

## **TESTIMONIAL NARRATIVE OF THE UNSPEAKABLE CRIMES IN NADIA MURAD'S THE LAST GIRL**

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### **Abstract:**

Trauma is an unpleasant experience suffered by an individual and or a group of individuals collectively. It is a life-changing event that leaves physical and psychological scars that could influence both explicit and implicit memories in the conscious and subconscious mind. Therefore, traumatic events can occur when previous memories haunt the present state of mind through flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, disorders, and other means. As a result, the suppressed ghost of the past conjures up mental imagery of locations, people, and items associated with the heinous crime. While some individuals are locked in their traumatic experiences, others may integrate and release them via narration and testimony stories. This is important in making the wound visible and the silence audible. Therefore, as Nadia Murad demonstrated, literature deals with trauma and constructs a bridge of communal solidarity amongst people who share the same society or culture by exposing hideous crimes. The book by Nadia Murad and the co-writer Jenna Krajeski, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and Resistance to the Islamic State* (2017), focuses on ISIS sexual assaulters of their Yazidi victims and women's aspirations for reparative and restorative justice. Between 2014 and 2015, Nadia Murad, the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize winner, was imprisoned in sexual slavery. Nadia's historical testimony gave details of the crimes that the ISIS members perpetrated against her and her determination to prosecute them. The study argues that the Yazidi women's brave decision to come forward assisted rape survivors in breaking the women's generational silence. They significantly recalled their people's collective traumatized memory to heal the wounds through verbalizing suffering and testimonial narratives. The author-personal narrator's experiences with injustices had been investigated using a mix of autobiography,

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biography, memoir, History, and testimony, and also how the testimonial narrative aids in the act of speaking out against crimes; by giving voice to the silent agony.

**Key words:** Nadia Murad, The Last Girl, Trauma, Memory, Collective Traumatized Consciousness, Testimonial Narratives, Resistance.

## Introduction:

### 1-Socio-Historical Context

The Yazidis are an ethnic and religious community from Mesopotamia that shares ethnic, cultural, and religious identities. Yazidism has a lengthy history as a monotheistic religion and has several characteristics with other faiths but is distinctive from Middle Eastern customs because of its originality. Prayer rituals, reincarnation belief, and the Peacock Angel, played by Tawusi Malek, is a crucial character who is regarded as the messenger of the Yazidi deity. The Yazidis have been persecuted for centuries due to their faith's distinctive precepts. Throughout the Yazidis' History, seventy-three genocides were perpetrated against the Yazidis, and ISIS carried out the most recent. In the past, persecution has always been a constant worry; therefore, many Yazidis relocated to Iraq's northwestern region because the rough terrain in this region (particularly, Sinjar) provided some protection.

Iraq's History is horrific, including the slaughter and murder of ethnic minorities and terrorism for decades. The ongoing battles between state-sponsored militants and ISIS-affiliated terrorists, in particular, constituted a conflict that resulted in changes in geography, demographics, social structure, and culture. Therefore, trauma and long-term illness must have occurred from such significant changes in the lives of war-affected people. Nadia Murad is a Yazidi, which is an ethnoreligious minority group in a small hamlet in Kocho. Her memoir detailed her struggles as a child growing up in Iraq throughout the conflict and her ordeals and escape from Mosul's streets and camps. *The Last Girl* is told from the viewpoint of the author, who is now an adult, as she searches for answers to her traumatic past. Her family and neighbors were vulnerable to any change in the country's political circumstances since they were a minority group. However, despite their vulnerable situation, the Yazidis could adapt to circumstances because of their community structure. "But when there was war in Iraq, and there always seemed to be fighting in Iraq," Murad writes, "Those towns loomed over us, their little Yazidi neighbor, and old prejudice soon hardened into hatred." (Murad, 2017, p. 12).

Atrocities, wars, battles, and assassinations that have occurred in Iraq are well-known worldwide. The region became a war-torn zone as authority and control passed between numerous institutional authorities, and the after-effects of the wars' had a substantial influence on people's lives. As Murad belonged to the Yazidi minority, her life was always in danger whenever there was a transfer of power or control because the Yazidi were always perceived as the "others" because they were a minority group. In this particular case, it was evident that a process of "Othering," a religiously associated group, was going to take place. Hatred was raised due to this process and the desire to hurt vulnerable minority groups. The community was afraid of being attacked because of its remoteness from other major groups of people.

This was particularly so after the Americans who had been guarding Kocho and many other nearby districts since 2007 started to leave after the conclusion of the Iraq-Iran War in

2011. Murad's ordeal began when she, her family, and all the Yazidi families in her neighborhood were abducted and carried to the school where she was studying. Understandably everyone was terrified of the unknown as the terrorist militants pushed them and marched them toward the building. The portrayal of minorities in Murad's school textbooks was nonexistent, contributing to the other community's general misconception about the Yazidis.

