.”\textsuperscript{178} Even though the Peacock Angel is a force for good in their religion, the pronunciation sounds like the Quranic actor “the devil” or “Shaytan.”\textsuperscript{179} They believe to be children of Adam but not Eve, and therefore to be different from other people.\textsuperscript{180} Yazidis do not have an official Holy Book to refer to, unlike most religions have. The knowledge of the religion passes from generation to generation through oral stories. Yet, they have two sacred books, which they can consult for religious meaning: the Kitab el-Jelwa, or the Book of Revelation, and the Meshef Resh, or The Black Book.\textsuperscript{181} Already during the Ottoman Empire, Yazidis were described as a “pervert community”, “looters”, and “bandits who do not pay their taxes.”\textsuperscript{182} Some religious groups further believe that Yazidis are devil-worshippers. For example, fanatical Muslims even claim that their faith is dedicated to worship Satan “because of their unique worship of the fallen [Peacock] angel.”\textsuperscript{183} Moreover, the Sinjar region is the home of Yazidis’ ancestral villages, holy places, and shrines. The area, where Yazidis from all over the world make pilgrimages to their religious origins, is very significant for the religion as such.\textsuperscript{184}

Yazidism is a closed religion which does not allow any conversions. “One cannot become a Yezidi, and marriage outside of the community is forbidden.”\textsuperscript{185} In order to be a Yazidi, a child must have two Yazidi parents.\textsuperscript{186} Yazidis tend “to maintain a more closed community than other ethnic or religious groups” through their religious-political hierarchy.\textsuperscript{187} The unique practice regarding converts highlights the fact that the religion is self-contained. Therefore, displacements make the Yazidi tradition and

\textsuperscript{177} Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
\textsuperscript{178} Asher-Schapiro, “Who Are the Yazidis, the Ancient, Persecuted Religious Minority Struggling to Survive in Iraq?”
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
\textsuperscript{182} Basci, “Yazidis: A Community Scattered in between Geographies and Its Current Immigration Experience,” 341.
\textsuperscript{184} Asher-Schapiro, “Who Are the Yazidis, the Ancient, Persecuted Religious Minority Struggling to Survive in Iraq?”
\textsuperscript{185} Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
\textsuperscript{186} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 6.
\textsuperscript{187} Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
religion even more vulnerable. Yazidis’ “belief in maintaining ancient bloodlines and self-containment combined with the disallowance of new converts is causing the Yazidi religion to disappear.”

Even though leaving the religion through intermarriage have been extremely rare, Yazidis and Muslim communities have been friends, neighbors, and worked together peacefully prior to the IS attack. To continue, Yazidis are traditionally cultivators and herdsmen who try to maintain their traditions also in daily life. What is harmful to the traditional jobs of Yazidis is that the government of Iraq “does not allow Yazidis to officially own properties.” Therefore, Yazidis have been oppressed and in the fear of losing their jobs and homelands also under the Iraqi government. At the same time, the Kurdish regional government in Iraq has granted full religious freedom to Yazidi minority. Yazidis further have two ministerial posts under the regional government. However, Yazidis have also criticized Kurdish officials for poor treatment of Yazidis.

Yazidis “are the most oppressed religion in Iraq because their religion and beliefs are misunderstood by Muslims.” Yazidis think that they have suffered 73 genocides or attempts of annihilation, which all have been brutal campaigns of religious violence, since the rule under the Ottoman Empire. The latest one was the IS attack in August 2014. Throughout the history, “Yazidis have been heavily persecuted under successive Islamic regimes due to several factors.” Yazidism is seen as a polytheistic religion, even though Yazidis identify themselves as monotheists. Islamic tradition further values a written scripture, while Yazidis have an oral tradition. Furthermore, Muslims do not even recognize Yazidis as similar people with them because they are not mentioned in the Qur’an and considered as the “People of the Book” like Christians and Mandaeans, for example, are. Instead, especially extreme fundamentalist Muslims

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189 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 6.
190 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yazidis.”
192 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yazidis.”
194 Asher-Schapiro, “Who Are the Yazidis, the Ancient, Persecuted Religious Minority Struggling to Survive in Iraq?”
195 Barber, “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014,” 3.
196 Ibid., 3–4.
believe that Yazidis are unbelievers and it is not forbidden to kill them. Muslims’ accusation of Yazidis as devil worshipers started already in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Yet, the organized anti-Yazidi violence started during the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, both Ottoman and local Kurdish leaders targeted Yazidis through brutal, religious, and violent campaigns in the second half of the 19th century. To continue, Yazidis “often share the same political fate as Iraq's other Kurds” because they speak Kurdish. In the 1970s, the Baath party of Iraq launched the Anfal campaign to Arabize Kurds in the northern territories. The Dictator Saddam Hussein demolished around 150 Yazidi villages and forced the population to move to the urban centers or “modern villages.” Hussein constructed the city of Sinjar and destroyed Yazidis’ rural lifestyle by forcing them into the city. In the cities, Yazidis were neither allowed to worship freely nor study their religion in schools. After the fall of Hussein in 2003, Islamic fundamentalism started to rise. Terrorists and religious extremists started to attack Yazidis. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, hundreds of Yazidis have been killed, beheaded, or mutilated by the insurgency. They have also suffered from a series of bombings. The most devastating terrorist suicide attack, during the Iraq war, occurred in August 2007 against the Yazidis population: four al-Qaeda’s truck bombs killed over 500 people, of which 215 were Yazidis, in one day. “Iraq's Ministry of Human Rights stated [in 2008] that between 2003 and the end of 2007, a total of 335 Yezidis had been killed in direct or indirect attacks.” Yazidis have been targeted other ways than killing as well since 2003. Many Yazidi women have been abducted and forced to marry Kurdish security forces. Such marriages force the victims to deny their Yazidi faith and identify as Kurds since the marriage outside of their religion is prohibited. During the 2005 elections, all Yazidis were not able to vote. Some Yazidi villages did not receive any voting ballots, and the government did not provide any transportation to polling stations for voting. In some voting stations, the ballot boxes

199 Asher-Schapiro, “Who Are the Yazidis, the Ancient, Persecuted Religious Minority Struggling to Survive in Iraq?”
202 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
were already filled before the voting, so it was impossible to vote. To continue, numerous attacks against Yazidi students in Mosul University forced about 2,000 Yazidi students to quit their studies in 2013 since it was not safe for Yazidis to attend their classes. Therefore, the memory of persecution has been a huge part of Yazidis’ daily life already before the attacks in 2014.

Due to the history of annihilation and especially the attacks in 2014, 500,000 Iraq’s Yazidis “fear the end of their people and their religion” stating that “extermination, emigration, and settlement of this community will bring tragic transformations to the Yazidi religion.” Yazidis are afraid that their whole religion will be wiped away from the whole earth since IS has taken their land, forced Yazidis to convert Islam, executed them, and forced them to run away from their historical lands. A 19-year-old Berfo has summarized the Yazidis’ fears in an interview, “I wouldn’t leave any Yazidis in Iraq. I would take all out of them away from there. There is no life left for us in Iraq. There are always massacres.”

### Genocidal violence against Yazidis in Iraq in 2014

The Islamic State may have committed a crime of genocide as well as several other crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidi population in Northern Iraq and Syria in 2014. Right after the attacks against Yazidis, the UN Security Council recalled that “widespread or systematic attacks directed against any civilian populations because of their ethnic or political background, religion or belief may constitute a crime against humanity.” The Security Council also condemned the deliberate targeting of civilians in Nineveh province in Iraq, including indiscriminate killing, persecution of religious communities, driving minority groups out of their homes, sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, and destruction of cultural and religious sites among other

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204 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
205 Asher-Schapiro, “Who Are the Yazidis, the Ancient, Persecuted Religious Minority Struggling to Survive in Iraq?”
206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
acts. Moreover, the UN Human Rights Council claims that the violence against Yazidis amounts into a genocide. On the other hand, Amnesty International sees the case as a deliberate and systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing rather than a genocide.

“When ISIS attacked Sinjar, they came to destroy,” Yazidi religious authority says. In August 2014, the Islamic State “seized the districts of Sinjar, Tel Afar and the Ninewa Plains.” IS targeted intentionally and systematically ethnic and religious communities in the captured areas. “This led to a mass exodus of Yezidis, Christians and members of other ethnic and religious groups from the Ninewa Plains.” The program of the destruction was “not only destroying lives, but also causing irreparable damage to the fabric of Iraq’s [whole] society, and fueling inter-ethnic, sectarian and inter-religious tensions in the region and beyond.” IS’s violent, extremist ideology has destabilized Iraq, Syria, and the whole region, and caused “devastating humanitarian impact on the civilian populations, which has led to the displacement of millions of people.”

In the early morning of 3 August 2014, IS “fighters attacked Sinjar from Mosul and Tel Afar.” The attack was organized very well. Hundreds of IS soldiers acted “in concert with each other as they seized towns and villages on all sides of Mount Sinjar.” “A series of systematic and widespread attacks took place” in Yazidi populated villages and cities. The campaign against Yazidi religious minority started with an “armed assault against the Yazidi homelands in the Sinjar region” and moved...
soon “against the Yazidi communities.” The attacks involved ethnic cleansing, mass executions, forced conversions into Islam, destruction of temples, and abduction and enslavement of thousands of Yazidis. IS attacks caused displacement of more than 400,000 Yazidis, which is the most of the whole Yazidi population. Many of the enslaved women and girls still remain as subjects of systematic sexual violence in the hands of IS.

IS fighters did not face much resistance because many of the local Peshmerga fighters withdraw, leaving the Sinjar region defenseless, when IS advanced. People from many villages did not know that the security situation had collapsed. In the villages, where Yazidis knew that Peshmerga forces were fleeing, Yazidis asked them “to leave behind weapons that they could use to defend the area.” Yet, Peshmerga troops refused to give their weapons to the Yazidis. However, some Yazidis tried to defend themselves instead of leaving their homes immediately. One survivor, Mohsen Elias, told Amnesty International,

> After the Peshmerga who used to protect our villages fled in the night between 2 and 3 August, me and many other men from the village … took our weapons (most of us had Kalashnikovs, for the protection of our families) and clashed with IS militants. At about 7 or 8am we ran out of ammunition and ran away toward the mountain.

“By daybreak, Yazidi families from hundreds of villages across Sinjar were fleeing their homes in fear and panic.”

IS fighters took control over “the main roads and all strategic junctions, … set up checkpoints and sent mobile patrols to search for fleeing Yazidi families.” Within hours, Yazidis who did not manage to escape, “found themselves encircled by armed, black-clad ISIS fighters.” IS captured thousands of fleeing Yazidis on 3-5 August 2014. “Almost all villages were emptied within 72 hours of the attack.” Only Kocho village survived until 15 August.

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222 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
224 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 6–7.
225 Barber, “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014.” 22.
226 Ibid.
228 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 7.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid.
232 Ibid.
IS systematically “separated the men from the women and young children.” IS often took the men immediately, or very soon, away and executed them in nearby locations, such as ditches. IS fighters sometimes tried to force their victims to convert to Islam. Those men who refused were killed right away. IS gave them a choice: convert or die. In some cases, those who converted in the hope of survival were also executed. Within an hour after the capture of men and women, IS soldiers forcibly transferred the survivors to temporary holding sites, such as schools. “Secondary transfers were later conducted in an organized manner, with buses and large vehicles moving captured Yazidis to designated holding sites in Mosul, Tel Afar and Baaj, deeper inside the ISIS-controlled territory.” While IS murdered men and teenage boys immediately, they kidnapped younger boys and sent them into indoctrination camps to be trained as future IS fighters. “Young women and girls [were] kidnapped as sex slaves while the middle-aged and older women were subsequently murdered.”

