



Middle East
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THE YAZIDI GENOCIDE

A DEMOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF ISIL'S

ATTACK ON TEL QASAB AND TEL BANAT

Valeria Cetorelli
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The Yazidi Genocide: A Demographic Documentation
of ISIL's Attack on Tel Qasab and Tel Banat

Valeria Cetorelli and Sareta Ashraph

About the Authors

Valeria Cetorelli holds a PhD in Demography from the LSE and has extensive experience in population data collection, management, analysis and reporting to inform humanitarian assistance and development policies and advance human rights and international justice. Since 2018, she has been the Head of Refugee Registration and Eligibility at UNRWA. She previously worked as Demographic Statistician at UNESCWA. Before that, she was Research Officer at the LSE Middle East Centre and at the Johns Hopkins Center for Refugee and Disaster Response. In 2015, she led a survey which provided the first population-based estimates of Yazidis killed and kidnapped by ISIL. In 2017, she established the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project together with Sareta Ashraph.

Sareta Ashraph is a barrister specialising in international criminal law and currently serves as a Senior Legal Consultant to the Center for Justice and Accountability and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide. From 2020 to 2022, Sareta was the Director of Field Investigations for UNITAD. In 2018, she authored the Global Justice Center's report 'Gender, Genocide, and Obligations under International Law', which examined the gendered dimensions of genocide, including that of ISIL's attack on the Yazidis. While Chief Legal Analyst on the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Sareta led the investigation for and reporting of the June 2016 report "'They Came To Destroy': ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis', which determined that ISIL was committing the crime of genocide, among other international crimes.

Abstract

On 3 August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked the Yazidis of Sinjar. Within days, reports emerged of men and boys being executed; of women and girls being kidnapped, sold, sexually enslaved, beaten, and forced to work; and of boys forced into ISIL training camps and made to fight.

This paper analyses ISIL's assault on the Yazidis in the villages of Tel Qasab and Tel Banat. It is the second publication of the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project (YVDDP), the objective of which is to identify every victim of ISIL's attack. It corroborates YVDDP's previous findings that the attack targeted the Yazidi community, that those captured were either killed or kidnapped, and that the violations suffered depended on the perceived gender and age of the victims. The data underscores the necessity of using a gender-competent, age-disaggregated analysis in order to understand the full scope of ISIL crimes.

The consolidated database resulting from this documentation project will have multiple short, medium, and long-term uses. These include, for example, a data pool that can assist in identification of remains in mass graves, and which provides reliable information for use in planning for and prioritisation of needs – including provision of counselling, increased medical interventions, and gender- and age-specific needs. It also provides reliable information of high probative value for use in criminal prosecutions before national, regional, and international courts, and is capable of informing transitional justice processes, including material and symbolic reparations.

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The authors would like to thank Orsola Torrisi and Yazidi colleagues who wish to remain anonymous for their excellent research assistance, and the Center for Justice and Accountability for its support. The authors would also like to express their deepest admiration to the Yazidi enumerators and community leaders, whose compiled lists of victims served as the foundation for this study. The views expressed in this study are those of the authors.

Introduction

On 3 August 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) attacked the Yazidi community of Sinjar. In 2015 and 2016, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the United Nations (UN) Commission of Inquiry on Syria released independent reports determining that ISIL committed genocide, as well as crimes against humanity and war crimes, in its assault on the Yazidis.¹ These findings were confirmed by the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for the Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD), based on its own investigations and set forth in its presentation to the UN Security Council in May 2021.²

This paper, which focuses on ISIL's attack on the villages of Tel Qasab and Tel Banat, is the second publication of the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project (YVDDP), the objective of which is to identify every victim of ISIL's attack. The project employs a similar approach to the one used by the Demographic Unit of the Office of the Prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).³

While the crimes committed against the Yazidis are now known, the identity of all victims is yet to be established. According to extrapolations from a retrospective household survey, roughly 10,000 Yazidis were either killed or kidnapped during the assault.⁴ This paper presents a rigorous analysis of demographic evidence of ISIL's attack on Tel Qasab and Tel Banat, and seeks to answer the following questions:

- *What is the number of victims who can be identified by name, and what is the likely number of victims who remain uncounted?*
- *What are the gender and age characteristics of the identified victims, and what types of violations have they suffered?*
- *Do the results of the demographic documentation confirm the findings of testimony-based documentation?*

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Our Generation is Gone: The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa', p. 20. Available at: <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Iraq-Bearing-Witness-Report-111215.pdf> (accessed 16 August 2023). International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 'They Came to Destroy: ISIL Crimes Against the Yazidis', 16 June 2016. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf (accessed 16 August 2023).

² UN News, 'ISIL Crimes Against Yazidis Constitute Genocide, UN Investigation Team Finds', *United Nations*, 10 May 2021. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/05/1091662> (accessed 16 August 2023).

³ Ewa Tabeau (ed.), 'Conflict in Numbers: Casualties of the 1990s Wars in the Former Yugoslavia' (1991–1999). Available at: <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/testimonies33.pdf> (accessed 16 August 2023).

