

What a Yezidi Nobel Peace Prize winner can teach us about the atrocities taking place in Syria and Iraq

The Canadian government is turning a blind eye to atrocities committed by returning ISIS/ISIL fighters and instead are offering them a get out of jail free card.

by Geoffrey Clarfield



Yazidis observe the religious new year, Lalish, Iraq, April 19, 2016. *Andrea Diczenco/European Pressphoto Agency*

A Yezidi, Nadia Murad and a Congolese, Dennis Mukwege have been jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.”

Dennis is a doctor who deals with victims of rape and Nadia is an activist, and a victim of rape herself.

What do the Congo and Syria/Iraq have in common?

At first glance not much. But they are very similar when one digs deeper.

Let the Canadian government take note, that the worst sufferers of sexual violence in those distant parts of the world share something in common.

In Syria and Iraq, it is the ancient indigenous population of the Yezidi, who are marked for destruction by ISIL.

In the Congo, it is the indigenous Pygmies who have suffered most from the sexual violence by the hand of tribal militias.

The Pygmies were in central Africa some thousands of years before any of the other tribes that now jointly inhabit that area who migrated there from other parts of Africa.

The Yezidi and the Pygmies are native populations threatened for their ethnicity

Both groups, Yezidi and Pygmies are what we Canadians call "first nations."

Their land, with all its resources (oil, coltan and diamonds) along with their very lives are at risk from the conflicting ethnic groups around them who would like them to "disappear."

I have not had the privilege of meeting Dr. Mukwege. But I was lucky enough to have met Nadia Murad.

My encounter with her generated a profound sense that she was someone living in a continuous state of mourning.

Her experiences have aged her mentally beyond how old she actually is. Nadia has been a victim of sexual abuse, particular of the ISIL Jihadi brand, meaning she was subjected to sexual slavery.

I have worked with both Congolese and Yezidi refugees and would not measure the suffering of one to be greater or worse

than the other.

However, there is one major difference.

Canadian forces not doing enough to protect the Yezidi population

Canada is at war in Iraq and Syria, and our soldiers have done next to nothing to protect the Yezidis on the ground.

You can find out a little about it on the Canadian Forces website.

The goal of this war is the defeat of ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Canada has earmarked 371 million dollars for this war, called Operation Impact for the next two years.

We have boots on the ground in Iraq. And since we are at war does that not mean that we also have responsibilities for the innocent victims of this war.

These victims are the Yezidi.

The government of Canada tried to get out of participating in the war in Iraq after the last election, but one must assume that the political cost of deserting its NATO allies was a potential embarrassment for them, especially as the renegotiation of NAFTA was on the political horizon.

I am sure our soldiers have many heroic stories to tell, but no doubt they are not allowed to tell them, at least not yet. And so, it seems that Canada has not learnt the lessons of WWII, when the allies fought the Nazis but let them get on with the Holocaust until the last days of the war.

Perhaps this prize will inspire Nadia to remind us of this fact, and we can do better this time..

The case of "Jamila"-who was taken into captivity as a young

girl

I am on the phone with Jamila (not her real name). My friend and Yezidi colleague Mirza Ismail is translating her Arabic for me, although I understand some of the language.

Jamila has been in Canada for a few months now. She is in her mid-teens, maybe fifteen or sixteen. Only six months ago she was a slave of ISIL.

She asks us to open our computer and go to a digital map of Damascus in Syria. The suburb, or village she asks us to look at is called Hajar al Aswad, "blackstone" in English.

That is where she was held. It is still under ISIL control today. I shudder to think that with a little effort we could actually see the house where she was enslaved.

During an ISIL assault on her village in Iraq, she was separated from her immediate family. She was sold as a slave to an ISIL supporting Arabic speaking family in this suburb of Damascus. She was ten years old at the time.

She was treated cruelly by her captors and forced to do menial work. When she faltered, her owners threatened to sell her again.

