

Yezidi minority and ISIS: the Victims of Trans-Generational Genocide*

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YEZIDISM: AS A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The Yezidis are “an ethno-religious minority whose existence dates back to c. 4750 BCE in the pre-Islamic Mesopotamian region”¹. Their religion is considered to be one of the oldest monotheistic religions in Mesopotamia² and their faith is based on the worship of one supreme God “Ezi”³ or “Khuda.” This God is very peaceful and “similar like Epicurean gods, who are not interfering with the world’s matter”[sic]⁴. He is, according to Yezidism, the One who created Himself,

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1 Serena Arena, “Peace Profile: Vian Dakhil, in Peace Review”: A Journal of Social Justice, Vol. 29 Issue 2, 2017, P. 244–247,

2 Mirza Dinnayi, “Die Verfolgung der „Teufelanbeter,“ Yezidi zwischen basthistischer Repression und sunnitischen Islamismus”; in *Irak von der Republik der Angst zu bürgerlichen Demokratie*, (Hg. Kreuzer & Schmidinger), CaIra Verlag, 2004, pp. 197-204

3 “Ezi” is, according to many scholars, the word that the name of the Ezidi (Yezidi) is derived from. In one of the religious texts: (Ezi is the Lord, He named Himself with 1001 Names, His greatest name is Khuda), (Broka, Hoshang: *Studies in the Mythology of Yezidi Religion* (in Arabic), Germany, 1995, p. 30

4 Roger Lescot, *Les Yezidis De Syrie et du Gjebel Sindjar*, Translation to Arabic: Ahmad Hasan, Al-Mada Publishing Company, Damascus, 2007, p. 51

then the universe and so this God is the first source of the creation⁵. After God (Ezi) there are seven angels, who govern the universe under the Will of God. One of them is the Archangel “Tawisi Melek”⁶.

An essential characteristic of the philosophy of the Yezidi religion is based on this understanding of God and Angels. The Yezidi mythology differs from other religions, like Islam and Christianity, in the context of the unique God and Devil. According to the Yezidis, God is responsible for and is the source of “good” and “evil,” and there is no “fallen angel.” All the seven angels are good, and the source of evil is inside human beings, and derives from the “wills of the human instincts”⁷. The human being has, therefore, full responsibility for his or her behavior, and there is no evil or fallen power that encourages him or her to commit sin. Evil originates from humans’ instincts and personal wishes. This is unlike most of the Abrahamic Religions who believe in a Devil power that opposes God and encourages human beings to commit sins.⁸ “The relationship between God and the Peacock Angel in Yazidism differs from the good/evil dichotomy found in Zoroastrianism which epitomizes the struggle between Ohrmazd and Ahriman. Tawus is the alter-ego of God rather than his opponent”⁹.

The religious culture of Yezidism is not only distinct from Islam, but also highlights a different perspective from very sensitive notions that have been subject to long and painful debates among Muslim scholars since the beginning of their religion. These notions are about the mythology of the Devil, God and Adam and the role of “Satan or Iblees”, whether he was an opposite to the will of God or a loyalist. The Sufis, like Imam Al Ghazali and Hussein ben Mansur Al-Hallaj, have especially raised this debate; they believed, unlike the other Islamic scholars that Iblees¹⁰ should not be punished, because he did not refuse the order of Allah, he refused to worship any other except Allah. Al-Hallaj was killed in Baghdad for his approach that, according to his contemporary scholars, was a kind of heresy (Zandaqa).¹¹

5 Khalil Jindy, *An Approach to know the fact about the Yezidi religion*, in Arabic, translation by authors, Rabun Publishing, 1996, Sweden, P 54-65

6 George Habib, *The Yezidi are remains of an ancient religion*, 1st edition, Dar Al-Rashid, Baghdad, 1979, electronic version, University of Michigan, 2009, p. 36 (in the Arabic Language)

7 Bayar Faqir Haji, “Qewle Nafse”, ROJ Journal, Volume 10, EZiA Print, Germany, 2001, P. 40-70

8 Prof. Wolfram Reiss, “Über Religion und Glaubensrichtung der Jeziden”, Conference der 74. Ferman, Wien, 21 March 2017

9 Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds, Yazidism in Colonial Iraq*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, P. 16

10 According to the common Islamic version, Iblees was punished because he refused an order from Allah to prostrate before Adam. Hallaj, Ghazali and other Sufies that he confirmed his Loyalty to Allah. Al Ghazali says: “Iblees is the Lord of the Monotheists”: (And [mention] when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam”; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers)