All in all, IS massacred around 5,000 and abducted 7,000 Yazidis. Moreover, 90% of the whole Yazidi community were driven out of their homes and displaced in refugee camps. Still, “3,400 women and children remain in ISIS captivity either as sex slaves or [are] undergoing brainwashing as future ISIS fighters.” IS also destroyed 42 Yazidi religious sites and plundered their property. IS intended to destroy the Yazidis, “whose identity is based on their religious beliefs,” through a well-organized pattern of attacks against the Yazidi community. If that is confirmed, “such conduct may amount to genocide.”

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234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
240 Ibid.
**Intent**

IS have clearly shown its intent to destroy Yazidis as a religious group. It “has continually referenced the Yazidis’ religious beliefs as the basis for its attack on and subsequent abuse of them.” IS believes that all Muslims should question the mere existence of Yazidis since they are “a pagan minority.” IS even claims that “their creed is so deviant from the truth that even cross-worshipping Christians for ages considered them devil worshippers and Satanists.” IS further asks everyone to capture and besiege all non-believers, including Yazidis, wherever they can find them. After their religious research, IS found out that there is no room for Yazidis to pay jiziyah payment, the special tax to live in the Islamic caliphate. In Allah’s words, “You bring them with chains around their necks, until they enter Islam.” Since Allah is forgiving and merciful, those who convert to Islam are free to go on their own way. IS gave Yazidis two choices: conversion or death. After the attack in Sinjar, IS additionally claimed that hundreds of Yazidis turned to Islam and left behind their non-believing religion voluntarily. Those who decided to flee, when IS entered the villages, are apostates and therefore not accepted people. In public statements in their own magazine, IS clearly revealed their aim to either convert or eliminate all Yazidis, since Allah will punish all Muslims if they allow this minority, “whose religion does not qualify for protection under Islamic jurisprudence,” to exist in the region. These public statements against Yazidis’ religious interpretation demonstrate clearly the IS intent to destroy the Yazidi group as such, especially because “historically, the special intent to destroy has often been inferred from conduct, including statements.”

“No other religious group present in ISIS-controlled areas of Syria and Iraq has been subjected to the destruction that the Yazidis have suffered.” For instance,

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241 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 20.
242 The Islamic State, “The Revival of Slavery before the Hour,” 14.
243 Ibid., 14–15.
244 Ibid., 15.
245 Ibid., 14.
249 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 28.
250 Ibid., 30.
Christians are allowed to live in the caliphate if they pay the special tax, jiziyah.\textsuperscript{251} Islamic State “perpetrated widespread, systematic attacks against civilians, and implemented policies that fundamentally violated their rights.”\textsuperscript{252} Many of the attacks in the Yazidi villages “were carried out in a methodical, systematic and deliberate manner.”\textsuperscript{253} Even though other ethnic minorities were also attacked, the evidence indicates that “only Yazidis were present at the various holding sites [and IS military bases] in Iraq and Syria, and that it was only Yazidi women and girls who are being sold at slave markets.”\textsuperscript{254} Since IS sees Yazidis as the only non-believers among other ethnic minorities in IS-controlled areas, IS statement in its magazine shows that it is acceptable, or even encouraged, to enslave Yazidi women; “Enslaving the families of the kuffar and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shari’ah that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Qur’ān and the narrations of the Prophet …, and thereby apostatizing from Islam.”\textsuperscript{255} Moreover, enslavement and increasing the number of concubines, in this case by raping the slaves, is good because “the child of the master has the status of the master [meaning he is a free man like his father], and thereby she has given birth to her master from this angle.”\textsuperscript{256} Additionally, IS has told mothers, whose young sons have been taken away, that IS took “their sons to teach them to be Muslims and to train them to fight.”\textsuperscript{257} For example, an IS fighter showed some Yazidi mothers “a video of young boys being trained in an ISIS camp, saying ‘we are training them to kill kuffar like you.’”\textsuperscript{258} “IS has not tried to hide or deny its crimes.”\textsuperscript{259} Instead, they have published videos and statements in social media, including gruesome details of atrocities against both captured civilians and soldiers.\textsuperscript{260}

“As held by the ICTY Appeals Chamber in the Krstić case, ‘[t]he destruction of cultural property may serve evidentially to confirm an intent … to destroy the group,”

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\textsuperscript{251} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{254} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 30.
\textsuperscript{255} The Islamic State, “The Revival of Slavery before the Hour,” 17.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{257} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 18.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
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as such.”261 IS systematically destroyed and damaged Yazidis’ places of worship and cultural heritage, which shows that the religious minority has no place in Iraq and Syria. IS, for example, destroyed several important Yazidi temples.262 IS also destroyed Yazidi shrines and looted Yazidi houses after the initial attacks.263

**Killing members of the group**

“They brought vehicles and started to fill them up with men and boys. … They got us off the vehicle by the pool and made us crouch on the ground in a tight cluster and one of them photographed us. I thought then they’d let us go after that, but they opened fire at us from behind. … I let myself fall forward, as if I were dead, and I stayed there face down without moving. … Five or six others were also alive and they also ran from the place. The rest were all killed. I know two of them, they were right next to me” a survivor of Kocho massacre told to Amnesty International.264

According to the reports from the UN Human Rights Council, UNAMI/OHCHR, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Yazda, IS deliberately attacked and killed Yazidis in Sinjar region in Northern Iraq in 2014. Even though the sources agree that most of the executed victims were men and boys, the number of murdered victims varies from hundreds to thousands.265 IS killed intentionally “hundreds of Yazidis as part of its attack on Sinjar. This includes Yazidis executed on capture, as well as the deaths which resulted from ISIS’s besieging of Yazidis trapped on the mountain.”266

Alone in August 2014, IS “fighters summarily executed hundreds of Yazidi men and adolescent boys when the victims refused to convert to Islam or were captured with weapons in their possession.”267 Uppsala Conflict Data Program website supports the number to be hundreds. According to this data, IS caused the death of 600 civilians in Sinjar at the beginning of August 2014.268 However, the number of Yazidis can be smaller since the website does not tell whether the civilian casualties were Yazidis, Christians, Muslims, or some other civilians living in the area. Human Rights Watch reports that IS killed more than 1,000 people around Sinjar in August 2014. IS did not kill only men but executed also elderly, sick, and Yazidis with disabilities who did not

261 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 30.
263 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 30.
265 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 21.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.
268 UCDP, “IS - Civilians.”
manage to flee in time. On the other hand, Yazda claims that IS “has murdered more than 3,000 Yazidi men and sold thousands of Yazidi women into sexual slavery” since 2014 until today. Moreover, “dozens of women have been killed in captivity while many others have committed suicide.” Since the executions happened mainly in small groups of 2-20 people in several locations, it is extremely hard to tell the exact number of people killed. There might be cases of killing without any witnesses. Yet, there are also two well-documented bigger massacres. IS killed at least 80 men in a single incident in Qani village on the 3 August and 700 men in Kocho village in August 2014.

When IS reached Yazidi villages and caught the people, they often separated men and women. Women and younger children were taken away and abducted while men and boys were killed in nearby killing sites. For instance, one witness told Amnesty International that a white IS’ Toyota pickup car stopped by a house of Yazidis even though the inhabitants had indicated being peaceful civilians by raising a white flag. IS men took all the women and children into another white car, Kia, which had arrived, and forced men to walk to a nearby dry riverbed, where they faced their death. IS also attacked the places where Yazidis had stopped to rest on their way out of the villages. IS tried to collect all weapons and cell phones from fleeing Yazidis so they would not have anything, neither to defend themselves nor to contact their relatives.

They again asked for weapons and we said we had none. They told us to hand over our mobile phones. They sent a Yezidi man who was with them to collect the phones from the women. Then they put us into two lines: men and boys in one line and women and children in the other.

In some cases, IS controlled the villages for several days before separating the population and killing men and boys. In these cases, IS had tried to keep the Yazidis calm and win their hearts and minds by telling lies that they would be freed later on.

270 Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”
271 Ibid.
272 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
275 Ibid., 11.
However, they were later separated and killed or abducted. For example, Mr. Mrad witnessed such a case,

IS militants, who had been controlling the village since 3 August, had promised repeatedly that we would be allowed to leave. I thought this was the day as I followed many people from the village… When we reached the school, the women and children were sent to the upper floor and we the men were kept on the ground floor. IS militants told us to hand over our money, our phones and any gold. Then they started to fill pick-up vehicles with men and to drive away.276

After the separation, IS summarily targeted and executed first those men who refused to convert to Islam,277 such as in Kocho village. Even if IS repeatedly promised the villagers that they would be freed after giving away their belongings, it never happened. Instead, IS took those men and boys who did not want to convert to a farm outside the village and told them, “you will see now what will happen to you, you pagans and peacock worshippers.”278 At the next moment, they were forced to lay down on the ground and shot to death in small groups while some IS fighters filmed the killings.279 According to survivor accounts, up to 400 men and boys were killed alone in Kocho village, while as many as 1,000 women and children were abducted and taken to unknown destinations.280

Most of the executed Yazidis were killed by gunshots pointed to their heads.281 In some villages, IS took Yazidis outside of the village before the executions. Salah was one of those who was taken away by car; “they brought vehicles and started to fill them up with men and boys. They pushed about 20 of us onto the back of a Kia pick-up vehicle and drove us about one kilometer east of the village.”282 Salah was one of the lucky ones, whom a bullet hit only his knee. He pretended to be dead until the shooting stopped and IS soldiers left.283 Since IS had not kept their promise to let them go to seek safety at the Sinjar Mountain, some men knew that they will be killed. Some

276 Ibid., 9.
277 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
279 Ibid.
281 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
283 Ibid.
Yazidis realized that IS men drove them to the other direction than towards the mountain, whereas some were able to see the dead bodies from previous car loads on the ground. Mr. Mrad witnessed one of these cases, “I knew that they were going to kill us as this was not the way to the mountain. We were on the edge of a hill and as I looked down I saw a group of bodies below by the wadi.” IS made Yazidi men stand in line to be shot. According to Mrad, the brutal shooting continued for several minutes, even though the victims were already lying on the ground. Moreover, according to the survivor accounts, the shooting often happened from behind of the victims, and was done for the honor of Allah; “When we got there they made us stand in a row and then one of them shouted ‘Allahu Akbar’ [‘God is Great’] and then there was shooting. There were maybe 10 of them, but they were behind us. I don’t know how many of them opened fire.” IS did not always take Yazidis to killing sites by vehicles, but sometimes forced them to walk nearby locations,

They marched us (men and boys) towards the mountain, about 15 minutes’ walk away. We stopped at a place where there was a big hole, by the wadi, we were on the edge of the hole. They opened fire … After the continuous fire stopped, IS militants fired individual shots at those they saw were not yet dead. Additionally, IS shot many of those who tried to escape, and burned down the Yazidi villages, “I heard a car come and I hid in some straw nearby but Nadir was behind me and did not manage to hide on time and was shot dead.”

IS did not only massacre Yazidis by shooting. Some men had their throats cut, and other mutilations of bodies were also used by IS. “The bodies were reportedly beheaded, not shot.” Moreover, the family members were forced to watch these extremely brutal killings; “After we were captured, ISIS forced us to watch them beheading some of our Yazidi men. They made the men kneel in a line in the street, with their hands tied behind their backs. ISIS fighters took knives and cut their

284 Ibid., 9.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid., 10.
287 Ibid., 11–12.
290 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
throats.” To continue, IS used painful mutilation and torture against Yazidis even before the genocidal violence started in August 2014. For example, in June, IS kidnapped 14 Yazidi soldiers and removed the eyes of 13 of them because they refused to convert to Islam. After that, IS burned all the kidnapped soldiers to death. Burning to death can also be interpreted as torture to death since the victim does not die immediately and suffers a terrible end. Similarly, some victims were buried alive, which means a huge amount of suffering while waiting to die. Reports of burying people alive have come from different killing locations. For example, in one case, “three truckloads of men were buried alive here in a deep grave.” To continue, IS further buried alive some women and children as well. Direct shootings sometimes caused terrible suffering as well, while waiting to die without being able to do anything to survive. Several survivors have reported that they had heard other people, who could not move and save themselves, to cry in terrible pain. Some of these victims could have died for their injuries hours, or even days, later. “They died a horrible death.”

