

Original Article

From Subjugation to Resilience: The Intersections of Patriarchy, Commodification, and Ethnic Cleansing in Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper interrogates the complex intersections between ethnic cleansing, sexual violence in conflict zones, and entrenched patriarchal structures, with particular attention to the dynamics of subjugation and commodification in the text under review. It explores how women survivors, despite enduring dehumanizing violence, transform their pain into agency by resisting, articulating their ordeals and emerging as advocates for other victims. Drawing on feminist scholarship, the paper demonstrates that patriarchal systems institutionalize rigid gender hierarchies which privilege male dominance while relegating women to subordination, legitimizing male control over female bodies. Within contexts of war and conflict, these asymmetrical power relations are intensified, turning women into primary targets of sexual violence deployed as a weapon of domination and control. Ultimately, the paper foregrounds the resilience and resistance of women, highlighting their roles as both survivors and transformative voices within narratives of war.*

KEYWORDS: Resilience, Patriarchy, Feminism, Resistance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, the issue of war- and conflict-induced sexual violence in narratives of militarized settings has always been disturbing and rather on the increase, especially in societies that are traditionally patriarchal. As Danushka Medawatte asserts, conflict-related sexual violence is an outcome of patriarchy, underscoring the portrayal of women as vulnerable and establishing power dynamics rooted in narratives of weakness versus power. According to him, "add conflict into the picture, and sexual violence transforms to a tool and a weapon with which women, families, communities, and at times, entire nations, are controlled" (Medawatte 672).

Themes of patriarchy, female oppression, resilience, ethnic cleansing, and agency constitute recurrent and thematically dominant motifs in the text under examination, particularly as they relate to the lived experiences of women and girls within narratives shaped by war and conflict. These narratives foreground women as both subjects of trauma and agents of resilience—figures who transcend victimhood to reclaim their voices and advocate for others. To further ground this analysis, the paper draws on the theoretical insights of literary feminist theory and literary trauma theory, which together enable a nuanced interrogation of gendered power relations and the multifaceted dimensions of female experience in the selected texts. Literary feminist theory, deriving from the ideological and critical foundations of feminism, particularly the third wave and intersectional perspectives as propounded by Crenshaw, Hooks, and Mohanty, serves as a key lens through which the study interrogates structures of power, representation, and resistance. Conversely, the literary trauma framework adopted here emphasizes the Survivor Narrative and the Recovery and Resilience Trauma Concepts, highlighting the trajectory from victimhood (marked by militarized sexual violence, trauma, and emotional numbness) to the reclamation of voice, agency, and narrative ownership as posited by Caruth, Herman, and Luckhurst. Through this dual framework, the study situates women's testimonies not merely as accounts of suffering but as transformative acts of remembrance, resistance, and recovery.

Consequently, there will be a synopsis of the book, *The Last Girl*, to provide an overview of the storyline, emphasizing its significance to the discourse before exploring the themes already outlined, as they relate to the memoir and their alignment with the study's intricate theoretical framework.

2. SYNOPSIS

Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl* (2017), set in Iraq, offers a gripping and emotionally intense account of her journey as a Yazidi woman surviving captivity and brutality inflicted by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). Her narrative unfolds amidst the backdrop of the genocide targeting the Yazidi community in Iraq. Nadia, a 2018 Nobel laureate for Peace, begins her story with the tranquility and innocence of life in Kocho, a small village where she lived with her family until ISIS militants attacked. She recounts the harrowing experience of witnessing her male family members and all adult males in her village being killed, while she and other women and girls were forced to watch and later abducted and subjected to enslavement and

sexual violence by ISIS fighters. The older women, including Nadia's mother, were also later killed off in Mosul. Nadia vividly portrays the brutality and unimaginable suffering endured by Yazidi women and girls under their captors.

Through her narrative, Murad recounts her captivity, escape, and pursuit of justice, highlighting themes of resilience, survival, and advocacy. *The Last Girl* illuminates the Yazidi genocide and stands as a powerful testimony to survivors' strength while calling for action on their ongoing humanitarian crisis.