11 Encyclopaedia Britannica: Al Hallaj, Islamic Mystic

Yezidi religion was reformed in the 13th century by Sheikh Adi ben Musafer,¹² who was one of the Sufis who joined the Yezidi holiest Temple Lalish. His biography is controversial and has confused many scholars. Most Arab researchers consider him as Muslim Sufi. Other more objective researchers consider him as an ascetic, pious person from Hakari, whose family immigrated to Balbak.¹³ The Yezidi themselves claim that Sheikh Adi accepted their religious faith and added some Sufi versions to reform Yezidism in order to protect them from Islamic conversion¹⁴. However, as Sheikh Adi was influenced by mystical ideas he infused Yezidism with similar ideas. Therefore, it is challenging for the researchers to understand Yezidism. Most Arab writers put the Yezidis as a deviated Islamic sect, some of them as a political movement.¹⁵ Even some contemporary orientalist scholars could not gather more than superficial information about Yezidi,¹⁶ besides that the community was an endogamic, closed and isolated society. This has facilitated all kinds of misinformation about the identity and faith of the Yezidi.¹⁷ The consequence was a further rejection of the Yezidi and their non-acceptance in their homeland and isolation from the world until the end of the last century.

On the other hand, these differences explain their being victims of hatred, persecution, and discrimination among conservative Muslim majority throughout the past.

THE YEZIDI: AS A UNIQUE COMMUNITY:

The structure of the Yezidi community is unique. It creates its society through very complicated binding's mechanism. The caste regime within the community divides people into three main casts (Sheikh, Pir, and Murid), and six under-caste marriage groups¹⁸. This structure makes the community very close to each other. The Yezidi tribes are divided among these castes. The religious caste inter-tribal connections facilitate a stronger unit, and this makes the Yezidi tribal society

12 Zuhair Kathim Abbod, *Udi Ben Musafer, Reformer of the Yezidi Religion*, in Arabic, Al Arabiya Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 2005, pp. 15-26

13 Ibid, pp. 15-34

14 Ibid,

15 Ibid, p. 60

16 Nelida Fuccaro, and many other western researchers have reproduced the ideas of Arabic writers about Yezidis and did no further research on other facts beyond that.

17 Many Muslim neighbours of the Yezidis have believed in the past that: the Yezidis have a tail, and if someone draws a circle around him he cannot leave it until he dies. Also, they drink milk of the dog after their birth in order to grow. Most Arabic books about the Yezidis have argued such rumours in order to confuse the reader, sometimes as sarcastic jokes but also often as semi-facts.

18 Mirza Dinnayi, *Standortsbetimmung und Integrationsperspektiven der Yeziden in der multikulturellen Gesellschaft in Deutschland*, Mergeh-Drükerei, 2000, p. 6-7.

different to the Kurdish or Arabic tribes within the region.¹⁹ Marriage between castes is strictly forbidden²⁰.

The majority setting of the Yezidis is in the northern part of Iraq²¹, where about 500,000 Yezidis live in the different regions of the northern Iraqi provinces of Nineveh and Duhok²². Their estimated number worldwide is between 800,000-1,000,000, and there are communities with various population densities in Syria, Turkey and the former Soviet Union, mainly Armenia and Georgia²³.

Over the past few decades, many members of the community have migrated to Europe. They escaped mainly because of persecution, discrimination and war in their homelands. The largest Yezidi community in the diaspora lives in Germany. The estimated number of the population in Germany is around 200,000.²⁴ However, the non-missionary character of their faith, besides the forced Islamisation, has reduced the size of the Yezidi society over the last few centuries. In order to be a member of the community, both of one's parents should be Yezidi. On the other hand, "according to conservative estimates, some 1,8 million Yazidi have had to convert and some 1,2 million Yazidi have been killed"²⁵.

THE PAINFUL HISTORY OF TRANS-GENERATIONAL PERSECUTION AND DISCRIMINATION:

Yezidis claim that they have survived 72 pogroms or Genocides during the past 14 centuries. The history books report evidence of dozens of military campaigns against them where various cruel pogroms and attacks on the Yezidis committed by Abbasids, Mongols, Atabeks, Galilean, Turkish Ottomans, Kurds and Arabs.²⁶ Each attack against Yezidis has left hundreds or thousands of victims, produced slaves and the mass destruction of houses, crops, and animals. Most of these military attacks -so-called "Ferman" have been based on a religious "Fatwa". Sadiq Al Damaluji explains in his book about the Yazidis: "The Fatwas that had been announced by Islamic scholars against those people had played an important

19 Ibid

20 Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, "The Yazidi – Religion, Culture, and Trauma", *Advances in Anthropology*, Volume 7, Scientific Research Publishing, 2017, pp. 333-339

21 Nelida Fuccaro, *The Other Kurds, Yezidis in Colonial Iraq*, I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, P. 9

22 The statistics are based on the documents of case law before the Iraqi Federal Court, Supreme Juristic Council, Case Law No. 11/Itihadia/2010, Ezidi Independent List vs. Iraqi Parliament.

