



a mile in



their shoes

To all victims of Daesh
especially the women who have shared their
stories with us and who are still held captive

An Installation by Siemon Scamell Katz and Falah Shakarm

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Brian Brivati, Jenny Munro and Siemon Scamell Katz (editors), A Mile in Their Shoes, The Knitting Circle, Edinburgh, 2015.

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Beyond Borders
Scotland



| | |
|----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Preface |
| 4 | Towards becoming a survivor |
| 8 | Installation |
| 22 | Genocide in Our Midst |
| 30 | Stories & Poems |

a mile in their shoes: exhibition for yazidi victims of daesh

One of the aims of *Beyond Borders Scotland* is to create platforms for people affected by conflict and who are engaged in international dialogue to meet and share experiences, knowledge and insights. Our platforms encompass culture and literature, art and creativity as much as diplomacy, law, and conventional capacity building. This installation, and the counter extremism project behind it, encapsulates the *Beyond Borders* approach. Members of the *Beyond Borders* team have been working in Iraq for many years: dealing with the impact of human rights violations across the country, advising on issues related to earlier Kurdish genocides mediating between Kurdish groups, and lately developing projects in Kirkuk and Baghdad on the documentation and prevention of sexual violence in conflict. In many of these projects our experts have used writing therapy dimensions and research as a means to overcome trauma and deal with genocide.

In *A Mile in Their Shoes*, Siemon Scamell-Katz and Falah Shakarm have created an installation that reflects on the tales and fate of survivors of Daesh (of

what the United Nations has said may have been genocidal acts) through the visual arts, dance, film and in this programme, through poetry and prose. It is the intention of the project's sponsors to take this installation on tour to help counter extremism and misunderstanding between peoples and cultures. Young people from diverse communities will be invited to explore the fate of the victims and survivors of Daesh inflicted violence. This combination of culture exploration and political reflection - of giving a voice and a platform to survivors - while supporting new work in diverse mediums, is at the heart of what *Beyond Borders* does. So please, take a selfie of your shoes, try and walk a mile in the shoes of these resilient and powerful women and remember these events are not history, they happened a year ago and continue to happen now.

Mark Muller Stuart QC

Founder and Executive Director
Beyond Borders Scotland

After great pain, a formal feeling comes

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –

Emily Dickinson

Towards becoming a survivor, Êzidî women shedding their shoes

Dr. Choman Hardi

Kurdish Poet, Writer

His boots¹

The old woman will always keep those boots.
On the day when things were ending
she was leaning on her stick, in disbelief,
when a car with black windows slowed down.

She watched the back window open fast,
and there he was, the dictator,
suddenly looking old and frail,
dropping his military boots,
replacing them with old men's shoes.

Then the window closed and the car took off
leaving dust on the pair of boots
still warm and moist from his feet.

The Yiddish poet, Moshe Szulzstein refers to the remaining shoes of Holocaust victims as “the last witnesses.” Our shoes are a witness to the journeys we take, they carry us into different phases of our lives, into adulthood and maturity, love and heartbreak, war and imprisonment, rape and slavery, escape and freedom. In August 2014 the shoes exhibited here stopped being a witness to innocent walks to school, to the bazaar and to friends’ homes. These shoes witnessed kidnap, murder, sexual abuse, enslavement, forced conversion to Islam and later escape and reunion with friends and family.

The connection between shoes and violence is not new. The worn-out shoes, found in concentration camps at the end of World War II, were divided up between various Holocaust Museums to honour the victims. In Budapest, sixty pairs of shoes were cast of iron and attached to the Danube bank to commemorate the Jews who were ordered to take off their shoes there and then shot and taken away by the river. What is new about this exhibition is trying to trace our recent history, which is about derailment, through Êzidî women survivors’ shoes.

This exhibition offsets war and brutality.

It is about the fate of those whose painful journeys we track through their footprints. It is an attempt to acknowledge their ordeal, return their lost identities to them and restore their humanity, so easily ignored by the oppressor. The stories of these shoes defy those who disrespect human beings just because they have a different ethnicity and religion, or because they don’t share a history with them. They defy those who try to wipe out identities other than their own, to kill, enslave and silence them.

Social scientists have long argued that history is written by the dominant groups, their version and voice excluding other versions and voices. Women are one of the groups whose experiences of national catastrophes are considered irrelevant to history. There is evidence that these sidelined experiences are then gradually lost or “forgotten”². It is therefore essential to listen to the ‘hidden voices’ of women and other oppressed groups to ensure that their experiences inform our history³. At times, however, including women’s marginalised experiences is not so straightforward. This is particularly true when sensitive issues are concerned.

Rape in settings of armed conflict is used

for physical torture, disempowerment, and humiliation of the victim and her group. In many societies, rape causes social stigma. Women survivors of rape are usually left with difficult memories that have “no easy access to public space even as they [are] ... constantly invoked or alluded to”⁴. Similarly, although the sexual enslavement of Êzidî women has become part of the public discourse, individual survivors find it difficult to speak out. This is because speaking may cause further stigma and shame as well as psychological retraumatisation.

Soon after the first women managed to escape Daesh enslavement in August 2014, the Êzidî spiritual leader, Baba Sheikh, urged members of the community to welcome the survivors back and care for them. This, however, does not mean that everything is okay now. The stigma remains and it will be difficult for young, unmarried women to find husbands after their ordeal has become public. There is also stigma around those who became pregnant as a result of the rape. There are recent reports about doctors in Kurdistan performing illegal abortions (abortion is still illegal there) on women survivors and secret surgeries to ‘reverse loss of

virginity’ of the victims.

The social shamefulness of these issues may be one reason why women may remain silent. It is also possible that some women find it too painful to talk about what they have endured. Even though some people find talking about their experiences therapeutic⁵, others may not feel the same. Talking about the past can bring it alive once more, and this may be something that many women are trying to avoid: “The survivor who allows memories ... to be brought forth again risks renewed pain, a return to anguished memories which they endure alone after the researcher has turned off the tape recorder and the interview completed.”⁶

Êzidî women survivors are called on by activists, researchers, journalists, and governmental workers and urged to speak. They carry the burden of telling the truth. The survivors here find themselves in a paradoxical situation. Disclosing such issues is particularly difficult in a patriarchal society that, on the one hand, pressurises women to speak about their experiences and raise awareness about their victimisation by the Daesh forces and, on the other

hand, victimises women who are known to have been raped.

This is why this exhibition is important. While bearing witness to this painful history, these photographs protect the identity of the survivors. It works on the principle that we do not need to see the faces of those who suffered in order to understand and relate to their suffering; looking at their shoes is good enough. These shoes are being shed because the women shed their identity as victims and step towards being survivors with all the resilience and strength which this shift brings.

Memories of oppressed groups must inform our history in a way that would restore respect and dignity to them and not further victimise them or reduce them to eternal victims. By listening to and reading these stories we condemn a history where religious totalitarianism and nationalism attempt to destroy pluralism in our societies and disregard human uniqueness. We need to restore respect in our communities, to create a community where every individual, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, is respected and their dignity is preserved. Like Germany, we should learn from our history and

reiterate: “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority” and indeed each and every one of us.

¹A poem by Choman Hardi about Saddam Hussein's shoes.

²Ringelheim, J. 1998. 'Genocide and gender: A split memory', in Ofer, D. and Weitzman, L.J. (eds) *Women in the Holocaust*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

³Leydesdorff, S., Passerini, L., and Thompson, P. 1996. 'International Yearbook of Oral History and Life stories', Volume IV. *Gender and Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

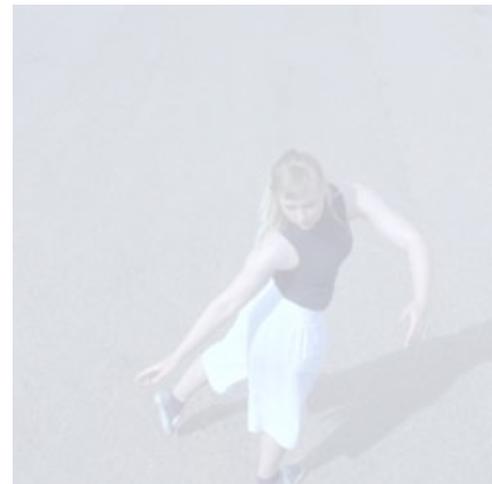
⁴Grossmann, A. 1999. 'A question of silence: The rape of German women by occupation soldiers'. *October Magazine*, Vol. 72. Ktd ad(?) Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

⁵Aron, A. 1992. 'Testimonio, a Bridge Between Psychotherapy and Socioterapy', in Cole, E., Espin, O.M. and D-Rothblum, E. (eds) *Refugee Women and Their MentalHealth: Shattered Societies, Shattered Lives*. New York, London, Norwood, Harrington Park Press: 173-189.

⁶Levine, P. 1995. 'Sweden and the Holocaust; Some Research Issues and Sources', in Gustavsson, S. & Runblom, H. (eds.) *Language, Minority, Migration*, Uppsala Multiethnic Papers.

entrapment

In August 2014 Daesh [ISIL] made rapid advances on Iraqi Kurdistan, displacing nearly 1,000,000 people. Any non-Muslims they captured were offered the following choice: “Islam; the dhimma contract - involving payment of jizya; if they refuse this they will have nothing but the sword”. The Yazidi population (a minority religion) was particularly targeted. Malak Taus, or the Peacock Angel, is a central figure in the Yazidi religion. He is considered a fallen angel. Muslims and Christians see him as a devil. But his story for the Yazidi is one of redemption. They say they do not worship evil, they just see that in the world there is good as well as bad. Darkness as well as light. Daesh regard them as devil worshippers. So they were not offered a choice. The Kurdish Peshmerga Army had retreated. When Daesh arrived in their villages the people were rounded up. The men were taken away to be shot or were beheaded in front of the women and girls. Girls aged between 7-25 and sometimes older were then removed and taken to holding houses.