All in all, IS executed Yazidis at different locations: villages, streets of the towns, made-up checkpoints, or roadsides, including by the roads leading to the Mount Sinjar. On the other hand, IS also tried to justify the killings in some cases through the law. UNAMI has been able to confirm that number of Yazidi men were taken into IS “self-appointed courts [in July] and forced to convert or face punishment.” Some of those “who refused to convert were executed” as a punishment. In some cases, IS did not kill civilians but executed “men and boys who had fought to defend their villages” as retribution.

The IS concept of “convert or die” represents the IS genocidal intention to destroy the Yazidi religion since, for example, Chalk and Jonassohn argue that forcing people

292 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
293 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
294 Barber, “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014,” 16.
297 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
299 Ibid.
300 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
to convert represents genocidal violence. Dadrian also claims that coerced assimilation may be seen as genocidal action. Yazidis had no other choice than to change their religion or to face death. While talking about genocidal violence from the sociological perspective, shooting and beheading do not only mean the direct killing of the victims as such. Survival of such incidents causes not only severe physical harm and external injuries but also serious mental harm. Seeing and experiencing such brutal killings cause lifelong trauma and memory of annihilation to the survivors. Survivors have very similar experiences of separation and brutal violence, which they can perceive as common characteristics and a common fate. Social categorization brings together these unique, but common and equivalent, experiences and social events of killing. This social process affects individuals’ actions, attitudes, and beliefs the rest of their lives.\textsuperscript{301}

Furthermore, IS “fighters sometimes executed captured Yazidi men and older boys just out of sight of the women and children. Some of those left behind reported hearing gunfire while others saw fighters returning with bloodstains on their clothing.”\textsuperscript{302} To make the situation worse, some of IS soldiers lied to the women that their men were released, and the men and boys were on their way to the Mount Sinjar. Yet, “the Yazidi men were not heard from again.”\textsuperscript{303} Killing made also the immediate victims’ families suffer extremely harshly. The wives of the Yazidi men never got to hear the truth of the fate of their husbands. Instead, IS simply lied to them and did not tell what had just happened even though the wives could not avoid knowing the truth after hearing gunshots and seeing the bloody IS fighters. Not knowing the truth for sure becomes a huge part of the survivors’ daily routine and characterizes their group identity. The Yazidi society is not only torn apart by killing the men, but also forcing women to live in this extreme situation they are not themselves responsible for. Denying what happened, forgetting the killed people, and not talking to survivors will definitely transform the victims into “nothing” and the survivors into “nobodies”, which is the main objective of genocidal destruction from the sociological perspective.\textsuperscript{304}

Even though most of the primary sources highlight that most of the killed Yazidis were men, also women and children – the whole families – were killed. “In many cases,
families were together when they were massacred. In several massacres, “those killed may have been a mix of women, men, and children.” For example, IS killed the whole families, who tried to escape, on the roads.

On the other hand, just one mass killing of only Yazidi women has been reported to Human Rights organizations. IS held the women from Kocho village in Solagh Technical Institution, where older women, over 60-year-old ladies, who presumably refused to convert to Islam were separated from the other women. After IS soldiers had taken the elderly away, the younger women heard gunfire and screaming of the older women. The remains of the older women, including bones and clothing, have been later found on the ground. This massacre caused the lives of approximately 80 women in the Middle of August 2014.

Several of the interviewed Yazidi men have accounted to different organizations that they were forced to go to the edge of deep pits or dry river beds, into which they were directly shot. In most of the cases, IS personnel covered the dead bodies, at least partially, often with bulldozers. There are still bones coming out of the earth in most of the mass grave sites and also bodies on the surface in some cases. On the contrary to mass graves, in killing sites, where individuals were killed on capture, the bodies were not frequently buried. “The bodies of those killed on capture were often left in situ.”

If the survivors ever return to their home villages, they cannot help but face the killing sites and mass graves once again. The victims, the killed Yazidis, have changed into nothing through IS actions because their commemoration has been ignored and, in most of the cases, they are not even buried properly. The way how IS has treated the bodies can even amount to dehumanization since full persons should not be handled this way in any religion. The dead bodies and bones lying around on the ground become a new reality and replaces the old one. Communication with family and neighbors are not part of daily life anymore since the close people from earlier life are now those people in the mass graves.

306 Ibid., 12.
307 Ibid., 8.
308 Ibid., 10; Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 11.
309 Barber, “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014,” 5.
310 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
To continue, IS has also killed abducted children to punish their mothers. For example, a woman, who IS held for 16 months, told Human Rights Council researchers that an IS fighter, with whom she lived with her children, killed several of the children after the mother tried to escape from IS\textsuperscript{311}; “I said, ‘What did you do to them?’ He beat me and said, ‘They are kuffar children. It is good they are dead. Why are you crying for them?’”\textsuperscript{312} In addition to beating the woman and killing her children, the IS fighter also raped the woman.\textsuperscript{313}

Furthermore, “ICTY jurisprudence holds that the suicide of a person may amount to killing where the accused’s acts or omissions ‘induced the victim to take actions which resulted in his death, and that his suicide was either intended, or was an action of a type which a reasonable person could have foreseen as a consequence.’”\textsuperscript{314} Some women and girls decided to kill themselves in the holding sites rather than get sold and raped by IS fighters. Some of those chose to hang “themselves using their headscarves,” while others cut “their wrists or throats.”\textsuperscript{315} For instance, a woman survivor, who managed to escape from IS, recounted to Amnesty International that a very beautiful girl had committed a suicide in a holding site because she did not want to be taken away and raped by an IS man. Instead, she decided to cut both her wrist and hang herself in the bathroom.\textsuperscript{316} Further, some desperate women, who had managed to escape to Mount Sinjar, had jumped off the mountain with their children.\textsuperscript{317} These women did not see any brighter future and made the decision to escape the brutalities and trauma by committing suicides. They further wanted to save their children from the terrible future by killing them as well. Additionally, the families of those women and girls who have managed to escape are also afraid that the women will commit suicides due to the trauma suffered during the captivity. For instance, a husband of a 19-year-old Yazidi woman told Amnesty International that “My wife has panic attacks and can’t sleep. I can’t leave her alone because I’m afraid for her safety. If I cannot be with her even for

\textsuperscript{311} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 12.
a short while, I find someone else who can be with her.”

Suicides of Yazidi women and girls could amount into killing if IS had foreseen suicides as a consequence of the serious psychological and physical pain. Moreover, the suicides have a big role in the social change of Yazidis’ group identity. If most of the survivor families face the same threat of suicide of family members and are afraid of leaving them alone, these patterned regularities will shape the possibilities for overall interaction among Yazidis. As the society is a network of individual group members, the society cannot be reformed if the members are not able to interact with each other. The families end up into an extreme and unknown situation. Psychological pain comes to the both traumatized women and their families. Moreover, the Yazidis refugees are not able to find a temporal limit to the existing situation, in the new environment, without external help. According to Volpato and Contarello, the extreme situation can lead to the social death of the victims.

To summarize, IS systematically hunted down and killed Yazidis who remained in their homes or tried to flee at the beginning of August 2014. IS further rounded up many Yazidi villages in Sinjar, so the people could not leave. It is impossible to estimate how many Yazidis lost their lives during the IS attacks because the people were killed in separate groups in different locations. The estimates of the direct victims vary between hundreds to several thousand. Even though IS had given other religious minorities in Iraq a choice to live by paying a special tax, Yazidis had only two options: “convert to Islam or die.” The direct killings were not the only genocidal acts IS committed, but the death of Yazidi population caused a huge psychological trauma to survivors and a remarkable change in the social concept of the whole group. Moreover, the survivors still live in an extreme situation without knowing for sure what have happened to their loved ones, “I don’t know what happened to my family, my wife, my seven children …, my son’s wife and their two children; I don’t know if they are dead or alive or where they are.”

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321 Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”

Deliberately inflicting the life conditions of Yazidis in order to destroy the target group

When IS attacked Ninewa Governorate and Sinjar District at the beginning of August 2014, Yazidis started to flee from their homes. Many people decided to run to the Sinjar mountains, and others went to Dohuk in Iraq’s Kurdistan. A lot of civilians also remained trapped in their villages and were not able to run away since IS surrounded them. The 3 August attacks displaced the majority of the Yazidi community. Moreover, thousands of Yazidis have tried to migrate to Europe to seek safety. Unfortunately, many of them have died by drowning in the Mediterranean between Turkey and Greece.

Walking down from that bare rock, Mt. Sinjar, after struggling to survive with no food or water for three days, where my wife and children were exhausted and stressed, we started walking down that safe path, which was established by US Air Force. ISIS was shooting at us, indiscriminately, at the desperate Yezidis, but they only would stop shooting at us when US jets were striking them of flying over (Khalil Mojow testified to Yazda).

A humanitarian crisis, which might amount to a genocide, unfolded very quickly at the Sinjar mountains where thousands of Yazidi men, women, and children were trapped. IS surrounded the mountains and controlled the surrounding areas. They let no one either to leave the mountain or to go there. Yazidis urgently needed basic items, such as food, water, shelter, and medicines. At the same time when IS prevented Yazidis from accessing basic items for living, the temperatures up the mountain raised above 50 degrees in Celsius. “Hundreds of Yazidis – including infants and young children – died on Mount Sinjar.” The group of death people included 40 Yazidi children, who had died due to thirst, hunger, and dehydration in the inhuman living conditions. Those Yazidis, who remained in their villages, were also surrounded by IS and faced similar inhuman living conditions without access to basic needs.

325 Yazda, “Testimonies.”
326 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 7.
328 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 7.
Furthermore, IS cut off “the electricity and water supply to many of these areas” where Yazidis were staying. IS further forced Yazidis to hand over their weapons, so they could not defend themselves. Moreover, they were not allowed to leave the villages and buildings where they were held inside. For instance, Elias Salah, who was a 59-year-old Yazidi nurse, testified to Amnesty International,

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\text{IS militants initially spoke to our Sheikh [community leader] and said that if we handed over our weapons we would not be harmed. So, we gave them our weapons but still feared they would kill us. Some of them demanded that we convert to Islam, which we refused to do, and threatened to kill us if we did not. … we were under siege and not allowed to leave.}\]

Salah further told that Yazidis were not only forced to hand over their weapons, but IS also wanted to take their money, cell phones, and jewelry. During the siege, Yazidi society’s needs changed from the general recognition of the ethnoreligious group into an urgent need for safety and security. Their routines changed from normal daily life into a struggle for survival as a group.

