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Victory, Violations, and Investment: Inside Islamic State's System of Slavery

IS' genocide of the Yazidis was pre-meditated and ideologically-driven. The group used varied means to attack and fragment the community, culminating in the mass murder, trafficking, and enslavement of thousands of men, women, and children. Media and scholarly attention has predominantly focused on the sexual element of IS' abuses. While this study maintains focus on the treatment of captive Yazidi women (and their children), it applies a wide-angle lens in order to contextualise and better understand their victimisation within the holistic physical and biological annihilation of the minority community. Yazidi women were targeted as Yazidis, as women, and some as mothers. The diversity of the victims is mirrored in the varied violences of the perpetrators, accessories, and supporters of the genocide. As a complement and counterpoint to the group's official documentation, the testimonies of survivors provide an 'inside view' of IS enslavement. Importantly, they expose the inconsistencies of, and deviations from, the group's regulations, demarcating official policy from the unofficial or even illicit practices of individual group members. The data and accompanying analysis of this report maps the evolution of IS' genocide in support of efforts to prosecute IS-affiliated persons for crimes that go beyond group membership.

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Introduction

In August 2014, the Islamic State (IS¹) group launched a campaign of violent persecution against the Yazidis in northern Iraq. In 2016, a report by the United Nations Human Rights Council concluded that IS' attacks and subsequent treatment of Yazidis were committed 'with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'.² Importantly, the council not only acknowledged that these events amounted to genocide, but that the genocide continues through its long-term impacts.³ IS used varied means to attack and fragment the Yazidi community, culminating in the mass murder, trafficking, and enslavement of thousands of men, women, and children. Media and scholarly attention has predominantly focused on the sexual element of IS' abuses; yet, this is only one piece of the puzzle. While this study maintains focus on the treatment of captive Yazidi women (and their children), it applies a wide-angle lens in order to contextualise and better understand their victimisation within the holistic physical and biological annihilation of the minority community. Yazidi women were not only 'sex slaves'. Their status as *sabāyā* (female prisoners-of-war, sing. *sabiyya*) legitimated their subjugation through myriad – physical, psychological, sexual, domestic, emotional, and even economic – violences. They were targeted specifically and explicitly as Yazidis, as women, and some as mothers. The testimonies of survivors thus provide an 'inside' view of IS' system of slavery, with varied experiences both within and sometimes despite the group's central directives. However, the objective was consistent: eradication of the Yazidi community beyond the group's physical assault. Drawing from multiple data sources, the following sections of this report map the three-stage evolution of IS' policies and practices of genocide.

First, IS' strategy and tactics of genocidal violence were pre-meditated and ideologically driven. Considerable resources were dedicated to creating an enabling environment and legitimating narrative for each criminal act, with multi-media propaganda published to justify its systematic persecutory treatment of captive men, women, girls, and boys. Tapping into long-held misconceptions and discriminatory narratives against Yazidis, IS' propagandists and bureaucrats demonstrate the power of the pen as a weapon of genocide. Couched in terms of a rite of passage and evidence of its pre-destined ideological and military superiority, the group's aim was the annihilation of the ethno-religious minority. The genocide was a holistic conquest that constituted multiple forms of physical and symbolic violences.⁴ The treatment and abuses levied against one segment of the Yazidi community is thus inextricable from those perpetrated against others. Whether killed, captured, or forced to live as 'Muslims' within the 'caliphate', IS' actions centred on the eradication of the Yazidi community, including their future reproductive capability.

Second, IS established an extensive and highly-regulated infrastructure to traffic and manage its thousands of captive women and children. The group's published edicts, notices, and

1 Also known as ISIS or its Arabic acronym 'Da'esh'.

2 UNHRC, "They Came to Destroy": ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis' (New York: United Nations Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 15 June 2016), [https://www.peacewomens.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.peacewomens.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en%20(2).pdf).

3 An independent investigation by UNITAD also made a finding of genocide, as reported to the Security Council in May 2021. See 'ISIL/Da'esh Committed Genocide of Yazidi, War Crimes against Unarmed Cadets, Military Personnel in Iraq, Investigative Team Head Tells Security Council', United Nations, 10 May 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14514.doc.htm>.

4 While not included in the definition of genocide set out in the Geneva Convention or Rome Statute, it is also important to acknowledge throughout this paper that IS' efforts to symbolically eradicate Yazidi identity and culture were an integral component of, and complement to, the physical and biological attack on the community.

pamphlets serve as breadcrumbs to track the process of its division and trade of captives from initial holding sites, through ‘wholesale’ distributors, retail slave markets, and finally to private ‘ownership’. At each stage, the testimonies of liberated captives reveal the inner mechanisms, inconsistencies, and even violations of the group’s regulations, particularly regarding the hidden and illicit abuses perpetrated in the home space of committed members. Consistent across their stories of captivity is what became clear as a ‘divide and conquer’ approach to IS enslavement. At the organisational level, Yazidi women were not abused indiscriminately. Their age, marital status and sexual ‘purity’, aesthetic beauty and even educational level were factored into their classification, value, and purpose. However, the abuses they suffered were the prerogative of their individual ‘owner’, highlighting a key distinction between official group policy and members’ practice. Importantly, this included IS-affiliated women, whose involvement in the genocide spans ideological, psychological, and even physical violations.⁵

Third, IS’ genocide has had long-lasting impacts on the Yazidi community, as it was intended to. The group designed and implemented its strategy to outlast its territorial assault. For individual group members, a slave was an investment that paid dividends – both literally and figuratively. ‘Ownership’ of a Yazidi captive was a privilege that marked militant rank and was formally remunerated in recognition of the importance of a slave’s provision and ‘protection’. As the ‘caliphate’ began to crumble, the profit to be earned by individual IS members from the illicit ransom of slaves back to their families became too lucrative for many to resist, resulting in the further impoverishment of an already displaced Yazidi community. Yet, the potential return of captives to their families presented another opportunity for the group. Its investment in captives was not purely financial, but also ideological, through the indoctrination and training of young teen and pre-teen boys. The documented violences perpetrated by these young recruits served as the ultimate evidence of their successful forced ‘conversion’.

This paper’s data and analysis can support efforts to prosecute IS-affiliated persons for crimes that go beyond group membership. Across these three phases, perpetrators of the genocide were not limited to those who directly inflicted violence by their own hands. Behind the scenes, members across the organisation contributed to providing the ideological justifications, legal frameworks, and physical infrastructure to enable these abuses. Group members bought into and contributed to this system – whether or not they themselves ‘owned’ a slave. These actors and their actions must be recognised as integral components to the genocide.

METHODOLOGY

Since the start of the genocide, the plight of the Yazidi community has received significant attention in international policy, academia and media. In addition to secondary sources drawn from these published literatures, the primary empirical basis for the study are IS documentation and original interview data. First, the group’s published propaganda – in the form of multilingual magazine articles and videos – provide insight into its underpinning ideologies and motivations, presenting rose-tinted and legitimated arguments for slavery

⁵ Germany is leading on the issue of prosecuting IS members of their involvement in the Yazidi Genocide, with two convictions of genocide of the Yazidis and a further five convictions for war crimes and crimes against humanity secured to date. All except one are female perpetrators. See Ewelina U. Ochab, ‘How One Yazidi Woman Helped To Secure The Second Genocide Conviction Of A Daesh Member’, Forbes, 2 August 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2022/08/02/how-one-yazidi-woman-helped-to-secure-the-second-genocide-conviction-of-a-daesh-member/>.

to appeal to its members and supporters. Second, internal administrative documentation, collated by archivists for scholarly analysis,⁶ reveal the group's logistics and regulations for the trade, ownership, and treatment of slaves. Yet, these documents once again provide only the theoretical framework for IS policies; they do not attest to their implementation in practice. As such, third, the author analyses data from fieldwork interviews with twenty-two Yazidi women who experienced IS captivity and enslavement first-hand. Their experiences not only reveal inconsistencies in the group's regulations, but also provide a unique insider view of enslavement from the homes of their captors. These primary sources offer vastly differing perspectives, and so when examined together they can provide the most detailed picture of IS' official policies and informal practices of enslavement, its regulation, and its evolution.