She pretended to convert to Islam. She lived in fear and was too terrified to escape.

Suddenly, she was freed, ransomed for thousands of dollars, redeemed from her captors by surviving relatives (who often go into debt to do so) with the help of middlemen who specialize in this kind of work.

She has ended up in Canada because our government finally decided to bring a few hundred Yezidi survivors of ISIL to Canada last year, as government-sponsored refugees from our war in Iraq and Syria, where Canadian troops are fighting.

Jamila has many, many relatives who are missing and presumed dead and others, mostly female who are still living in captivity, that is as slaves, just like Nadia Murad was only a few short years ago.

I hesitated to question her further as we have not yet met face to face.

Similarities between the Holocaust and the Yezidi genocide

When Mirza and I give one of our many public lectures about the Yezidi genocide, I often point out how similar their experience of persecution by ISIL is to the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, especially in Eastern Europe.

This argument is supported by a new book called "The Terrorist Factory" by a French Roman Catholic priest and a Romanian Roma (gypsy) researcher and activist.

Father Patrick Desbois and Costel Nastasie are among the world's expert researchers on what has come to be called the "Holocaust by bullets."

That was the murder of more than one million eastern European Jews by special Nazi and collaborating units called "Einsatzgruppen".

The Einsatzgruppen and their local Eastern European collaborators would round up masses of Jews, have them dig their own graves, line them up, then shoot them, causing them to fall into those death pits.

For some years, Desbois and Nastasie have been interviewing non-Jewish witnesses, often in their nineties, so that these graves of mass murder can be preserved and commemorated, for if not, they will be turned into unmarked suburbs and parking lots.

Research now being done on the Yezidi genocide

They are doing similar work with the Yezidis of Iraq and Syria, but for the Yezidi, the war is not yet over.

And so, as they travel to the displacement camps and sit for hours in the desert heat with Yezidi survivors and their trusted translators, they get a lot more detail than Mirza and I recently got from Jamila on the phone.

Six similarities between ISIS and the Nazis

Their argument is simple, and it is that ISIL has been behaving like the Nazis and the SS. There are at least six parallels.

The first is that the Nazis and the SS, had an ideology where they thought they were a master race.

ISIL has a similar but religious (and not ethnic) ideology that supports their notion of innate superiority, based on their interpretation of Islam.

Their theologians and scholars have ruled that the indigenous monotheists of Iraq and Syria, the Yezidi, are marked for Holy War.

This means that when ISIL terrorists surround and overwhelm a Yezidi village, if the villagers do not instantly convert to Islam, they then kill off the men, take the young boys to Jihadi training camps, kill the elderly women, and proceed to rape and enslave the girls and younger women.

They have also carried out the same kinds of mass murder as did the Einsatzgruppen.

In order for this to be efficient, they must have local non-Yezidi Muslim neighbours colluding with them, as the graves are often prepared in advance of an attack on a specific Yezidi village.

Desbois and Nastasie point out that there is never genocide

without the active participation of neighbours, who cooperate with the incoming and conquering tyrants as did so many Christian Europeans with the Nazis against their Jewish neighbours.

The third point is that like the Nazis, ISIL is very good at and committed to documenting what they do.

They have a well thought out media strategy and stage manage the deaths of so many of their victims, such as when one Yezidi captive woman reported that her ISIL "husband," stage-managed the live burning of a captured Jordanian pilot.

The fourth point is that like the Nazis, ISIL has created a series of secret prisons where they brutally torture Yezidi captives and anyone else they think may have heretical beliefs, and then often have them summarily executed.

The fifth has to do with the medical profession.

Almost the entire German medical profession colluded with the Nazis.

Recent research has suggested that the Nazis were also great drug users and often gave them to their fighting troops.

ISIL gives drugs to its suicide bombers, particularly captive Yezidi children who they then threaten with death if they do not become terrorists and suicide bombers, and also ensure that their captive women are drugged, so they do not escape.