## ***2-Trauma and memory***

The book's testimonial narrative calls into question many aspects of the daily lives of those affected by violence worldwide. Throughout her narrative, Murad describes the collective suffering of all types of people. She goes on to explain the bleak future of a society when many young men are enticed to join ISIS due to the organization and or the institution's power structure, as well as her own horrific experiences as a sex slave. "for the teenagers, they abducted, ISIS had developed a rigorous system of reeducation and brainwashing," Murad adds, "ISIS had instituted an intense system of reeducation and brainwashing for the teenagers they kidnapped. While the boys were taught Arabic and English, they learned words of war like a gun, and they were told that Yezidism was a religion of the devil and that their family

members who would not convert would be better off dead." (Murad, 2017, p. 108).

As she related her earlier experiences, it became more evident how memory plays a key role in the writing of Trauma theory, and theory revolves around the concept of memory. Laurence, a psychiatrist, defines memory in the Context of trauma as:

"anything but a photographic record of experience; it is a roadway full of potholes, badly in need of repair, worked day and night by revisionist crews. What is registered is highly selective and thoroughly transformed by interpretation and semantic encoding at the moment of experience. What can be veridically recalled is limited and routinely reconstructed to fit models of what might have—must have— happened". (Kirmayer, 1996, p. 167).

This notion argues that all sorts of traumatic memories are susceptible to the reconstruction of events because what is imagined or may have been built, plays a vital part in what and how it is remembered and conveyed. The feeling associated with recollection becomes traumatic when an experience stimulates the memory and drives it to a situation where the individual mediates new ways of discovering the surrounding world and environment. On the subject of memory, Pierre Janet differentiates between traumatic and narrative or ordinary recollections. Traumatic memories, on the other hand, should not be a part of one's life or intermingled with other social activities. Janet explains, "In contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody; the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function" (Janet, 1928).

It is generally accepted that memory is determined by social and cultural artifacts, whereas speaking a particular language may be seen as defiance of the authorial power's standards. Consequently, it is evident that collective memory and individual memory are tightly intertwined. While collective memory aids in the organization of individual memory, it also has the potential to lead individuals to forget what they have experienced while recalling what they have not. Hence, collective memory uses a variety of artifacts such as culture, art, and media to rebuild the past in the present, and remembering atrocities is mostly an image of reality for those who have not experienced them.

The Yazidi people's collective suffering after ISIS militants murdered the men of Kocho's hamlet might be seen as a genocidal effort to wipe out the Yazidi community. Fundamentalists' ideology rationalized such crimes by misinterpreting Yazidi's holy figure Tawsi Melek because religion's participation and interpretation always involve playing the power game in any hierarchical system. In many world conflicts, women were reused as weapons of war. In the Yazidi case, sexual violence against women was described in her autobiography. These acts included raping women and women being sold and bought by various individuals as a simple transaction. Such acts appeared to her as a new kind of punishment or a sadistic pleasure experienced by offenders to inflict extra misery on the victims' feelings. ISIS terrorists have turned women into easy targets and inflicted physical suffering on virgin girls and married and older women, a significant problem that can be seen as a result of the conflict.

Like all other Yazidis, Nadia could not grasp or comprehend the events that would unfold. She was stunned, and the masses dragged her to the school. After a few minutes, the men and ladies were separated, and the elder males were murdered in a group shot. The Yazidis' mass departure is described in this setting in the book. "Then the doors closed, and the trucks drove away behind the school," she writes. We heard gunfire a little time afterward. As the room exploded in screaming, I backed away from the window. The ladies screamed, "They killed them!" as the militants yelled at us to be silent.

Nadia's family seemed to be destitute and had never seen the horrors of war. According to Nadia, most of the families in Kocho village were impoverished, relying on their farmed animals and part-time jobs in the city. Murders and atrocities performed against oppressed people caused more tremendous mental suffering in the form of trauma than physical injury. Cathy Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* discusses this phenomenon as a wounded psyche. Caruth described how writings about an event after a certain time not only talked about the event but also examined the narrative of a painful event in more detail. Both skeptics and psychologists, she adds, agree that "trauma" refers to physical harm or injury.

However, Caruth continues to interpret the word in relation to Freud, who saw it as a wound inflicted on the mind rather than the body. Therefore, a trauma is more than just a simple sickness of a wounded psyche since it is always the story of a wound that screams out, and it confronts the issues to inform the readers of a reality or truth that is unknown or

freely accessible. Thus, the psychological suffering that affects a person's mental mind may be better understood through Murad's written story.

