

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Suha Hazeem Hassen for the degree of Master of Arts in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies presented on May 24, 2016.

Title: 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.

Abstract approved:

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In the current armed conflicts that have become known to the international community since the sweeping attacks on northern Iraq on Aug. 3, 2014, the Islamic State (ISIS) perpetrated extreme forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against a small ancient ethno-religious conservative Yazidi group. ISIS has used SGBV against Yazidi women and girls as an integral part of their military strategy, as a weapon of war, and as a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide. ISIS employed SGBV as a cheap weapon of war that can achieve many strategic goals at the same time. Thus, ISIS used multiple forms of SGBV such as torture, abduction, slavery, systemic rape and other heinous crimes against the Yazidi women and their families. These crimes included the massacre of men, babies, seniors and disabled women. In addition, ISIS caused the complete destruction of Yazidi villages which caused the displacement of thousands of people. Some of these women and girls are survivors of ISIS captivity, and their current living conditions constitute a human rights crisis.

This research was designed to explore and provide a better understanding of how and why ISIS used SGBV and to shed light on its multiple dimensions. It aims to illustrate how the survivors are coping with trauma and to explain the challenges that they continue to face in the aftermath of the ISIS invasions.

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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

by
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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts

Presented May 24, 2016
Commencement June 2016

Master of Arts thesis of Suha Hazeem Hassen presented on May 24, 2016

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Suha Hazeem Hassen, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words have a soul, and the soul has tears, and these stem from the unforgettable memory of the pain.

I would like to collect all the beautiful and meaningful words and plant them as flowers in front of every individual who supported me to heal, write and work on this thesis. I also would like to say that the words in this thesis are weaved by the tears of the participants and the researcher. As a war survivor and a person who has suffered from severe trauma and painful memories for more than ten years, it is not enough to say thank you to all of the people who made this work a reality. First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to all of the Yazidi women and girls who agreed to share with me their love and painful emotional journeys. Your voices and faces are still in my eyes, mind and heart. Thanks for changing my life forever and for teaching me not to surrender to the internal and external fears. I am also thankful for my thesis chair Dr. Mehra Shirazi who provided me with all the support and guidance that I needed to make this thesis exist. I would like to recognize and thank my committee members Dr. Patti Duncan and Dr. Qwo-Li Driskill who opened their hearts and paved the way for me to grow and develop my skills within and beyond Oregon State University. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Janet Lee and Dr. Jessica White for supporting me in achieving my trip to Iraq during the middle of the fall term.

I am indebted to Nancy Barbour who helped me from the beginning in revising and editing my thesis. I also would like to acknowledge the support of the director of the School of Language, Culture, and Society Dr. Susan Shaw and every member of the Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies program. From Iraq, my deep

gratitude and appreciation also go to the respectful, patient and great Yazidi scholar Mr. Khatari who facilitated my trip and worked for more than eight hours each day during the interviews in the refugee camps; he was a brother, a guard and a great mentor throughout my journey in those camps. Many thanks to my friend and colleague Vyan Asad, the instructor at Koya University in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, for welcoming and hosting me while I was in Iraq. Many thanks to my family in the US and Iraq for their never-ending support, and particularly to my parents who took care of my daughter and taught her to be a happy and independent person. Thanks again Mom for teaching me how to weave love from the pain, through surviving the conflicts and wars. My thanks to my husband, with whom I share the memories of love, trauma, displacement and diaspora, and our beautiful daughter Marla. Finally, my last words of love go my country, Iraq, who taught me how to survive through wars and genocide.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISIS	The Islamic State
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

DEDICATION

To the souls of the baby Asseer and baby Toly, who were brutally tortured and killed by ISIS.

One year has passed

Yet, the crib is calling the baby Asseer

to return to his mother's lap

His milk bottle is filling

with his mother's tears

the bottle is still growing

and reaching the hand of God

God has spoken the final word

Asseer is resting in peace

with the baby Toly in a safe green place

- Suha Hazeem Hassen

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Islamic State's (ISIS) sweeping attacks across northern Iraq on Aug. 3, 2014, began the series of armed conflicts that have become well known to the international community. As an integral part of their military strategy, ISIS has used sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as a weapon of war and a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide. ISIS perpetrated extreme forms of SGBV against a small, ancient ethno-religious group, the Yazidis. Yazidi women and girls from multiple villages were kidnapped and treated as property by ISIS, who considered them *Sabaya* —“war spoils.” According to a recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, ISIS is still holding thousands of Yazidi women and children in slavery (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

The SGBV that ISIS used against the Yazidi women and girls was deliberately varied in its brutality, method, and purpose. First, there was the general form of SGBV, which has been used by ISIS militia as a military strategy and a tool of ethnic extermination, and includes abduction, sexual slavery, infanticide, and the slaying of men and disabled or senior women, whose children would later be subjected to compulsory training as suicide bombers. Second, there was the specific form of SGBV used by each fighter individually, such as systemic rape, forced miscarriages, and the sadistic torture and murder of the captive women's children. Although the nuances are elusive and complex to trace, this thesis strives to document and analyze the different forms of SGBV that the survivors mention in the interviews.

The harmful consequences from ISIS's brutal crimes against these Yazidi victims have not ended with their rescue from captivity, because the survivors' long-

term health, mental and economic plights have just started. These survivors are now facing horrible and difficult battles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which has led some of them to attempt suicide in the refugee camps. Moreover, the survivors' living conditions in these camps could itself be described as a humanitarian crisis.

Therefore, this thesis explores and provides a better understanding of how and why ISIS used SGBV as a military strategy, a weapon of war, and a tool of genocide in their attacks against the Yazidi community. It also sheds lights on the differentiation between SGBV levels and purposes. The thesis aims to show the highly overlooked dimensions of the ongoing collapse and coping processes of these women and girls' lives after surviving ISIS captivity. Based upon this inquiry, the research was designed to answer three central questions:

1. How and why did ISIS use SGBV against Yazidi women and girls as a military strategy, a weapon of war, and a tool of genocide?
2. How are the survivors of these crimes coping with the trauma of SGBV?
3. What challenges do the survivors continue to face in the aftermath of their experiences?

This investigation, which took place at the refugee camps in Kurdistan region (northern Iraq) used narrative inquiry with the Yazidi women and girls survivors. These women and girls are free because they have either escaped from their captors or were rescued from ISIS imprisonment by their relatives using middlemen or what have become known as "brokers." Ultimately, the research will verify how SGBV

was not simply a by-product of the armed conflict, but was precisely organized as military strategy, a weapon of war and a tool of genocide.

Moreover, the findings from this thesis will be used to provide a set of recommendations to the policy makers at the United Nations, human rights organizations, the Iraqi government, and others in the international community to take more substantive measures to prevent the use of SGBV against women and children in the wars and armed conflicts in Iraq and other Middle East regions, in addition to providing short and long term solutions to the groups most affected by these crimes.

The second chapter of the thesis illustrates the historical background of SGBV against Iraqi women and particularly women from the minority (religious and ethnic) groups in four different epochs of modern history. The periods demonstrate the political, social, legal, and economic situations and their role and influence on the construction, normalization and conversion of SGBV to a weapon of war and a tool of genocide by ISIS. The four periods cover: i) the Saddam regime and his Ba'ath party (1968-2003), ii) the US led invasion (2003-2011), iii) the post-invasion/US occupation (2011-2104), and iv) the ISIS invasion and occupation (2014- present). This chapter also explores the emergence of ISIS in Iraq/Syria and their theology and ideology about non-Muslim groups. Moreover, this chapter explores the historical role of SGBV in the armed conflicts as a weapon of war and tool of genocide.

The third chapter elucidates in depth the design, methodology, research questions and theoretical framework used to conduct and analyze the data. By presenting biographies of ten Yazidi women survivors, this chapter also strives to

break the silence that undermines the truth about using SGBV in armed conflict. The biographies describe their stories and highlight key aspects of their lives before, during, and after ISIS's invasion of their lands and bodies.

Chapter four displays the coding themes and the findings that are generated from the survivors' narratives. Chapter five provides the discussion, conclusions of the results, and final recommendations. In the discussion section, the findings are examined using Strategic Rape Theory, intersectionality, masculinity, and "Othering" concepts as frameworks for the data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

SGBV against Yazidi women and girls is a very complex issue and cannot be analyzed in isolation. One must also consider the historical, political, legal, social and economic predisposing factors that paved the road for ISIS to employ SGBV as a military strategy, a weapon of war and a tool of genocide. Thus, the key prerequisite to dismantle this complex issue is by tracing the roots and trajectory of all the stages of SGBV in Iraq. This process includes an exploration of all the above factors and the political actors that played a major role in producing and developing SGBV to become a fast and cheap extermination weapon in the hands of ISIS.

Moreover, the focus of this thesis is unique. There is an abundance of scholarly resources and works that investigate the phenomenon of SGBV in armed conflict and war, but I found no independent field-based research that has been done in Iraq yet. Therefore, gathering and organizing the primary literature was one of the main challenges in this research. To overcome this obstacle, I strived to collect and translate many related Arabic/Kurdish scholarly resources that relate to the thesis subject. And since the Yazidi women share (to a large extent) with all other Iraqi women the same history of SGBV up until the emergence of ISIS, the historical review will therefore include all Iraqi women.

Historical Contexts of SGBV against Iraqi Women

“I do not believe that there are any women that faced the challenges of lack of security and peace more than women in Iraq. For a very long time, women in Iraq have been living with wars, conflicts, and occupation.” –S. Abbas, Director of the Iraqi Women’s Leadership Institute, Baghdad. (Pratt, 2011)



Figure 1: Map of Syria and northern Iraq

Although Iraq's history shows that the country went through many long periods of political turmoil before the US-led invasion of the country in 2003, SGBV and particularly sexual slavery was taboo in Iraqi society. Many sources show that all women including the Yazidi enjoyed some forms of freedom, such as self-independence, free education, and free health access, until the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Even the legal system that was established by all former Iraqi regimes protected women and legally immunized them from SGBV (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

The repercussions of the US invasion (2003-2011)—including the egregious abuses at Abu Ghraib prison, the use of chemical weapons by the US at the Baghdad airport (2003) and in Fallujah (2005), the Haditha massacre of Iraqi civilians by US marines (2005), the Al-Mahmudiyah case involving the rape and murder of a young girl named Abeer Qassim Hamza al-Janabi and the murder of her family by US army

soldiers (2006), the Nisour Square massacre by Blackwater employees (2007), and many other less publicly known cases—and the civil war that ensued after the US invasion (2006-2008), all led to the domination of armed militias, gangs, death squads and SGBV in Iraq. Many other factors also contributed to the catastrophic use of SGBV against women in Iraq after the US invasion, such as the George W. Bush administration's decision to dissolve the Iraqi army in 2003. This decision led to the destabilization of the political, economic and security situations in the whole country. It has been documented that in 2003, in less than four months following the US-led invasion, more than 400 women were subjected to different forms of sexual violence such as abduction, rape, and sex-trafficking (Bahun & Rajan, 2008).

SGBV also catastrophically increased especially against minority groups after the US administration established a new government that distributed legislative authority proportionally based on demographics of race, ethnicity and religion. This process led to years of sectarian-ethnic armed conflicts, and the domination of SGBV was always present in these conflicts (Global Research, 2006; Jasim, 2015).

Ultimately, on August 3, 2014, ISIS exploited the political, social, economic, and security collapses in the country and invaded Nineveh province, including Sinjar city and the surrounding Yazidi villages in northern Iraq (Lister, 2015). During their invasion of Sinjar and other Yazidi villages, ISIS committed atrocious crimes of SGBV against thousands of Yazidi women and young girls and employed SGBV as a military strategy, a weapon of war, and a tool of genocide.

Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein's Regime (1968-2003)

Tracing SGBV in this period is a complex task because women's rights are intricately connected with fluctuating political and economic stability. Therefore, the best way to trace the roots of SGBV against women and particularly against minority women is to start with the secular Ba'ath party era. The Ba'ath party not only played a role in ruling the country for over 40 years, but also contributed to the rise and decline of women's rights in these years.

Shortly after the Ba'athists gained power in 1968, the party approved a new constitution that guaranteed gender equality for women. For example, women could seek their rights in marriage, inheritance, polygamy, child custody, and education, and they had the right to vote, run for political office and own property (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009). To curry favor with the Iraqi people, the Ba'ath party proclaimed that women's liberation was one of the top priorities of their agenda.

Moreover, in 1978, the party legislated compulsory education for males and females, which extended the opportunity to go to school to women and girls from villages and tribal areas (Al-Azzawi, 2015). In order to secularize the community, the government and the Ba'ath party took another progressive step towards women's rights: the government passed labor and employment laws which granted equal opportunities to women in the workforce. Under this legislation, women were able to get one year of maternity leave and were legally protected from all kinds of harassment in the workplace (Kalek, 2013).

However, women's rights started to decline with the beginning of the Saddam era (1979-2003). Beginning with the war with Iran (1980-1988), the economic and political instability created a new environment that enabled the community to subject women to SGBV in the form of domestic violence and lack of freedom. Moreover, the eight-year-long war led to the creation of a new class of vulnerable women in the community—the soldiers' widows. These women were exposed to SGBV in the form of domestic violence such as beatings and restricted access outside the home, prohibition from education, and were prevented from marrying again (Michael, 2010).

According to Bahun and Rajan “The Iran-Iraqi war severely hampered the security of Iraqi women who suddenly found themselves widowed and were suddenly confronted with the severe economic burden of both leading and managing their household in the midst of war” (Bahun & Rajan, 2008). While in 1986 Saddam and the Ba'ath party ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Human Rights Watch, 2003), Saddam used SGBV as tool of ethnic cleansing against his opponents. In 1987-1988, in the so-called Anfal Campaign of 1987-1988, Saddam committed a huge massacre against Iraqis of Kurdish ethnicity; he killed more than 182,000 Kurds including women and children (Zebrai, 2013). Choman Hardi, a Kurdish professor and poet at the American university in Iraq (AUI-S), confirms that Saddam used extreme forms of SGBV in his campaign to defeat his Kurdish opponents, such as rape, killing, displacement, starvation, and humiliation (Hardi, 2011).

In 1990 and after the loss of the Gulf War, the authority of Saddam's regime dramatically declined, leading him to find new ways to deflect people's indignation. Firstly, he adopted laws and policies that reflected tribal traditions which embrace patriarchy and support gender inequality. According to HRW, Saddam's government issued legislation that negatively impacted women's legal status in the labor code, criminal justice system, and personal status laws (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The changes also reduced the sentences for "crimes of honor" from eight years to several months. According to Dr. Rohde at Philipps University Marburg, since the passage of the reforms in 1991, an estimated 4,000 women and girls had been victims of "honor killings" (Rohde, 2010). Moreover, SGBV against women aggressively increased after economic sanctions were imposed against Iraq in 1991. During this sanction, the regime faced economic and political instability. To overcome these issues, Saddam relied upon the support of conservative tribal and religious leaders, which in turn led to the so-called faith campaign (Hunt & Posa, 2009). In 1995, Saddam and his party established an armed militia and named their members *Fedayeen Saddam*, which mean Saddam's Men of Sacrifice. This militia perpetuated horrendous crimes such as the beheading of any woman accused of or engaged in prostitution (Global Security Organization, 2011).

