

Future Perspectives of the Yazidi Community after the Genocide: Trauma, Cultural Transformation, and Collective Survival

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Abstract

The Yazidi community, a monotheistic ethno-religious minority, experienced a profound rupture of its social and cultural continuity through the genocide perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State in 2014. This article provides an interdisciplinary analysis—drawing upon historical, social-psychological, religious-sociological, and trauma-therapeutic perspectives—of the conditions for collective survival in the diaspora. The study focuses on the transformation of religious norms, particularly the caste system and marriage regulations, as well as the role of cultural resilience, oral history, and psychosocial care. The findings underscore that a sustainable future for the Yazidi community depends on a critical engagement with traditional structures and the development of socially integrative practices.

Keywords

Yazidis, 2014 Genocide, Collective Trauma, Cultural Resilience, Religious Norms, Diaspora, Social Identity

1. Introduction

The genocide against the Yazidis in August 2014, perpetrated by the terrorist organization “Islamic State” (IS), represents a historic rupture in the long-standing history of this centuries-old religious minority. According to the United Nations, thousands of people were murdered, abducted, enslaved, or forced to flee (UN Human Rights Council, 2016). The aim of this genocide was not only physical extermination but also the total erasure of collective identity, religious practice, social structures, and historical continuity.

This systematic violence is part of a broader pattern of collective traumatization suffered by ethno-religious groups worldwide. Comparative analysis of other genocides not only deepens our understanding of the specific conditions of survival but also illuminates the societal, cultural, and political factors that can influence resilience and recovery (Staub, 2006; LaCapra, 2001).

The Holocaust is regarded as the paradigmatic genocide of the 20th century. Between 1941 and 1945, approximately six million European Jews were murdered by the National Socialists (Bauer, 2001; Dekel et al., 2013). Studies indicate that collective trauma was processed through the establishment of new Jewish communities in Israel and North America, and the creation of a transnational culture of remembrance (Assmann, 2013). Survivor initiatives such as the Shoah Foundation succeeded in documenting tens of thousands of testimonies that remain foundational for research and educational efforts (LaCapra, 2001).

A similarly profound collective trauma is found in the Armenian genocide between 1915 and 1917, during which over one million people were systematically killed or deported. The continued denial of these atrocities in Türkiye hinders collective healing to this day (Suny, 2015). Nevertheless, the Armenian diaspora succeeded in establishing new cultural centers—such as in Los Angeles or Marseille—which have preserved language, religion, and identity over generations, and which have used digital media to develop new forms of transnational memory culture.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide, in which approximately 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed within 100 days, also marked a massive collective trauma (Des Forges, 1999). In response, mechanisms for national reconciliation, such as the Gacaca courts, were introduced. These allowed for some form of acknowledgment of guilt and community-based processing, even though social tensions persist (Staub, 2006).

In the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar, reports from the UN and Human Rights Watch since 2017 have documented ethnic cleansing and genocide (Fortify Rights, 2018; UNHCR, 2020). Over 700,000 Rohingya fled to refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where international NGOs are working toward collective resilience through education, trauma treatment, and self-organization projects (UNHCR, 2020).

The violence in western Sudan (Darfur) since 2003 has led to mass rapes, displacements, and more than 300,000 deaths. International criminal prosecution by the International Criminal Court, including against Omar al-Bashir, has remained politically contentious and partially ineffective (de Waal, 2007). Studies show that despite the lack of reparations, local women's cooperatives, education programs, and memorial practices contribute significantly to self-empowerment (Totten, 2011).

Other smaller religious minorities in the Middle East, such as Assyrian Christians, Suryanis, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians, have also been subject to centuries of discrimination, displacement, and violence (Aboona, 2008; Gaunt, 2006;

UNHCR, 2007; Choksy, 2006). These groups have employed various survival strategies—from retreating to isolated regions, to building diaspora communities, to engaging in transnational political activism. In the case of the Mandaeans, for instance, the post-2003 Iraq War and targeted violence have drastically reduced the population in their homeland (UNHCR, 2007).

These cases illustrate that post-genocide survival cannot be ensured by physical safety alone. Rather, long-term strategies are needed to secure collective memory, promote cultural education, and achieve political recognition (LaCapra, 2001; Assmann, 2013; Staub, 2006). Only under such conditions can resilience be realized on social, religious, and individual levels.

