

**RESISTING NECROPOWER:
A STUDY OF SELECT YAZIDI WOMEN'S
NARRATIVES**

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Abstract

This thesis, “Resisting Necropower: A Study of Select Yazidi Women’s Narratives,” examines the writings of the Yazidi women as forms of resistance to the necropower exercised by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Drawing on Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics, the study analyses how ISIS institutionalised the power to determine life, death, and disposability through systematic, gendered violence, situating the Yazidi genocide within its broader social, political, and historical contexts. It foregrounds women’s bodies as key sites for the enactment of sovereignty through rape, enslavement, forced conversion, and public spectacles of death.

The primary texts, *The Last Girl*, *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS*, *A Cave in the Clouds*, *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar*, and *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, are read as counter-narratives that disrupt representations of the Yazidi women as passive victims. Transforming trauma into testimony, these narratives reframe survival as political resistance, functioning as counter-archives that reclaim agency, visibility, and justice. The thesis situates the Yazidi women’s writing within longer histories of gendered violence and persecution, demonstrating how vulnerability is transformed into radical political agency.

Keywords: Necropower; Necropolitics; Yazidi Women; ISIS; Sexual Violence; Testimony; Resistance; Body and Agency; Survival

സംഗ്രഹം

“നെകോപവർ പ്പതിക്രോധം: തിരനെടുക്കനെട്ട യസീദി സത്തീരളുനെ ആഖ്യോങ്ങനള ന
ികമോന കAോക്കിയുള്ള പനറം” എന്ന ഈ ഗരവഷണം, ഐഎസ്എഎസ് യസീദി
സAുഹകതോന്ന ന ന തിയ തിരAങ്ങനെയും, തിനെതിരെ യസീദി സത്തീരൾ വരുന്ന
ജീവിതകയോകമോർമയനങ്ങിലുനെ പങ്കിട്ട പ്പതിരരണങ്ങളെയും ഏത ക ങ്കേധിക്കുന്നതോണ്. ഈ രൂട്ടഹതയയുനെയും
Aംഷകയോവകരോ ലംനെങ്ങളുനെയും ഏറ്റവും ഭീരരകAോയ ഇരൾ യസീദി
സത്തീനകരോയിരുന്ന. വരുന്ന രീരങ്ങളും ജീവിതങ്ങളും ധികരോരതിനെ ആയുധനകങ്ങോയി
കAറ്റുനെട്ടരതന ക ങ്കേൾ, ബകലോത്സംഗം, ലലംഗിര ന ിAതവും, ന ിർബന്ധിത Aതപരിവർനതം തുന ങ്കിയ
തിരAനങ്ങിലുനെ വരുന്ന ന ികമോന Aംഷകയോവകരോ ങ്ങൾ പൂർണ്ണകAോയും
ന ിക്ഷധിക്കനെട്ടു. ഷിപെ എംനളുംനള വതരിന ിച്ച നെകോകപോന ിറ്റിക് എന്ന ആ യം
ആകയോരകAോക്കികയോണ് ഈ പനറം. ജീവവും Aരണവും ന ിട്രിക്കുന്ന ധികരോരം
സത്തീരളുനെ രീരനങ്ങിലുനെ എങ്ങനെ പ്പകരയോഗിക്കനെട്ടു എന്നതും, ആ ധികരോരത വർ എങ്ങനെ രതന ക
ോദയം ങ്ങു എന്നതുകAോണ് ഈ പനരതിനെ Aുഖ്യക്രം.

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പകചോതലിൽ വോയിച്ചു കെരോകടോണ് ഈ ഗരവഷണം Aുരതകന്നോട്ട രതകപോരുന്നത്. യസീദി സത്തീരളുനെ
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കലോരതിനെ Aുന്നിപെത്തുന്നത്, വെറും രവനദയുനെ റ്റരഖ്വനെടുതലുനകരോയിട്ടല്ല, Aറിച്ച് തിജീനവതിനെ
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ഉയരുന്ന പ്തിക്രോധ ബുനക്കുടായികടോണ്: ന ിശ്ശബ്ദാക്കനളു രീരങ്ങൾ കദോഷയിലൂണ സംകസോരികക്കോൻ
തുന്നങ്ങുന്ന ന ിഷിഷനകങ്ങോണിവ.

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സത്തീരളുണ ഐഭവങ്ങനെ തുറന്ന് പറയുന്നതിലൂണ, ധികരോരതിനെതികരോയ തകAയോ
പ്തിരരണനകങ്ങോയി കAറോന്നു. ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുര എന്നത് വെറും സനഹAല്ല, Aറിച്ചു ഒരു
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ന ിശ്ശബ്ദാക്കലിളെ രതന ക റോദയം നെയുന്ന, ന ിതിയിലക്കുള്ള വഴി തുറക്കുന്ന നളെനപലുനകരോണ് ഇവെയകല്ലോ .

യസീദി സത്തീരളുണ ഐഭവങ്ങനെ Aുൻ റിയപെതിച്ചുകേരോട്,

തിരAതിയ്ക്കും ധികരോരതിയ്ക്കെAതിയ്ക്കെ Aയ്ക്കും എങ്ങനെ
ഉറച്ചുന ിൽക്കുന്നു എന്നകതോണ് ഈ ഗരവഷണ്പബന്ധം രതനവഷിക്കുന്നതു്. ദൗർബലയം രതകപോലും
തികയോയി കAറോന്ന ഒരു

പ്തിക്രോധരവദികയോയി ഈ എഴുത്തുരനെ ഈ പനറം കവോയിക്കുന്നു. യസീദി സത്തീരളുണ

ന ിനലിൽ ന് വയതിപരകAയോ തിജീനവം കAയോത്തAല്ല, ഒരു കരോഷത്ടീയ

പ്തിക്രോധതിനെ കദോഗവകAറോണ്.

സൂചകപദങ്ങൾ : നെക്രോപവർ; നെക്രോകെപോന റിറ്റിക്; യസീദി സത്തീരൾ; ലലംഗിര റA;

പ്തിക്രോധം; രീരവം ഏജൻസിയും; ന ിനലിൽ ന് .

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Chapter One

Introduction

“The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die” (Mbembe 66). It is challenging to survive for a minority community like the Yazidis, who are stigmatised as infidels and have no right to live in a world marked by ever-increasing inequity, animosity, and fear, as well as by a resurgence of racist, fascist, and nationalist forces striving to exclude and kill. We are not in charge of our own decisions about how and whether to live, but rather an outside force determines the very essence and existence. Mbembe introduces the concepts of necropolitics and necropower to discuss the different ways that weapons are used in the modern world to kill as many people as possible and create death worlds, which are new and distinct ways of living in society where a large number of people have to deal with conditions of life that cause death. The notion of the walking dead describes how various manifestations of necropower over the body subject people to unstable conditions of life. Mbembe is engaged with concepts of sovereignty whose main purpose is “the generalised instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (68).

According to Mbembe, necropolitics functions at both the individual and collective dimensions. It can manifest in explicit acts of violence, such as torture, execution, and massacres, but it also exists in more subtle forms, including the denial of resources, confinement to neglected areas, or the gradual diminishment of opportunities for a better life. Necropower used by the state and other militant

groups imposes restrictions on economic resources, and they also establish a controlling system that creates a precarious condition for the people. Necropower, which transcends the battlefields, exercises systems in which death is normalised. This idea provides the primary analytical tool for the research, demonstrating how the necropolitical control of ISIS has been challenged by the writings of the Yazidi women. The testimonies of the Yazidi women depict the horrific experiences of captivity, sexual violence, displacement, and escape under the control of ISIS that made their lives worthless and disposable. At the same time, they also try to reclaim their subjectivity and agency through writing and voicing their experiences.

Mbembe's concepts of Necropolitics/Necropower act as the major theoretical framework to examine the experiences of the Yazidi women who underwent systematic exploitation and sexual slavery under ISIS. The dynamics of necropower imparted by ISIS are revealed in the horrific experiences of the Yazidis, and it also highlights how their bodies have been controlled and thereby making the very idea of survival uncertain. The Yazidi women have been objectified by ISIS by employing rape, slavery, and forced conversion. They exercise necropower both on the physical body and on the very soul of the Yazidi women. The authority to determine life and death is not a new phenomenon. Mbembe argues that it should be understood in the context of colonialism and apartheid. In his work *Necropolitics*, Mbembe explains how the colonial power established a condition in which certain people are considered expendable (69). The genocide carried out by ISIS increased the vulnerable position of the Yazidi community, which was already a marginalised and persecuted ethnic minority in Iraq. The ISIS atrocities against the Yazidi women

are a part of the long history of colonialism, sectarian differences, and ethnic marginalisation.

Mbembe reveals the stark reality of the modern society, which is influenced by necropower and how states and the international system use this necropolitical logic, maintain death-worlds by creating conflicts, economic scarcity, and regular oppression. The modern states often employ necropower by pretending that it is for safety, security, and order. This is made possible through different strategies such as economic policies which are exploitative, military interventions and a prolonged system of exclusion from social life. The functioning of necropower as a global phenomenon is clearly portrayed through the experiences of the Yazidi women, indicating the institutions that work beyond the conflicts. Mbembe's theory of necropolitics offers a significant framework to analyse how power and violence function in the contemporary scenario where minority groups are targeted and treated as expendable. His work shows how important it is from an ethical point of view to recognise the inherent worth of every life and fight against systems that turn people into objects of control.

The concept of necropolitics develops as a fundamental extension of Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which he characterised as the means by which modern states govern life through the regulation of bodies and the management of populations. The genealogy of biopower and its subsequent advances in theory can be traced to the evolving conceptualisation of sovereignty, authority, and life within modern political philosophy (Mbembe 70-71). Michel Foucault was the first to enunciate a significant departure from classical theories of power, which regarded it

chiefly as a repressive and juridical force exercised by the sovereign. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that modernity has culminated in a shift from sovereign power, characterised by “the right to take life or let live,” to biopower, which functions through “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” (136-140). Contemporary states employ strategies of regulating the lives of the people by using institutions like education, medicine, religion, and the military instead of using direct violence. Power thus works invisibly by being generative than repressive, and it maintains itself by disciplining, regulating, and enhancing the lives of people. It marked a shift from power over death to power over life. The biopolitical revolution marks the change by revealing that modern sovereignty employs the potential to manage life itself, with which it normalises monitoring and also maintains biological existence. Here, the state determines which lives are worth preserving and whose life can be erased and discarded. Foucault’s “biopolitics” carried the seeds of its darker counterpart within itself, which Mbembe later called “necropolitics.”

The discourse on sovereignty is further advanced by Giorgio Agamben, and he emphasised the paradox of it. The supreme authority of the sovereign lies not in the preservation of life but in determining when and how life becomes devoid of any political significance. Agamben introduced the concept of “bare life” in his work *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), which is defined as a condition in which an individual, though being under the jurisdiction of sovereign power, is marginalised from the mainstream political community. The sovereign creates a “state of exception” where the law itself is suspended to generate subjects who may

be killable but not sacrificed (*Homo Sacer* 9-11). In modernity, the state of exception emerges as a basic paradigm of administration. Siting the example of the concentration camp, Agamben argues that it was a hidden agenda of political modernity rather than an aberration. Refugee camps and invaded territories exhibit individuals who are devoid of political and moral recognition, thereby existing as bare life. *Homo Sacer* experiences a condition in which the very existence of the subject is treated as worthless of mourning and justice (*Homo Sacer* 11).

Within the disciplinary institutions of modern society, Foucault identified power; at the same time, Agamben revealed the presence of power in the paradox of sovereignty. Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2003; trans. 2019), on the other hand, critiques these views by situating the politics of life and death within the context of colonialism, slavery, and racial violence. According to Mbembe, the concept of "biopower" is limited to the liberal perspectives of the West, and it fails to consider how colonial power employed control over the population not by enhancing life but by creating death. He defines sovereignty as "the capacity to dictate who can live and who must die" (67). Death becomes a fundamental tool of contemporary governance. Necropolitics extends the concept of biopower into the realm of death, creating death-worlds where the whole community experiences conditions of existence that are humiliating, exploitative, violent, and dehumanising. Survival becomes a gradual death (Mbembe 69). Mbembe argues that slavery, apartheid, and colonial occupation revealed the basic structure of modern political rationality. The colonies became sites for experimenting with modernity, where racial and ethnic oppression and necropower became normal strategies of administration (80).

Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (2004) by Judith

Butler further develops these discussions, focusing on the ethical perspectives on life and vulnerability. Butler questions the criterion for deciding whose lives are grievable and how certain losses become invisible. She argues that human beings are essentially precarious and, for survival, they rely on different social and political structures, which are unequally distributed. Those who are racialised, displaced, or colonised are treated as non-humans, thereby being absent from public mourning (*Precarious Life* 32). It becomes a political act that legitimises the systematic abandonment of vulnerable communities.

A genealogy of modern power has emerged from the concepts of Foucault, Agamben, Mbembe, and Butler. A paradigm shift from regulation to continuous erasure and from the governance of life to the weaponisation of death is marked here. To examine the modern expressions of violence, which include the necropolitical logic of ISIS, this trajectory is essential. These theoretical paradigms are visible in the Yazidi genocide, where the bodies of women were violated and commoditised. The historical transformation of power, which revealed a continuous logic of domination that determines the worth of individuals, is marked by the theoretical shift from biopolitics to necropolitics. Through their writings, the Yazidi women challenged the necropower of ISIS by exhibiting that life continues and resists even in death worlds.

The research titled “Resisting Necropower: A Study of Select Yazidi Women’s Narratives” probes into the intricate coexistence of gender, power, and violence. The study focuses on how the narratives of the Yazidi women challenge

the necropower of ISIS through the act of writing. It analyses how ISIS used sexual abuse and death as means of control, shifting the Yazidi body into a place of deliberate violence. The necropower of ISIS not only aimed the physical damage but also encompassed the symbolic realm through which they erased the Yazidi culture and religion. The Yazidi women were subjected to physical and epistemological violence within this brutality. The thesis argues that the Yazidi women try to reclaim their agency by giving voice to their lives, disrupting the structural violence and also the silence imposed on them. They convert trauma into resistance in narrating their self. At a time when modern sovereignty aims to transform individuals into mere objects of disposal, the autobiographical texts, testimonies, and memoirs of the Yazidi women challenged the necropower of ISIS. Their subjectivity is reinstated through narration. They redefine the Yazidi women as a witness and an agent where survival becomes a political resistance. The female body has always been treated as a site for exerting violence, power, and control. This research situates the writings of the Yazidi women within that larger context of gendered violence.

History has always revealed how the bodies of women become sites of contention within the structure of sovereignty. This study gives emphasis on the nuances of gendered politics over the geopolitical implications of it. Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, Najda, and many more Yazidi women reveal the complexity of trauma through which they create a narrative of resistance. The subjectivity, identity, and the very existence are celebrated through their writing by challenging the necropower with which ISIS tried to marginalise them. To

analyse all the aspects of these narratives, it is significant to position the Yazidi community within the historical, cultural, and religious framework.