23 Birgit Ammann, *Kurden in Europa, Ethnizität und Diaspora*, *Kurdologie*, Band 4, LIT Verlag, 2001, pp 259-265

24 According to the Statistics of Zentralrat der Eziden, ZED

25 Kizilhan (2017), Ibid

26 Abu Dasin Shekhani, "Panorama of the mass destructive campaigns against Yezidis", *Roj Journal*, 6 Issue, EZiA Publishing, 1998, pp. 38-59

and dangerous role in their life. They threw them into wars for more than three ages. Also, they bear all kinds of pain and suffering, but they didn't give up".²⁷ Said Al Dewachi, one of the Arab scholars, justifies such Fatwas followed by mass killing of the Yezidis because they have retreated from Islam. He argues that the Ottoman leaders had, therefore, encouraged religious scholars to issue Fatwas denouncing the Yezidi as infidels.²⁸

According to Judge Zuhair Kathim Abbod, an Iraqi judge and scholar who wrote many influential books and articles about the Yezidis and other Iraqi minorities, the first Fatwa against Yezidis was issued by Al-Sheikh Ahmed ben Mustafa Abu Al-Suud Al-AMADI (1493-1574 AD). He gained the post of "Mufti of El-Astane" (1545 AD) for thirty years, the longest period for being Sheikh Al-Islam.²⁹ He was the contemporary of Ottoman Sultans Suleiman Al-Qanuni and Selim II.³⁰ Al-Amadi legitimized his Fatwa and execution of Yezidi men, and slavery of their women and children, by announcing that their killing is "Halal" because they are more "infidel" (Kufar) than the "original infidels" and that their killing belongs to "religious Obligations" because they are "Apostates retreated from Islam." He argued furthermore, that the killing of Yezidis is "halal based on the teachings of the four Islamic sects".³¹

The Iraqi scholar Sadiq Al-Damaluji describes that the Islamic scholars from different regions, including Yemen, Tatar, Qarabagh, confirmed similar Fatwas, which legitimized the killing of Yezidi men, and slavery of Yezidi women, would reward the killers in both worlds „this Life and the Hereafter“³².

It is crucial to mention some of these many Fatwas, to explain the legalization of pogroms and attacks against the Yezidi people. These Fatwas played a fundamental role in all of the 72 pogroms "genocides":

1. Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal (164-231AH) and Imam Al-Samarqandi (373AH) „permitted to deal with them [as with the Infidel]“³³.
2. Imam Fakhradeen Al-Razi (544-606AH) „proved religious legitimacy [being Halal] of their killing, dealing with their girls, wives and children as captives [Arabic: Malak al-Yameen- making them sex slaves] and allowance of arresting of their women and descendants“³⁴.

27 Sadiq Al Damaluji, *Al Yazidiya*, (in Arabic), Al-Ittihad Print, 1949, p. 428, citation in Abbod, Zuhair Kathim: *Al Ayzidiya*, Al Arabiya Foundation for Researches and Publishing, 2011, p. 80.

28 Said Al Dewachi, *Al Yazidiya*, Dar Al-Kutub Foundation, Mosul, 173, p. 226

29 Isam Muhammad A. A. Adwan, *Sheikh AL Islam Abu AL-Suud Afandi* (in Arabic), Open University of Al-Quds, 2017, pp. 261-290

30 Zuhair K. Abbod, *Al-Ayzidiya* (in Arabic), Al Arabiya Foundation for Researches and Publishing, Beirut, 2011, p. 80

31 Ibid

32 Sadiq Al-Damaluji, Ibid, pp. 428-444

33 Ibid

34 Zuhair K. Abbod, (2011): Ibid

3. Sheikh Abdullah bin Shaikh Ahmad bin Shaikh Hassan bin Ahmed Al-Zeezy Al-Ritbaky permitted in his Fatwa (1137AH) „seize their belongings, properties and taking their lives. He considers them as infidels, who shall be subject to the rule of apostates”³⁵.
4. Muhammad Amin Al-Khateen Al-Umari (1150-1203AH) issued his Fatwa in 1199AD making the Yezidis, as „Apostates, and fighting against them is an Obligation”³⁶.
5. The Kurdish Imam of Koya Abdulrahman Al-Gali considered them, as „Infidel, and they should be treated according to the rules based on this fact”³⁷.
6. Al-Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ratbky Al-Mudaris (1060-1159AH) issued his Fatwa in 1137 explaining that the Yezidis are the „Original Infidel”³⁸.
7. Muhammad Thakhri bin Ahmed Al-Khayat addressed in his book to the Sultan Abdulazeez bin Sultan Mahmud (1127-1293AD) a Fatwa about the Yezidi, who refused to join the Ottoman military. He announced them as „Apostates” and „obliged to fight them”³⁹.
8. The neighbours also committed many pogroms, including several attacks organised by Muslim Kurds. However, the cruellest massacre of the Yezidis was in 1832, when the Kurdish Prince of Soran (Rawanduz) called Mir Muhammad Rawanduzi, started an invasion against the Yezidi people in the northern side of Zab Rivel until Shaikhan and Sinjar. His attack was based on a religious Fatwa from Malay Khati, the Mufti of the prince⁴⁰. According to British traveler Henry Layard, thousands of Yezidis were brutally killed. They escaped from Shaikhan to the City Mosul, but the Mosulis closed the bridge on the river to avoid the entry of the Yezidi into the city, and when the soldiers of the Kurdish prince arrived they started to kill everybody without distinction between children, women or men. All the while the people of Mosul were watching the massacre from the other side of the bridge. Sir Layard claims that the reason for the indifference of the Mosulis was also a result of their belief that the Yezidis are Infidels⁴¹ and so they deserved to be killed.