Ethical implications of the study were carefully considered, including for desk-based research.⁷ IS documentation contains (sometimes extremely graphic) imagery of the group's governed populations and its exploitation of captives in service to its cause. Whilst detailed examination is necessary for improved understanding and judicial process against perpetrators, the forthcoming analysis does not indulge in detail or description beyond analytical necessity. The same of course applies to survivors' interview data drawn from the author's fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan in March and April 2019. The trauma experienced and sensitivity of the interview dynamic with liberated Yazidi women is well documented.⁸ At the time of interview, the women were all displaced by IS. Nineteen women were located in four Yazidi-only internally displaced persons (IDP) camps – Esyan, Shariya, Shekhan and Mamrashan – two lived in unfinished buildings in the Kurdish village of Ba'adre; and one woman was visiting from Germany, where she had been granted asylum. The research was granted full approval from the author's university ethical review board⁹ and the Duhok Board of Relief and Humanities Affairs (BRHA) responsible for the management and protection of the governorate's twenty-two IDP and refugee camps. Informed voluntary consent was obtained from all interviewees individually, as all conversations were facilitated by a female interpreter, translating between English and Kurdish Kurmanji. The interviews were conducted on the basis of full and automatic anonymisation to protect their identities and personal security.

VICTORY: BEYOND SEXUAL CONQUEST

In a matter of days following the initial invasion of Sinjar, an estimated 9,900 Yazidis were either killed or kidnapped,¹⁰ and a further 400,000 were displaced in Iraqi Kurdistan.¹¹ Seizure

6 The primary sources for these documents are the archives collected and translated by Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, the 'ISIS Files' held by the George Washington Program on Extremism, and records declassified by the Combating Terrorism Center's Harmony Program. See: Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 'Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents', 27 January 2015, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents>; Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, 'Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence' (Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4079/poe.05.2021.00>; Gina Vale, 'Piety Is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat: The Islamic State's Strategy of Civilian Control', CTC Sentinel 13, no. 1 (2020): 34–40, <https://ctc.usma.edu/piety-eye-bureaucrat-islamic-states-strategy-civilian-control/>.

7 Amelia Hoover Green and Dara Kay Cohen, 'Centering Human Subjects: The Ethics of "Desk Research" on Political Violence', Journal of Global Security Studies 6, no. 2 (2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jgss/ogaa029>.

8 Johanna E. Foster and Sherizaan Minwalla, 'Voices of Yazidi Women: Perceptions of Journalistic Practices in the Reporting on ISIS Sexual Violence', Women's Studies International Forum 67 (2018): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.01.007>.

9 Approval was granted from the Ethics Review Board of King's College London, the author's institution at the time of data collection.

10 Valeria Cetorelli et al., 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq, in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey', PLOS Medicine 14, no. 5 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297>.

11 Bayar Mustafa Sevdeen and Thomas Schmidinger, eds., Beyond ISIS: History and Future of Religious Minorities in Iraq (London: Transnational Press London, 2019), 5.

of new territory provides a non-state armed group with tactical benefits, namely increased recruitment, taxation, and war spoils.¹² IS documentation and survivors' testimonies reveal that the aim and scope of the group's campaign of genocide extended beyond simply opportunistic rape and pillage of conquered territories. Rather, it constituted a pre-meditated strategy of conquest and holistic subordination of an ethno-religious minority. Perpetration of the genocide must therefore be understood not in purely militaristic or physically violent terms. While militants may have pulled the trigger in the Yazidi massacres or led the assault in the abduction of captives, behind them lies a web of ideologues, logisticians, and propagandists vital to the creation of an enabling environment, legitimating narrative, and pragmatic capability for IS' system of enslavement.

Scholars of rebel governance emphasise the crucial role that civilian support plays in the maintenance of control and order by a political actor that lacks the power to claim full sovereignty.¹³ While this literature has largely focused on 'everyday' policies of security or welfare provision by an armed group, the same applies to its designation and persecution of an 'Othered' enemy. IS propagandists and bureaucrats sought to frame its barbarity against the Yazidis as both ideologically and socially legitimate. In doing so, it tapped into long-standing misconceptions of the Yazidi faith. First, Yazidism is antiliteral; its songs and teachings are passed down orally by sheikhs as *qewl* (songs). As a result, unlike Judaism and Christianity, Yazidism is not a 'religion of the book', thereby excluding adherents from protection in exchange for the *jizya* (non-Muslim) tax under classical Islamic law.¹⁴ Second, Yazidis venerate Tawûsê Melek – the Peacock Angel. Though considered a benevolent angel in Yazidi tradition, IS likened Tawûsê Melek to Satan, the traditional fallen angel,¹⁵ resulting in the designation of Yazidis as 'devil worshippers' and 'infidels'.

In an edict published during its attack on Sinjar, IS provided 'scholarly' justification for its targeting of the Yazidis as 'original disbelievers' and 'idolaters'.¹⁶ Two months later, in a multiple-page spread of its flagship English-language magazine, *Dabiq*, IS again explicitly legitimised the attack on Sinjar and the treatment of the Yazidis. It declared, 'the Islamic State faced a population of Yazidis, a pagan minority existent for ages in the regions of Iraq and Sham [Syria]. Their continual existence to this day is a matter that Muslims should question as they will be asked about it on Judgment Day'.¹⁷ By couching the genocide in apocalyptic terms, and aimed at its international supporter base, IS signifies and legitimates its violence as a milestone of its larger ideo-military battles. Moreover, it is important to reflect on the fact that the article took great pains in emphasising the 'research' of 'Shari'ah students in the Islamic State' in determining Yazidis' classification (and punishment) 'prior to the taking of Sinjar'.¹⁸ The influence and power of IS' ideologues and scholars in shaping the group's military and

12 Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

13 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

14 Islamic State of Iraq and al-Shâm, 'Text of the Pact of Security the Islamic State has Given to the Christians of Raqqa with Their Embracing the Rulings of Dhimma' (Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Commander of the Faithful, 26 February 2014), <https://www.aymenn-jawad.org/14472/the-islamic-state-of-iraq-and-ash-sham-dhimmi>.

15 Thomas Schmidinger, 'The Yazidis: Religion, Society and Resentments', in *Beyond ISIS: History and Future of Religious Minorities in Iraq*, ed. Bayar Mustafa Sevdeen and Thomas Schmidinger (London: Transnational Press, 2019), 168.

16 Islamic State, 'Fatwa 11. Ruling on Yazidis: Is the Yazidi sect in Iraq original disbelievers or apostates?' (Head of the Department of Research and Fatwa Issuance, 9 August 2014).

17 Islamic State, 'The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour', *Dabiq*, 11 October 2014, 14–17.

18 *Ibid*, 14.

propagandistic exploits is well-documented.¹⁹ The Yazidi genocide is no different, and importantly it extends to supporters whose unofficial social media content reflects approval or legitimisation of the group's system of slavery.²⁰ The perpetrators of, and accessories to, the Yazidi genocide wielded a pen as well as a sword.

The aim of the Sinjar invasion was the eradication of Yazidis as an ethno-religious minority that must submit to the supremacy of IS' version of Islam. What transpired in practice was a highly gendered and ethnicised persecution, with 'conversion' taking multiple forms. Considerable attention from within and beyond the Yazidi community has been paid to the sexual element of IS' abuse, notably the systematic trade and rape of young Yazidi women and girls as *sabāyā*. Lahoud notes that IS' policy of sexual enslavement legitimates 'access to multiple sexual partners beyond the four wives that the Islamic institution of marriage allows'.²¹ Pragmatically, purchase of a *sabiyya* could circumvent the group's ruling of separate accommodation and equal provision for co-wives.²² Indeed, an IS pamphlet entitled 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement' explicitly presents *sabāyā* 'ownership' as 'God's mercy on men who cannot find marriage or for whom the matter of marriage is difficult from expenditures and the like'.²³ This certainly resonated with some male followers on social media.²⁴ However, sexual gratification was not explicitly promoted by the group's central media outlets as a recruitment tool. In fact, one magazine responding to female critics of Yazidi slave 'ownership' takes pains to differentiate the practice from Western prostitution.²⁵

The purpose and practice of enslavement of Yazidi women and girls went beyond sexual gratification. In other words, rape was not the goal; it served a wider strategic purpose. As biological reproducers and symbolic boundary markers of a community,²⁶ women's bodies and gendered identities are targeted and serve as a battleground for larger ethnic or nationalist struggles principally fought between men.²⁷ Whether recreational, security-driven, or genocidal, gender oppression is a prerequisite for the formal strategies and informal practices of wartime sexual violence that are reflective of hypermasculine and misogynistic organisational culture.²⁸

19 For example, see Graeme Wood, 'What ISIS Really Wants', *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

20 YYehoshua, R Green, and A Agron, 'Sex Slavery In The Islamic State: Practices, Social Media Discourse, And Justifications' (Washington, DC: The Middle East Media Research Institute, 11 August 2015), <https://www.memri.org/reports/sex-slavery-islamic-state-%E2%80%93-practices-social-media-discourse-and-justifications-jabhat-al>.