Blue in her twelfth year and from the village of Kojo. She currently lives in Dhok. Daesh abducted Blue with her family. They moved her from one place to another until she ended up back in Dhok. When Daesh entered her village they gathered all the families. They looted the houses and took all the valuables like gold, money and mobile phones. They separated all the children, girls, elderly women and men. After an hour and a half, buses arrived to take the villagers to Solag collective town. Later they separated her from her family and took her to Mosul. They were her in Mosul for eight days. “I found out that among Daesh there were terrorists who spoke Kurdish, the Sorani dialect, and I saw a man from Shangal. I had seen him there before.” From there, they took them to the village Rmosi for one day and then to her own village of Kojo. They stayed there for twelve days. “When Daesh found out my mother was in the village, they took me to her for only one day”.

The next day they took her and the three girls on a very long march to Syria, where they were kept in one of the houses. They moved them from time to time to other houses and apartments. In the last apartment, there were a lot of men. One of the men kept me alone in a small room of the apartment for a few hours. He was sitting in front of me and trying to get in touch with someone via his mobile phone. The line being poor, he had to go out of the room. “I went out too, but to a second room. There, I noticed a toilet”. As she spoke, Blue always turned her head to the ground as if looking for something. You might think she was looking at her fingers which never stopped twirling, one around the other. She entered the toilet and stood thinking about what she was doing. “My courage led me through the toilet window and out”, she said, “and with difficulty because it was small”. She fled, running between the houses away from the apartment. Then, fatigue and pain forced her feet to betray her and made her knock at one of the gates. She asked for shelter for the night, explaining what had happened to her. Her appearance helped the family understand her situation. They cared for her but she realised the following morning that they were afraid of keeping her. They did not want to take the responsibility; therefore, she decided to call her uncle and explain to him where she was and what had happened to her. An agreement was reached between her uncle and the family. They asked her to get ready. “They said that they’d take me to Albu Kamal”. Two men arrived in a car and took her to Al-Baaj where they stayed in a house for a day. After that they handed her to the PKK who brought her to her uncle in the province of Dhok. Tears kept rolling down her face throughout the meeting. She threw herself into the arms of the ladies who looked after her. Fear and pain have seized her since her escape from Daesh. When asked whether Daesh raped her, her lips turned almost blue because she closed them so tightly. Then, she spoke in a painful and incendiary way, “I am a little child. All that I know is that there was an aged man sleeping beside me every night. One morning, I woke up to see drops of blood that had stained my clothes without knowing why.”

blue

separation

The Yazidis (also YYazidi, Êzidî) (/jəz'ɪ:di:z/ yah-ZEE-dees) are a Kurdish religious community whose syncretic but ancient religion Yazidism (a kind of Yazdânism) is linked to Zoroastrianism and ancient Mesopotamian religions. They live primarily in the Nineveh Province of Iraq which is part of the non-state nation of Kurdistan. The Yazidi community is conservative and strongly traditional. In the past, a woman who left her family, married outside the religion or was raped would have been killed. A woman in this community is either under the rule and protection of her father or her husband, so separated from her family she feels especially vulnerable and at risk. Some of the girls had their phones on them. They phoned their families as they were abducted. Sometimes they were told to kill themselves and not come back. Other times they could not reach anyone because their family was already dead.



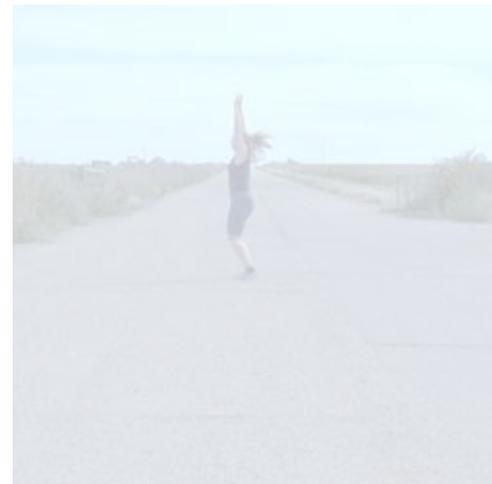


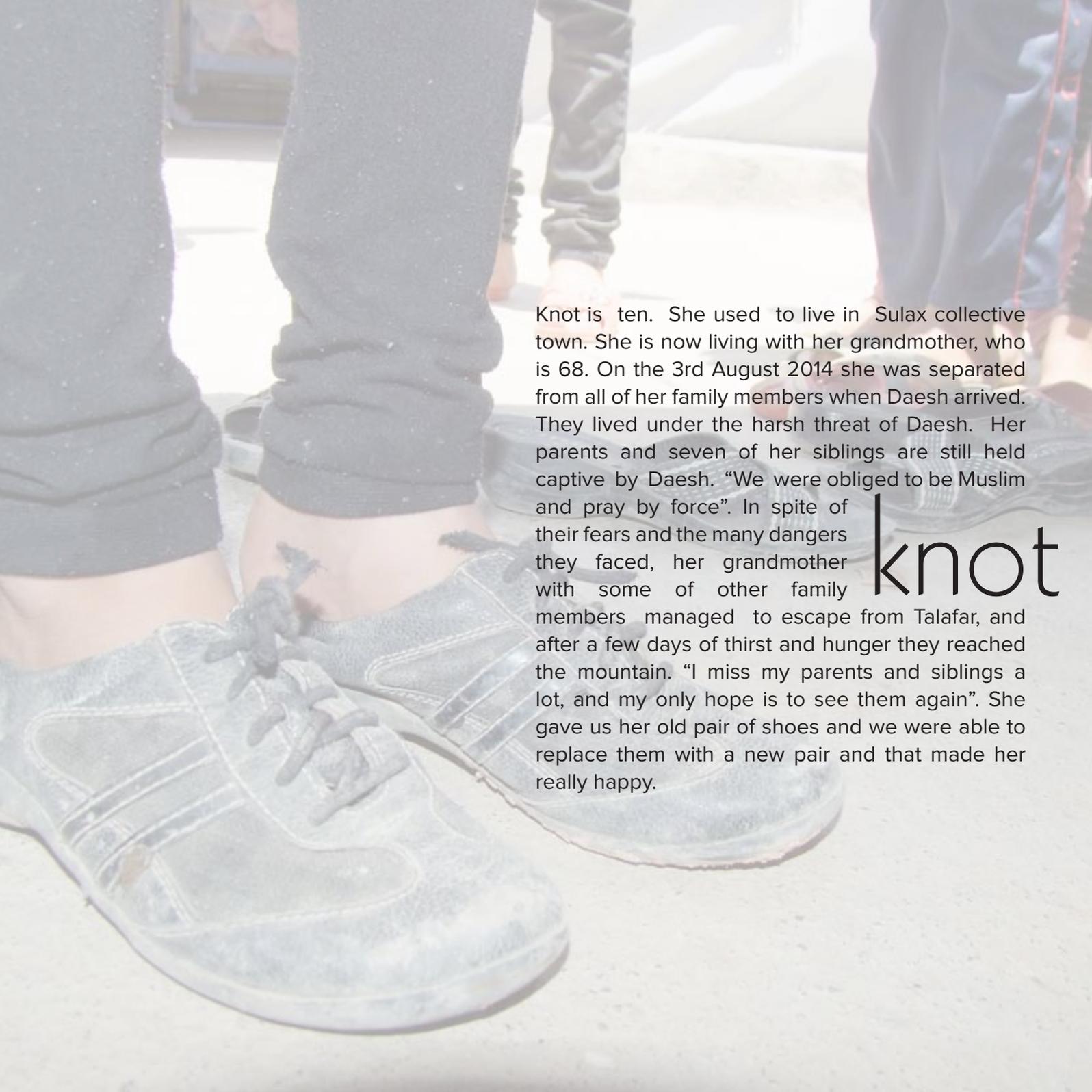
Red is 19 and is from Shangal. She and her sister Socks were kidnapped by Daesh on 3rd August 2014. Red said: "When my father died we were little children, and my mother married a second husband, therefore I was given a lot of responsibility. I was with my uncles, making a living for myself and my siblings". Red told her story: "That day when Daesh entered Mosul, most of the people fled into the mountains but a lot of Daesh's cars came and arrested them. They shouted "Allah u Akbar Allah u Akbar" while shooting randomly". Immediately afterwards they were arrested and separated from their brothers. They took them from Shangal to Badush prison in Talifar, then to Mosul and then Syria. "In Syria people were coming to look at us and buy us daily". She and her sister and some of others had been chosen by someone and he took them to his friends in Humis. From there he took them to another house: "This was like a jail, they insulted us a lot and fed us once a day". Red said: "Socks had a long hair. She lifted her hair up in order not to be seen. She was scared a lot. Many times they said they would kill her, and she would always hide behind me. We were raped by someone, every time one of us or the other, at that place. He would hurt us a lot. Even now I can't describe how it was". She added, "I decided I should kill my sister and commit suicide but I couldn't". Others told us that this man had been killed in the fighting". He then disappeared for a period of time, and they were sold to someone else in Raqa. "We worked a lot there during the day and the night and faced cruel treatment. Many times they were drugged and beaten. They made the mothers and daughters pray, wear hijab (veil) and read the holy Quran by force". Only a very little child in that house was treated well. With the help of one small child they made a call and alerted their relatives, and told them where they were. Their relatives got in touch with Abu Shujah: "He was famous for selling and buying girls". Abu Shujah agreed to convince Daesh to sell them for an amount of money and took them to Rabiaa area in the border between Iraq and Syria. He gave them new clothes. "We were covered from head to toe, we could barely see what was in front of us. They went back from Rabiaa to Dhok". She said "Until now we can't believe how we were rescued". They were worried about their friends, and hope they will come back one day.

red & socks

conform

The Daesh captors hold the girls and they are either sold in markets as sex slaves or forced to convert to Islam so that the jihadis can marry them. Daesh's interpretation of the Quran allows the Yazidi girls to be used, sold or killed as the fighter desires. Daesh has created a temporary marriage that allows sex with women to whom the men are not going to be married to long term. Girls who refuse to convert and have sex with the jihadis are executed. Girls who are not immediately used as sex slaves by Daesh are sold in markets in cities like Mosul. The prices increase as the age of the girls goes down. The aim of Daesh is to create what they call a caliphate. A state in which everyone will conform to their rules in a totalitarian society.