This study draws upon a combination of empirical data, including over 20 original qualitative and quantitative studies, interviews with survivors, clinical case documentation, scholarly literature, years of field research, and clinical experience with Yazidi survivors in Germany and northern Iraq. Its aim is to provide an integrative understanding of the pathways toward survival and future viability for a community on the brink of annihilation. The work is conceived as an interdisciplinary contribution that weaves together cultural, psychological, religious-sociological, and political perspectives.

This article is structured as follows: Following a historical overview of the genocide, it analyzes the psychosocial consequences, the role of oral history, religious norms and the caste system, and social resilience and future prospects. The article concludes with policy recommendations and a summary of key findings.

2. Methods and Approach

This study is grounded in more than a decade of interdisciplinary fieldwork and clinical engagement with the Yazidi community in northern Iraq and within the diaspora, particularly in Germany. The author holds doctoral degrees in both Clinical Psychology and Middle Eastern/Arabic Studies, with a long-standing research focus on Yazidi society, culture, and trauma. His scholarly contributions include several monographs and edited volumes on Yazidi history, religious identity, and psychosocial rehabilitation after genocide. This dual academic and applied background informs the present analysis, allowing for a holistic integration of cultural-religious knowledge with psychological and trauma-theoretical frameworks.

The empirical foundation of the article comprises over 20 original qualitative and quantitative studies, including structured and semi-structured interviews with genocide survivors, psychotraumatological case documentation collected in therapeutic settings, and ethnographic fieldnotes based on participant observation in psychosocial intervention programs. These data were gathered in both clinical and community-based contexts between 2014 and 2024.

The literature selection and analytical framework follow a theory-driven and interdisciplinary methodology, drawing on key concepts from genocide studies, transgenerational trauma theory, religious sociology, and collective memory re-

search. The methodological orientation combines hermeneutic and reconstructive approaches to social reality with empirical validation through primary data and systematic comparison across post-genocide contexts.

3. Historical Persecution and the 2014 Genocide

The persecution of the Yazidis spans many centuries and is marked by systematic discrimination, religious intolerance, and repeated episodes of physical annihilation. As early as the Ottoman Empire, Yazidis were considered heretics and thus not granted the protection afforded to “dhimmi”—non-Muslim communities such as Christians and Jews—under Islamic law (Al-Jazri, 1966). The dhimmi status, rooted in Sharia law, provided conditional legal protection in exchange for political loyalty and a special tax (*jizya*) (Allison, 2016). Since Yazidis were not recognized as “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*), they were excluded from these protections, rendering them especially vulnerable to violent persecution and forced conversions (Al-Damalgi, 1949; Waardenburg, 1985; Nagel, 2001). Throughout history, they have repeatedly been subjected to coercive missionary campaigns, deportations, and executions. These episodes are not only historically documented but also deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Yazidi people. The term “74 Fermans” refers to the accumulated number of documented genocidal campaigns, and has become a core component of Yazidi cultural memory (Kreyenbroek, 2004).

The 2014 genocide marked an unprecedented escalation. The atrocities committed by the so-called Islamic State began in August 2014 with the assault on the Sinjar region in northern Iraq. To date, over 13 countries—including Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, and Armenia—have officially recognized the genocide, highlighting its global significance and moral urgency (European Parliament, 2016; Government of Canada, 2021; Kizilhan & Weigelt, 2025). The town of Kocho became a symbol of Yazidi suffering within days. Men were executed, while women and girls were abducted, enslaved, and in many cases held captive for years. The violence was explicitly aimed at annihilating Yazidi identity—a defining characteristic of genocidal violence (Human Rights Council, 2016).

The strategic use of sexual violence was not merely an act of humiliation but a calculated attempt to dismantle the social fabric of Yazidi society (Kizilhan, 2016). The systematic separation of children from their mothers, the forced recruitment of Yazidi boys, and the mass rape of women served as deliberate tools to destabilize identity and destroy social cohesion (Kizilhan, 2009).

The 2014 genocide represents a continuation of cumulative collective trauma, as described in transgenerational psychological models. Acts of violence such as forced conversion, exile, murder, and expropriation have sedimented within collective memory and significantly shape the psychosocial development of entire generations (Assmann, 2013; Kizilhan et al., 2020).

The religious-fundamentalist justification used by IS is not without precedent. As documented throughout the history of the Middle East, religious systems were

often intertwined with patriarchal power structures that sanctioned violence against non-believers (Waardenburg, 1985). Islam, in many historical contexts, functioned not only as a spiritual framework but also as a sociopolitical order. IS exploited this historically entrenched fundamentalism to religiously legitimize its ideology of domination (Nagel, 2001).