“The people known as Yazidis are found scattered over a vast area, in the northern part of Iraq and Syria, in Eastern Turkey, Armenia, and Georgia” (Asatrian and Arakelova vii). It is in the Sheikan region, North West of Mosul, and Sinjar, west of Mosul, and also in Siruj, Birjak, Klis, Afrin, Amuda, and Qamishli in Syria that the majority of the Yazidis live today. Asatrian and Arakelova, in their preface to the book *The Religion of the Peacock Angel*, note,

The total number of the Yezidis can be estimated only approximately: in Iraq around 200,000; in Syria 80,000-100,000; Armenia 45,000-50,000; Georgia 20,000-25,000; Russia 10,000-15,000; western Europe 45,000-50,000; all in all, some 400,000-450,000 people. The Yezidis speak a local variant of northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), which they call ēzdīkī: “the Yezidi language”. In terms of religion, the Yezidis are a product of the Near Eastern non-dogmatic milieu. They are deeply rooted in a form of Sufism but with multiple elements of Christianity, Gnosticism, local pagan cults, and so on. Because of their religious idiosyncrasy, they have been traditionally viewed as pagans, heretics or devil-worshippers and have therefore remained for centuries an object of persecution in the Muslim environment. (vii)

Talking about the diasporic and marginalised communities, Stuart Hall discussed this idea of “interweaving of cultural memory and identity” (236). Nadia Murad, in her work *The Last Girl*, also identifies her religion “like an ancient tree with

thousands of rings, each telling a story in the long history of Yazidis. Many of those stories, sadly, are tragedies” (6).

Tawusi Melek, “the Peacock Angel,” is an angel whom they worship in the Yazidi religion. He is considered the essence of this religion and a prominent one among the seven angels who were bestowed with creating the world (Kreyenbroek 20). Transforming religious difference into a moral threat is visible in his case when he is always misunderstood as a demon by non-Yazidis, and this misinterpretation is used as a tool to justify the massacre (Asad 20). Asatrian and Arakelova argue,

Many people of the region go so far as to consider Malak-Tāwūs the embodiment of the lord of darkness. This claim has led travellers who have entered the Yezidi environment at different times to describe them as worshippers of Satan. The epithet “devil worshippers” has been attached to the Yezidis, particularly among the followers of orthodox religions, primarily among Muslims. (10)

Tawusi Melek is a symbol of divine mercy, according to the Yazidi beliefs, and this is represented in the holy writings like *Kitab-al-Jilwah* (‘Book of Revelation’).

These holy writings exhibit the ethical principles and the worldview of the Yazidis.

Nadia Murad explicates the origin myth of the Yazidis,

Yazidis believe that before God made man, he created seven divine beings, who were manifestations of himself. After forming the universe from a broken pearl like sphere, God sent his chief Angel, Tawusi Melek, to earth, where he took the form of a peacock and painted the world the bright colours

of his feathers...on earth, Tawusi Melek sees Adam, the first man, whom God has made immortal and perfect, and the Angel challenges God's decision. If Adam is to produce...he can't be immortal, and he can't be perfect. He has to eat wheat, which God has forbidden him to do. God tells his Angel that the decision is his, putting the fate of the world in Tawusi Melek's hand. Adam eats wheat, is expelled from paradise, and the second generation of Yazidis is born into the world. (27)

The Yazidis believe that Tawusi Melek, by proving his worthiness to God, became the link between earth and heaven. Nadia Murad says, "When we pray, we often pray to Tawusi Melek, and our New Year celebrates the day he descended to earth" (27). There is always a tendency to interpret religious myths as symbols to be targeted, especially when they are interpreted through hegemonic beliefs (Asad 47). The same is the case with the Yazidis when they are interpreted as devil worshippers by others, thereby legitimising their centuries of persecution. Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, in her work *A Cave in the Clouds*, clearly mentioned the misinterpretation of their origin myth. She says,

Zoroastrians said the devil made a peacock to show his powers. But we believe the peacock represents Tawusi Melek, the angel we look to an example. Another reason the Yazidi have been persecuted is because our spirituality is so old. When conquerors came to our area and learned of our powers, they assumed we were playing with dark forces. That's why we Yazidi don't share our wisdom now with the rest of the world. And then there is the Quran... The devil is described it as an angel who refused God's

order to bow down before Adam. Tawusi Melek didn't pray to Adam, so some Muslims say that he is the devil... God asked the angels to bow to Adam and Tawusi Melek was the only angel who refused, saying that he had made a promise never to bow to anyone but God. We Yazidi revere Tawusi Melek for his faithfulness to the only source of power in this world, God. (34-35)

The concept of "contrapuntal reading" (Said, *Cultural and Imperialism*, 66) reveals this strategy of interpreting the minority beliefs in a way that the dominant beliefs can maintain spiritual supremacy. The Yazidi belief is reinterpreted as devil worship, and it is used as a weapon to erase the entire community. Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir (1075-1162 CE), a Sufi mystic, is considered the divine incarnation of Tawusi Malek. Farida Khalaf says,

We worship Sheikh Adi, a preacher who lived in Lalish many centuries ago, as the reincarnation of the Peacock Angel. His grave, as well as those of other reincarnations of angels, is in the sanctuary that lies at one of the valley's gently sloping hillside... Every year, there is a heavenly gathering in this shrine. In September, under the leadership of the Peacock, there is a meeting of the Seven Angels who control destiny on earth. They discuss the events of the coming year and make important decisions about the future of humanity... During the autumn gathering, Melek Tawus would reveal himself to them and disclose his will... he sometimes takes the form of a peacock and hence is known as the Peacock Angel. (7-8)

Sheikh Adi was the one who had given a proper spiritual structure for the Yazidis and thereby reformed the Yazidi beliefs and customs. His influence and reformation proved that the Yazidis are not just an ancient religion without spiritual innovation and cultural upgrade.

The Yazidis are often criticised for not having a canonical religious source like the Bible or the Quran. The oral tradition followed by the Yazidis is often discarded as illegitimate. The Abrahamic and Western discourses carry a textual bias in which the authenticity of the religion is often calculated on the basis of holy books (Asad 42). This sidelining of a religion with a holy book is questioned by the Yazidis,

They say we have no religion because we have no book like the Jewish Torah, the Quran, the Hindu Vedas, or the Christian Bible. They say the Yazidi aren't a real culture. But those are lies. The real reason the Yazidis are not wanted here is power. Our land is rich in oil. (Ahmed and McClelland 35)

This reveals the geopolitical strategy of dispossession and how the delegitimisation of spiritual beliefs causes exploitation and displacement.

Rituals followed by the Yazidis are distinct and unique, and they often challenge the existing dominant religious paradigm. "The Yazidis consider sunset to be the start of the day, so Tuesday evening is actually Wednesday morning. Wednesday is our rest day. We believe it is the day the world was made" (Ahmed

and McClelland 42). They have been misrepresented as pagans for their practices, like praying towards the sun and not taking a shower on Wednesdays. Murad says,

Because some of us don't shower on Wednesdays, the day that Tawusi Melek first came to earth, and our day of rest and prayer, they say we are dirty. Because we pray toward the sun, we are called pagans. Our belief in reincarnation, which helps us cope up with death and keep our community together, is rejected by Muslims because none of the Abrahamic faiths believe in it. Some Yazidis avoid certain food, like lettuce, and are mocked for their strange habits. Others don't wear blue because they see it as the colour of Tawusi Melek and too holy for a human, and even the choice is ridiculed. (28)

This is a clear indication of how the faiths of minority communities are distorted. In the Yazidi faith, sunlight is very important. Khalaf asks,

After all, everything in the world depends on the sun, doesn't it? Could a plant flourish without its light? Could we cultivate our fields? Could we harvest and satisfy our hunger with the yield? No! This is why the sun is sacred to us; its light is our place of worship and our most important connection to God. (6)

Religious festivals among the Yazidis are linked to various seasons,

In Kocho, the ritual cycle began with our New Year's festival 'Sere Sal,' which we would celebrate on the first Wednesday in April, 'Red Wednesday.' On this day we would decorate our house with flowers and

paint eggs in bright colours, which we believe stand for the rebirth of all life and the beginning of the world. (Khalaf 6)

They celebrate *Cle Havine* (“Forty Days of Summer”) and *Cle Zivistane* (“Forty Days of Winter”). These festivals are rich with different religious ceremonies, and they end with a three-day fast (Khalaf 6). The Yazidi New Year is celebrated in April as it is a month that “holds the promise of a big profitable harvest and leads them to months spent outdoors, sleeping on the rooftops, freed from the cold overcrowded houses” (Murad 37). The connection that the Yazidis maintain with nature is significant. Murad expresses her view on this, saying, “It feeds us and shelters us, and when we die, our bodies become the earth. Our New Year reminds us of this” (37). This belief indicates a “return to the origins,” connecting seasons, agriculture, and the divinity (Eliade 54). This becomes an act of cultural resistance for the Yazidi community, who were continuously threatened with destruction. In the Yazidi religion,

God does not judge them based on how often they pray or go on pilgrimage. They don’t even have to build elaborate cathedrals or attend years of religious schooling in order to be a good Yazidi. Rituals, like baptism, are performed only when the family has enough money or time to make the trip. (Murad 115)

For the Yazidis, their faith is their actions. No ritual orthodoxy can be seen in Yazidism; rather, their faith is deeply rooted in the ethical concerns they show toward others. Murad says,

We welcome strangers into our homes, give money and food to those who have none, and sit with the body of the loved one before burial. Even being a good student, or kind to your spouse, is an act equal to prayer. Things that keep us alive and allow poor people to help others, like simple bread are holy. (115)

Wasting bread or food is considered a sin. These practices show that the Yazidi religion is a “discipline of embodied practices” (Asad 82) where everyday acts of humanity are treated as sacred. Mistakes in the Yazidi religion are part of being human, and they have members of the Yazidi sheikh caste who help them learn religion and also help in the afterlife.

The most important job these brothers and sisters have is to sit with God and Tawusi Melek and defend you after you have died, they will defend the dead, saying that I knew this person when she was alive... She deserves to have her soul return to earth. She is a good person. (Murad 115)

The concept of spiritual mediation is different for the Yazidis and they believe that the sacred beings and the righteous dead continue to play an active role in the moral and spiritual journey of the individual after death. It can be understood as a theological variation not as an absolute contrast from other Abrahamic traditions.

The spiritual and pilgrimage centre of the Yazidis is the Lalish Valley in Northern Iraq, situated in the mountains between Dohuk and Mosul. The pilgrimage to Lalish is considered the most important event of the year. Khalaf says,

In autumn, the whole village would make its way to this mystical place, a wonderful green valley... For me, Lalish represents something like a second home, a spiritual one, as from the cradle my parents took me on the annual

journey to the valley... Lalish is a divine place for us... my mother would also wrap a white scarf around her head. Unlike Muslim women, Yazidis are not obliged to veil themselves... our clothes for the pilgrimage would be relatively modern... But we would always make sure that at least one item of clothing was white. (7)

The Yazidis believe that they are the people “created by God” and others are “children of Adam and Eve” (Khalaf 7).

Prayer practices in the Yazidi religion are different. For them, prayer is meant to be a personal expression, not a chore or an empty ritual. Nadia Murad says,

My mother taught us how to pray, toward the sun in the morning, Lalish during the day, and the moon at night... You can pray silently by yourself or out loud, and you can pray alone or in a group, as long as everyone in that group is also Yazidi. Prayers are accompanied by a few gestures, like kissing the red and white bracelet many Yazidi women and men wear... Most Yazidis prayed three times a day, and prayers can be made anywhere... After reciting a few standard lines in praise of God and Tawusi Melek, you can say anything you want. (29)

Murad, who was once used to pray for the future of herself, her siblings, and her mother, to complete her education and to open her saloon, now prays for the survival of her religion and her people (30).

To be a Yazidi, one should be born into that religion. Conversion to their religion is not possible. Interreligious marriage is also not allowed in the Yazidi

culture. Marriage preserves the communal ties, and it also ensures the religious practices they follow. There is a “biological boundary maintenance” (Barth 15) which the Yazidis keep to preserve the uniqueness of their culture. Murad states,

Marriage outside the faith is not allowed; nor is conversion. We were taught about the seventy-three past firmans against Yazidis, and these stories of persecution were so intertwined with who we were that they might as well have been holy stories. I knew that the religion lived in the men and women who had been born to preserve it, and that I was one of them. (29)

In the Yazidi culture, if two people love and want to get married, they can elope, disregarding what their families think, and later they can reconcile with their families. The custom is known as a woman “running away,” but Nadia Murad says, “It is actually liberating, taking power away from the parents and giving it to the young couple and specifically to the girl, who has to agree to the plan” (52). The Yazidi men are allowed to marry more than one woman, and divorce among the family reveals the patriarchal structure in which men dominate. Murad’s father married another woman, Sara, and brought her into the house, replacing his existing wife, her mother. This act forced her mother to shift from the house, indicating how male authority can easily change the course of life (17).

Death in the Yazidi culture interrupts the daily activities to a large extent. *The Last Girl* provides a clear picture of this,

When someone dies, particularly if the death is sudden, mourning lasts for a long time and sweeps up the entire village. Neighbours retreat from normal

life along with the family and friends of the dead. Grief takes over every house and shop and spreads through the streets... weddings are cancelled, holiday celebrations are moved indoors, and women switch out their white clothes for black... Televisions and radios are kept off. (Murad 36)

This practice of suspending normal life altogether becomes a “ritualisation of crisis” where the entire village is a part of the grief and makes it a collective ritual (Bell 220). The rituals after death are important because in Yazidism, “the afterlife is a demanding place, where the dead can suffer like humans” (Murad 80). They believe that the dead people rely on their loved ones for their needs. They often come in their dreams to tell them that “they are hungry” (Murad 80), and they give food and clothing to the poor, and in return, they believe that God gives their dead, food or clothing in the afterlife. The Yazidis believe in reincarnation. Murad expresses,

If you were a good person and a faithful Yazidi during your lifetime, your soul will be born anew, and you will rejoin the community that mourned you... You have to prove to God and his angels that you deserve to go back to earth... It is important that Yazidis are buried properly and prayed for. Without these rituals, our souls may never be reborn. And our bodies may never go home to where they belong. (81)

Mourning, which is both social and spiritual, maintains a collective memory among the Yazidis, and they transfer this grief into a cultural endurance (Halbawachs 85).

Honour-based killing is not inherent in Yazidism, but it happens in the Yazidi society, as it can be seen in all of Iraq. Conversion from the Yazidi religion is

often seen as a betrayal of the family and community because the Yazidis have always been forced to convert to save their lives for a long time. But they do not kill men and women who leave Yazidism. People have used this as a weapon to stigmatise the Yazidi community, which is evident in the killing of Du'a Khalil. She was stoned to death by her family for wanting to marry a Muslim. Even though the Yazidis were ashamed of this murder, the Sunni extremists used the video of her murder, which went viral, to spread propaganda calling the Yazidis “infidels and worthy of death” (Murad 48). Such acts get politicised and go beyond the family context, and they fuel communal hatred, which easily leads to violence (Al-Ali 167). People outside the context represent the Yazidi religion as a “religion of murderers” (Murad 48), and the lack of representation in media and in politics worsened the situation, helping increase hatred among the Sunni community.