3. INTERSECTION OF GENOCIDE, DISPLACEMENT, AND SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN

The intersection of genocidal killings and women's displacement exposes distinct gendered dimensions in war narratives. Women and girls, often the most vulnerable, face heightened risks of sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking, as mass killings force them into rapid, often perilous displacement within or beyond national borders. As Fredrick rightly observes, "In conflict zones, basic human rights like the right to life, security, and dignity are often disregarded. Civilians face risks such as displacement, violence, and exploitation," (Thies and Thies 1). This reality underscores the grave conditions driving such mass displacements.

In *The Last Girl*, Murad's narrative powerfully illuminates the horrors of genocide, the gendered impacts of displacement, and the resilience of survivors. It reveals how sexual violence and subjugation intersect with class, ethnicity, and citizenship (Brickell and Speer), aligning with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which underscores the interconnectedness of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression within societal structures.

4. DISPLACEMENT, SUBJUGATION, AND COMMODIFICATION OF WOMEN IN THE LAST GIRL

Themes of displacement and its attendant patriarchal and subjugating impact on women and girls in Murad's *The Last Girl* are made more profound by the intersection of cultural, religious, gender, class, and socio-economic factors that shape the gender dynamics in the Asian region. Murad focuses specifically on the ISIS-perpetrated genocide and forced displacement of the women in her village, Kocho, within the Yazidi ethnic group in southern Iraq. The genocide has both ethnic and religious dimensions, devastating men and imposing severe consequences on women. Patriarchal norms, often justified through interpretations of Islamic teachings, underpin forced conversions, gender-based violence, and honor killings. In Murad's narrative, ISIS claims justification for "taking girls to use as sex slaves" (Murad 139). Her account reflects a third-wave feminist intersectional perspective, showing that women's experiences in conflict are shaped not only by gender but also by race, class, ethnicity, and other intersecting identities. Moreso, this perspective also acknowledges and values the diverse experiences of women from different backgrounds and identities in war narratives.

Again, Murad's portrayal of the nature of the women's ordeal resonates with Simone de Beauvoir's argument in "The Second Sex," where women are categorized as the "Other," a classification that perpetuates their oppression. The targeted violence and displacement experienced by Murad's community highlight sexual objectification of the female body, systemic marginalization, and dehumanization of women, echoing Beauvoir's critique of how societal constructs label women as inferior and subordinate. While men endured torture and massacre, displaced women and girls faced an equally harrowing fate: they were dehumanized and treated as the "Other". Termed "Sabaya," a word connoting sexual slavery and ownership, they were considered mere property, as Murad poignantly states, that they "can be given as gifts and sold at the whim of the owner, for they are mere property" (Murad 140). Labelled as "Sabaya," these women were stripped of their independence, identities, rights, and reduced to commodities that could be bought, sold, or gifted at the will of their captors. It sadly illustrates the intersection of displacement, sexual violence, and gendered subjugation.

Societal gender roles traditionally positioned men as protectors of women and girls due to physical attributes influenced by biology. Yet, as Prakash grimly recounts, in the genocidal killings, Kocho men were brutally executed, leaving their female relatives defenseless and vulnerable. Mothers, sisters, wives, and young sons witnessed the massacre helplessly from a schoolhouse window (Prakash 164). In this horrific context, women were left at the mercy of attackers who displaced them and reduced them to sexual objects, articles of trade, and slaves -the Sabayas. They were forcibly transported to an institute in Solagh and subsequently taken to Mosul, which had fallen under ISIS control. This displacement not only separated them from their families but also subjected them to repeated sale and resale as commodities, used as sex slaves, and subjected to unimaginable abuse. This commodification of displaced women and girls, evident in the sales and auctions orchestrated by their captors, is a stark manifestation of the subjugation and objectification inherent in the oppression of displacement. Murad's account captures this dehumanization succinctly as she recalls that "on the floor, a militant was registering the transactions in a book, writing down our names and the names of the militants who took us" (Murad 140).