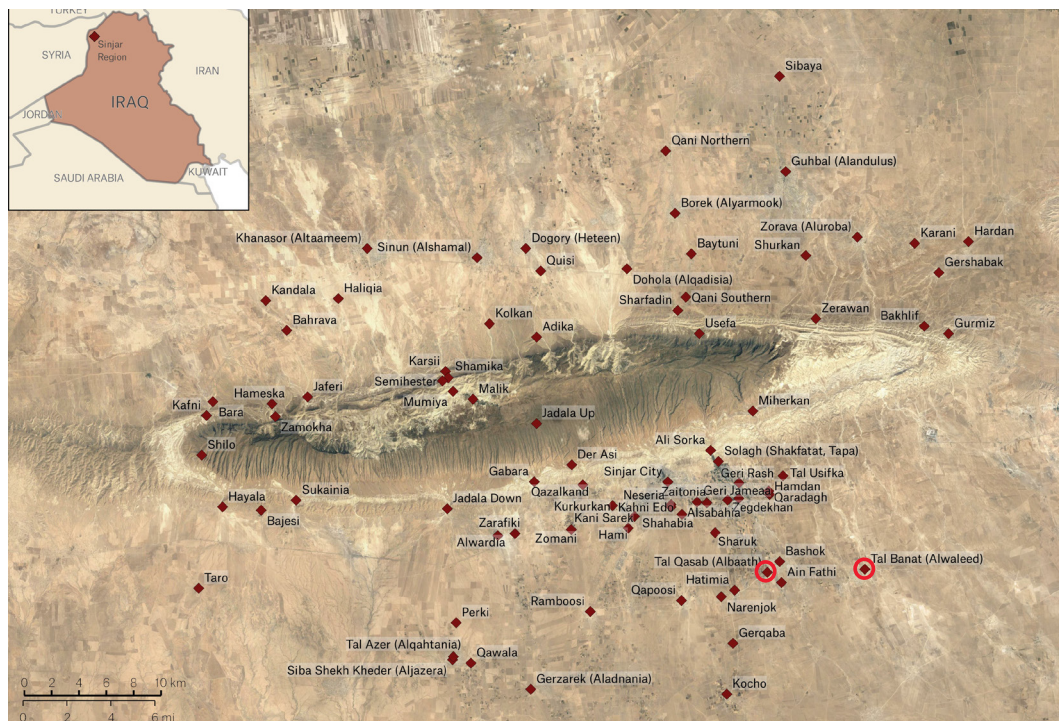
⁴ Valeria Cetorelli et al., 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq in August 2014: A Retrospective Household Survey', *PLOS Medicine*, 2017. Available at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297> (accessed 16 August 2023).

This second demographic analysis by YVDP builds upon the June 2019 demographic analysis of the ISIL attack on Kocho.⁵

The Attack

In the early hours of 3 August 2014, ISIL fighters converged on the Sinjar region in north-west Iraq. There, Sinjar town and 81 villages are spread around the base of Mount Sinjar. Tel Qasab and Tel Banat lie on the south-eastern side of the mountain (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of Yazidi Villages in the Sinjar Region, highlighting the location of Tel Qasab and Tel Banat



In 2014, Sinjar was home to many ethnic and religious groups including Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, Christians, Kurds, and Turkmen, all of whom suffered in varying ways under ISIL. It was also home to the majority of the world's Yazidis. A pre-Judaic group, the Yazidis are not 'People of the Book'⁶ and, consequently, have suffered centuries of discrimination,

⁵ YVDP, 'A Demographic Documentation on ISIL's Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho', *LSE Middle East Centre Report*, June 2019. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101098/1/Cetorelli_Demographic_documentation_ISIL_attack.pdf (accessed 16 August 2023).

⁶ 'People of the Book' (or *Ahl al-kitāb*) is an Islamic term referring to those religions which Muslims regard as having been guided by previous revelations, generally in the form of a scripture. In the Qur'an they are identified as the Jews, the Christians, the Sabeans, and according to some interpretations the Zoroastrians. Within Islam, people of the Book have the status of *dhimma*, meaning that they are permitted to practice their own faith and govern their community according to the rules and norms of their own religion, in return for paying *jizya*, a tax. See John L. Esposito, ed., 'Ahl al-Kitab' in *The Oxford*

marginalisation, and, at various points, mass atrocities including killings and sexual violence.⁷ ISIL regards the Yazidis as not only infidels, but also pagans⁸ whose existence could not be tolerated in their ‘caliphate’.⁹

ISIL took control of Mosul and Tel Afar on 10 and 16 June 2014, respectively. By the end of June, ISIL held territory across northern Syria and Iraq, with an estimated ten million people living under its control.¹⁰ When Tel Afar fell, members of the Shi‘a Turkmen community fled into Sinjar, including to Tel Qasab and Tel Banat. Their accounts, together with news coverage of ISIL atrocities, increased Yazidis’ fears. Throughout July, ISIL launched small-scale attacks on Sinjar, including mortar attacks on Tel Qasab and Tel Banat, ostensibly testing the defences of the Peshmerga, the Iraqi Kurdish forces securing the region.

Peshmerga strengthened the region’s defences, deploying more men and reinforcing berms around some of the villages. Most Yazidis, aware of the Peshmerga reinforcements and in a context where the family’s principal (and sometimes only) assets were their land and sheep, did not try to leave. Some families did attempt to leave for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), usually to join sons who had left Sinjar for work opportunities there, and were prevented from doing so by the Peshmerga.¹¹

Peshmerga forces had positions both in and around Tel Qasab and Tel Banat. By mid-July, village men, armed with light weapons ubiquitous in post-2003 Iraq, set up small guard posts along the inner ring of the berms, concentrated along sections closest to Sunni Arab villages. As night fell on 2 August, men took shifts guarding the perimeters as their families slept outdoors on patios and roofs, as is common in the summer.

Around 2am on 3 August, ISIL began its assault, first attacking Gerzerik and Siba Sheikh Khidr villages. Between 2:30 and 3:30am, ISIL units began to attack Tel Qasab and Tel Banat. Peshmerga forces began to fight, reinforced by those at the guard posts. Between 5am and 6am, the Peshmerga, running out of ammunition and lacking reinforcements,

Dictionary of Islam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 10.

⁷ For more information on earlier annihilative campaigns against the Sinjari Yazidis, see Birgül Açıkyıldız, *The Yazidis: The History of a Community, Culture and Religion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); John S. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yazidis* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 67, 136; Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds: Yazidis in Colonial Iraq* (London: I.B Tauris, 1999), p. 37.

⁸ ISIL refers to Yazidis as *mushrikin* (polytheists and idol worshippers). This differs, for example, from their view of Shi‘a Muslims who they define as *murtaddin* or *rafidah* (apostates or rejectors of the faith), or Christians who are *Ahl al-kitāb* (People of the Book). ISIL’s treatment of these groups is theoretically defined by these classifications. The Yazidis, who ISIL define as polytheists (but who explicitly define themselves as monotheists) are seen to practice *shirk* (idolatry) and are held as a direct threat and insult to the central principle of ISIL-interpreted Islam, an adherence to strict monotheism, also known as tawheed.