The Yazidi community is divided into *sheikhs*, *pirs*, and *mureeds* governed by a mir, and Baba Sheikh follows a hereditary hierarchical system that provides them a way to preserve their culture amidst the continuous persecution that they have experienced. The unique nature of their culture and ritual practices strengthens their family bond (Omarkhali 122). The distinct practices they follow, such as the forbidden word “satan”, not eating lettuce, and not wearing the colour blue, are not superstitious beliefs, but they act as symbols which define the Yazidi identity in a world which is regulated by the hegemonic practices (Allison 42). The architecture of the Yazidi shrines exhibits the themes of purity and spiritual renewal. It deeply influences the “visual and spatial aspects of daily existence” (Fuccaro 57). The Yazidi customary law, the *adat*, which is mediated through oral tradition, focuses on

peace settlement rather than enforcing strict justice. This helps them to maintain a strong bond and a moral conduct among themselves (Jongerden 241).

The post-Ottoman division of Kurdish lands, which caused forced migration in Syria and Turkey, displaced the majority of the Yazidis who have been the inhabitants of the Sinjar and Shekhan region. By the end of the twentieth century, half a million of the Yazidis had been displaced. They become inhabitants of different parts of the world, including Armenia, Russia, Germany, and many more. Those Yazidis who have been displaced formed a diaspora with which they sustain their religious rituals, and at the same time, they assimilate different cultures to which they belong (Kreyenbroek 5). This diaspora expanded Yazidism beyond Sinjar. The richness of diversity in their religion and rituals created a justified context for ISIS to impose its necropower upon them. The 2014 genocide targeted the complex cultural and religious practices that allowed the Yazidis to exist. Historically, the Yazidis have been misrepresented as devil worshippers due to the interpretations based on Christian and Islamic ideologies, and this justified the narrative that they could be dead. ISIS made use of this stigma upon the Yazidis by portraying them as *kuffar* and thereby considering their religious identity as ontological impurity. The political significance of the Yazidis has been discarded in a world that is constructed with the ISIS sovereignty. The life of the Yazidis was reduced to a life that could be subjected to violence and slavery. The necropolitical agenda of ISIS was gendered in nature. They exercised their power over the bodies of the Yazidi women and raped them brutally. Sexual violence was a calculated mechanism of administration through which ISIS dismantled the very soul of the

Yazidi women. This genocide is linked to the broader geopolitical and ideological forces that foster the emergence of ISIS. To have a critical understanding of the emergence of ISIS, an analysis of the historical, political, and militarised incidents that reconfigured Iraq and Syria is essential.

The journey of ISIS can be traced back to the “American-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 to its expansion beyond the Iraqi borders to Syria in late 2011” (Gerges 50). The rise of ISIS unfolded through a long genealogy of strategic militarisation, geopolitical expansion, and ideological radicalisation, which makes it clear that it is neither an abrupt nor an accidental rise. The emergence of ISIS marks a transformation of militant jihadism in the twenty-first century, revealing how modern terrorism can evolve as a necropolitical sovereign. The ability of ISIS to convert violence into a structured administrative system is what distinguishes it from its predecessors. Brutality and extreme violence are inherent in their governance. ISIS transformed the life of the minority into a “death-world,” where sovereignty was enacted through the authority to determine life and death (Mbembe 77). The proclamation of the group as a Caliphate on June 29, 2014, was not just a political statement. It became an absolute claim of power over territories, identities, and bodies.

“Ideology is a superglue that binds Salafi-jihadist activists and combatants to each other and allows the movement to renew and revitalise itself... ISIS is first and foremost an extension of the global Salafi-jihadist movement” (Gerges 23). Salafi-Jihadism had established its own rituals, iconic leaders and references through which they took control of the minds of Sunni communities globally. ISIS was built upon a

“romantic idea of resurrecting the caliphate” (Gerges 24) and it was oriented towards a genocidal project. It was “born of a marriage between an Iraq-based AQI (Salafi-jihadism) and an identity frame of politics” (Gerges 24). ISIS, undoubtedly, is a result of “the broken politics of the Middle East, delegitimization of state institutions as well as of the spreading of civil wars in Iraq, Syria and beyond” (Gerges 7). The fundamental reason for the establishment of the group is deeply rooted in the extreme social and political conditions that led to the regional and global hatred in the Arab societies.

The US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 caused a rupture in an already fractured Iraqi society. America’s destruction of Iraqi institutions, particularly its dismantling of the army and the Ba’athist ruling party, unleashed a fierce power struggle, mainly along sectarian lines, creating fissures in society. These growing ruptures provided the room for necessary for non-state actors and armed insurgent militants, including Al Qaeda, to infiltrate the fragile body politic in post 2003 Iraq. (Gerges 24)

This invasion of Iraq by the US provided a fertile ground for ISIS and its leaders to flourish. The irrepressible violence of ISIS was embedded in its origin, AQI, and its founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. This Jordanian militant later became the ideological father of ISIS. He was the one who built a foundation for Al-Qaeda, which led to the rise of ISIS. He was also known for his disputes against bin Laden and Zawahiri, who were the founders of the global jihadist movement. The land of Iraq provided him a social base to implant his ideology, which marked a turning point in global jihadism. He founded *Jama’at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* in 1999 to target

Shias, considering them as potential enemies to be eradicated (Weiss and Hassan 34). “Zaraqawi was a sectarian psychopath who harboured a genocidal worldview against the Shias” (Gerges 81). He also targeted Sunnis who opposed his ideas, justifying the killings of Muslims as “to ward off a greater evil, namely, the evil of suspending jihad” (Gerges 83). He later changed the name of his group to Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) by pledging allegiance to Osama bin Laden in 2004. AQI became extremely brutal through its mechanisms of targeted killings and suicide bombings, which culminated in the bombing of the Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra (Weiss and Hassan 41). This attack fuelled sectarian violence, indicating the transformation of social spaces into zones of fear where people become objects of control. Zaraqawi employed a strategy of terror to reconstruct Iraq in his own way.

By 2005, the hundreds of suicide bombings, kidnappings, and beheadings had turned the vast majority of Iraqis and Muslims against Al Qaeda in Iraq and Al Qaeda Central in general... many Sunni scholars across the Arab world, including Zaraqawi’s spiritual mentor, Maqdisi, openly criticised his brutal methods and blanket takfiri ideology. Maqdisi publicly reprimanded his former pupil for his terrorism against civilians... Maqdisi said that violence against civilians is wrong because it harms the interests of the umma and tarnishes the image of Islam. (Gerges 91)

In June 2006, the Americans killed Zaraqawi, and a few days after his death on 13 October 2006, the Mujahideen Shura Council, an organisation that included all the like-minded groups, announced the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Abu Omar al-Baghdadi became the leader of the new group. They acted

independently of the Al Qaeda Centre, disregarding the vows they had made to bin Laden. The transition period between June 2006 to April 2010 marked as a period “in which internal bleeding and haemorrhaging intensified and threatened to crush ISI” (Gerges 94). After the death of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi came to power in May 2010, during which “the Islamic State of Iraq was internally besieged and bleeding” (Gerges 98).

Baghdadi had the strategic foresight to transform a fragile organisation on the brink of collapse into a mini-professional army, an army capable of waging urban and guerrilla warfare as well as conventional warfare. In this sense, Baghdadi had suspended his two mentors, Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zaraqawi, in strategic cunning, organisational skills, and mobilizational outreach. (Gerges 143)

Baghdadi became more ruthless than his forefathers. He was “the most bloodthirsty of all” (Gerges 139). The political and ideological situation in Iraq during his time was highly polarised, and this was favourable for him to execute his ideology. The Syrian Civil War in 2011 made the land of Syria a battlefield and a fertile ground for ISI to recapture its power.

Inspired by the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen, tens of thousands of Syrians revolted against *al-istibdad* (repression) and *al-tahmeesh* (exclusion). Bread, freedom, social justice, and *al-karama* (human dignity) were the rallying cries...reflecting political and economic vulnerabilities. (Gerges 15)

These peaceful protests were violently crushed by the Bashar al-Assad security force, taking it as sectarian violence. “What started as a progressive call for social and political reforms turned into a sectarian clash and war of all against all” (Gerges 15). The ISI under Baghdadi took advantage of this instability, and he sent some of the ISI militants to Syria, who formed a group named Jabhat al-Nusra. They presented themselves as “the defenders of the persecuted Sunni community” (Gerges 15).

In April 2013, Baghdadi publicly announced the connection between al-Nusra and ISI, and he made it clear that al-Nusra was his strategy to establish an Islamic State in Syria. He declared the merging of both groups to form the “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.” This led to the separation of ISIS and Al Qaeda, as the declaration of it was rejected by Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Feeding upon each other, Iraq and Syria were vital to the resurgence of ISIS, which defined the struggle in both countries through the framework of identity. It developed a distinct pan-Sunni sectarian identity, a deliberate contrast to the pan-Shia identity... ISIS has developed a narrative that has infiltrated and is taking over the Islamic world...the most effective card it has played in Iraq and Syria... a powerful recruiting tool. (Gerges 16-17)

Syria became a significant source of income for ISIS, including “the oil trade taxation, wheat and fertile agricultural lands, and criminal activities” (Gerges 17). ISIS became a well-structured insurgency capable of territorial expansion and emerged as a sovereign capable of controlling the lives of others. The breakthrough of the group occurred on June 10, 2014, when they occupied Mosul, the second-

largest city of Iraq. It clearly indicated the ability of ISIS to employ psychological warfare along with military force. Tikrit, Tal Afar, and large areas of the Nineveh Plain were also captured in a few days. The August 2014 assault on Sinjar culminated in the Yazidi genocide, which led to massacre, forced conversion, human trafficking, and the enslavement of the Yazidi women.

The declaration of ISIS as a global Caliphate and Baghdadi as its Caliph on June 29, 2014, marked the evolution of this organisation from an insurgency to a sovereign. Baghdadi established a powerful social constituency, which helped ISIS in getting skilled militants and a politically safe place to reside. The Caliphate was an emblem of utmost power. “Baghdadi presented ISIS as the sole defender of Ahl al-Sunna (the Sunni community), the voice and champion of Sunni Arabs who feel excluded and persecuted” (Gerges 13). The religious policies, execution chambers, and the slave markets reveal the necropolitical logic behind their governance. They became a form of modern power where domination is obtained through regulating daily life, disciplining bodies, and making subjects who should always be obedient, enslaved, or erased (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138).

The Caliphate has undergone serious setbacks in 2019, but they do not signify the end of ISIS. ISIS affiliates have expanded in different places such as Afghanistan, the Sahel, South Asia, and Africa. The networks of ISIS are dispersed globally, and its ideology still persists. Global political failures, sectarian violence, and necropolitical administration led to the rise of terrorism, as demonstrated by the rise of ISIS. The ruptures in the modern international order are exploited by the militant groups, and they transform conflicts into a claim to sovereign authority. The

emergence of terrorist organisations is a lesson to understand the weakness of states, the venomous ideologies, and the politics of death and killing that sought to govern through violence.

The Yazidi genocide in 2014, administered by ISIS, led to mass displacement, forced conversion, sexual slavery, and persecution based on gender. It represents a significant example of necropower in the contemporary world. It is in this current humanitarian context that this study, “Resisting Necropower: A Study of Select Yazidi Women’s Narratives,” finds its relevance. How state and non-state actors make use of religion, ethnicity, and gender is analysed by addressing the violence experienced by the Yazidi women. The enslavement of the Yazidis by ISIS calls for an in-depth study of resistance and reconfiguration of power, especially in a context of erasing agency. The testimonies of the Yazidi women give insight into the enslaved position that they have experienced, and they also reveal the different forms of self-assertion and survival through which the identity of the survivors is reclaimed. This study attempts to contribute to the different discourses on violence, which are gendered necropower, and also the politics of survival and narration.

Gender based violence is always intersected with various other factors such as ethnic marginalisation, centuries of persecution patterns, and statelessness. The reductive representation in which the Yazidis are treated as victims is challenged through their narratives, and they try to reveal the complexity of resistance rooted in survival, memory, and cultural resilience. To displace the dominant discourses that often dominate the agency of the marginalised communities, these narratives have to be highlighted. The narratives of the Yazidi women help to address the social,

communal, and psychological dimensions of survival and recovery. They reveal the culturally, ethnically, and religiously grounded interventions that lead to eternal trauma. The legal, political, humanitarian, and structural failures that contributed to the genocide of the Yazidis are also exposed in their narratives. It demands the making of a more responsible system of justice, protection, and prevention in a world of targeted conflicts.

This study tries to document and recognise the atrocities committed by ISIS toward a minority community that may otherwise be discarded in the political discourse. The silence produced by global indifference and the erasure executed by ISIS are challenged in the Yazidi narratives, thereby functioning as counter-archives. Re-examining violence, sovereignty, power, and resistance in a necropolitical regime is necessitated by these narratives. The study tries to address the governance of life, precarity, and death under ISIS, revealing how differences in gender, religion, and ethnicity are devalued. The Yazidi narratives expose how violence is normalised. These concerns go beyond the specific context of the Yazidis. Alarming parallels of necropower can be seen in different parts of the world where marginalised groups inhabit vulnerable conditions imposed by the hegemonic powers. People who are designated for continuous abandonment, destruction, and violence are still there, though the social, political, geographic, and temporal contexts vary. The ethnic conflicts and war zones where women are paraded naked and raped show how the bodies of women always become a battlefield for the enactment of sovereignty and dominance. Individuals who lack protection and power in politics are regularly produced by operating necropower through the

administrative system. In this space, people are deprived of their rights, future, safety, and identity.

Resisting necropower demands a total restructuring of the systems that produce legitimised discrimination, untouched hierarchies, dominant ideologies, and state-sanctioned violence. Marginalised voices, especially women's testimonies, become epistemic counterforces that attempt to challenge the dominant narratives of social order and the security system. A transformative change can be achieved through collective memory, educational interventions, and solidarities that question the prejudices and exclusion. The lives of the Yazidi women and many other minority women are targeted by various necropolitical mechanisms that define them as worthless and insignificant. Their life and death are deemed irrelevant. To dismantle the influence of modern necropower, the different contexts that produce it have to be examined. The narratives of the Yazidi women provide a framework to identify and oppose the diverse expressions of necropower in different socio-political contexts. They present a rationale for analysing necropower that fosters a condition of vulnerability and how those conditions justify destruction.

The study attempts to shift the emphasis from viewing the Yazidi women as passive victims. It tries to recognise the different forms of resistance they employ to challenge the necropower of ISIS. A narrative analysis is employed to examine the testimonies as political acts, revealing the extreme conditions of domination. The strategies of the Yazidi women to assert their presence over erasure are thoroughly evaluated. The importance of agency is emphasised in the argument. This study is an attempt to exhibit the narratives as counter-discourses that challenge the sovereign

power that tries to categorise their lives as disposable. The political significance of their resistance is often left unaddressed, and this study probes into that research gap. Sexual exploitation and religious persecution influenced the oppression of the Yazidis, and their situation can also be analysed through a gender perspective. Gender becomes a point with which they rethink resilience and ethical responsibility, rather than viewing it as a source of oppression. The Yazidi women are reframed as active agents who challenge the necropolitical rule critically by positioning themselves as survivors. The act of resistance is prioritised here, which adds to deeper discussions on justice, survivorship, and gender.