However, Yazidis did not remain trapped on the mountain and villages more than a couple of days. Since August 6, a huge number of Yazidis: “around 80,000 displaced persons from the Sinjar District (the majority of whom were Yezidi),” managed to leave from Sinjar to Syria and Dohuk to seek safety. Moreover, “American, Iraqi, British, French, and Australian [military] forces were involved in airdrops of water and other supplies to the besieged Yazidis” starting from 7 August 2014. Yet, IS “fighters shot at planes airdropping aid, and at helicopters attempting to evacuate the most vulnerable Yazidis.” So, IS did not only prevent Yazidis to access basic needs but also tried to prevent their rescue operation by making it very hard for anyone to help them. This is another indicator for the genocidal attempt of IS since IS actions were purposeful and sustained, like in Fein’s definition of genocide. Even though IS tried to prevent the rescue of Yazidis, Syrian Kurdish fighters, who belonged to the PKK, succeeded to

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331 Ibid.
333 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 7.
334 Ibid.
break through IS lines and establish “a corridor through which to evacuate the entrapped Yazidis into Syria” with the help of the US air bombing targeting to IS. “The corridor allowed PKK fighters to enter the mountain, and they maintained the front line against IS inside the city of Sinjar … for over 15 months until the city was liberated.” From Syria, many rescued Yazidis traveled back into Iraq and settled in refugee camps in Dohuk. The USA’s airstrikes managed to weaken IS, which was important to save Yazidis, as one survivor testified to Yazda, “We were able to escape from captivity after ISIS was weakened, … I am free now, but thousands of Yazidis are still in captivity, we have no one but God and USA, we need your help.”

At the holding sites, where IS took captured Yazidis, living conditions were not any better than in the villages or at the mountain. There were hundreds and even thousands of women and children in each holding site. “All were severely overcrowded” and surrounded by armed IS soldiers. Captured Yazidis did not receive enough food and water from IS. Sometimes, the food had even insects in it, and the victims had to drink water from toilets to get something to drink. Since there was not enough food, “mothers often gave their share of food to their children” in order to save them. Moreover, the rooms were unheated, and therefore extremely cold during winter. Many Yazidis, especially small children, became very sick due to the poor living conditions. Furthermore, IS did not provide any medical care to those in need.

A Yazidi male survivor, Elias, confirmed to Amnesty International that the living conditions of women and children were extremely bad,

> Their conditions are very poor, and especially so for the children and the older people; they get little food, they don’t have milk for the children. I heard that three children died on Friday 15 August and that the women were threatened with rape. My wife and my mother would prefer to be killed than to stay there.

IS has kept Yazidi women and children in inhumane living conditions forcing them to an inadequate diet and not providing essential medical services. Since IS did not provide essential needs for living to captured Yazidis, they were also dehumanizing

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335 Barber, “Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014,” 22.
336 Ibid.
337 Ibid.
338 Yazda, “Testimonies.”
339 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 11.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid., 11, 17.
them physically. IS cannot anyhow see Yazidis as human beings if they offer them insects to eat and forces them to drink from toilets. “Dehumanized victims lose their moral standing”343 as have happened within the Yazidis since some of the captured women would rather die than to stay at the holding sites.

Many captured women were also given or sold to IS fighters. The fighters held them in “a variety of locations, including in the fighter’s family home, alone in apartments and houses, and in makeshift shelters nearer to the ISIS frontlines or in gas fields.”344 An 18-year-old Fawziya told her story about her treatment to Amnesty International,

In the first 10 days, we were not molested, the men brought us food and left us alone. Then we were told each of us must choose a husband or else men will choose us. At that time, we were kept together, many of us, more than 100. Then we were split in groups, six girls per group, and each group was taken to a different house in Rambussi (near Mount Sinjar). In the house where I was held each girl was with a man from Da’esh; these men were aged between 30-40 years; we were aged between 15 and 20. The man who took me as his wife was about 30 and was from Mosul. He used me as his wife for four days in that house and then took me to Mosul to his family home. His family did not agree with what Da’esh did to the Yezidi girls but did not do anything to stop it. I was put in a room with his wife, ... His parents did not interfere, but they said that if I did not convert to Islam he should give me away or sell me, and get a Muslim wife instead.345

Because only Muslims are seen as worthy wives, Yazidis can be seen as nobodies, which is one of the goals of sociological genocidal destruction.346 Fawziya is only one example of those victims held in their captors’ homes. Several other victims had also been held in their captors’ houses with the captors’ whole families, including wives, children, parents, and even siblings.347 IS usually kept captured Yazidis locked inside the buildings and did not allow them to go outside. Only young Yazidi boys were sometimes taken to pray in local mosques with IS fighters. Regularly, both IS fighters and their wives forced Yazidis to work in their houses. In the houses, IS fighters often gave only a little food to captured Yazidis. Malnutrition led to significant weight loss

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344 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.
of many victims. Moreover, “some Yazidi females were starved as punishments for escape attempts or for resisting rapes.” IS further prevented escape attempts quite well by not giving Yazidi women and girls abayas (the loose dresses, which cover almost the whole body), “which all females over the age of 10 are obliged to wear in public in ISIS-controlled territory.” IS spotted very easily those women in the streets who had managed to escape from captivity because they were not properly covered. Those Yazidi families who converted and were living in villages with their families were not allowed to leave their houses either. Instead, IS locked them in and monitored all their activities. A converted Yazidi agrees with the other reports,

We are in a very difficult situation. We agreed to convert because we thought this would solve our problem but the pressure on us is increasing. We are under surveillance and cannot leave. We cannot just try to leave on our own; we are scared of what could happen to us. … It is too dangerous for us here.

The IS continued to treat converted Yazidis very badly rather than treating them like other Muslims. It means that the IS actions were sustained even if the victims surrendered. One of the genocidal goals of IS may have been to destroy Yazidis by keeping them inside the houses and not allowing them to meet each other. Social change and socialization into Islam can happen through the fact that the Yazidis’ only contacts are IS fighters and their families. Since a society is a network of individuals within a group, society can be reformed through the isolation of individuals. In isolated villages and houses, Yazidis can form their daily contacts and create their network only with IS members and their personal families if they are held together.

The social change can also be aimed to cause social death of Yazidis during the captivity. IS uses personal domination of Yazidis by forcing them to work for them, offering them inadequate nutrition, and through rape. Rape is also at a very high level of perpetual state of dishonor of Yazidi women as individuals and as the whole community, in which sexual intercourse is not allowed with other religious groups. Additionally, already Lemkin highlighted the importance of excommunication from the

348 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14–15.
349 Ibid., 15.
350 Ibid., 14.
351 Ibid.
legitimate social and moral community, disintegration from social institutions, culture, language, and their religion in the genocide discussion. The situation can further lead to the social death of the victims. On the contrary, IS does not see their actions against Yazidi women as illegal. They believe that the captivity and enslavement of women are a means to spread Islamic monotheism. Captivity and enslavement are seen as the greatest honor of Islam to disbelievers. “Making captive of the women and offspring is a mercy from God for them, because this captivity and enslavement are the practical and realistic means to save these women from waste and desolation.”355 It is the most useful way to protect them from atrocities.356

On the other hand, all captured girls did not face hardship, dehumanization, and starvation during their captivity in IS fighters’ homes. For example, a 13-year-old girl told Amnesty International that her captor had saved her instead of abused,

He took me to his home and I slept in a room with his older wife while he slept in another room with his younger wife. The older wife was very nice to me. He said he had bought me because he felt sorry for me and wanted to send me and my little sister back to my family and indeed he did so.357

Many other girls also reported that the wives of their captors had helped them to keep in touch with their families and to escape at the end; “She was more than a mother to us. I could never forget this woman, she saved our lives.”358 Some girls further confirmed that two fighters had registered them as their wives to keep the girls together as a group. Instead of abusing the girls, those fighters were fighting on the front line most of the time.359 So, even if the overall aim of IS would have been a genocide against Yazidis, not all individual fighters obeyed the general aim. Instead, they were against slavery and sexual violence against the young Yazidi girls and eventually decided to help them. All fighters did not dehumanize and try to convert or socialize the captured girls into Islam.

355 Al-Tamimi, “Unseen Islamic State Pamphlet on Slavery.”
356 Ibid.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
**Preventing births**

ISIS ordered everyone from Kocho to go to the school. Men and boys over 10 years were on the ground floor, while women and children were on the upper floor. The fighters took the men and boys away. After ISIS took them, no men from the village ever returned. My husband was with them (a woman, who was held for 15 months, told Human Rights Council investigation team). 360

After the capture of Yazidi families, IS fighters separated men and teenage boys from women and other children. “In villages south of Mount Sinjar, men and older boys were immediately separated upon capture. In the northern villages, Yazidi families were first transferred to main checkpoints and towns … before they were separated.” 361 Soon after the separation, IS killed the men, 362 and transferred women and young Yazidi children forcibly between multiple holding sites, both in Iraq and Syria. 363 Separation of Yazidi men and women definitely prevents births, which also fits, for example, into the UN and Fein’s definitions. Moreover, killing the men leaves only women left. Women alone cannot have children without their Yazidi men. Separation of the sexes to cause a genocide is crucial, especially in the Yazidi case since “under Yazidi religious tradition, both parents must be Yazidi for the child to be of the Yazidi faith. It is not possible to convert to Yazidism.” 364 By separating men and women, the Yazidi society, the network of individual members, is broken. No one can replace either men or women in this society since no one can join in it through conversion. One needs to be born as a Yazidi in order to belong to this society.

IS further separated married and unmarried females, and those who had children and who did not, into different groups. Only the youngest children were allowed to stay with their mothers. IS continued forcible transfers of these separated groups and sold Yazidi women and girls as sex slaves to IS fighters around the caliphate. 365 These women and girls were forced into marriages and raped systematically. “Marriage with members of other faiths and sexual relations outside marriage are not accepted” in Yazidi customs. 366 “Such practices are considered to be shameful for the whole

360 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 8.
361 Ibid.
363 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 10.
364 Ibid., 27.
365 Ibid., 10, 12.
family.”  

In the past, Yazidis have punished women and girls for such a conduct by honor-kilings. Sexual violence does not only consider female victims, but the whole society, by breaking it apart. This kind of social change can lead to the social death of the victims because they are taken away from their legitimate social and moral community, and they and their customs are dishonored on purpose. Moreover, rape causes women and girls not to want to have sex anymore. If women do not want to have sex at all, the actions of IS prevents births within the Yazidi population.

Yazidi women have also been subjected to forced birth control and abortions in the hands of IS. “Many Yazidi women and girls reported that they were forced to take birth control, in the form of pills and injections.” At the same time, however, “other women were given no birth control.” Therefore, forced birth control does not seem to be used as a mean to prevent births. Instead, some IS fighters maybe wanted Yazidi women to make Muslim children because all women did not receive any birth control. However, abortions of Yazidi children were used to prevent births within the Yazidi group. For instance, an IS fighter stated before two abortions on Yazidi women that “we do not want more Yezidis to be born.” Forced abortions were conducted through injections and pills. “A week after the abortion, both women were sold” to IS fighters as sex slaves. To continue, rape resulted in pregnancies for Yazidi women, but they were not often willing to discuss the issue. Some interviewed women reported that “some Yazidi women gave birth in captivity or upon release but many appear to have given the infants away in circumstances that remain unclear.” If the babies were pure Yazidis, IS might have forced mothers to give the children away to educate them on Islam, or the infants may have been killed to get rid of them. If the babies were caused by rapes, the mothers might have been too ashamed to keep the children since Yazidi customs do not allow to have sex with members of other religious groups, and therefore

367 Ibid.
368 Ibid.
370 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 28.
371 Ibid., 15.
372 Ibid.
374 Ibid.
375 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
decided to give them away. Either way, IS has prevented the Yazidi population to grow and caused both physical and psychological pain to young mothers.

Since IS used sexual violence as a norm against Yazidi women and girls, the Yazidi spiritual leader, Baba Sheik, tried to make the Yazidi community to accept the situation and not to punish the victims. He asked the Yazidi community to welcome back those women who had been victims of sexual violence or forced to convert to Islam, instead of rejecting them. However, the suffering did not only affect captured women and their relatives, but also the abductions had negative social consequences. “Some said that it would be difficult to find suitable husbands for those who had been abducted, even if they had not been victims of sexual violence because it was assumed that all those abducted had been raped.” Therefore, some escapees have lied to their relatives that “they had not been subjected to any form of sexual violence in captivity,” even though other women and girls held with them can prove otherwise. Sexual violence does not only prevent births within the raped or aborted women, but affects the whole community. It is a sociological problem because a sociological group perceives that to be their common characteristics or common fate. If the Yazidis feel that sexual violence is their common fate, they might finally come to accept it as a form of a social change. Since the social identity of Yazidis is formed through the reality of daily life and routines, sexual violence might break the whole community apart if Yazidis cannot accept the victims back into the society.