⁹ ISIL, in an article ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’, published in its magazine *Dabiq*, stated that it had sought to determine how Yazidis should be treated under ISIL ideology, prior to the attack. In the article, ISIL declared, ‘Upon conquering the region of Sinjar... 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...’. ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’, *Dabiq*, Issue 4, 2014, pp. 14–6.

¹⁰ ‘Islamic State and the Crisis in Iraq and Syria in Maps’, *BBC News*, 28 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034> (accessed 16 August 2023).

¹¹ Cathy Otten, *With Ash on their Faces: Yazidi Women and the Islamic State* (New York: OR Books, 2017), p. 35.

began to withdraw. Between 7 and 8am, many in the guard posts left to flee with their families or to join their families already headed towards Mount Sinjar. Some men – usually those with military backgrounds – refused to leave the berm but instead instructed their families to flee while they put up a last stand to slow the ISIL advance. Those who survived made their way out of Sinjar, alone or in small groups of other men, using dirt roads or drainage ditches and moving mainly at night. Some older men in the two villages refused to leave their property, with some assuming that ISIL would focus on seizing territory and would not be a danger to civilians living within. The disabled or infirm also remained in the villages, physically unable to flee.

Yazidis from Tel Qasab and Tel Banat who fled early and/or who had used backroads, reached Mount Sinjar's upper slopes, where they were besieged by ISIL.¹² Tens of thousands of Yazidi men, women, and children were trapped in temperatures rising above 50 degrees Celsius, unable to access water, food, or medical care.¹³ Hundreds – mainly infants and the injured – died.¹⁴ By 14 August, Syrian Kurdish forces, under the cover of airstrikes by Iraq and an American-led coalition, rescued the survivors.

Accounts suggest that ISIL entered Tel Qasab and Tel Banat after most residents had fled. Most of those captured were stopped on the roads while fleeing, with the exception of a small number who did not leave the villages and who were captured in their homes. Regardless of where Yazidis were captured, fighters separated out men and post-pubescent boys. Those who refused to convert were executed. ISIL fighters carried out executions at makeshift checkpoints, on roadsides, and on the lower slopes of Mount Sinjar.

In the 1970s, as part of Saddam Hussein's Arabisation campaign, Iraqi authorities moved Yazidi communities from villages on the lower slopes of Mount Sinjar to collective townships on the flat plains around the mountain. When fleeing the ISIL attack, some Yazidis fled first to their ancestral villages and the safety they offered by virtue of their proximity to the mountain.

Many from Tel Qasab first fled to Qani village. In the early afternoon of 3 August, ISIL entered Qani, rounded up Yazidi men and older boys, and took them to the edge of a nearby valley and opened fire. Over 100 men and boys were reportedly killed. In July 2022, the Iraqi government exhumed mass graves and, following identification of the remains, returned them to their families for proper burial.¹⁵

Yazidis from Tel Banat appear to have fled first towards Zleli and then to Pire Awra, a shrine further up Mount Sinjar, before either ascending to the mountain top or seeking a route into the KRI. On the afternoon of 3 August, ISIL fighters perpetrated a mass killing of Yazidi men and post-pubescent boys in Zleli with vanishingly few survivors. In the days that followed, ISIL launched various attacks on Pire Awra. In at least one of these attacks, they captured Yazidis who had sought safe haven there. This included younger men who sent their families onwards but stayed behind to guard the shrine and assist other fleeing Yazidis.

¹² CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, paras. 27–8.

¹³ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 27.

¹⁴ Cetorelli – Household Survey.

¹⁵ 'Exhumation Ceremony in Qani Village, Sinjar', *Nadia's Initiative*, 28 June 2022. Available at: <https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/news/qani-village-exhumation-ceremony> (accessed 16 August 2023).

Those who survived capture – mainly, but not solely, women and young children – were forcibly transferred to temporary holding sites, usually inside the Sinjar region. This included Tel Banat and Kocho villages. ISIL then moved the Yazidi women and children to secondary holding sites, including schools in Tel Afar, a wedding hall in Mosul, and Badush prison. Each site held hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Yazidis.¹⁶ There, they were registered, with fighters recording their name; age; village; marital status; and if married, how many children they had.

Families who converted – or feigned conversion – were transferred to empty houses, previously belonging to members of the Shi'a community, in Tel Afar city and nearby villages. There, Yazidi men and older boys were forced to labour, tending farms and livestock and doing construction work. By spring 2015, however, ISIL appeared to decide the Yazidis' conversions were false, at which point the men and older boys went missing and the women and remaining children were filtered into ISIL's system of enslavement.

In that system, Yazidi women and girls were deemed ISIL property and referred to as *sabaya* or slaves.¹⁷ ISIL would sell Yazidi women and girls in slave markets, or as individual purchases to fighters coming to the holding centres. It was forbidden, on pain of death, to sell them to anyone outside of ISIL.¹⁸ Yazidi women and girls began to bloody themselves to make themselves unattractive to buyers. Some committed suicide.¹⁹ While in captivity, Yazidi women and girls were subjected to sustained sexual and physical violence.²⁰ They were often forced into domestic servitude in fighters' homes, where they suffered beatings and denied adequate food and medical care.²¹ Fighters insult Yazidism, referring to captives as 'dirty *kuffar*' (infidels) and 'devil-worshippers'.²²

At the age of seven, ISIL transferred Yazidi boys to training camps across its territory, where they suffered physical and psychological abuse, before being forced to fight. Propaganda videos published on ISIL channels in 2016 showed Yazidi boys being made to carry out executions.²³ When ISIL was forced from eastern Syria in March 2019,²⁴ several Yazidi boys from Sinjar were rescued.²⁵ It is estimated that thousands of Yazidis, including many from Tel Qasab and Tel Banat, remain missing.²⁶

¹⁶ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 54.

¹⁷ See Mara Redlich Revkin and Elisabeth Wood, 'The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices', *The Journal of Global Security Studies*, 2020.

¹⁸ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 60.

¹⁹ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 53.

²⁰ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 64.

²¹ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, paras. 66, 72–3.

²² CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 74.

²³ ISIL, 'To the Sons of the Jews', 9 December 2015; ISIL, 'Repent and You Will Have Safety', 19 November 2016.

²⁴ Sarah El Deeb, 'ISIS militants evacuate last stronghold in Syria following government offensive,' *The Star*, 9 November 2017.