Trauma, captivity, sexual violence, and the victim role of the Yazidi community in general, and women in particular, are often examined in the existing studies. The following section outlines some of the major works relevant to this study:

“ISIS Genocide against the Yazidis and Mass Violence in the Middle East” by Cheterian analyses the violence exercised by ISIS on the Yazidis in the larger context of mass violence in the Middle East. The systematic persecution and the deliberate targeting are examined in this work. The genocidal nature of the violence is also addressed. The article looks at the intricacies of genocide in the Middle East. It also examines how the regional community reacts to these acts of mass violence.

“Trauma and Perceived Social Rejection among Yazidi Women and Girls Who Survived Enslavement and Genocide” by Ibrahim et.al. extensively analyses the perceived social rejection of the Yazidi women and girls. Different methods are used in the study to analyse the traumatic experiences of the Yazidi women. Quantitative

measurement and qualitative interviews are used to evaluate the psychological effects of trauma. The experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and perspectives of society are the focus. This reveals the intensity of trauma and its long-lasting nature. It looks at the connection between perceived social rejection and trauma. It indicates how the mental health of the survivors is negatively affected by social isolation. The importance of strong mental support and thorough interventions is highlighted. It also addresses the specific psychological needs of the Yazidi women and girls after genocide and slavery.

“Potential Trauma Events and the Psychological Consequences for Yazidi Women after ISIS Captivity” (2020) by Jan Ilhan Kizilhan et. al examines the wartime traumatic experiences of the Yazidi women. This article also focuses on the mental health issues faced by the Yazidis after the ISIS attack in August 2014.

“Prosecuting ISIS for the Sexual Slavery of the Yazidi Women and Girls” (2018) by El-Masri addresses the legal side of holding ISIS responsible for the sexual slavery of the Yazidis. It looks at how ISIS can be punished for its crimes using international criminal and humanitarian laws. This article critically examines the complications of prosecuting the offenders. The difficulties of gathering evidence, questions of jurisdiction, the trial process, and protecting witnesses are also examined. It contributes to the discussions on justice for sexual violence and rape victims, valuing the cooperation and legal process of international law in holding ISIS accountable for the atrocities against the Yazidi community.

“Resilience and Hope among Yazidi Women Released from ISIS Enslavement” by Taha, Nguyen, and Slewa Younan (2021) reveals how hope and

resilience function among the Yazidi women who have escaped from ISIS captivity. The psychological process and also the support given to the Yazidis are evaluated, and it looks at how optimism and hope can be inculcated among them. The experiences of trauma, sources of hope, and survival methods are analysed in detail. Hope is seen as a critical component of post-traumatic recovery. The bravery and boldness of the Yazidi women in the face of death are discussed. It also offers new perspectives that can be applied to support the Yazidi survivors. “Yazidi Women: Healing the Invisible Wounds” (2018) by Jaff stresses the mental illness faced by the Yazidi women who have experienced sexual assault, kidnapping, and displacement. It focuses on the recovery measures. It analyses the interventions that can be used to help the Yazidi women heal and live their lives. The invisible wounds of these women have to be addressed to provide medical aid and mental support. It reveals the necessity of addressing culturally sensitive approaches to sexual abuse. It prioritises the effectiveness of healing and resilience by focusing on the distinct experiences they faced.

“Survival after Sexual Violence and Genocide: Trauma and Healing for Yazidi Women in Northern Iraq” (2020) by Goodman et al. portrays the psychological damage experienced by the Yazidi women in ISIS captivity. The well-being of the survivors is emphasised. It looks at the consequences of trauma and also the assistance networks that helped the Yazidis recover. It recognises the struggle of the Yazidis to resist the situation they face. The complex interaction between resistance, trauma, survival, and healing is discussed, offering insights into the recovery trajectories of the Yazidis. “Voices of Yazidi Women: Perceptions of

Journalistic Practices in Reporting ISIS Sexual Violence” (2018) by Foster and Minwalla explores the different journalistic approaches in covering the sexual violence committed by ISIS, and these approaches have been viewed by the Yazidi women. The opinions of the Yazidi women on the portrayal and publication of their stories in the media are analysed in this article. The ethical issues of journalists when covering such sensitive issues are critically examined, and it also emphasises the need for ethical reporting in the case of sexual violence. How media representation affects the survivors is very important, and the complexities of such situations have to be carefully dealt with.

Miriam Cooke’s “Murad vs. ISIS” (2019) studies the contemporary Iraqi literature, analysing the texts that endorse and denounce the use of rape as a weapon of war. The experiences of Nadia Murad as a Yazidi woman who has undergone sexual slavery and later emerged as a human rights activist are explored in this article. It shows how Nadia Murad addressed the issues of the Yazidis in the larger context of genocide and atrocities against minority communities in the Middle East. Sali Bitar’s 2015 study, “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq,” examines the purpose of using sexual violence as a weapon when ISIS targeted the Yazidi people. This reveals the deliberate choice of women’s bodies as targets. It helps understand both the targeted community and the one who targets them. Sexual violence is used as a tool for many reasons. It is a tactic of war. There are political, religious, and misogynistic reasons for using it as a weapon. ISIS wanted to maintain homogeneity. They captured the Yazidi villages and persecuted the community. The use of sexual violence is justified by a religious ideology. “Sex

Slavery: One Aspect of the Genocide” (2017) is an article by Peter Nicolaus and Serkan Yuce. It concentrates on the unspeakable horrors of the Yazidi women and how human rights have been violated. The struggle of the women who experience rape is discussed in it. The fundamental Islamic ideology of ISIS, with which they encouraged sexual slavery, is detailed here. It also reviews how the local Sunni community casually accepted the terror tactics of ISIS. It describes the escape attempts of the Yazidis and the state officials’ response to their experiences. It also moves on to discussing the methods of international law for holding ISIS accountable for the genocide.

“The Rise and Fall of ISIS: From Evitability to Inevitability” by Willem Theo Oosterveld and Willem Bloem is a 2017 study that seeks to understand ISIS, its vulnerabilities, and the driving forces behind it. The objective of this study is to outline the changes that may come under powerful regional forces and how they can block the appearance of ISIS again in the face of its defeat. Different circumstances that led to the rise of ISIS are also focused on in the study. They analysed how and why ISIS emerged and also looked at the long-term objectives of the organisation. It also throws light on the flaws of ISIS to prevent the rise of a successor. “ISIS is One Piece of the Puzzle: Sheltering Women and Girls in Iraq and Syria” (2015) by Jillian Schwedler analyses the difficulties and challenges in providing shelter to women and girls of Iraq and Syria, especially in the context of the rise of ISIS. The title suggests the role of other important factors that also influence the welfare measures of women and girls in that region. The paper argues that the presence of ISIS creates

difficulty in providing refuge and aid to women and girls who have been affected by violence.

Most of the existing studies focus on the genocide and the use of sexual violence against the Yazidis. But all these studies little consider the body as a site of resistance. The existing literature does not examine body writing as a challenge to the necropower of ISIS. It rarely addresses how these traumatic experiences also contribute to defiance and self-assertion. This study attempts to focus on the overlooked dimensions of embodied resistance in the form of narratives. It tries to analyse how they use survival as a tool to defend injustice that they have experienced. They use escape as a weapon of resistance through which they reveal their plight. Through writing, they show how women oppose power, and survival becomes a literary form of resistance. The Yazidi community consists of only a few writers who are the survivors who stood in the way of the dead. They are still fighting for justice to prevail.

The works of three Yazidi writers, Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, and Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, who escaped the sexual enslavement of ISIS, and also the works of Dunya Mikhail and Barbara White that document the experiences of the Yazidi women, have been selected for this study.

Nadia Murad is an Iraqi Yazidi woman who became a global advocate for survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Born in the village of Kocho in northern Iraq in 1993, she grew up in a tight-knit Yazidi community. Her life took a tragic turn in August 2014, when her village was attacked by ISIS. The attack resulted in the killing of thousands of Yazidis, many were captured, enslaved, and they were

subjected to unheard cruelties. It was marked as genocide against the Yazidi community. Murad was one of the numerous girls who were taken as captives. She experienced sexual abuse, forced conversion and marriage, and continuous beatings. In November 2014, she could manage to escape to a northern Iraqi refugee camp. Despite the trauma she experienced, she acquired the boldness to speak out about the cruelties of ISIS. She becomes a spokesperson for the Yazidi survivors. She also addresses the issues of all sexually abused victims, especially during a conflict. She is a UN Goodwill Ambassador for the dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. She travels across the world, revealing the struggles faced by the Yazidi community. She stays with those who have survived sexual violence and regularly advocates for their justice. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016 for raising awareness of the horrors experienced by the Yazidi women under ISIS. She worked hard to urge the international community to recognise and respond to the seriousness of the crisis. Nadia's Initiative is an NGO co-founded by Nadia Murad, and they focus on providing support for the Yazidis who are displaced. They also advocate for the vulnerable communities. They offer medical and psychological assistance to survivors. They try to rebuild their community, guaranteeing that the voices of survivors will be heard worldwide. Together with Denis Mukwege, Nadia Murad won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018. They work to reduce the use of rape as a weapon in war and other conflicts. The immediate need for action and accountability in the matter of sexual violence is always given greater attention in their work. Her work, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* (2017), exhibits the will of a woman to fight against the trauma. The degradation and humiliation she experienced under the sexual slavery of ISIS are revealed in this

work. She brought her body into the discourse of writing and resistance. Using her traumatic experiences as a tool, she dedicates herself to helping the survivors of sexual violence and genocide. She becomes a human rights activist by showing bravery, and her perseverance brings attention to the suffering of her people, who demand justice. Her autobiography stands as a monument to the tenacity of survivors. It demands the need for international actions to protect the vulnerable and also hold the offenders responsible for what they have done. This book inspires readers to speak out against injustice. It helps support the initiatives to end violence and discrimination. *The Last Girl* acts as a call to work for the cause of justice and healing. Her journey from a sex slave to an internationally recognised activist suggests the resilience of human minds. It is the result of her commitment to bring positive change in a world of violence.

Farida Khalaf is a Yazidi writer who lives in Germany after escaping from the clutches of ISIS. Surviving the brutalities of ISIS, she becomes an advocate for the Yazidis who suffered at the hands of a terrorist organisation. Her story shows a will to rebuild her life as well as the lives of many others. It is a story of courage and resilience. Farida was only 19 years old when ISIS attacked her village in Sinjar. They were forcefully separated from their families and remained as captives. They were subjected to sexual abuse and physical torture. She suffered months of captivity, being sold as a sex slave. She was forced to convert to Islam and was treated inhumanely. Life was not easy after escape, but she found the courage to recount her journey from captivity to freedom. Farida dedicates herself to raising awareness and giving support, which helps the Yazidis find their place. Though

reluctant in the beginning, she has shared her story in interviews and also on international platforms. It brings attention to the suffering of her community and also the need for justice. Human trafficking in conflict zones and the experiences of the survivors who have undergone rape are always highlighted in her advocacy works. Aimed at preventing sexual violence, she has participated in many discussions and other events. She wants to raise awareness about the current situation and also the challenges her community faces. Along with Nadia and other activists, she has played an important role in bringing the issues of sexual violence to the global platform. She becomes a symbol of hope and strength for many. She continues to make a change in the plight of the Yazidis through her advocacy. She narrates her harrowing experiences in her work, *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS: This is My Story* (2016). She describes how horrible her life was after the arrival of ISIS. At every opportunity that she got during captivity, she tried to fight back. She was not ready to give up, though being sold as a sex slave in Syria. She lived with several ISIS militants, but she was sure that ISIS would never succeed in crushing her spirit. Her life under ISIS and also her life after captivity are detailed in the work. ISIS unsettled their peaceful way of life by killing their men and raping women. Despite the danger in attempting escape, she tried to escape. She could flee with the help of a few kind people, and the door of light and hope was open before her. The story is intensely personal, but she hopes to give voice to herself, which ISIS has tried to suppress. The constant fight for justice is highlighted in the work, and it is a perfect example of the strength of working together. She remains determined in her quest for justice.

Badeeah Hassan Ahmed is another Iraqi Yazidi writer who reveals the immense suffering experienced by the Yazidi community. She also works for the cause of the survivors of sexual violence. She was forced into a life of unimaginable trauma along with many other Yazidi women in 2014 when ISIS intruded into the village of the Yazidis. After months of captivity and rape, she made her way to a refugee camp. She also becomes a great supporter of the victims of sexual assault. She shares her story as well as the stories of other survivors, exposing the structural violence of ISIS. During her campaign, she focuses on compensation for victims of crimes. She tries to eliminate any kind of violence against women and children in war. She earns recognition through her work, and it has contributed to larger efforts to uplift the Yazidi community. She has also challenged the stigma faced by survivors of sexual abuse. Her work, *A Cave in the Clouds* (2019), reveals her experiences under ISIS. She was sold to an American-born ISIS general. She speaks loudly to the public through her words to remove any attempts by ISIS to silence her. She makes the world aware of the acts of genocide. It was at the age of eighteen; she became a sex slave and endured the sufferings. The story unfolded in Syria, where she was subjected to regular rape by a captor. While she was in captivity, she used her childhood memories to help her maintain control over herself. She escaped with her niece and reunited with her family. Her testimony reveals the bravery of the Yazidi women in confronting unresolved injustice.

Barbara White's *Nadja the Pearl of Sinjar* (2019) is a documentation of a Yazidi girl's capture by ISIS, and it also reveals how her determination helped her survive the sexual slavery. The best and worst side of humanity is shown through

the characters in the work. Waiting for death, Nadja experienced the pain of a wounded animal. She was transformed into a form of the walking dead. Brabara White is currently residing and working in Kurdistan, Northern Region of Iraq, as the Owner of the Dream Centre Language Institute. She has served the Global Community, Teaching Leadership Training, Entrepreneurial Building, and as a teacher in various other subjects. She has continually sought to advance humanity through her endeavours. She has visited the People's Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Somalia in Eastern Africa on numerous occasions. She has had the privilege of meeting with many Government Leaders. While working and contributing to her local community in the United States of America, Barb also successfully owned and managed two businesses. For more than twenty years, she has taught leadership and successful life skills. She has worked to establish confidence, courage, and inspiration for those who dare to dream. She has succeeded, both as a paid Professional Consultant and as an English Teacher. She has been a United States Congressional Candidate for the 5th District of Minnesota twice, and she is also a Licensed and Ordained Pastor, holding a Master's Degree in Theological Studies from Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Dunya Mikhail, who is known for her powerful and poignant literary works that often focus on themes of war, displacement, and the resilience of people in the face of adversity, is an Iraqi-American poet and journalist. She deals with the experiences of minority women and people who undergo war, especially those in Iraq, her home country. Born on August 30, 1965, in Baghdad, she studied at the University of Baghdad. She worked as a journalist for the Baghdad Observer. In the

late 1990s, because of her writings against the regime of Saddam Hussein, she faced danger in Iraq and migrated to the US. She continues to write about the experiences of Iraqi refugees and Iraq from the US. She is good at capturing the experiences of people in times of crisis through her vivid imagery and emotionally in-depth narrative style. She often tries to explore the struggles of vulnerable communities in conflict and displacement. *The War Works Hard* (1993), a collection of poems, is one of her well-known works. It addresses the themes of memory, loss, and resilience by portraying the impact of war on society, family, and individuals. She has received awards and recognitions for her contributions to the literary world. She has been a finalist for the National Book Award for her book *The Iraqi Nights* (2014). She received the UN Human Rights Award in 2001. She has given voice to many stories that otherwise might have been silenced. Through her writings, she tries to enrich the understanding of readers of the realities faced by people living in war zones. *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* (2019) tells the experiences of the Yazidi survivors, is a non-fiction work by her. The book is written in a conversation mode in which she talks to Abdullah Shrem, a Yazidi beekeeper from Sinjar, Iraq. He has worked with selfless efforts to save the lives of the Yazidi women in captivity. It represents Abdullah as a symbol of courage and compassion, and he is determined to rescue women and girls from the captivity of ISIS. It reveals the brutalities of ISIS on the Yazidis, and the importance of acknowledging these issues is also addressed in the work. The crucial role of people like Abdullah in providing help to those in need is also emphasised. This work stands as a monument to the struggle of people who dare to take any risk in their lives to not let evil win. In difficult times, each act of

bravery is important. *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* not only draws attention to the condition of the Yazidi people and the effects of ISIS, but it also urges readers to address the crimes done and fight towards justice, healing, and the reconstruction of shattered lives and communities.