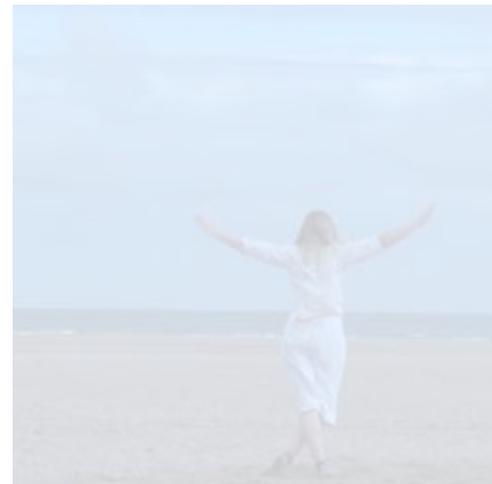
A person wearing grey sneakers and dark pants, standing on a light-colored surface. The image is a close-up of the lower legs and feet. The person is wearing dark grey or black leggings and grey sneakers with white laces and white soles. The background is a light, possibly concrete or stone, surface. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

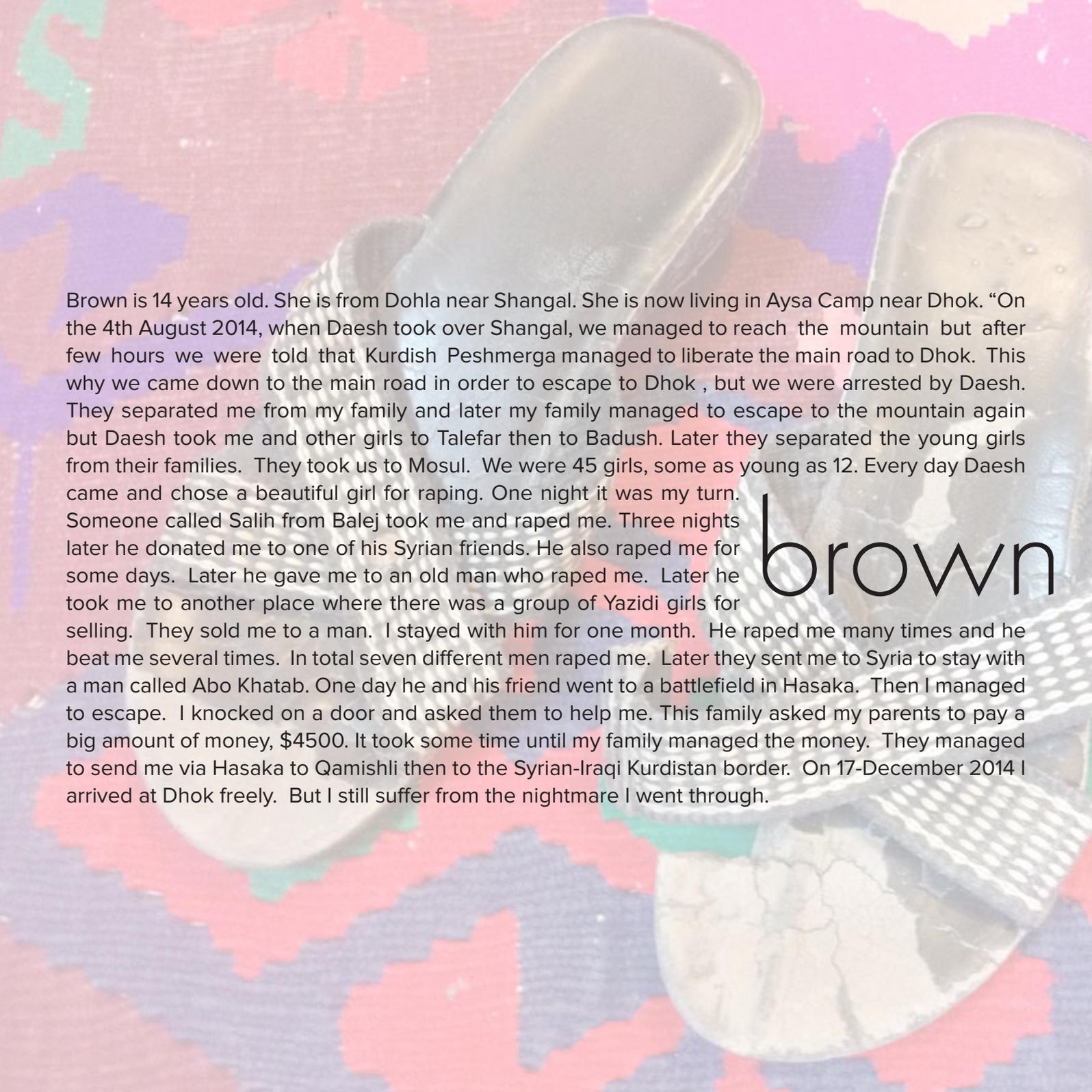
Knot is ten. She used to live in Sulax collective town. She is now living with her grandmother, who is 68. On the 3rd August 2014 she was separated from all of her family members when Daesh arrived. They lived under the harsh threat of Daesh. Her parents and seven of her siblings are still held captive by Daesh. “We were obliged to be Muslim and pray by force”. In spite of their fears and the many dangers they faced, her grandmother with some of other family members managed to escape from Talafar, and after a few days of thirst and hunger they reached the mountain. “I miss my parents and siblings a lot, and my only hope is to see them again”. She gave us her old pair of shoes and we were able to replace them with a new pair and that made her really happy.

knot

escape

Out of the more than 4,000 women taken by Daesh, some have escaped. Testimonials often refer to the captured girls hearing rumours of other girls escaping. Families and the Kurdistan Regional Government have attempted to buy back the girls with some success. Daesh members and fellow travellers have turned the “selling and buying of Yazidi women in the slave markets” into a “trade.” According to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Directorate of Yazidi Affairs: “They sell women in the slave markets, some militants buy a girl for \$50 and sell her back to us for \$2,000-2,500.” The amount of money the officials pay to save the Yazidis ranges from between \$1,000 and \$10,000. Sometimes the girls escape themselves. As of March 15, 974 Yazidis have escaped, including 513 women and 304 children. In recent months there has been a spate of more escapes.



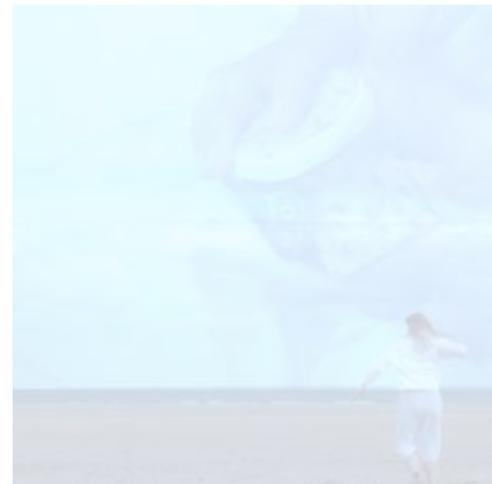
A pair of worn, light-colored flip-flops is positioned at the top of the page. The background is a vibrant, multi-colored patterned fabric with shades of pink, purple, blue, and green. The text is overlaid on the lower portion of the image.

Brown is 14 years old. She is from Dohla near Shangal. She is now living in Aysa Camp near Dhok. “On the 4th August 2014, when Daesh took over Shangal, we managed to reach the mountain but after few hours we were told that Kurdish Peshmerga managed to liberate the main road to Dhok. This why we came down to the main road in order to escape to Dhok , but we were arrested by Daesh. They separated me from my family and later my family managed to escape to the mountain again but Daesh took me and other girls to Talefar then to Badush. Later they separated the young girls from their families. They took us to Mosul. We were 45 girls, some as young as 12. Every day Daesh came and chose a beautiful girl for raping. One night it was my turn. Someone called Salih from Balej took me and raped me. Three nights later he donated me to one of his Syrian friends. He also raped me for some days. Later he gave me to an old man who raped me. Later he took me to another place where there was a group of Yazidi girls for selling. They sold me to a man. I stayed with him for one month. He raped me many times and he beat me several times. In total seven different men raped me. Later they sent me to Syria to stay with a man called Abo Khatab. One day he and his friend went to a battlefield in Hasaka. Then I managed to escape. I knocked on a door and asked them to help me. This family asked my parents to pay a big amount of money, \$4500. It took some time until my family managed the money. They managed to send me via Hasaka to Qamishli then to the Syrian-Iraqi Kurdistan border. On 17-December 2014 I arrived at Dhok freely. But I still suffer from the nightmare I went through.

brown

home

Yazidi religious and community leaders have issued new teachings since last August, calling on the community to welcome back the abducted women. Converting to another religion, even under duress, was long considered an unpardonable sin in the Yazidi religion. In the wake of the mass abductions that view has softened. But what community leaders might say does not necessarily translate to the reactions of fathers and brothers. Many girls have suffered the double jeopardy of returning to either find their families missing or dead, or to find they are not welcome back to their families.