35 Ibid

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

38 Ibid

39 Ibid

40 Arshad Miho, “Religious Faith the Kurdish Yezidis as a Model, in: In the Context of Identity, Culture and Change From the Ottomans to the Present the Kurds”, International Symposium, University of Bingol, 2013, pp 346-365

41 Ibid, p. 359

The fall of the Ottoman Empire did not stop the suffering of the Yezidi. Then the new Iraqi state did not recognize the Yezidi as an independent religion or ethnic group. The Yezidi were subject to the Personal Status Law, which is based on the Islamic Sharia Law. During this time, the government prohibited all kinds of progresses in the Yezidi regions.

In addition, the Baathification agenda of Iraqi Regime after 1968 and especially after 1975 was based on the so-called Pan-Arabism ideology⁴², which means the assimilation of all identities of the small minority groups, including the Yazidi, to create one “Arabic nation.” The regime had consequently implemented a pan-Arabised education system. Yazidi regions were neglected and marginalized from economic, cultural and political development⁴³.

The Iraqi policy towards minorities was not distinct from the policies of the Ottoman Empire/Turkish Republic. An interesting document⁴⁴ from the League of Nations on the debates between the UK and Turkey in 1925 shows the opinions of Turkish/Ottoman politicians about the Yezidi. The British government argued that the Yezidi people have a distinctive religious identity that differed from Muslims, and therefore they had to enjoy the status of a minority. The Turkish government was against this approach. The political view of the Turkish delegation “asserts that the Yezidi are a distinct Kurdish race and have the same manners and costumes as the Kurds. They are merely a different religious sect, i. e. a Muslim sect and the Turkish government urges that “the fact that they are distinct sect cannot be taken as a ground for differentiating from the Kurds”⁴⁵. The Turkish government considered the difference between Moslems and the Yezidis like a minimal “difference between Catholicism and Protestantism”⁴⁶, merely, small deviation between the same faith. The Iraqi state, after the period of the British Mandate, adopted the same approach as the Turks to the Yezidi, who were considered as a Muslim sect inside the Kurdish Minority.

However, the policy of the Ba’ath party was changed, especially during the negotiations with the Kurds about the establishment of the autonomy in Kurdistan in 1970-1974. The Iraqi government prohibited the Kurds from any demand about Sinjar and other Yezidi regions in Shaikhan, Bashiqa, and villages of Tel-

42 Louise Monique Janssens, *TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN IRAQ. Justice and reconciliation for the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq for crimes committed by ISIS*, EIUC Master Thesis, University of Vienna, 2017/2018, p. 12.

43 Dilshad N. Farhan, *Suffering of Yezidi Kurds during the Iraqi Governments 1921-2003, a study about the plan’s measures of displacement, Immigration, Arabisation of Ezidis*, University of Duhok, 2008, p. 135.

44 LoN, Doc. No. 400.M.147.1925 VII: Question of the Frontier between Turkey and Iraq

45 Ibid,

46 Ibid, p 49 (English version).

kef district. The Baath Party claimed that the Yezidis are Arab, particularly are Umawitts, and that their name is derived from Yezid Ben Muwawiya, the second Umawite Caliph. The regime implemented extraordinary measures of Arabisation of the Yezidis between 1975 and 2003, for instance, the registration of the community in the Census of 1977 as Arabs.⁴⁷