21 Nelly Lahoud, 'Empowerment or Subjugation: An Analysis of ISIL's Gendered Messaging' (New York: UN Women, June 2018), 16, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lahoud-Fin-Web-rev.pdf>.

22 Islamic State, 'Polygamy Without Transgression', *Al-Nabā'* (36), 21 June 2016, 13.

23 Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement' (Research and Fatwa Issuance Committee. October, October 2014), 13.

24 Abu Anas As-Somali, 'Brothers Dnt MARRY!!! In Darul Kufr Ts Better You Buy a Slave in IS than Being Enslaved by a Woman Who Doesn't Care about Yr Akhirah !!', Tweet, @NdoSisi_, 20 July 2015.

25 Islamic State, 'From Our Sisters: Slave Girls or Prostitutes?', *Dabiq* (9), 21 May 2015, 44–49.

26 Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation, Politics and Culture* (London: Sage, 1997), 103.

27 Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 362.

28 Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'Variation in Sexual Violence during War', *Politics & Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 307–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323290206290426>; Mara Redlich Revkin and Elisabeth Jean Wood, 'The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices', *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa038>.

Moreover, systematic and genocidal rape serves as a tool of ‘ethnic cleansing’, targeting females through their child-bearing capacity to destroy the ‘purity’ of an ethnic group.²⁹ IS documentation reinforces the role of rape in its broader vision of ‘conquest’, highlighting captivity and enslavement as means of both spreading tawhīd (monotheism) and increasing Muslim offspring.³⁰ Through rape of individual women, IS sought to psychologically and physically fragment the collective Yazidi community, exploiting its socio-cultural mores of endogamy. Marriage or sexual relations with non-Yazidis is strictly prohibited and punishable by excommunication, and even reported cases of honour killings.³¹ Accordingly, rape served as means to crystalise women’s captivity and their new identity as IS sabāyā.

It is a common misconception that all Yazidi captives were immediately and automatically sexually enslaved by IS. Six female interviewees – aged between twenty-two and forty at the time of their capture – reported that upon condition of their ‘conversion’, their families were permitted to live – temporarily until the spring of 2015³² – with varying degrees of ‘freedom’ in IS-controlled villages.³³ One woman recalled an IS militant proclaiming, ‘Now you are free; you are Muslim and can live as you want. There is no risk to your life’.³⁴ The families’ compulsory participation and conformity to IS’ religious codes and practices solidified their new status as ‘Muslim converts’. While not themselves enslaved, they were denied freedoms of movement, religious belief, and expression. Most men were subjected to daily forced labour, carrying out tasks such as grave-digging and work to support IS’ agriculture and manufacturing, only interrupted to attend the local mosque for the five daily prayers. One woman added that during Ramadan, ‘they forced us to fast and said to us that women and children who do not fast will be separated’.³⁵ For a female-only family in Resala village, open-plan houses required women and girls to wear the IS-mandated shari‘i (legal) dress for women – black loose-fitting abaya, niqab, and twin-layered khimar – at all times.³⁶ These instances highlight an understudied aspect of IS captivity through the eradication of the Yazidi faith and identity through replacement and immersion in new Islamic religious practices.

Approximately 3,100 Yazidis died in the invasion and siege of Sinjar; nearly half were executed en masse in mass graves encircling Yazidi villages.³⁷ The majority of Yazidis killed in these massacres were adult men and adolescent boys – identified as having reached puberty by factors including height, general appearance, and the presence of armpit hair.³⁸ Given that IS’ ‘caliphate’ was established as an ‘utopia’ for Sunni Muslims,³⁹ Yazidi men’s ethno-religious identity co-

29 Miranda Alison, ‘Wartime Sexual Violence: Women’s Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity’, *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210507007310>; Heidi Hudson, ‘Peacebuilding Through a Gender Lens and the Challenges of Implementation in Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire’, *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902899982>.

30 Islamic State, ‘From the Creator’s Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement’.

31 Schmidinger, ‘The Yazidis’, 170.

32 UNHRC, ‘They Came to Destroy’, 9.

33 Gina Vale, ‘Liberated, Not Free: Yazidi Women After Islamic State Captivity’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 3 (2020): 516–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1726572>.

34 Interviewee 16, 7 April 2019.

35 Ibid.

36 Interviewee 8, 4 April 2019.

37 Cetorelli et al., ‘Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates’, 1.

38 Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State* (London: Virago, 2017), 108.

39 Charlie Winter, ‘Documenting the Virtual Caliphate’ (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015), 30–37, <http://www.quilliaminternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf>.

constituted their subordinated masculinity. Several interviewees recalled that their initial encounters with IS militants centred on forced conversion and threats addressed to husbands or fathers as the head-of-household or masculine protector responsible for feminine dependents: ‘You must belong to Islam, or we will slaughter you and take your children and wife’.⁴⁰

IS sought to emasculate Yazidi men, viewed as responsible for the adherence and reproduction of their families into perceived idolatry and sin. Their deaths were thus far from secret. Liberated Yazidi women describe militants taunting them with the sights and sounds of their male relatives’ murder. One woman reported hearing sounds of gunfire, after which four IS men entered her family’s home: ‘We saw blood on their shoes and blood running when they washed their hands in our house. We asked them what they did with all the men, they answered, “We sent old men to paradise and youth to Sinūnī village”’.⁴¹ She then described horrifying scenes as she was transported with other captive women in an IS convoy from Tal‘afar into Syria: ‘I saw many crimes in the road, so I closed my eyes. Daesh told us to open our eyes and said, “You will see more and more”’. This was echoed by another woman who witnessed first-hand the shooting of a Yazidi man from Khāna Ṣūr. He had a severe mental illness and was separated from the collective massacres. His body was left in the middle of the road ‘as an example to others’.⁴² The woman did not specify what this ‘example’ was. The abandonment of Yazidi men’s corpses and the taunting of their female relatives and neighbours contributed to the group’s psychological persecution.

The captivity and sexual abuse of Yazidi women and girls and the separation or murder of Yazidi men are inextricably linked within IS’ strategy of genocide. Yazidi reproduction is contingent upon the Yazidi identity of both parents;⁴³ IS adhered to pre-existing local patrilineal culture whereby an infant inherits the national and religious identity of the father. Accordingly, the fertility of young women and girls was positioned as ‘means of increasing the offspring of the Muslims’.⁴⁴ IS documents reflect a profound concern for the issue of paternity of children born through rape. Upon capture, IS considered non-Muslims’ marriages to be annulled: ‘the female captives [...] were separated from their husbands by enslavement. They became lawful [...] even without pronouncement of divorce by their harbī (infidel) husbands’.⁴⁵ The disruption of a group’s legal institutions reinforces their inferiority, and served to achieve IS’ goal of ‘humiliation and degradation of the kāfir’.⁴⁶ Across both Yazidi and Islamic reproductive norms, men’s deaths were integral to the biological aspect of the genocide. Among a total of 12,000 victims buried in mass graves across Iraq and Syria,⁴⁷ eighty-

40 Interviewee 16, 7 April 2019.

41 Interviewee 3, 2 April 2019.

42 Interviewee 12, 5 April 2019.

43 Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, ‘The Yazidi–Religion, Culture and Trauma’, *Advances in Anthropology* 7, no. 4 (2017): 335, <https://doi.org/10.4236/aa.2017.74019>.

44 Islamic State, ‘From the Creator’s Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement’, 14 emphasis added. To date, only one mass killing of 80 elderly women has been documented at Solagh Technical Institute. Though perhaps the decision of an individual IS commander, the women’s senior age marked them as ineligible for sexual enslavement – likely linked or due to infertility – and the physical rigours of domestic servitude (discussed in the following section). See UNHRC, ‘They Came to Destroy’, 11; Jane Arraf, “Nothing Left In The World Except These Bones”: Yazidis Search For Mothers’ Remains, NPR, 2 December 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/02/940208630/nothing-left-in-the-world-except-these-bones-yazidis-search-for-mothers-remains>

45 Islamic State, ‘From Our Sisters: Slave Girls or Prostitutes?’, 44.

46 Ibid, 46.

47 Josie Ensor, ‘Yazidis Lose Hope for Captured Loved Ones as End of Islamic State’s Caliphate Nears without Answers’, The Telegraph, 17 February 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/17/yazidis-lose-hope-captured-loved-ones-end-islamic-states-caliphate/>.

one graves specifically of Yazidis have been discovered in Sinjar alone.⁴⁸ Formal excavation and identification efforts are underway but slow.⁴⁹

IS' strategy and practice of genocide was pre-meditated and holistic. The group dedicated resources to research and 'scholarly' legitimization of its classification and persecution of the Yazidis as 'infidels'. Propaganda and administrative documentation reflect IS' aims to present the subordination of conquered ethno-religious minority populations as a rite of passage and symbol of the group's wider pre-destined ideological and military victory. However, this did not necessarily take the form of Yazidis' murder or enslavement. Liberated captives attest to an undocumented practice of forced 'conversion' of families, who were then permitted to live – albeit only temporarily – as 'Muslims' within IS-controlled territory. What is consistent across these texts and accounts is the group's genocidal policies and practices to physically and biologically eradicate the Yazidis, as well as the symbolic diminution of their identity. Exploiting both local patrilineality and Yazidism' endogamous culture, the fate of men and boys, elderly women, and young women and girls are inextricably linked to their reproductive potential. Forced 'conversion' thus took varied forms and required extensive management.