The US invasion (2003-2011)

Following the US-led invasion in 2003 and the toppling of Saddam's regime, Paul Bremer III, the administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) of Iraq, decided to dissolve the Iraqi military after 12 days of the invasion (Lister, 2015). This decision not only caused thousands of soldiers to live in extreme poverty, but

also spread chaos and triggered the emergence and growth of several groups of extremists, non-state armed militias and violence in every part of the country. SGBV against women increased significantly due to lack of security. According to Pfiffner (2010), “The disbanding threw hundreds of thousands out of work and immediately created a large pool of unemployed and armed men who felt humiliated and hostile to the US occupiers” (p. 80).

The US administration’s policy in mastering the new Iraq contributed to tearing the social fabric of Iraqi society and increased racial, ethnic, and religious segregation. This in turn fueled surges of sectarian-ethnic armed conflicts concurrent with the civil war between Shia and Sunni Muslim groups, and SGBV against women rapidly increased, particularly against minority women of other religions and ethnicities. According to the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), “Ousting the government and all systems of security left Iraqi cities vulnerable in the following months to gangs of men who kidnapped women and girls and assaulted them sexually” (OWFI, 2010). In this period, sexual violence was used to achieve political, economic, and religious hegemony between the state, non-state, and coalition forces. Al-Ali and Pratt argue that “Iraqi women are exposed to discriminatory practices and policies as well as to violence from a range of sources—political parties, militarized groups, and the occupation forces” (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, p. 2004). For example, in the Mahmudiyah Killings case, five US soldiers raped Abeer, a 14-year-old girl, then murdered her, her mother, her father, and her six-year-old sister. Then these soldiers set fire to the girl’s body to cover their crime (Jarrar, 2006).

The nature of sexual violence against women and girls varied in each city, taking different forms such as murder, privation, forced evictions from their homes by their husbands, gender-based discrimination, neglect, threats, abuse, slander, harassment, and genital mutilation. More than 1,053 rape cases were documented in the period of 2003-2007 as result of escalation of SGBV against women, as Mohamed al-Dainy, a member in the Iraqi parliament, stated. According to Jaffar, a member of the Iraqi Women's League, "The American forces started raping Iraqi women and children 40 days after the invasion. With collaboration from the British forces, they raped 57 women and 27 children" (International Women's Network, 2004). The dire repercussions of the war, lack of security and the daily bomb or car-bomb explosions led to an increasing number of orphans and widows. It has been estimated that the number of widows rose sharply to 1-2 million after 2003 (Iraqi Al-Amal Association, 2015). Balun and Rajan (2008) argue that the impacts of war led many widows and single women to become prostitutes.

Moreover, SGBV against minority girls increased, especially with the rising rates of poverty and child marriage. Al-Ali and Pratt argue that "High unemployment and poverty in Iraq means that families have to be inventive in securing their livelihood. These coping strategies take different forms.....young girls are married off at an early age to relieve their families of the financial burden of looking after them" (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009, p. 1987). Al-Ali and Pratt also outline that the decline of the security situation led to an increase in "policing public behavior" of women from the non-state, such as imposing hijab. Extremist armed militias particularly assaulted minority groups (p. 2009).

HRW also documented extreme violence and the abuse of women by Iraqi security forces, who used such tactics as sexual assault, beating, electric shock, rape and forced pregnancy (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Non-Muslim minorities were exposed to torture, detention conditions, and enforced disappearances in which thousands of Christian, Mandaean and Yazidi had to flee the country (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Post-Invasion US occupation of Iraq (2011- to Present)

After the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq in 2011, the structure of Iraq's society, economy and culture were ruined and dilapidated. According to Amnesty International's Senior Crisis Response Adviser, "Successive Iraqi governments have displayed a callous disregard for fundamental human rights principles" (Amnesty International, 2014). The policy of ethnic and religious segregation that the US implanted in collaboration with successive Iraqi governments led to extreme violations of women's rights. Collectively, chaos, abductions, and ethnic and sectarian killing are considered social norms and expected daily events.

Within these incidences, SGBV is notably used by the government or other armed militia as a tool to achieve political hegemony, especially against indigenous women. Rita Izsák, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, indicated that "religious minorities are being targeted and their members subjected to abductions, killings or the confiscation of their property by extremist groups" (UN News Centre, 2014).

Kimberlé Crenshaw compared the intersection of violence against people with multiple marginalized subject positions to a traffic intersection. She stated: “Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them” (Crenshaw, 1989). Davis also observed that SGBV was used precisely against women who held different ethnicities and beliefs in both the former Yugoslavia and Congo conflicts (Davis, 1996). Likewise, minority women in Iraq are subjected to more violent forms of oppression such as exclusion, intimidation, abduction, rape, coercion to wear the veil (hijab), in addition to denial of their property rights, etc. In all of these cases SGBV interlocks with multiple identities to serve as a weapon of war.

The Islamic State in Iraq (2014 - Present)

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS, ISIL, IS and Daesh, is considered one of the most extreme and dangerous terrorist groups in the world. In 2014, the world witnessed the emergence of this group when they seized Nineveh province and many other territories in Iraq and Syria under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. According to Lister, the former head of the Middle East and North Africa at IHS Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency center, ISIS has succeeded so far in recruiting more than 18,000 Muslims from ninety countries. Lister argues that one of the factors that made ISIS successful depended on the recruiting of “1,000 or more from Iraqi army officers that American disbanded a decade ago,” men who are mostly from the Sunni doctrine. He also explains that ISIS continued growing because of the Sunni population exiled by the Nuri al- Maliki government which was backed by the US

(Lister, 2015). Thus, it is no surprise that many rebels who pledged allegiance to ISIS, especially their emirs (leaders), are from the Sunni provinces that included the remnants of Saddam Hussein's military (Al-Hashimi, 2015). Moreover, Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi was a former prisoner for four years in camp Bucca. According to Spencer, the US army used Camp Bucca to hold prisoners removed from the scandal-ridden Abu-Ghraib prison. The ideology espoused by Abu Bakir al-Baghdadi and ISIS is based on building a unified state that will deconstruct all the Islamic countries' borders and eradicate all other ethnicities.

According to Iraqi historian and ISIS expert, Al-Hashimi, ISIS used different strategies to impose their political and military power. Mostly, they employed the fundamentalist Wahhabism's creeds that want to restore monotheistic worship, resist all kinds of colonization and refuse the existence of other religions in the region (Al-Hashimi, 2015). Even Lister argues that ISIS categorized the Yazidi as a "non-monotheistic faith... and thus Satanists who could be legitimately enslaved and whose women could be made ISIS concubines." Consequently, ISIS justified their use of SGBV against the Yazidi women as part of a moral, religious duty toward the Islamic society. According to ISIS's *Dabiq* magazine, "Prior to the taking of Sinjar, Sharī'ah students in the Islamic State were tasked to research the Yazidis to determine if they should be treated as an originally mushrik [polytheistic] group or one that originated as Muslims and then apostatized" (Dabiq, 2014). Therefore, on Aug. 3, 2014, and under the leadership of Abu Baker Al-Baghdadi's self-proclaimed leader of all the Muslim in the world, ISIS militias invaded Sinjar city and other Yazidi villages of Nineveh province in north of Iraq. ISIS committed heinous forms

of violence against the Yazidi community such as killing the men and sometimes the babies and the oldest women, looting, burning and destroying their villages.

Although ISIS used multiple forms of violence, SGBV against women and girls was the most significant form in this conflict. After killing the Yazidi men, ISIS enslaved all of the women and girls and transferred them to Al-Raqqah city in Syria. ISIS humiliated and dehumanized them, treating them as war spoils. ISIS proudly published in Dabiq magazine what they did to the Yazidis: “After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Sharī’ah amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Singer operation” (Dabiq, 2014). Vian Dakhil, the only Yazidi member of the current Iraqi Parliament, also asserts that ISIS’s intention was to wipe out the Yazidi people. She states, “there is a collective attempt to exterminate the Yazidi people” (Ibn Abbad, 2014). The women’s rights director at Human Rights Watch, Gertholtz, also declared that “ISIS forces have committed organized rape, sexual assault, and other horrific crimes against Yazidi women and girls” (Muscati, 2015).

History of the Yazidi Religion and Community in Iraq

The Yazidi (also spelled Yezidi) are an indigenous ethno-religious group who live in Nineveh Province, in the north of Iraq (Abdullah, 2014). Yazidis live in smaller numbers in other parts of the world including Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine, and in immigrant communities in Germany (Kreyenbroek, 2009). The name is derived from Yazidism, an ancient Mesopotamian religion. The religion is non-

missionary, monotheistic, and endogamous. Their practices and beliefs are influenced by the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations (KRG Cabinet, 2007).

During different periods of history, the Yazidis have suffered from marginalization and discrimination because of their religion. According to Yazidi scholar and historian Al-Khatari (2010), “The Yazidis were subjected to 73 genocide campaigns by Turkish, Muslim Kurdish, and Persians because of their religion. Their religious reputation was distorted and they were demonized because of their beliefs and practices” (p. 11). Yazidi scholar Delshad Farhan also explains that, “Between 1585 and 1918, the Ottoman Empire had committed more than 34 genocide campaigns over political conflicts between the Ottoman empire and the Yazidi community” (Farhan, 2008). In 1921, after the foundation of the Kingdom of Iraq under British colonization, the Yazidis were also exposed to oppression and killing campaigns led by the British army. Between 1925 and 1935, the British army attacked Yazidi villages and killed more than 100, including their leader, because of their resistance to compulsory military service. During these years, the Yazidi community lived in isolation and oppression as a result of the misrepresentation and distortion of their religion, having been labeled devil worshipers and apostates (Al-Khatari, 2010).

Discrimination against Yazidis increased during the Ba’ath party and Saddam Hussein’s regime. In 1977, Yazidi were registered as ethnic Arabs in population statistics and were subject to an Arabization campaign by the regime, which created settlements of Arabic tribes from other regions in Yazidi villages (Dolmae, 2015). Prejudice and discrimination against the Yazidi religion and community increased

after the US invasion, as a result of sectarian-ethnic tensions fomented between political parties that were compelled to share proportional governance of the country.

Historical Background of SGBV in Armed Conflicts

“The project of colonial sexual violence establishes the ideology that native bodies are inherently violable—and by extension, that native lands are also inherently violable.” (Smith, 2005)

Although history shows that SGBV has always been used in armed conflicts, it is often looked at as a by-product of war rather than a strategy and policy during times of armed conflicts (Aafjes, 1998). According to an ICRC report, SGBV is “still remaining vastly under-reported and underestimated in terms of prevalence and consequences” (ICRC, 2013).

However, in modern history, SGBV, including systemic rape, forced incest, sexual mutilation and other crimes, have become a visible weapon of war in almost all conflict regions. For example, SGBV was used in the armed conflicts in Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia, and the Syrian Arab Republic. In her article, “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War,” Maciejzac points out that SGBV is very effective in producing concrete strategic results at a relatively low price (Maciejzac, 2013).

SGBV is used systematically in conflicts to ignite horror and humiliation, and to exterminate communities. According to Mullins, SGBV is a useful war tactic for ethnic cleansing or to create a cohort of mixed-ethnic children to maintain the humiliation/spoilage/domination (Mullins, 2009). Moreover, SGBV in the form of systemic rape is considered an effective strategy for ethnic cleansing. In her article

“Rape as an Act of Genocide,” Cheryl Bernard suggests six interpretations for this strategy: facilitating ethnic cleansing by making people flee their homes; demoralizing the adversary; signaling the intention to break up the society; inflicting trauma and psychological damage on the opponent; providing psychological benefits to the perpetrators; and inflicting a blow against a collective enemy if the attacked group has a high symbolic value (as cited in Maciejczak, 2013). Moreover, some scholars consider systemic rape as the most intensive and extreme form of SGBV. Ekeno states that “the use of rape as a strategy of war has an impact on the entire society, particularly immediate families. Within the family set-up, rape destroys bonds that unite and define family relations” (Ekeno, 2013). MacKinnon further clarifies:

This is not rape out of control. It is rape under control. It is also rape unto death, rape to massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. (MacKinnon, as cited in Russell-Brown, 2003)

Chapter 3: Methodology

Rape, like genocide, will not be deterred unless and until the stories are heard. People must hear the horrifying, think the unthinkable and speak the unspeakable.
(Tamara L. Tompkins, 1995: 852)

The overall objective of this research is to better understand how the Islamic State (ISIS) used SGBV against Yazidi women and girls as a military tactic, a weapon of war, and a tool of ethnic cleansing. It also aims to illuminate the highly overlooked dimensions of the ongoing collapse of their lives after surviving capture by ISIS. Consequently, these investigations could provide evidence that SGBV was in fact used deliberately by ISIS as tool of genocide. Moreover, the ultimate objective of this research is to use its findings and recommendations to inform policymakers at the national and international levels, human rights organizations, and others in the international community in order to prevent armed militias from using SGBV against girls and women. Hence, it is imperative to center the voices of the survivors and document their lived experiences in ISIS prisons in order to illustrate and analyze the heinous crimes committed against them. The research methodology adopted for this paper was designed to answer three central questions:

1. How and why did ISIS use sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)?
2. How are the survivors of these crimes coping with the trauma of SGBV?
3. What challenges do the survivors continue to face in the aftermath of their experiences?

Research Strategy

Qualitative methods were employed in this research in order to illustrate in detail how ISIS used SGBV against Yazidi women as a military strategy and a weapon of war. According to Kvale, qualitative methodology “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale, 1996). This study employed Narrative Inquiry interviews for data collection. The rationale for this style of conducting interviews was that this technique offers many advantages in the data collection process, including gaining a holistic understanding of the participants’ situations, making personal contact with them, using recordings and visual aids, and offering flexibility to participants while they are answering interview questions. Moreover, this method has been used to “provide important insights into the subjective experience of violence and a greater understanding of the context and meanings associated with it” (Testa, Livingston, & Vanzile-Tamsen, 2011).

Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Rosiek define narrative inquiry as a ubiquitous practice because, “Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 35). Polkinghorne (2010) describes it as “a

cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (Polkinghorne, 2010, p. 1). The main purpose of choosing this method was to reveal and hear the truth about SGBV and its impacts from the Yazidi women and girls’ perspective. Each of these survivors has a valuable story, history, and memory that needs to be heard and told.

As a war survivor, I have always wondered where the Iraqi women’s voices are: why our stories have so often been written and presented through the eyes of other people and so rarely by the women who have lived, tasted and melted in the agony of wars. The Iraqi women’s voices were silenced not because they are weak, but because Iraqi women can tell the truth about the crimes and sexual violence that has been perpetrated against them by Saddam’s regime, the US invasion forces, and ISIS.

Grounded Theory

Since the data collection in this qualitative research was made by collecting data/information from the participants’ narratives and the selection of theories depend on interpreting and analyzing these data, Grounded Theory (GT) was appropriate for this purpose. GT is useful because it “aims to generate a substantive theory that will explain a phenomenon in a specific context and suited to its supposed use” (Cho & Lee, 2014, p. 5). Cho and Lee (2014) emphasize that using grounded theory for data analysis should entail “labeling, categorizing, identifying core categories, finding relationships among categories and generating a theory from such relationship” (p. 7).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described GT as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). Hence, using GT will pave the

way to discover and develop more substantive theories to give significance and dimension to the survivors' narratives. Additionally, the use of GT is considered a useful strategy for qualitative data analysis. According to the Grounded Theory Institute, using GT will lead to "the emergence of conceptual categories. These categories are related to each other, as theoretical explanation of the actions that continually resolve the main concern of the participants, in a substantive area" (Bergaus, 2015, p. 110).