²⁵ Jane Arraf, 'Freed From ISIS, Few Yazidis Return To Suffering Families, Many Remain Missing', *National Public Radio (US)*, 14 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/14/702650912/freed-from-isis-few-yazidis-return-to-suffering-families-many-remain-missing> (accessed 16 August 2023).

²⁶ Knox Thames, 'Why Is There No Global Effort To Find The Missing Yazidis?', *United States Institute of*

Data Sources and Methods

Civil society organisations and local authorities have attempted to compile lists of Yazidi victims of ISIL's August 2014 attack. This paper analyses data from two independent sources. The first source is a list of victims gathered by trained Yazidi enumerators,²⁷ primarily from close family members and occasionally from more distant relatives, friends and neighbours, in camps for internally displaced persons in the KRI – hereinafter referred to as 'List from Camps in the KRI.' The second source is a list of victims compiled by a few village leaders who survived the genocide – hereinafter referred to as 'List from Village Leaders.'

Both sources recorded the victims' first name, father's name, grandfather's name,²⁸ gender, age, and village of residence at the time of the attack. Information on victims' status – dead, missing, or rescued – is updated to March 2023. Neither of these sources is likely to be complete, but together they corroborate each other and provide more reliable information than each of them used separately.

The first phase of the analysis involved a detailed screening to assess data quality within each source. Victims' names were sorted alphabetically, checking for possible spelling variants and ensuring a uniform transliteration from the Arabic to Latin alphabet. The reported gender was examined alongside victims' names to verify consistency. Digit preferences²⁹ and rough approximations in age reporting were identified. Such inaccuracies are common in data collection through questionnaires in surveys and censuses, especially for populations with low literacy rates, but do not constitute a serious problem for the purpose of this analysis.

The second phase involved merging the screened data from the two sources using victims' names to match the overlapping records. The merging process resulted in three sets of records: (i) a set of matched records of victims found in both the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders; (ii) a set of unmatched records of victims found only in the List from Camps in the KRI; and (iii) a set of unmatched records of victims found only in the List from Village Leaders.

The matching process served to validate the identity of victims whose names were found in both lists. The subsequent phase of the analysis involved validating the unmatched records of victims whose names were only found in one list. Those records were inspected one by one to exclude the possibility that some victims were reported in both lists, but

Peace, 6 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/10/why-there-no-global-effort-find-missing-yazidis> (accessed 16 August 2023).

²⁷ The Yazidi enumerators received training from Dr Valeria Cetorelli concerning questionnaire design, interview techniques and core principles of human subjects' protection.

²⁸ According to Iraq's patronymic system, persons are generally referred to by their given name followed by their father's and grandfather's names.

²⁹ Inaccuracies in age reporting in surveys and censuses often result from a tendency of rounding the age to the nearest number ending in the digits 0 or 5.

their records were not matched because of minor errors in their first, father's or grand-father's names. Detailed screenings of existing lists of victims from other Yazidi villages and the town of Sinjar were also undertaken to rule out the possibility that some victims were erroneously reported as residing in Tel Qasab or Tel Banat at the time of the attack when they were in fact residing somewhere else. The validation process produced a consolidated database of all identified victims.

The final phase of the analysis involved applying a dual system estimation to determine the likely number of victims who remain uncounted. This methodology can be used when two independently collected incomplete lists of victims are available. More specifically, the total number of victims can be estimated by comparing the size of overlap between the two lists to the size of the lists themselves. If the overlap is small, this implies that the total number of victims is much higher than the number of identified victims in the lists. If, on the contrary, most records in the two lists overlap, this implies that the total number of victims is not much higher than the number of identified victims in the lists.

Let V_T be the unknown total number of Yazidi victims from Tel Qasab or Tel Banat, V_C be the number of identified victims in the List from Camps in the KRI and V_L be the number of identified victims in the List from Village Leaders. There are V_B identified victims who are matched across both lists.

If all victims have an equal probability of appearing in the List from Camps in the KRI, then the probability of a specific victims being reported is:

$$Pr(\text{reported in the List from Camps in the KRI}) = V_C / V_T \quad (1)$$

Similarly, if all victims have an equal probability of appearing in the List from Village Leaders, then the probability of a specific victim being reported is:

$$Pr(\text{reported in the List from Village Leaders}) = V_L / V_T \quad (2)$$

The probability of a specific victim being reported in both lists is:

$$Pr(\text{reported in both lists}) = V_B / V_T \quad (3)$$

By definition, the probability of an event composed of two independent events is the product of the independent probabilities. Therefore:

$$V_B / V_T = V_C / V_T \cdot V_L / V_T \quad (4)$$

Solving equation (4) for V_T , the total number of victims can be estimated using the number of identified victims from the two lists and the matches between them:

$$V_T = V_C \cdot V_L / V_B \quad (5)$$

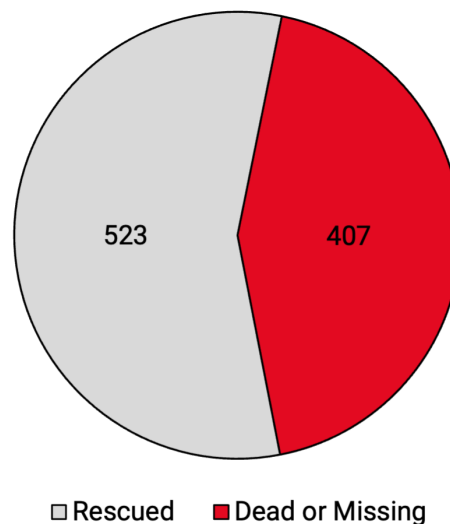
The likely number of victims who remain uncounted is then obtained by subtracting the number of identified victims to the estimated total number of victims.