**Transferring children from their original to another group**

The ISIS fighters told us, ‘Children are young; they are like animals. We can change them. But you are adults. We will not be able to change your mind,’ (a 17-year-old girl, who was held for 17 months, told Human rights Council investigation team).

IS has forcibly transferred Yazidi children from the Yazidi ethnoreligious group into the IS own Islamic group and into violence. Over 9-year-old girls have been taken from

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377 Ibid.
378 Ibid.
379 Ibid.
382 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 18.
their mothers and sold as sex slaves to IS fighters around the caliphate. At the same time, over 7-year-old boys have been sent to IS training camps both in Iraq and Syria, where they are converted to radical Islam and taught how to fight a war in IS front lines.\textsuperscript{383} Since the separation of children from their families still continues in many cases, the IS actions are sustained and purposeful against both children groups, which is one of the main characteristics of genocide according to Fein.

After the separation of women and girls into different groups according to their marital status, girls soon noticed that unmarried females without children were in the greatest danger.\textsuperscript{384} One of the escapees told Amnesty International that IS men “focused first on the young girls, the pretty ones. They were the first ones to be taken away.”\textsuperscript{385} Even the young girls were separated from their families and either sold as sex slaves, given as gifts, or forced to marry IS fighters and other supporters. “Many have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, and have … been pressured into converting to Islam.”\textsuperscript{386} Moreover, the young girls were removed several times between different holding sites and owners around the caliphate. For example, a 15-year-old Arwa spent time in five different places, including four different cities. She told Amnesty International that in the last place, “we were held in a house with five other girls. There they did to me what they did to many other girls. I was raped.”\textsuperscript{387} Another girl, 16-year-old Randa was not moved from a place to place. Instead, her IS husband found her from her first holding site.

\begin{quote}
I was taken to Mosul and kept there all the time. First in a building which they called the maqarr (headquarters). We were about 150 girls and five women. A man called Salwan took me from there to an abandoned house. … He took me as his wife by force. … I could not do anything to stop him.\textsuperscript{388}
\end{quote}

While young girls faced terrible atrocities against their personal humanity and the whole society, IS personnel saw the actions as good practices. IS’s own pamphlet on slavery states that “whoever has a girl and teaches her, is good to her, and then emancipates and marries her, he has double the remuneration.”\textsuperscript{389} Moreover, IS believes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{383} Ibid., 28.
\item \textsuperscript{384} Ibid., 10.
\item \textsuperscript{386} Ibid., 4.
\item \textsuperscript{387} Ibid., 5.
\item \textsuperscript{388} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{389} Al-Tamimi, “Unseen Islamic State Pamphlet on Slavery.”
\end{itemize}
that by raping the innocent girls, they can increase the number of Muslims because “slave girls may give birth” to Muslim babies and future IS soldiers. Instead of being ugly and condemnable matter, rape and forced marriages are seen as benevolent acts by IS.

Boys, who were over 12-year-old or had reached their puberty, were grouped with Yazidi men in the first place. IS used different tactics to find out the age of the children. “The fighters in Kocho village, for example, inspected Yazidi boys to see if they had any underarm hair. Fighters in other locations made snap judgments based on height and weight.” Yet, this was not always the case. Those boys, who stayed with their mothers at first, were also forcibly separated from the families and transferred to several IS army training centers and military camps around Iraq and Syria when they were over 7 years old. The boys whose families converted to Islam were saved from training until April or May 2015. Yet, they were forced to pray in local mosques with their converted relatives. Young boys “recounted how they received religious and military training following their forced conversion. Training lasted from 13 days to three weeks.” Yazidi boys were forced to train together with Sunni Arab boys, who also attended the army training. At the training sites, Yazidi boys “are registered and given Islamic names. From then on, the boys are only called by their new names, and are treated as ISIS recruits.” Military training includes “how to load and unload guns, shoot using live bullets and launch small and medium-sized rockets,” such as AK47s, hand grenades, and Rocket Propelled Grenades. When it was time to enter the battlefield, IS forced the Yazidi boys “to form the front line to shield ISIL fighters

390 Ibid.
391 Ibid.
392 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 7.
394 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 18.
396 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19.
398 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19.
during fighting.” 399 They also had to donate blood for injured IS soldiers, even though they did not want to do so. Civilian witnesses had seen children wearing similar attire, including masks over their faces, as IS gunmen. 400 Children sometimes even carried weapons, which were “too big for them to carry.” 401 Moreover, IS forced Yazidi boys to watch IS-made “propaganda videos of armed battles, beheadings, and suicide missions. ISIS instructors also hold sessions for the boys on ‘Jihad’ and the importance of participating in ISIS’s war against ‘the unbelievers.’” 402 When the boys refused to watch such videos, they were badly beaten. One child recounted to the Human Rights Council investigation team that IS told Yazidi children that “this is your initiation into jihad, you have to be strong because you will do this when you will go to jihad for the Islamic State; you are an Islamic State boy now.” 403

The boys’ daily program included also socialization into Islam and Quranic recitation. “If the boys fail to memorize Quranic verses or perform poorly in training sessions, they are beaten.” 404 IS also has important books to use for religious training into jihad, such as Course in Monotheism. This book states that

Faith is not fulfilled except by showing hostility to these counterparts and strength of hatred for them and hatred of their people, being hostile to them and waging war on them. Thus did God send all his messengers and revealed all his books and created the hellfire for the people of this idolatrous affection, while creating Paradise for whosoever wages war on this people and shows hostility to them out of this [faith] and His contentment. 405

The young Yazidi boys are socialized and incorporated into IS fighters through army training and into Islam through Islamic indoctrination. The genocide happened both through assimilation into Islam, such as Dadrian explains, and disintegration of their families like Fein describes. IS transfers them from victims of genocidal violence into perpetrators against their original ethnic-religious group. As the killing and IS’s religious ideology become the daily routine for the young boys, old reality of daily life

400 Ibid., 17–18.
401 Ibid., 17.
402 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19.
404 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19.
405 Al-Tamimi, “Islamic State Training Camp Textbook: ‘Course in Monotheism’- Complete Text, Translation and Analysis.”
as Yazidis will be replaced by a new reality as IS fighters. Social change will happen within the Yazidi boys. A 12-year-old captured Yazidi boy summarizes the IS’s goal,

They told us we had to become good Muslims and fight for Islam. They showed us videos of beheadings, killing and ISIS battles. [My instructor] said ‘You have to kill kuffars even if they are your fathers and brothers because they belong to the wrong religion and they don’t worship God.’

IS took groups of children from their mothers to unknown locations daily. This did not only include taking young girls as sex slaves and young boys into military training, but they also took care of orphaned children. For instance, IS brought up to 65 Yazidi and Turkmen children into an orphanage in Mosul. Those children were between 5 months and 17 years old who had seen IS murdering their parents. Yet, IS came back to the orphanage later and took pictures of the children posing with IS flags. So, IS used the little children to promote the organization.

_Causing serious bodily or mental harm_

Virtually every family has lost track of at least some of their relatives, as they are frequently moved from place to place between Iraq and Syria.

IS abducted Yazidis on a mass scale in August 2014 and detained many of them for several months. Hundreds, even thousands, of Yazidi women, children, and men, who tried to flee from the Sinjar region were abducted. Most of the abducted Yazidis were women while many men were forced to face death or convert to Islam. IS held these people at a number of sites, including the former Badoush prison outside of Mosul. For example, IS captured 196 Yazidis in August 2014, including elderly, children, and ill people, and held them in captivity until January 2015. “Many victims

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406 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 18.
were forced to convert to Islam during their captivity.\textsuperscript{412} Even though many sources claim that many of the relatives of the captured men, who IS took away from their families, believe that they had been killed, hundreds of captured Yazidi men can still be detained and alive in IS captivity. At the end of August 2014, IS released a video in which they showed scores of Yazidi men converting to Islam. Moreover, many captured families have reported that IS consistently had pressured them to convert to Islam. They have pressured Yazidis by promising them freedom after conversion or threatened them with death if they do not convert.\textsuperscript{413} For instance, one of the captured men, who managed to escape, recounted to Amnesty International that many of the Yazidi men still can be alive in detention rather than killed,

They took us to Bi’aj and the following day they took all the women and children to another place. I later learned that they had been taken to Mosul. My grandfather was released after four days and the other men and I were taken to Tal Banat and held there for another three days. They told us that we would be killed if we did not convert to Islam. Then they told us we would be released. On 10 August me and nine others escaped. We walked for 10-12 hours to reach the mountain. While we were detained they took a group of boys aged about 12-15 years who were held with us to another place; maybe they took them for military training. My uncle who did not manage to escape is still being held, now in Tal ‘Afar in a place with many other men.\textsuperscript{414} After the systematic separation of Yazidi men, women and children, women were further divided into three groups according to their marital status and whether they had children or not. Different groups were transferred to different locations and holding sites several times inside IS territory. Some of the victims were even transferred more than 10 times during a four-month-period. “These repeated transfers and displacement were apparently aimed at reinforcing ISIL control over the victims by instilling feelings of fear, insecurity and disorientation.”\textsuperscript{415} Creating fear and insecurity are the goals of a terrorist organization, but also means of genocidal violence since the abductions and multiple transfers are degrading treatment against Yazidis and attacks on their dignity. Since socialization is a process in which the victim “becomes incorporated into


\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 17.

organized patterns of interaction,” Yazidis are socialized into the new lifestyle as prisoners who are regularly moved around. It is extremely hard for captured Yazidis to create new relationships with each other and reform their social identity as Yazidis, other than as an oppressed group, because interaction between Yazidis in the prisons is very limited to those who are in the same cell, and people in the cells change all the time due to the transfers.

IS’s tried to destroy the Yazidi group as such since they are not the “People of the Book”, and therefore full human beings. Therefore, forced conversions into Islam have become a regular pattern, including both women and men. IS managed to force some women to convert and marry them to IS fighters. Those women who refused to convert were taken as war booty or sold as sex slaves to individual IS fighters. IS further ruled that marriages of married, converted women were not recognized in Islamic law. They were also forced to marry IS fighters, just like unmarried Yazidi women. Moreover, IS soldiers regularly searched and seized unmarried Yazidi “women and girls, as well as those who were married but had no children” in the villages within their territory. Yazidi men and older boys were also forced to convert to Islam under the IS captivity. They were “forced to pray, grow their beards and hair, and follow other religious dicta as interpreted and promulgated by the terrorist group.” IS treated converted Yazidi males as Muslims in the sense that they were also required to go to a mosque to pray. In a village without a mosque, IS forced the captured men to pray inside the house where they were kept. However, IS was planning to build a mosque so that Yazidis’ “praying would be ‘properly’ monitored.” Moreover, IS recorded videos of converted Yazidi men and boys and forced them to urge their relatives to convert as well. “These videos were shown to the men’s families at holding sites.” The converted families were reunited if they all were still alive and transported to

419 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 9.
420 Ibid.
421 Ibid.
423 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 9.
424 Ibid.
new villages where they were monitored by IS troops. However, “the forced conversions did not … provide Yazidi families with any protection or equal status” with the “real Muslims.” IS did not allow Yazidis to leave the villages and counted the people regularly. “Anyone who tried to escape was beaten at the first attempt, and executed on the second. … When someone successfully escaped, members of their household were beaten.” To continue, IS determined by spring 2015 that all “conversions that the Yazidis had made were false.” Forced conversions prove that IS wanted to destroy the Yazidi religion and did not want anyone to practice it anymore. Since their policy was the “convert or die,” IS did not leave any choice to Yazidis than to change their religion or lose their life. Yazidis were obligated “to behave in ways which would be unthinkable in normal times” to save their lives. Sustained action, regardless of the conversions, is one of the key points of genocidal violence in Fein’s view. The actions and the aims to destroy the Yazidi religion is both a genocide by assimilation and a cultural genocide according to Dadrian. IS tried to change the survivors into “nobodies”, which is the main objective of genocidal destruction, in the Yazidis’ religious perspective. When Yazidis change their religion, the faith does not allow them to come back since the conversions are not accepted in Yazidi religion. So, IS caused mental harm to Yazidis by replacing their own religion with Islam.