Community Collaboration

Collaboration with the Yazidi community was an essential component of the research, which I began more than eight months prior to the start of this project. Before traveling to Iraq and prior to contacting any of the survivors who participated in this study, IRB approval was secured for all aspects of the project, including my travel details, the participant pool, interview questions, and payments for participants. I was able to reach out to the Yazidi community first through social media. I used social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter and other electronic communication tools (e.g. Skype and E-mail) to find and establish channels of communication with Yazidi community leaders. Through these interactions I learned about and later was introduced to Mr. Khatari, who became an essential facilitator in my visit to Iraq and meetings with the Yazidi women (Figure 2).

Mr. Khatari is a renowned historian and scholar of Yazidi affairs. He played a role in rescuing many Yazidi women and girls from the hands of ISIS. In addition, he is one of the very first Yazidi activists who discovered and documented 16 mass graves of Yazidi civilian men, children, and seniors, who were murdered by ISIS

during its sweeping invasion of their villages in 2014. He has authored a number of books and published several articles about ISIS's crimes against the Yazidis, including a significant book about the Kojo city genocide. Finally, Mr. Khatari has witnessed the daily lives of the survivors since they started to flee their villages and later gathered in a number of refugee camps managed by international organizations. When I was at the camps I learned from the people that Mr. Khatari had even financially supported some of the most affected Yazidi families to improve their living conditions in the refugee camps. With his own money, he helped many women to buy food and clothes. He continues to check on their status on a near daily basis.

Mr. Khatari lives in Dohuk city in northern Iraq (Kurdistan region). Dohuk lies 170 km from Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdistan region and one of the largest cities that are sheltering thousands of Yazidis and other internally displaced people (IDPs) from Iraq and Syria. Mr. Khatari supported me with travel, accommodation, transportation to refugee camps, and participant recruitment.

I communicated with Mr. Khatari, who served as my community coordinator, for about a year prior to my travel to Iraq and onsite visits to the refugee camps. This step was necessary to learn from the survivors themselves about their experiences under ISIS custody and what they went through during their imprisonment by ISIS militias. For me, the media coverage of their stories was insufficient for an in-depth analysis of these cases and the conditions of the women's lives. It was also essential for me to familiarize myself with the survivors' physical, mental and living conditions in their new lives in refugee camps. These in-person and face-to-face communications and interactions with the survivors were crucial for me to understand

their lived experiences and to communicate their needs and messages to the world. The process of building a relationship with the local community and involving a community coordinator with direct knowledge about the cases of these women and their conditions was essential for me to gain the trust of these women and to be able to conduct the interviews smoothly at the refugee camps in Iraq.



Figure 2: Community coordinator, Mr. Khatari. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Site Selection

Although ISIS used the same military strategy of murdering the men, abducting and enslaving the women and the girls in all the Yazidi villages, Mr. Khatari suggested that it would be better to visit more than one refugee camp during interviews with participants. The reason behind this suggestion was the demographic distribution of the Yazidi women per their villages in the refugee camps. Thus, this geographical diversity of the participants will help illuminate the use of SGBV by

ISIS as military strategy, a weapon of war and a tool of genocide. On this basis we selected the following refugee camps: Qadi, Kaberto, Khanke, Shariya, and Bathers. The camps were located in different places within varying driving distances from Dohuk's city center—some of them over an hour's drive on very bad, mostly muddy, unpaved roads (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Refugee camp. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Participants

In consultation with my supervisor and community coordinators, we invited a total of 15 Yazidi women to be interviewed for this research. As a person on the ground and with close ties to these communities, Mr. Khatari recruited all proposed participants. To ensure that this research amplifies different survivors' voices and increases the validity and reliability of the study, we invited the participants from among the five refugee camps that were selected before. The total number of participants in this research included fifteen (15) Yazidi women who were subjected

to SGBV under ISIS militia and survived their imprisonment. The participants included single, married, widowed, and senior women. Their age range was 18-65. The minimum age for recruited participants was 18 years old because it was the age of consent, and the maximum cut-off age was 65 years old because it represents the life expectancy in the region. All of the participants were given pseudonyms in this research to protect their identities.

Research fund and Travel to Iraq

This research was funded by a Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (Sylff) Graduate Fellowship for International Research. The amount of the award was used to cover the cost of the trip to Iraq, living expenses, and transportation while conducting the research at the refugee camps.

On November 25, 2015, I traveled to northern Iraq and arrived in Erbil city, the capital of Kurdistan region. Then, I traveled by road from Erbil to Dohuk city where I met Mr. Khatari, my community coordinator.

Visiting the Refugee Camps and Meeting with the Survivors

On the second day of my arrival in Iraq, I met Mr. Khatari in Dohuk and we decided to visit the five refugee camps as planned. As mentioned above, all the refugee camps were distributed in distant and difficult to reach areas from Dohuk city center due to the poor roads and the winter season, which is usually rainy in this part of the country. For that reason we hired a driver that would stay with us all the time while we conducted interviews and moved between the tents at a camp and sometimes from one camp to another in a distant location. Before each interview

session, verbal consent was obtained from all 15 participants to confirm that they were willing to share their stories. The verbal consent included the following information: a) participation in this project is voluntary; b) the participant is free to withdraw at any time without penalty; c) the participant will not be treated differently if she decides to stop taking part in this study; d) the participant can choose to withdraw from this project before its ends; e) the participant can request her information to be destroyed; f) the participant is free to remain silent on any topic she does not want to answer or talk about.

According to Postmus (2013), researchers are required to minimize risks and maximize benefits of participation, ensure anonymity and confidentiality, ensure free and informed consent of participants, and ensure that the benefits of the research are fairly distributed (Postmus, 2013, p. 513). In the process of gaining verbal consent, the participants were informed about the risks and the benefits of this research. They were told that their identities will not be made public when the results of the study are published. However, they were warned of the risk that they may experience psychological discomfort and trauma; thus, they were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question and to leave at any time during the interview. The participants were told that this research will document and amplify their voices as victims of SGBV under ISIS, and consequently that their participation could help the international community to understand the impact of sexual violence as a tool of genocide on marginalized groups.

Since most of the Yazidi community is able to speak both Arabic and Kurdish (Kurmanji), verbal consent was also obtained according to the participant's preferred

language. Taking into account that my mother tongue is Arabic and the participants speak the Kurdish language, which is very different from the dialect I am familiar with, my ability to fully understand their statements was limited, so Mr. Khatari agreed to serve as an interpreter during the interviews. Mr. Khatari is also a Yazidi. His fluency in both Arabic and Kurmanji (the Yazidi dialect of Kurdish) helped him to simultaneously interpret the interview questions to Kurdish and then interpret the answers for me to Arabic which led to very smooth and successful interviews.

Transcribing Interviews

In the beginning of the interviews, all participants were informed that the interviews would be audio recorded. They were also informed if they did not wish to be recorded their interviews would be documented by notes made with pen and paper. All participants interviewed for this research agreed to be audio recorded. All of the interviews were conducted in the Kurmanji and simultaneous interpretation to Arabic, and were audio recorded in the participants' tents with attendance of Mr. Khatari. I also used pen and paper to write the field notes from each interview in Arabic. I transcribed the interviews verbatim, while Mr. Khatari was translating. Later, I transcribed all the interviews to Arabic Microsoft Word. After that, I sent them through e-mail to Mr. Khatari to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. Later, I received the final Arabic version from Mr. Khatari, who made some minor changes to my first draft. Finally, I translated all of the interviews into English.

Interview questions

The total questions for each interview were 12, and each interview lasted approximately 4-5 hours.

Questions one to three asked the participants to describe their lives, community and living conditions before the ISIS attacks. These questions were essential to this study because they provided information about the participants' lives before the ISIS attacks. This information allows me to make a comparison between the living conditions of these women before and after being in ISIS's prisons. In questions four to ten, the participants were asked to describe in their own language what happened to them on August 3rd, 2014, the night that ISIS militia invaded the Yazidi cities and villages. The question also inquired about the way the survivor Yazidi women dealt and coped with their emotional experiences after they were freed from ISIS. Moreover, these questions also aimed to bring to light the current living conditions of these women in the refugee camps. I also asked if any of the participants has received any form of medical, financial, psychological, or legal support from the Regional Government of Kurdistan or the federal Iraqi government since the time they were are freed from ISIS and brought into these camps. The last two questions (11-12) dealt with the participants' thoughts about their future and what message they want to share with the world through this study.

Each participant received a payment of \$100 whether they chose to continue or withdraw at any time during the interview. This amount was determined and budgeted based on the Sylff international research scholarship that I received to fund my research and was calculated after deducting the cost of airfare, lodging, and transportation in Iraq.

Data Analysis: Coding and Emerging Themes

As mentioned above, this qualitative research employed GT for coding data. Coding is defined as “the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Charmaz (2006) comprehensively illustrated the GT coding process as “categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (p. 43).

The process of coding involves three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I used the three levels of coding the data. Firstly, I used open coding which is described by Corbin and Strauss (1990) as “the interpretive process by which data are broken down analytically” (p. 12). The open coding process started with closer reading of the Arabic transcription of my field written notes. Many words were reiterated and used to express the same concepts in all participants’ interviews. Therefore, I printed all the transcribed interviews and repeatedly read them. Then I used highlighters to mark the common concepts and grouped them into themes. As stated earlier, all of the transcribed Arabic data were sent to my community coordinator in order to increase the accuracy of the transcription. After receiving the final Arabic draft from my community coordinator, I translated and transcribed all of the data to English Microsoft Word. After translating the data to English, I moved to the second stage of coding which is the axial coding. Axial coding is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as the “process of relating categories with subcategories” (p. 143). I shared the concept and themes with

my adviser who helped me to organize the themes, define subthemes and connect them.

At this level all the data were ready to be processed in the selective coding stage, which is described as “the process of selecting the core category, systematically linking this core category to other categories, validating this linking process and the filling of other categories which requires further refinement and development. A core category is that central phenomena around which all other categories are integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). Thus, checking this final stage was essential because it was identifying key concepts to develop the themes and relate them to the theories that will interpret the use of SGBV against the survivors by ISIS. Hence, my advisor and I decided to send the coded data back to my community coordinator to review and provide input. Mr. Khatari’s participation was necessary in the selective coding stage because his opinion could lead to additional insights and add further dimension to the coding. Mr. Khatari suggested that the themes should be distributed in three stages. The first stage was ISIS’s strategies against the entire Yazidi community, such as looting and destroying their villages and cities, and perpetrating genocide against the men. The second stage was the use of SGBV against each woman and girl, and this should cover all the forms of SGBV that ISIS used. The third stage should display the current ordeals of the survivors, including the deficiency in health, mental and legal support in the refugee camps in Iraq. My advisor recommended a fourth stage to describe the ways the survivors are demonstrating resilience. Thus, the results were cataloged in these four overarching themes, which are then broken down into various associated subthemes.

Obstacles

Mr. Khatari, my community coordinator, helped me with my travel arrangements and accommodations in the region. As my flight from the US landed in Erbil city, the capital of Kurdistan Region, Mr. Khatari also organized local transportation from Erbil to the refugee camps in Dohuk where I met the Yazidi women. During my trip to Iraq, I faced an obstacle that needed to be solved so that I could get access to the refugee camps. Mr. Khatari informed me that the recent and ongoing attempts of ISIS to overrun the Kurdistan region has led to increased security measures in the region even for US citizens. So according to the new security instructions I was required to obtain written and official permission from Kurdistan security offices (Asayish) so that I could travel to Dohuk. Before leaving the US for Iraq, my department provided me with an official letter that clarified the purpose of my trip to Iraq. But despite this measure, getting the security permission to travel between Kurdistan cities in these circumstances was not an easy procedure. After frequent visits to more than three Asayish offices and with the support of some friends in Kurdistan, the issue was finally resolved and I received the permit to conduct my visits to the camps.

After many days of continued travel I finally reached my destination—Dohuk city in northern Iraq where only some additional time of travel separated me from the women I had looked forward to meeting for the last two years. However, the distance of the refugee camps from Dohuk city center where I was staying and the very bad roads leading to those camps made reaching them a very difficult daily trip for the next few weeks of my research. Each camp was about 2-3 hours driving from Dohuk.

Mr. Khatari again made great efforts to assist, and he helped me hire a local driver who would stay with us until all the interviews were done every day.

Positionality

To quote Cherríe Moraga, “I think: what is my responsibility to my roots—both white and brown, Spanish speaking and English? I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue” (Moraga, 1983). As a war survivor myself and a woman born and raised in a war torn country, one of the things I strive to do as a US-Iraqi scholar is to make social justice a reality for women and particularly for indigenous and minority groups. I also want to stop the exploitation of women’s bodies in the service of political, religious, and war agendas—by all parties involved in the deterioration of women’s rights. It was necessary for me as an activist, poet, and former university instructor from this nation to take action against the human rights violations and SGBV against indigenous people, widows, orphans, and LGBTQ groups (Iraqi Women’s League, 2014). These groups were always marginalized and considered vulnerable and voiceless sections of the Iraqi community. Thus, they were easily sacrificed and disposed of in the war and the armed conflict.

Therefore, I made the decision to open the gate, to bring to light the missing stories of women in Iraq and bridge them with those of women worldwide who struggle against SGBV. I believe hearing these stories will not only provide better understanding of how SGBV is used as weapon of war and a tool of genocide, but also can provide an example of how women can demonstrate resistance when faced with sexual violence and genocide. It is also crucial to mention that making the

decision to return to Iraq and open the door to the winds of war—memories of injury, displacement, home, and PTSD —was emotionally and physically exhausting to me. To overcome this hard situation and not let my complex internal feelings interfere with my research, I decided to write poems and to include them in each chapter of this research. Writing has helped me to focus and center these women’s stories, through their personal narratives and my poetry.

Theoretical Framework

During the interviews for data collection, the survivors asserted that ISIS not only committed SGBV, but they also perpetrated other atrocious crimes. ISIS massacred all the men, looted and destroyed the villages, forced the survivors to convert to ISIS’s creeds, and tortured seniors, women, and children. ISIS also employed SGBV as a tool to gain quick wins, especially in the processes of sex slavery. Moreno Ocampo, the former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, is pushing for the Hague to open an investigation into ISIS’s attacks against the Yezidis, calling the situation an ongoing genocide. According to Ocampo, “It’s a very clear case. It’s an ongoing genocide because there are still people in captivity” (Coles, 2015).

Therefore, to fulfill the purpose of this research, it is crucial to understand SGBV within the context of these mass atrocities. Hence, this research applies strategic rape theory and intersectionality, in addition to theories of “othering” and masculinity as conceptual frameworks for data analysis and interpretation. The reasons behind the selection of these theories and concepts are: firstly, to identify how ISIS used SGBV as a strategy and weapon of war by identifying the purpose of using

SGBV and its extreme forms. Also, to understand the motivations of ISIS because, as mentioned earlier, ISIS is a multinational terrorist group. As feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe has indicated, “institutionalized militarized rape” can occur in three forms: “recreational rape,” which occurs when the soldiers are not adequately supplied with accessible women; “national security rape,” which is a tool employed by a nervous state; and “systematic mass rape,” which is used as an instrument of open warfare (Enloe, 2000). First, I will explain the notions of strategic rape theory, intersectionality, masculinity and “othering.” Secondly, by amplifying the survivors’ voices by documenting their testimony, we can understand how SGBV proliferates.