Results

Total Identified Victims from Tel Qasab

Screening and merging the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders led to a consolidated database of 930 Yazidi victims from Tel Qasab who can be identified by name. Of the 930 identified victims, 523 (56 percent) have been rescued from ISIL captivity, while 407 (44 percent) are reported as dead or missing (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Status of Identified Victims from Tel Qasab



There were 685 matched records between the two sources; that is to say, 685 victims were recorded in both the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders. In addition, the List from Camps in the KRI contained 44 records not included in the List from Village Leaders, and the List from Village Leaders contained 201 records not included in the List from Camps in the KRI (Table 1). The actual number of victims is likely to be higher than the number of identified victims in the consolidated database. Nevertheless, the broad overlap between the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders is an indication of their high degree of completeness. Under the dual system estimation assumptions, the actual number of victims from Tel Qasab, including those not recorded in either list, can be estimated using equation (5):

$$(685 + 44) \cdot (685 + 201) / 685 = 943$$

This number is only marginally higher than the number of identified victims in the consolidated database, suggesting that the likely number of victims who remain uncounted is 13 (1 percent).

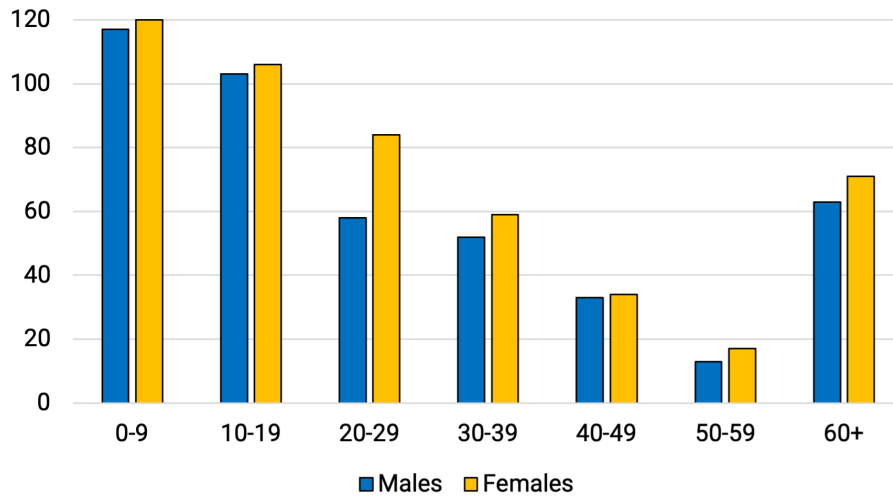
Table 1: Number of Identified Victims from Tel Qasab

Source	Number
Identified victims in both lists	685
Identified victims only in the list from camps in the KRI	44
Identified victims only in the list from village leaders	201
Total identified victims in either list	930

The results depict a narrative that strongly corroborates the findings of testimony-based documentation. The estimated population of Tel Qasab prior to the ISIL attack was 18,000 Yazidis.³⁰ The number of identified victims in the consolidated database confirms that most of them fled before ISIL took control. Those who stayed or fled too late (5 percent of Tel Qasab's population) were either killed or kidnapped.

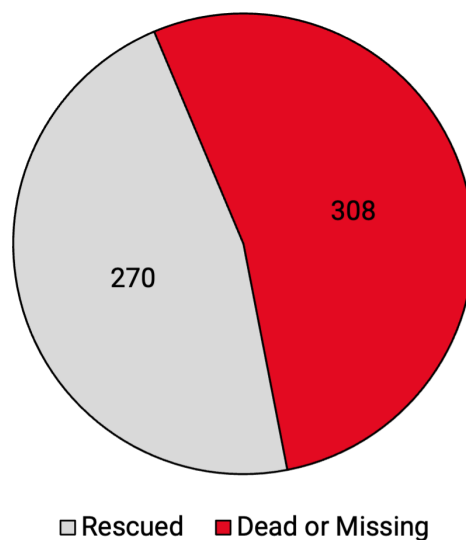
The nature of the attack is further substantiated by the gender and age characteristics of the identified victims. Fully, 439 (47%) of the identified victims are males and 491 (53%) are females. The age of the identified victims reflects Tel Qasab's young population age structure, with 237 (25%) being under 10 years and 446 (48%) under 20 years. The lower number of men than women among the identified victims in the age group 20-29 aligns with testimonial evidence. Interviewees reported that a number of men from Tel Qasab had military backgrounds and served in the border guards or the army. When ISIL's attack began in the early hours of 3 August 2014, these men dispatched their families as part of the convoys leaving shortly after sunrise. They stayed to continue to fight at the berm, with those who survived making their way out of Sinjar along dirt roads or walking in drainage ditches over the course of several days, moving at night. The relatively high number of elderly persons among the identified victims is due to the fact that they were more likely than other age groups to be still in the village when ISIL took control. They were also more likely to be captured while trying to flee if they were physically unable to make the arduous journey up and across Mount Sinjar on foot (Figure 3).

³⁰ The estimated population of Tel Qasab prior to the ISIL attack was provided by the district administrative office to UN Habitat; see 'Emerging Land Tenure Issues Among Displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq', *UN Habitat*, November 2015, p. 8. Available at: https://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/YAZIDI%20HLP%20REPORT_EN.pdf (accessed 16 August 2023).

Figure 3: Gender/Age of All Identified Victims from Tel Qasab

Total Identified Victims from Tel Banat

Screening and merging the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders led to a consolidated database of 578 Yazidi victims from Tel Banat who can be identified by name. Of the 578 identified victims, 270 (47 percent) have been rescued from ISIL captivity, while 308 (53 percent) are reported as dead or missing (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Status of Identified Victims from Tel Banat

There were 381 matched records between the two sources; that is to say, 381 victims were recorded in both the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders. In addition, the List from Camps in the KRI contained 8 records not included in the List from Village Leaders, and the List from Village Leaders contained 189 records not included in the List from Camps in the KRI (Table 2). As in the case of Tel Qasab, the broad overlap between the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leaders is an indication of their high degree of completeness. Under the dual system estimation assumptions, the actual number of victims from Tel Banat, including those not recorded in either list, can be estimated using equation (5):

$$(381 + 8) \cdot (381 + 189) / 381 = 582$$

This number is only marginally higher than the number of identified victims in the consolidated database, suggesting that the likely number of victims who remain uncounted is 4 (1 percent).