The above quote, especially the act of recording the sale and ownership of women-like objects, speaks directly to the commodification of women during the Yazidi genocide. This transactional view of women is a brutal manifestation of gendered violence during conflict, where women's bodies are stripped of autonomy and reduced to objects that can be traded or "owned." Additionally, it is particularly harrowing to read in the narrative that some of these women resorted to desperate

measures to avoid falling into the hands of more brutal militants, by willingly giving themselves up to kinder militants, begging to be taken instead of being sold to anyone perceived as crueler. Murad provides a touching example of this tactic, recounting how she pleaded to be taken by a certain militant instead of facing a potentially crueler fate. This strategy, demeaning as it is, helps to evade being sold to someone like Salwan, described as a formidable and menacing figure. She recounts that, "I flung myself toward those feet. I started begging, please take me with you... do whatever you want, I just cannot go with the giant" (Murad 141). Here, the protagonist is reduced to an object in a system where women's bodies are traded, owned, and subjected to unimaginable violence. The desperation in her plea reflects the extreme circumstances of her subjugation, where her only choice is to beg for a "lesser evil" to escape the brutality of a more terrifying captor.

Further examples of how gender, power, and violence intersect in conflict and war zones to systematically subjugate women, using their bodies as tools of dominance and control, include the slave market activities of haggling and exchange between buyers and sellers recorded thus, "they are virgins, right?... of course... they are so young, and they are Yazidi... no Yazidi girl would have sex unless she is married" (Murad 136). This again is reflective of how women, particularly Yazidi girls, were reduced to commodities whose values were determined by their sexual purity and ethnicity. Additionally, these young Yazidi girls are sold and re-sold as a form of punishment for resisting, or when their present owners get tired and bored of them. For instance, Nafah, one of the militants, had bought a noticeably young, beautiful girl; others teased, "We knew you would pick her... let me know when you are done with her-give her to me". (Murad 137). The above lack of personal regard for the woman's feelings, consent, or basic humanity reflects the broader subjugation women face in such circumstances. They are stripped of their identity and self-worth, becoming mere vessels for the violent and oppressive desires of their captors. Moreover, the statement also suggests an implicit understanding between the men involved, revealing a patriarchal hierarchy that reinforces their control over women's bodies.

In addition to the sale and sex slavery of these girls, some of them were subjected to sham marriages not only to give their male abductors more control over them but to convert them to the Islamic religion forcefully. As soon as the financial transaction was concluded on them, they were made to line up to fill out forms that declared them as properties of the men who bought them. As far as Murad was concerned, "it was a contract for rape that the militants, including Haiji Salman, called marriage" (Murad 150).

Murad captures in the quote below this recurring systemic determination of women's values by the men who control them, and their bodies, and see them as commodities that can be used, abused, and bartered.

We were all victims of the same violence. We would be bought at the market or given as a gift to a new recruit or a high-ranking commander, and then taken back to his home, where we would be raped and humiliated ... Then we would be sold or given as a gift again, and again raped and beaten, then sold or given to another militant, and raped and beaten by him, ... and it went this way for as long as we were desirable enough and not yet dead. (Murad 181)

This transaction-based system strips women of their humanity, reducing them to assets in a brutal economy of sexual slavery. This passage captures the relentless cycle of violence, dehumanization, and commodification that Yazidi women endured under the control of ISIS, as described by Nadia Murad in *The Last Girl*. It reflects the systemic use of sexual violence as a tool for oppression and domination.

5. TRAUMA OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND FAMILY LOSS IN CONFLICT NARRATIVES

Experiences of sexual violence, torture, and the loss of loved ones often generate profound trauma for individuals living through armed conflict. The convergence of these experiences forms a devastating web of suffering that disrupts one's sense of safety, identity, and trust. Sexual violence in war is rarely incidental; it functions as a calculated weapon of terror used to humiliate, dominate, and dismantle communities. Beyond the physical harm, survivors endure deep psychological wounds, feelings of shame, powerlessness, and guilt that can persist long after the violence ends.