VIOLATIONS: THE POLICY AND THE PRACTICE

Throughout its territorial rule, IS demonstrated an almost unrivalled level of bureaucratic output, having produced thousands of documents to manage and justify its control of its governed population.⁵⁰ The group's documented management of Yazidi captives is no exception. From 'caliphate'-wide edicts to provincial-level public notices, examination of IS' administrative content provides a detailed picture of the infrastructure – and even the personnel – that sustained the group's transnational system of human trafficking and slavery. Published regulations also extend to the permitted treatment of individual *sabāyā* by their 'owner'. At this point, the testimonies of liberated captives diverge from the written policies of their captors. They reveal cases of unharnessed abuses behind closed doors, as well as the undocumented involvement of IS-affiliated women in the genocide.

IS employed varied methods to traffic and trade thousands of captured women and children. The first stage was entering slaves into the IS economy as 'wholesale' chattel at holding sites across IS territory.⁵¹ In groups of up to approximately 500, the names, ages, and characteristics of the women and girls were noted in order to record and track their re-sale and movement over time and space. Indeed, in her memoir, Nobel Laureate and liberated Yazidi captive Nadia Murad speaks of the photographs and logged characteristics of each *sabiyya* printed and hung at checkpoints like 'wanted' posters, with a \$5,000 USD (~£3,720.00 GBP) reward for those who find and return the *sabiyya* to her registered 'owner'.⁵² Such important data was the responsibility of one of the group's most senior officials. Held in separate holding sites,

48 '81 Mass Graves of Yazidis Found in Iraq's Sinjar since 2014: Official', Anadolu Agency, 17 March 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/81-mass-graves-of-yazidis-found-in-iraqs-sinjar-since-2014-official/2538307>.

49 Güley Bor, 'Working Against the Clock: Documenting Mass Graves of the Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State' (Yazda, 2018), https://irp.cdn-website.com/16670504/files/uploaded/Yazda_Publication_2018_DocumentingMassGravesYazidisKilledISIS_28062021_Download_EN_vf.pdf.

50 Vale, 'Piety Is in the Eye of the Bureaucrat'; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, 'The Evolution in Islamic State Administration: The Documentary Evidence', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015): 117–29, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pt/article/view/447>.

51 UNHRC, 'They Came to Destroy', 12.

52 Murad, *The Last Girl*, 161.

several interviewees overheard the name of the man surveying them with a notebook: ‘Haji Abdullah’.⁵³ A senior judge and one of the members of the infamous ‘Delegated Committee’ in 2014 to 2015, he was identified by the Commission for International Justice and Accountability as ‘one of the key architects of the Islamic State slave trade’.⁵⁴ His responsibilities included overseeing the distribution of captive Yazidi women and children from Iraqi holding sites, and he is also reported to have ‘personally enslaved and raped captive women’.⁵⁵ ‘Haji Abdullah’ later became the successor to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the group’s leader or ‘caliph’.⁵⁶ It is important to note here that liberated Yazidis can provide detailed and vital victim-witness testimony of their tormentors.⁵⁷ From the author’s interview experience, women and teenage children have the kunya (nom de guerre) of each IS member responsible for their captivity and persecution seared into their memories. This applies to members from the group’s highest echelons to its lowest rank-and-file, as evidenced in recent criminal justice proceedings.⁵⁸

The second step in the group’s trafficking industry was the distribution of captives for ‘retail’ at provincial sabāyā markets held in public halls or abandoned multi-storey villas. For high-ranking militants, in-person attendance was not even a prerequisite for purchase. One woman recalled that she was collected by a proxy for her new ‘owner’ – ‘Abu Ibrahim’, a Syrian IS emir from Qamishli, who had been severely disabled in a car bomb.⁵⁹ However, this appears to be the exception to the rule. A chilling video published by the New York Times, entitled ‘Slave Market Day’, provides a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the management and atmosphere of these testosterone-filled arenas. The footage, filmed and published unofficially by individual members, shows (all male) militants are playfully discussing the prices and attributes of slaves for sale, stating their preference for young and pretty girls with blue or green eyes.⁶⁰ One young woman recounted that she and her sister, then aged just fourteen- and fifteen-years-old respectively, were sold through a weeklong sabāyā market in Galaxy Hall in Mosul. She noted that, ‘the price depended on specifications: eye colour, height, and level of education’.⁶¹ Above all, almost all of the women interviewed recalled that throughout their captivity, the youngest virgin girls were prioritised for sale and commanded the highest price.

The valorisation of virgin sabāyā can be accounted for by revisiting the group’s preoccupation with patrilineal reproduction. In addition to some young married women, all ten of the women who were single at the time of their initial capture were sexually enslaved. In accordance with

53 Interviewee 4, 3 April 2019; Interviewee 22, 17 April 2019.

54 ‘CJIA Issues Press Release on Slain Islamic State Leader’, Commission for International Justice and Accountability, 3 February 2022, <https://cjaonline.org/news/2022/2/3/cjia-press-release-on-slain-islamic-state-leader>.

55 Ibid; Sarah El Deeb and Associated Press, ‘Investigators Build Case for ISIS Crimes against Yazidis’, PBS NewsHour, 21 May 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/investigators-build-case-for-isis-crimes-against-yazidis>.

56 Rewards for Justice, ‘Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla’ (US Department of State), accessed 26 April 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/2020123125521/https://rewardsforjustice.net/terrorist-rewards/amir-muhammad-said-abdal-rahman-al-mawla-2/>.

57 Gina Vale, ‘Case Note - Justice Served?: Ashwaq Haji Hamid Talo’s Confrontation and Conviction of Her Islamic State Captor’, Journal of Human Trafficking, Enslavement and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence 1, no. 2 (2020): 189–98, <https://www.uitgeverij-jparis.nl/nl/reader/208814/1001521422>.

58 Alistair Bunkall, “‘She Tortured Me’: Yazidi Woman Held as Slave by German Mum Who Joined IS Relives Her Captivity”, Sky News, 21 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/yazidi-woman-captured-by-isis-to-hear-verdict-on-german-mum-she-says-kept-her-as-a-slave-12906611>.

59 Interviewee 21, 9 April 2019.

60 Slave Market Day, New York Times, (2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000003226608/isis-slave-market-day.html>.

61 Interviewee 15, 7 April 2019.

Yazidism's religious and moral codes, this guaranteed that the women and girls were virgins, and were considered 'pure' by IS. Many girls as young as nine years old were detained in IS' holding sites as prospective sex-slaves. This aligns with a manifesto from the al-Khansā' Brigade – IS' female morality police –, which specifies that girls are eligible for marriage from the age of nine.⁶² The preference for young, virgin girls conforms to histories of wartime sexual violence and ethnic cleansing through violation of those considered most innocent, pure, or symbolic of a nation or group. This is most frequently females of reproductive age. This trope of war practice was possibly even ingrained in the consciousness of IS' captive population, as one woman recounted that upon the initial siege of their village, 'all young, unmarried girls hid in the bathroom and locked the door so Daesh only saw old men and old women'.⁶³

Young prepubescent boys spared from mass-execution were largely held with their mothers in the initial stages of IS captivity. Several women described the screams and cries of the children who were hungry and frightened. Though, in two cases, it was suspected that IS put sedatives in the food to encourage the children to sleep.⁶⁴ Unlike young girls who were separated for sexual trade, boys were initially protected by the group's own guidelines. A pamphlet published in late 2014, entitled 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves', aimed to provide a list of 'dos and don'ts' for IS' membership in the format of 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs). It clearly states: 'It is not permissible to separate a mother from her prepubescent children through buying, selling or giving away [gifting].'⁶⁵ Such rulings were not consistently enforced or adopted by individual IS members. One woman (then aged twenty), who was trafficked and 'owned' by seven different families inside Syria, remained with her two infant sons throughout her four years in captivity.⁶⁶ However, some IS members proved unable to resist the temptation to separate mother and child.

