

Traumatised women – organised violence

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Introduction

The history of wars represents a grim history of violence against civilians, especially women and children. Violence against non-combatants, civilian people, seems to have increased in the last centuries and is now a factor that are beginning to recede from the headlines. We are getting used to it – it is what “follows” modern warfare, even if modern weapon industry claims to produce precision instruments that will only target the enemy combatant. The euphemism, “collateral damage” are often used as a kind of excuse.

But there is a fact that modern wars are targeting civilians in many ways that are outside the control of the “precision” of military leaders. The present situation in Syria speaks a very sad testimony to this: more than half a million people killed, mostly civilians (there is now so difficult to count bodies that these may only be estimates), 6 million internally displaced and 5 million who have fled. In large parts of the country there is lack of food, water, healthcare and other basic necessities. Millions of refugees are stuck in bad refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. The few who have managed to reach Europe with the help of expensive and brutal smugglers, are now mostly filling up bad refugee facilities in Greece, Italy and on the Balkans (Flyktningehjelpen, 2017; Turner, 2015; UNHCR, 2018) and especially women are at risk during flight (UNHCR, 2017).

Refugees are to a large degree not welcome in Europe where human rights and values were developed and became a pride for the Europeans. Xenophobia has been dramatically on the rise and all kind of misinformation on refugees are spread – and believed by majorities of the population in many EU countries (Fekete, 2009; Varvin, 2017). This notwithstanding that more than half of the refugee population are children and the number of women refugees are rising (UNHCR, 2018).

This is one of the most serious “collateral damages” resulting from present days wars.

Millions of families with children, single mothers, young women, are forced to flee from their

countries due to wars, violence and serious human rights violations – and they are treated badly by a system that has left them in the hands of organised crime (smuggler organisations). The situation is serious, which is a weak word in this connection. It represents a system that consists of direct violence against women and children in the war zones, in the prisons and concentration camps and during flight, followed by structural violence (Farmer, 2004; Galtung, 1969) that systematically undermines millions of women and children's' possibilities for a decent life.

We will in this article look at some aspects of the present situation of women in relation to wars and atrocities and also violence and atrocities against women in civil life.

This work is based on different researches by the authors on women in war zones, in captivity and afterwards and also on clinical experience with women who have experienced atrocities in different contexts. The main thesis of this work is that women, in accordance with ancient traditions, still is seen as legitimate target in order to hurt the enemy and that, even though the violence often is beyond imagination, there is a special kind of resilience related to womanhood and motherhood that is worthy of reflection.

Women and organised violence

Violence against women - particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence committed in peace and in situations of war and persecution - are violations of women's human rights and represents major public health problems. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence (WHO, 2013).

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."(UN, 1993).

Intimate partner violence refers to behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object." (UN, 1993).

A 2013 analysis conducted by WHO with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Medical Research Council, based on existing data from over 80 countries, found that worldwide, almost one third (30%) of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.

The prevalence estimates range from 23.2% in high-income countries and 24.6% in the Western Pacific region to 37% in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region, and 37.7% in the South-East Asia region. There is underreporting of sexual abuse in many contexts (WHO, 2013). China, for example, reports that the incidence of rape is one of the lowest in the world (2.1 per 100,000 people compared for example to 26.6 per 100,000 in the US) ranking as 81st in 130 countries surveyed based on police reports. As a contrast, a survey among men showed, however, that 22.7 percent of Chinese males said they had raped a woman (Ping, 2014).

Furthermore, globally as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners. In addition to intimate partner violence, globally 7% of women report having been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner, although data for this are more limited. Violence against women represents thus major violations of women's human rights in addition to result in severe health problems worldwide.

Violence can negatively affect women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. Factors associated with increased risk of perpetration of violence include low education, child maltreatment or exposure to violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality. Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may exacerbate existing violence, such as by intimate partners, and present additional forms of violence against women (WHO, 2013).

The consequences are severe. In addition to fatal outcomes like homicide or suicide, many are injured for life, there are unintended pregnancies, abortions, gynaecological problems, sexually transmitted infections (e.g. HIV). Intimate partner violence in pregnancy may cause miscarriage, stillbirth, pre-term delivery and low birth weight babies. The mental consequences may be severe: depression, post-traumatic stress and other anxiety disorders, sleep difficulties, eating disorders, and suicide attempts, headaches, back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility and poor overall health.