Nadia Murad, Khalaf, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, Dunya Mikhail, and Barbara White contribute to the rebuilding of the Yazidis by addressing their issues and making the world act for them to attain justice.

This research problematises how the sovereign power operates on the weaker sections and how it determines the lives of the vulnerable. It also identifies the different ways of marginalisation and victimisation based on religion, colour, caste, and gender. The life of the Yazidi women who have argued that rape and sexual violence should be recognised as weapons of war and that the international criminal law should address rape is examined in this study. Where democracy and constitution fail in the hands of capital, communal, and sovereign power, and when human life becomes insignificant against the potent power, it is important to comprehend how we can live with these by resisting the supreme power of some over one's own life. This research finds its relevance in this context, where it analyses the execution of ISIS power on the body and mind of the Yazidi women and how they resist the same using the discourse of writing.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion. An overview of the Yazidis, their religion and culture, and also the emergence of ISIS are detailed in the first chapter. The details of the core chapters,

methodology, review of literature, and the works selected for the study are outlined in this chapter.

The second chapter situates the rise of ISIS within the larger context of terrorism, explaining the necropower of ISIS and the different methods they used to exercise necropower upon the vulnerable bodies of the Yazidi women. It also demonstrates how ISIS determines the life and death of others by institutionalising necropower as a strategy of governance.

The third chapter tries to examine how sexual violence becomes a necropolitical weapon used by ISIS to instil fear and thereby erase an entire community. Forced conversion, rape, and torture have always been systematically used for ethnic cleansing and to destroy communal harmony. How the bodies of women are made battlegrounds where sovereignty is instilled through dehumanisation is discussed in this chapter.

The fourth chapter reveals the narrative agency of the Yazidi women who transformed trauma into testimony. It deals with the lives of survivors and how they have reframed trauma into resistance. It indicates how, through writing the body, one can reclaim dignity, identity, and also agency. Through activism and writing, the Yazidi women resist the imposed silence. It shows how they turn their body into a site of renewal and defiance.

The final chapter concludes the central arguments of this study by revealing how the writings of the Yazidi women challenge the necropower of ISIS. Connecting the experiences of the Yazidi women to the global dynamics of

oppression, this chapter delves into the different frameworks, political, historical, and gendered, that enabled the genocide. It discusses how the testimonies become a political tool, shifting trauma into an agency for obtaining justice. It also examines how necropower works in modern conflicts, contextualising the Yazidi genocide among so many other genocides and wars that targeted the vulnerable communities globally.

The resistance against the recurrent system of erasure and domination is made possible through the narratives of the Yazidi women. They have to be examined from two perspectives- the geopolitical and the gender political agendas of conflict. This study is an attempt to situate the Yazidi case in the broader history of gender politics of genocide, tracing how women's bodies have been systematically instrumentalised by colonial, sectarian, and patriarchal forces as a way of exercising social and political control. It attempts to highlight the relation between violence and sovereignty, thereby including gender experiences in the idea of necropower. Where the power controls and regulates life, death, and visibility, the bodies of women become critical realms. They also provide a space for agency, resistance, and reclamation. This study tries to explore how the testimonies of the Yazidi women subvert the disposability, turning vulnerability into political agency. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that the subaltern can speak when the speech itself becomes an act of survival (42). The Yazidi acts of narrating resist erasure, and they regain visibility.

This study attempts to situate the narratives of the Yazidi women within the longer genealogy of resistance. It tries to link them with the histories of persecution,

colonial domination, gendered violence, and epistemic silencing. The wounded body is transformed into a counter-archive that challenges the necropower. The focus is on the gendered patterns of survival rather than on the geopolitical dimensions of terrorism. It is an attempt to address how the identity of women is reclaimed through language and how the violated body reasserts its agency. It also tries to emphasise the importance of preserving these voices to redefine sovereignty and justice from a marginalised perspective. It tries to state that the resilience of vulnerable communities in general, the Yazidis in particular, remains a major concern in the discourse on gender, power, and survival.

Chapter Two

ISIS: The Caliphate of Terror

Contemporary experiences of violence, extermination, and human devastation reveal that politics and sovereignty can be understood not through the rational subject but in the more fundamental categories of life and death. They emerge from death-worlds in which vast populations are relegated to conditions of abandonment and exposure (Mbembe 70). Terrorism in the twenty-first century must therefore be understood not as an aberration from political order but as one of its most radical expressions, produced within the same logics of exception, dispossession, and ruptured sovereignty that structure modern global power. Mbembe states, “The link between modernity and terror can be found in the political practices of the ancient regime” (72). Rather than appearing as episodic eruptions of violence, terrorist formations crystallise from long historical trajectories, anti-colonial rebellions, ethno-nationalist insurgencies, and transnational jihadist networks that have progressively detached political violence from the territorial state. These formations constitute what Giorgio Agamben describes as “zones of indistinction,” where the state of exception transforms from a temporary suspension of law into “a permanent spatial arrangement” outside the normal juridical order (*State of Exception* 23). Terrorism evolves into a global phenomenon in such spaces. It exploits the foreign policies, power vacuums, and the breakdown of states. Analysing the concept of “power,” Michel Foucault suggests, sovereignty extends beyond the state apparatus circulating through “mobile and diffused mechanisms of control” (*Discipline and Punish* 67). ISIS has taken root in these gaps where fissures

appear in governance and when the authority dissolves. ISIS is not solely the product of extremist ideology. Still, the rise of it is a result of the changing structure of global sovereignty, using violence as a mode of governance. They exploit “the political tyranny and dismal social and economic conditions by both challenging the ideology of the state and presenting a subversive alternative through the reestablishment of the caliphate or the Islamic State” (Gerges 5).

Terrorism emerges as an apparatus embedded within the “state of exception,” where life becomes exposed to uncontrolled power and where the juridical order gets suspended (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 23). It becomes a decentralised authority capable of subverting or displacing the course of the state. It is revealed in the lands of broken regimes, insurgencies, and transnational militancy. Sovereignty is not just a power that regulates life as put forward by Foucault’s biopolitics, but it is fundamentally entangled with death, as explained by Mbembe. Modern political power is largely grounded in the management of death. The basis for necropower is formed in this tension between life-giving and death-dealing. Modernity produces death worlds, spaces of alienation, and people who can be exposed to destruction while presenting itself as an entity to promote equality, freedom, and reason (Mbembe 67). Terrorist organisations gain momentum in such abandoned spaces that are formed by sectarian hatred and geopolitical vacuum. These groups administer through violence, making use of the gaps in the failed states. They are at once insurgent and administrative. ISIS emerges within such unstable and shattered sovereignty and governs through terror. They transform terror into a mode of governance and a performance of sovereign authority, integrating

spectacular violence with bureaucratic administration, and also by mobilising global media infrastructures to amplify its symbolic power. Its project reveals how, in the twenty-first century, violence becomes both a political instrument and a foundational principle of statecraft, allowing ISIS to take claims over territory, bodies, and the very conditions under which life and death are distributed.

The attacks of 9/11 fundamentally redefined the epistemic category of terrorism, transforming it from a geographically localised tactic into a globalised, mediated, and spectacular regime of power. Judith Butler argues, “The cry that there is no excuse for September 11 has become a means by which to stifle any serious public discussion of how U.S. foreign policy has helped to create a world in which such acts of terror are possible” (*Frames of War* 3). The United States, by using the term “terrorist”, frames itself as the “sudden and indisputable victim of violence”, even though suffering violence is not the same as acquiring the right to pursue “limitless aggression” against targets potentially unrelated to the original harm.

Every experience of violence is accompanied by a frame for understanding that shapes what questions can be asked and what kind of explanations can be heard. The U.S. tells the story of the conflict beginning with September 11, adopting a first-person point of view that centres its own experience. The phrase ‘acts of terror’ is reserved for September 11 and similar attacks, distinguishing these forms of state violence justified by war or foreign policy. (Butler, *Frames of War* 5)

Terrorism after 2001 became inseparable from the “symbolic economy of violence,” wherein acts of terror function not merely as military operations but as communicative performances designed to restructure global perception (Hoffman 112). The U.S.-led Global War on Terror, while aimed at dismantling jihadist networks, inadvertently destabilised the political infrastructure of Iraq and Afghanistan, generating spaces where sovereignty is suspended and alternative forms of militant rule proliferate. Mbembe argues, “These spaces fuse biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege” (75), more completely than anywhere else. Exploiting the vacuums produced by imperial intervention and state failure, terrorism “thrives in zones of collapse, fragmentation, and contested sovereignty” (Cronin 45). In this geopolitical landscape, ISIS emerges as a paradigmatic expression of contemporary militant power, marking the erosion of state authority and the expansion of abandoned spaces.

The pre-existing jihadist trajectories shaped by the failures of post-9/11 counterterrorism are intensified by ISIS. Fawas A. Gerges states,

In March 2015, President Barack Obama traced the origins of ISIS to his predecessor George W. Bush’s decision to send US troops to occupy Iraq. In an interview with Vice News, Obama said that the rise of the Islamic State can be directly led to the US-led invasion of Iraq: ISIL is a direct outgrowth of Al-Qaeda in Iraq that grew out of the invasion. (58)

Obama’s statement highlights the “structural violence”, the long-term harm produced by political decisions whose destructive consequences unfold indirectly and often unintentionally. The invasion destabilised Iraqi society so profoundly that

insurgent actors could claim legitimacy among Sunni communities who felt marginalised under the new political order. Emerging from the remnants of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi during the violent aftermath of the U.S. occupation, ISIS is simultaneously an ideological continuation of and a radical break from the model institutionalised by Al-Qaeda Central. It is noted in the work *A Cave in the Cloud*, “Daesh had grown out of al-Qaeda, the group that had attacked the World Trade Centre in New York City in 2001” (Ahmed and McClelland 28). ISIS rejected the strategy of Al-Qaeda that focused on the “far enemy of the United States, Israel or other global actors, instead they consistently focused on “the Shia and the near enemy of the Iraqi and Syrian regimes” (Gerges 6). The declaration of ISIS as a Caliphate in 2014 represented their “immediate embodiment of divine sovereignty through conquest” (Weiss and Hassan 54). Badeeah Hassan Ahmed notes this as an extremely dangerous situation, “They wanted to create an Islamic state, which they called a caliphate... I wasn’t sure what this Islamic state would mean for non-Muslims, like us, and it worried me” (28).

Al Qaeda and ISIS belong to the family of Salafi-jihadism, and they also share a similar view, but in their perspectives on power, both groups form divergent trajectories, revealing deeper theoretical distinctions.

ISIS is radically different from and more dangerous than Al Qaeda Central...

While Al Qaeda is characterised as an underground, transnational, borderless organisation, ISIS managed to blend in with local Sunni communities, functioning within the concept of statehood. (Gerges 42, 223)

The ideology of ISIS is deeply rooted in the Sunni-Shia divide, which is often referred to as “geosectarianism.” They try to replace the existing political order by institutionalising violence and establishing territorial sovereignty. “ISIS is not a mere terrorist or even an insurgent organisation; rather it is a quasi-state entity that aspires to build a pan-Islamic state, a caliphate” (Gerges 224). They distinguish themselves from all other jihadist groups in their ambitions of expanding territories and establishing a state. They become more than a “terrorist threat.” They employed violence and terror as modes of administration, acquiring the ability to dictate death to those who were not ready to follow their path. When Al Qaeda used death as an instrument to destabilise the state, it became an organising principle for ISIS. They reconfigured the jihadist ideology of Al Qaeda and made territorial ambitions, violence, and juridical exception into a new form of militant sovereignty, realising their necropolitical agenda. The shift from an insurgency to a death-driven state apparatus is marked as one of the most radical evolutions in modern terrorism.

The apocalyptic theology, the aesthetics of spectacular violence, and the digital propaganda outplaced ISIS among other groups. They considered martyrdom and violence as sacred duties. Social media platforms, *nasheeds*, and the *Dabiq* magazine were used to spread their ideology, and through which they transformed necropower as a religious and political responsibility. Through the institutionalisation of death and perpetual warfare, ISIS insisted on the immediate establishment of an Islamic State. The brutality of violence and its diffusion on digital platforms persist even after the collapse of its territories, complicating the efforts for counterterrorism. The legacy of ISIS clearly indicates how necropower

redefined sovereignty as a violent strategy in the twenty-first century and how it circulates globally. The political order of ISIS was laid on the foundation of violence and death. Killing was not incidental in the territories under their control, but it was a careful plan for destruction. The ultimate sovereignty of the caliphate rested on its capacity to categorise and eliminate bodies. ISIS became “war machines” which consist of “segments of armed men that split up or merge... depending on the tasks” (Mbembe 84). They did not have any stable institutions to rule, but they operated through deterritorialization. They incorporated themselves into the state apparatus, and their relation with the state was dynamic. ISIS transformed terrorism into statecraft by implementing necropower through its taxation system, courts, *diwans* (ministers), educational institutions, and media. Their governance was inseparable from the systematic production of death. The existence of the Caliphate was rooted in the destruction of heterogeneity and in the enactment of violence. They believed that sovereignty could only be materialised through domination. The emergence of ISIS was a paradigm shift in modern terrorism, signifying the rise of a modern militant order where administration, sovereignty, and violence blend in the necropolitical structure.

In the evolution of global terrorism, the rise of ISIS marked a pivotal threshold. It signalled the change of terrorism from a clandestine militancy to a visible territorial project where sovereignty was achieved through systematic killing. ISIS was developed as a proto-state based on necropolitical governance, where the primary focus of the rule was to regulate life and death. This shift marked a movement from ideological disruption to a statecraft rendered on genocide. ISIS

thus established a death world where they destroyed the distinctive beliefs of minority communities such as Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, and heterodox Sunni groups. Religious and ethnic diversity was not respected rather crushed to a permanent erasure. Tracing the necropolitical practices of ISIS that functioned across territorial, corporeal, and symbolic realms is crucial in analysing its genocide of the Yazidis.