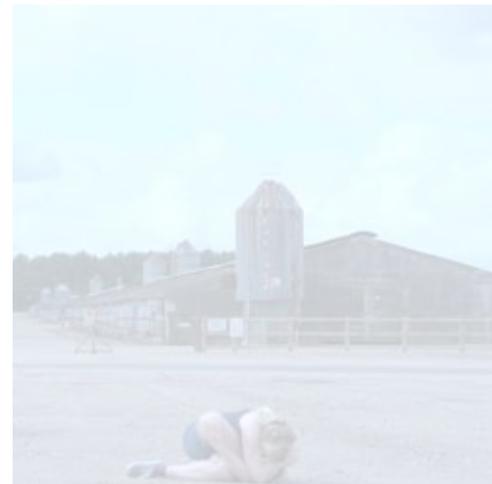


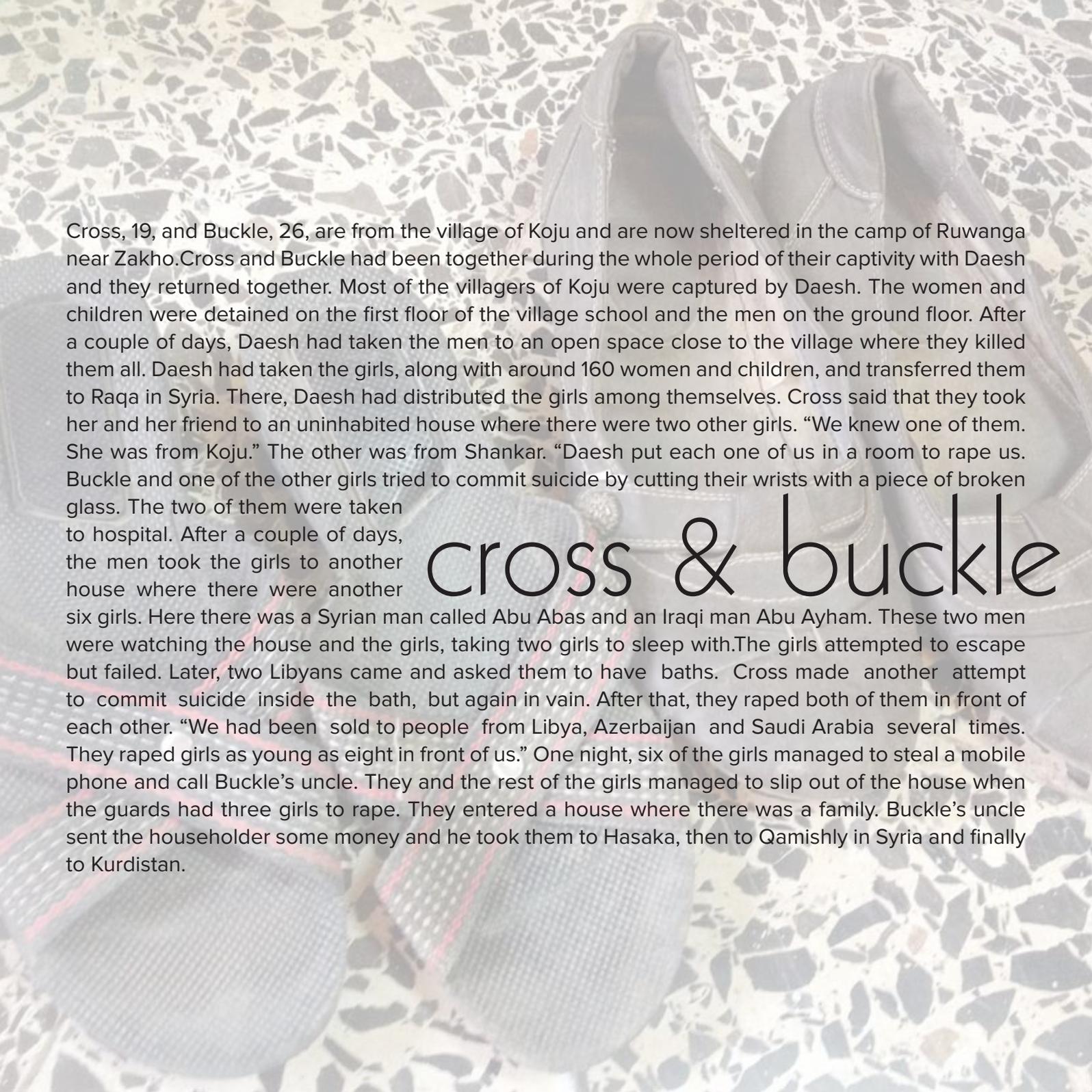
Flower is an older woman who does not know her age and has lost her documents. She is from Sulax collective town but now resides in a tent shelter in Xanki Kon. Daesh seized twenty-three members of her family. She said, “I could survive only with these clothes and shoes that I wear. I always hid because they were threatening that they will kill me if I don’t take off the white clothes that I used to wear”. Older Yazidi women only wear white. “For nine months some other people and I stayed in a big school building which was seized by Daesh” she added. Wadi asked about her health, to which she replied, “Psychologically and physically I am in a terrible condition, now I’m able to see with only one eye”. Flower couldn’t complete her story, because she was crying. Wadi stopped asking her questions.

flower

suicide

According to a nurse in Mosul, Iraq: “Here in Mosul and in the surrounding regions of Kurdistan, focus on virginity is causing patients to contemplate suicide. Many rape survivors who are not under any kind of formal care do commit suicide. The problem is the obsession with virginity among the Iraqi and Kurdish communities. This obsession is handing an easy genocidal weapon of rape to the Islamic State.”



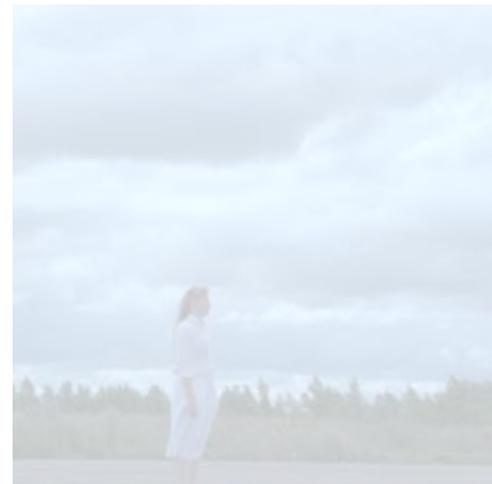
A pair of brown leather shoes and a blue woven basket are placed on a mosaic floor. The shoes are positioned at the top of the frame, and the basket is in the foreground. The mosaic floor is composed of small, irregular tiles in shades of grey, white, and brown. The background is a soft, out-of-focus view of a village with traditional buildings and a hillside.

Cross, 19, and Buckle, 26, are from the village of Koju and are now sheltered in the camp of Ruwanga near Zakho. Cross and Buckle had been together during the whole period of their captivity with Daesh and they returned together. Most of the villagers of Koju were captured by Daesh. The women and children were detained on the first floor of the village school and the men on the ground floor. After a couple of days, Daesh had taken the men to an open space close to the village where they killed them all. Daesh had taken the girls, along with around 160 women and children, and transferred them to Raqa in Syria. There, Daesh had distributed the girls among themselves. Cross said that they took her and her friend to an uninhabited house where there were two other girls. “We knew one of them. She was from Koju.” The other was from Shankar. “Daesh put each one of us in a room to rape us. Buckle and one of the other girls tried to commit suicide by cutting their wrists with a piece of broken glass. The two of them were taken to hospital. After a couple of days, the men took the girls to another house where there were another six girls. Here there was a Syrian man called Abu Abas and an Iraqi man Abu Ayham. These two men were watching the house and the girls, taking two girls to sleep with. The girls attempted to escape but failed. Later, two Libyans came and asked them to have baths. Cross made another attempt to commit suicide inside the bath, but again in vain. After that, they raped both of them in front of each other. “We had been sold to people from Libya, Azerbaijan and Saudi Arabia several times. They raped girls as young as eight in front of us.” One night, six of the girls managed to steal a mobile phone and call Buckle’s uncle. They and the rest of the girls managed to slip out of the house when the guards had three girls to rape. They entered a house where there was a family. Buckle’s uncle sent the householder some money and he took them to Hasaka, then to Qamishly in Syria and finally to Kurdistan.

cross & buckle

retreat

Many if not most young Yazidi women have vanished from some communities near Sinjar and if you walk through those towns today you will not see female children above the age of 6 or 7. This absence is the heart of the impact of genocide. For those that survive there are layers of trauma. The violence that they witnessed. The violence that was inflicted upon them. The violence that left their families destroyed, their communities shattered. The violence that allowed them to survive while others around them died and suffered. As one woman, a 19-year-old victim, told the journalist Jonathan Rugman, “We were asking them to kill us. We were pulling their guns towards our heads, but they refused.”





Grey is fifty-one. She is from Sulax collective town in Shangal. All six members of her family, including her husband, sons, and daughters, were seized by Daesh. Only one of her daughters survived with the help of Wadi. Daesh seized Grey for nine months. One night, she and some of the other families she was with suddenly got the opportunity to escape. Three days later they arrived at a safe place. Psychologically she is in the worst possible situation. One of her daughters in-law has a two month old baby. Wadi asked about the child's name and shoes. Grey replied, "It has none. We are expecting the baby's father to survive and choose a name for the child".

grey

Genocide in Our Midst

Brian Brivati

Academic Director
Beyond Borders Scotland

In August 2014 acts of Genocide took place in Iraqi Kurdistan – part of a much larger and deeper conflict in Iraq and Syria. This exhibition focuses on one part of these events. We do not wish to privilege these crimes over other crimes but to draw closer attention to the general situation through these individual stories.