Separation of captive women from their children served three main purposes. First, an unaccompanied young woman would demand a higher value of sale as a (sexual) slave. Second, it reduced the likelihood of women attempting to escape alone. Third, it enabled the indoctrination and military training of young Yazidi boys (discussed in the following section). Held in Bādūsh prison, one young woman (then aged twenty-four) recounted her struggle to remain with her eight-year-old son. On account of her own youth, IS guards did not (want to) believe she was his mother, as this would hinder her sale. They took him with other boys his age to another cell. However, she proudly exclaimed, 'us women decided and said to the Daesh men, "If you don't bring back our sons, we will all break the prison gate". So [...] they returned our sons'.⁶⁷ This case echoes the findings of the author,⁶⁸ and Gowrinathan and Mampilly,⁶⁹ whose studies observe that women's resistance or negotiation efforts against non-state armed

62 Charlie Winter, 'Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade' (London: Quilliam Foundation, February 2015), 24, <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/women-of-the-islamic-state-a-manifesto-on-women-by-the-al-khansaa-brigade-2/>.

63 Interviewee 21.

64 Interviewee 3; Interviewee 13, 5 April 2019.

65 Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves' (Research and Fatwa Issuance Committee, November 2014).

66 Interviewee 1, 2 April 2019.

67 Interviewee 17, 8 April 2019.

68 Gina Vale, 'Defying Rules. Defying Gender?: Women's Resistance to Islamic State', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, online first, 11 September 2020, 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1816680>.

69 Nimmi Gowrinathan and Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, 'Resistance and Repression under the Rule of Rebels: Women, Clergy, and Civilian Agency in LTTE Governed Sri Lanka', *Comparative Politics* 52, no. 1 (2019): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041519X15698352040097>.

groups are met with greater acceptance if couched in gendered terms, and, in particular, a maternal framing. However, despite their efforts, others were not so fortunate. One woman recalled that on one occasion, her IS captor took her son to stay with his family, leaving her and her daughter unsupervised in the house with the doors unlocked. Despite having suitable conditions for her own escape, she awaited her son's return.⁷⁰ In other cases, they never came back. During four years under IS, one woman in her mid-40s was gradually separated from all of her captive family members: her husband, six sons, three daughters, mother-in-law, and daughter-in-law. She was told, 'they aren't your children. We control you; everything is ours'.⁷¹

The final step in IS' system of slavery could be repeated indefinitely: the purchase and abuse of a sabiyya by a group member as a private 'owner'. A proof of ownership certificate in Mosul in 2016 documents a re-sale agreement and payment confirmation.⁷² The Yazidi woman is described as twenty years old with 'honey-like eyes, thin, short: 130cm'. She was sold for \$1,500 USD (~£1,200.00 GBP). The document was issued by the 'Office of Marriage Contracts' within IS' Shari'a Court, and was verified by the names and fingerprints of the seller and new 'owner'. Once bought, young female captives experienced varying treatment; yet, consistent emphasis was placed on their subjugation, either through 'legal' marriage, the act of rape and resulting impregnation, and religious education.⁷³

As an organisation, IS did not have a stated position on marriage to slaves. Accordingly, the practice of individual militants appears varied. Three of the women interviewed stated that they were never legally married to their IS 'owners'; though this of course did not negate their experiences of rape. However, others were either themselves married, or aware of the marriage of other captives from the age of thirteen.⁷⁴ Forced marriage to an IS militant was seen by the women interviewed as a source of great shame,⁷⁵ solidifying their 'conversion' to Islam – an act forbidden in Yazidism. However, it also offered practical benefit under IS control. Then aged only fourteen, one woman was married to Salman, or 'Abu Suhaib', a twenty-year-old Palestinian militant living in Fallujah.⁷⁶ Their official marriage document, and her status as an 'IS wife', afforded (proportionate) protection and respect. On account of her legal 'commitment' and full 'conversion', her status changed from Yazidi sabiyya to a Sunni Muslim woman. As a result, she could not be sold onwards, but was treated as a 'free' and an integral member of his IS family.

Within the private home space, IS' 'FAQs' pamphlet provides further regulations and expectations for 'owners' to follow regarding the correct treatment of their *sabāyā*. Of all documented abuses suffered by Yazidis in IS captivity, rape has received the overwhelming majority of scholarly, media, and policy attention,⁷⁷ and thus warrants only brief discussion

70 Interviewee 16.

71 Interviewee 13.

72 Islamic State, 'Proof of Ownership No. 221' (Head of the Court, Record of the Shari'a Court of Left Side (East) Mosul, Department of Justice and Complaints, 16 August 2016).

73 Yazda, 'An Uncertain Future for Yazidis: A Report Marking Three Years of An Ongoing Genocide' (Houston: Yazda, 16 September 2017), 15, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/92f016_230c3d32aa44498db557326046ad5ca7.pdf; Peter Nicolaus and Serkan Yuce, 'Sex-Slavery: One Aspect of the Yezidi Genocide', *Iran and the Caucasus* 21, no. 2 (2017): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1573384X-20170205>.

74 Interviewee 13; Interviewee 17; Interviewee 20, 9 April 2019; Interviewee 15, Interviewee 3; Interviewee 4.

75 Ibid.

76 Interviewee 20.

77 Miriam Cooke, 'Murad vs. ISIS: Rape as a Weapon of Genocide', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 15, no. 3 (2019): 261-85, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-7720627>; Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, 'PTSD of Rape after IS ("Islamic State") Captivity', *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 21, no. 5 (2018): 517-24, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-018-0824-3>; Rukmini Callimachi, 'ISIS

here. The practice was quickly regulated, with early guidance released within three months of the Sinjar invasion regarding licit sexual relations with captives, including very young girls: 'It is permissible to have intercourse with the female slave who hasn't reached puberty if she is fit for intercourse; however if she is not fit for intercourse, then it is enough to enjoy her without intercourse'.⁷⁸ Further regulations centre on the potential for pregnancy resulting from these forced unions. IS' guidance prevents trade and sexual relations with pregnant captives, instead stating that 'her uterus must be purified' beforehand.⁷⁹ IS' own edict acknowledges the 'violations' committed by some of the 'brothers' as private infractions of these regulations,⁸⁰ while reports from liberated women attest to forced ingestion of contraception⁸¹ – also forbidden by IS.⁸² By contrast, some women reported that 'fatherhood' was ideologically fulfilling for their 'owners', and they recalled kind treatment in accordance with the 'status of an umm walad (mother of the child); one who could no longer be sold'.⁸³ Again, this ruling links to the group's preoccupation with patrilineal descent and reproduction for the Islamic 'caliphate'. Evident in their social media content, militants appear to support an individualised, unofficial practice of forced impregnation as means of 'conversion' of slaves. One foreign militant tweeted that the women are 'Very obedient akhi I know a bro who has one and she is already pregnant alhamdulilah many revert bro'.⁸⁴ Whether or not 'Abu Aiman Al Kinyi' ever owned a slave himself, he has clearly promoted this practice for others, sustaining and legitimating the group's industry and narrative of enslavement.

Of all the regulations regarding the rape and abuses of Yazidi women and girls, one stands apart as the most revealing of the group's motivations and methods of slavery. In the 'FAQs' pamphlet, answer number eleven states, 'A man may not have intercourse with the female slave of his wife, because [the slave] is owned by someone else'.⁸⁵ This is the only document (known to the author) that makes reference to an IS-affiliated woman's legal right to slave 'ownership'. Several interviewees attest to this practice. In addition to IS-affiliated women's auxiliary role of standing guard over captives in the group's holding sites,⁸⁶ several women stated that they had been bought as a 'gift' by the husband or brother of IS women for her exclusive 'ownership'. Importantly, these Yazidi women were significantly older than the young and unmarried women and girls traded for sexual exploitation by IS men. Their purpose was domestic servitude, and their primary functions were cooking, cleaning, and caring for

'Enshrines a Theology of Rape', The New York Times, 13 August 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html>; Human Rights Watch, 'Iraq: ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape' (New York, 14 April 2015), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/14/iraq-isis-escapees-describe-systematic-rape>.

78 Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves'.