Table 2: Number of identified victims from Tel Banat

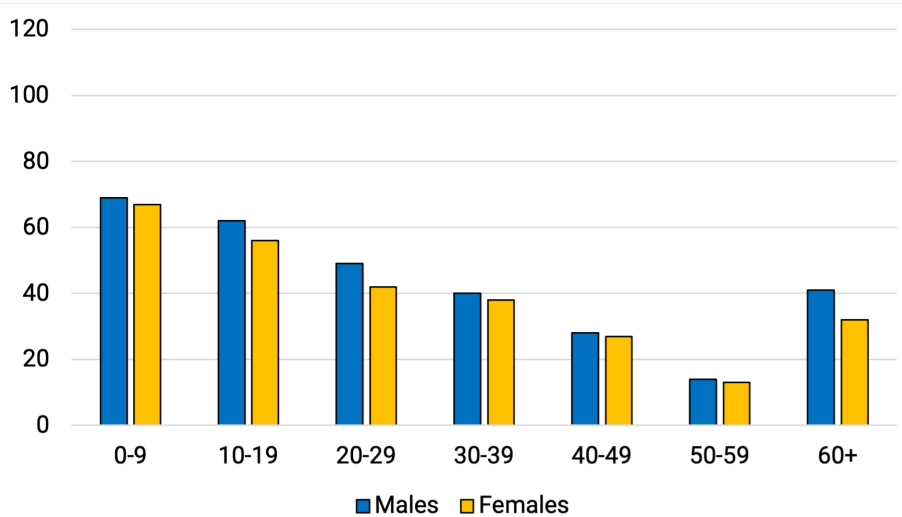
Source	Number
Identified victims in both lists	381
Identified victims only in the list from camps in the KRI	8
Identified victims only in the list from village leaders	189
Total identified victims in either list	578

The estimated population of Tel Banat prior to the ISIL attack was 12,600 Yazidis.³¹ The number of identified victims in the consolidated database confirms that most fled before ISIL took control. Those who stayed or fled too late (5 percent of Tel Banat's population) were either killed or kidnapped.

The nature of the attack is further substantiated by the gender and age characteristics of the identified victims. Fully, 303 (52%) of the identified victims are males and 275 (48%) are females. The age of the identified victims reflects Tel Banat's young population age structure, with 136 (24%) being under 10 years and 254 (44%) under 20 years. The relatively high number of elderly persons among the identified victims is due to the fact that they were more likely than other age groups to be still in the village when ISIL took control. They were also more likely to be captured while trying to flee if they were physically unable to climb Mount Sinjar on foot (Figure 5).

³¹ The estimated population of Tel Banat prior to the ISIL attack was provided by the district administrative office to UN Habitat as consisting of 12,600 Yazidis and 1,400 Shi'a Turkmen; see UN Habitat, 'Emerging Land Tenure Issues Among Displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq', p. 8. Available at: https://www.hlm.org/img/documents/YAZIDI%20HLP%20REPORT_EN.pdf (accessed 5 September 2023).

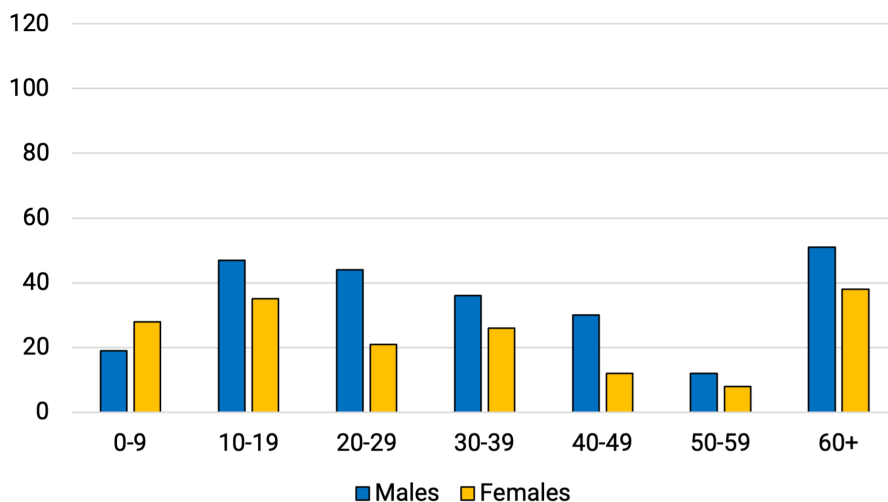
Figure 5: Gender/Age of All Identified Victims from Tel Banat



Dead or Missing Victims from Tel Qasab

The violations suffered by those who were captured by ISIL varied depending on their gender and age. Of the 407 victims from Tel Qasab who are reported as dead or missing, 239 (59%) are males and 168 (41%) are females. Among the 117 boys and 120 girls under 10 years of age captured by ISIL, there are respectively 19 (16%) and 28 (23%) who are reported as dead or missing. Among the 103 boys and 106 girls between 10 and 19 years at the time of the attack, 47 (46%) and 35 (33%) are reported as dead or missing. Of the 219 men aged 20 years and above, 173 (79%) are reported as dead or missing. The number of those reported as dead or missing is 105 (40%) among the 265 women aged 20 years and above (Figure 6).

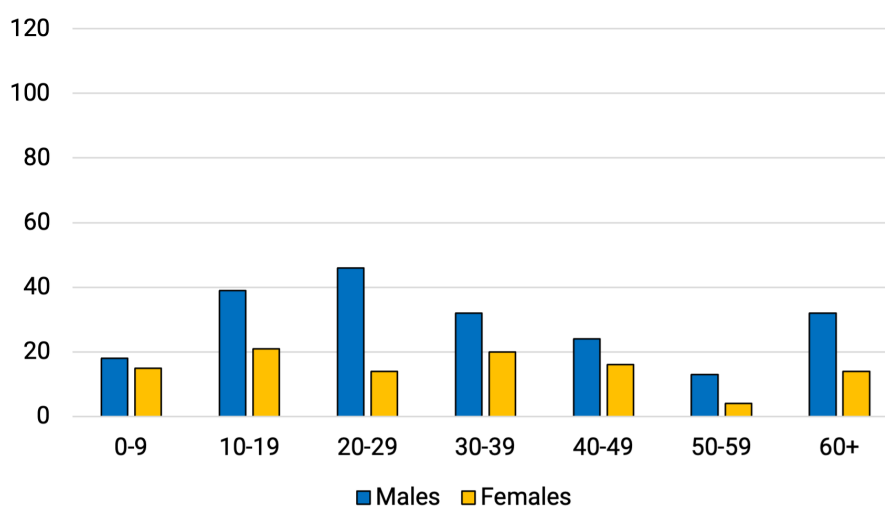
Figure 6: Gender/Age of Identified Victims from Tel Qasab Reported as Dead or Missing