There is a genocidal force fighting a war of destruction in Iraq and Syria and across the Middle East and North Africa. The magnitude of what is occurring is difficult to grasp. To help bring these terrible things into a focus we can comprehend, a team of volunteers has created this exhibition. We need to better understand the nature of Daesh so that we can help the people of Iraq, Syria and other countries in the Middle East and so that we can stop our own people from supporting it¹.

In his classic presentation of how to think about the holocaust, Raul Hilberg, suggested a triangle of victims, perpetrators and bystanders. There are fundamental intellectual and emotional challenges in grasping the meaning of each point of this triangle. Between these points the grey zones are also challenging places. They are the places in which Primo Levi came to end his meditations on the holocaust, they are the grey zone².

The triangle works as a means of entering this field of contemplation, but after thirty years of looking at it – thirty years in which genocides have occurred in Rwanda,

in Darfur, in the former Yugoslavia, and in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan and elsewhere – the triangle feels inadequate. The moments during which this inadequacy comes across most strongly, have been the moments when I have encountered survivors and survivors’ stories. The triangle is an abstraction. It increases the distance between us and the things that have happened in our time. This exhibition sets out to reduce that distance. To enable reflection on the crimes of Daesh, on the real nature of Daesh. It asks us to look.

Our way of looking comes from the shoes of women and girls who have escaped from Daesh, from the photographs taken in Kurdistan by Falah Shakarm and from the films and the installation made by the artist Siemon Scamell-Katz.

I first met Siemon when we were at school together in Bournemouth, Dorset. We have attempted to collaborate on a number of projects over the years combining words and images. This is the first time that the imperative of the events and the stories of the survivors have inspired us to complete something. Siemon’s work is intensely private and personal while appearing open and accessible.



He explores themes such as adoption and our relationship to landscape. His home in North Norfolk, the landscape, the sky, the beach are integral to his work, as is evidenced in the films in this exhibition.

I first met Falah via skype for an interview and then as a participant on a UK fellowship programme. He told me he was a survivor of Halabaj: the site of a genocidal act committed by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds. The Baathists dropped gas on Halabaj, then flew over filming the impact of the bombs and the gas. Falah has a wonderful, warm smile. He has campaigned extensively in the Arab world against the practice of

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). He is not popular with Arab men. During one of the sessions of the Fellowship he said that FGM was a problem in Kurdistan and in the Arab world as much as it was in Africa. The problem was that the men in particular and, more broadly, the culture of the Middle East is in denial that it exists. As soon as he finished speaking, he was surrounded by Arab men who denied that FGM was a problem of the Middle East. He was calm, listened, contradicted. There was a resilience in him that was good natured but utterly firm. You cannot touch me, he seemed to say. It was not arrogant or off putting, just direct and, in the end, resilient.

He is a powerful survivor. Is he also a victim? Is there a point at which he stops being a victim who survived and becomes a survivor who triumphs or even, in the ultimate victory, that he transcends that category altogether? The films, the photos and the shoes in this exhibition are a route into thinking about the meaning of survival, the possibility of recovery.

Our route into thinking about the shoes is objects and images. It is the shoes of the women and girls who escaped from

Daesh, who walked, who ran, crawled, willed themselves to freedom. Or slipped away in the chaos of war. These objects and images of liberation appear in many museums of genocides. But this is not a museum and these events are not in the distant past, they are happening now. So these objects, these shoes, are patches of normality – recognisable, designed, manufactured objects, most of which would find a home on a shelf in a Clarks shop. These images are part of the first testimonies; we are here at the beginning of the telling of the story of this genocide. This story has already passed through a beginning and will pass through a number of stages in the future. So with the shoes and the photos, we have the testimony.

Before the testimony there was the event. These events have happened to these people because of words and ideas. Daesh has a manual: *The Management of Savagery*³. This book was pregnant with genocide for a long time before the actual killing began.

Ideas are written, spoken and argued over. Ideologies evolve from these conversations about ideas. This ideology targets specific groups of people. It has



We watched them flee to the mountains of Sinjar on the news.

given these groups an identity they cannot escape - how can you stop being a Yazidi or a Shia? The followers of these ideas came to have a monopoly of violence in Sinjar and other parts of Iraq in August 2014. They became the state. They then put into practice their ideas.

They will not live on the same planet as the other. In common with other genocidal movements, this “other” includes all members of the community from the smallest children to the oldest grandparent. In all genocides, words give shape and meaning to the idea of annihilation before it takes place. There are also many places where the same mix of prejudice, hate, half-baked philosophy, scapegoating and

malice never gives birth to mass murder. But in some cases these words of hate find a strong enough voice to carry them forward to fruition by becoming the state – if only temporarily.

In this case the people who were not killed were enslaved.

Especially, the women and the girls.

Sexual violence is integral to genocide. It is the means by which recovery is made impossible, by which a culture is destroyed. In all genocides there is agency. The agency in all the stories recounted here is clear. Orders are issued. Women are moved from place to place. Prices are fixed. Ransoms are paid. This is not random

violence coming out of the chaos of war and the spontaneous violence of the victors or vanquished. This is the premeditated use of sexual violence to destroy, in whole or in part, a people because of their identity. Context and history matter. However, for genocide to take place there must be individuals who decide that this is what should happen now. Agency gives birth to extermination; words give individuals the power to act. They make the enemy legible and the murder and rape meaningful. Without words and ideas genocides do not take place. There are discourses of hate that do not lead to genocide. There are instances of mass killing that do not come to be called genocide.

When the event has taken place there must be a naming of that event. A consensus that this particular bout of human hatred is one thing and not another: words come into play again. The baptism of an event as a genocide became possible after 1944 when the word was coined. It was given legal meaning in 1948 when the convention was passed. It has since become a hugely contested area of geopolitics, and international law, and the global human rights and rule of law industry. What name do we give the killing of this group of people compared to another group of people? Is gender-based violence, the destruction of a community, something that should be called genocide or not? Will the testimonies of the victims stand up in court? Can what has been done be reduced to chronology of facts, figures and places. Checked and verified.

The first two stages in the life cycle of a genocide take place before a victim's voice is heard. While the genocide is taking place the decisions about what to call it are not made in response to the testimony of the victims. Rather the mass killing is first a geopolitical event. Its status is determined by the status, position, importance of the location of events and the context in terms of other events in which it is taking place. Read over the Human Rights Council report again. Notice the word "may".

The voices of the victims are struggling to be heard through that "may". It is almost always long after the event that the witness comes to the fore. The early years after a genocide are the childhood and adolescence of the event. They are the period in which the witness voices begin to be heard. This exhibition is a very conscience effort to bring that voice out early and loudly. Victims and survivors are heard, recorded and their testimony is formed through a range of genres and in a range of ways. Evidence is collected to contribute to the bringing of cases to the ICC and evidence is taken from victims who have fled, to establish if they are real refugees or not. Formal evidence collection brings the voice of the victim, the words of the victim, into contact with the first of a myriad of interconnecting, sometimes different and competing cycles. This first is the legal cycle. It is slow, cautious and driven by what is and can be recorded, cross-checked and verified. It is dominated by the word "may".

For the victims of Daesh, the United Nations sent a fact-finding mission. This is what they said:

United Nations

A/HRC/28/18



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 March 2015

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Twenty-eighth session

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so- called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations

78. Subject to a determination by an independent and competent court, this report concludes that:

- Members of ISIL may have perpetrated genocide against the Yezidi community by killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm and forcibly transferring members of the group, including children, in the context of a manifest pattern of conduct aimed at the destruction of the group.
- Members of ISIL may have committed crimes against humanity by perpetrating: murder, enslavement, deportation or forcible transfer of population, severe deprivation of physical liberty, torture, rape, sexual slavery, sexual violence and persecution, committed as part of widespread or systematic attacks directed against civilian populations pursuant to or in furtherance of an organisational policy to commit such attacks.
- Members of ISIL may have committed war crimes by perpetrating: murder, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, outrages upon personal dignity, taking of hostages, the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, directing attacks against the civilian population, directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, historic monuments, pillaging a town or place, committing rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence, conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years or using them to participate actively in hostilities, ordering the displacement of the civilian population, destroying or seizing the property of an adversary.
- ISIL is perpetrating serious human rights violations in areas which are under its de facto control; including torture, cruel and inhuman treatment, and extrajudicial killings.



Whether it is the evidence of the victim about the perpetrators or indeed the evidence of the victim about themselves, facts become key; these facts can be challenged in court, the testimony can be contradicted, there is insecurity, there is fresh trauma and there is the fallibility of memory. Victims must prove themselves not only to ensure that their perpetrators are judged and maybe also punished, but also to establish their own identity, status and position as victims. Much of this evidence will emerge from and repeat private or closed discourses within the victim communities and in their own languages rather than any international lingua franca. These closed discourses in diaries, letters, family discussions and community

newspapers are often dominated by survivors trying to find each other, trying to find who has lived and who has died, who has escaped and who remains. They are full of stories of escape and stories of destruction. They are raw and the stories are then repeated for immigration and UN officials, in court cases, in applications for pensions and reparations.