Strategic Rape Theory

Jonathan Gottschall’s strategic rape theory can be used to describe rapes that are perpetrated to achieve a certain agenda. According to Gottschall (2004), rape can serve to achieve a war strategy and serve as a weapon of war at the same time. He states that “...wholesale rape represents just another ordinance—like bombs, bullets, or propaganda—that a military can use to accomplish its strategic objectives; rape is a tactic executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives” (Gottschall, 2004, p. 131). Furthermore, in this theory he argues that rape is useful in war to terrorize, demoralize, humiliate, oppress, and dehumanize groups of people for political, social, and economic gains. Maciejczak (2013) also outlines that examining the concept of SGBV as a weapon of war will be incomplete if the political and military goals of the military are excluded. In other words, we must ask what economic and strategic interests motivate the armed group to participate in this process. Furthermore, SGBV can also be used as tool to exterminate an entire

community. According to Allison Ruby Reid-Cunningham, “Rape is used as a tactic of war and genocide because of its physical and psychosocial consequences for individuals, families, and communities” (Reid-Cunningham, 2008, p. 279). Rape is also used for ethnic cleansing purposes such as in the in Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict (1992–1996), when forced impregnation and rape were used to create a new generation of Serbian children. Bradshaw states, “Rape that results in pregnancy also means that the future generation of the ethnic group is 'diluted', since children born through martial rape will be of mixed heritage” (Bradshaw, 2013, p. 89). Consequently, this theory will be useful to analyze and interpret how SGBV was employed by ISIS as a military strategy, a weapon of war, and a tool of genocide.

Rape as a Tool of “Othering” and Intersectionality Theory

Though Nineveh province is considered one of the most diverse places in Iraq and contains multi-ethnic groups, ISIS intentionally targeted Yazidi women and girls. In their Dabiq Magazine and according to their interpretation of Islam, ISIS stated that Islamic law allowed them to enslave women considered *kuffar* (infidel) or *mushrik* (polytheist). Thus, based on this interpretation ISIS alleged that Yazidi women are polytheists or “devil worshipers,” and that enslaving them as war spoils is religiously acceptable. According to James Waller, a professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College, rape and SGBV can be analyzed based on our understanding of an “othering” pattern in armed conflict. In this pattern, Waller also defines three “othering” mechanisms that perpetrators use to commit SGBV without feeling guilt or remorse: 1) Us-them thinking, 2) moral disengagement, and 3) blaming the victims. He states that “mass murder can be made personally and

socially acceptable and even morally justified if it is portrayed as serving a socially worthy or ethical purpose” (Rittner & Roth, 2012). Many women and girls who have been interviewed on Arabic and Iraqi television channels asserted that ISIS targeted them because of their religion and ethnicity (Alhurra News, 2015). The survivors also claimed that they were consistently treated in dehumanizing and despicable ways by ISIS. Consequently, this pattern could bring us closer to understanding why ISIS used SGBV against the Yazidi women and girls.

Moreover, applying intersectionality theory is also necessary here, especially in order to understand the overlapping of SGBV with religion, gender, race, and ethnicity. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as the “core insight that analysis of discrimination based on a single identity trait does not adequately account for intersecting aspects of identity, such as race or sex” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). Other legal scholars all raise the question about the role of intersectionality in the wars in Democratic Congo and Bosnia. Assistant Professor of Law and Associate Director of the Center on Children and the Law, University of Florida, Sherrie Russell-Brown argues that in the Rwanda conflict, certain women are targeted because of their gender and ethnicity. She states:

It is important to acknowledge that genocidal rape is in fact a crime that implicates both gender and ethnicity and to understand that certain women are being raped by certain men for particular reasons” (Russell-Brown, 2003, p. 351).

In other words, the intensity of violence reaches extreme levels when these women are from different religious, ethnic, and racial backgrounds.

Hegemonic Masculinity

According to Miranda Alison (2007), hegemonic masculinity is a set of “norms and institutions that seek to maintain men’s authority over women and over subordinate masculinities” (p. 76). Dudink, Hagemann, and Tosh (2004), define hegemonic masculinity as a theory that “seeks to explain how the political and social order is created in the image of men and expressed in the specific form of masculinity” (p. 42).

Hegemonic masculinity has played a significant role in causing the severe harm of SGBV to Yazidi women and girls; therefore it is necessary to conceptualize the relationship between masculinity and SGBV in this conflict. As Mechanic observed, “the link between ‘being masculine’ and causing violence is unfortunately a reality” (Mechanic, 2004, p. 16). The masculinity in this conflict has manifested and been performed in different ways and for different purposes. First, there is the masculinity that was used by ISIS leaders and the decision makers who are originally from Iraq. According to Neriah (2014), ISIS leaders were mostly former military officers in the Iraqi army that was dissolved during the first days of the US invasion. For these leaders, performing or not performing masculinity is like a decision between life and death. For over 30 years, Saddam and his Ba’ath party played a major role in asserting the notion of an undefeatable Iraqi army and soldiers. Moreover, the leaders and officers have been depicted by the society symbols of manhood, sexuality and upper-class status. These images about the Iraqi officers and soldiers were completely changed and destroyed after 2003. When the US administration dissolved the army, these men were left without jobs, salaries, or

retirement. Many were also captured and tortured by the US coalition forces and new Iraqi government. The ways in which ISIS employed SGBV reveal the level of their desire for revenge over lost or threatened masculinity. Dudink, Hagemann, and Tosh (2004) argue that hegemonic masculinity “implies that control (even oppression) is in some way integral to masculinity, providing a framework for placing men in relation to women and to those males whose manhood is for some reason denied” (p. 42). Ruth Seifert (1994) argues that “rape is not an aggressive manifestation of sexuality, but rather a sexual manifestation of aggression. In the perpetrator’s psyche it serves no sexual purpose but is an expression of rage, violence, and dominance over a woman” (p. 84).

Moreover, ISIS also used the narrative of hegemonic masculinity to lure extremist Arabic fighters from societies that are shaped by religious-patriarchal systems, such as Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Morocco. Desiree Lwambo (2011) points out that “violence and aggression is often a sanctioned way of asserting masculinity” (p. 19). In such social contexts, using SGBV against Yazidi women and girls is deemed morally and socially acceptable. Moreover, the successes of ISIS’s operation against Yazidi women and girls, such as the abductions and sex slavery, played a role in attracting young men from the cities that are highly marginalized by the Iraqi government. Weiss and Hassan (2015) found that ISIS encompasses a variety of different groups and some of them join ISIS because they are “impressed with ISIS’s military prowess in campaigns against rival rebel factions” (p. 161).

Chapter 4: Biographies

My dear angel

On the moon's surface

There is a house and big table

And bread with basils

Enough for us and the neighbors

There are kind hearts and open eyes

Guarding you from the rats

There are mothers and children

Dancing in sliver circles

Let's close our eyes and say farewell

to our bodies and the hunger

- Suha Hazeem Hassen

For over a month after my return to the US from my trip to the camps in Iraq I felt ill and suffered from very disrupted sleep. To this moment, I still have difficulties sleeping sometimes when the pictures of these women and the sound of their voices come alive to my memory. However, ethically, I felt that my responsibility as a scholar, woman and mother was to translate and document these women's stories word by word. There was no way for me to escape from writing the biographies of these women, especially when the survivors shared with me their tears and deep feelings about post rape trauma. Writing these biographies was an emotionally and

physically exhausting process because every word and every emotion and feeling are important and need to be heard. Thus, this section aims to acknowledge the complex identities and life stories of the women interviewed and to recognize each of them not just as research participants but as individuals who have the right to be heard.

Story One: Noaha

Noaha is 27 years old and a survivor from Kojo village. She was the mother of four children and pregnant with her fifth before the ISIS attacks on Kojo, a small Yazidi village 23 kilometers west of Sinjar city. On August 3, 2014, ISIS attacked, looted and burned this village of 1,603 people and committed horrendous crimes against its inhabitants. During her captivity, ISIS fighters not only tortured Noaha, but they also poisoned three of her children, including her new baby. Noaha is one of 270 women who survived the Kojo massacre.

Noaha witnessed and experienced some of the most extreme forms of SGBV, including the genocide of her community, abduction, torture, human trafficking in slave markets, and the systematic rape of girls and women. She also witnessed ISIS's conversion of male children into suicide bombers or human shields. During the interview, Noaha documented that ISIS committed a massacre in Kojo: ISIS took all of the men from the village to a remote suburb and distant farm lands and slaughtered them. Noaha later learned that ISIS used a bulldozer to crush their bodies into a mass grave.

ISIS then took all of the virgin girls, including Noaha's elder daughter, just thirteen years old, and distributed them in different places between Iraq and Syria. At

the same time, ISIS killed almost all of the elderly and middle-aged women alongside the babies.

During a fifteen-day transit in ISIS buses to Al-Raqqa, the stronghold and de facto capital of ISIS in Syria, Noaha witnessed the deaths of babies and the torture and abuse of women. She said that children cried and suffered until many died from dehydration and malnutrition. Moreover, ISIS made the women and their children sleep on bare cement in underground prisons. Noaha documented their arrival in Al-Raqqa and the existence of the slave market there, describing how ISIS fighters beat the women and children like animals if they refused to obey their commands. Moreover, she said that ISIS forced her to convert to Islam, describing in detail how they beat her and always called her *kuffar* [Infidel].

Noaha stated that she was abused, tortured and raped repeatedly after she was sold in the slave market to an ISIS fighter who was originally from Saudi Arabia. She also documented the horrendous methods of rape that were used against Yazidi women. She said that she was raped even when she was in the late days of her pregnancy and immediately following the delivery of her new baby. The ISIS fighter named her baby Bilal, a common Arabic name. Noaha named him Asseer, which means “prisoner of war” in Arabic. She named the baby Asseer as an act of resistance, reasoning that a prisoner of war may ultimately be liberated.

According to Noaha, ISIS fighters and emirs frequently exchanged women and enjoyed hurting and humiliating the women and their children. She was sold to another fighter who was extremely brutal and violent; he raped her and tortured her children. Noaha said that ISIS fighters enjoyed murdering kids because they

considered them sinners and infidels. She claimed that one of the ISIS fighters who held her captive poisoned her three sons, including the new baby. In a symbolic act of resistance, Noaha placed an empty crib in the middle of her tent as a symbol of her baby's soul.

Noaha and the younger of her two daughters, an eight year old, finally escaped from ISIS after her relatives and friends paid a huge ransom to a dealer. She stated that this money is now considered a debt that she must repay, and this causes her sadness and worry all the time. For all her ordeals and pain, Noaha has not received any health, mental, financial or legal support from the Iraqi or Kurdistan regional governments.

Story Two: Shereen

Shereen is 36 years old. She is the mother of four children and a survivor from Kojo village. Before the ISIS attacks, Shereen's life was full of happiness and joy. She was married to the love of her life, and they had their own house and a car. However, her life was changed forever after ISIS captured the village on August 3, 2014. Like Noaha, Shereen described how ISIS burned and destroyed her village. Then they captured all of the families and separated the men from the women and children. ISIS fighters killed 380 men, including her husband and many of her relatives. During the attack, Shereen witnessed the torture and murder of old women and babies from her village.

Afterward, ISIS took the rest of women, including Shereen and her children, to Al-Raqqa city. The trip to Syria was extremely painful and exhausting. Shereen's children suffered from hunger, thirst, and skin diseases such as scabies and lice.

Upon their arrival, ISIS tortured Shereen and took her 15-year-old son in order to train him to be a soldier and fight for ISIS. Shereen and her three other children were moved by ISIS fighters between several houses and ISIS military camps.

Then, ISIS took Shereen and the rest of her children to the slave market. She was tortured, brutally beaten, and sold to a Moroccan ISIS fighter. This fighter took Shereen to his house and raped her. At first she resisted, but she was forced to surrender because he tortured her youngest kids. At one point Shereen overheard that ISIS were planning to sell the rest of her children. Under the influence of constant rape, the torture of her children, and the threat of her children being sold, Shereen attempted suicide by cutting her wrists.

In addition to the sexual violence Shereen suffered, and the abuse against her and her children, she was forced by ISIS to convert to their version of Islam. Shereen said that even though she prayed and followed all of ISIS's rules, the fighter who held her captive repeatedly abused and raped her for over six months. When this soldier was killed during an air strike conducted by the US military, Shereen was sold again—this time to a bloodthirsty Moroccan ISIS soldier. He beat her children severely and locked them in a dark room, preventing her from feeding and taking care of them. He wanted to sell her two daughters who were 12 and 13 years old. Eventually, this soldier was killed in a battle, and ISIS fighters decided to sell Shereen again. Fortunately, she was able to escape with her three children. Her oldest son is still in ISIS custody, and Shereen has not learned anything about his health or whereabouts.

After she was returned safely to her relatives, Shereen reported that eight women and eleven children from her extended family were still imprisoned by ISIS. She currently lives with relatives and is dependent upon them because she has not received any kind of financial, mental, health, or legal support. As with the other survivors, her debt to the dealer who facilitated her rescue weighs heavily on her mind. She confirmed that her relatives gave more than \$60,000 to the dealer to bring her back home.

Story Three: Neveen

Neveen is a 22 year-old Yazidi woman and a survivor from Tal-Qasab village. Located to the south of Sinjar, Tal-Qasab is a small village that was built during Saddam's regime. Neveen was a happy wife and mother of three children before ISIS attacked her village. Her plight and suffering began after ISIS conquered Tal-Qasab on August 3, 2014. ISIS separated all of the men from the women and killed 85 men, including Neveen's father, her three brothers, and her husband. ISIS looted everything in the village and then burned it.

In a strikingly similar story to those of the other survivors, Neveen described how she was transferred with her children and the rest of the women under armed guard to Al-Raqqa city in Syria. During this trip, Neveen's children suffered from hunger, thirst, and skin diseases due to unsanitary conditions. Upon their arrival in Raqqa, Neveen and her three children were sold in the slave market. She was cruelly abused and beaten, then sold to a very bad-looking (as she described) 35-year-old man from Tunisia. This soldier forced her to convert to Islam.

In addition to the abuse and torture, Neveen was raped in front of her two-year-old baby girl, Toly, multiple times every day. After this soldier enjoyed and assaulted Neveen's body for six months, he then sold her to an even more brutal soldier. According to Neveen, the new soldier was extremely violent and used the Yazidi women and their children as human shields, tying them to the hoods of ISIS's vehicles in order to prevent US airstrikes against them. Neveen was raped by this new soldier, and she and her children were tortured with fire and knives. During her captivity, she was beaten and chained so that she could not feed Toly. Sadly, the baby died after being tortured repeatedly; her left eye was gouged out, her chest was crushed, and her neck was broken.

Finally, Neveen's relatives supported her escape. They paid a huge ransom to a dealer to set her and her children free by buying them back from ISIS at the slave market. However, Neveen's struggles did not end with her rescue, but merely took a new turn. She and her children continue to suffer from severe health and mental issues, and she has not received any financial, medical, mental, or legal support from the Iraqi or the Kurdish regional governments. She is extremely worried and distressed, not only because of what happened to her, but also because she has to pay back all the money given by her family and relatives to the dealer to buy her back from ISIS's slave market.