The instrumentalization of religious dogma as a tool of political violence is deeply rooted in the region's history. The symbolic authority of religion has repeatedly been used to maintain social order—but also to justify violence. The Yazidi case demonstrates with particular clarity how religious-cultural codes can become instruments of systematic dehumanization (Schirrmacher & Spuler-Stegemann, 2004).

These historical patterns of discrimination and persecution have forged a collective identity marked by deep mistrust, traumatic memory, and a constant struggle for recognition. The events of 2014 must therefore not be viewed in isolation, but rather as part of a broader historical and cultural continuum in which violence against the Yazidis has become structurally embedded.

The genocide also had geopolitical consequences: tens of thousands of Yazidis fled to Kurdish-controlled areas, to Türkiye, to Syria, or were accepted into humanitarian admission programs in Germany, especially vulnerable women and children. This resulting diaspora enabled the survival of many individuals, but also gave rise to new social, religious, and political realities. The genocide thus represents a pivotal moment after which the cultural and societal structure of the Yazidis underwent a fundamental transformation. The historical trauma not only continues to resonate—it also shapes present-day identity and conceptions of the future (Kizilhan & Wenzel, 2020).

The question of whether the Yazidis can survive as a collective is thus not merely a religious or spiritual matter, but equally a political, social, and psychological one. Securing the survival of Yazidi culture requires deep engagement with the roots of violence, its intergenerational continuity, and the means by which memory, resistance, and resilience can be sustainably integrated. The following analysis draws on both historical sources and contemporary studies to illuminate the long-term effects of genocide on collective identity and the capacity for survival (Kizilhan, 2018; Assmann, 2013).

Box: The Current Situation of the Yazidis in Their Regions of Origin

The present circumstances of the Yazidi population in their countries of origin are marked by insecurity, marginalization, and demographic decline. Despite the military defeat of ISIS, threats persist in Iraq, Syria, Türkiye, and the Caucasus. Yazidis continue to face religious discrimination, lack of protection, and displacement—resulting in the erosion of cultural identity and increased diasporic migration (Kizilhan et al., 2021).

Iraq

The majority of Yazidis reside in Iraq, yet many refugees have been unable to return home since 2014. They remain in camps lacking infrastructure, prospects of return, or safety—especially in the Sinjar region, which is controlled by rival

militias (Human Rights Council, 2016; Kizilhan, 2019).

Syria

The civil war has nearly uprooted the entire Yazidi community. Over 80% of the more than 150,000 Syrian Yazidis have fled. Religious sites have been destroyed, and protective structures have all but collapsed. Today, only about 20,000 to 30,000 Yazidis remain in Syria (Amnesty International, 2018; Kizilhan et al., 2021).

Türkiye

Once home to tens of thousands of Yazidis, fewer than 1000 Yazidis remain in Türkiye today. This is due to historical persecution, religious stigmatization, and cultural erasure—especially in the regions of Tur Abdin and Şırnak (Kizilhan, 2012; Çetin, 2016).

Caucasus

Small Yazidi communities still exist in Armenia and Georgia. However, economic marginalization and cultural isolation are driving many to emigrate to Europe or Russia, leading to the dissolution of traditional structures (Kreyenbroek, 2004; Kizilhan & Othman, 2012).

Conclusion

Yazidis in their regions of origin continue to live under structural threat: political instability, lack of protection, and cultural marginalization are fueling ongoing exodus and endangering the collective survival of this community (Kizilhan et al., 2021).

4. Collective Trauma and Psychosocial Consequences

The 2014 genocide inflicted not only physical destruction upon the Yazidi community but also engendered a collective trauma that remains deeply embedded in both individual consciousness and the community's social fabric. The systematic violence—including mass killings, abductions, enslavement, forced conversions, and sexual exploitation—has left psychological wounds that reach far beyond the immediate events. Survivors suffer not only from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but also from complex mental health conditions such as chronic depression, dissociative disorders, and profound anxiety (Kizilhan & Neumann, 2020).

The consequences are particularly severe for Yazidi women and girls who were subjected to IS's sexual violence. Many reported repeated rapes, forced marriages, and the systematic attempt to erase their identity as Yazidis. The effort to produce a “new generation” through rape has been described in scholarly literature as a biopolitical strategy of the Islamic State—intended not only to symbolically but also biologically annihilate Yazidi culture (Human Rights Council, 2016). The psychosocial consequences of such violence are long-lasting, affecting not only the individuals involved but also the social dynamics within the broader community.