IS also caused physical harm by forcing Yazidis to work in hard physical jobs “on construction projects, digging trenches, cleaning streets, and looking after cattle.” The jobs were not located even in the villages where Yazidis lived. Instead, IS took daily all over 12-year-old boys and men to nearby cities and towns for labor projects. Those men who did not want to leave for work were beaten, and those who tried “to escape were executed upon capture.” IS further took away all ID cards from

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426 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 9.
427 Ibid.
428 Ibid.
430 Feierstein, Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina’s Military Junta, 38.
431 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 9.
432 Ibid.
all Yazidis, so those who managed to escape had nothing to prove their identity as members of the oppressed group. Forced labor in hard physical jobs caused physical pain and inhuman suffering of the men. It can further be regarded as the deprivation of their personal rights to decide whether they want to work or not. Even though the Yazidi group has been traditionally physical workers, no one should be forced to work without their will to do so and without a proper payment. The extreme situation without a possibility to decide by oneself does not allow Yazidis to improve their social identity. Instead, IS forces them to accept the new reality as slaves of IS by the use violence and the threat of violence.

“The first 12 hours of capture were filled with sharply mounting terror.” Many Yazidi women and children were forced to witness their male relatives’ murders or to watch IS taking away the men to unknown destinations. After the men were gone, armed IS fighters surrounded the women. Both witnessing the men’s destiny and being separated from their male relatives made Yazidi women and children suffer serious mental harm. The inhuman mental suffering, caused by IS actions, can lead to the social change and even to social death of the victims. Both social and moral community is destroyed since the social group does not physically exist anymore for the victims, and their morality and sense of humanity is affected by IS brutalities. The extreme situation includes almost unbearable psychological pain, which the victims are not responsible themselves, but which IS has justified under the Islamic law.

At the holding sites, women and girls faced terrible mental inhuman suffering and deprivation of their rights. A young girl, who was only 12 years old and was held for 7 months and sold four times during the captivity, told Human Rights Council researchers,

We were registered. ISIS took our names, ages, where we came from and whether we were married or not. After that, ISIS fighters would come to select girls to go with them. The youngest girl I saw them take was about 9 years old. One girl told me that ‘if they try to take you, it is better that you kill yourself.’

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434 Minority rights group international, “Iraq – Yezidis.”
436 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 11.
437 Ibid., 11, 25.
438 Ibid., 10.
Besides marriage, the number of possible children was also registered. Some women and girls also reported that IS fighters photographed them without their headscarves. IS fighters wanted to see their hair. Sometimes, the men checked the girls’ teeth as well. IS even forced girls to smile and laugh for the pictures.\textsuperscript{439} IS fighters wanted to be sure that they bought perfect women. The registration process and trying to make the girls as appealing as possible is very degrading treatment. Since the registration process did not happen only ones, but at all holding sites,\textsuperscript{440} it became a regular pattern of the interaction between Yazidi women and IS. The registration process separated Yazidi women and girls from each other and later from the whole Yazidi community. Forced socialization into the victimhood as people who are oppressed and dehumanized breaks the social identity of Yazidi women. IS tried to present the girls in an objectified fashion as something that the fighters want and can buy through physical dehumanization and forced behavior. IS legitimized the victimization of Yazidis “through instrumentality, ownership, denial of autonomy, inertness, fungibility, violability, and denial of subjectivity.”\textsuperscript{441} One day, a group of young girls was even “given clothes that looked like dance costumes and were told to bathe and wear those clothes.”\textsuperscript{442}

According to the witness accounts, IS fighters came to the holding sites “to select women and girls they wished to take with them.”\textsuperscript{443} Women and girls tried to make themselves as unattractive to potential buyers as possible; “We would scratch ourselves and rub dirt on our faces.”\textsuperscript{444} Women also lied that they were older, and girls claimed to be younger than they really were. However, these things did not help to save them from the selections. As the selection were terrible nightmares for the girls, some women and girls even did suicides to avoid the selections and forced marriages. Selections always included screaming because IS forcibly pulled the girls out of the room, even though mothers and other women tried to hold on the girls. Furthermore, IS fighters beat those who did not want to let the girls go.\textsuperscript{445}

Men came several times to take away some of the girls. Those who resisted were beaten and pulled away by the hair. Some were beaten with electrical cables. I was not afraid of

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 10–11, 13.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{441} Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Interactive Review,” 253.
\textsuperscript{443} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 11.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid., 11–12.
the beatings, but could not bear the thought that they could attack my honor. We were constantly told that we would be forced to marry or sold to some men.446

These women do not only suffer on mental harm but also on physical injuries. Scratching and cutting themselves, and beating with electrical cables can leave permanent marks, which Yazidi men can further see unattractive. So, the Yazidi women do not only suffer physically due to the injuries, but the injuries can also break the social interest between Yazidi women and men after breaking away from IS. If the Yazidi men do not see their women as attractive, they might not want to marry them and have children. This can lead to the physical destruction of the Yazidi religion since it is possible to become a Yazidi only by birth into the Yazidi family.

Captured Yazidi women and girls became the property of IS and were openly termed as slaves.447 According to IS, “it is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives and slaves, for they are merely property, which can be disposed of as long as that doesn’t cause any harm or damage.”448 About 80% of available Yazidi women and girls were sold individually to IS fighters in slave markets or to those IS men who came to buy girls straight from the holding centers. IS fighters sometimes bought several Yazidi females at ones and sold them later with higher prices in rural areas, where there were no slave markets. The rest of the women, 20% of them who were not sold, were held as IS’s collective property in military bases throughout Iraq and Syria. A woman, who was sold at “the farm” in Raqqa recounted that the slave market had a raised area in a big hall, where all Yazidi girls had to stand on when IS soldiers picked the ones they wanted to buy. The youngest victims of the sales were only seven and nine years old.449 Additionally, women were forced to take off their headscarves and “walk through the room like a catwalk”450 one by one in the front of IS fighters. The man who raised his hand got to buy the girl and take her with him. Furthermore, IS sold Yazidis also online by circulating photos of captured victims with their age, marital status, current location, and price.451 Being as an object for selling and buying became a routine for Yazidi women and girls, as one woman, who was held

447 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 12.
448 ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
449 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 12-13.
450 Ibid., 13.
for a year stated, “I was there for three weeks before I was sold. Throughout that time, ISIS fighters were coming to buy women and girls. All of us were Yazidi. I think I was sold about 15 times in all. It is hard to remember all those who bought me.”

Some Yazidi women and girls were present at their sale and were able to hear the price negotiations between sellers and buyers, while the emir instructed IS “fighters to inspect and choose girls for ‘marriage.’” The prices varied between $200 and $1,500 “depending on marital status, age, [the] number of children, and beauty.”

Once IS “sells a Yazidi woman …, the purchasing fighter receives complete rights of ownership and can resell, gift, or will his ‘slave’ as he wishes.” In the IS ideology, disbelievers’ “blood and property are free for pillage if they do not convert to Islam or pay the jizya and enter under the rule of Shari’a.” Moreover, IS fighters are not allowed to murder women and children as long as they do not provide any “assistance in the war against the Muslims.” However, they can be taken as captives and used as slaves. Even though the Qur’an allows slavery, many Muslim countries have formally made it illegal. Yet, “the Islamic State proudly celebrated the return of the practice to public view” in the fall of 2014. It did not only cheer “the revival of slavery as a major step in the turn of Islamic law, which the group wants to impose in its totality; it also hailed slavery’s renewal as ‘one of the signs of the Hour’ or the Day of Judgement.”

However, IS have very strict rules concerning the sale process, albeit IS fighters regularly breach the rules for their personal gain without caring about the possible consequences. For example, a fighter should not sell the woman to his brother, or to anyone, before the woman has completed her menstrual cycle. It is not allowed to sell a woman “if she becomes the mother of a child.” Furthermore, it is not

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452 Ibid., 10.
453 Ibid., 13.
455 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 13.
456 Ibid., 15.
457 Al-Tamimi, “Unseen Islamic State Pamphlet on Slavery.”
458 Ibid.
459 Ibid.
461 Ibid.
462 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
463 ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
permitted to separate a mother and her young children. However, “it is permissible to separate them if the children are grown and mature.” Even if it is forbidden to sell “the spoils of war” to non-IS members, IS has opened an office for selling abducted woman in Mosul where most of the buyers are local youth. IS tries to induce the local young men to join their ranks by letting them buy captured beautiful women. Additionally, Muslim men from Mosul and Tal’Afar, who had good relations with IS without being members themselves, have also been able to “marry” abducted Yazidi women and girls; “They are local businessmen, not fighters. I don’t know if they bought the girls or what the arrangements are to get the girls but they registered their marriage in the local Shari’a court [established by IS].” The aim of this rule is to prevent IS soldiers selling captured Yazidis back to their families. However, IS fighters have huge financial interests to break this rule since the families pay $10,000–40,000 to get their women and girls back. It is many times more than the fighters can earn by selling the slaves to each other. On the other hand, “a male or female slave may buy themselves from their master and be free” through a “contract of manumission between the slave and his master.” Yet, the women do not have any cash to buy themselves free since IS collected all their belongings, including money, cell phones, and jewelry when the women were captured.

Most of the captured Yazidi women and girls “are subjected to brutal sexual violence” including violent daily rapes by their fighter-owners. Not only IS fighters but also Muslim residents in some cities believe that “it is right and proper that” Yazidi people “should convert to Islam and that the unmarried women should be married to Muslim men according to Islam.” Sexual intercourse with a captured female is even permitted in IS ideology and ruling, but only when the master owns her exclusively. If the woman is a virgin, her master “can have intercourse with her immediately after

464 Ibid.
466 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
469 Ibid.
470 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
471 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
472 ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
473 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.
taking possession of her.” If she is not a virgin, “her uterus must be purified first.”

Sexual intercourse is also permitted with young girls, even though they have not reached puberty if they are fit for the intercourse. However, the master cannot have sexual intercourse with his female slave if she is married to someone else. Yet, IS has ruled out that the marriages of Yazidi women and men are not recognized under Islamic law. This ruling allows sexual violence since the women are captured as slaves and they are not married according to Islamic law. Moreover, captured females are distributed as part of the perpetrator’s estate, and their treatment is authorized under “the property rights of those who ‘own’ the women and girls.”