The Kurdish liberation movement in the 60s and 70s was invincible because the villages in the mount supported the Peshmarga. The villages had some economic independence because they did not need the “city” to survive. Therefore, the Iraqi authorities started the so-called (Scorched Earth Policy). The Yezidis were also affected by this destructive strategy of the regime, like the Kurdish population.⁴⁸ The Iraqi government, at the beginning of the 60s, destroyed more than 61 villages and more than 60,000 hectares were confiscated and given to the Arab tribes that had been settled around Sinjar in 1961⁴⁹. In 1975, after the fall of the Kurdish revolution, more than 322 Yezidi villages in Sinjar were destroyed. The people were displaced to 10 “collective towns” around Mount Sinjar. These new “Towns” were administratively “huge villages,” without “Municipality character.” It means, that the inhabitants did not have any access to the facilities of a normal municipality, and at the same time they could not work as farmers and take benefit from the “farmer economy”, because they could not reach their lands and they could no longer breed their livestock inside such crowded “villages”⁵⁰. They were completely dependent on the state. Families had to move during the summer to the Arab villages in Rabia, about 50km east, as the Iraqi regime had established a successful irrigation system for all Arab farms but excluded the agricultural land of the Yezidis.⁵¹ Yezidi families were therefore forced to leave their lands. They had to work as paid “sub-farmers” to the Arab landlords. And because the farms were far away from the Yezidi villages (Collective towns), they had to temporarily move every year during the summer and autumn with their children to live in small tents besides the Arab farms, where all family members had to work hard in order to secure enough money for the winter.⁵² Consequently, their children were also unable to attend school.

This kind of policy against the Yezidi people was based on special intelligence research about the Psychology of the Yezidi people that was prepared by the Gen-

47 Dilshad N. Farhan, (2008), pp. 136-138

48 Mirza Dinnayi, (2004), pp. 198-201

49 Ibid, p.200

50 Ibid, p. 201

51 The “Al-Jazeera Irrigation Project” and “Saddam DAM” is an important agriculture project that has irrigated more than 250,000 hectares in its first Stage and another 250,000 hectares in the second. Step in Rabia and Jazeera Region, Provinz Nineveh. The Iraqi master plan for this project was to include all Arab lands and to ignore all the Yezidi regions and farms, although the pipelines and waterways were passing by the Yezidi lands.

52 Dilshad N. Farhan, (2008) ...p. ????

eral Military Intelligence Service.⁵³ The strategy of Iraqi intelligence was assimilation and manipulation of the Yezidi identity, not only the ethnic identity but also their religious identity.⁵⁴

MASSACRE AGAINST THE YEZIDIS COMMITTED BY TERROR ORGANISATION AL-QAIDA AUGUST 2007:

In the morning of 12th August 2007, two suicide trucks entered the Yezidi towns Gir Izer and Siba Sheikh Khidire and exploded in the town markets. They killed around 350 civilians and injured 850 others.⁵⁵ It was the biggest terror attack committed by Islamic groups in Iraq since the fall of the Saddam Regime. The Yezidi Prince Tahseen Said beg, explained to the Guardian: “the Islamic terrorists had made it very clear that they wanted to see rivers of Yezidi blood”⁵⁶. However, the violence against the Yezidis began silently after this attack, during the 2004 civil war. The increase of terror attacks in Iraq until the Islamic violence became a phenomenon, by killing Yezidi workers, students, and passengers in different cities of Iraq or on the highways. In February 2007, large Muslim mobs attacked the home of the Yezidi prince and burned the Yezidi cultural centres in Shaikhan without justification. In April 2007, a group of Islamic terrorists stopped a bus of Yezidi workers in Mosul and executed 24 women and men brutally in the daylight.⁵⁷ In response, thousands of Yezidi students at the University of Mosul escaped from their classes, and thousands of workers in different regions left their places of employment. The Yezidis have been isolated in their villages.⁵⁸ The relationship between the Yezidis and their Arab neighbours was interrupted, and the trust between them and their neighbours was broken. The Yezidis in Sinjar became more dependent on Kurdish influence unlike their Arab neighbours who refused to collaborate with the new Iraqi authorities and had dreams of another comeback of Baath or Saddam regime, therefore the voice of resistance against the new government was very strong inside Arab Sunna community that has changed later to brutality. As a measure to protect the Yezidi civilians, Peshmarga banned all Arab people from visiting Sinjar and many Yezidi villages unless they

53 Saad Sallom, *Ezidis in Iraq, Memory, Beliefs and Current Genocide*, Un Ponte Per, 1st Edition, 2016, p. 96

54 Ibid

55 Michael Howard, “They will not stop until we are all wiped out.’ Among the Yezidi, a people in mourning”, the Guardian: 18.08.2007: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/18/iraq.topstories3>, (downloaded 04.03.2019)

56 Ibid

57 Sebastian Maisel, “Social Change Amidst Terror and Discrimination: Yezidis in the New Iraq”, The Middle East Institute Policy Brief, No. 18, August 2008,

58 Ibid

had a Yezidi escort. The gap between the components of the region grew and became more dangerous. The majority of the Sunni population in Nineveh Province were opposed to this Kurdish influence because they were more religious, which was another factor led them to hate the Kurdish liberal parties, and the Yezidis who welcomed the Kurdish collaboration with the US and allied forces. A new era of hatred against the Yezidis became a reality. They were seen as traitors from one side and infidels, in the view of the Islamic fundamentalists, from the other. This dynamic has deepened the sensitivity and conflict threshold between the Arabs and the Yezidis that had negatively impacted the solidarity, peaceful coexistence, neighbourhood ethics and “Kriv- Relationships”⁵⁹.