Gradually the stories and testimonies mature. The private cycles of community discourse and the slow moving cycles of legal process are intertwined with political cycles of interest and disinterest. They are intertwined with news and media cycles of interest and indifference. They are intertwined with generational cycles

comprising the questions of children and grandchildren. They are intertwined with the cycles of historians and the opening of the archives and the writing of the history. A process of hegemony of a narrative can take place. A mature story emerges which was once fresh and exciting, gradually fading from view. Perhaps the world pays attention for a time but then gradually the story becomes old. The interconnected wheels of news, politics, and history shift and the testimony becomes overly familiar, too often heard and slowly it begins to be ignored. The court cases finish or slow to a stop. The news organisations refuse stories, the movies are no longer made, the books no longer published. New genocides emerge and new causes develop. The story dies. But it does not disappear. In the digital age there is a permanent afterlife. The story sits in this digital heaven and can have new life breathed into it on occasion. But in essence, outside the closed discourses of the victims themselves, their families, their sites of memorialising, unless a political cycle needs to revive it, the story has been told.

We would like with this exhibition to

disrupt the cycle. To bring the victims voices, images and stories out earlier, in as dignified a way as possible. We did not ask young traumatised victims of sexual violence to come and be paraded around the House of Lords.

We asked them to send their shoes.

Daesh is still killing and enslaving people today. This exhibition is not about an historical event, but a current one. Our purpose is to allow the survivors to tell their stories and to reflect on the meaning of that story.

¹Daesh is also known as ISIL and ISIS. We use Daesh so that we do not dignify the group with the word Islam directly in the translation. For a discussion of this question see “The Human Shield” at <https://brianbrivati.pgjtl.com>

²“The Grey Zone”, in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.

³<http://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/abu-bakr-naji-the-management-of-savagery-the-most-critical-stage-through-which-the-umma-will-pass.pdf>

enough

Civilization by the bullet,
and by the whip.

They descended upon us,
with their fearsome piety.

They brought The Book,
and swept our collective pasts
aside.

Scavenging for ore,
snouts in the trough,
the pillaging rarely ceased.

Gold. Women. Diamonds. People.
All commodities,
stripped and raped and sold and
bought.

The schizophrenic benevolence
of colonialism,
left us battered and bruised and
almost broken.

Almost.

But not quite.

For,

the tides began turning,
winds of indignant defiance began
rolling,
up through the hinterland,
and down to the sea.

The rising began,
in pockets,

then in swathes of the plundered
country.

The rising took shape,
grew,
and found its coherent voice.

They were chased,
chastened,
from our shores,
back to the northern lands that
craved the sun.

And the gold. Women. Diamonds.
Men.

This was centuries ago.

Yet,

the craving persists.

And,

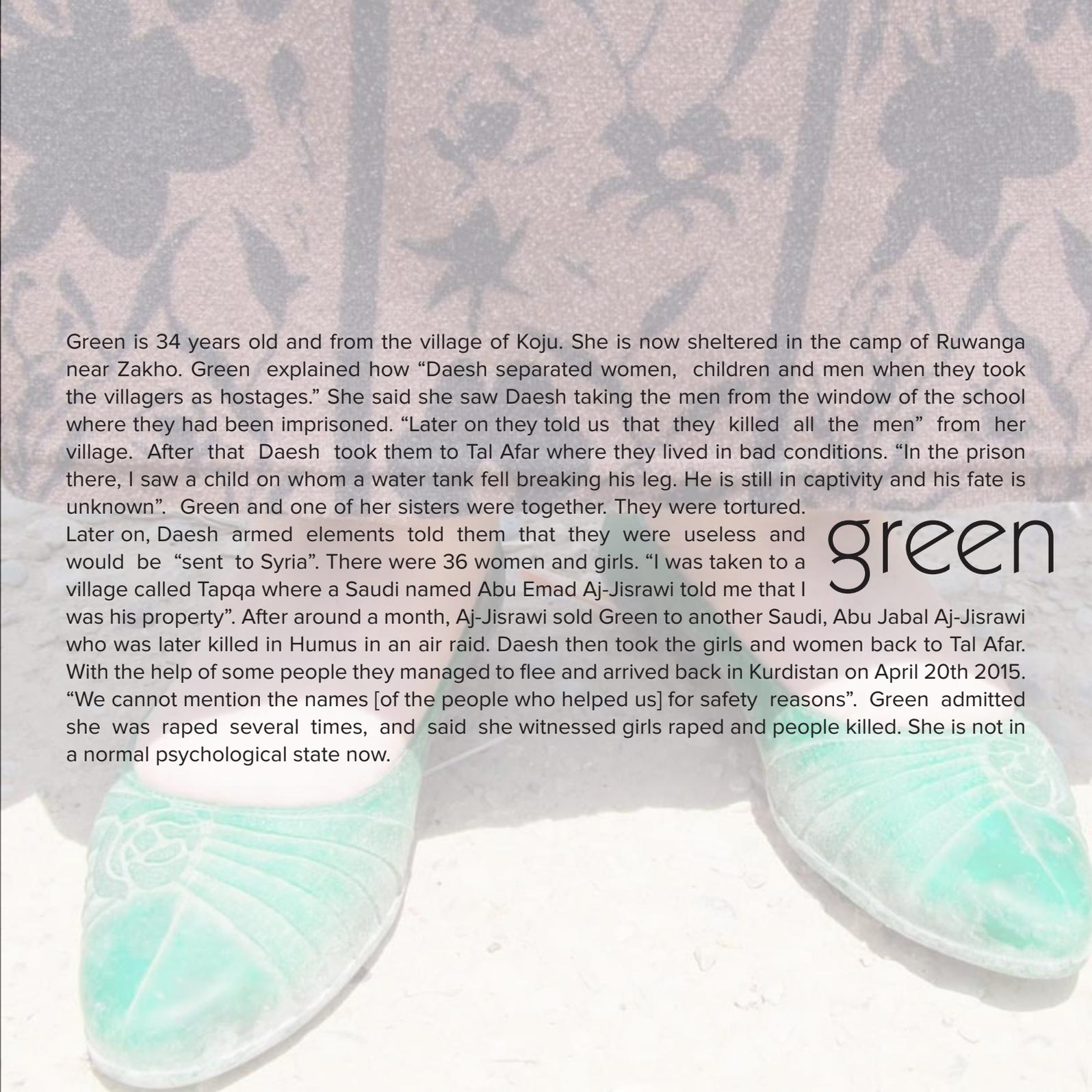
they scavenge still,
never sated.

Till the rising shouts out,
once again,

Enough.

Afzal Moola

(first appeared on ProtestPoems.Org,
February 2015)



Green is 34 years old and from the village of Koju. She is now sheltered in the camp of Ruwanga near Zakho. Green explained how “Daesh separated women, children and men when they took the villagers as hostages.” She said she saw Daesh taking the men from the window of the school where they had been imprisoned. “Later on they told us that they killed all the men” from her village. After that Daesh took them to Tal Afar where they lived in bad conditions. “In the prison there, I saw a child on whom a water tank fell breaking his leg. He is still in captivity and his fate is unknown”. Green and one of her sisters were together. They were tortured. Later on, Daesh armed elements told them that they were useless and would be “sent to Syria”. There were 36 women and girls. “I was taken to a village called Tapqa where a Saudi named Abu Emad Aj-Jisrawi told me that I was his property”. After around a month, Aj-Jisrawi sold Green to another Saudi, Abu Jabal Aj-Jisrawi who was later killed in Humus in an air raid. Daesh then took the girls and women back to Tal Afar. With the help of some people they managed to flee and arrived back in Kurdistan on April 20th 2015. “We cannot mention the names [of the people who helped us] for safety reasons”. Green admitted she was raped several times, and said she witnessed girls raped and people killed. She is not in a normal psychological state now.

green

the cloths of heaven

Had I the heaven's embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light;
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

W. B. Yeats
chosen by Meg Jensen

A pair of sandals with woven straps and a textured sole sits on a sandy surface. In the background, a person's leg wearing a patterned garment is visible. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor, arid environment.