Social reintegration of these women is often fraught with difficulty. Although certain religious leaders, such as Baba Sheikh Khurto Hajji Ismail—the highest religious authority—issued statements declaring that the women remain members

of the community, ethnographic data reveal ongoing patterns of social exclusion, blame, and stigmatization (Kizilhan, 2017). This frequently results in a form of double trauma: on one hand, survivors bear the marks of the violence they endured; on the other, they are perceived by their own community as “defiled,” and are thus subjected to social isolation.

Beyond individual psychological symptoms, the concept of collective trauma is of central importance. Collective traumatization occurs when an entire group is targeted by violence and either processes this experience together or fails to do so. For the Yazidis, this means that not only the direct survivors are affected, but also subsequent generations internalize the trauma through oral narratives, cultural practices, and inherited social dynamics. Transgenerational consequences are already visible. Children raised in refugee camps often exhibit emotional numbness, behavioral difficulties, and an inability to form trusting relationships (Kizilhan & Noll-Husson, 2017).

Another crucial challenge is the limited availability of therapeutic infrastructure. Psychological services in Iraq are severely underdeveloped, and culturally sensitive therapeutic models are largely lacking. Even in the diaspora, significant barriers remain: language obstacles, lack of knowledge about Western therapeutic methods, and deeply ingrained cultural mistrust of mental illness often prevent affected individuals from seeking help (Ibrahim et al., 2018). This context demands culturally specific approaches that merge trauma-informed therapeutic knowledge with cultural sensitivity. Initial efforts have already been made—for instance, transcultural trauma models that integrate individual narrative work with collective memory practices (Pagotto et al., 2015; Kizilhan, 2019).

The effects of collective trauma extend beyond mental health and touch upon the sociopolitical realm. The loss of homeland, of safety, and of social order has created deep uncertainty about the future. Many Yazidis perceive themselves as a defenseless minority—both in their countries of origin and in diaspora contexts. This perception manifests in intensified identity attachment, but also in withdrawal tendencies and political resignation. Over time, there is a risk of what may be termed “cultural paralysis” if active coping strategies are not implemented. Addressing this issue requires a collective trauma-processing framework that incorporates both religious and secular components and places community psychosocial health at its center (Assmann, 2013).

This raises critical questions about the structural prerequisites for healing: What forms of collective remembrance, which narratives, and which social practices allow a community to overcome the paralysis of trauma? What role do institutions, education, and cultural representation play in restoring psychological and social integrity? These are not merely theoretical inquiries—they directly concern the viability of Yazidi identity in the present and future.

5. Oral History and Cultural Memory

The cultural memory of the Yazidis has, for centuries, been primarily transmitted

through oral tradition. Since the community's religious and historical narratives were rarely codified in writing, narrative forms such as storytelling, hymns (*Qewls*), rituals, and familial remembrance practices play a central role in preserving Yazidi cultural identity (Kreyenbroek, 1995). This form of collective memory is based on a close interweaving of generational knowledge, religious context, and lived experience. Particularly for a society that has repeatedly endured traumatic persecution, oral history serves not only as a means of transmission but also as a mechanism of resilience.

The atrocities of 2014 have heightened the urgency of consciously preserving collective memory and transmitting it across generations. The trauma resulting from murder, displacement, and sexual violence has often disrupted traditional transmission pathways. Entire family lineages were annihilated, elderly storytellers were murdered or traumatized, and children were severed from their social environment and alienated from their language, religion, and familial structures over extended periods. These dynamics have created significant voids in cultural memory that now require deliberate reconstruction (Fuccaro, 2003).

Comparative oral history projects in other post-genocide contexts provide valuable insights into best practices. The Shoah Foundation collected tens of thousands of Holocaust survivor testimonies in video and textual formats, preserving intergenerational memory and supporting educational efforts (LaCapra, 2001). The Armenian diaspora developed digital archives to maintain cultural continuity across generations (Suny, 2015). In Rwanda, the community-based Gacaca courts provided a platform for survivor testimonies, enabling communal healing (Des Forges, 1999; Staub, 2006). Among the Rohingya, narrative documentation of violence and exile has also emerged through international NGOs and community initiatives (Fortify Rights, 2018; UNHCR, 2020). Such examples demonstrate that oral history not only preserves identity but can also serve as a tool of psychological resilience and justice-oriented remembrance.