THE INVASION OF THE ISLAMIC STATE: RELIGIOUS AND GEOPOLITICAL MOTIVATIONS AGAINST YEZIDI:

The Islamic State had two different reasons, a religious and a geopolitical motivation, to commit Genocide against Yezidi. The religious motivation was based on a radical version of Islam that demands realisation of “**Sharia’s Rulings about the Infidel inside the Islamic Caliphate Territories**”.

ISIS prepared the attacks against Yezidi in Sinjar on the 2nd and 3rd August 2014 very professionally, not only in terms of military strategy but also with regard to religious, social and cultural contexts. The press office of the so-called (Nineveh Wilayat) published on the 3rd of August 2014 a special declaration about the “conquest of Sinjar and the neighbourhoods of Rabia and Wana”.⁶⁰

The occupation of Sinjar was officially and proudly declared as “a continuation of the blessed conquests that began days ago” where, “the soldiers of the Islamic State opened [occupied] the district (Sinjar)”.⁶¹

The invasion was based on the Islamic religious “Takfir” justification that ISIS had used in order to convince regular Muslims in the region to collaborate with this plan. ISIS wanted also to draw the attention of the world, especially those radical ISIS followers and the believers in these victories. The terror organiza-

59 The Yezidis have an interesting tradition during the ceremony of circumcision, in which they make a brother-like relationship with non-Yezidi people, which is known as a “Kriv” relationship. It is a spiritual binding relationship with the one that a Yezidi family named during the circumcision of their children. The Yezidi deal with this Kriv as a brother and as a member of their family. He is even ready to sacrifice in all Tribal conditions. Most of the Arabs in the neighborhood of Yezidis in Sinjar know the value of such a relationship, and it was respected by all parties until the ISIS attack. This relationship was broken because many of the Krivs also participated in the crimes. (Testimony of the Witness, Case of Idrees Bashar, a Survivor from Kocho massacre, personal Interview, ABI Documentation, Duhok, 2015).

60 ISIS Declaration: The conquest of Sinjar and the neighbourhoods of Rabia and Wana, in: Al-Sunna Forum in Iraq, Al-Khilafa Al-Rashida: a special homepage of radical Sunna groups (downloaded 08.03.2019): <http://www.sunnti.com/vb/showthread.php?t=21052>

61 Ibid

tion, therefore, prepared an exclusive article about the justification of slavery and published it in its official magazine (Dabiq)⁶².

ISIS used the name Dabiq from a town in the northern part of Syria. In fact, this place has no military or political importance. There is only a symbolic myth or prophecy in Islamic literature related to it, that “foretells of a cataclysmic battle at Dabiq between the Muslims and the Romans”⁶³ where the Muslims will defeat the Infidels and “revive” their “glory”.

The fourth Issue of the magazine published an exclusive article with the title “The Revival Of Slavery Before The Hour”.⁶⁴ This article is crucial to understanding the intent behind conquering the Yezidi homeland. The author starts with the explanation that the Islamic state is faced with a “pagan” group in Iraq and Syria. He expresses his wondering, how such infidel group could survive inside a Homeland of Islam, for which God might ask the Muslims on “Judgement Day”⁶⁵ for the reason for their inaction. The author justifies his questioning with a verse from the Quran (the verse of the sword): „{*And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the mushrikīn wherever you find them, and capture them, and besiege them, and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.*} [At-Tawbah: 5]”⁶⁶.

The author accuses the Yezidis of “worship Devil”. He reaffirms the approach of some Arab writers, who claimed that the idea of the Yezidi about the Angels, especially the Archangel, is similar to the idea of some Muslim Sufis like Imam Al-Ghazali and Ibn Al-Arabi (see the 1.1.) who stated that Iblis is a good Angel. The author continues to argue that the “Yezidi being Infidel” and that not only Muslim writers but also others have shared the same approach to Yezidis, because “[t]heir creed is so deviant from the truth that even cross-worshipping Christians for ages considered them devil worshippers and Satanists, as is recorded in accounts of Westerners and Orientalists who encountered them or studied them”⁶⁷.

Therefore, according to the author, the question faced by the Islamic State was how to deal with the Yezidi. There are two Islamic versions of how a person or group can become Infidel (Kafir). The first way is if the person or group has originally held an infidel faith “Mushrikeen”.⁶⁸ The other version is where the

62 Dabiq, 4th Issue, (11. October 2014), in Clarion project (downloaded 12.12.2018): <http://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf>

63 Peter Wignel et al, “A Mixed Methods Empirical Examination of Changes in Emphasis and Style in the Extremist Magazines Dabiq and Rumiya”, Perspectives of Terrorism, Vol. 11, Issue 2, April 2017, pp. 7-8.