Story Four: Haval

Haval is a 40-year-old Yazidi woman who escaped from ISIS just four days before my interview with her at the refugee camp. Haval lived in Khansor, a small town just a few kilometers from Sinjar city. Khansor city was one of the many Yazidi

villages that fell to invasion and genocide by ISIS in the summer of 2014. Before ISIS attacked, Haval lived a normal life as a wife and a mother of three boys and two girls. She was a distinctive source in this study, because her testimony clarified how ISIS used SGBV as a military strategy to conquer the town.

The miserable ordeals endured by Haval were compounded by and intertwined with the plight of her daughter. During the attacks on Khansor town, ISIS moved all of the families to different places and then separated the men from the women. Then they took around 300 men and slaughtered them. Although Haval's husband and two of her boys were among those slaughtered, she still holds out hope that her family members, including her husband, are still alive. After that, ISIS fighters took all virgin Yazidi girls from their families, including Haval's 12 year-old daughter, Janar. Although Haval tried to resist and protect her daughter, the ISIS fighters viciously beat her and took her daughter Janar along with several other virgin girls. Haval also tried to stop the fighters from taking her younger son, but they beat her back with sticks. As she bled, her son gave her a kiss on the head. She never saw him again.

After that, ISIS dragged 350 women including Haval and her 2-year-old baby girl to an underground prison. Her daughter got sick and she had to shave her head because of lice and other skin conditions. In that prison, Haval desperately tried to help three women keep their pregnancies, but all of them miscarried. Haval was transferred to the slave market, where she and other women and girls were paraded before potential buyers. Because she was a middle-aged woman with a child, she was deemed undesirable. Nevertheless, she suddenly found herself owned by a merciless

Moroccan fighter who purchased her to serve as a maid and cook for his wife. The soldier's wife abused and tortured Haval's two-year-old baby.

Later, the Moroccan soldier sold Haval and her baby to another aggressive and cruel soldier. Like her first owner, the new soldier assaulted and humiliated her. He ripped her clothes, beat and raped her, and withheld food and water for days. Then he sold her to yet another soldier. Ultimately, Haval recounted that she was sold and raped by six different soldiers, each of whom used different kinds of excruciating SGBV against her. She finally escaped from ISIS hands after her relatives paid more than \$20,000 to the dealer, who bought her from the slave market.

Haval stated that in order to explain the depth of her mental health condition, it is imperative to describe what happened to her 13-year-old daughter. As mentioned above, Haval's daughter Janar was among the first to be abducted along with the other virgin girls. Haval stated that she was lucky enough to find her daughter alive and that she had escaped from ISIS within a few days of Haval's rescue. Janar had been selected with ten other girls and taken by bus to Kojo village. Janar and the other girls who refused to convert to Islam were tortured and given to one of the ISIS emirs. Janar and another Yazidi girl were raped by a 40-year-old emir. When he was killed in battle, Janar was sold to another man who also raped and abused her.

Haval's daughter was also rescued after paying a huge ransom to the dealer, who made a deal with his contacts inside ISIS and bought her. Haval and her two daughters are now living in their relatives' house. However, their mental and physical health situation is dire. They have not received any financial, medical, or mental support from the Iraqi or Kurdish governments.

Story Five: Samar

Samar is 18 years old. She is from the village of Tal Azir near Sinjar town. Her life was pretty satisfying in Tal-Azir village, and she was living with her parents and her newlywed 19-year-old brother and his beautiful wife. However, Samar's life changed after the ISIS onslaught in August 2014.

Immediately after ISIS conquered and looted her village, they killed all of the Yazidi men, including Samar's brother, father and eight of her cousins. Her brother died from multiple gunshot wounds to the chest. It was a dreadful night for Samar and her mother. Samar's mother refused to leave her son's body and remained beside him wailing all night. ISIS left her mother there with the young man's body, and she made her way to safety with relatives. ISIS then loaded the rest of the women and children into trucks and buses and transported them to Nineveh province. The trip was exhausting, and the women and their children were terrified and crying for more than 12 hours. Samar revealed that she saw many beheaded bodies of men, women, and babies tossed all over the road to Nineveh.

Upon their arrival in Mosul, ISIS grabbed the children and elderly women and took them to a different place where they were later murdered. Afterward, an emir came and recorded every woman's name and age. As many of the abducted girls were very attractive, he sent 20 of those girls to different destinations. Samar was selected along with four other girls, and they were transported at gunpoint to another city.

After their arrival in the new city, Samar was taken by ISIS fighters to many different houses. She and the other girls were distributed among ISIS emirs. She said

that some girls were sold and others were given as gifts. Samar and one other girl were given as gifts to a terrifying emir. He told Samar to prepare herself to marry him and gave her a sharp blade to shave her body. Instead, Samar used the blade to cut her thigh in order to pretend that she had her menses, which might spare her from rape.

While Samar was able to buy some time and postpone her rape, the other Yazidi girl was less fortunate and was raped immediately. Samar remembered hearing the girl's screams as she was raped in front of her. After that, Samar attempted suicide multiple times in order to protect herself from rape. Samar and the other girl decided to escape, even if this decision could cost their lives. Although Samar and her friend escaped from ISIS and made it safely into their new camp in the city of Dohuk in Kurdistan Region, she is still suffering from a leg injury and mental health issues. She experiences panic attacks and recurrent nightmares about the sexual assaults she was subjected to during those months under ISIS custody. Finally, Samar was reunited with her mother and they are currently living in their relatives' tent. She is borrowing money from their relatives in order to buy food. Like other survivors, Samar has not received any financial, legal, health or mental support.

Story Six: Nova

Nova is a 60-year-old woman from Kojo village. She was a happy wife and mother of three children before the ISIS attacks. Nova is one of the few senior women who survived the gruesome genocide of ISIS. On August 3, 2014, ISIS attacked Kojo and killed her son, husband and five of her relatives. ISIS fighters abducted Nova's 15-year-old daughter. They threatened to kill her 23-year-old daughter when they learned that she was disabled. Nova begged them to spare her, and they relented.

However, since there was no wheelchair for her, Nova had to carry her daughter on her back for a long distance in order to keep her alive. Nova suffered excruciating back pain, but could not risk complaint. She knew that her daughter would be killed like many other disabled girls if she gave in to the pain and stopped walking.

Nova and her daughter were rescued after her relatives paid a ransom to the dealer to set them free. But this debt looms over her. Furthermore, Nova knows that her 15-year-old daughter is still alive and enslaved by ISIS. Nova's grief increases every day because she is not able to raise the money to return her other daughter. Currently, both Nova and her daughter are living in a tent. She received one-time limited assistance from the Kurdistan government, but has received no further aid from them or from the Iraqi government. Sharp declines in health and mental services in the refugee camp have left Nova and her daughter with numerous untreated conditions.

Story Seven: Suzan

Suzan is 18 years old. She is from Tal al-Banat compound, which is located about 15 kilometers south of Sinjar city and is home to a mix of Muslim Kurds and Yazidis, as well as hundreds of Shiite Turkmen. Before the onslaught, Suzan was a happy and successful high school student. She was also engaged to one of her relatives.

When ISIS seized the Tal al-Banat compound, Suzan and her family were among the Yazidi people captured by ISIS. In the incursion, ISIS militia looted the houses and cars, then burned the village. ISIS then loaded all of the families into trucks and moved them to a city close to Sinjar. Then they separated the men and

murdered them, just as they did with all the other villages in or around Sinjar. ISIS took 25 men from Suzan's immediate family and relatives, including her father, brother, and fiancé.

Later, ISIS took the women and the children to another city in Nineveh province. In this city they separated the unmarried virgin girls from their mothers. Suzan was beaten, dragged by her hair, and moved along with many other girls aged between 11 and 25 to another place. Suzan's sisters and her cousin were among this group. Immediately after their arrival, ISIS started distributing the girls between them. Treating the girls as war spoils, they tortured and beat Suzan's 11- and 18-year-old sisters and 12-year-old cousin, then sold them. Suzan also witnessed one of the Yazidi girls commit suicide. "I saw one of the young girls strangle herself to death with a rope. She was 22 years old and a new bride," said Suzan.

Suzan was given as a gift to an ISIS fighter, who made deep cuts in her legs with a military knife so that she could not resist and then raped her constantly. The man had bought another girl, and Suzan recalled that he raped both of them every day for seven months. Then he gave the two girls as a gift to one of his friends, who also raped them.

Ultimately, Suzan was able to escape. She walked for seven hours straight without knowing where she was going. Then she reached an Arabic family and asked for their help. However, this family asked her to pay a huge amount of money for their assistance. So they called the dealer and Suzan's relatives paid the ransom.

Suzan is currently living with relatives at a UN-managed camp where I interviewed her for my research. She requires urgent help to contend with mental and

health conditions, especially after losing her mother, father, sisters, fiancé and many of her relatives.

Story Eight: Manaer

Manaer is a 23-year-old Yazidi woman and a survivor from Kojo village. Before the ISIS attacks on Kojo village, Manaer was living with her mother, her two brothers and two sisters. However her life changed drastically after ISIS's arrival in her village on August 3, 2014. On that day, ISIS took her mother and her two brothers (12 and 13 years old) and buried them alive in a mass grave with other people in her neighborhood. Then, ISIS divided the women and girls into groups in order to distribute them among their fighters as war spoils. Hence, some of them were sent to Al-Raqqa city and some of them to Mosul in Nineveh province. Manaer was one of 23 girls sent to Nineveh. After their arrival, ISIS put Manaer in a big house and gathered all of the girls in a large room where they were beaten unconscious and auctioned off as sex slaves. Manaer was awarded to an 18-year-old fighter from Saudi Arabia. She described him as skinny with a long beard. When she refused to get up and leave with him, he chained her and covered her eyes, then took her to a camp and put her in a bright room. He ordered her to convert to Islam and slapped her twice. He proceeded to rape her anally and orally.

She endured ten months of being bound and chained and repeatedly raped. She often thought of suicide and abstained from food. Later, he sold her to another soldier who had a wife and four children. He held her captive for 11 months. He raped her at least four times every day, usually until she bled or lost consciousness. He also forced her to convert to Islam, pray and fast. She did not like praying, and the

forced conversion made her extremely depressed. After a while she escaped, but was recaptured. She was whipped sixty times by eleven ISIS fighters, and they withheld food from her for a week.

Manaer now lives at one of the refugee camps in Kurdistan Region's city of Dohuk. She is lonely and sad. She also explained that she is suffering from many mental and health issues and there is no psychiatric clinic to go and seek treatment. Her two sisters are still enslaved by ISIS.

Story Nine: Zaina and Her Sister

Zaina is a 19-year-old Yazidi girl from Al-Qabusia village. Al-Qabusia is a small village that lies eight kilometers from Sinjar city. Before ISIS's onslaught, Zaina lived along with her five sisters, two brothers, and her parents in a small house in Al-Qabusia. Although Zaina's family was poor and made their living through selling groceries, they were happy and satisfied with their lives.

On August 3, 2014, ISIS militia overran Al-Qabusia and captured Zaina and her family along with her four uncles and two of their teenage daughters. Zaina stated that the family tried to flee but were surrounded by ISIS's vehicles. They were all transferred to several places until they arrived in Kojo city. In Kojo, ISIS beat her father and attempted to take the girls. Zaina's father resisted, but he and her mother, two brothers, and four uncles were taken away. During the interview Zaina seemed very depressed, probably suspecting that her family was likely murdered during the genocide operation.

After Zaina's family was taken away, ISIS transported Zaina and her sisters and her cousins between Syria and Nineveh province. Upon their arrival to Nineveh

province, ISIS started distributing the girls as war spoils. Zaina and her 14-year-old cousin were sold in the slave market to one of the ISIS fighters. Immediately after taking them to his house, this soldier raped both of them in horrendous and violent ways. Bravely, Zaina and her cousin decided to run away. With her cousin's help, Zaina jumped over the wall and ran, with no sense of direction, until her shoe was ripped and her foot swollen. After a painful and long trek in the middle of nowhere, Zaina and her cousin got some help from a Muslim Arab family.

Zaina is currently living with her sister, cousin, and aunt, all in one small tent. All four of them are living on less than three dollars per day. Her aunt was rescued from ISIS after paying a ransom to the dealer who facilitated her escape. However, the aunt also suffers from severe physical and mental health issues because ISIS still holds in custody her 5- and 17-year-old boys. Zaina's aunt knows that her children are still alive, but she is not able to pay the dealer's ransom to rescue them. Zaina expressed disappointment with her current situation, saying that she and her sister do not receive any services from the Kurdistan government since they lost all of their identification papers. As to the fate of her sisters, who were separated from her when the girls were divided and transferred to different places, Zaina stated that only her 15-year-old sister was able to escape. Her other four sisters and her cousins are still missing.

Story Ten: Jamela

Jamela is 30 years old and she is from Khansor town. Before ISIS seized her town, Jamela lived happily with her husband and her seven children. She was also in

the last month of pregnancy at that time. On August 3, 2014, ISIS captured Jamela's family along with her brother-in-law's family.

Similar to the stories of other survivors, Jamela stated that ISIS moved the families to many places and then separated the men from the women. Knowing that ISIS would murder *kuffar* (infidel) men and abduct the young women and girls, Jamela's family and her brother-in-law pretended to convert to ISIS's version of Islam. After they converted, ISIS decided to keep both families together and transferred them to one of ISIS's camps. During this time, Jamela delivered her new baby girl. Realizing that ISIS would not refrain from abducting the virgin girls, even those who converted, Jamela gave her new baby to her 18-year-old daughter and told her to pretend that she was the new mother.

Afterward, Jamela's family and her brother-in-law decided to escape from the camp. They were captured, and ISIS took her husband, her brother-in-law, and three of his boys and killed them. ISIS transferred the women and children to Al-Raqqa city. When they arrived at a camp in Al-Raqqa, ISIS soldiers immediately grabbed her 18-year-old daughter and her new baby girl and sold them in the slave market. They also took two girls from her sister-in-law. Then, Jamela and six of her children were also sold in the slave market to one of the ISIS soldiers. This soldier tortured her children and left them many days without food. As result of hunger and torture, three of Jamela's young children, who are diabetic, lost the ability to speak.

Finally, Jamela made her way with the rest of her children and reached her relatives. She is currently living with her six children in one tent. Her three children urgently need treatment for diabetes and speech therapy. However, she has received

only one small sum of money which was not enough to buy medicine for the sick children. Jamela's dream is to meet her eldest daughter and baby and hug them again. She also wishes that all the abducted girls will be reunited with their families.