Initiatives such as the "Yazidi Documentation Project" and digital archives that systematically collect survivor testimonies can also help not only preserve knowledge but also make it accessible to academic research. Crucially, these projects must be designed with cultural sensitivity and in a participatory fashion. Many survivors perceive Western interview formats as inappropriate when recounting deeply existential experiences. The integration of traditional narrative techniques, respectful listening, and anchoring within the religious-cultural context are essential prerequisites for authentic and effective remembrance work (Kizilhan & Noll-Husong, 2017).

Furthermore, oral history is closely linked to the function of healing in the Yazidi context. Sharing experiences of violence and suffering in a protected environment embedded in collective structures can contribute to psychological processing. In many traditional societies, collective remembrance serves a therapeutic role by situating individual suffering within a meaningful framework. Incorporating oral history into psychotherapeutic and social programs for survivors thus of-

fers a promising strategy for simultaneously strengthening cultural identity and mental health (Assmann, 2013).

However, questions regarding narrative authority also arise: Who is permitted to tell these stories? Which memories are prioritized, and which are marginalized? Like all collective memories, Yazidi history is inherently selective. The perspectives of women, children, non-elite individuals, or those who have left the community are often excluded. A future-oriented remembrance culture, therefore, requires an inclusive understanding of history—one that embraces plurality and integrates discontinuities rather than repressing them (Kizilhan & Wenzel, 2020).

In summary, oral history holds dual significance for the Yazidi community: it is both a bearer of cultural identity and religious continuity, and a powerful tool for processing violence, trauma, and exile. In the post-genocidal context, it forms a bridge between past and future, between tradition and transformation. Its preservation and development are therefore essential tasks for all those committed to the survival of Yazidi culture—whether within the community or through research, education, and policy.

6. The Role of Religious Norms and the Caste System

A defining feature of Yazidi identity is the strict code of religious norms, particularly regarding marriage laws, caste affiliation, and religious purity, which collectively structure the community's social order. The Yazidi caste system classifies believers into three primary categories: Sheikhs, Pirs, and Murids, with strict marriage regulations prohibiting unions across castes. Intercaste marriage—especially with non-Yazidis—is traditionally regarded as grounds for expulsion from the religious community (Kreyenbroek, 2004).

These norms served for centuries as stabilizing mechanisms for preserving collective identity by safeguarding religious autonomy and reinforcing communal cohesion. In light of repeated historical persecutions, threats of forced conversion, and social marginalization, such regulations functioned as protective barriers against assimilation. Yazidi religious law thus fulfilled not only spiritual but also political functions of self-assertion and demarcation (Omarkhali, 2017).

However, these structures are increasingly under strain. Migration to Western countries, exposure to pluralistic societal models, and the growing education and self-reflection of the younger generation have fostered inner conflict between traditional adherence and individual freedom. In particular, the prohibition against marrying non-Yazidis is being increasingly questioned in the diaspora. Many young Yazidis view such rules as infringements upon their right to self-determination, often resulting in intergenerational conflict or even complete estrangement from the religious community (Kizilhan & Wenzel, 2020).

These tensions were especially evident following the return of Yazidi women from IS captivity. In numerous cases, these women had borne children as a result of rape. While some religious authorities, including the community's highest leaders, issued public statements welcoming the women back into the community,

their children remained categorically excluded. This revealed the limits of reform willingness and highlighted the conflict between religious doctrine and humanitarian reality (Kizilhan, 2019).

Academic and internal community debates increasingly question whether the caste system and strict marriage rules are viable for the future. Some voices advocate for cautious reform—such as recognizing secular marriages or developing a theological discourse on inclusivity. Others warn of identity erosion, viewing any form of openness as a threat to the spiritual integrity of the community (Ceri, 2019).

In practice, the diaspora has already witnessed a departure from these traditional norms. Many young Yazidis are in relationships that violate religious rules, without necessarily severing ties with their heritage. This hybrid lifestyle suggests that religious belonging is increasingly interpreted as a form of cultural identity rather than a rigid doctrinal framework. A transitional space is thus emerging in which traditions must be renegotiated and, at times, reinterpreted to retain relevance and bonding power (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017).