Women in war and conflict

From ancient times rape and other forms of sexual violence has been used to demasculinise the enemy and make him weak. This practice has also been implemented in recent times. In World war II there were horrific examples. What has been called the “Rape of Nanking” stands out in its gruesome reality and represent an example of the inhumanity of the Japanese soldiers’ behaviour during the occupation of China from 1936. Japanese soldiers did what has been described as systematic rape of Chinese women during the campaign when occupying south-eastern China. Thousands of women were raped and killed as documented in the book by Iris Chang (Chang, 1997). The massacre occurred over a period of six weeks starting on December 13, 1937, the day that the Japanese captured Nanking. The Imperial Japanese Army forces brutally murdered hundreds of thousands of people—including both soldiers and civilians. How many women were raped has been difficult to estimate and Japanese nationalists have even contested that this took place. A probable estimate is that between 20,000 and 80,000 women were sexually assaulted (History.com, 2009). The Japanese army organized sexual slavery other places where women from Korea and other countries were kidnapped and forced to “serve” for the army. What is remarkable is the extent to which these atrocities have been denied, even at high governmental level and apologies for the harm done, has been scarce.

In the late part of world war II mass rapes of German women by Russian soldiers were performed at a shocking degree. As the Soviet army entered Germany from the east into the more rural areas, sexual violations had a severely brutal character which was somewhat attenuated when they reached Berlin. But even here it was brutally performed by drunken

Russian soldiers almost totally out of control. The dehumanisation was excused in different ways (it was their right because the Russian people had suffered under the German invasion, maybe the German women liked it etc). It was in Germany, as in other places, for a long time an untold story and in Soviet Union mostly denied. Consequences appeared, however, in peoples' personal life and children had to take the burden of having severely traumatised mothers. In psychoanalytic treatments the reparation of these broken mother-child relationship could take long time (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2012)

In Berlin, estimates of rape victims from the city's two main hospitals ranged from 95,000 to 130,000. One doctor deduced that out of approximately 100,000 women raped in the city, some 10,000 died as a result, mostly from suicide. The death rate was thought to have been much higher among the 1.4 million estimated victims in the more rural regions of East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia. Altogether at least two million German women are thought to have been raped, and a substantial minority, if not a majority, appear to have suffered multiple rapes (Beevor, 2002).

The systematic rapes of Muslim women during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is well-known and has left scars that have been and is hard to heal. This was a gender-targeting violence as part of ethnic cleansing and genocide. The great majority of rapes were perpetrated by Bosnian Serb forces of the army of the Republika Srpska and Serb paramilitary units. It was an instrument of terror and the quasi-ideological claim was done that it should be a part of the rectification of the Ottoman domination of Balkan in that "Serbian blood" was installed in Bosnian women (Volkan, 1997). Estimates of the number of women raped during the war range between 12,000 and 50,000 (Crowe, 2013).

The Rwandan genocide was another tragic example of mass-violation of women in connection with the genocidal killings (Skjelsbaek, 2001) and in the Democratic Republic of Congo systematic rape and other violations of women has been prevalent (Banwell, 2015).

Torture

Torture is a violation of basic human rights and represents one of the cruellest acts done by man against man. Torture may be perpetrated in many settings but often it is done in the context of state organised violence. Torture is practiced in more than 100 countries today. Doctors and other health personal not seldom participate directly or indirectly in torture making the devastating effects on those subjected to it even worse.

The aim of torture is often more to destabilise the personality and harm safety and social bonding than to achieve information. Torture has serious effects on the mind, body and the community to which the tortured belongs. For those who survive, torture will have serious mental health effects depending of strength of personality and circumstances afterwards. Most serious are damages to inner relations to good objects, disturbance in affect regulation and control, cognitive deficiencies and also possible brain damage (Rosenbaum & Varvin, 2007; Steel et al., 2009).

Torture happens in what Lifton calls, "'atrocities-producing situation" —These are situations: "so structured, psychologically and militarily, that ordinary people can readily engage in atrocities". And concerning doctors' participation he states: "Even without directly participating in the abuse, doctors may have become socialized to an environment of torture and by virtue of their medical authority helped sustain it. In studying various forms of medical abuse, I have found that the participation of doctors can confer an aura of legitimacy and can even create an illusion of therapy and healing", (Lifton, 2004), page 415).