The year 2014 marked an unprecedented success in the history of modern insurgent organisations. ISIS became a powerful organisation expanding its territories and also its position across the world. Territorial expansion was only one of the facets of the necropolitical project. They had suspended all forms of normal legal framework through their claim to sovereignty, where the individuals were devoid of their rights and experienced a bare life (Agamben, *State of Exception* 9). They were exposed to uncontrolled violence. Only those who conformed to the absolute vision of Sunni identity were recognised as subjects. ISIS constructed a necropolitical order in which Shia Muslims, Yazidis, Christians, and many others stood outside the boundaries of legitimate life. They were left to the domain of expendability. ISIS employed strategies of mass execution, public beheading, sexual enslavement, and the regular forced conversion to institutionalise terror. The absolute power was exercised through these acts. The execution videos consolidated the sovereignty of ISIS, and those videos helped them project their power to the world. The beheading videos of ISIS become the “society of the spectacle” (Debord 12) in which visibility itself becomes a mode of domination. Terror becomes more intensified when it is circulated publicly. ISIS used this strategy to maintain its

powerful position. These beheading videos showing violence shifted death into a political act.

The aesthetic of domination was signified in the beheading of American journalist James Foley in August 2014. He was abducted by ISIS in 2012. The masked executioner wearing a black dress increased the intensity of the terror, showing a complete omnipotence. Foley, wearing an orange jumpsuit, was forced to kneel before him and was reduced to a medium for ISIS to announce its sovereignty. Rukmini Callimachi opines that the video, titled *A Message to America*, reveals the ideology of ISIS and how they tried to spread their necropolitical message (12). It was an instance of the enactment of sovereignty in its modern form rather than a punishment. Foley became a *homo sacer*, and he could be killed with impunity. He stood outside the protection of any legal or moral order (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 83). His death reaffirmed the claim of ISIS to absolute power. They attained a capacity to decide who may live and who must die (Mbembe 67). The broadcasting of his killing video declared the authority of ISIS globally. To intensify its politics of terror, ISIS used the medium of digital platforms. The beheading was a necropolitical performance of ISIS, which transformed the body of an individual into a canvas upon which sovereign power inscribed its command. The governance of the Caliphate was inseparable from the display of violence. ISIS realised the magnificence of the power of terror in making it visible. The execution videos were carefully taken, and they made the world view it, showing the ritual of sovereignty. The Guantanamo-style orange jumpsuit for the victims was a careful choice. In that dress, they became a “mythical signifier,” repurposing U.S. carceral imagery into a

narrative of inverted vengeance and symbolic retaliation (Barthes 117). ISIS exceeded the normal limits of warfare through these beheadings. The executioners who addressed the audience directly in the video suggested that ISIS was outside any kind of negotiation and diplomacy.

The Caliphate positioned itself as a sovereign performer capable of reinscribing the semiotics of violence. They justified their acts of cruelty using Islamic ideology and the earlier practices of caliphates. They framed brutality as a divine responsibility. Quranic verses and Hadith were used to legitimise and cover violence as a spiritual duty. Mainstream Muslim scholars criticised and rejected this view of ISIS (McCants 45). ISIS normalised its necropower using this hermeneutic manipulation. Killing was performed as an enactment of God's will. ISIS constructed a "corporeal communication of power" by embedding violence within a scriptural genealogy, where the body becomes the primary site upon which authority is inscribed (Kraidy 29). Acting as a psychological warfare, these beheading videos intimidated the global and local populations. The aesthetics of terror and horror were instrumentalised by ISIS, attracting recruits, demoralising enemies, and outbidding the rival jihadists (Stern and Berger 89). This strategy of ISIS was exemplified in many of their acts, including the execution of hundreds of Iraqi soldiers at Camp Speicher in June 2014. Many were beheaded, and more than 1,700 Shiite cadets were executed, dumping them into mass graves as a demonstration of absolute control over military opposition, territory, and sectarian identity (Weiss and Hassan 78). This massacre was an implementation of sovereignty aiming at asserting total domination over Tikrit. It was not simply an incident of mass killing, but it also

indicated the collapse of state protection. The act of making the violence a spectacle went beyond Iraq and Syria. They declared their religious war and also geopolitical expansion in their beheading of twenty-one Egyptian Coptic Christians on a Libyan beach in February 2015. They broadcast the video, titling it as “A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross” (Maher 45). The semiotic mastery of ISIS was reiterated in the performance of the execution against the Mediterranean shore, making death a media artefact captured for circulating globally. “Modern power consolidates itself not only through force but through the spectacle of force” (Debord 12). This logic was clearly employed by ISIS. All these killings indicate a “differential distribution of grievability,” where the lives of some, especially those of minority communities, are rendered ungrievable and therefore killable (Butler, *Frames of War* 41). The sectarian ideology of ISIS was visible in dumping the bodies of the Shiite cadets into the Tigris. The massacre reaffirmed the identity of the caliphate as a purifying agent committed to eradicating heresy. It stood as the most brutal embodiment of the necropolitical order.

Shiite cadets, blindfolded and terrified, were executed on June 12, 2014, with methodical precision. Their dead bodies were arranged in pits, and ISIS enjoyed a ritual satisfaction in each gunshot. The violence went beyond military retaliation, and the caliphate exerted its necropolitical performance most violently. They had written a clear message in blood that ISIS was a sovereign entity based on the regulation of death (BBC, Al Jazeera). The necropower of ISIS was further intensified in the execution of Jordanian pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh in 2015. He was burned alive in a cage. They filmed his death with cinematic detail, intercut with

slow-motion sequences, drone footage, and ideological narration. The choice of burning was rare in jihadist practice. As reported in the *New York Times*, ISIS presented itself as the arbiter of divine justice against Jordan's anti-ISIS coalition policies (Sengupta). Al-Kasasbeh stood outside any legal protection, became a *homo sacer*. His killing did not undergo any juridical consequence (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 83); rather, it reasserted the claim of ISIS to absolute sovereignty. The necropolitical logic governing the caliphate was revealed in these killings. Necropower rules through reducing human beings to killable bodies (Mbembe 81). Beheading was a declaration of sovereign supremacy, making death a public performance and claiming authority over any nation-state. Death became a fundamental principle of governance. Al-Hayat Media Centre of ISIS ensured the reach of these beheading videos circulating through digital platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram (Zelin 34). There was a regular pattern for these videos, which consisted of a spiritual sermon by the executioner, a scripted statement by the victim, and the act of beheading. This pattern reflects a ritualisation of violence, a performance that normalised death within the political logic of the caliphate. These videos were also used to discipline the militants inside ISIS, creating an environment rooted in fear, obedience, and the celebration of martyrdom (Bunzel 67). The violence was a blow to the normative order of the international system. It helped them declare that there was no limit for the ISIS sovereign except the divine force. The systematic recording and dissemination of videos globally distinguished ISIS from earlier jihadist movements. They recorded the execution videos as if it were a state ceremony. Agamben argues that modern sovereign power relies on the production of states of exception, spaces where the law is suspended,

and lives become expendable (*Homo Sacer* 83). ISIS deliberately textualised violence and constructed such zones across Iraq and Syria, reducing the lives of minorities, including Shiites, Yazidis, and Christians, to killable subjects whose existence depended only on total submission (Weiss and Hassan 56).

Christians, Shia Muslims, Turkmen, and Shabaks found it difficult to cooperate with the theological objectives of the caliphate, and they were targeted for their religious beliefs. ISIS employed its necropower within this sectarian reconfiguration. Shiite shrines in Mosul and Karbala served as essential repositories of communal history, and ISIS disrupted the cultural and communal harmony of minority life, destroying these symbols (Hashim 142). They created a hierarchical system that accepted only Sunni orthodoxy as having humanity, and all other minority identities were shifted into an insignificant realm. The demands for forced conversion, pay jizya, and execution resulted in the expulsion of Christians from Mosul. ISIS imposed ethnic homogenisation, eliminating centuries of religious diversity. The very principle of “making live and letting die” (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 254) had been transformed under ISIS rule.

The most systematic and devastating expression of the ISIS necropolitical regime was manifested through its attack on the Yazidis, a religious minority historically marginalised from the mainstream regional politics. The attack on Sinjar on 3 August 2014 revealed the establishment of a death-based sovereignty rather than being a territorial victory. The attack was executed with perfect accuracy. It was through a series of fatwas issued by its Diwan of Research and Studies that ISIS institutionalised enslavement, redefining rape as a legal and religious method of

governance rather than an inevitable sexual violence during war. The Yazidi female body became a “prosthetic extension of sovereignty,” functioning as a medium through which the caliphate exerted control, retained its violent ontology, and enforced communal purity (Mbembe 71). Sexual violence was a gendered necropolitical tool used by ISIS to govern and also to destroy. The United Nations Commission of Inquiry concluded that “ISIS acted with the explicit intent to destroy the Yazidi community, either in whole or in part, thus meeting the legal definition of genocide as stated in international law” (23). ISIS implemented domination, attempted communal erasure, and enforced sectarian purification within the death world, and the Yazidi female body was a target in it. Necropower constructs “death-worlds,” spaces where populations are intentionally subjected to conditions that make them disposable (Mbembe 68). Sinjar, the region where most of the Yazidis used to reside, turned into a real death zone under ISIS.

The narratives of Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, Nadja, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, Dunya Mikhail, and Barbara White reveal the systematic organisation that underpinned the sexual violence of ISIS. The Yazidi women were categorised and catalogued. They were livestock in a structured auction system. A price value was assigned to each woman, and these women were redistributed within the market. It was a system of instrumentalising the “female subaltern body” (Spivak 92) where the bodies were exploited as economic and political assets through which ISIS maintained its control. This deliberate attempt to dominate using sexual violence as a means of control served the purpose of terror and the elimination of cultural identity. Ancestral legacy was disrupted, social structures were dismantled, and the

female body was transformed into a conflict area. ISIS sought to erase the cultural memory of the Yazidi community, and they even controlled their reproduction to make it sure that the community would be totally removed. ISIS invaded the Yazidi regions and classified the civilians on the basis of their religion, age, and gender, revealing their strategy of dominance. They instrumentalised the very existence of the Yazidi people, killing men and older women. ISIS disregarded the minority community as insignificant. The Yazidis were labelled as “*abadat shaytan*” or “devil worshippers,” excluding them from the realm of secured and safe existence. ISIS militants declared, “These Yazidis are *abadat shaytan*.” These non-believers, if they don’t convert, they are sabaya. War booty” (Ahmed and McClelland 33). They experienced a life stripped of legal protection due to the marginalisation based on their religious beliefs (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 83).

In the evolution of ISIS from an insurgent group to a proto-state, the capture of Mosul in June 2014 represented a critical juncture. ISIS fighters successfully dismantled “the Iraqi Army’s force of 30,000 personnel, seizing an ample quantity of U.S.-supplied military equipment, around \$500 million from the central bank of the city, and also the infrastructure of the government” (Cockburn 132). On June 29, 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the ISIS leader, declared the establishment of a caliphate from the Great Mosque of al-Nuri in Mosul (Wood 67). He rebranded the organisation as the “Islamic State,” merging spiritual authority with necropower. The caliphate established a juridic-political order. It was grounded in the ultimate interpretation of Sharia, characterised by strict social control, public executions, and brutal punishments (Amnesty International 23). Mosul became more than just a

conquered territory, and it served as the hub of the ISIS death-world, transmitting necropower to the other areas, most horrifically to Sinjar. This event ultimately led to the atrocities committed against the Yazidi women, using their bodies as a platform for the caliphate's plan to govern the world.

It is observed in the work *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS: My Story* that ISIS aimed to “bring the whole of the Middle East under their control” (Khalaf 18). The structural conditions that favoured the rise of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi are foregrounded here. It was made possible through the collapse of state authority, the aftereffect of U.S. military intervention, and the circulation of arms through regional powers. “Baghdadi and cohorts have made it clear that jihad, as perpetual war or the institution of war, is offensive, not defensive... he lends his voice to his definition of jihad as constant warfare” (Gerges 140). His incarceration in Camp Bucca was a pivotal event that changed his life. It functioned as a space of radical realisation. “Many of the jihadist commanders spent time in this US-run prison, providing them access to like-minded individuals and opportunity to expand their networks” (Gerges 132). It became a factory that produced jihadists. Prisons become “laboratories of militant sociality” (Khalili 145) where networks are consolidated and strategies refined. Such insights shift the focus from individual fanaticism to the infrastructures of repression and war that cultivated it. It complicated the narrative of the ISIS growth even further.

The regional involvement in the rise of ISIS was expressed by Khalaf's father saying, “They and other jihadis were given support by the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar in particular. But Turkey sent weapons too, because they wanted

to topple Assad and strengthen the radical Sunnis in the country. And they succeeded!” (Khalaf 18). It was not only an internal radicalisation that enabled the rise of ISIS, but rather they were also supported by transnational networks, including funding, transfer of arms, and strategic opportunism. It reveals that the power to determine who lives and who dies is not limited to a single sovereign entity; rather, it is distributed among a global network of states, proxies, and war economies (Mbembe 92). The violence inflicted upon the Yazidi women was not just an expression of the brutality of ISIS. It was the result of the geopolitical context that strengthened various groups to enhance the capacity of ISIS for violence and control.

When the civil war broke out in Syria... Baghdadi's group and other jihadis were given support by the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Qatar in particular. But Turkey sent weapons too, because they wanted to topple Assad and strengthen the radical Sunnis in the country. And they succeeded! Baghdadi's men wield more influence than all the other groups in Syria. They're battle-seasoned and just swimming in money and arms. That's why they are dangerous. (Khalaf 18)

The material support for the ISIS regime of terror was evident in these words. What made the conversion of the Yazidi women's bodies into subjugation, sites of conquest, and sexual terrorism was the geopolitical will, and also the abundance of military resources that fed them remained powerful. ISIS executed its ability to dominate life at its most embodied level, killing the Yazidi men and capturing the Yazidi women. What ISIS started as a geopolitical account of arms and power led to

its extreme necropolitical governance. It became a weaponised expression of sovereignty. Judith Butler argues that sovereign violence operates through a “differential distribution of vulnerability,” where certain populations are rendered hyper-exposed to injury and killability (*Frames of War* 25). ISIS produced this vulnerability, intersecting regional geopolitics and the ideological goal.

The car bombings in Mosul on 6 June 2014 were the first public declaration of the absolute domination of ISIS. It was a statement of ISIS’s superiority announcing, “You’ve got no defence against us!” (Khalaf 23).

The poor people of Mosul were screaming too- with pain and fear. The camera showed images of weeping women, shell-shocked inhabitants, emergency medics attending to the injured, and clouds of black smoke above the sites of destruction. They billowed through the busy streets of the metropolis, where chaos appeared to be reigning. Everyone was trying to get to safety. For nobody knew when and where the next detonation would take place. (Khalaf 23)

Such violence produced a new political order grounded in terror rather than merely destroying. Sovereignty was redefined as the ability to dictate who must die, who may be enslaved, and who must live (Mbembe 67). The assertion of power foreshadowed the reduction of the Yazidi women to a situation of what Mbembe calls “living dead”, lives stripped of agency and preserved only as sites of exploitation (72). The aftermath of the explosions served as a visual document of this transformation in the life of the Yazidis. The female body was not only an agent of mourning but also became an object of sexual enslavement. ISIS converted both

public and private spaces into spaces of necropower. First, through the destruction of their communities and later through their targeted abduction and assault, the Yazidi women experienced a dual victimisation.