### **3-Resistance, Awareness and Social Action**

There has been a relationship between trauma and storytelling for almost as long as trauma itself. The sharing of one's own personal trauma narrative is widely recognised as a therapeutic practise. Together or separately, we can play a significant role in rehabilitation. Freud and Breuer suggested that the "talking cure" would help individuals recover, and this encouraged them to speak about their problems. Patients' stories help victims recover, and a talking cure may give them a powerful voice to terrify onlookers, as Ganteau and Onega point out. They reasoned this way because they saw language as a medium of communication, something that happens all the time, and something that can be used as a stand-in for action to have the same result (S.Onega, 2014, p. 2)

According to Beverley, a testimonial narrative is more than simply a legal testimony; it is essentially an organised account and alludes to a present crisis or situation to which the speaker focuses the reader's attention in the hopes of eliciting an appropriate reaction. These splits, in Beverley's view, are inherently time-related and morally problematic: "Testimony must above all be a tale that... addresses some urgent and immediate issue of communication," while "Testimony is also ethical in that it imposes a particular ethical duty on its readers and demands that readers "participate... in the concreteness... of current social battles." (Beverley, 2004, p. 47)

This approach also emphasizes Kimberly Nance's statement in her thesis *Can Literature Promote Justice?* Which claims categorically that literature could promote justice. This is not about talking about one's anguish for healing, records or legal reasons; it's about talking about "one's suffering in such a way that readers will be induced to act against the injustice of it". Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their book; *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Laub who analyzed the evidence of surviving Auschwitz prisoners' evidence of their discontent including scant information, highlights the importance of competing narratives as being the survivors' vital truth. He states "Knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, an event in its own right" (Shoshana Felman, 1992) He states "Knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, an event in its own right" (Shoshana Felman, 1992, p. 62) Laub categorizes witnessing into three distinct stages, based on his personal experience as a Holocaust survivor: "the level of being witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing" (Shoshana Felman, 1992, p. 75) The first level is Laub's "autobiographical awareness as a young victim" (Felman and Laub 1992, P 75). The second level is his work as a survivor interviewer for Yale University's Fortunoff Video

Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. The third step is “the process of witnessing while being watched.

In other words, testimony given for the purpose of psychological healing (“therapeutic”) or the revision of the “official” historical record (“archival”) does not qualify as testimony under this revised and more narrow definition. This narrow definition considers not only what readers know, but also what they do; this solicited action is not abstract and generalized. Therefore, as Caruth postulates, “trauma is marked not by presentness but by “latency,” and the “period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent” (Caruth, 1996, p. 17).

However, as time passes since the heinous crime, a new feeling of urgency emerges the desire to tell the narrative because a characteristic of trauma is the difficulty of communicating and the need to communicate. As James Young observed,

“It is almost as if violent events –perceived as aberrations or ruptures in the cultural continuum– demand their retelling, their narration, back into traditions and structures they would otherwise defy... [T]he more violently wrenched from a continuum a catastrophe is perceived to be, the more desperate –and frustrated– the writer’s attempts become to represent its events as discontinuous”( Young,P,404).

The appearance of several narratives concerning a prior experience provides “evidence” of trauma; in the sense that the narratives suggest what must be recounted above all else.

In and of itself, Murad’s memoirs and revisiting of her painful experiences might be considered acts of social action and resistance. Resistance literature refers to writing about any sort of unlawful violence done against a person or group. Murad is describing a reality that the rest of the world may be ignorant of or incapable of comprehending. Resistance stories often incorporate a sequence of images and the truth of reality, raising more concerns about the writer’s life, identity, and commitment. She has given a loud, strong voice to her minority group; the Yazidi, and their daily struggle to exist as religious minorities in the face of uncertainty and danger to their life by sharing her story as a kind of resistance to the atrocities she saw. Edward Said explores the role of intellectuals and literature in opposing imperialism in his 1993 book “*Culture and Imperialism.*” In his work, he highlights that resistance is a multi-stage process with several key stages. He points out that at the ideological resistance stage, the intellectual takes the lead by altering various sets of ideas and attitudes while at the same time keeping the resistance movement in mind. This is particularly important in the Context of resistive narrative.

Individual and collective memories of the Iraqi tragedy and conflicts; demonstrate the importance of the historical background of oppression and events that led to the formation of the resistance narrative. Furthermore, since the rapists were capable of causing violence, every act of resistance by a woman seemed to alter the rapists’ manliness, as they relish in a woman’s limitations. The amount of power a man can exert by himself, assuming a female’s

gender is much inferior to his own, might explain the psychology of such a situation. According to Murad, a woman was seen as a commodity that could be bought and sold, but the women who bought them retreated from the men, giving them an edge. “Abu Muawaya grabbed me by the jaw and pushed me against the wall when he came into the room about eight p.m.,” Murad states in this Context. “Why aren’t you resisting?” he inquired. He seemed irritated by it.” (Murad, 2017, p. 94).