Torture is used against individuals and families. Here the words of a torture survivor:

"Sometimes [the children] were shocked seeing the violence in jail and still remember. Sometimes they feel depressed and they always remember and ask about it and sometimes they can't sleep.... All of my family members, including the children, have nervous problems since being in jail as a result of the lack of clothing, the fierce cold, nowhere to bathe, the shortage of food and the suffering."

Torture almost always imply sexual degradation and very often rape, both against women and men. These are aspects of torture seldom told by the victim due to the extreme shame implied.

A woman patient told the following story:

P. Yes, because there we have seen so much,
too much,
we had never expected that human beings
could do things like that.

P. Yes, it was in the middle of the night,
they had fetched one from the cell where I was
and they raped her. (..)

(Pause 10 seconds).

Yes, we were all in the same room,
and they came,

they could come 1, 2 or 3 men.

They were covered all over with black clothing
so, we could not see.

We could not see anything of those people,
they were all covered.

And in every cell, we were about 70 at the time.

And then they came,
placed themselves in the middle of the room,
turned around several times
pointing,

and then suddenly stop,
and the finger pointed at one of us

The other of us had almost lost the breath
while this man turned around,
now it will be me, by coincidence.

When one was pointed at,
we other could breathe again,
but we were desperate
for the person who had been selected.

Because we did not know.

Is it torture or execution?

And I remember my friends,
they were fetched at 4 o'clock in the night for execution
and we were not allowed to raise
and say our thanks and say goodbye

And it was like that,

This was maybe a typical example of how to say that one was raped: they raped the other women. Long time in therapy was needed for her to work through these experiences.

Lifton said torture happen in “atrocities producing situations”. These are situations where torture and sexual violations are somewhat normalized, often with some kind of justification – we deserve this, as the Russian soldiers explained – or more ideological as in the rape of Nanking: we are the superior race and can utilize women, rape and kill them as they are inferior.

We will now give some example from such an atrocity producing situation from a research by the second author of this paper among Yezidi women who survived captivity by the Islamic state ISIS or Daesh.

The genocide on the Yezidi people



The 3rd of August 2014, ISIS launched a campaign against the Yezidi community on the Ninawa plains of Northern Iraq. The structure of the attack bears the witness of being planned, ideology-based and organised through their bureaucratic system. ISIS magazine, Dabaq, stated in its 2014 October edition that the attack, killing and later abduction and enslavement of men, women and children were justified according to their stated law and morals, based on the Yezidis being thought to be “a pagan minority” (Dabiq, 2014). ISIS’s structured attempt to completely exterminate the Yezidi people has been defined as a genocide by the UN, the EU, the Council of Europe, the United States, France and Scotland. ISIS

aimed to not only eradicate the Yezidi people, but also their culture, religion, identity and mere existence.

All Yezidi cities and villages surrounding the Shingal mountain were attacked in a coordinated campaign in the early morning of August 3rd, 2014. The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces in charge of security in Shingal left the area without informing the civilians hours prior to ISIS' attack. In areas where Arabs, Kurds and Yezidis co-resided, some of the local Muslims, often close friends, who joined ISIS, participated in mass killings, rape and abduction of neighbours (UN, 2016; Yazda, 2016). The campaign affected every Yezidi living (approximately 400 000) in the Shingal area: Many fled, were killed, captured for enslavement or are missing to this day. It is estimated that 6-15000 women and children were captured during that day, while many men, older boys and elderly Yezidis are missing with still unknown destinies (Cetorelli et al., 2014).

As the road to the Kurdish territories became increasingly dangerous to pass, the Yezidis were left with the Shingal mountain plateau as the only escape. In the next hours, the mountain was quickly surrounded by ISIS and escape thus made impossible with no access for humanitarian aid. With the heat of the late summer days on the Ninewah Plains reaching into the 50 C with no shade, food and water, the situation soon became unbearable, leading to the death of many, particularly elderly and children (Yazda, 2017). The first humanitarian aid arrived the 7th of August and a coordinated rescue operation involving Yezidi volunteer defenders, the Syrian Kurdish Forces (YPG) and Kurdistan working party (PKK) along with an international coalition led by the United States managed to create a safe passage from Mount Sinjar to Syria, open until the 13th of August. The vast majority of the surviving Yezidis fled to the Kurdish Region of Iraq where basic humanitarian aid was given, and later refugee camps were set up in which 340 000 Yezidis are still residing as of September 2017.