In militarized narratives, sexual violence is depicted as part of a systematic campaign of subjugation and control. Armed groups often use it to destabilize populations, silence resistance, and assert dominance. During episodes of ethnic cleansing, such as the 2014 Yazidi genocide recounted in Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl*, sexual violence emerges as a strategic instrument of extermination. As Liu notes, ISIS "captured or trafficked over 6,800 Yazidi women and children, subjecting many of them to sexual violence... to eradicate the Yazidis through systematic murder, forced conversion, and sexual violence on a shocking scale" (1).

Kivlahan and Ewigman argue that "rape includes lack of consent to sex as well as provision of sex to avoid harm and obtain basic necessities" (69). Sexual violence and torture therefore frequently overlap, both serving to strip victims of dignity and autonomy. Torture, defined as the intentional infliction of severe physical or psychological pain, reinforces the depersonalization of women in war contexts. Gray et al. note the blurred boundaries between "sexual violence" and "torture,"

suggesting that sexual violence may amount to torture in specific situations. Similarly, *Shattered Lives* (1996) observes that women were "raped after witnessing the torture and killings of their relatives" and sometimes mutilated afterward (Nowrojee 1). Acts such as vaginal mutilation with machetes, sticks, boiling water, or acid exemplify the brutality and intent to annihilate female personhood.

Murad's memoir speaks to this intersection of sexual violence and torture. She recounts how her captor, Abu Muawaya, shoved her against a wall and demanded, "Why aren't you resisting?" (94). Her defiance provoked further assault: "They started kicking at our shoulders and hands" (147). These moments underscore how sexual abuse, physical torture, and psychological terror converge in the lived realities of women in militarized zones.

Equally traumatic is the loss of family, a recurring motif in conflict narratives. War-induced deaths, disappearances, and displacement produce intense grief, anger, and survivor's guilt. Such losses are not merely personal but collective, symbolizing the destruction of family structures and social bonds. Murad's anguish upon realizing that her mother and niece, Katherine, were gone forever reveals the depth of emotional devastation caused by genocide. Her struggle to accept their deaths underscores the long-lasting psychological consequences of familial loss.

Murad's exploration of the aforementioned themes, and the overlap in her memoir, portrays them as deeply traumatic, shaping her emotional and psychological journey as a survivor of the Yazidi Genocide.

6. THE TRAUMA OF BEREAVEMENT AND SEX SLAVERY IN THE LAST GIRL

Trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that can have long-lasting psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical effects on a person. It occurs when an individual is exposed to overwhelming events, abuse, violence, or situations that exceed their ability to cope. Khaleel and Abbas assert in "Testimonial Narrative of The Unspeakable Crimes in Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl*", "that all sorts of traumatic memories are susceptible to 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..." (3).

Murad powerfully depicts the trauma of bereavement and sex slavery, exposing the deep emotional and physical scars left by the ISIS conflict. She recounts the massacre of her family during the Yazidi genocide, an experience that shatters her sense of belonging and leaves her haunted by the brutal deaths of her loved ones. The separation of men from women and children in Kocho marks the beginning of her enduring grief and isolation. She recounts how she "watched my brothers being loaded into trucks... then the doors closed, ... A moment later we heard gunshots". (Murad 103). She further revealed that the women erupted in screams: "They killed them... They've killed my sons" her mom sobbed. Murad conveys the profound grief and helplessness of the Yazidi genocide, recounting the traumatic separation as her brothers are forcibly taken and executed. The gunshots confirm their deaths, reflecting both personal loss and the collective suffering of the community under ISIS brutality.

Beyond losing her six brothers among the hundreds of others murdered in one day, Murad also lost her aged mother, who was executed and buried alongside all the aged women and hundreds of others in unmarked graves. Her favorite niece, Katherine, "had stepped on an IED while trying to cross into Kurdistan and it exploded beneath them" (Murad 290), the explosion claimed her life. Each loss deepens Murad's grief, reflecting the intersecting layers of trauma she bears and symbolizing the broader suffering of the Yazidi community during the genocide.