The role of religious rules and the caste system thus exemplifies the broader challenges facing the Yazidi community today. The issue is not the abandonment of cultural order per se, but rather its critical reflection and adaptive development. Only if the community succeeds in mediating between preserving continuity and embracing constructive change can it safeguard its religious and cultural identity amid the realities of diaspora and globalization.

7. Social Resilience and Future Perspectives

Despite the profound trauma experienced by the Yazidi community as a result of the 2014 genocide and centuries of persecution, there is today compelling evidence of remarkable social resilience (Gerdau et al., 2017). Resilience is understood here not merely as an individual coping mechanism, but as the collective capacity of a social group to withstand existential threats, create new spaces for agency, and preserve or regenerate its cultural coherence (Sagi-Schwartz et al., 2013).

Among the Yazidis, this resilience is evident in the establishment of self-organized structures within the diaspora: cultural associations, women's support groups, youth initiatives, and religious institutions have been formed in numerous countries where Yazidi communities have settled—especially in Germany. These organizations provide not only practical support in everyday life but also significantly contribute to strengthening identity, self-efficacy, and collective orientation (Kizilhan, 2017).

Education represents another powerful marker of resilience. Many Yazidi youth are actively participating in educational opportunities, learning new languages, pursuing professional qualifications, and engaging in civil society. Education serves not only as a means of individual emancipation but also as a strategic key to societal inclusion. In this process, young Yazidis are developing a renewed self-

conception that links their origins to their future: they continue to identify with their cultural and religious heritage while asserting their rights, freedoms, and opportunities within host societies (Kizilhan & Wenzel, 2020).

At the same time, the number of Yazidi voices in the international public sphere is growing. Survivors, activists, and scholars are speaking out about the crimes of IS, denouncing human rights violations, and advocating for recognition and redress of the genocide. This advocacy not only raises global awareness but also reinforces internal community identity. The courage to articulate suffering and demand political accountability is a manifestation of collective re-subjectivation, consolidating the Yazidis' self-perception as an empowered community (Kizilhan & Neumann, 2020).

A forward-looking dynamic is also evident in intergenerational dialogue. Many elder Yazidis observe that their children and grandchildren are forging new paths without necessarily severing ties to their roots. On the contrary, in numerous families, a conscious engagement with heritage is taking place—not dogmatically, but exploratively. Younger generations are questioning the meaning of religious rules, the historical origins of the caste system, and alternative forms of spiritual practice. This dialogical approach fosters a reform space that is internally motivated rather than externally imposed (Braga et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, serious challenges remain. A return to the ancestral settlements in Iraq remains unsafe and largely unrealistic for many Yazidis. Political instability, inadequate infrastructure, ongoing discrimination, and the lack of accountability for perpetrators continue to impede meaningful prospects for return. At the same time, the diaspora poses the long-term risk of cultural dissolution unless viable structures for the transmission, negotiation, and reflection of Yazidi culture are created.

This is where the international community must play a role. Symbolic gestures are not enough—what is needed is concrete global solidarity that includes:

- Political recognition of the genocide under international law;
- Legal safeguards for return and reconstruction efforts in Iraq;
- Prosecution of perpetrators at national and international levels;
- Protection of religious minorities in crisis regions;
- Support for transnational networks and projects that promote visibility and research into Yazidi history, culture, and religion (UNAMI & OHCHR, 2016).

Long-term support for the diaspora is equally essential. Only when Yazidi migrants are granted rights, resources, and institutional recognition in host countries can they actively shape and pass on their culture. This implies that integration policy must go beyond fostering assimilation and instead embrace cultural diversity as a productive resource.

In the Yazidi context, reform does not entail the abandonment of religious identity, but rather its conscious evolution. The challenge lies in mediating between preserving heritage and adapting to new realities. Such a process can only succeed if it is driven from within and simultaneously supported from without—

through participatory processes, education, psychosocial care, and political responsibility.

In summary, the Yazidi community possesses a remarkable reservoir of social resilience. This resilience is not a static trait but a dynamic process of collective self-assertion—one that demands creativity, courage, and critical reflection. The prospects for the future will depend on the community's ability to integrate tradition with transformation: with full awareness of the past, a clear understanding of the present, and a commitment to building a pluralistic, just, and open future.

8. Need for Reform and Policy Recommendations

The preceding analyses clearly demonstrate that the survival of the Yazidi community following the genocide depends not only on remembrance and the processing of trauma but also—critically—on a willingness to undertake structural reforms and initiate new cultural negotiations. The need for action spans intra-community, political, and international dimensions.