The regular rapes of Yazidis were often very violent and degrading, according to different witness accounts. Many victims reported that they had been “injured as a result of the rapes, suffering bleeding, cuts, and bruising.” IS fighters handcuffed some women behind their backs or tied their hands and legs to the corners of the bed during the rapes. Yazidis were also raped at the holding sites. For example, a witness told the Human Rights Council team that two IS fighters forcibly took 15 and 18-year-old girls into another room at a holding site. The witness heard that the girls screamed while IS’s “emir” and a so-called “imam” laughed in the same room while the fighters raped the girls for 20 minutes. After that, the girls returned to the room, where other captured women were held, in shock and blood on their trousers. The girls confirmed to the witness that they were raped by IS fighters. Moreover, nothing protected the women from rapes since very young and also pregnant women were sexually enslaved. For instance, an IS “doctor” raped and tortured a 19-year-old pregnant, married woman for two and half months. “According to the woman, the doctor sat on her stomach, aiming

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472 ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
473 Ibid.
474 Ibid.
476 ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
477 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 12.
478 Ibid., 14.
479 Ibid.
481 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.
to kill her unborn child, saying, ‘this baby should die because it is an infidel; I can make a Muslim baby.’”\(^{482}\)

To continue, IS threatened the women not to resist the rapes. For example, the men frightened the women with gang rape; “[H]e raped me every day that I was with him... He told me that if I did not let him do this thing to me that he would bring four or five men and they would all take turns raping me. I had no choice. I wanted to die.”\(^{483}\) Another kind of violence, such as beating, was also used to threaten the women; “He took me as his wife by force. I told him I did not want to and tried to resist but he beat me. My nose was bleeding, I could not do anything to stop him. … It is so painful what they did to me and to my family. Da’esh (the IS) has ruined our lives.”\(^{484}\) One woman described that her owner beat her until her “body was black and blue.”\(^{485}\) Another woman recounted that her fighter-owner told her that he would throw her off the roof of his house if she resisted the rapes.\(^{486}\) A 17-year-old girl further told Amnesty International that her captors did not only rape and assault her but also her small baby was beaten. IS fighters also starved both of them.\(^{487}\) Additionally, attempted escapes caused severe consequences for the women. IS fighters, for example, ordered and supervised gang rapes.\(^{488}\) A 20-year-old Jamila “was tied to a bed by her hands and legs and gang-raped as well as being beaten with cables and deprived of food.”\(^{489}\) One woman “reported that her fighter-owner killed several of her children after an escape attempt.”\(^{490}\) Moreover, the violence and beating are accepted according to IS rules on slavery. “It is permissible to beat the female slave as a form of … disciplinary beating.”\(^{491}\) However, beating to break the woman, to achieve gratification, or to torture the slave is forbidden. Hitting the face is not allowed either.\(^{492}\) Furthermore, IS does

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\(^{483}\) Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.


\(^{485}\) Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.

\(^{486}\) Ibid.


\(^{488}\) Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.


\(^{490}\) Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.

\(^{491}\) ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”

\(^{492}\) Ibid.
not permit access to medical care for those women and children who have been injured by beatings and rapes.493

Sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls causes serious mental and physical harm to the victims since they are physically injured and the mental pain is terrible, even unbearable to some women. IS fighters’ desire to humiliate and the denial of the victims’ autonomy make the acts very degrading. Deprivation of Yazidi women’s rights finally leads to a total loss of human rights, even though sexual enslavement is legally right according to IS. Moreover, serious mental and physical harm is sustained by Yazidi victims leading to continuing pain and trauma, and even to suicides after returning to their families. “The sexual violence being committed by ISIS against Yazidi women and girls, and the serious physical and mental harm it engenders, is a clear ‘step in the process of destruction of the … group – destruction of the spirit, of the will to live, and of life itself’.”494 On the other hand, the Muslims, who are not part of IS, also believe that IS does not harm the captured women, but handle them correctly; “It is not true that they are oppressed, this is just propaganda. They are being fed and well treated like any other wives. I personally know some of the local men who have married these girls and they are good and honorable men.”495

In this extreme situation, women and girls behave differently than they would think in normal times – they let IS to humiliate and rape them since they cannot fight back to IS men, because IS uses all possible means to force the women to sexual intercourse from beating to killing their children. To continue, sexual enslavement and sexual violence, including rape, causes serious harm to the Yazidi group as such. Social change within the Yazidi women can easily lead to their social death because they face “subjection” and “personal domination, excommunication from the legitimate social” and “moral community, and relegation to a perpetual state of dishonor.”496 Since the Yazidi religion does not allow any relationships and marriages outside the religion, it is extremely hard for the women to go back to their original roots and families after the sexual humiliation and forced marriages with Islamic fighters. The society – the network of individuals – is totally destroyed through sexual violence if the group cannot accept the faith of women and try to help them to recover from the trauma.

493 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 14.
494 Ibid., 24.
As IS and its fighters sell Yazidi mothers and their young children as a package, the children must face the atrocities as well. They are forced to see and hear the terrible treatment of their mothers. Yet, they are not only witnesses but also objects of the violence,

When he would force me into a room with him, I could hear my children screaming and crying outside the door. Once he became very angry. He beat and threatened to kill them.

He forced two of them to stand outside barefoot in the snow until he finished with me.\(^{497}\) IS fighters want that the children are quiet while they are raping their mothers. They “often beat Yazidi children for making too much noise or for clinging to their mothers.”\(^{498}\) Sometimes, the wives and children of the fighters also beat Yazidi children.\(^{499}\) Bearing the witness of such atrocities causes mental harm and terrible trauma for children. If the children are beaten and see their mother raped daily, it becomes a routine for them. The violence becomes a part of their daily life. Since children learn what is right and wrong already in the early age, they might start to think that violence can be allowed. This might reflect into their future, even when they are adults. If they handle women similarly than they and their mothers have been treated by IS, the whole Yazidi society is destroyed because they do not understand each other’s rights and responsibilities.

Children are not only witnessing rapes of their mothers but sometimes very young girls are raped as well. For instance, a witness stated that an IS fighter raped a 9-year-old girl for three days. She heard the girl “screaming out her name for help.”\(^{500}\) According to the girl, “she was blindfolded, handcuffed, beaten and repeatedly raped.”\(^{501}\) At the same house, another IS fighter raped a 6-year-old girl. Both of these young girls were sold to other IS fighters afterward.\(^{502}\) These raped young girls must suffer both serious physical and mental harm. They are not handled as human beings since such small girls are not ready for sexual interaction either mentally or physically. Young girls have totally lost their human and legal rights, even under IS own

\(^{497}\) Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 16.
\(^{498}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{499}\) Ibid.
\(^{501}\) Ibid.
\(^{502}\) Ibid.
jurisdiction, which does not allow sexual intercourse with very young children.\textsuperscript{503} Such young girls can do nothing to protect themselves from the violence of adult men simply because they are too weak.

Not only young Yazidi girls are harmed physically and mentally, but also over 7-year-old boys suffer in the hands of IS. The physical and psychological harm comes “through the violent separation of Yazidi boys from their families, forced conversions and subsequent indoctrination, recruitment, [and] military training – which includes beatings, training on suicide bombing, and watching violent war propaganda.”\textsuperscript{504} IS further forces the boys to participate actively in hostilities. Through the several ways of abuse, IS aims “to destroy the boys’ identity as Yazidis.”\textsuperscript{505}

In the case of genocidal violence, dehumanization can lead to social change and even to social death because the victims are personally dominated, excommunicated from their social and moral community, and dishonored by the perpetrator. “Dehumanized victims lose their moral standing” and cannot finally ask for humane treatment.\textsuperscript{506} IS dehumanized Yazidi victims calling them “dirty kuffar” and “devil worshipers” due to their religion.\textsuperscript{507} IS further claims that Yazidis worship stones.\textsuperscript{508} This genocidal dehumanization is related to Yazidis’ ethnic and religious background and values. Yazidis are “perceived to lack shared humanity”\textsuperscript{509} because they are not considered as the “People of the Book.”\textsuperscript{510} IS has especially directed the verbal abuse towards captured Yazidi women and children at the “holding sites and while being bought and raped” by IS soldiers.\textsuperscript{511} Dehumanization continued at the family homes of IS fighters, where not only the men but also their wives and children “routinely told the Yazidi children that they and their mothers were ‘kuffar’ and that they were unclean.”\textsuperscript{512} Moreover, IS fighters sometimes forced the Yazidi children “to say the name of the devil aloud,” which is not permissible in Yazidism.\textsuperscript{513} Dehumanization is not only

\textsuperscript{503} ISIL, Diwan al-Buhouth wal-Iftaa (Departments of Scholarly Research and Verdicts in the Islamic State), “Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves.”
\textsuperscript{504} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 26.
\textsuperscript{505} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{507} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
\textsuperscript{508} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{509} Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Interactive Review,” 255.
\textsuperscript{511} Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 15.
\textsuperscript{512} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{513} Ibid.
limited to linguistic dehumanization but stretches also into physical dehumanization. IS has ritualized the dehumanization of Yazidis by treating them as chattel because the Yazidis are moved around either in over-packed vehicles or forced to walk, all they monetary assets and other belonging have been taken away, the women and girls are registered and photographed at the holding sites for selling them, and they are raped like instruments and sex objects. They are treated like animals without any human rights. Degrading treatment and the deprivation of rights causes Yazidis inhuman suffering and make them feel something less than full persons. IS do not give them any kind of respect or dignity because they are seen as “dirty infidels.”514 “Captured Yazidi women and girls immediately” recognize “the hopelessness of their situation, which is to say the complete deprivation of their liberty.”515 A 16-year-old Nour summarized their situation to Amnesty International,

To them we are ‘kuffar’ [infidels] and they can do whatever they want. It was so humiliating. We were imprisoned; they wouldn’t feed us; they would beat us [all] even the small children; they would buy and sell us and do whatever they want to us... It is like we are not human to them.516

Many survivors of the initial attacks of IS have “experienced the loss of their loved ones.”517 Some, who witnessed the attacks, are badly traumatized and depressed. The experienced trauma and depression have made the number of suicides and attempted suicides have risen sharply due to the experienced trauma and depression, especially among Yazidi women and girls.518 Additionally, heavily traumatized female Yazidis face many challenges to their recovery. Especially those who come from rural areas of Sinjar have limited education, and have married and got children at an early age. “Their communication with the world beyond their extended families was through their husbands or male relatives” before IS attacks.519 As the Yazidi women and girls lack personal and financial independence, their ability to survive and recover is very limited since many Yazidi men were killed or are missing. Moreover, those women and girls who have managed to escape, have been rescued, or sold back to their relatives

514 Ibid., 23.
515 Ibid.
518 Ibid.
519 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 16.
“are consumed by thoughts of their missing husbands, fathers and brothers, and by the
distress of not knowing the locations and fate of young sons taken for training and/or
daughters who were sold into sexual slavery and remain in the hands of ISIS.”\footnote{520} Not
knowing anything about one’s family, even whether they are alive or not, is very
stressful for survivors; “I have no news of what happened to my parents and my four
brothers and six sisters. Did they kill them? Did they abduct them? I don’t know
anything about them.”\footnote{521}

Also, the men, who survived the attacks or managed to escape, are desperate and
helpless because they have been separated from their loved ones, including wives and
children. For example, one survivor states to Human Rights Council team, “losing my
wife and children to ISIL is the worst nightmare that could happen to a man.”\footnote{522} In
some cases, the abducted women and children have been able to keep in touch with
their families. So, the families know where they are and how they are treated.\footnote{523} On the
other hand, many women and children are missing, and their families do not know what
have happened to them or even whether they are alive or dead; “I don’t know where
anyone is, my children, my family. Where are they? Have they taken them? How can I
find them?”\footnote{524} Getting information about the missing family members is extremely hard
because many people cannot even try to contact anyone because IS took the cell phones
from Yazidis during the attack. At the same time, Yazidis did not only lose their phones
but also all the phone numbers, which were saved in the phones. Like one survivor,
Salah, described to Amnesty International, “I can’t contact anyone as they took our
mobile phones and so I have lost all the numbers.”\footnote{525} Not knowing the fate of close
family members and more distant relatives has become a part of survivors’ daily life.
Therefore, Yazidis might even feel that not knowing anything about their relatives and
living a desperate life characterizes their common faith. This can be seen in the Yazidi
group, especially, because other ethnic minorities in the land of IS have had a change
to pay extra taxes to the terrorist organization in order to live, even though many
Christians and other ethnic groups have also been forced to flee. Yet, IS did not give

\footnote{520} Ibid.
Human Rights on the Human Rights Situation in Iraq in the Light of Abuses Committed by the
so-Called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Associated Groups,” 10.
\footnote{524} Ibid., 10.
\footnote{525} Ibid., 8.
Yazidis that choice, their choice was only to convert or die instead of to live peacefully among other ethnicities. This social categorization has broken Yazidis’ social identity.