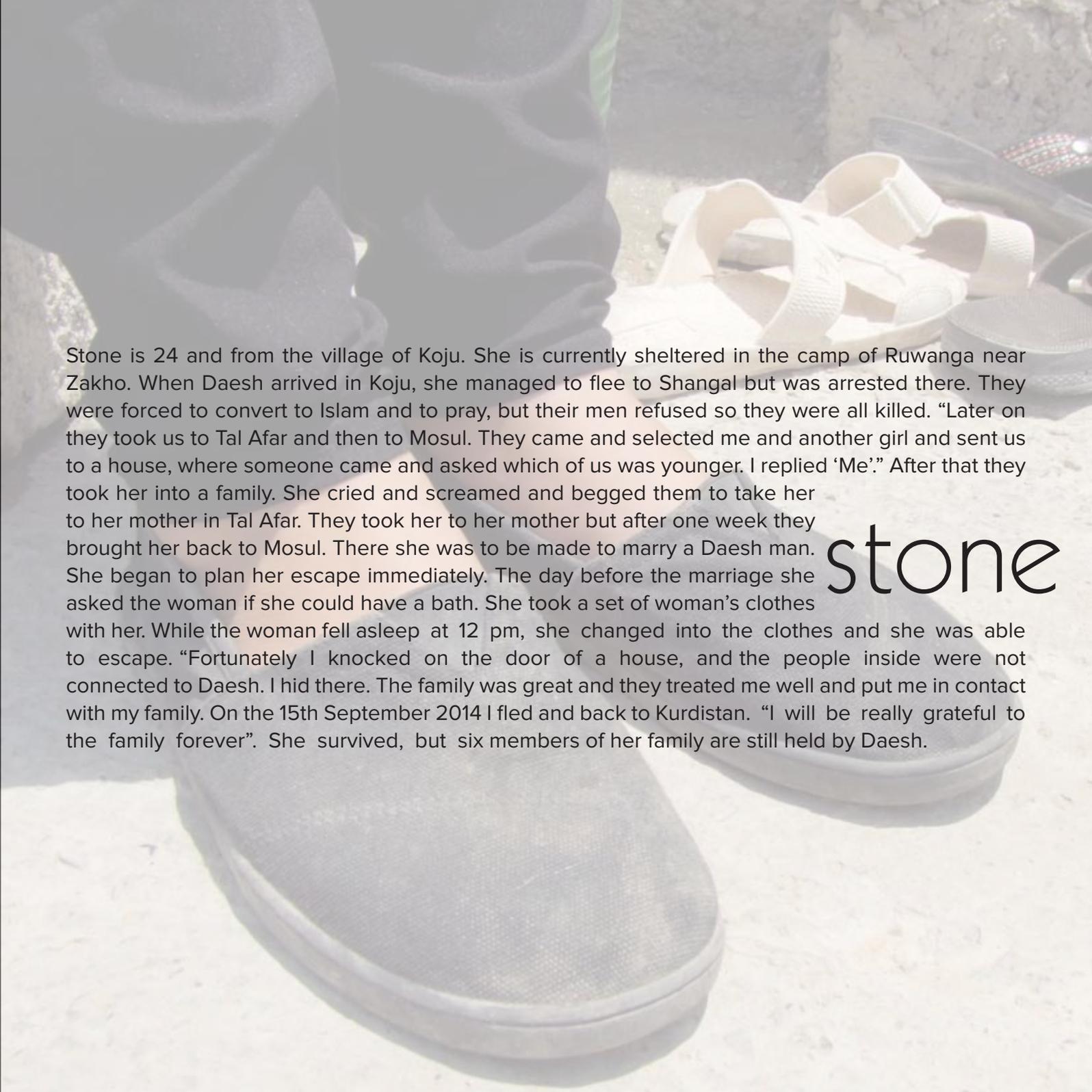
Black is 40 and from the village of Koju. She is currently sheltered in the camp of Ruwanga near Zakho. Black told us how Daesh gathered all the people and took all of their possessions including money, goods, and cars...etc, and how the women were separated and transported to Tal Afar. They were living in bad conditions there. Later on, they were taken to Mosul. "There they fed us well but they added drugs to the food and we became drowsy. They played the Quran through loud speakers and they gathered us together. They converted us to Islam and took pictures of us to send back to our people in Kurdistan." The women and girls worked as shepherds there until April 8th 2015. Later on, someone helped them escape for a fee, and after eight days of walking they arrived in the hands of the Peshmerga. Black is a friendly and talented woman, and while talking to her it is impossible to believe how tough she is after the ordeal that she went through.

black

sonnet 50

How heavy do I journey on the way,
When what I seek, my weary travel's end,
Doth teach that case and that repose to say,
"Thus far the miles are measured from thy friend!"
The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,
As if by some instinct the wretch did know
His rider loved not speed being made from thee.
The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,
Which heavily he answers with a groan,
More sharp to me than spurring to his side;
For that same groan doth put this in my mind:
My grief lies onward and my joy behind

William Shakespeare
Chosen by John Donald

A photograph showing a person's legs from the knees down, wearing dark-colored pants and white sneakers. The person is standing on a light-colored, textured surface, possibly concrete or stone. To the right of the person's feet, a pair of white, open-toed sandals with wide straps is lying on the ground. The background is slightly out of focus, showing more of the ground and some indistinct objects.

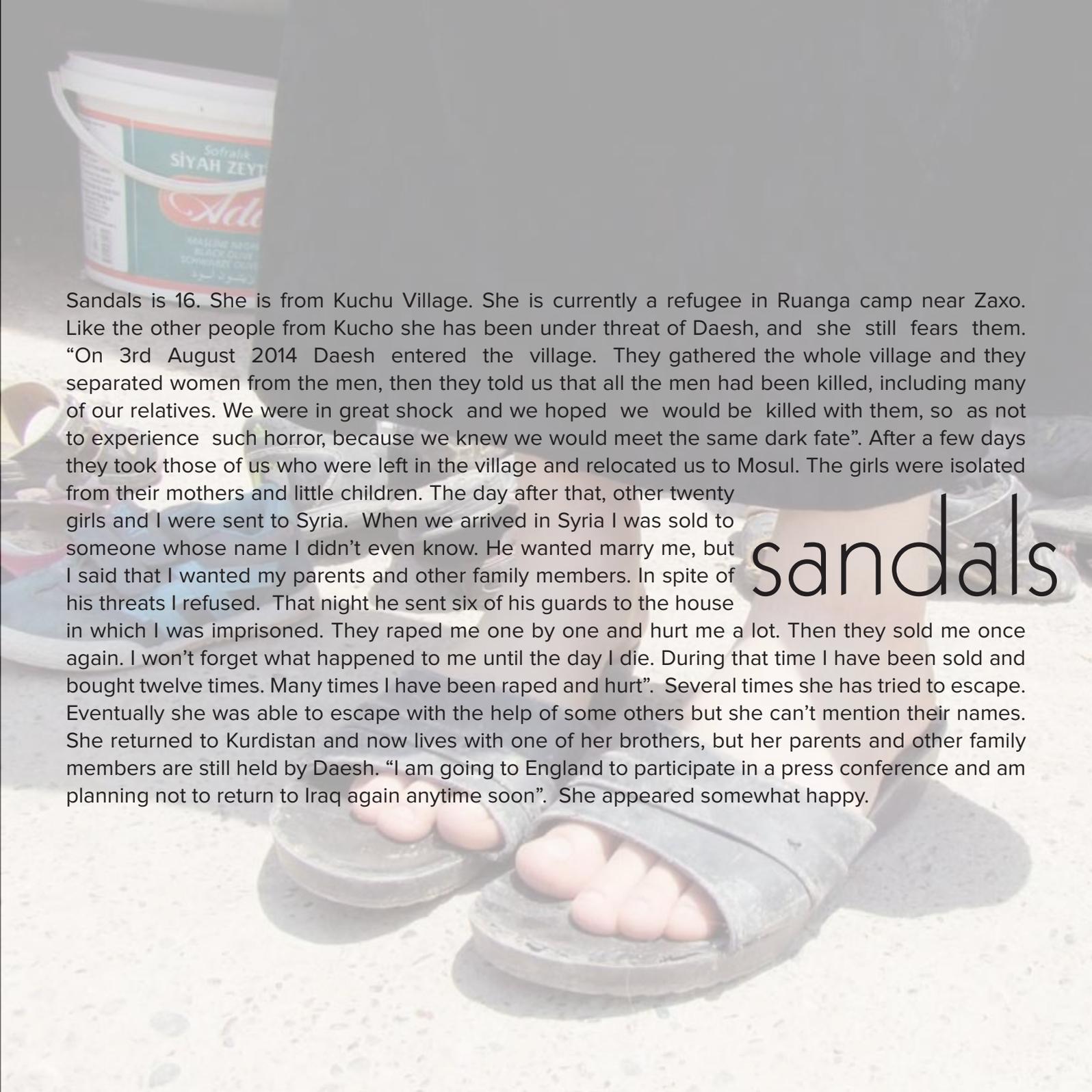
Stone is 24 and from the village of Koju. She is currently sheltered in the camp of Ruwanga near Zakho. When Daesh arrived in Koju, she managed to flee to Shangal but was arrested there. They were forced to convert to Islam and to pray, but their men refused so they were all killed. “Later on they took us to Tal Afar and then to Mosul. They came and selected me and another girl and sent us to a house, where someone came and asked which of us was younger. I replied ‘Me.’” After that they took her into a family. She cried and screamed and begged them to take her to her mother in Tal Afar. They took her to her mother but after one week they brought her back to Mosul. There she was to be made to marry a Daesh man. She began to plan her escape immediately. The day before the marriage she asked the woman if she could have a bath. She took a set of woman’s clothes with her. While the woman fell asleep at 12 pm, she changed into the clothes and she was able to escape. “Fortunately I knocked on the door of a house, and the people inside were not connected to Daesh. I hid there. The family was great and they treated me well and put me in contact with my family. On the 15th September 2014 I fled and back to Kurdistan. “I will be really grateful to the family forever”. She survived, but six members of her family are still held by Daesh.

stone

leave their clothes as they drop

before baths
before bed
the crumpled trousers
creased
greased
from days of play
the blackened bottoms of their white socks
just as they tossed them
i know they should pick them up
put them away
learn all those lessons
for their later days
but I leave till the morning
the mess of their being
i know
i will glance
at the empty rug
and remember
each shadow
each mud splat
exactly as they lay.

Brian Brivati

A photograph showing a person's feet wearing simple, grey, open-toed sandals. The person is standing on a light-colored, textured surface. In the background, there is a white plastic bucket with a green label that reads "Sofraik SIYAH ZEYT" and "Adel". The text of the story is overlaid on the image.