On the day of August 3rd and the following days, ISIS separated the women, children and men into groups. The division of the population were coordinated and followed pre-set decisions by the ISIS, though some changes were made in locations and time. Accounts from survivors shows executions being conducted following a "verdict" as well as separation of women and children following a systematic approach according to age and gender.

Boys younger than puberty were considered to have malleable identities and taken for armed enslavement to be brainwashed to ISIS ideology. Men and boys from puberty who refused to convert to Islam, and in some cases those who converted under pressure as well as some elderly women were gathered and executed by shooting or having their throats cut. In the following days, the remaining captured Yezidis were taken to large buildings and schools where they again got separated and groups of elderly and men have been reported taken out before gun shots were heard. More than 70 mass grave sites are estimated still unexhumed (Yazda, 2017). The separation was the start of the continuing process of separation, forced slavery and open slave markets in the days, months and years to follow. Women were divided again in groups, where some were allowed to unite with their surviving husbands who had accepted to convert to Islam. Unmarried women and girls older than 9 years old were taken to Syria to be sold and distributed amongst the ISIS fighters as sex slaves (UN, 2016) involving both forced marriages and conversion to Islam. Girls younger than 9 years old were often allowed to stay with their mothers. After some time, ISIS' approach changed and married women without spouses were also sold as sexual slaves, often with their children accompanying them to the perpetrators. Children have often been victims of severe physical violence and torture as well as being forced to watch violence and rape directed towards their mothers or other siblings. Information given during interviews for this article have shown boys from approximately the age of 5 years taken to battle training camps, forced to renounce their ethnic belonging and religion, and being beaten, tortured and forced to attend armed training, which in some places included practising torturing and killing prisoners. Children of both genders talk about being forced to manual labour, often to work with constructing arms and improvised explosives. Most boys have been told during captivity to kill all Yezidi, including their own family. Young children were often allowed to stay with their mothers, yet still forced to work, witnessing torture and rape of their mothers as well as experiencing violence, torture and dehumanizing behaviour. Most children were given new Arabic names and banned from speaking their native Kurdish tongue. This leaving the mothers who were still living with their children unable to speak about their identity, homeland, family members, or oppose to what ISIS were teaching them.

Since the beginning of the genocide some Yezidis have managed to escape, while others have been sold to their families by smugglers or ISIS members. As of September 2017,

approximately 3048 people have escaped - 1092 women, 334 men, 819 girls and 803 boys (Directorate of Yazidi affairs) (Yazda, 2017). Upon returning from captivity women often find themselves forced to reside in refugee camps in the Iraqi Kurdish area. Many women have lost their core family, where their husbands, parents, brothers and sisters often are still missing. In camps, they receive some basic assistance, yet insufficient, not covering the basic need for food, shelter, medical and psychological support.

Moreover, the life situation upon return often entails a new range of challenges. The Yezidi society is a patriarchal society in which sexual relations outside of marriage are not accepted and where honour killings occur. Furthermore, the Yezidi society is exclusive, one cannot convert into Yezidism, nor marry into the community or faith. If a Yezidi convert or marry a non-Yezidi, the individual is no longer considered a member of the community. Women have not been accustomed to living alone but have lived with their close relatives or in-law families. The uprooting of the entire society with the additional large impact the genocide had on most families led to significant changes. Women were now living alone or with remote relatives and thus in some cases forced to take on manual labour upon returning from captivity. ISIS have been known to threaten the women in their captivity that they would not be accepted back in the Yezidi society if they return.

The Yezidis has thus been exposed to an attempt at total destruction of their culture, their society, their possibility to organise themselves and make living conditions for the people in addition to massive violations and killings. The situation for those who have survived, especially for those returning from captivity of ISIS, is serious and calls for profound re-organisation of their community, longstanding reparative efforts and also help and support from the outside. As mentioned, many live now in refugee camps under deplorable conditions and many are still in captivity by ISIS or missing.

We will not discuss the struggles of the Yezidi community to start the reparation. It is sufficient to say that huge efforts are being done by community, religious leaders to welcome and help to integrate those Yezidi women who have been in captivity and this, it seems, is followed up by the Yezidi community at large. Here we will bring some testimonies from Yezidi women who have been in captivity, mostly with their children, to illustrate how this “atrocious producing situation” led to the most horrendous violations of human rights of these women and children. We will also demonstrate the strength and resilience of the Yezidis to

support themselves and their children both in captivity and afterwards. Needless to say, a longstanding process is needed to repair at least some of the damages done to Yazidis in captivity.