At last but not least, since IS has driven Yazidis away from their home territory, Yazidis feel that their ethnic group identity is destroyed. At the same time with taking control over the Sinjar region in early August 2014, IS started to destroy Yazidi religious sites. They destroyed numerous holy temples and shrines in the area. Many Yazidi houses were also destroyed or severely damaged. IS fighters marked the houses with symbols while capturing the inhabitants so that they could later distinguish those houses from Arab houses. IS often looted the houses and stole all the belongings before demolishing the buildings. Because of the displacements and destruction of the houses, tens of thousands of Yazidis are homeless. Therefore, it is impossible for many to think about returning to their homes. If they do not have a home or any other belongings in Sinjar area, it is extremely hard to go back and start building everything, including houses and temples, from the beginning. Moreover, the Sunni Arabs, who live nearby Yazidi villages, tend to support IS. To continue, many displaced Yazidis must live “as guests in the shelters of more distant relatives” or neighbors, who are also displaced from their homes. “This situation causes them additional material and emotional discomfort as it entails an unusual arrangement for conservative rural Yezidi communities, where unmarried girls live with their parents and siblings, and married women with their husbands and close family.” Furthermore, ethnic groups tend to believe that their mere survival depends on controlling the territory, which they have inhabited for centuries. “For ethnic groups, [a] territory is often a defining attribute of their identity, inseparable from their past and vital to their continued existence as a distinct group.” Therefore, the material destruction further ruins the Yazidis’ familiar religious, cultural, territorial, and historical references to their whole group identity.

526 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19; Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”
527 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 19.
528 Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”
531 Ibid.
533 Yazda, “Yazidi Genocide.”
To continue, because IS has taken all the valuables from Yazidis, many displaced Yazidis are financially dependent on their relatives whom they live with. However, the relatives and neighbors are likewise displaced forcibly and suffering the same hardship. The financial situation is even worse for those Yazidi families who have managed to buy back some captured women and girls since they “are now heavily in debt.” They are worried about both making the payments and “about how they will be able to afford to buy back any other relatives that fighter-owners wish to sell in [the] future.” Some IS fighters also regularly call Yazidis and threaten them for making the payments to them.

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535 Human Rights Council, “‘They Came to Destroy’: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis,” 16.
536 Ibid.
537 Ibid.
Conclusion

The acts of IS against the Yazidi population in Iraq constitute an attempted genocide, including deliberate killing, inflicting their life conditions to bring physical and psychological death to the victims, preventing births within the Yazidi community, transferring Yazidi children into the IS, and causing serious bodily and mental harm to the survivors of the attacks, and imprisonment. According to Fein’s theory, social destruction was caused by preventing birth within Yazidis and breaking the link between children and their families through separation. IS have committed all these acts with the intent to destroy the Yazidi group as such. IS has clearly shown its aim through the perpetrated acts, material destruction, and through public statements. The violence was intended to eliminate a potential threat, the Yazidi religion that is not accepted in Islam, to implement Islam into the whole society, and to spread terror among the whole Middle East, as the genocidal goals have been described by Chalk and Jonassohn. Moreover, according to Dadrian’s theory, the genocide happened through assimilation of Yazidis into Islam because IS forced their victims to convert. IS further wanted to create a utopian and homogeneous caliphate. As Feierstein theorizes, IS replaced the Yazidis way of life with new ideological, cultural, economic, and political power. Moreover, forced disintegration of original social institutions and the importance of multiculturalism was highlighted already by Lemkin.

From the theoretical perspective, the attempted Yazidi genocide was a very successful method to transform the society and change their social identity. IS managed to change the social structure – “the patterned regularities that characterize most human interaction”538 – of Yazidis because they forced the Yazidi minority to abandon their original lifestyle and their families. Since many men were killed, the women must survive themselves in a society where they are often left without education and jobs. They are used to be economically dependent on their husbands, and the men in the family have been the ones who have been working. Moreover, both physical and psychological pain and trauma have become a part of their daily life, including the fear of suicides, especially among female survivors due to the sexual violence. In the environment of oppression and violence, the Yazidis find themselves as a distinct religious and ethnic group, which is at the edge of a total destruction. Many Yazidis

fear that their whole religious community will disappear in the near future. In this sense, IS has accomplished one of the main objectives of genocidal destruction to transform survivors into “nobodies.” If the Yazidis feel that the whole community will disappear, they also might feel that they are nobodies in the religious sense, as their religion is not supported in the area where they are originally from. Their common characteristics and fate include having lost family members and being forced to witness the murders and abductions of their loved ones. Many women have further faced the loss of their children when the children have been forcibly dragged away from them. IS took very young girls into sexual slavery and young boys to train with IS’s army to kill the kuffar, including their own families, who do not want to convert to Islam. These characteristics have become common among the Yazidi group since the other ethnic and religious minorities in the area have been treated very differently by IS. IS has accepted, for example, Christians and Mandaeans to live in the caliphate if they pay extra tax for it. At the same time, IS gave Yazidis only two choices: to convert to Islam or die. The environment for Yazidis, compared to other ethnic and religious groups in the area, has been extremely harsh. IS succeeded to destroy the Yazidi society, the network of individual Yazidis, through separation of men and women, taking children away from the group, killing members of the group, and causing unbearable psychological pain to Yazidis. If the individuals cannot contact each other – since they do not often know where their family members are, or even whether they are alive or dead – the network and society cannot be rebuilt. Because a society’s needs change at the times through the evolution of the society, Yazidis need to take into consideration their new needs while trying to recover from the attempted genocide. After such physical and psychological violence, the group cannot continue its life as they used to before the attacks in August 2014.

Even though IS tried to socialize Yazidis into Islam and their own fundamental Islamic society through forced conversions, kidnappings, sexual violence, and army training, they did not completely succeed in their goal. Even if IS claims that many Yazidis changed their religion in the aftermath of the attack, most of the Yazidis still fear of losing their religious community. Those who changed their religion did it

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541 The Islamic State, “Military Conquest in Ninawa and Ar-Raqqah,” 18.
because they did not have any other choice. The forced socialization attempts into Islam and IS led to the social death of many victims. They faced “subjection or personal domination, excommunication from the legitimate social or moral community, and relegation to a perpetual state of dishonor.”  

The social death of the survivors and the whole society can be seen in the feelings of lost humanity and human rights, being a slave to IS, being able to communicate neither with their family members nor contacting religious authorities in the temples destroyed.

The perpetual state of dishonor has continued a long time, during the 73 attempted genocides, and is not going away with the latest attempt by IS to destroy the group as such. Part of the social death of the victims happened through moral sanctions, exclusion, and dehumanization, which are common characteristics in cases of genocidal violence. Dehumanized Yazidis lost their moral standing and could not ask for humane treatment during their captivity. They just had to accept what was happening to them or kill themselves. There was nothing they could do to live in a humane way. IS dehumanized Yazidis linguistically by calling them as “dirty kuffars” and “devil worshipers,” whose religion should not be accepted. Genocidal dehumanization was related to their religious beliefs and partly to their ethnicity as unbelieving Kurds. The Yazidis’ religious value system differs from Islamic values and ideology so much that IS believed that there is no room for Yazidis at all in Iraq. Additionally, IS dehumanized Yazidis physically as well. The victims have reported that they have, for example, received food with insects and having to drink from toilets during their captivity at the holding sites. They have been treated like animals instead of human beings. Moreover, Yazidi women and young girls have been dehumanized through pornography. IS represented them in a very objectified fashion during the registrations at the holding sites and in the selling auctions. Trying to make the women look attractive by forcing them to take off their headscarves and even to wear dance costumes moved them from moral consideration and legitimized their victimization and rape. IS fighters were able to buy the women and literally to own them, which made the women to become IS’s instruments, whose autonomy was denied. IS fighters treated the victims as something whom they can violate. Sexual violence of captured non-believers is further accepted, and even encouraged, within the IS community and the ruling from the Sharia and Allah. Treating Yazidis as animals and raping them like machines to produce more

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Muslims became part of the victims’ daily life during the captivity. This new reality of harsh life replaced the previous peaceful reality before the August 2014 attacks. Later on, the new reality in IS’s hands changed into trauma and terrible memories, which are extremely hard to get over.

The Yazidi community faced a very extreme situation, in which they were not responsible for the suffering themselves. Yazidis faced, and are still undergoing, unbearable psychological and physical pain. For instance, they were forced to become eyewitnesses of deliberate kidnappings and killings of their loved ones and the whole community. The survivors were separated from their families, and many of them still do not know the faith of all either close or distant family members. The victims totally lost their human and legal rights, even though IS had legalized their acts under Islamic laws. Under the threat of being killed, Yazidis did not have a chance to react against IS fighters. Instead, they were forced to behave other ways than they could even think about in normal times in order to survive. The extreme situation during the initial attack, captivity, and even after the captivity does not allow Yazidis to improve their social identity. The victimized population struggles with terrible trauma and fear of future suicides instead of being able to build the society again.

To continue, they feel that their ethnic identity has been destroyed since IS drove them away from their ancient home territory. Yazidis have lived in the Sinjar region in Iraq for centuries, and therefore believe that their survival depends on the area. Their identity is built in the past in the area, where all their important holy places, like temples and shrines, have been destroyed by IS. Therefore, Yazidis do not have any original places carry out their religious traditions anymore. Yazidis even argue that they can never return to their homes anymore because it is too dangerous. At the same time, victims of genocidal violence tend to restore their meaning of life using “familiar historical, territorial, cultural or religious references.” Therefore, rebuilding the Yazidi society in refugee camps is extremely difficult without being able to return to Iraq and Sinjar.

All in all, the case is clearly an ethnic cleansing since IS managed to drive the whole Yazidi population out of Sinjar. From the theoretical perspective of the thesis, the case is also a genocide. The social destruction of the Yazidis’ group identity is enormous. Several Yazidi organizations, such as Yazda and Yazidi International, are

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Currently doing all they can to restore the Yazidi religion and group identity. However, they are mainly working in the western world rather than in the refugee camps where the actual victims of the genocide are relocated. Even though IS did not manage to destroy the whole religious group, many survivors fear that their social identity as Yazidis will be gone at any time because many people are still missing, thousands of women are held by IS, and several survivors have later committed suicides due to the unbearable psychological pain and shame.

Since IS has managed to commit a genocide, a terrorist organization can be capable of such genocidal destruction. Therefore, the perpetrator of a genocide does not need to be an actual state. However, IS is a very specific terrorist organization that is organized like a state and therefore able to carry out a genocide in the areas they control. On the other hand, the small Yazidi minority may have been a rather easy target for IS because they have been oppressed for a very long time and they have faced several attempted genocides before. Furthermore, IS coercive mass killing of ethnic minorities in Iraq escalated into genocidal targeting of Yazidis solely because of their religious identity. It would be interesting to find out if the Islamic State would be capable of committing a genocide against any other religious minority in their caliphate. Further case studies could help to draw a better conclusion of IS’s overall genocidal capability. Furthermore, there is not so much recent research comparing genocidal violence and terrorism. Therefore, other terrorist organizations need to be investigated in the light of genocidal violence to find out whether or not IS is the only terrorist organization capable of such destruction due to its specificity. Even though this thesis can conclude that a terrorist organization can be able to perform a genocide, at least from the point of sociological destruction and social change of the target group, it is a very small piece of the overall puzzle.
References


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