Farida Khalaf's disturbing thought, "Yesterday Samarra, today, Mosul, and tomorrow? What would happen tomorrow? If the country's second most important city was such an easy target, then probably nowhere in Iraq was really safe anymore" (23), shows how necropower exceeds the specific moment of attack. Producing a temporality of terror and a "politics of perpetual threat" that dissolves the boundary between civilian space and battlefield, ISIS used uncertainty as a weapon (Weizman 157). This temporality culminated in captivity for the Yazidi women. Life for them was unpredictable. They could be traded, sold, raped and even killed at any moment. Such systematic sexual violence constitutes "sexual terrorism," a form of domination inscribed directly onto the bodies and also to the identities of women. ISIS exhibited the basic principle of its governance, necropower, through the Mosul bombings. They blurred the lines between warfare and governance, combining the destruction of cities with oppression on a gender basis. ISIS extended its control beyond territory into the most personal lives of captives. They employed bodily violation along with the destruction of public properties. The terrorist attacks on Mosul act as a precursor to the impending genocidal violence in Sinjar, depicting the operation of necropower through spectacle, gender and temporality. The seizure of Mosul signalled the ability of ISIS to dismantle sovereign authority through spectacular violence.

A huge convoy of vehicles was heading toward Mosul from the Syrian border, each of these packed full of ISIS fighters. The pickups were transporting hundreds of terrorists and were equipped with mounted machine guns... Suicide bombers attacked police and army buildings in a parallel assault. (Khalaf 24)

“The black flags with quotations from the Quran” (Khalaf 25) were hoisted as a sign of both a religious and territorial dominance. It transformed conquest into a symbolic act of sovereignty. Mosul became a “state of exception” where law collapsed (Agamben, *State of Exception* 22), and ISIS alone dictated life and death. The broadcasting of their victory reveals the necropower of ISIS, where domination was sustained through spectacle and fear. This seizure was not only the beginning of territorial control, but for the Yazidi women it signalled a precondition for their bodies being reduced to bare life, vulnerable to enslavement and exploitation within the emerging caliphate.

The terrorists were drunk on their success in Mosul. While the inhabitants fled the city in hordes, the terrorists looted banks, museums, and government buildings. They freed all the Sunnis who had been imprisoned because of terrorist acts or their affinity to Al-Qaeda... thereby doubling the number of their fighters in one fell swoop. (Khalaf 29)

The domination of ISIS was unleashed in Mosul in proving that it was more than an opportunistic plunder. The cultural and political memory of Iraq was completely erased. ISIS unsettled the collective identity of minority communities through its calculated act of necropower. This cultural erasure creates spaces in which life,

history and identity itself become subject to the sovereign destruction (Mbembe 80). It was not only killing that revealed the sovereign power of ISIS. Their capacity to double the fighters in a single act also made it clear that sovereignty in the necropolitical order of ISIS decided who could be reabsorbed into the circuits of violence and who was abandoned to death (Mbembe 81). The mechanism of sexual enslavement was intensified by the expansion of militants, ensuring that necropower operated at all levels, including territory, culture, and the Yazidi female body. The newly released fighter who pledged allegiance to ISIS became a potential participant in the enactment of sexual enslavement.

The seizure of Mosul laid the groundwork for the systematic gendered atrocities that culminated in the Sinjar genocide, reconfiguring the territorial authority, intensifying the mechanisms of violence and removing the cultural memory. It must be understood as a multilayered act of crafting a state rooted in necropower. Through these acts, ISIS demonstrated how necropower operates across military, cultural, and intimate domains and how it had transformed sovereignty into a totalising control over territory, community, and the female body.

At the beginning of July, a man around forty years old appeared in front of the cameras... announced that he was the new legitimate ruler of Iraq and Syria. He called himself caliph, by which he claimed to be both the spiritual and political leader of the Muslims... The title caliph, which Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had selected for himself, implied nothing less than that he considered himself to be the successor of the Prophet Muhammed. (Khalaf 30)

This moment was not merely a ceremonial one. It constituted a “performative enactment of power,” where sovereignty is materialised through ritualised spectacle that compels collective recognition (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 187). Baghdadi combined religious legitimacy with political rule by claiming himself a successor to the Prophet. This declaration inaugurated their necropolitical project in which dissenters, non-Sunni minorities, and especially the Yazidis were cast outside the realm of legal and moral protection. Domination over minority communities and women’s bodies became not incidental but doctrinal and a spiritual imperative.

Baghdadi proclaimed,

O Muslims everywhere! Hurry to your state, yes, your state! Hurry, for Syria does not belong to the Syrians and Iraq does not belong to the Iraqis. No, the earth belongs to God alone, who gives it to those of His servants on earth whom He chooses... This state is the state of Muslims... O Muslims, wherever you may be, whosoever can emigrate to the Islamic State must do this, for emigration to the house of Islam is your duty. (Khalaf 31)

He sanctified the conquest and nullified the national borders. The geographical land was reimagined as a divine territory through this universal claim. The existence of minority communities like the Yazidis was positioned outside the “house of Islam.” His proclamation suggested the disposability of those who did not belong to the ideology of ISIS. Under the rule of the caliph, forced conversion and sexual violence were considered legitimate and permissible. This is a clear demarcation of how religious discourses become weapons of sovereignty. The persecuted body was transformed into a terrain where violence, sovereignty and faith converge.

After Mosul fell, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) sent additional peshmerga into Sinjar to guard Yazidi towns... Yazidis trying to leave Sinjar for Iraqi Kurdistan were turned back by Kurds stationed at checkpoints around their villages and told not to worry. Some families thought it was suicide to stay in Kocho. (Murad 54)

It was a self-destruction for the villagers to remain in Kocho. They lamented, “We are surrounded on three sides by Daesh!” (Murad 54). Talking about the late modern colonial occupation, which is disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical, Mbembe states,

The *state of siege* is itself a military institution. It allows for a modality of killing that does not distinguish between the external and the internal enemy. Entire populations are the target of the sovereign. Besieged villages and towns are sealed off and isolated from the world. Daily life is militarised. Local military commanders have the discretionary freedom to decide whom to shoot and when. Movements between the territorial cells require formal permits... the besieged population is deprived of their means of income. Invisible killing is added to outright executions. (82-83)

The same was the case with the Yazidis. Under necropower, the entire Yazidi population was the target of the sovereign, turning everyday life into a space of militarisation and fear. Despite the impending threat, most of the Yazidis chose not to flee, anchored by their homes, fields, animals, and the intimate spaces that embodied familial and cultural memory (Murad 54). During the communal meeting convened by Ahamed Jasso, the collective decided, “We stay as a village” (Murad

54), reflecting more than attachment to land. It revealed the impossible predicament of populations trapped within the state of exception, where ordinary protections collapse, and life becomes exposed to imminent death. Necropower operates through uncertainty, immobilising entire communities between the will to live and the inevitability of violence. The refusal of the Yazidis to flee from Kocho was a testament to this. It was not a naive miscalculation. Their rootedness in their culture was exploited by ISIS, and they interpreted the immobility of the Yazidis as their vulnerable situation. ISIS transformed the Yazidi homeland into a death world, a space for genocide. A homeland that sustained the Yazidi identity became the terrain upon which ISIS enacted the genocidal violence. Their existence demonstrated how they could impose sovereignty through terror, transforming the peaceful life into a site of extermination. The assault on Sinjar, which was a home to nearly 400,000 Yazidis, occurred in August 2014 and marked the onset of the most devastating phase of ISIS rule (OHCHR, *They Came to Destroy* 12). The Peshmerga forces responsible for safeguarding the region abruptly withdrew on August 3, abandoning the Yazidis to a complete encirclement by ISIS (Human Rights Watch, *Iraq: ISIS Escapees*). This retreat was not merely a military failure, but it created a fertile space for ISIS, “which was the raw material of sovereignty and of the violence it bears within it” (Mbembe 79). Tens of thousands of the Yazidis were stranded on Mount Sinjar, lacking food and water. Their survival was solely dependent on the humanitarian route established by Kurdish forces and U.S. airstrikes. Over 6,000 Yazidi women and children were abducted, and many were reduced to sexual slavery. They became the victims of the ISIS campaign of genocide (Callimachi). The siege showcased necropower as a governance strategy. It was a manipulation of

life and death where the Yazidi body became the central source of control. Sexual enslavement operated not only as an act of violence but also as a ritual of destruction, as identified by genocide scholars. It aimed to eliminate communal lineage, memory, and continuity through regular oppression.

A few hundred Yazidi men attempted to defend their villages with limited firearms, but they quickly ran out of both ammunition and also in their capacity to defend. That was the only resistance that the Yazidis could put up to the rapid conquest of ISIS. The structural vulnerability of a minority people was shown through this asymmetry of force. They relied on informal modes of community self-defence in the absence of state protection. The reality that the Peshmerga vowed to protect the Yazidis who had fled Sinjar without warning intensified the sense of abandonment.

It was, the Kurdish government later said, a tactical withdrawal. There were not enough soldiers to hold the region... and their commanders thought not to stay would be suicide; their fight would be more useful in other parts of Iraq... what we couldn't understand was why they left without warning us, or taking us with them or helping us to go to safety. Had we known they were leaving, we would have gone to Kurdistan. (Murad 57)

The Yazidi survivors interpreted it as a betrayal that collapsed both their political trust and physical security. This abandonment was a “slow death”, a political condition in which marginalised populations are rendered expendable within broader regimes of regional power (Berlant 96). It was a clear political abandonment where the Yazidis were reduced to expendable lives in the realm of regional power. The

failure to assist civilians in fleeing to safety reinforced their perception of betrayal. Many of the Yazidis were sure about their return, and even when the first gunfire of ISIS reached Kocho, several women hoped that “maybe the peshmerga have come to save us” (Murad 57). It was a hope that got crushed under the reality of desertion. Abandonment became visible only after the moment of annihilation had already begun. “With the peshmerga gone, ISIS quickly blocked the road connecting southern Sinjar villages, like Kocho, to the mountain... the few families who tried to escape were captured as they fled and were killed or kidnapped... ISIS killed the men on the spot” (Murad 58). The stark realisation that “The Peshmerga in all the Yazidi towns and in Shingal have just retreated. It is like they were ordered to withdraw... We don’t even have our weapons anymore to defend ourselves” (Ahmed and McClelland 36) revealed a moment where the Yazidis were left in a zone of abandonment, a space where sovereign protection fails, and life becomes radically disposable. With the withdrawal of the peshmerga, ISIS militants encircled the Yazidis within the village and trapped them within their control.

Kocho was transformed into a death trap, leaving its inhabitants suspended in a state of anticipation where “all they could do was hope for the worst” (Murad 58). The assault on Kocho was a precondition which set the land ready for genocide. It physically, psychologically and politically trapped and immobilised the Yazidis. ISIS issued its ultimatum demanding conversion to Islam under the threat of execution. A structured sequence of violence was unveiled when the villagers refused to renounce their faith. It resulted in the systematic killing of men and the abduction of women and girls. They aimed at erasing the Yazidi community either

through conversion or through killing those who refused to convert to their faith. To attain ideological purity, the Yazidi Men were killed and disposed and the women and girls were seized as instruments through which the caliphate could reconfigure lineage. The genocidal logic of ISIS was materialised through the assault on Kocho. ISIS executed planned murder, sexual enslavement, and the erasure of cultural and religious memory to destroy the minority. ISIS militants declared,

You say we came out of nowhere, but we sent you a message. When we took the hen and the chicks, it was to tell you we were going to take your women and children. When we took the ram, it was like taking your tribal leaders, and when we killed the ram, it meant we planned on killing those leaders. And the young lamb, she was your girl. (Murad 14)

These metaphoric words revealed how ISIS viewed the Yazidi community, representing them as mere property for domination and slaughter. They were reduced to livestock. The ISIS representation of the Yazidis was not just an insult, but it made possible the production of “ungrievable lives,” populations whose destruction would not be registered as a loss within the moral universe of the perpetrator (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). ISIS codified a hierarchy of disposability by positioning women as “chicks,” leaders as “rams,” and girls as “lambs,” and they justified their execution, captivity, and sexual violence as organic extensions of conquest. ISIS deployed a vocabulary of dehumanisation that legitimised their necropower to eliminate the Yazidi men and commodify the Yazidi women. They symbolically degraded the Yazidi identity into a category unworthy of survival. ISIS

rationalised its necropolitical regime, transforming social structure, vulnerable bodies, and communal symbols into sites of destruction.

The meticulous plan of ISIS to exercise terror as a performance of domination was clearly visible in the attack on Kocho. Murad records, “ISIS arrived on the outskirts of Kocho early in the morning of August 3, 2014, before the sun came up” (56). The pre-dawn attack ensured fear before resistance could be organised. The timing was crucial, and it operated as a psychological tactic, heightening the vulnerability of the community. It was a necropolitical tactic which could be identified as the construction of fear through temporal disorientation, where violence erupts precisely at the moment bodies are most vulnerable (Mbembe 81). Even the trucks, which sounded like “grenades in the peaceful countryside air” (Murad 56) revealed how everyday spaces of rural life were violently transformed into sites of war. ISIS disrupted the Yazidi social and spatial order through this intrusion. It shifted security into terror, dismantling the rhythm of a peaceful agricultural life into a space of militarised dread. The attack was a destruction of a life world, and also a deliberate dismantling of the Yazidi spatial security. “Sovereignty meant occupation, and occupation meant relegating the natives to a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood” (Mbembe 79).

The plan for genocide, which guided the operations of ISIS, was further revealed through the well-planned and executed assaults on multiple Yazidi villages.

ISIS had launched surprise attacks on several villages, driving thousands of Yazidis out of their homes and toward Mount Sinjar... the militants killed anyone who refused to convert to Islam or who was stubborn or confused to

flee, and they chased down those who were slow on their feet, shooting them or cutting their throats. (Murad 56)

Religion was used as a tool for destruction, transforming faith into a decisive marker between survival and death. This tendency produced individuals who were stripped of all political value and were reduced to bodies whose survival depended solely on the arbitrary decisions of the sovereign (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 28). Their intention was not merely to expand territories but also to erase the Yazidi identity, which was visible in their ultimatum: conversion or execution. The restriction to flee from the ISIS-controlled regions reinforced the structure of domination. ISIS warned the Yazidis that any attempt to flee would result in execution. The warning immobilised the community and also dissolved the distinction between captivity and death (Murad 56). This restriction left them in “forced inhabitancies of injury” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 77). The Yazidis became hostages in their own land, and they got trapped within a death-world where every route became a path toward violence. The town, then belonging to the ISIS, was “a place peopled by men of evil repute. A crouched village on its knees” (Mbembe 80). ISIS fighters were having American-made weapons in their hands. It underscored the global complicity that enabled this genocide. ISIS made use of the weapons originally supplied to strengthen the Iraqi state for extermination. This revealed how international military flows inadvertently facilitated the massacre. The genocide was actually a result of foreign interventions, collapsed states and also the circulation of weapons between nations, all of which converged on the bodies of the Yazidi villagers. The ISIS “men themselves were just weapons to me” (Murad 60). It offers an insight into the phenomenology of

genocide. She reveals how, under conditions of extreme violence, the distinction between human agency and mechanical destruction dissolves. This perception embodies what scholars identify as the dehumanising logic of terror in any genocide. Perpetrators ceased to appear as individuals with their stringent motives and horrific identities. They became machines of a killing apparatus. Such violence reduces the perpetrator to “a function of annihilation,” stripping encounters of interpersonal meaning (Cavarero 32). Murad’s metaphor of ISIS men as weapons provides a critical insight into how the Yazidis experienced the assault as a total reduction of human life to the logic of extermination.