She writes about the deep trauma and pain she felt at Katherine's funeral, "I felt all the wounds of my captivity and escape anew. I could not believe that I would never see Katherine or my mother again. That was the moment I knew that my life was truly destroyed" (Murad 291). This confession highlights the psychological burden of witnessing the annihilation of family, the irreparable loss of life, and the continuing emotional and mental struggle to cope with such immeasurable grief.

"Being dead was better than being sold like merchandise and raped until our bodies were in shreds... when you are a Sabayya, you die every second of every day, and just like the men, we would never see our families or home again...we wish we had been with the men when they killed them" (Murad 182). This passage highlights the trauma of sex slavery, where physical violation erases humanity and inflicts profound emotional and mental suffering. Murad's narrative shows how losing her family to genocide and enduring enslavement intertwine, revealing the overlapping burdens of bereavement and sexual violence in war.

To underscore the above overlap of the trauma of bereavement and sex slavery, she testifies that, "first they took us from our homes and killed our men. Then they separated us from our mothers and sisters. Wherever we were, they reminded us that we were just property, there to be touched and abused... all of those violations were steps in the execution of our souls" (Murad 151). The separation from family, the loss of loved ones, and the commodification through sale and resale are presented above as interconnected steps in the systematic destruction of Yazidi women's physical, emotional, and spiritual selves.

Murad gives a harrowing account of Yazidi women's trauma under ISIS, highlighting how sex slavery combined repeated physical abuse with systematic degradation. She recounts being called *Sabaya*, forced into pseudo-marriages that legalized rape, and stripped of dignity and personhood. She writes that, "This was a contract for rape that the militants, including Hajji Salman, called marriage" (Murad180). Murad's description of this "contract for rape" underscores how sexual slavery was institutionalized, veiled in a perverse interpretation of marriage, and used as a powerful tool of control and continued subjugation of Yazidi women.

Also, Jilan, her sister-in-law, and Nisreen, her cousin, told their ordeals as sex slaves, and how they were both sold again and again "...I was sold twice in Mosul, and they brought me here" (Murad 181). Being sold repeatedly highlights the transactional cruelty of their suffering, reinforcing their perceived disposability. Yazidi women like Nisreen and Jilan endured relentless abuse, where sex slavery violently erased the boundaries between their bodies and their captors' desires.

"I was a Sabiyya at the checkpoint, and any Islamic State member could come into the room and do whatever he wanted with me. They would keep me in a locked room with nothing but a mattress and a bowl of rotting fruit, just waiting for the door to open and another militant to enter..." (Murad 192). This passage underscores the use of sabbayas as prostitutes without autonomy over their bodies, and this realization prompts Murad to declare that this was her life now. As punishment for attempting to escape, Hajji Salman reduced her to the level of a caged animal at the checkpoint, subjected to constant sexual abuse. Her description of the room a mattress and rotting fruit captures the total loss of dignity and rights, reflecting the physical, mental, and emotional imprisonment of Yazidi women and the relentless fear of the next assault.

Notwithstanding the above, we are told about other brutal treatments Hajji Salman meted out to her when she tried to flee. When she was caught, she was thoroughly horse-whipped by him, "so fast and with so much anger.... He then ordered all his guards to gang-rape her until she passed out - Morteja was the first to come to bed...after Morteja, another guard raped me" (Murad 175). She recalls the guard carefully placing his glasses on the table, ironically valuing them more than her own life. According to her, "When I opened my eyes, Salman's driver was standing over me ... Hajji Salman has sold you" (Murad 176). The rotating abuse by different guards underscores the systematic objectification of women under sexual slavery, treating their bodies as disposable and valuing them less than inanimate objects.

7. THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITIES OF RACE, RELIGION, CLASS, AND GENDER IN THE LAST GIRL

Intersectionality is a framework that examines how various social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and religion interact and overlap to shape an individual's lived experiences. It explores how these interconnected identities influence systems of power, privilege, and oppression, highlighting the complexity of discrimination and inequality as they affect people on multiple levels. Introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer and an academic, it is an analytical agenda to explain the various levels of societal oppression suffered by black women and women of colour. She defines the term in an interview, "Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, more than Two Decades Later", as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects". Additionally, Venus E. Evans-Winters avows that "Intersectionality is a theoretical framework and mode of analysis used to understand the multifarious ways race, class, gender, and other social categories overlap and intersect with one another to shape individuals' and groups' perspectives and collective experiences" (2). From a feminist analysis, the intertwining dynamics of genocidal killings and the war-induced displacement of women and girls reveal profound implications that intersect with various forms of social identity-based oppression as theorized by Kimberlie Crenshaw.

However, these social identities like race, class, religion, and gender serve as key symbols of the systems of oppression that deeply shape the experiences of women, particularly in conflict and war narratives. These systems interconnect and are weaponized to humiliate, dehumanize, and subjugate women, reinforcing their marginalization within both societal and militarized settings. In *The Last Girl*, Murad explores this intersection, illustrating how their combination intensifies the trauma experienced by Yazidi women during the Islamic State's reign of terror. The memoir specifically sheds light on how the targeting of Yazidis was a result of ethnicity/racial and religious considerations but also deeply gendered due to patriarchal undertones. It should be noted that the Yazidi community is a low-class religious and ethnic minority in Iraq. Their distinct religious beliefs were viewed as heretical by ISIS militants, "who considered Yazidis to be kuffar, unbelievers worthy of killing", (Murad 5), and sought to either convert or annihilate them. As Murad succinctly puts it, "our religion has been what defined us and held us together as a community. But it also made us targets of persecution..." (Murad 8). The targeting of Yazidis due to their religion is deeply intertwined with race, as they were also marginalized as an ethnic group. This intersection made Yazidi women especially vulnerable to atrocities like slavery and sexual exploitation, as their identity marked them for genocidal violence.

Gender as part of the intertwining identities plays a pivotal role in the violence described by Murad in the memoir. Having executed the men, the women were captured, sold, and trafficked as sex slaves- the "Sabaya" system that commodifies women to be traded again and again, raped and discarded. The Sabaya system reflects the brutal exploitation of women's bodies as

instruments of war, not just on account of their race and religion but worsened by their gender. For instance, recalling the information on the ISIS distributed pamphlet just before the onset of the genocide, Murad quotes as follows, "Question: is it permissible to sell a female captive? Answer: it is permissible to buy, sell, or gift female captives and slaves for they are merely property" (Murad x). This illustrates the extreme gender subjugation and oppression faced by women under the Islamic State's regime. By framing female captives as mere "property" to be bought, sold, or gifted, the passage reflects how gender is weaponized to subjugate them. This view strips women of their agency, reduces their identity to objects of trade, and reinforces a system where their bodies are exploited for male dominance and control. It highlights the intersection of gender-based oppression with the brutalities of conflict, where women are not only victims of violence but also tools in maintaining patriarchal and oppressive power structures, especially in militarized settings.

Murad also highlights how interconnected forms of oppression perpetuate power imbalances and reinforce existing hierarchies. The memoir emphasizes the compounded oppression faced by Yazidi women due to the overlapping systems of race, religion, and gender, clearly demonstrating how subjugation functions to uphold the status quo and maintain dominant identities. Her story is a powerful example of identity-based violence, showing how Yazidi women are victimized not only for being part of a minority ethnic and religious group but also for being females.

8. RESISTANCE, ESCAPE, TESTIMONY, AND ADVOCACY IN THE LAST GIRL

Amidst brutality, Murad's story is one of resilience and defiance as she reclaims her voice and transforms trauma into advocacy. She was the first to resist sexual abuse, confronting Abu Batat on the bus from Kocho to Mosul by grabbing his hands and raising the alarm. She writes, "I screamed. It tore open the silence. Soon other girls started screaming as well, until... the Turkman driver pulled over and the bus stopped with a jolt..." (Murad 121). This passage underscores Murad's agency and defiance amid degrading sexual violence. Her scream becomes both personal resistance and a spark for collective protest, as other girls join her. Even in extreme vulnerability, Murad reclaims her dignity and inspires others, affirming her courage and refusal to be reduced to an object of exploitation.