Murad’s mental illness has compelled her to write instead of burying memories, forcing her to relive and recreate awful acts of cruelty, injustice, and inhumanity. The actions of resistance and the will to fight such a horrible organization also inspired the citizens of Kocho, and it was urgent and necessary to encourage other women to raise their voices to talk about their awful experiences and take severe social action. As a consequence, a number of women who had been enslaved were able to flee their ISIS captors and dissidents faced a range of serious consequences, some of which might be as hostile as losing their lives. Young boys who join ISIS may acquire a warped view of life and lose their real-world perspectives due to their suffering. The typical living attitude of enjoying a stable existence while adhering to the majority’s faith has always imprisoned the younger generation, and they may never be able to break free. This textual repetition of her voice binds Nadia to two worlds: the world of her memories, from which she cannot escape, and the actual world. Her moral reaction is to reflect on the “horror” of the situation and to warn others in the hope that such a thing will not happen again.

#### **4-“Bearing Witness.”**

“testimony” refers to a formal written or oral statement made before a court. As Beverley has pointed out, it has to do with testifying to events. The “truth

effect” (Beverley, 2004, p. 33) aims to convince the reader that the horrific events portrayed are “real” or “authentic”; the testimony function in a book achieves this; is the obsession to recreate this reality, and there could be an influence even as fiction. However, the real effects of trauma literature should be isolated from the effects of depicting testimony in a constructive approach. The investigation of psychological damage requires the account of the heinous acts committed and suffered by the victim. The incriminating witness has the right to expose and silence what happened and stand up for “the underdog.” In some cases, however, the witness must overcome and correct some amnesia elements, called amnesia reversal. Thus, authors who bear witness to horrific events in the past tend to look for words and forms that will help them keep some of these traumatic memories alive. Witnesses often show concern for the victim. However, individuals who witness dreadful human acts, on the other hand, are caught in a struggle between victim and perpetrator. Bystanders are obliged to choose sides in this conflict, which makes them morally neutral and untenable, and appeal to the desire of everyone to avoid seeing, hearing, or speaking anything hurtful. On the other side, the sufferer asks the bystander to bear the weight of the pain suffered. Nadia, in her



book, addresses the audience directly, the vast majority of whom have seen horror films from the twentieth century or earlier. She feels obligated to talk about her feelings after playing victims/witnesses to the event. She does so even when she is silent and also takes on the role of a storyteller on behalf of many others who have gone missing in this manner. One of the most crucial components in bearing testimony is the attentive listener who shares the testifying process and joins the survivor in search of the truth about the past. “The narrative’s answer to hearing his testimony,” says Laub, “because only when the survivor believes he is being heard can he stop to hear—and listen to—himself” (Felman and Laub 1991: 71). After playing victims/witnesses to the event, Nadia feels compelled to ‘talk’ about her experiences. Even when she isn’t speaking, she does so and also becomes a narrator for countless

others who have gone missing in this way. The presence of an attentive listener who shares the testifying process and accompanies the survivor/witness in his/her quest for the truth about the past is one of the most important components in the process of bearing testimony.

Nadia’s experience of being persecuted and forced to work as a sex slave by

ISIS radical terrorists are a vivid example of how some people are punished in today’s society for being religious, young, or simply female. The religious marginalization of the Yezidi minority is just one of many horrific events taking place around the world. Losing one’s identity, family, and homeland is a tragic event that puts one in danger. Even when the heroine feels defeated and exhausted in her struggle for survival, the process of awakening in the autobiography helps her restore an identity that could only be restored through resistance.

## **Conclusion**

Nadia Murad’s article significantly acknowledges the current global injustices based on religion, ethnicity, and gender. It sends a powerful message worldwide that no matter how far our civilization has evolved toward freedom, humanism, and secular principles, terrible brutality and evil still lurk at the margins of society. Readers will identify with the Yezidis, and the author’s cause as the book exposes horrors and injustices, and it will certainly make them want to bring ISIS to justice. Nadia Murad recounts how she was kidnapped and raped in her own home and then thrown into a pit of misery while being raped, insulted, and having her dignity destroyed simply because she did not believe in the same God as them. Also, due to the unknown existence of the identity and membership of many small religious organizations, her future is currently in question. It also draws attention to the worldwide human rights violations due to authoritarian regressive power tactics.

There are many historical omissions regarding atrocities inflicted on small religious, marginal groups, and ethnic minorities in various countries by official authorities and terrorist organizations, similar to the atrocities suffered by the Yazidi people. Therefore, such omissions must be historically recorded so that lost voices, testimonies, and acknowledgment

are public knowledge. Thus, allowing access to untold experiences that do not refer to singular, monumental events but rather to the everyday experiences of minorities and marginal groups, which must be listened to and understood on their own terms by Governments and the public in general. Hence atrocities such as racism, political oppression, economic supremacy, and social disempowerment can be conceptualized in a historical framework to show the suffering of the many small religious, marginal groups and ethnic minorities worldwide.

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