Sandals is 16. She is from Kuchu Village. She is currently a refugee in Ruanga camp near Zaxo. Like the other people from Kucho she has been under threat of Daesh, and she still fears them. “On 3rd August 2014 Daesh entered the village. They gathered the whole village and they separated women from the men, then they told us that all the men had been killed, including many of our relatives. We were in great shock and we hoped we would be killed with them, so as not to experience such horror, because we knew we would meet the same dark fate”. After a few days they took those of us who were left in the village and relocated us to Mosul. The girls were isolated from their mothers and little children. The day after that, other twenty girls and I were sent to Syria. When we arrived in Syria I was sold to someone whose name I didn’t even know. He wanted marry me, but I said that I wanted my parents and other family members. In spite of his threats I refused. That night he sent six of his guards to the house in which I was imprisoned. They raped me one by one and hurt me a lot. Then they sold me once again. I won’t forget what happened to me until the day I die. During that time I have been sold and bought twelve times. Many times I have been raped and hurt”. Several times she has tried to escape. Eventually she was able to escape with the help of some others but she can’t mention their names. She returned to Kurdistan and now lives with one of her brothers, but her parents and other family members are still held by Daesh. “I am going to England to participate in a press conference and am planning not to return to Iraq again anytime soon”. She appeared somewhat happy.

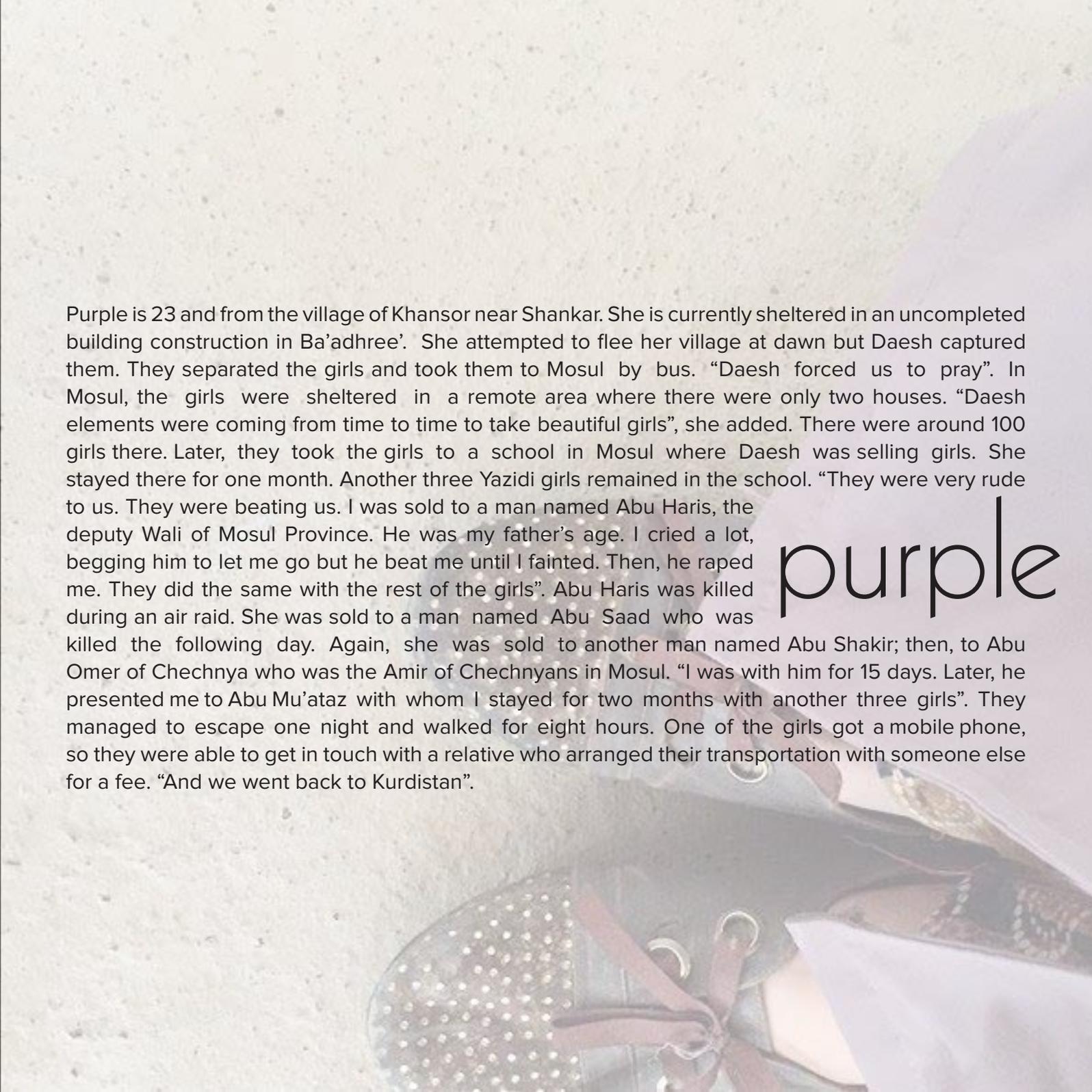
sandals

I love to slide my daughters' feet into their shoes. I kneel like a salesman and dip their toes in, before pressing down the heel for a neat, snug fit. Viola's are solid - for playing football - while Frieda's have a thin, blue strap. Soon we're off to school across the heath, Viola dragging sometimes, Frieda mining me for stories until their footsteps vanish in the playground where Mrs Mawford holds the door. And in they go, with the other boys and girls, their reading folders firm beneath their arms. I miss them for a second, wishing I could get them back, which happens later as they scamper out towards me.

We do phonics, balled up on the sofa. Frieda is on her ee sounds, a smile with each attempt. She's getting good now. Heel, she says, then meat, and treat and feet. Then flee, she say and me.

See me. Free.

Adam Baron



Purple is 23 and from the village of Khansor near Shankar. She is currently sheltered in an uncompleted building construction in Ba'adhree'. She attempted to flee her village at dawn but Daesh captured them. They separated the girls and took them to Mosul by bus. "Daesh forced us to pray". In Mosul, the girls were sheltered in a remote area where there were only two houses. "Daesh elements were coming from time to time to take beautiful girls", she added. There were around 100 girls there. Later, they took the girls to a school in Mosul where Daesh was selling girls. She stayed there for one month. Another three Yazidi girls remained in the school. "They were very rude to us. They were beating us. I was sold to a man named Abu Haris, the deputy Wali of Mosul Province. He was my father's age. I cried a lot, begging him to let me go but he beat me until I fainted. Then, he raped me. They did the same with the rest of the girls". Abu Haris was killed during an air raid. She was sold to a man named Abu Saad who was killed the following day. Again, she was sold to another man named Abu Shakir; then, to Abu Omer of Chechnya who was the Amir of Chechnyans in Mosul. "I was with him for 15 days. Later, he presented me to Abu Mu'ataz with whom I stayed for two months with another three girls". They managed to escape one night and walked for eight hours. One of the girls got a mobile phone, so they were able to get in touch with a relative who arranged their transportation with someone else for a fee. "And we went back to Kurdistan".

purple

How does it feel to run in the falling dark, and
think, my feet are bleeding?
How does it feel to think, I cannot take another
step. I want to lie down and sleep.
How does it feel to hear steps in the dark which
may be them?
How does it feel to think, I will not let them...
Not to know if there's a child inside you. To
know that
What happened will always be within.
How does it feel to see some tents ahead; to
think: There's human help.
How does it feel to think, I've made it. There's
life, I will live, I will have a life.
How does it feel to think, who will I be.
Do you now think – I am free?

Eva Hoffman

Leaf is fifteen from the village of Tal Uzair in the district of Shingal. She arrived in the Khankee' camp after a long journey that began when Daesh forces stormed Shingal and its villages on the 3rd August 2014. "Our Dad took us, me and all my family; my only brother, his wife and our mother at nine a.m. to a farm outside the village. At about eleven o'clock the Daesh forces that continued their attack reached Tel Uzair and all the nearby village farms. They separated the women from the men and the old from the young after gathering them in the village school. Leaf added, "They took my old mother and a number of other women to an adjacent room. They took my father and my brother to an unknown place. I stayed with a number of girls in an isolated room." Daesh killed all the younger men. They kept Leaf's father and some of the elderly men alive. Then they took the young women and girls, "Me among them, to the district of Tall Afar, from there to the sub-district of Baaj and then into Shangal in trucks and buses." Daesh men harassed them, taking pictures of them with their mobile phones whenever the trucks and buses stopped on the way. "I saw a lot of bodies of men and women on the roads between one region and another", she continued. From Shangal they took them to Mosul, where they arrived at exactly midnight. The following morning, some of the Daesh men entered the big three-floor house where they were being kept and forced them to read the Quran and convert to Islam threatening to kill their families if they refused. They stayed in Mosul for about ten days. They had very little food and drink. The girls and young women were taken to a house. "One day, a senior Daesh official arrived and entered our room. He chose the most beautiful girl among them for himself and distributed ten other beautiful girls as gifts among his friends. The remainder were given to other Daesh men in other provinces and towns where their forces resided. Our fate took me and my friend to Fallujah to two members of the Daesh organization who took us to a mosque as soon as we arrived". They ordered the two girls to convert to Islam telling them that they would not harm them. The following morning they moved them to a house inside Fallujah, leaving them for the market. They returned with some women's clothes. "We both realized that they would rape us. We began imploring them not to touch us and we would do whatever they demanded if they didn't rape us", Leaf said weeping. Here, she could not continue. When we asked her if she had indeed been raped, she was crying more and unable to answer. She calmed down a bit. She replied in a low voice mixed with shame, "Yes, they did." She continued telling her story, "We stayed in that house for three or four days". The two Daesh men left home, locking the gate behind them. The girls, after making sure that the men were away managed to break out and ran away. They came across a man and asked to use his mobile phone. "My friend told a person on the phone about our location". This person instructed them to wait for someone he knew in Fallujah, telling the girls where to meet him. The man, accompanied by someone else with a car, collected them and took them to Baghdad and from there to Erbil. Leaf arrived and settled in Khankee' camp after her long and painful journey. There, she met the surviving members of her family, her parents.

leaf

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