The following are excerpts from a woman, A, who short time after release from ISIS. She came from a poor, but caring family near Shingal. She had been captured and enslaved for 3 years. She was released 3 months prior to the interview together with her son. We meet them in an unfinished house where the husband had been living with the extended family and some surviving children during the time the women were in captivity. We sit in a room separated from the rest of the family during the interview:

A said:

They abused us and beat us, they were separating, they were taking children from their mothers by force. We were afraid all the time, we couldn't sleep even one hour. We wished that we could sleep without frighten or scared. Because they were taking children from their mothers by force, and we were afraid they would do the same to my children when I was asleep. But they did not separate my children. They were with me all the time. Some of the children were one year old, or two-year-old, and they were taken from their mothers. But thanks God they did not take my children away from me.

A continues:

You know, sometimes I was telling myself – if you were like a rock or a stone, you would be broken by now because of so many times I have been beaten. I was beaten hard a lot. They were even using sticks and beating us with sticks. They were breaking sticks while beating us. Sometimes they were using plastic pipes, and cables and wires. They were beating me with military boots. Even they were using rocks – throwing rocks at me.

They were also beating my son. Every day they were hitting his head towards a wall, they were hitting his head towards the wall. They were breaking his head. Sometimes they were beating him until he was bleeding from his mouth and nose. They broke his both legs and his both arms. They did not leave any parts of his body that they did not break, break it down. (showing the marks on the boy's arms, legs, head, stomach). I was always saying the God will one day be there for us, protect us from them. He would rescue us from them. I said, I was thinking about what happened to a Prophet, Joseph when he was sick. The insects – animals

were eating him. Eventually the Gods healed him. So, I was saying, one day he will come for us and we will get out of here.

It was possible to escape – but:

In the beginning when I was first captured, I was thinking about escaping. I could escape maybe, but I had my four children with me and they were small. I could not leave my children. I said “what is going to happen to them if I leave them?” I could not take them with me. That is why I decided not to.

The hardship continued, and became worse:

Yes, we were very scared. We were worried and not able to eat, and we were not able to see. We were always scared and trying to figure out what would happen next. It was very difficult, our situation was very difficult. We were women in that situation. Our husbands and our men, were killed by them. That was very difficult. We were saying “We wished we were also killed with our men and not brought here after the men were killed. But we had no choice. They were forcing women to go with them. The women were raped and were forcedly raped by them and were tortured and beaten by them. So, it was very difficult for the women. To be in that situation.

A asked the ISIS people:

Every time I were asking them why they are beating my son, he is not guilty, why are you beating him?” they would say “Yezidis are infidels, kufars, ”. His father is a Yezidi.

Because they know that whenever they beat my son and torture him, they know I am going to feel bad, and my heart will be broken. That is why they were torturing my son in front of my eyes. They were hitting his head to the wall. They would beat him and torture him until he starts bleeding from his nose and his mouth. That is how they were torturing me, and they were beating my son in front of me, in order to hurt me and to make me feel bad.

He was even, it was much harder for me to see them beat my son and torture him. I wish they would beat me and torture me, hurt me instead of him.

They were not only torturing my son. There were torturing other. I had another friend, she was from (name of place), she had three children and all of them were killed. They were poisoned. They were killed by them. It was really difficult

Another woman survivor, B, said about some children in captivity:

..they were orphans with no mother. You know kids, when they have no mother and no one takes care of them they get dirty and they get hungry. They were beaten everyday by others

A's husband was not killed. He told how he waited for her ignoring others who said she surely had been killed:

I said "she is still alive and I will see her again". My heart was always telling me that she is alive, she is not dead and I will see her again. I had faith in God, my God, that I will see her again alive.

And he continues:

Yes, it seems to me like nothing happened to her. She looks like a non- broken egg right now in front of me. She is like an egg that is not broken, as nothing happened. That is how I look at her. And now I am giving more care to her. I care more to her, even more about her than before.

This way of receiving their wives after captivity was quite common among the Yezidis.

A commented:

Yes, I know, and I feel that he was waiting for me. We loved each other a lot before. That is why I knew he was waiting for me. I was always waiting for the moment that I would come back home and see him again. --- so I put this tattoo, his name on my hand, in order to keep him in my heart. Because I loved him so much and I was missing him.