A central area of reform concerns the religious norms and the caste system, which have historically upheld an exclusive social order in which marriages outside the community—particularly with members of other religions or castes—have been punished by exclusion from the religious community. In the post-genocidal reality, however—where many Yazidi women gave birth to children as a result of sexual violence—these rules have triggered a profound crisis of identity and integration. To restore social cohesion and address the needs of survivors, a more inclusive understanding of belonging is required—one that reconciles individual life realities with collective religious principles (Kizilhan, 2019).

This also calls for theological reflection that integrates spiritual values with contemporary ethical imperatives. This task should not fall solely to traditional religious authorities but also to a new generation of intellectuals, educators, and cultural leaders committed to renewing religious knowledge and adapting it to modern life worlds. This includes initiatives to train Yazidi theologians and spiritual counselors capable of preserving tradition while fostering reform (Omarkhali, 2017).

A second key area for action is the psychosocial support of traumatized survivors. While initial programs have been established in Germany, northern Iraq, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, many regions still lack sufficient resources, qualified personnel, and culturally sensitive approaches. Long-term stabilization requires the expansion of trauma clinics, counseling centers, and therapeutic institutions that operate not only in clinical terms but also through social, spiritual, and intercultural frameworks (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017).

In parallel, education must be recognized as a strategic cornerstone. Education does not only impart knowledge—it shapes values, agency, and social networks. For the Yazidi community, this means ensuring access to schools, language courses, scholarships, and intercultural pedagogical programs. In particular, women and girls need targeted support measures to overcome multiple layers of discrimina-

tion—as survivors, as members of a minority, and as women—and to become empowered agents of change (UNAMI & OHCHR, 2016).

Finally, the international community must help create structural conditions that support the survival and cultural integrity of the Yazidis. These include:

- Binding international legal recognition of the genocide;
- Guarantees for return rights and reconstruction assistance in Iraq;
- Prosecution of perpetrators at national and international levels;
- Protection of religious minorities in conflict zones;
- Support for transnational networks and projects to promote the visibility and study of Yazidi history, culture, and religion.

Sustained support is also needed in the diaspora. Only if Yazidi migrants are granted rights, resources, and institutional recognition in host societies can they actively shape and transmit their culture. Integration policy must therefore not only aim for assimilation, but rather value cultural diversity as a productive asset.

In the Yazidi context, reform does not mean relinquishing religious identity—it means advancing it with intention. The goal is to mediate between the protection of tradition and adaptation to new realities. Such a process can only succeed if it is internally driven while externally supported—through participatory engagement, educational outreach, psychosocial support, and political accountability.

In this way, it becomes clear: the future of the Yazidis lies in their capacity for transformation—and in the resolve to convert the suffering of the past into an ethical, social, and spiritual vision for the future.

9. Summary

Following the 2014 genocide, the Yazidi community faces an existential challenge: How can a religious-cultural minority that has historically endured systematic persecution and violence renew itself without losing its identity? This study has shown that the answer does not lie solely in a return to traditional norms, but rather in an active engagement with the past, the present, and the future.

The traumatic experiences of the genocide continue to reverberate—on the individual level as deep psychological wounds, and on the collective level as cultural trauma. At the same time, the Yazidis demonstrate substantial social resilience: new networks, cultural initiatives, educational projects, and religious reflections are emerging in the diaspora with the potential to transform the community from within.

A viable future path, however, requires the community to critically examine its social and religious norms. The caste system, the prohibition of interfaith marriages, and the exclusion of survivors of sexual violence are among the key structures that hinder an inclusive, dialogue-oriented future. What is needed instead is a new hermeneutic of belonging—one that interweaves spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions, and views internal diversity not as a threat but as a resource.

At the same time, psychosocial support for survivors must be improved and culturally adapted. Education, memory work, and political participation are fur-

ther crucial areas where sustainable developments must be initiated. Here too, the international community bears responsibility: protecting the rights of religious minorities requires more than symbolic recognition—it demands concrete action.

The survival of the Yazidis does not rest solely on whether they physically escaped genocide, but on whether they can assert their cultural existence within a new social and political context. The task ahead is to shape a shared future out of suffering—a future in which faith, history, cultural practice, and humanistic values are brought into harmony. The transformation of Yazidi society will not proceed without tensions and ruptures. Yet it remains possible—if it is shaped through dialogue, self-reflection, and solidarity.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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