Dead or Missing Victims from Tel Banat

Of the 308 victims from Tel Banat who are reported as dead or missing, 204 (66%) are males and 104 (34%) are females. Among the 69 boys and 67 girls under 10 years of age captured by ISIL, there are respectively 18 (26%) and 15 (22%) who are reported as dead or missing. Among the 62 boys and 56 girls between 10 and 19 years at the time of the attack, 39 (63%) and 21 (38%) are reported as dead or missing. Of the 172 men aged 20 years and above, 147 (85%) are reported as dead or missing. The number of those reported as dead or missing is 68 (45%) among the 152 women aged 20 years and above (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Gender/Age of Identified Victims from Tel Banat Reported as Dead or Missing



Analysis

Distinguishing between dead and missing victims has been complicated by the fact that some relatives were unwilling to list the missing as having died in the absence of either witnessing their killings or having confirmation of their remains being present in the mass graves. Testimonial evidence, together with the identification of remains from mass graves already exhumed, indicates that the majority of men and boys over the age of 12 at the time of capture were executed. While it is impossible to exclude that some of them may have survived capture and captivity, as the analysis below shows, few have been rescued in the intervening years, creating slender hopes for their survival.

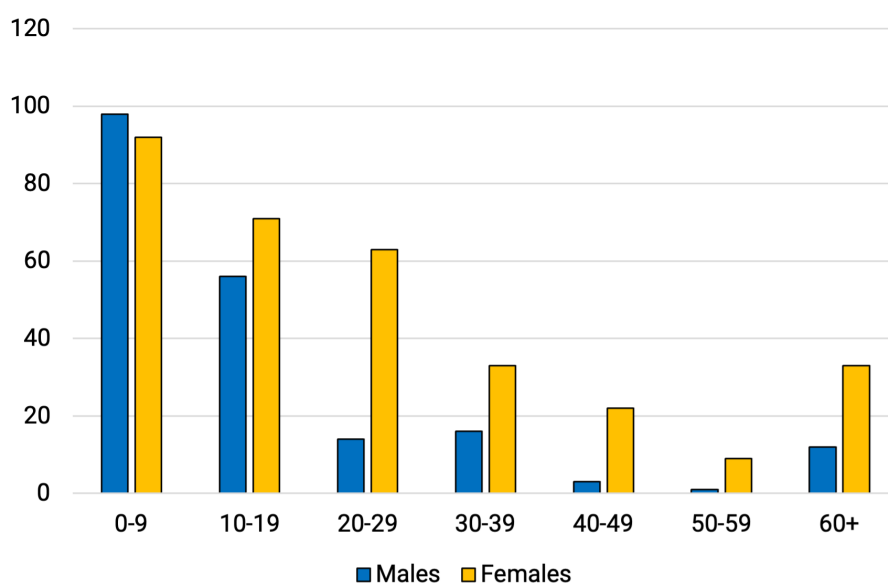
Following ISIL's loss of territorial control, the fate and whereabouts of the still-missing women and girls, as well as boys under the age of 7 who were more likely to have been allowed to remain with their mothers, remains a painful and largely unanswered question. As women and girls were likely to have been held in close proximity to fighters, whether in their houses or bases, they were particularly at risk of being casualties of the airstrikes directed at the armed group. It is possible that some have survived but are yet to be rescued.

For boys who were above 7 but below 12 at the time of capture, or who turned 7 while in captivity, their fate also remains unclear. For those forced to fight with ISIL, they were at high risk of dying on the battlefield. Several Yazidi boys were rescued following ISIL's defeat in 2019.

Rescued Victims from Tel Qasab

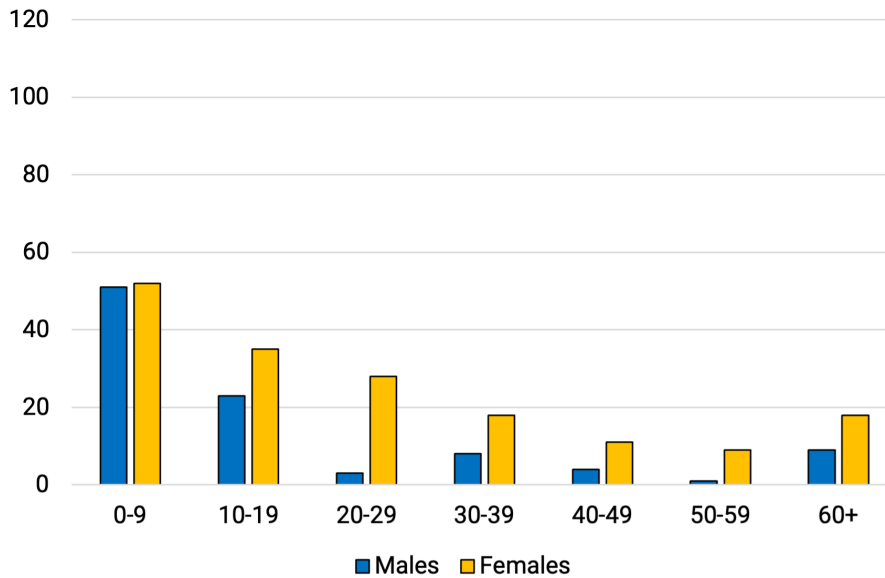
A demographic analysis of those rescued from captivity – a catch-all term governing a diverse range of situations through which abductees have been returned to their families – also reveals important insights into the ways in which ISIL targeted Yazidis. Of the 523 victims from Tel Qasab who have been rescued, 200 (38%) are males and 323 (62%) are females. The number of boys and girls under 10 years who have been rescued is 98 (84%) and 92 (77%) respectively. Among those aged between 10 and 19 years, 56 (54%) and 71 (67%) have been rescued. Only 46 (21%) of the men aged 20 years and above have been rescued; the number of those rescued is 160 (60%) among women in the same age range (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Gender/Age of Identified Victims from Tel Qasab Rescued from Captivity