A's husband made this touching statement:

I do not want her to think that she was raped by ISIS or anything of that. I do not want her to think that way. She should not think that way and feel anything like that. I will never let her down and I will never let her feel that she is broken. I will always make sure that I give her encourage, and that I encourage her to be strong. I will do my best to do so.

Their situation is hard. A's husband said:

But it is still very hard. They killed my brothers and my father. They killed his brothers and his father and cousin and uncles, seven cousins, people, a lot of people.

There were about 100 people killed, they were mostly our relatives and cousins. But thanks God my mother and children are here

ISIS seems now largely to have been deprived of their territory and there is a claim of victory over ISIS by Iraqi and allied forces. ISIS is, however, still active in the region and represents a threat to Yezidis living there. This is especially highlighted with the complex situation when ISIS women return with children born as result of rapes by their ISIS capturers. Traditionally, children born with fathers outside the Yezidi society will not be recognised as Yezidi. The main problem for the Yezidi society is now how to deal with Yezidi mothers with their children born of ISIS fathers. An intense work is ongoing in the Yezidi society involving religious leaders, the community and especially the families involved. Acceptance and integration of these children in the Yezidi society involves for many Yezidis the fear of retaliation from ISIS as the children may be recognised as true Muslims in the ISIS' version. In addition, complex work has to be done on religious and cultural levels on how to deal with this situation, which may involve changes in a traditional patriarchal structure of the society (Ibrahim, 2019).

De-humanisation and rehumanisation

The above testimonies give some insight into the cruelties these women experienced at the hands of ISIS. It is no doubt that this was genocide and ethnic cleansing. Women who had been captured in houses experienced that the elders were put in a separate part, then led out and afterwards they heard many shots. When asking their ISI perpetrators, the reply was: “we were only shooting dogs”.

We want to underline the extreme dehumanising conditions in this “atrocities producing situation” and how this was ideologically justified by the ISIS version of Islam. The use of women as sex-slaves, selling and buying of what they called “wives”, bears resemblance to other situations described above: the Japanese exploitation, rape and killing of women in Nanking, the mass raping by Russian soldiers of German women and so forth. What stands out with ISIS is the solid religious ideology that dominated where, for reasons that have a long history in the Middle-east and which certainly needs further inquiry, Yezidis were chosen as the appropriate target for a savage machinery of violence where members of ISIS willingly and consciously took part. They were not actually obeying orders, as was the excuse by many

German Nazis, they were convinced that this was the right thing to do. In their view, there existed a lower kind of human beings that could be disposed of. These matters touches on deep and problematic issues related to mass psychology, which is not the focus in this article (see (Akhtar, 2003; Varvin, 1995, 2017; Volkan, 1997)).

We think, however, that this extreme example of dehumanisation of women, together with the examples described above, is not only related to war conditions but connects with the general situation of women. We think here of the shocking reports of the frequency of rape, domestic violence, partner violence and partner murder described in the beginning of this article.

What we also want to focus here is the way these women describe their struggle to survive and the degree of resilience they showed. We cannot bring a full analysis of all the interviews conducted in this research here. We think, however, that the citations we have brought are representative for some aspects of the Yezidi survivors way of coping with atrocity. We call this rehumanisation – a process that is highly dependent on the context for the survivor, as we can see in the interviews cited above.

Resilience concerns the enigma of survival. Survival means not only physical survival but implies keeping something intact. Maybe one's morality, that is, keeping one's mind's integrity, while others lose their moral anchorage, a belief in something positive in oneself, and potentially also in others (Hinschelwood, 2007; Varvin, 2010). Our impression is that those who have had a resilient development has had a belief that it must be something there that is worth experiencing, after all, and also some kind of courage to go on and find out. Resilience concerns therefore positive emotions and capacities. It implies not, however, an idealistic view on human nature and certainly not on one's own nature. Resilience is about emotions like courage, love, humour but also about capacities to deal with, work through and overcome difficult emotions like hate, wish for revenge, depression and wish to destroy. Resilience, from the perspective of emotions, is maybe more about capacities to deal with negative emotions and about strength to implement and be an agent on one's life (Betancourt et al., 2015; Tummala-Narra, 2007; Ungar, 2012; Weine et al., 2014). In the end, hope is decisive – and also fatal when it is lost. Primo Levi, the Italian Jew who survived Auschwitz, who gave us the most human stories of how to survive (Levi, 1987a, 1987b) and who later took his life, give an example of the importance of hope – and the dread when it is lost. Judging his act of suicide is of course presumptuous. We live as long as we live – in the end

there is not enough to withstand, and then it is time. It can be an act of will and it can be an “act” of the complex processes at the interphase between body and mind when for example the heart just stops beating. We know of the higher morbidity and mortality of those who survived the concentration camps (Eitinger, 1973). From populations under siege or terror (for example constant air attacks) we hear of alarming increase in heart attacks and sudden deaths.