There is one chilling example in the book about a wealthy Saudi fighter who purchased a Yezidi slave woman.

She resisted his advances and so he had her taken to the hospital in Raqqa, Syria, sedated, tested for virginity and then he raped her.

He already had another wife back in Saudi Arabia.

Clearly, hundreds of Syrian and Iraqi medical personnel and hospitals under ISIL authority have had no problem drugging and giving virginity tests to Yezidi slaves.

Finally, ISIL is an international movement as was Nazism.

In the Caucasus, during WWII thousands of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis and in the Balkans, Bosnians and Albanians joined the Nazis, embraced their ideology and carried out atrocities.

Western nations are doing nothing to prosecute former ISIS fighters

The countries who have allowed their citizens to join ISIL include, Arab League nations like Iraq and Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. But most horrible of all is that Western countries including NATO members have let citizens leave and join ISIL. Among these are Germany, France, Norway, Belgium, Britain, Australia and Canada.



Canadian ISIS fighter John Maguire

All of these countries have robust secret services that seem to have been passive or asleep at the wheel, and now that ISIL has lost most of its territory, none of these terrorists are being sought out and prosecuted.

Even the allies during WWII, who sat back and let the Nazis murder six million Jews created the very symbolic post-war Nuremberg trials to convict top Nazis, of crimes against humanity.

The Canadian government has actually publicly announced that those Jihadi fighters who return here from the middle east will not be prosecuted.

Instead, they are getting “therapy.”

No effort is being made to protect the indigenous Yezidi

From my contacts in the Yezidi community in Canada and Iraq, I am sure that Canadian and coalition troops have made no effort to protect the Yezidi in their indigenous homeland in the Sinjar of Iraqi Kurdistan where ISIL fighters are now returning.

So far, one could argue that ISIL simply lives up to its ideology and that is what people do in this multicultural 21st century.

In our eyes, they may be evil, but they are consistent with their radical Jihadi values. Not so fast. For those young Yezidi women whose looks did not find favour in the eyes of their captors, ISIL created brothels to satisfy the carnal needs of its fighters.

Yezidi women were and probably still are drugged, kept in prison-like conditions, chained to their beds and violated, sometimes many times a night. This is pure hypocrisy and underlies the evil that permeates ISIL.

Desbois and Nastasie write:

If the men of ISIS are so proud of the rapes of Yezidi girls and women, why don't they commit them in front of the cameras? Decapitation and crucifixion ordered by an Islamic judge are awarded places of honor so why don't they show these young women locked up in basements tied to their beds in pain? Why don't they show off the black canvas bags filled with telephones, jewelry and money they load in their cars when they arrest Yezidis if those abuses are for the glory of the religious ideology they claim to uphold and defend?

The answer is simple. Much of ISIL ideology is a cover for pure evil.

As the authors explain:

In Isis territory, a man can be sentenced to death for smoking a cigarette, a woman for appearing in public with her head uncovered. But a killer clothed in Islamic purity doesn't fear getting his head cut off when he pays to see a prostitute or robs a house.

Jamila and the many other Yezidi women who have survived ISIL have experienced all this and more.

Most of them, for the moment, are too traumatized to give us the details of their individual stories as they trickle into Canada.

Returning ISIS soldiers and the Yezidi Holocaust needs to become an election issue

If you read "The Terrorist Factory", you will get an in-depth view of what drives ISIL and what they have done.

It will take many years until Jamila may be able to read such literature. Or, it may never happen.

Those who have read their modern history must conclude that the Holocaust by bullets was a technical success and has now been imitated in Iraq and Syria.

Some of the perpetrators and facilitators of this latest Holocaust by bullets, carried out by ISIL, now live among us. What a moral catastrophe!

Should this become an election issue in the upcoming year?

Yes.

But do not hold your breath.

The three leaders of our political parties seem to be on a holiday from history.

Let us hope that the prize given to Nadia Murad will force our leaders to come to grips with history, rather than blindly repeat it.

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