Another form of resistance employed by Murad and other women is that of defiance through resignation, which serves the dual purpose of a protection mechanism whereby survivors shield themselves from further emotional or physical harm, or can be a silent protest. The second is a form of silent protest, a refusal to engage with or acknowledge the perpetrator's power. She notes that "after what happened with the guards at Hajji Salman's, 'I lost all fear of ISIS and of rape'" (Murad 186). Nisreen detaches herself and switches off from her present reality whenever Abu Muawaya, the nasty-looking old man, comes to her at night. In her own words, "I don't think about me" (Murad 182). This is her own protection mechanism to save her mental and physical health in the face of such degradation. For Murad, her resignation is a silent protest defying her violators, not giving them the satisfaction of watching her in pain. She confesses that "when Abu Muawaya came to have his way with her, she did not fight back; this 'seemed to make him angry,' and he asked her why she was not resisting. Nadia replied, what's the point... how long do you expect me to resist" (Murad 183). This form of resignation reflects a complex and paradoxical form of agency and resistance. In oppressive situations where overt rebellion might lead to further violence or death, resignation can become a way for victims to assert their will by refusing to give their captors the satisfaction of breaking their spirits.

Murad recounts several instances of Yazidi women and girls attempting to escape ISIS captivity, revealing that they were not passive victims, but resilient individuals driven by desperation and an unwavering desire for freedom despite immense risk. For instance, Kathrine was bought by Dr. Islam and kept as a fake wife and forced to look happy: "she tried to escape six times and was turned in by the people whom she went to ask for help. 'Each time when she was delivered back to Dr. Islam, he punished her viciously. The stories are endless'" (Murad 196).

Murad recounts her escape attempts from Hajji Salman, which led to harsher punishments, beatings, gang rape, and forced sexual servitude, yet she remained undeterred. Before her first attempt, Salman tried to break her resolve through fear, cultural manipulation, and body shaming, telling her, "Even if you make it home, your father or your uncle will kill you. You are no longer a virgin, and you are a Muslim" (Murad 162). Murad ultimately escaped from her last captor, Hajji Amer, after months of sexual violence, seizing a moment when the household was distracted. Despite the threat of recapture or death, her will to be free prevailed, reflecting the indomitable spirit of women who, though enslaved and dehumanized, refused to relinquish hope. Her story exposes the horrors of sex slavery while affirming the strength and agency of those who resist through both action and resilience.

Through her memoir, a powerful testament to resilience and resistance, Murad confronts the dual horrors of loss and enslavement, ensuring that the world remembers the suffering endured by Yazidi women like herself. Khaleel and Abbas state that her "historical testimony gave details of the crimes that the ISIS members perpetrated against her, and her determination to prosecute them" (11), stands as a testament to resilience. Despite facing unimaginable horrors, she found the strength to escape and later bravely bear witness to the atrocities committed against her and her community, refusing to let their stories be forgotten. Her memoir, *The Last Girl*, with vivid descriptions of her abuse and the trauma, testifies to her agency, resistance, and advocacy. In this testimonial narrative, Murad powerfully recalls her people's collective traumatic memory as a way to

heal wounds through "verbalizing suffering and sharing testimonial narratives". (Khaleel and Abbas¹²). While many remained powerless and dependent, Murad's act of bearing witness transforms her pain into a tool for empowerment and recovery.

In the foreword of *The Last Girl*, Amal Clooney writes that "Nadia Murad refused to be silenced. She has defied all the labels that life has given her: Orphan. Rape victim. Slave. Refugee. She has instead created a new one: Survivor. Yazidi leader. Women's advocate. ... And now author" (Murad xi). This passage encapsulates Murad's journey of resistance, resilience, and advocacy, revealing how she rejects the labels imposed by war and violence. *The Last Girl* embodies themes of defiance, escape, and empowerment as she transforms from victim to advocate, determined to seek justice for herself and others who suffered under ISIS.

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