

LIFE DURING AND AFTER ISIS: YAZIDI WOMEN

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Men, women, and children fleeing with terror watching their homes being destroyed because the Islamic State considers them infidels. “Reports that Islamic militants have trapped up to 40,000 members of Iraq’s minority communities” (Jalabi,2014). Most of these people are a Kurdish religious minority call Yazidi. ISIS began being a menace to the Yazidi people in August of 2014 after the capital of Nineveh province, part of Sinjar fell to the Islamic State (Ottens, 2017). This minority was being targeted because of their religious elements. Yazidi community has been oppressed for many centuries and of course threatened to be exterminated. “The religion has taken elements from each, ranging from baptism (Christianity) to circumcision (Islam) to reverence of fire as a manifestation of God (derived from Zoroastrianism)” (Jalabi,2014). ISIS viewed them as devil worshippers. This led the members of the Yazidi minority to flee to Mount Sinjar which is in the Iraqi north-west region or else they would be slaughtered.

Women and children who were captured by the jihadist faced a heinous destiny. Meanwhile, men were either executed or forced to join the jihadist group. “ISIS guards brought lanterns inside and began inspecting the faces of the women and girls, the ISIS fighters were carrying out a pre-planned mass abduction for institutionalized rape” (Ottens, 2011). Women were now treated as

slaves and were forced to marry those who were in the terrorist group. The reason behind it is because for those women can be in control and what they are good for is to bear children. Once they have their kids, the children are then put to learn and obey the jihadist rules and become their soldiers. “estimated 6,383 Yazidis- mostly women and children- were enslaved and transported to ISIS prisons military training camps, and the homes of fighters across eastern Syria and western Iraq, who demanded that they convert” (Otten, 2011).

The females of the Yazidi group were pulled away from their family by force while they would scream and plead for their life but they would get brutally beaten if they did not listen to their commanders. Many of them committed suicide because of the fear of being physically and mentally tortured. “women and girls began to scratch and bloody themselves to make themselves unattractive to potential buyers” (Otten, 2011). There were many ways that the women and children were sold in markets such as electronically, mobile phone messaging or market halls and prisons (Otten, 2011) A woman name Khulka captured by the jihadist feared that her body would never be recognized if she was dead and her family was looking for her. She then had this idea of tattooing herself the names of her father and husband with the mixture of breast milk with ash and a needle (Otten, 2011).

With the same needle, she began to embroider in her underwear with the names and numbers to call in case ISIS found her phone. The Yazidi women were not to be underestimated because they were finding ways to survive and escape from the caliphate. Some of them were even lucky to escape with the help of some good-hearted people. Nour a survivor was sold seven times along with her children to ISIS militants and by the last time she was rescued. A man pretended to be part of the jihadist group, his goal was to rescue as many people and get them back home to their family (Graham, 2017)

Although many women and children could go back home to their loved ones it was very difficult for them to adjust back to society. Many of them were captured for months and even years.

Women were sex slaves while children especially the boys were being brainwashed. “Under Yazidi religious law, the women seized and raped by ISIS should be evicted from their faith and permanently ostracized from their communities” (Graham, 2017).

Yazidi women feared they were going to banish from their community because their life was tarnished. Although it was not their fault because they were forced to go what they went through they still had hope that at least their family could understand them. What the Yazidi women wanted is for someone to reverse their psychological injury, especially those who were in captivity for so long (Callimachi, 2017) “Khinder Domle is an academic writer began asking why their religious traditions gave extremist the very power they most craved: the ability to exclude believers from their faith and family” (Graham, 2017). This writer challenged the doctrine and their spiritual leader to not shun the women who escape, but to welcome them instead. This led to the Supreme spiritual leader, Baka Sheikh to draft the declaration and agreed that those who were enslaved are welcomed back into their faith because they did not choose to join the terror group (Graham, 2017).

The psychological and physical distress these women and children had after imprisonment were not easy to treat. It's only goal while captivity was to survive by any means necessary and avoid being sold into sex slaves. Most went to the extent of committing suicide before being abused, but many that were mothers decided to go through it and find their children to escape. Even after breaking free many families worry about their children because they have been indoctrinated since the jihadist group was able to persuade them about believing the ISIS faith. It is very important that the Yazidi people accept and guide the women who were in the slave markets to

readjust to their society and feel loved and accepted. “At the heart of Lalish is a pool of water sheltered by a small cave, its entrance shaded by mulberry trees and watched by a guardian in a red turban, this is the ‘holy white spring’, where newborns must be brought for baptism” (Graham, 2017). Here these women prayed and wash their bodies as a cleansing to be born again to their faith.

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