Chapter 5: Findings

*The wolves schmooze together
Decided to devour my womb for dinner
Quaff my blood in the cold weather
crushed my bones to ashes by the hummer
The wolves schmooze again together
licked my body with their saliva
and made my soul naked forever
However, the animals forget
that I am a goddess from
the ancient land lovers
and “Mesopotamia” is my mother
that will send her winds
to wash my body on
the Tigris and Euphrates rivers
-Suha Hazeem Hassen*

“Interpretation is a complex and dynamic craft, with as much creative artistry as technical exactitude, and it requires an abundance of patient plodding, fortitude, and discipline. There are many changing rhythms; multiple steps; moments of jubilation, revelation, and exasperation The dance of interpretation is a dance for two, but those two are often multiple and frequently changing, and there is always an audience, even if it is not always visible. Two dancers are the interpreters and the texts.” (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, pp. 138-139)

The aim of this chapter is to address and catalog all themes that were coded in the previous chapter. As stated earlier, the themes and subthemes are obtained from the words, statements, and concepts that emerged repeatedly from the narrative inquiry with the participants at the refugee camps. Though the survivors are originally from different villages and cities, it was obvious from the interviews that ISIS militia used the same forms of SGBV in their military attacks. For example, all the survivors stated that ISIS committed gruesome massacre against the Yazidi men combined with using extreme forms of SGBV such as torture, abduction, forced conversion to ISIS’s creed of Islam, starvation, miscarriages, and sex-trafficking against the women and girls. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that SGBV moved to another level of brutality after the women and girls were distributed and sold as war spoils in the slave market. All the survivors also confirmed that ISIS emirs and soldiers committed systemic rape, forced impregnation, sadistic torture, and infanticide. This chapter will address and uncover the multiple layers of SGBV and thus will clarify how ISIS has employed SGBV in their military strategy as a weapon of war to destroy, humiliate and dehumanize the Yazidi community and to occupy their lands.

Listing the themes according to the time of their occurrence will also help to give a clear picture about the current hardships and the new challenges the survivors are facing after being rescued from ISIS hands. To ensure the accuracy of the results,

some quotes and paraphrases from the survivors' narratives will be used in the presentation of each theme of the findings. The main themes that emerged from the coding of the narrative inquiries are: ethnic cleansing, sexual and gender-based violence, current living conditions in the refugee camps, and resilience.

Ethnic Cleansing

Destruction of Yazidi Villages and Mass Execution of Male Members

When ISIS invaded Sinjar city and other Yazidi villages, firstly, they captured all the people and imprisoned them in a large school or any empty building they were able to find in those villages. The participants ascribed the use of this strategy by ISIS as a means of preventing the people from escape, confiscating their properties and counting the number of women and girls. Secondly, ISIS separated all the men from the women, moved them to rural areas and distant farm lands outside the city and village peripheries, and slaughtered them in masses.

Neveen, 22, stated, "After ISIS conquered our city, they captured all the people and put us in a big school. Later, they seized all our money, jewelry, and other valuable personal belongings, including our government issued IDs. Then they separated us the women from the men and took all the men to outside the town and slaughtered them. They killed 85 adult men from my village and among them were my husband, my father and three of my siblings."

Similarly, 19 year old Zaina stated that one of the ISIS soldiers had informed her that her parents, her two brothers and her four uncles were killed and some of them were buried alive in a mass grave. During the interviews, Mr. Khatari (my community coordinator) also confirmed this event. He stated that he had helped the

local authorities and international organizations in Kurdistan to document 16 of these mass graves so far. He added that the initial inspection of the bodies of the murdered Yazidi men in these mass graves showed most of their bones were smashed indicating the torture they were subjected to by the group. Then he explained that some men from this massacre were only able to survive because they were covered by hundreds of bodies that were randomly shot at by ISIS.

Mr. Khatari also confirmed that these surviving men currently experience severe trauma especially those who spent nights in the mass graves. The executions and murders and the destruction of Yazidi villages were highly conspicuous during the coding process, taking into consideration that all other participants shared and confirmed these phenomena.

Abductions and Continuing Murder Operations

According to statements from all participants, ISIS committed more than one abduction campaign. After completing the brutal massacre of Yazidi men, ISIS immediately moved to the next step and perpetrated a series of abduction operations on Yazidi girls and women.

The findings clearly revealed that ISIS perpetrated their first abduction operation on August, 3rd, 2014 against teenage girls, in particular those who were identified or categorized by ISIS as virgins and beautiful. This process conjoined with murdering most of the old women and innumerable babies. According to the participants, most of these girls were awarded to ISIS emirs or to suicide bombers because these girls are young and virgins. During the interview Nova, 60, one of the rare senior women who survived the massacres, shared the agony that she had to

endure pain and sorrow every day because of losing her daughter: “ISIS kidnapped my 15-year-old daughter and they also wanted to kidnap my other daughter who was 23 years old. But since she was disabled, they decided to kill her.” Later, ISIS fighters changed their minds and kept her daughter alive, after Nova begged them for mercy.

Similarly, Shereen, 36, stated, “I saw ISIS fighters urinate on elder women months before they killed them. They killed many babies too. ISIS forced my kids to witness their massacre. They took the virgin girls along with my twenty-year-old cousin to Syria.” Shereen also confirmed that other prisoners told her that they saw ISIS burying children alive, because babies disturb or impede the militias’ movements.

Reminiscent of these stories, Haval, 40, described how ISIS kidnapped her 12-year-old daughter, Janar:

After separating the men and women into two groups they took my 12-year-old daughter, Janar, from my hand. I tried to resist and protect her, but they were armed and they beat me by their guns on my arms, my head, my legs and my hands. They grabbed her from my hands. Although I still have a lot of pain in my wrists, but I wished that my arms were broken and I didn't let her go.

The findings indicated that after ISIS abducted the teenage girls and killed most of the old women and babies, the rest of the women and children were transferred to different places, but mainly to Al-Raqqa city in Syria.

It is necessary to highlight that it was hard to trace if these teenage girls are still alive or passed away, mostly because teenagers were not included in this research

and also because the girls' mothers who participated in these interview had no clue about the fate of their daughters.

Journey of Displacement and Diaspora

According to the participants, ISIS relocated the rest of prisoners (women and children) to Al-Raqqa city, the stronghold and de facto capital of ISIS in Syria and to different cities in Nineveh province. ISIS fighters beat the women with guns, cables and hoses and loaded them in big buses and vehicles in a long trip lasting for 13-15 days. The participants verified that during these days, ISIS didn't provide them with food and gave them only a few bottles of water, even though the weather was very hot and dry.

Noaha, 27, called this journey "the journey of death." She stated that ISIS fighters forced her and her three children to ride in the buses with other prisoners. During this trip ISIS provided them with nothing except for dried bread and a little water. Noaha precisely described the situation by saying:

During this trip, many babies passed away because of dehydration and malnutrition. ISIS cast the babies' bodies from the buses, and didn't stop the buses to let the women bury the babies. ISIS militia were controlling all the roads and had built many detention centers and prisons between Iraq and Syria. When ISIS buses would stop for a break, they dragged all the women and children under armed threat and threw us in underground prisons. The prison was small and dark and with only one source of tap water. ISIS didn't provide us with any food or milk for children, just few pieces of cucumbers and tomatoes to eat, while we used to spend the nights on the bare cement

floor. All the children suffered starvation, and cried from the fear of darkness. My 15-month baby (Ceaser) was crying a lot because I couldn't change his diapers or give him milk.

Noaha also verified that many children got infected with scabies, lice and dangerous skin diseases like Pemphigus.

Like Noaha, Haval said that ISIS dragged 350 women, including herself and her 2-year-old baby girl, to an underground prison. Her daughter got sick and she had to shave her head because of lice and other skin diseases. In that prison, Haval also tried to stop the bleeding of four young pregnant women by using her own clothes, but all of these women suffered miscarriages. Haval added, "All the women in the prison kept screaming and imploring ISIS's guards to help these women and get some medicine, but no one responded."

From the statements, it seems that survivors were transferred to many places in Nineveh province. Samar, 18, stated that "ISIS loaded all the women and children in trucks and buses and then transported us to Nineveh province. The trip was so exhausting and the women and their children were terrified and crying for more than 12 hours." Samar also confirmed that she saw many beheaded bodies of men, women, and babies tossed all over the road to Nineveh.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Yazidi women taken into Slavery

The findings revealed that after the captives were transferred to Al-Raqqa city and Nineveh province, they were held in a large area in order to be sold later in the slave market. The participants verified that ISIS made a biography of each woman

that included her age, number of children, beauty level, etc. Later, ISIS soldiers dragged the women one by one from the prison to display them in the slave market. According to all participants, the slave markets looked like an auction place where the women and girls were exhibited as a gift or a property. The young girls (between 18-26) are usually awarded as gifts to ISIS emirs or suicide bombers, while the other women (those identified by ISIS as mothers or less beautiful) are treated as war spoils and sold as property.

As the survivor Zaina, 19, stated, “The differences between the gift and the property depended on the beauty of the girls and women; if she was beautiful then she will be a reward for ISIS emirs, or to the suicide soldiers. While the rest of the women will be sold as property in the slave market.” Neveen also verified that:

In this place ISIS fighters sat in a circle shape on their chairs. In the middle of this circle a soldier had the list with the names of the girls and women with their information and prices. When this soldier began calling the names, ISIS forced each of us to enter the circle and walk around so that all the buyers could check and grope our bodies. I know some girls would fall unconscious due to the shock and humiliation. However, ISIS didn't care and threw water on their faces and forced them to walk in this circle again and again.

Haval, 40, also described how she felt insulted and humiliated:

They brought us to a room or as they called it, slave market. It was filled with buyers. When each one of us entered the room, they would take our veils from our head, then someone at the door would raise his hand to start the bidding. Because of my old age and I had a two-year-old child, no one would buy me.

Yet, I felt very humiliated and insulted when I walked around in front of ISIS fighters in a circle for eight times.

Giving another example of the slave market in a different location, Manaer, 23, stated:

After we arrived in Nineveh province, ISIS chained and put us in a big house and told us we should forget our past and families because we are now war spoils. In that house, ISIS gathered all the girls and put us in a big room to sell. In that event all of the girls were sold or given as gifts directly. When any one of us showed any resistance, ISIS beat us with thick cables and sticks on our backs until we lost consciousness and then exhibited us. There was no fixed price, it was like an auction. A woman and a girl could be sold for \$2,000, and sometimes for 20 cigarettes only.

Systemic Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Abuse

During the interviews all the participants confirmed that they were brutally tortured and raped constantly by ISIS emirs or soldiers. The findings also revealed that the survivors were raped by more than one person and constantly threatened and beaten with weapons. According to all the participants, ISIS fighters exchanged and sold women among themselves after they were bored from raping the same woman. The level of torture, humiliation, and the number of rapes also increased after the women and girls were sold or exchanged. Also, all the survivors who had children indicated that ISIS ruthlessly tortured their children as a punishment to the mothers' resistance of rape. Furthermore, the findings revealed a connection between rape and

the torture of children, which will be explained in the next section. According to

Noaha:

I was sold to twice to two fighters from Saudi Arabia, the second one called Abu -Waleed, he was so brutal and had a harsh appearance. He dragged me to an empty house and immediately raped me, although I was six months in my pregnancy. He was obsessive of sex and used sadistic rape methods; he felt very happy when I screamed or was in pain. He raped me anally and orally. He used to lock the doors and rape me three to four times in the day. He kept me with him at least two to three hours and ignored my begging to feed my crying child (Caesar) who was only 15 months old. I was painfully screaming, because I was in the last days of my pregnancy.

Similar to Noaha's experience, Manaer stated that she was exhibited with 16 other girls in the slave market. She was awarded to a hard-hearted 18-year-old skinny soldier with a long beard.

When I refused to get up and leave with him, he chained me and covered my eyes, then took me to a camp and put me in a small room. He ordered me to convert to Islam and slapped me on my face. I resisted and threatened that I would kill myself if he touched me. Then, after a few hours he attacked me, ripped my clothes and raped me from my anal and mouth. I was a virgin girl and I begged him not to touch me, but he chained me and raped me four times constantly. Then he said to me I will show you how I will destroy your virginity, and will fuck you as in porn movie. He raped me even when I had my menstrual period.

Manaer had to endure ten months living like that. She also thought of suicide and abstained from food for days. Later, Manaer was sold to another Arab soldier who had a wife and four children. “I stayed with him 11 months. He raped me at least 4 times until he made me bleed or faint. He told me that my whole family was exterminated and chewed by dogs, so I should never think about going home,” said Manaer.

Likewise, Samar, 18, was given to an ISIS emir as a gift:

He told me to take bath in order to prepare myself for him. He gave me a sharp blade to shave my body. I used the blade to cut my thigh in order to pretend that I had my menses, which might postpone my rape. I kept pressing my thigh very hard everyday so the blood would come out from my leg. I also attempted suicide multiple times in order to protect myself from getting raped. The emir tortured and beat me on my hand and abdomen with his guns, then pulled me from my hair to his bed.

Infanticide and Torture of Children

Most of the children who survived ISIS’s initial massacre were eventually killed or gruesomely tortured by ISIS soldiers and emirs. The violence against the children and babies was varied and extreme in its style and brutality such as: uprooting the eyes, breaking the bones, poisoning with arsenic, or using the children as human shields. Therefore, it is essential to highlight all these forms of child abuse and explain their relation to the systemic rape against the participants. One of the most agonizing results of ISIS’s torture of children and infanticide was indicated by Noaha:

After I delivered my baby (Asseer) in one of the ISIS hospitals, Abu- Waleed raped me after a few hours of my delivery and this caused me a lot of pain. He also intentionally raped me in front of my babies, so he could enjoy both the rape and my humiliation. After that he imprisoned me and my new baby (Asseer), and my other three children (Caesar, 15 months; Azad, 5 years; Zahra, 10 years). He left us in a closed, cold room for days and gave us dried bread without any water. I had to use the toilet water to drink and wet the bread to feed my kids. My kids were starving and dehydrating in front of me, so I decided to break the window and find my way to escape. I was so exhausted and bleeding, and my children were thirsty and hungry, but we ran for days even without knowing where we were heading in this strange city (Al-Raqqa).

However, ISIS fighters captured and sent us to Abu-Waleed again. Abu-Waleed was very angry, so he beat and whipped me with a hose 40 times on my back until I lost my consciousness. After that he dragged me and raped me again. Abu-Waleed was only interested in raping me all the time, so when I showed any resistance he directly beat and whipped my children. My babies were crying all the time, because he deprived me from feeding them.

Eventually, Abu-Waleed took my babies and their brother Azad to an unknown place. After one hour he brought them shivering, swelling and puking. I begged him to take them to hospital. Later, he took us to a doctor who assured me that my children were poisoned with Arsenic since there was a dark and blue spots on their body and swelling. As result, Asseer lost his life

in my hands at the first month of his life, then Caesar and their older brother. I really tried to cut my veins in the hospital to join my children, but the nurses who work for ISIS stopped me.

Similar to Noaha, Neveen, also described how extremely her three children were tortured as the result of her resistance to rape. Neveen shared:

I was sold twice to two of ISIS's soldiers, the first one was originally from Tunisia and the second one from Morocco. The second soldier behaved like a monster with me and raped me in sadistic ways. He had other Yazidi women and children in his house and he was raping us one after the other. He was obsessive in sex, and he was torturing my kids all the time. He also locked the children in a dark room and deprived them of food and water as a result of my resistance to rape. When I tried to break the door and take my children out, he dragged me outside the home in light clothes to freeze in the cold. He also bit and kicked the children on their stomachs until they were bleeding (Figure 4, Figure 5).