Beneath or beyond resilience, a silent depletion may set in, where resources are diminished and mental and biological processes are slowed down.

How to survive? Well, among others, Henri Parens, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, tells us, you need to overcome distaste with certain “foods”, clothes and the bedding: “Just as I self-protectedly then did not allow myself to feel intolerant of my sack-cloth and wool bedding, so too, I swallowed turnip and rutabaga without puking” (Parens, 2008). For the children/youngsters, playing was not so much a conscious strategy for survival, but something self-evident, something that just had to happen. Life goes on in that age, as we can see in refugee camps all over the world, even under the most appalling conditions and as was seen with all the children under captivity by ISIS. What was most appalling here was the recruitment of children above the age of 8-9 to be combatants and the accompanying indoctrination.

Being resilient is in a way about tolerating the condition one is put in, even when it is most depriving and disgusting, but above all to have hope. What seem to characterise the way the Yezidi society now cope with the atrocities of its members seem to be an exemplary justification of what we know about resilience. As Hauser and co-workers write:

“.. resilience does not lie in either the competence or relationship; it lies in the development of competence or relationship where they did not exist before” (Hauser, 2006) p. 261).

The Yezidi society is deeply religious and being Yezidi means being in faith and believing in their God and his angels. Both survivors cited above underlined in their narratives how the faith in God helped them. God has created everything, all mankind, even ISIS. But there was also the belief that there were someone waiting for them. The husband of A was a typical example of how many women was received after captivity. The religious leaders have had an all-important role in this process. The husband said that he did not want his wife to believe that she had been raped by ISIS. This statement, we think, reflects how the

religious leaders have managed to re-interpret religion in a way that can help the traumatised women integrate.

But problems are of course not over by this. There is a long struggle to deal with the massive traumatisation of this society and its members. It is of importance to study how this develops. In many post-traumatic societies one can see how, sooner or later, the memories or traces from overwhelming experiences will emerge. People may get different illnesses related to atrocities undergone like heart disease, skin disease, cancer and so forth and psychical consequences can have a long delay. Second generation may suffer due to impaired parenting and lack of societal support.

The body remembers and what is remembered deals with feelings that often, or most of the time, are intolerable and unexpressed or not symbolised. Resilience concern in such contexts more the ability to see possible meaning in the future, or for next generations, than with creating meaning out of what really was horrifying and meaningless. For the survivor it concerns the possibility of seeing a potential meaning of his/her life in the eyes or mind of another, a possibility for a kind of new start in another's mind. In this way, what we see now in the Yezidi society, is most promising even though they are now facing the seemingly impossible question on how to deal with the "ISIS children".

What are the backgrounds for the pervasive male violent perpetrations against women and are there possibilities for prevention?

We can in this concluding chapter only touch on some issues related to background or causes and prevention. It is obvious that several societal and religious ideologies preserve a vision of male entitlement. Longstanding claims of the superiority of males are woven into practical and material circumstances. In large parts of the Chinese population there are still the belief that a male child is to be preferred, which can result in radiant devaluation of girls, adoption and even maltreatment. In China rural society this connects with the tradition that the women, in marriage, "go" the husbands family and thus become additional member there, often with a more or less servant status. The family with the girl loses thus a child while the family with the boy gains one. Even under circumstances where the material and societal conditions no longer exist such arrangements, girls may still be devalued – which can have negative consequences in their development and identity consolidation. The rapid

urbanisation in China promises change in these affairs (Eklund, 2018), that nevertheless prevail as seen in many clinical cases that the first author of this article has experienced.

In many contexts family honour demand that women behave in certain ways, wear specific clothing, do not have relations with men before marriage, do not have relations with men from certain groups etc. Severe sanctions may befall women in such, often religious dominated groups and societies, where women may be outcasted and in the worst case “honour killings” by family members occur (Wikan, 2003). The unequal position women relative to men in such contexts may lead to the normative use of violence to resolve conflict and this is strongly associated with both intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence (Chodorow, 2003).