64 Dabiq, 4th Issue, p 14-17.

65 Ibid

66 Ibid

67 Ibid

68 Mushrikeen: is an Arabic-Islamic term for people who are not “monotheistic” and belief in more than one God.

person or group was originally a Muslim person or group and is now apostatized “Murtadeen”⁶⁹.

This kind of distinction seems to be crucial for ISIS to implement the correct provisions (Islamic Rulings) to a group, both its members, and their families. Historically, according to the Islamic Sharia the punishment of Apostasy is the death penalty⁷⁰ without mercy or exception. While the rules of dealing with an original Infidel is to offer her/him the conversion to Islam first, if she/he refuses to accept Islam, then the death penalty is applied. Nevertheless, the consequence of this forced Islamization is, once converted, to take the converted people as slaves or “Malak Al-Yameen”,⁷¹ because their agreement to change their faith was “under the power of the swords”.⁷²

The so-called „Sharia Students“/ISIS Scholars concluded after “further research” that the Yezidi “existed since the pre-Islamic jahiliyyah, but became “Islamized” by the surrounding Muslim population, language, and culture, although they never accepted Islam nor claimed to have adopted it. The apparent origin of the religion is found in the Magianism of ancient Persia, but reinterpreted with elements of Sabianism, Judaism, and Christianity, and ultimately expressed in the heretical vocabulary of extreme Sufism”.⁷³

Applying the historical “Islamic rulings” toward the Infidels consequently followed this conclusion of the Sharia Students. These rules are unlike measures applied by the people of the Books, Christian and Jews, who have to pay taxes. But for the Yezidis “there was no room for jizyah [taxes] payment. Also, their women could be enslaved unlike female apostates”⁷⁴.

The author uses historical and religious argumentation from the core of the Islamic heritage, mostly the Salafist’s radical version:

1. Citation from Quran: „{*You are the best nation produced for mankind*} [Ali ‘Imrān: 110]“. With the interpretation from the Islamic Commentator Al-Bukhari: “*You are the best people for people. You bring them with chains around*

69 Murtadeen: is an Arabic-Islamic term for Muslim people, who are born as Muslims and are retreated from Islam (Apostates).

70 Peters, Rodolph & De Vries, Gerd J. J.: Apostasy in Islam, Die Welt des Islams, New Series, Vol. 17, Issue 1/4 (1976 - 1977), pp. 1-25

71 Malak Al-Yameen: is an Islamic religious term from the Quran that refers to slaves, especially women as sexual slaves, who have been enslaved during war (Quran, Al-Ahzab, 50) (Al-Nisaa, 3).

72 In an interview with Yezidi teenager Sadeeq JAZZAA, who was 15 years old and spent two years in the captivity of ISIS together with his mother, he said that he had asked the ISIS leader in Raqqa, the training camp, why he was separated from his mother. “Why you are dealing with our mothers as Slaves, unlike other Muslim women, although they had accepted Islam and are already practicing it?”. The ISIS teacher answered him: “Because their Islam came under the provision of the sword, and not voluntarily. Therefore they are concubines until their master give them their liberty”. (ABI-File, Case No. 1356/16)

73 Dabiq, 4th Edition, (2014), p 14-17

74 Ibid

*their necks, until they enter Islam*⁷⁵. The meaning of this verse is that God gives privilege to Muslims to enforce the other people to enter Islam, in chains, but at the same time this is their gate to the Paradise.

2. Using citations from Hadith⁷⁶ of Prophet Muhammad: like the famous Hadith that says “Allah marvels at a people who enter Jannah in chains”⁷⁷. Or another citation from Hadith that claims “one of the signs of the Hour” is that “the slave girl gives birth to her master”⁷⁸. The author refers the originality of those sayings to “al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurayrah and by Muslim on the authority of ‘Umar”⁷⁹.

More interesting is also the way of explaining in this article, namely, what Prophet Muhammad meant by this famous sentence: Whereas the father of the newborn from a slave girl is her master, therefore is the child also Master of his mother. Such interpretation was leaning on the prophecy of Muhammad, because slavery had stopped being a regular practice for a long time, but with reliance on this interpretation the Islamic State could revive slavery for the matter of strengthening Islamic religion.⁸⁰

3. Using Islamic mythology about the “Day of Resurrection”: Dabiq managed to establish a sufficient propaganda for awakening the Muslim’s subconscious mind about the so-called Islamic “era” or “glory”. The professional use of words from the history of Islam; like “greatest battle before the Hour”, “defeating crusader” or “conquering Rome”, and by combining the slavery of Yezidi women and girls with these terms to convince the readers about a positive future was an effective inspiration. Finally, concluding “it is interesting to note that slavery has been mentioned as one of the signs of the Hour as well as one of the causes behind al-Malhamah al-Kubra”⁸¹ [the greatest legend/battle].
4. The Author mentions proudly all verses, stories and Hadith related to slavery and uses them in a convincing narrative, combining the names of the most important figures in Islamic literature, like Abu Huraira, Muslim, Ben Hanbal, Al-Bukhari, Omar ben Khatab, Ibn Rajab, and Al Nawawi, to justify the forced Islamization of the Infidel Yezidis, and other related acts during the invasion.