Figure 4: The scars from torture and burning on Neveen's hand. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen



Figure 5: The scars from torture and burning on Neveen's children's bodies.
Photos by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Neveen described in detail how her two-year-old daughter Toly was tortured and eventually killed by their captor:

Although I obeyed all his orders to save my children, he kept me handcuffed all the time and prevented me from feeding my children. Finally, he locked

my two-year-old (Toly) in a box for eight days without food or water. She kept crying and calling me, “Mom...Mom.” Later, he allowed me to carry her out from the box. The smell of urine and feces was covering my daughter. She was so skinny, bluish, and looked like a dead person. She was starving and wanted to eat my clothes from the hunger. In the next day, he beat her with a hose on her toes until her feet swelled. Then he continued torturing her through putting her head in a cold water tank for several times. He then took Toly to the restroom and broke her backbone. Toly wasn't able to stand and she puked blood. However, he ordered her to stand and raise her hands. She was so terrified and called this soldier “Dad,” but he ripped out one of her eyes because she was painfully crying. During the following incident, he threw Toly on the floor, which caused her to break her legs; she spent the next three days raising her hands, but this soldier kept torturing my daughter. He pulled Toly from her hands and stated to throw her in the room until her shoulder was dislocated. He kept cursing and said why this daughter of a sinner does not die. Later, he smashed Toly's head in the ground in front of my children. She passed away with torture marks on her face and bruises covered her body.

Many of the participants also affirmed that some of their children who survived from ISIS captivity now have permanent disabilities.

Compulsory Militia Training Camps for Young Males

The participants shared that ISIS abducted the young male members of the Yazidi minority group and kept them alive for the purpose of training them to be

potential fighters for ISIS, mainly as suicide bombers. The rationale was that ISIS had put the most experienced fighters on the front lines and was using child soldiers to fill the gaps.

Zaina's aunt stated, "Upon our arrival to Al-Raqqa city, ISIS soldiers attempted to take my 5- and 17-year-old boys from me to train them to be suicide bombers. Thus, when I resisted and tried to prevent the soldiers from taking them, ISIS whipped me on my hands with thick sticks and hoses until I surrendered."

Similar to Zaina's aunt's experience, Haval explained how she cannot forget her son's last words:

I don't know how I can forget my young son's voice. He was only seven years old. ISIS killed his two brothers before, and I am devastated because I couldn't protect any of them. I really tried to resist, and hugged my young son tightly, but the soldiers beat me with their fists and with heavy sticks on my fingers. Finally, I lost my son's hands forever. His hands were so soft and small. I kissed him and kissed those hands and I know I will never kiss him again.

The Politics of Forced Religious Conversion by ISIS

The findings indicated that the participants were forced to convert to ISIS's version of Islam, which is based on Wahhabist doctrines. The participants revealed that ISIS labeled the Yazidis as *kuffar* (infidel), which justified killing the people who refused to convert. The findings also suggest that ISIS did not stop the abduction, torture and enslavement of the women and girls who did convert. Furthermore, most of the participants shared that foreign (non-Iraqi) ISIS soldiers were not interested in

the practice of Islam—prayer, fasting, etc.—but rather were deeply interested in engaging in sex, even those soldiers who were considered the most religious fighters (ISIS identified them as suicide bombers from Saudi Arabia).

The narratives also suggest that converting to Islam did not make any difference in stopping any of the forms of SGBV against the participants or the killing of children: “I thought that if we obeyed their rule and converted to Islam, ISIS would not abduct my 18-year-old virgin daughter or kill my husband, but it did not,” said Jamela. Samar also verified that “ISIS soldiers didn’t teach us how to practice Islam or have a conversation about it. All their conversations and actions were about sex and fun.”

In addition, even though the Yazidi women were praying and memorizing Quran, ISIS kept calling them *kuffar* (infidel), or devil worshiper. ISIS also justified torturing and killing children and babies because they were the children of *kuffar* people, such as in Noaha and Neveen’s case. According to Noaha, ISIS soldiers always beat her children and called them *kuffar*, “One day this soldier brought a boiled pot and spilled the hot water on my children’s heads; when I tried to help them he laughed and said that my children are *kuffar* and they need to die.” Finally, Havel also stated that ISIS never called any woman by her name, but they used the word *Sabaya*—“war spoils”—to humiliate them.

Current Living Conditions in the Refugee Camps

Dealer and Ransom Money

All the participants who were rescued discussed the extremely dangerous circumstances of their rescue operations. Most of the details revealed about these

operations will not be discussed here as they may compromise the safety of those engaged in this process and might impede their usefulness to rescue other prisoners. However, the participants wanted to address the dealer and debt issues, since these have had a devastating impact on their current situation in the refugee camps. Many of the participants explained that their rescue operations involved paying thousands of dollars to dealers, and indirectly to ISIS.

All the survivors had already lost everything, including their men who are the household providers in the Yazidi community where most women and girls are poorly educated and do not have jobs outside their households. Thus their relatives and community leaders filled that role and helped secure the funding—usually a large sum—required to free some of their family members from ISIS. However, this money is now considered a debt that the survivors are under pressure to repay.

Also, some participants indicated that the attempts to rescue their family members sometime failed because they could not collect the money that ISIS or the dealer demanded. Zaina stated, “ISIS wanted a huge ransom to free my two cousins, but we didn’t have any. So all the rescue attempts failed. My aunt is currently suffering trauma and suicide desire.”

Other survivors indicated that some of the abducted Yazidi women and especially young girls killed themselves because they could not tolerate more humiliation, assaults and rape by ISIS fighters. “I witnessed the suicide of a 19-year-old girl. She strangled herself with a rope,” said Shereen. The failure of rescue efforts in some cases also led some girls to escape without any help. Most of these attempts failed and in turn resulted in more torture and rape against the girls. Mr. Khatari

shared a story of two girls who tried to escape, but then ISIS captured them: “ISIS soldiers tore the clothes off two girls and forced them to walk naked in front of ISIS emirs and soldiers; then they whipped them as a punishment for their attempt to escape,” said Mr. Khatari. Thus, according to the participants, thinking about debt is extremely mentally exhausting and this issue further complicates their current situation and their relationship with the Yazidi community.

Living Conditions

The living conditions of the survivors in the refugee camps are extremely harsh. All the participants are living with many family members and relatives in very small tents. These tents are made from flammable material that can burn in less than 30 seconds, which makes it a very dangerous place to live, especially in the winter (Figure 6). Many participants indicated how they were freezing in the winter because they are unable to use a heater to warm themselves. The survivors are also deprived



Figure 6: One of the participant's tent at the refugee camp - Kurdistan Region, Iraq. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

from receiving any financial assistance from the government because they need identification documents to prove their Iraqi citizenship, despite the government's knowledge that the Yazidi lost everything during the attacks.

All the participants survive through donations from the Yazidi community. Some do not receive other support, which forces them to live on less than three dollars a day with their children. The three dollars are a donation from other displaced Yazidi people. Neveen mentioned that her children are still wearing the clothes that ISIS provided them. She stated that these things make them relive everything and cause more trauma.

Access to restrooms and clean water were also considered a major problem in the camps. According to the participants, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had allocated one restroom for 20- 30 persons. In addition to



Figure 7: Bathroom and kitchen of one of the survivors in the refugee camps. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

these issues, lack of clean water caused increased diseases among children such as diarrhea, poisoning and skin diseases (Figure 7, Figure 8).



Figure 8: Living conditions of the survivors in the refugee camps - Kurdistan Region, Iraq.
Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Mental and Physical Needs

Many of the survivors are suffering from severe forms of mental and physical disorders such as suicidal thoughts, sleeping and eating disturbances, headache, vomiting, vaginal discharges, sexually transmitted diseases and bladder infections. They are also suffering from loss of memory, depression, hysterical and constant crying episodes.

The children are suffering from malnutrition, urinary incontinence, loss of sight and speech, and teeth diseases. The participants also indicated that their children are suffering from depression, anxiety and lack of sleep, crying and screaming, anger episodes, and nightmares. In addition to all of these issues, the participants verified that they are sleeping only one to two hours at night because they feel tremendous anxiety about their debts and other financial needs.

Neveen expressed her deep feelings of pain and sorrow: “I don't feel I am worth anything. I feel I am like a dried land. I don't have husband or home. I have nothing. I want to go to that far home where Toly's soul hovers and plays around me.” Zina expressed her anguish: “I don't eat or sleep, and all my thinking is about my family and what ISIS is doing to them. All I want in my life is to meet and hug my sisters before I die.” Noaha who lost almost everything, including three of her children, said, “I lost everything. My home was my children and my husband. I wish I will die so I can join them.”

Resilience

Michael Ungar, Co-Director of the Research Centre at Dalhousie University in Canada, has defined resilience, arguing that:

Where there is potential for exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their well-being, and their individual and collective capacity to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways. (Ungar, 2012, p. 17)

Though the survivors experienced SGBV and ruthless living conditions under ISIS and though their plights are ongoing, as a war survivor I noticed a power and resistance in the participants' eyes. Even among those who had lost their children and expressed their desire to die, there was resistance in their actions. When Noaha was telling me about her children's torture, I couldn't hide my curiosity about the baby's crib that was located in the middle of Noaha's place.

I felt the weight of her pain and wanted to know whose crib it was. Noaha said, "I know why you are looking at the crib, but my baby was killed. However, I put that crib there because I know that my baby is coming back every night to sleep in it. I fill his bottle of milk because I know he was hungry when he passed away. I believe his soul is floating around me all the time" (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Baby Asseer's crib. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Although Neveen witnessed the death of her two-year-old baby Toly, she said that she sees her every night in her dreams and this gave her courage to resist and stay alive for the sake of her other kids. When I showed up for our interview, I noticed that Neveen was baking bread and had planted a small garden in front of her tent to feed her family (Figure 10).



Figure 10: A vegetable garden planted by one of the survivors in the refugee camps - Kurdistan Region, Iraq. Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

Other participants who are young, such as Suzan, returned to school after being rescued from ISIS. The first time I met Suzan she was on her way to a mobile school that was opened by a volunteer teacher in the camp. Suzan expressed her passion for English novels, and she wants to be an English teacher in the future. Other examples of resiliency that provided glimmers of hope include Samar, who shared her desire to be a writer and poet.

The rest of the survivors indicated that they feel strength and power when they visit Lalish, the main holy temple in the Yazidi religion. The survivors also indicated that Mr. Khatari and other community members help them financially. For example, although Mr. Khatari has a big family, he has donated his time and money to help them. His house is located in a village far from the refugee camps, but he drove every day to visit all the survivors and managed all of their cases to help them access food and a tent to live in. Such acts of kindness, the survivors said, had restored faith in humanity and hope for a better future.

Survivors' Messages and Concerns

This section was requested by and created on behalf of all the participants. All of them wanted to share a personal message that included their own words. The findings revealed a similarity between all the participants' feelings, demands and concerns. For example, their main demand was the rescue of other girls, women and children from ISIS' hands. The participants raised their concerns and fears about the negligence of the rescue operations by the Kurdistan regional government, the Iraqi government, and the international community. The survivors indicated that current rescue operations are not successful because they provide ISIS with funding through the payment of huge ransoms to release captive survivors. They also pointed out that ISIS is using the children and women as human shields, which has led to the killing of Yazidis instead of ISIS.

On other hand, the survivors complained of the poor treatment they receive from the Iraqi and Kurdistan governments. They indicated that the survivors cannot access any government assistance due to their lack of official documents such as

personal ID cards. The participants stated that some official employees asked them to pay bribes in order to get IDs, sometimes reaching up to \$300.

All the survivors pointed out the lack of counseling services in the refugee camps. Even when the survivors or their children collapse, they find no support or medicine they can rely on. During our visits to the refugee camps, I went to the only mental health center, although each camp houses at least 2,000 families.

The center is managed by two personnel who have no experience or training with SGBV issues plus the center has not been provided with any training or materials that can be used for that purpose. The center mainly offers training in cooking, knitting and sewing instead of mental health services. The participants also complained about the lack of access to health care services because the health centers were too far away from the refugee camps and there was only one female doctor assigned for each camp. Finally, the participants indicated that they do not feel secure in Iraq anymore after what happened to them, even if ISIS were to be destroyed. They confirmed that the ongoing conflict in Iraq had increased the racial and religious discrimination against minorities, especially the Yazidi. They demanded that the Iraqi government take serious steps to enact laws that will protect minority women from SGBV, and to acknowledge what happened to them and their community as an act of genocide.

Chapter 6: Discussion

I will hang the sun at our front door

My lover will be back tomorrow

from the far land

holding in his hands

the evening sorrow and

a veil from the moon

I will hang the sun at our front door

and dance like a free spirit and

a child in his mother's hands

sigh,tomorrow

My lover will tell me an anecdote of

the forgotten names, bodies and babies

However, I still hang the sun at our front door

Clean the bullets from our walls and

give them the stars' names

Millions of stars shine in our home

sigh,tomorrow

I will paint new black eyes and mouth

my lover will be back from the sad land

-Suha Hazeem Hassen

The SGBV that Islamic State uses against the Yazidi women and girls is a complex phenomenon because it takes different forms and has different purposes. Therefore this research was designed to explore and provide a better understanding of how and why ISIS uses SGBV and to shed light on its dimensions. It also aims to illustrate how the survivors are coping with trauma, and to identify the challenges that they continue to face in the aftermath.

The findings of this research indicate that ISIS employed sexual violence as an integral part of their military strategy during the invasion of Nineveh province and particularly Sinjar and other Yazidi villages. The findings also reveal that ISIS used different forms of SGBV in their attacks.

Firstly, there is the general form of SGBV that has been employed as a tool of occupation, destruction, and ethnic cleansing. In this form, ISIS inflicted multiple atrocities in the Yazidi community such as burning and destroying the villages, massacre of males, infanticide, abduction, forced displacement, and sexual slavery. Leatherman describes this kind of sexual violence as an example of “runaway norms,” in which a group like ISIS legitimizes social harms as a process of conflict. She says, “It is repulsive because it is human depravity without limit; it is the crossing of all thresholds on acceptable conduct even when measured against the inhumanity of war. It is a weapon and strategy of war aimed at domination, humiliation, expulsion and extermination of the targeted group” (Leatherman, 2013, p. 32).

Secondly, there is the specific form of SGBV that was used by each soldier individually, such as sadistic torture, systemic rape, and the murder of these women’s

children. The distinction between these two forms can be explained by understanding the structure of ISIS and the motivation and behaviors of their fighters.

The findings show significant matching between the general and specific forms of SGBV and ISIS's group, leadership, and individual behaviors. According to Weiss and Hassan (2015), "The organization spans an array of backgrounds and belief systems, from godless opportunists to war profiteers to pragmatic tribesmen to committed takfirist [infidel]" (p. 153).

In the general form, ISIS employed SGBV as a military strategy and a weapon of war that achieves multiple purposes at a cheap price. The dimension of this form was shaped by ISIS leaders' motivations, particularly the Islamic leader, Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, to attain territorial domination, disseminate horror, impose hegemony, suppress their opponents and erase the Yazidi and other minorities from Iraq. The truculence of ISIS' crimes emerged from their deliberate motivation to wipe out the Yazidi race and religion from Iraq. The motivation was to impose their hegemony in the region through ethnic cleansing of the Yazidi community and the spread of terror and destruction throughout the region. ISIS was strategically organized in their ethnic cleansing operations and intentionally executed all of the men in the first days of their attacks in order to eradicate any hope of having new Yazidi generations in the future. Based on the Yazidi religion, marriage to non-Yazidi men is considered forbidden and taboo. However, addressing how ISIS employed SGBV as a tool of ethnic cleansing and a weapon of war will be not enough here, because this form of SGBV is dangerous and it could inspire other armed militias that are currently awake in Iraq.

Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the impact of the security vacuum and the chaos that the US invasion created when they dissolved the Iraqi army. Reid-Cunningham (2008) argues:

Rape and sexual violence may be particularly destructive when they occur within the context of ethnic cleansing or genocide, and it is necessary to attend to factors that amplify the significance ascribed to these acts. Rape can be a strategy of war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide because it reduces the civilian population through a variety of practical means while instilling fear, submission, compliance, and flight from areas of contested territory. (p. 281)

Since the US invasion in 2003, Iraq has witnessed a huge demolition of its institutional security forces, which has led to the spread of weapons of the former Iraqi army in the streets and the construction of many non-state militia, including Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

According to Al-Hashimi “ISIS encompasses the big leaders of the former Iraqi army and the Ba’ath party, and most of them were imprisoned in Abu-Graib and Bucca prisons under US-led coalition forces. These prisons were like a training academy that led to graduate and proliferate bloody, angry, extremist terrorists” (as cited in Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2014). Even the Islamic leader Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi himself was a prisoner in Bucca prison, where he had the opportunity to meet many former Abu-Ghraib prisoners, mostly former members of Saddam’s army, that had been transferred to Bucca after the scandal of torture and abuse in Abu-Ghraib (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2014). Those leaders had professional experience in military

planning and the administration of long wars, and they had fought against the US military since 1990 (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2014). Much attention has been given to the influence of former Ba'athist officials who hold top leadership and decision making positions in ISIS (Stewart, 2015). Those Iraqi leaders also played a role in recruiting the young men who were originally from the Sunni cities that were exposed to ongoing discrimination, oppression and military occupation by US coalition forces and the later Iraqi governments. Weiss and Hassan (2015) indicate that “ISIS is the only option on offer for Sunni Muslims who have been dealt a dismal hand in the past decade—first losing control of Iraq and now suffering nationwide atrocities, which many equate to genocide, in Syria” (p. 162).

Amnesty International documented that Iraqi Sunnis had experienced severe forms of violence and sexual violence at the hands of US and British Coalition forces, Iraqi security forces and non-state militia:

Detainees had been blindfolded, stripped and suspended by their wrists or hung in contorted stress positions for hours at a time; subjected to electric shocks to the genitals, ears, tongue and fingers; beaten on the soles of their feet (falaqa), whipped and beaten with canes, hosepipes and metal rods; burnt with cigarettes or had their hands pierced by electric drills or had their toe or finger nails ripped out. Some had been sexually abused by having objects such as broken bottles forced into their anus or by other means; some had been forced to watch as interrogators tortured their relatives or had been threatened that their wives or mothers would be brought in and raped in front of them.

(Amnesty International, 2014)

This form of SGBV also serves the purpose of revenge or to regain the masculinity of ISIS leaders and soldiers. This concept can be examined from observing that the first abduction operation was only targeted at teenage girls, and that they were awarded as gifts to the ISIS emirs or to the suicide bombers, who were mostly Iraqis. Roose (2016) finds that: “Humiliation is a central feature of the ISIS movement’s attempt to recruit young Muslim men to join their fight And revenge is a clear contributing factor to shaping the dispositions of the young men” (p. 184). According to the Iraqi culture, virginity is a symbol of honor, power and land, and taking a virgin girl is like claiming all of these. In this matter Deblina Hazra (2015) argues, “The bodies of women have proved to be useful mediums to transfer symbolically messages of power, victory and supremacy. Violence perpetrated on these bodies not only metaphorically asserts male superiority, but also serves as an effective platform to terrorize people” (p. 111). Revenge for challenged masculinity was also used by ISIS to lure the Arabic and foreign soldiers. Roose (2016) writes about this process: “The narrative of ISIS recruiters specifically targets the masculinity of young men asking them how they can enjoy in their life in the West while their brothers and sisters are being humiliated and suffering” (p. 184). ISIS also employed SGBV against Yazidi as a tool for spreading horror among all the people in Nineveh province and used it as tool for terrorizing its opponents and controlling vast tracts in the North of Iraq.

The occupation of Sinjar was significantly important for ISIS because of its geographical location on the borders of Syria and Turkey. ISIS used these borders to smuggle oil from Nineveh province, to arm their militias, and to expand their

authority in Syria too. Under the strategic rape theory, sexual violence and particularly rape is a tool and tactic that can achieve quick and equivalent results to bombs, bullets, or propaganda. It is also a “tactic executed by soldiers in the service of larger strategic objectives” (Gottschall, 2004, p. 131). Thus, SGBV in this form was an integral and significant weapon of war for ISIS to succeed in their military attacks and conquest. ISIS’s motivations and desire for control can also be confirmed from their behaviors toward other minorities such as Christians, Shia Shabak, Turkmen and Sunni populations. ISIS identified their Sunni opponents as the enemy of the Islamic State and accused them of loyalty to the US and the Iraqi government. The Umayya Center for Research and Strategic Studies confirmed that ISIS perpetrated heinous crimes in Nineveh and Anbar provinces, such as bombing and burning mosques and houses and the torture and beheading of thousands of individuals (Umayya Center for Research and Strategic Studies, 2015). Al-Hashimi writes, “Between, 2014-2015, ISIS had ruthlessly massacred more than 6,000 Sunni individuals, including women and children in Anbar province alone” (Iraq Press Agency, 2015). Thus, this form of SGBV qualifies as a genocide, because it was used as a weapon of war to destroy and annihilate a whole ethnicity and race.

In the second and special form of SGBV, ISIS committed other crimes against the Yazidi women and girls such as humiliation, dehumanization, systemic rape, sex-trafficking and children murders. According to the HRW, “Forced displacement is itself a violation of international humanitarian law (the laws of war)” (Human Rights Watch, 1993). A close review of the findings shows that this form was mostly used by non-Iraqi Arab fighters who held nationalities of countries like Saudi Arabia,

Tunisia and Morocco. Although the participants' numbers were not large enough to determine the motivations of these soldiers, the behaviors of these fighters show that they subjected the survivors to extreme levels of SGBV. These soldiers treated these women as war spoils, degraded them, and denied their humanity.

This form of SGBV can be interpreted through understanding the role of "otherness" and the intersection of religion, gender, race and ethnicity in this conflict. The survivors indicated that these fighters labeled them as devil worshipers and their children as sons of *kuffar* (infidels). ISIS used these women and girls' bodies as war spoils in order to attract and recruit the takfiri groups who are also identified as suicide bombers. Weiss and Hassan (2016), confirmed that ISIS leaders succeeded in recruiting a group of fighters "who had already held Islamist or jihadist views but had limited themselves to only orbiting takfiri ideology" (p. 160). The demonization of the Yazidi religion and the dehumanization of Yazidi women was strategically planned by ISIS leaders to lure and recruit more fighters. Leatherman (2013), points out that:

Negative attitudes such as stereotyping, dehumanization, and zero-sum thinking-the psychological dynamic of conflict association- are tools for pushing the internalization runaway norms, so that the norms gain strength and stability throughout the group. Runaway norms are fueled by proliferation of hate propaganda and with mobilization of communities on the basis of hatred for "other." (p. 34)

These fighters were able to cross the Iraqi border because of the security vacuum and the failure of the government and the US to build a new army capable of protecting the Iraqi borders. For these fighters, Yazidi women are considered worthless and the enemies of Allah. Thus, raping these women and slaughtering their children are morally acceptable because ISIS believes they are actually serving Allah by torturing the enemy. They also considered these women a source of future new *kuffar* generations, and therefore it was necessary for them to exterminate the babies. As the findings revealed, ISIS also subjected the Yazidi women in their detention prisons to physical and psychological torture, starvation, denial of food, water, and medical assistance, which in turn led to many miscarriages and infanticide cases. This form of SGBV emerged from both misogyny towards Yazidi women and hatred of their race, ethnicity and religion. Reardon, director of the Peace Education Center and Peace Education Graduate Degree Program at Columbia University, argues that sexual violence and torture happen during conflict because, “It manifests the general misogyny of patriarchy intensified during war so as to reinforce objectification of women and ‘otherness’ of the enemy” (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015, p. 136). This form of SGBV also qualifies as a weapon of war and a tool of genocide, because ISIS used the same methods that the Nazis used against Jewish women during the holocaust. Rittner and Roth explained that the Nazis used “planned starvation and overcrowding, psychological and physical torture, and inhuman medical experiments” to exterminate the Jews in Europe.

Following the US invasion, the decline of the security situation ISIS to move between Iraq and Syria and transfer thousands of Yazidi women in buses without any

fear of the government. During the interviews, many of the participants stated that ISIS moved them in big buses between Iraq and Syria and different cities because there were no Iraqi security forces to prevent or stop ISIS.

Cumulatively, SGBV in both general and specific forms has inflicted multiple and serious physical and mental health problems. The survivors are currently suffering from different kinds of trauma such as rape trauma, PTSD, and forced displacement. All of these forms of trauma need urgent intervention, counseling and treatment by qualified and professional doctors and psychiatric counselors in crisis or trauma centers. The girls who lost their families and virginity feel they have lost everything, and the women who lost their husbands, children, and homes feel lost and in deep depression. These women and girls feel worthless and need support to regain trust and the sense of belonging to the Iraqi society. Furthermore, the children of these women are currently suffering permanent physical and psychiatric problems. According to Terr, a child psychiatrist, “psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (Terr, 1990, p. 8).

However, none of the refugee camps that I visited provided professional doctors or counseling assistance. Also, all the refugee camps built by UNCHR were located a very far distance from the city center, which makes access to any urgent care a difficult process. The only mental care center I found in one of the refugee camps was similar to a caravan, and has not been provided with any equipment or a private room for meeting the survivors. Nor are they run by people experienced or trained in sexual

violence or war crisis conditions. The negligence of the Iraqi government and Kurdistan region towards the survivors' financial, physical and mental health has led to further decline in these women's situation. Also, having lost their homes and being forced to live in tents that could burn in 30 seconds makes these women feel as though they are worthless (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Mental service center at one of the refugee camps - Iraq.
Photo by Suha Hazeem Hassen

The only hope for the survivors to cope with their trauma and their plight has emerged from their personal attempts to continue living for their children and for the hope of rescuing the rest of their families. The coherence of these women also stemmed from the solidarity and the love they receive from their community. Though the majority of the Yazidi community are living in the refugee camps since August 3rd, 2014, and though they are living in poverty and without jobs, they have not left the survivors alone. The entire community shares with survivors love, food, and family memories. The personal efforts of Yazidi individuals has played a role in preventing these women from killing themselves. Providing blankets, food and old

clothes has alleviated a little bit of the burden on these women's shoulders and has empowered them to continue.

Lastly, all the survivors shared their messages about their desire to rescue their families and other girls from ISIS's hands. They also want to be treated equally and respectfully by the Iraqi government and Kurdistan regional authority. The discrimination towards the Yazidi religion has thus far restricted these women from access to any government assistance. Finally, these women want an end to the religious discrimination towards the Yazidi.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The use of SGBV against the Yazidi women and girls was carefully and strategically planned by the Islamic State to be used as an integral part of their military strategy. The Islamic State employed SGBV as a cheap weapon of war to achieve multiple victories at the group, leadership, and individual levels of ISIS militia. The Islamic State employed SGBV to attain hegemony, ethnic cleansing, destruction, humiliation, and retaliation against the Iraqi government and US army. ISIS also offered Yazidi women as war spoils to lure and recruit more fighters to expand their authority in the region and to attract takfiri and other extremist groups from all over the world.

ISIS committed gruesome massacre against the Yazidi men, babies, and senior women. They also burned and demolished the Yazidi villages and exiled the whole Yazidi community from their region. ISIS also destroyed many Yazidi ancient temples and holy places. The Yazidi women and girls were enslaved, tortured, and systematically raped by different fighters. Further, many of the Yazidi women suffered miscarriages as a result of the torture and abuse in the ISIS detention centers, and many of the children lost their lives because of hunger and disease. The Islamic State atrocities towards Yazidi women are a crime against humanity and should be understood as genocide.

Moreover, any attempt to understand SGBV against the Yazidi women and girls cannot be achieved in isolation of the contributing factors that played a major role in promoting ISIS to commit their crimes. First and foremost was the role of the US in

destroying the security system in Iraq. The irrational decisions made by the president George W. Bush through dissolving the Iraqi army led to thousands of soldiers and families without jobs and to the spread of weapons in the streets. Furthermore, forming what the US called Iraq-after-Saddam or the “new Iraq” (Suwai’id, 2016) based on race, ethnicity and population majorities led to the creation of ethno-religious conflicts and violence in all the country. Since the US invasion and its aftermath, SGBV was part of these conflicts. Ismael and Ismael (2015) claim that “any causal connection between the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the violence that has ensued has been dismissed. Coverage of Iraq in English-language media declined markedly prior to the US withdrawal, and coverage of the humanitarian impact of escalating violence on Iraq following 2011 has been scant” (p.1). The ongoing conflict and the failure of the latter Iraqi governments to establish a security institution and protect the borders of the country empowered ISIS authority and paved the way for ISIS to perpetrate their SGBV crimes against the Yazidi women and girls as a weapon of war.

SGBV will not end with the destruction of ISIS, because of the decline in the security situation and the distribution of non-state and gang militias throughout the country. As Leatherman (2013) points out, “As sexual violence overtakes one threshold after another, it ‘normalizes’ extreme forms of violence” (p. 32). These groups will continue to use women’s bodies and SGBV to attain their agenda and interests in the land. Yazidi and other Iraqi women have the power to raise their voices and concerns, but there has been little national interest in hearing the voices of Iraqi women. All the Yazidi women participants were brave and a reflection of all

women in Iraq. They resisted the cruelest enemy in the world and they resisted ISIS when they refused to die. Each of these women and girls has a story and memory of war that is necessary to document in order to understand how to stop these crimes in the future. Therefore, more serious efforts need to be taken by human and women's rights advocates to empower these women, such as creating mental health and educational programs. The road to coping with these war crises requires solidarity with and support for the Yazidi community. Field work in the community is important in order to hear the voices of survivors and to understand how they are coping with trauma as well as the challenges that they continue to face in the aftermath.

Postscript

The process of writing about violence from the perspective of a war survivor made me feel like I was bleeding from each cell in my body. Writing about pain is pain, and writing about terror is terror. SGBV has been established like an independent kingdom that has been filled with blood, terror, tears, women's screams and babies' bodies distinctively after the US invasion. The destruction of this kingdom needs greater effort and an understanding that the kingdom of SGBV has an open door to every Iraqi woman and girl's home and room and that these women are sacrificed so that the rulers, soldiers and the guards of war can sustain their authority and power. For me, entering the kingdom of death and listening to survivors' stories made me feel like I was breaking to pieces and I suffered from mixed and sudden shocks. These feelings were like a melody of bombs in my head, the melody of farewell to our home and bodies.

Under the melody of war

The wombs are falling from the women

The children are delivered without names

The lovers' bones are flaming to

Warm the women's bodies

the enemy says that love is forbidden

and our slavery will keep going

Under the melody of war

The women are waiting there

Waving poems from the pain

their memory is warm

resisting all the genocide forms

their memory is pure, resisting all the hateful waves

The women are using their fingers to fight,

to light the candles in the cold nights

the kids are opening their eyes to remember

that the truth will never die.

-Suha Hazeem Hassen

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