79 Ibid.

80 Islamic State, 'Fatwa 64: Some of the brothers have committed violations in the matter of the treatment of the female slaves. These violations are not permitted by Sharia law because these rules have not been dealt with in ages. Are there any warnings pertaining to this matter?' (Research and Fatwa Issuance Committee, 29 January 2015).

81 Interviewee 21; UNHRC, 'They Came to Destroy', 15; Callimachi, 'ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape'.

82 It is not clear whether this was a widespread or sustained policy, but an available document indicates the prohibition of contraception in Deir al-Zour province in late 2014, thus timed alongside the group's central guidance on slavery and treatment of Yazidi captives. See Islamic State, 'Decree (2)' (Medical Administration, Deir al-Zour Province, 5 November 2014).

83 Interviewee 20; Nicolaus and Yuce, 'Sex-Slavery', 205.

84 Abu Aiman Al Kinyi, 'Very Obedient Akhi I Know a Bro Who Has One and She Is Already Pregnant Alhamdulilah Many Revert Bro', Tweet, @poorslave5050, 19 May 2015, <https://www.memri.org/reports/sex-slavery-islamic-state-%E2%80%93-practices-social-media-discourse-and-justifications-jabhat-al>.

85 Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves'.

86 Interviewee 13.

the IS family's children.⁸⁷ Indeed, a directive issued in 2016 by the 'Delegated Committee' reinforces the purpose of slavery to 'restore piety in slaves, teach them the correct doctrine, shari'i rulings, prayer, and fasting'.⁸⁸ IS-affiliated women had a vital and heavily under-reported role in fulfilling this purpose.⁸⁹ For undivided families living under surveillance as 'converts', some female Yazidis were regularly visited by IS women who taught them how to pray at home.⁹⁰ Similarly, within the private home of an IS family, IS-affiliated women were responsible for teaching sabāyā the Qur'an and the Shahada, and forcing them to wear Islamic clothes to finalise their 'conversion'.⁹¹ While some IS-affiliated women were integral to the care, protection, and even escape of Yazidi captives from their homes,⁹² others were key to their continued detention, as well as the denial of their fundamental right to freedom of religious belief and practice.

The role of IS-affiliated women in the genocide importantly extends beyond ideological support and into psychological and even physical abuses. The group's guidelines mainly focus on the treatment of young sabāyā; however, one more general edict states, 'the owner of a female captive should show compassion toward her, be kind to her, not humiliate her, and not assign her work she is unable to perform'.⁹³ Testimonies of liberated Yazidis demonstrate frequent infraction of the rule of 'mercy', in particular by IS-affiliated women as official 'owners' of older captives. One woman described her harsh duties: 'In the winter [...] the Daesh wife ordered me to wash the carpets in the rain, and in the summer, she ordered me to wash many things under the sun. Because of the hot weather my body was burned; my fingers bled'.⁹⁴ Another woman was told, 'your children make the house dirty. If you don't clean the house well, we will sell your children'.⁹⁵ IS' own official propaganda chastises female members whose jealousy and resentment of sharing their husband's attention and affections led them to 'hit and curse' their sabāyā.⁹⁶ Despite IS regulations, the treatment of individual Yazidi women was clearly the prerogative of individual group members, whose violations have been concealed by the privacy of the home space and by gendered stereotyping of female criminality. To date, only a handful of legal cases against IS-affiliated women have included crimes committed against Yazidis (and other minority or civilian groups under IS rule).⁹⁷ The overwhelming narrative of the 'jihadi bride' who was 'just a housewife' continues to present a barrier to justice.

87 Ibid; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 17; Muslimah4Life, 'My Maid (Slave) Taught Me How to Bake Syrian Bread, Finally i Made One on My Own Today [Smiley Face Emoji] Alhamdulilah', Tweet, @Seeking4Good243, 4 March 2015.

88 Islamic State, 'Guidelines on the Possessions of One's Right Hand [Slaves]' (Delegated Committee, 24 July 2016).

89 Gina Vale, 'Intersectional Analysis of Rebel Governance: Impacts of Islamic State Rule on Local Women in Iraq and Syria, 2013-17', PhD thesis (unpublished), King's College London, January 2021, chap. 6.

90 Interviewee 8.

91 Interviewee 19, 9 April 2019; Interviewee 15; Interviewee 22; Interviewee 3.

92 'Nadia Murad Escaped Sexual Slavery at the Hands of ISIS. This Is Her Story.', Nadia's Initiative, 5 October 2018, <https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/nadia-murad-escaped-sexual-slavery-at-the-hands-of-isis-this-is-her-story>; Seivan M. Salim, 'The Yazidi Women Who Escaped ISIS', The Daily Beast, 7 June 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-yazidi-women-who-escaped-isis>.

93 Islamic State, 'Fatwa 64'; Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement', 11.

94 Interviewee 3.

95 Interviewee 17.

96 Islamic State, 'Allah...Allah...While You Have Faith', Al-Nabā' (47), 20 September 2016, 13; Lahoud, 'Empowerment or Subjugation', 18.

97 See note 5. Although still few in number, to date, the majority of cases of crimes against Yazidis have been brought against female, rather than male, IS-affiliated defendants.

Examination of IS' official policy documentation and propaganda, cross-referenced with interviewees' testimonies, reveals a highly organised system of human trafficking, enslavement, and genocide. The registration and division of thousands of captured women and children was overseen by the group's highest-ranking officials and conducted through a web of provincial markets and court registries. Yazidi women were not abused indiscriminately. Their age, marital status and sexual 'purity', aesthetic beauty and even educational level were factored into their classification, value, and purpose.⁹⁸ The lack of documentation regulating the treatment of older female captives is reflected in the disparity of their experiences and treatment by their 'owners', including IS-affiliated women. It is clear that some individual IS members defied the group's guidelines that prohibit the mistreatment of captives and their separation from young children. Across all cases and to varying degrees, physical and psychological abuses combined to forcibly erase their Yazidi identity, with some of the most profound abuses concealed within the private sphere.

INVESTMENT: LOOKING TO THE LONG-TERM

Throughout its rule, IS dedicated significant resources to its system of slavery – from establishing its ideo-legal basis to the infrastructure of trafficking and trade of captives. The above section also attests to Islamic education instilled by 'owners' and their families within the private sphere. Each of these stages reflect a long-term investment in the group's strategy to physically and biologically eradicate the Yazidis as an ethno-religious minority. For individual IS-affiliated families, captives reflected both a financial and personal investment. Their later liberation presented an opportunity for financial gain, but at the cost of their 'service' and exploitation. For captive teen and pre-teen boys, successful 'conversion' in the form of Islamic and militaristic training offered tactical benefits that could out-last physical territorial control.

IS commoditised all in its path, from sale of abandoned housing and excavated antiquities, to the taxation and even enslavement of minority populations. In line with their designation as 'ghanīma' (war spoils), Yazidi captives constituted a precious financial asset and marker of status for individual 'owners'. In a magazine article, IS confirmed that following their 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 Sinjar operations, after one fifth of the slaves were transferred to the Islamic State's authority'.⁹⁹ Those responsible for the military conquest of Sinjar were thus rewarded with the opportunity to purchase the female captive of their choice. One woman attested to this practice. Held among a group of young women in an abandoned Shi'a house in Mosul, she witnessed an IS militant claim her friend. A 'Daesh man, called Abu Dhiab from Bāa'j, came and said he chose her. As he had been the fighter to first control and kidnap [her] in Sinjar, he liked her and decided he wanted to own her'.¹⁰⁰ Thus the virility and militancy of IS combatants was directly rewarded. IS' policy of slavery conforms to a common narrative of warring, in which 'the victorious (male) soldiers [are rewarded] with the rape of the women of the vanquished (male enemies)'; it sends a 'symbolic message of dominance to the conquered [and ethnically inferior] (men)'.¹⁰¹

98 Nadia Al-Dayel, Andrew Mumford, and Kevin Bales, 'Not Yet Dead: The Establishment and Regulation of Slavery by the Islamic State', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45, no. 11 (2022): 940, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1711590>.

99 Islamic State, 'The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour', 14.

100 Interviewee 22.

101 Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, 'Why Do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC)', *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 498, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00543.x>.