75 Ibid

76 Hadith: “Record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, revered and received as a major source of religious law and moral guidance, second only to the authority of the Qu.”ān“. (Definition from Encyclopaedia Britannica)

77 Ibid; *Jannah: the Arabic meaning of Paradis

78 Dabiq, 4th Edition, p 14

79 Ibid

80 Ibid

81 Ibid

5. And the article also describes the measures that the Islamic State utilizes to deal with the Yezidi slaves by finding strong linkages to Islamic history. According to Dabiq “the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shari’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 to be divided as khums”^{82*}. Many Yezidi survivors confirmed that the ISIS fighter had practiced the same methods with same argumentations.⁸³

Finally, Dabiq reminds those Muslims who “doubt” or are “weak-minded” that “enslaving the families of the kuffār [Infidels] and taking their women as concubines is a firmly established aspect of the Shari’ah”. The Author warns the believers “that if one were to deny or mock, he would be denying or mocking the verses of the Qur’ān and the narrations of the Prophet (...) and thereby apostatizing from Islam”⁸⁴.

GEOPOLITICAL REASONS – SINJAR AS A DISPUTED AREA:

Religious motivation may be the most important factor to justify the attacks against Yezidi people, including massacre, slavery and displacement of civilian, but the invasion of the district Sinjar had geopolitical reasons as well. Sinjar was strategically essential for the Caliphate for the following reasons:

1. As a Disputed Area between KRG (Kurds) and Iraqi Central Government (Arabs): The background of racist mentality of the Iraqi ISIS leaders played particular role in defining the targets of an organization that become a “state” within a few weeks. It is no secret that many Baath Party members and former officers of the Saddam regime’s intelligence machinery penetrated the leadership positions within this terror organization, and some of them planned of its policies.⁸⁵ Accordingly the ethnic conflict between Arabs and Kurds was also of relevance.

Sinjar is one of the Disputed Areas between KRG and the Iraqi government according to Art. (58) of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), which

82 Ibid; *Khums: a Special Islamic financial term refers to „fifth” of the booty during the war, which has to be paid to the Beit Al-Mal (Treasury of the Islamic state).

83 ABI File, Eye witness Sadeeq JAZZAA, Case No. 1450/16

84 Ibid, p. 17

85 Sabah Kunci, *Relationships between Baath Party and ISIS* (Research manuscript, Hamburg, viewed by the author 02.03.2019)

has been transformed to the Art. (140) of the Permanent Iraqi Constitution (2005)⁸⁶.

It is well known that these disputed areas are not part of a peaceful governmental debate between both parties, but instead they are the battlefield of many players, including the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Syria and Iran. Therefore, neither the TAL nor the constitution of 2005 could facilitate a suitable practical solution for the dispute.⁸⁷

Sinjar, with the majority of Yezidi people, is essential for the KRG:

- On the one hand, the majority of electoral votes for Kurdish parties, particularly the KDP, inside the province of Nineveh are Yezidi votes. The Kurds usually have 12-14 seats in the Province Council and 6-8 seats in the Iraqi Parliament. Without Yezidis they would only earn 4-5 seats in the Provincial Council and 2-3 in the Parliament.⁸⁸
 - On the other hand, Sinjar is a strategic territory because it connects the KRG with the Kurdish regions in Syria. For the KRG policies, the Syrian Kurds are used as a political card for their policies with Turkey to compete with PKK and its affiliated groups inside Syria.
2. The District of Sinjar, especially the southern side of the mountain and Road No. 47, were strategically seen to connect (or separate) both Capitals of ISIS (Mosul and Raqqa) together (or from each other). Road 47 was the only road that can easily combine Mosul - the official capital - with Raqqa - the practical administrative capital - of the Caliphate. Otherwise, the fighters had to travel three times further through (the Al-Jazeera Desert) without infrastructure. In this case, ISIS travellers would also be out on the open field and easy targets for air strikes.

The question whether the “religious” motivation, or the “geopolitical” motivation or both were the backgrounds of committing genocide against Yezidis, is justified but it will not change the bitter fact that an innocent indigenous group from Middle East is nearby to be exterminated.

86 Voting results of Province Nineveh, Homepage of the High Commission of Implementing Art. 140, Council of Minister, Iraq: www.ihec.iq

87 MERI Policy Report: The Future of Kirkuk, A Roadmap for Resolving the Status of the Governorate, Erbil, 2015,

88 The High Independent Electoral Commission, Iraq: (Comparing the Votings results; Elections of 2010,2014, 2018 Iraqi Parliament, and the results for Province Council Nineveh, 2009, 2013): see www.ihec.iq