There is an obvious need for change in ideology, religiously and politically based attitudes towards women and there is strong need to legal and societal measures to obtain changes. In many societies there are weak legal sanctions against the use of violence in relationships, which contributes to a preservation and the normalization of violence. The more violent contexts for brutality against women have often a religious justification. One of the more horrific examples is ISIS’ atrocities against Yezidi women.

The different violent contexts described in this article demands further research on the backgrounds for “targeting” women. What seem obvious, however, is how long-standing ideologically and religiously based claims of dominance of men over women can emerge under societal conditions of pressure and scarcity. It seems similar to situations of ethnic conflict. Analyses of such situations, done among others by Vamik Volkan, demonstrates how historical and religiously/ideologically based conviction can give a quasi-explanation for present discontent and reason for action in a situation of social upheaval (Bohleber, 2010; Varvin, 2003; Volkan, 1997; Volkan, 2003). The claim here is that present situations of social unrest, wars, persecution and so forth, may produce conditions where archaic images of male dominance and entitlement may emerge – and – if these are justified by some religious-political ideology atrocities may follow. In the same way as ethnic groups may be targeted, women (and girls) may be the chosen objects of repression and aggression.

The fight in order to prevent this to happen is difficult, complex but need anyway to happen on many fronts. We will mention some:

In low-income settings, strategies to increase women's economic and social empowerment, such as microfinance combined with gender equality training and community-based initiatives that address gender inequality and relationship skills, have shown some effectiveness in reducing intimate partner violence. Family programs and the support of women's liberation, especially in its more basic sense: the rights to act independently, is of immense importance. Targeted interventions for vulnerable groups of women in societies, as the so-called low-caste women in India and generally the raising of social consciousness on women's and children's rights: human rights work. School-based programs may be effective in preventing relationship violence (or dating violence) among young people and in some contexts, also the abuse by teachers and others in authority position.

In situations where large groups have been traumatized there has historically been an astonishing lack of acknowledgment and support by political and others leaders. We have given examples of this in this article, for example the denial of Japanese authorities of the atrocities against women during the war, the silence in Germany and denial in Russia after the war. Presently refugees in the European context is primarily not seen as a group who has suffered more than can be imagined and who have been traumatized to an extent that is far greater than in the normal population in Europe (Bogic et al., 2015; Carlsson JM, 2005; Drozdek et al., 2013; Opaas & Varvin, 2015; Priebe et al., 2010; Stompe et al., 2010). On the contrary, the present political and ideological condition argues that refugees may be threat to society, that they may change our values and deplete our resources. This lack of acknowledgement and silencing of their predicament lead to a systematic depletion of resources for the group where their living conditions deteriorate and any healing of wounds become more difficult. For those refugees who have been severely traumatized the conditions is, as for any other traumatized person, that silencing from the "outside leads to silencing from the inside". That is, they become very alone with their suffering. This is of course a complicated psychological and social dynamics, but it can also be quite simple. In a research by the first author on severely traumatized refugees in treatment, we found that the time between arrival and any organized treatment on average was around 11 years (Opaas & Varvin, 2015). We are now researching how children of these refugees has coped with the situation of having one or two severally traumatized parents' during formative years of their development (Johansen & Varvin, 2019).

Therapeutic work is needed by many but usually can only reach a small portion of those affected but it can be of utmost importance for individuals and their families. The insights gained from psychotherapeutic or psychoanalytic work with traumatized individuals and families can, however, be of importance for both understanding the dynamics between the traumatized and the actual relational and societal situation of those affected. The social recognition that followed the women liberation movement's focusing sexual violence and abuse, stands out as an example partly therapeutically based insights have led to a significant change where social silencing earlier prevailed (Morris, 2015).

Of overriding importance in any work with victims of violence is the support of resilient forces in the individual and the group. This aspect is inherent in psychoanalytic therapies and a precondition in the preventive projects mentioned above. Psychoanalysts and other health workers can, moreover, use the knowledge gained through clinical work and make significant contributions by taking part in public discourse on women's rights and on the protection of women and children. They can inform the public, politicians and administrators on the consequences of violence against women and they can take part in preventive programs for vulnerable groups, e.g. families with mental health problems, drug abuse where women and children as a rule are most vulnerable.

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