Once available in open markets, purchase of *sabāyā* was highly regulated, and represented a transaction that was both financial and custodial. The customer's formal registration – by IS court records¹⁰² – as the 'owner' literally paid dividends. Within the 'caliphate', a man's adoption of the masculinist 'protector' role – of both Muslim and captive Yazidi dependents – was remunerated via a highly gendered pay scale. An official monthly wage slip reveals that a male IS militant was paid according to the number of women and children in his care: \$50 USD (~£32.10 GBP) for each wife, \$35 USD (~£22.47 GBP) for every child under 15 years old, \$50 USD per *sabiyya*, and even \$35 USD for each dependent child of a captive slave.¹⁰³

It is unsurprising that IS members went to great lengths to protect their investment. Several women stated that they were tightly guarded in initial holding sites and were often locked inside the house or even room of their private 'owner'.¹⁰⁴ One young woman recounted that an IS militant from Tal'afar taunted and threatened her group to deter their resistance:

[H]e specialised in explosives and many times he showed us on his phone how he bombed Yazidi houses and people. He also told us that there were special houses in the desert in Bāa'j, Mosul, and Tal'afar that specialised in punishment and torture of [...] Yazidi men who were with government forces. He took us there to show us to be afraid so we wouldn't try to escape.¹⁰⁵

Despite this, many of the women attempted escape; some succeeded. Such activism was the only path out of the physical 'caliphate'. In theory, a captive could be 'liberated' from slavery through formal emancipation by their 'owner',¹⁰⁶ but this did not constitute true freedom. Moreover, the group attempted to spin a positive narrative for members, citing a Hadith that states, 'Whoever frees a believer Allah frees every organ of his body from hellfire'.¹⁰⁷ In practice, this policy was rarely implemented. One woman reported that her 'owner' 'provided a testament to his wife that if he is killed one day, she should save me and not allow anyone to buy or sell me, but to free and liberate me'.¹⁰⁸ However, the wife did not honour his directive, keeping the woman as her own slave within the home for a further three months. This case reinforces the role of IS-affiliated women in the genocide. Not only did they stand to inherit captives as part of their husband's estate through widowhood,¹⁰⁹ but some also actively prolonged Yazidis' enslavement for their own benefit.

Other Yazidis were physically liberated by their 'owners' through necessity. At the group's rise and peak of power, 'ownership' and trade of Yazidis – particularly women and girls – constituted a lucrative boost to individual militants' monthly income. However, during the group's latter phase of diminishing territorial control, in which IS militants were increasingly detained by Iraqi and Kurdish forces, the 'possession' of a Yazidi became an incriminating

102 Islamic State, 'Statement for Distribution No. 1' (Homs Province, 15 June 2015).

103 Islamic State, 'Pay Slip' (Financial Administration, al-Hasaka Province, 14 January 2016); Devorah Margolin and Charlie Winter, 'Women in the Islamic State: Victimization, Support, Collaboration, and Acquiescence' (Washington, DC: George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2021), 91, <https://doi.org/10.4079/poe.05.2021.00>.

104 Interviewee 1; Interviewee 4.

105 Interviewee 15.

106 Islamic State, 'Certificate of Emancipation' (Judge Abu Yaser, Islamic Court, Department of Justice and Complaints, al-Jazīra Province, 4 March 2015); Islamic State, 'Statement for Distribution No. 4' (The Wālī, Homs Province, 19 June 2015).

107 Islamic State, 'Questions and Answers on Taking Captives and Slaves'.

108 Interviewee 3.

109 Ibid.

marker of group membership. In some cases, IS members – including women – arranged or even directly participated in smuggling networks to liberate Yazidis.¹¹⁰ In some cases this was driven by financial incentive. As early as 2015, IS released a document summarising monthly administrative decisions from across the ‘caliphate’. This included a ruling in August that prohibited ‘selling sabāyā to the masses or their family. The person who sells one will be reprimanded by taking the entire sum for which he sold her’.¹¹¹ However, with time and greater pressures on IS’ territorial holdings, the lucrative practice of illicit re-sale of female captives became commonplace. Arranged either via phone or online ‘marketplace’ pages on Facebook and Telegram, four women said that their brothers each paid 17–22 million IQD [~£11,750–15,200 GBP] for their release and are still in debt to other families who provided loans.¹¹² Such extortion has economically devastated an already impoverished, displaced community;¹¹³ yet, many would consider these families to be fortunate. What these testimonies reveal is the forbidden yet relatively widespread practice of ransoming Yazidis. While the presence of a captive was potentially costly if discovered by local counter-terrorism forces, their financial value increased exponentially, the gains from which likely facilitated the escape and perhaps further criminal activity of IS members beyond the group’s territory.

Beyond financial gain, IS invested in children as the group’s inter-generational future. Children under the age of fourteen constitute a third of all Yazidis captured by IS during the Sinjar offensive.¹¹⁴ The mode of their abduction and their expected roles within the ‘caliphate’ are similar to traditional forced recruitment techniques for child soldiers, wherein girls are largely confined to domestic and sexual service and boys are trained as frontline combatants, (suicide) operatives, and even executioners. Such large-scale involvement of children in an extremist or rebel movement does not occur by chance. Studies of child soldiering have noted the utility and benefits of child recruits, including cheap labour; physical or psychological characteristics; undivided allegiance; and ideological malleability.¹¹⁵ In fact, it is important to note IS’ inheritance of the practice of child militarisation from Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist regime, which in the late 1970s formed the Futuwah (Youth Vanguard) movement, and in the mid-1990s established extensive military training camps for children and the special Ashbal Saddam (Saddam’s Lion Cubs) unit.¹¹⁶ Through its own ‘Cubs of the Caliphate’ youth military training programme, IS sought to reassess ideological belief, communal identity, and group allegiance of teen and pre-teen boys – including Yazidis – to its own militants. The sites of these practices of Islamic and militaristic socialisation extended from the group’s official training camps into the private homes of IS-affiliated families.

110 Interviewee 16; Interviewee 17.

111 Islamic State, ‘Condensed Summary of the Statements for Distribution and Directives Issued by the Delegated Committee August–October 2015’ (October 2015).

112 Interviewee 1; Interviewee 3; Interviewee 13; Interviewee 16.

113 Nicolaus and Yuce, ‘Sex-Slavery’, 208.

114 Cetorelli et al., ‘Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates’, 7–8.

115 Mara Redlich Revkin, “‘I Am Nothing Without a Weapon’: Understanding Child Recruitment and Use by Armed Groups in Syria and Iraq”, in Cradled By Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict, ed. Siobhan O’Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven (New York: United Nations University Press, 2018), 112–13, https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6409/Cradled_by_Conflict.pdf; Gina Vale, ‘Cubs in the Lions’ Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory’ (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, July 2018), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-Cubs-in-the-Lions%20-%20Den-Indoctrination-and-Recruitment-of-Children-Within-Islamic-State-Territory.pdf>.

116 Norman Benotman and Nikita Malik, ‘The Children of Islamic State’ (London: Quilliam Foundation, March 2016), 25, <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/the-children-of-islamic-state/>.

The removal of Yazidi maternal influence through physical separation of the mother and child enabled IS militants to assume responsibility for the boys' 'conversion' to Islam and IS' ideology. Forced conversion served to reinforce the superior masculinity and ethno-religious identity of IS' membership, who were uniquely positioned to offer 'correct' religious guidance, as opposed to the teachings of Yazidi (male) elders. One woman's son was taken to IS' local headquarters for 15 days with no contact. There, he was forced to learn Arabic and the Qur'an, and to grow his hair long and wear a Kandahari (Afghan style) tunic and trousers in line with the group's male dress code. When he returned, he was no longer allowed to sleep alongside his mother, only IS men.¹¹⁷ This was echoed by another woman, who was punished for speaking Kurdish with her eldest son and for preventing him from learning the Qur'an. Again, she was not allowed to sleep with her son, who was sometimes taken away for 10 days at a time without explanation.¹¹⁸ This ideological instruction and 'mentorship' by male militants constitutes an important duty in fulfilment of the first stated objective of IS enslavement: 'spreading tawhīd'.¹¹⁹

The ideological training of young Yazidi boys increased their value to the group and was flaunted by some IS supporters on social media as an expression of their commitment. An example is the infamous Australian Sharrouf family. Then 14-year-old Zaynab tweeted a photo of a male toddler in military fatigues with his finger raised and a rifle in the background. The caption of the photo reads: 'From Yezidi to ISIS <3 [heart emoji]'.¹²⁰ The gesture of the raised index finger by IS militants frequently appears in the group's propaganda, and has come to symbolise their fight for tawhīd.¹²¹ Behind closed doors, the visual symbolism of young Yazidi boys' 'conversion' also featured in their private trade among militants. One woman lamented that her sons were forced to pose for photographs in IS military fatigues, raising their index fingers and grasping assault rifles. In contravention of the group's official regulations, the photos were used to advertise boys for re-sale informally through encrypted messaging apps, thereby circumventing the required court registration and also separating the boys from their mother and each other.¹²²

At the behest of their 'owner', Yazidi boys joined their Sunni counterparts in IS' military training programmes. Several women recounted their fear and sadness of their sons' forced enrolment into training camps. The group's propaganda extolled the results. One woman recounted that IS forced her two twelve-year-old male cousins to wear explosive vests and detonate them in Tal'afar in 2017. She explained that the same had happened to two other young Yazidi boys from Dugri village, whose attacks were reportedly recorded and published with the caption 'two martyrs'.¹²³ The most chilling evidence of IS' militarisation of Yazidi boys are two videos showing – or, rather, celebrating – their perpetration of camera-recorded executions.¹²⁴ One boy is identified through on screen captions under the IS kunya 'Salman al-

117 Interviewee 16.

118 Interviewee 1.

119 Islamic State, 'From the Creator's Maxims on Captivity and Enslavement', 4.

120 Umm Hafs, 'From Yezidi to ISIS <3'; Tweet, @71a48fa7eff14ad, 20 March 2015.

121 Nathaniel Zelinsky, 'ISIS Sends a Message: What Gestures Say About Today's Middle East', Foreign Affairs, 15 September 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message>.