Rescued Victims from Tel Banat

Of the 270 victims from Tel Banat rescued from captivity, 99 (37%) are males and 171 (63%) are females. The number of boys and girls under 10 years who have been rescued is 51 (74%) and 52 (78%) respectively. Among those aged between 10 and 19 years, 23 (37%) and 35 (62%) have been rescued. Only 25 (15%) of the men aged 20 years and above have been rescued; the number of those rescued is 84 (55%) among women in the same age range (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Gender/Age of Identified Victims from Tel Banat Rescued from Captivity

Analysis

The demographic documentation cannot tell the whole story of the violations suffered by Yazidi women and girls from Tel Qasab and Tel Banat. What it clearly demonstrates, however, is that women and girls were more likely to have been kept alive in ISIL captivity and, consequently, to have the possibility of rescue.

Testimonial evidence collected by multiple organisations consistently indicates many of the boys under the age of 7 and girls under the age of 9 were kept with their mothers by ISIL and sold as a package within the armed group's system of enslavement. It is therefore likely that most of the children in this age group were rescued with their mothers. It is also possible that some of the boys – particularly those between 10 and 19 years who were more likely to have been forcibly recruited and made to fight as part of ISIL forces – escaped or surrendered to or were captured by opposing forces during fighting, and on being identified as Yazidis were returned to their families. YVDDP data indicates that more boys who were of an age where they were likely to have been trained and made to fight as part of ISIL may have survived than testimonial evidence had previously suggested.

While very few men over the age of 20 years were rescued, those that did had similar accounts. Upon capture by ISIL, they escaped immediate execution by feigning conversion to Islam. ISIL then housed the 'converted' men with their families in a number of locations in and around Tel Afar and Mosul, where the men were forced to labour for ISIL.³² While ISIL monitored the families, many of these locations allowed for some freedom of movement. By early 2015, some men and their families were able to escape, often with the assistance of smugglers. By spring 2015, and in part informed by the number of escapes, ISIL determined the conversions to be false and moved the women, girls and pre-pubescent boys into the system of enslavement. Yazidi men and older boys went missing at this time.³³

³² CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, paras. 37–40.

³³ CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy, para. 41.

Conclusion

This demographic documentation of ISIL's attack on Tel Qasab and Tel Banat corroborates YVDDP's previous findings that the attack was directed against the Yazidi community, that those captured were either killed or kidnapped, and that the violations suffered depended on the perceived gender and age of the victims.

The consolidated database of victims generated by this demographic documentation project will be of substantial assistance in identifying the remains of residents of Tel Qasab and Tel Banat during mass grave excavations and forensic analyses. It is likely only at that point will there be clarity over the distinction between those listed as dead and missing, providing if not solace then at least closure to surviving family members.

That Yazidis rescued from ISIL are more likely to be female has long been apparent and can be seen in the practices of documentation groups and humanitarian agencies. This is particularly so in the psychosocial support and medical services available to female survivors, albeit arguably concentrated more towards women than younger girls. Continued and adequate funding of these programmes needs to be secured, particularly as international focus risks moving away from the Yazidis to conflagrations in other parts of the world, such as Ukraine.

Yazidi women and girls from Tel Qasab and Tel Banat face additional challenges to their recovery. Many have limited education and married early. Their interactions with the world beyond their extended families was often through their husbands or other male relatives, who may number among dead or missing. As a result, it remains unclear how Yazidi women and girls will thrive in environments with such limited social and economic independence. Investments should be made in tracking early marriages and attention should also be paid to any indications of a rise in polygamous relationships, particularly as this has not been a feature of the Yazidi community in recent years. Equally, longer-term strategies to promote female education, skills training, and employment should be resourced to ensure greater female political, social, and economic independence. A good in itself, this is also the most effective way to ensure that any marriages spring from choice and not the vagaries of financial hardship.

The consolidated database of victims indicates that, at the time of the ISIL attack, about a quarter of population of both Tel Qasab and Tel Banat were children under 10 years. Children in this age group also had higher rates of rescue. Additional resources should be placed into ensuring there is expertise available to document crimes committed against children, and to undertake the interviewing of child survivors, where appropriate to do so. Moreover, it may indicate a stronger than expected need for trauma therapy, and other forms of psychosocial support, that are specifically tailored to children, including child victims of sexual violence and child soldiers. There may need to be further specialisations in the services offered to boys and girls held by ISIL, where it is determined that children were exposed to different violations and different traumas by reason of their gender. Families of child survivors, as well as schools, may also need additional information and support in recognising and dealing with children living with trauma.

There are glimmers of hope for justice for Yazidis. In September 2017, the UN Security Council established UNITAD, with a mandate to support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable by collecting, preserving and storing evidence of acts that might amount to international crimes committed in Iraq. UNITAD's ongoing investigations have supported prosecutions in third states of crimes committed by ISIL, including against the Yazidis. Further, on 1 March 2021, the Iraqi government adopted the Yazidi Survivors Law, establishing a program aimed at giving effect to survivors' right to reparation. A significant step forward, civil society continues to advocate for a survivor-centred implementation process.³⁴

Demographic documentation constitutes the first step to providing data that may be used before existing and future accountability mechanisms to establish elements of various international crimes. This may include indicators that ISIL committed specific violations as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, as is required for a finding of crimes against humanity. Similarly YVDDP's demographic documentation may yield data concerning conduct relevant to the determination of genocidal intent, including 'the scale of atrocities committed, their general nature, and the fact of deliberately and systematically targeting victims on account of their membership in a particular group.'³⁵ Finally, the data collected and analysed by YVDDP continues to underscore the necessity of using a gender-competent, age-disaggregated analysis in order to understand the full scope of ISIL crimes.

³⁴ 'Joint Statement on the Implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law', Human Rights Watch, 14 April 2023. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/14/joint-statement-implementation-yazidi-survivors-law> (accessed 16 August 2023).

³⁵ Akayesu Trial Judgment, para. 523.

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Amira Djuric

Cover Image

Framed photos of deceased Yazidis, Memorial room, Northern Iraq.

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