122 Interviewee 13.

123 Interviewee 3.

124 To The Sons of the Jews (Media Office of Deir al-Zour Province. 3 December, 2015); Repent And You Will Have Safety From Us (Media Office of al-Jazīra Province. 9 November, 2016).

Sinjari' followed by 'mawla', a term indicating a freed ex-slave who is a client of their 'master'. Importantly, this boy – then aged approximately between ten and twelve years old – was the last in a series of six youths to carry out an execution in the video. As the others conducted shootings, he was the only one to behead his victim.¹²⁵ Contrary to the quick shots of his peers, the Yazidi boy's slow, manual killing of a 'Syrian regime collaborator' invites the viewer to reflect on IS' ability to instil commitment among children whose own communities have been persecuted by the group.¹²⁶ Such acts served as the ultimate 'graduation' assessment for the 'Cubs' programme. They also served to demonstrate the reassignment of identity and belonging to IS – a process that has been shown to have long-term consequences for the psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of Yazidi boys.¹²⁷

The above cases and documentation demonstrate that despite their classification as 'war spoils' or 'merely property', the value assigned to captives went beyond purely the financial. 'Ownership' of a Yazidi slave was a marker of (masculine) status, rank, and wealth. Certainly some 'owners' were driven by greed and thirst for violence and exploitation, even in some cases in defiance of IS' official regulations. Yet, others sought to fulfil their duty of ideological proselytisation. The ideological and physical training of Yazidi boys reflects the inter-generational ambitions of IS' state-building project. Reflecting feminist research on the military as an institution of masculine socialisation, their training – from ideological instruction to weapons handling – constituted an 'important rite of passage in making men out of boys'.¹²⁸ IS' hegemonic jihadist masculinity was marked by, and performed through, military dominance and ideological commitment, thus naturalising religious 'conversion' as an expression of power over subordinated men and communities. Through denial of maternal, Yazidi, and Kurdish influence, and the re-assignment of allegiance and group belonging, IS educated and armed young boys to one day themselves become IS militants and enforcers of the community's continued persecution.

Conclusions and Implications

IS' genocide of the Yazidis evolved and was shaped by the group's changing territorial infrastructure and the individual circumstances of group members. From its initial invasion, the group sought a holistic conquest of the ethno-religious minority – a victory that went beyond purely sexual exploitation. As standard-bearers of Islamic monotheism, IS militants demonstrated their religious and masculine dominance over the weak 'infidel' community. Men were executed. Their lives would serve little purposes within the 'caliphate'; their deaths enabled severance of the Yazidi reproductive capability. The capture and rape of young women and girls was intended to fracture the ethno-religious minority, as sexual relations and marriage with non-Yazidis – and particularly the birth of 'IS infants' from forced unions – constituted forbidden acts in accordance with the community's socio-cultural mores. At its

125 To The Sons of the Jews.

126 Gina Vale, "'You Are No Longer Cubs, You Are Now Lions': Examining the Constructed Masculinities of Islamic State Child Executioners and Their Victims', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 4 (2022): 838, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2116155>.

127 Jan Ilhan Kizilhan and Michael Noll-Hussong, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Former Islamic State Child Soldiers in Northern Iraq', *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 213, no. 1 (2018): 425–29, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2018.88>.

128 Lauren Wilcox, 'Gendering the Cult of the Offensive', *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (2009): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900152>.

peak of power, IS dedicated significant resources to the ‘correct’ management and treatment of its captives, with the protection of Islamic patrilineal descent as a consistent theme running through its edicts and propaganda. However, increasing territorial defeats transformed captives’ purpose from projects for ideologically-driven subjugation to (illicit) sources of income. The above accounts attest to multiple cases of militants that defy IS’ rulings on the treatment and detention of *sabāyā*, including the direct facilitation of their escape. Eventually, the liberation, resale, or ransom of Yazidi females became a critical signifier of the group’s impending territorial collapse.

As a non-state actor, IS created an almost unrivalled bureaucratic record. Its propaganda succeeded in creating a rose-tinted lens through which supporters could learn about its ideo-legal justifications for slavery and reflect this official narrative through their own social media content. Even if they never owned a slave themselves, both official and unofficial propagandists – IS-affiliated men and women – promoted the practice for others, and played a significant role in creating and legitimating the group’s theoretical framework for its slavery policies. Moreover, guiding the pragmatic management of trafficked captives were administrative notices, edicts, and pamphlets produced by some of the group’s most senior officials, while court records, marriage contracts and sales ‘receipts’ certified by provincial governors and clerks provided a seal of approval to each transaction and abuse. Yet, irrespective of their detail and quantity, these documents rarely provide evidence of regulatory infractions, and certainly cannot attest to the treatment of slaves behind the closed doors of the individual IS family home space.

Under IS rule, Yazidi women’s bodies were reduced to mere ‘property’; assigned a value by and for men; and subjected to psychological, physical and sexual abuse by IS-affiliated men and women – both of whom were legally entitled to slave ‘ownership’. Beyond their liberation, these women face acute trauma, in part shaped or exacerbated by the patrilineal systems of both IS and the Iraqi state. Infants born of rape by IS militants are a painful and enduring symbol of the genocide. Not only are they the physical product of sexual violence, but these children cannot be legally – or culturally – identified as Yazidi. Women who wish to remain or reconnect with their IS-born infants now face a life in exile or continued concealment of their own Yazidi identity.¹²⁹ In this regard, IS continues to fragment and disempower the community through the past violations of individual captives.

Arguably the group’s greatest long-term investment was the forced militarisation and ‘conversion’ of young Yazidi boys. As part of its ambitions for inter-generational survival, IS prized young, malleable minds, which were not limited to the children of supportive members or Sunni Muslim civilians. Indoctrination and training of young boys was facilitated through the illicit separation of mother and child, removing maternal, Yazidi, and Kurdish influence. The results of intensive Qur’anic education and militaristic physical training were promoted in the group’s propaganda videos through the most grotesque displays of ultra-violence. Following physical liberation, access to psychological support to address childhood and conflict-related trauma is acutely needed.¹³⁰ However, the bleak reality is that the likelihood of boys receiving

129 Serri Mahmood, ‘Challenges of Children Born of ISIS Rape in Iraq’ (Geneva: University of Geneva, September 2017), <https://www.cerahgenève.ch/files/1715/0963/3793/WP49-Challenges-Children-Born-by-ISIS-Rape-Iraq.pdf>; Josie Ensor, “She’ll Never Know She Had a Mother Who Loved Her” - Yazidi Women Forced to Abandon Their Babies Born to Isil’, The Telegraph, 6 July 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/06/could-give-two-children-good-life-bad-one-three-yazidi-women/>.

this specialised care is low.¹³¹ Now returned to a minority community that has become more isolated than ever before, the focus of liberated Yazidis is fixed on existential survival.

The common trope of IS enslavement centred on sexual violence has obscured the wider ideological motivations for and means of the group's persecution of 'infidel' populations. This needs to be corrected through adoption of a wider-angle lens that recognises the holistic nature of the genocide and the actors involved. The journey to secure 'justice' for the victims of IS' crimes has been wrought with political and procedural hurdles. Interviews with Yazidi survivors of the genocide serve to demonstrate that cursory trials and blanket convictions provide no solace.¹³² Instead, international recognition and contribution to convictions for the genocidal crimes committed against themselves and the wider Yazidi community constitutes the first step to recovery.¹³³ Momentum is building but remains slow.

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