“ISIS shot at the Yazidis as they fled” (Murad 65), demonstrating that even the slightest movement of them was watched by “the eye acting as a weapon” (Mbembe 81). Their rescue was made possible through U.S. airstrikes and the YPG’s creation of a humanitarian corridor, reflecting the “last-resort function of the responsibility to protect,” invoked only when state structures have collapsed entirely (Bellamy 167). The Kurdish population, predominantly Sunni, by offering “food, water, and clothing” and converting homes and schools into shelters (Murad 65), challenged the sectarian binaries. In a region often narrated through Sunni-Shia-Kurdish hostility, such cross-communal solidarity reveals the essential role of local actors in mitigating violence, as often seen in the UNHCR analyses of civilian-led protection during mass atrocities (UNHCR).

“There was no sign of help coming to Kocho... Kocho’s men were trying to figure out a plan, but no one outside the village was willing to help” (Murad 66). They even hoped that the Americans would use their planes to free them. This

complete abandonment shows the “selective distribution of death and protection” under necropolitical regimes (Mbembe 80). Their plea for help embodied the desperation of a community rendered invisible to global rescue. The contrast between those rescued on the mountain and those trapped in Kocho exposed the terrain upon which humanitarian intervention operated unevenly, producing spaces of life and zones of uncertainty. Suddenly, they felt trapped and “ISIS appeared everywhere” (Khalaf 43), erasing the boundary between ordinary life and militarised terror. The Yazidis experienced what Bhabha calls a “liminal temporality,” a suspended state in which past forms of security disappear while no future can be imagined (148). Khalaf’s aunt Huda’s lament, “They’ve destroyed everything; we’ve got nothing left. They’re shooting at everything: men, women, and children. My entire family is dead” (45), represents this condition of existential precarity. Her cry reveals the “precariousness of life,” where certain populations, particularly racialised and religious minorities, are structurally positioned as disposable under violent regimes (Butler, *Precarious Life* 25). Huda’s grief revealed the broader necropolitical order that ISIS rendered upon the Yazidis and made them killable long before the first shots were fired.

“Siba is lost. You should flee now while you still have the chance. Run for your lives! It’s full of ISIS soldiers. The battle is lost. Pack up your things and flee to the mountains, or they’ll kill you too” (Khalaf 45). This helpless situation of the Yazidis demonstrates how terror circulates across social networks where living itself is reduced to a form of slow dying (Mbembe 80). In such zones, displacement ceases to be a choice and becomes the only viable form of survival. Escape becomes an

ontological condition: to live is to flee, yet the possibility of escape always hovers at the edge of extinction. The desperate attempts of the Yazidis denote the paradox of necropolitical violence, where life persists only as a remainder, and the fragile residue of what has not yet been destroyed. The decision to flee became the last possibility for the residents of Kocho, who gathered essential belongings in a desperate attempt to escape toward the mountains. Muhammad Salman, the Emir, foreclosed their last chance to escape by ordering them,

Turn around at once! You must on no account drive away, or you'll pay with your lives. We've come to an agreement with ISIS: if you stay where you are, they won't do you any harm... You won't get very far anyway; ISIS soldiers have set up checkpoints on all roads. If you leave, your convoy will come under fire. (Khalaf 46)

ISIS transformed Kocho into a carceral enclosure under the guise of protecting every life. Their movement was forbidden, immobility was mandated, and the promise of safety became the strategy of captivity. Mbembe argues, necropower rendered "all movement impossible... The occupied territories have thus been divided into a web of intricate internal borders and various isolated cells" (80). ISIS converted the village into a space where bodies were immobilised not by chains but by the threat of immediate execution.

ISIS soldiers had formed a ring besieging Kocho. Together with our Arab neighbours, they were making sure that no one left the village. Some of the inhabitants tried to slip past the checkpoints at night. Most of them were forced to haul themselves back to the village with bullet wounds. (Khalaf 47)

This situation embodied the bodily inscription of the immobilising violence. They dissolved the boundaries between their private life and war by transforming their own house into a makeshift fortress and maintaining watch in shifts. The ordinary domestic space was militarised under siege. Such transformations show disciplinary power, which extends into the most intimate spaces of existence, reorganising life itself under constant surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 213). The Yazidis of Kocho were subjected to a regime in which both movement and stillness were governed by the threat of death, rendering ordinary life indistinguishable from captivity. ISIS weaponised promises of protection to disarm and control the movements of the Yazidis, which was visible in their so-called peace settlement imposed on Kocho. ISIS made them believe that they would be safe if they surrendered their weapons. It was less an act of mediation than a calculated tactic of control. They thought, “A peace agreement is always better than an attack” (Khalaf 48). The act of disarmament symbolically stripped the community of its last means of agency. The symbolic stripping of weapons signified more than the loss of military capacity. It represented the dismantling of communal agency and the disintegration of protective infrastructures. The deeper ideological objective of ISIS was made clear in their ultimatum:

We know that you are devil worshippers. That is a heinous crime. No one on earth may pay homage to Satan or Melek Tawus... You must renounce this false belief and acknowledge Islam instead... only thus can your souls be saved... In our Islamic State, we will not tolerate any infidels. We will give

you three days to make your decision. Otherwise, we will deal with you in the way that infidels deserve. (Khalaf 51)

Foucault identifies these kinds of demands as the exercise of pastoral power, which governs not only bodies but souls, prescribing the conditions of salvation and damnation (*Security, Territory, Population* 237). The demand was a forceful restructuring of life itself, denying the possibility of survival into a forced conversion. ISIS did not merely exercise violence. It reconfigured the conditions under which the Yazidis could exist at all. Their forced conversion, confinement, and disarmament reveal how sovereignty operates through territorial control, spiritual coercion, and the reduction of populations to killable subjects. ISIS transformed the Yazidi life into a perpetual negotiation with death.

ISIS implemented a meticulously organised regime of violence in the captured villages, such as Kocho. It systematically separated families, executing thousands of Yazidi men and elderly women in mass shootings, and abducted an estimated 7,000 women and children into sexual slavery (Murad 47). These acts exhibited the necropower of ISIS, a form of sovereignty that manifests through “the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not” (Mbembe 80). The bodies of the Yazidi women were kept alive to instil the terror of ISIS. They were circulated through slave markets, sold, continuously subjected to sexual violence, and experienced forced religious conversion, embodying “ungrievable life,” where they were positioned outside the normative frames of humanity (Butler, *Frames of War* 32). Sexual violence was a strategy of domination and cultural erasure. The precariousness of the Yazidi survival under the rule of ISIS

was further revealed through the desperate humanitarian interventions on Mount Sinjar, where nearly 50,000 Yazidis were trapped under siege without food or water (BBC News). The U.S.-led airdrops and targeted airstrikes that enabled temporary escape underscored the unequal distribution of precarity, where the capacity for survival hinges not on inherent rights but on geopolitical contingency. The Yazidi life was shuttled between abandonment and salvation, organised by the violent regime that weaponised gendered vulnerability to dominate.

There was a strategic deployment of terror. ISIS revealed that the deliberate targeting of women and girls was less a religious act and more a mechanism to control cultural differences, demographics, and social hierarchies (White 52). It demonstrates Foucauldian logic of population control, where domination operates through the intimate regulation of bodies, reproductive capacity, and intergenerational continuity. As Barbara White notes in *A Cave in the Clouds*, for the Yazidis, this genocide was not an unprecedented rupture but the seventy-fourth attempt at their extermination, a continuity White identifies as central to the historical consciousness of the Yazidis (85). The invasion, therefore, encapsulates both the culmination of historical persecution and the intensification of necropolitical violence. ISIS governance aimed not merely at killing individuals but at eradicating the cultural, spiritual, and reproductive foundations of an entire community.

ISIS confined Murad, Farida Khalaf, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, and countless other Yazidis within their homes during the occupation of Sinjar. At the same time, they were executing a campaign of genocide across the neighbouring villages.

ISIS held us prisoners in our homes while they carried out genocide elsewhere in Sinjar. They were busy confiscating Yazidi homes and filling bags with jewellery, car keys, and cell phones... they were distributing young women among militants in Iraq and Syria to be used as sex slaves and murdering the men who might be old enough to defend themselves. Thousands of Yazidis had already been killed, their bodies swept into mass graves that ISIS would try and fail to keep hidden. (Murad 68)

This systematic expropriation of the Yazidi property reflects a deliberate strategy to dismantle communal autonomy and social structures. Such dispossession is identified as a biopolitical tactic. It is the reordering of populations through the calculated deprivation of resources necessary for survival (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 138). As Mbembe puts it in the case of colonised people, “The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light” (80). The distribution of young women to militants for sexual exploitation and the execution of men capable of resistance underscores the gendered nature of ISIS violence. It reveals a planned exercise of sexual terrorism and necropower, where the control over life and death is mediated through the bodies of women. Necropower operates through the differential allocation of death and the transformation of bodies into instruments of domination (Mbembe 81). Kocho remained under siege for several weeks. “On August 12, an Islamic State commander visited the *jevat* with an ultimatum: we either convert to Islam and become a part of the caliphate, or suffer the consequences” (Murad 82). The realisation of the Yazidis of the impossibility of rescue shows the existential

vulnerability identified as the extremity of state-sanctioned violence, where populations are abandoned to death (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 138). Murad's mother instructed, "Everyone, pack a bag" (83). The Yazidis were forced to burn or bury belongings too large to carry. This erasure of material life suggested a small but potent form of resistance. It was a refusal to let their histories be appropriated by the very forces seeking their destruction. When Ahmed Jasso informed his brother Naif of the ISIS order to gather at the primary school, Naif warned them, telling, "They won't. They will kill all of you" (Murad 88). Ahmed believed that ISIS posed no real threat to them due to their numbers, so he followed their instructions and began walking towards the school. "Leaving my home, for no reason except fear, was the hardest thing I have ever done" (Murad 91). The emotional, moral, and psychological violence inflicted upon victims of genocide was expressed in her words. The terror of necropolitical governance, where entire communities are transformed into zones of corporeal precarity and existential abandonment, was exhibited in the strategies of forced displacement, sexual subjugation, and the fragmentation of families.

The Yazidis walked with limited freedom while ISIS fighters watched over them. Their bodies showed that they were willing to give up when they were threatened with violence. Women wore headscarves to hide their faces from the radicals, which seemed like a protective measure, but it could not protect them from the oppressive power that was put on them. People moved in a way that made it look like they did not know where their steps were going or how to control them. "People walked as if they had no control over their movements or direction. They

looked like bodies without souls (Murad 92). It was a transformation from a living figure to figures of the “living-dead.” Even their movements showed how terror disoriented spatial and bodily autonomy. It reduced mobility to a form of forced movement rather than a purposeful action. Murad said, “I hadn’t realised how small my village was until I saw that all of Kocho could fit into its schoolyard... The militants pointed their guns at us. Women and children, on the second floor. Men, stay down here” (Murad 99), which codified a gendered hierarchy to violence, indicating the sexualised and patriarchal strategies of domination. The school, once a space of learning and sociality, became a space of surveillance and terror, where silence was mandated and emotion forbidden. ISIS militants conducted a systematic extraction of valuables, demanding cash, cell phones, and jewellery, transforming personal belongings into objects for suppression. The acts of ISIS embodied violence, where the imposition of fear and gender-based separation function to enforce ideological control and obliterate communal integrity. It was both an economic domination and a symbolic degradation, signalling that nothing, not even personal possessions, lay outside the reach of the caliphate’s authority. Within this regime of dehumanisation, the Yazidis did not give up. Murad asserted, “We were scared, but we weren’t giving up” (100). It was a statement that gestures toward the weak persistence of agency even under conditions of extreme coercion.

The militants confronted the village leader, Ahmed Jasso, demanding, “You represent the village. What have you decided? Will you convert?” (Murad 100). The trust of the community rested on the authority of Jasso. He was compelled to make a decision that would determine the fate of all residents. His reply, “Take us to the

mountain” (Murad 102), reflects both the impossibility of true autonomy under conditions of violent subjugation and the constrained enactment of agency within a framework of systematic compulsion, showing Foucault’s concept of power as relational and embedded in everyday decision-making (*Society Must Be Defended* 136).

The execution of the Yazidi men unfolded in the presence of their women, who were locked upstairs. But they were prohibited from expressing their grief or terror. The regulation of grief and mourning, which is a form of social and corporeal subjugation, was reinforced by the prohibition of expression, which served as a terror mechanism (Butler, *Frames of War* 32). One of the Yazidi men said, “They killed everyone. They lined us up and made us climb down in the ditches... the younger-looking ones they made lift up their arms to check for hair, and if they had none, they were taken back to the trucks. They shot the rest of us” (Murad 104). This brutal selection bears witness to the gendered and corporeal calculus of ISIS violence, where bodies were categorised, inspected, and either exterminated or appropriated for sexual enslavement, in which the sovereign dictates who may live, die, or be exploited (Mbembe 80). The preparation for acts of terror in Kocho shows how regular places can be turned into tools for destroying society and politics, and how the bodies of Yazidi men and women became sites of ideological and material control.

The massacre at Kocho left an indelible mark of necropolitical violence, where the lives of men and women were unequally measured. Most men were executed, “falling like lightning-hot trees” (Murad 106), while the surviving males,

including Murad's brothers, bore witness to the targeted capture of women. ISIS implanted its necropower, where the sovereign's power is exerted through the control and exposure of some bodies to death while others are subjugated and commoditised. The systematic separation of men and women revealed a deliberate exercise of power over life and death. Saeed's pledge to fight for his sisters and mother, "If I survive, I swear to God I will become a fighter, and I will rescue my sisters and my mother." (Murad 107), emerged as a counter-narrative of agency even within the control. Men were executed or militarised, while women were objectified and displaced.

ISIS found its most explicit form of necropower in the systematic enslavement of the Yazidi women. They institutionalised rape as a system of governance. It was formalised through fatwas, pricing guidelines, and administrative procedures. For ISIS, sexual violence was not an impulsive act that often came along with war. It was a core component of the caliphate's political economy. Sexual violence became a strategy of governance. It was carefully designed to dismantle communal solidarity and reproduce the ideology of the caliphate through the domination of the female reproductive body (Amalya 45). Murad's description of rape and captivity in *The Last Girl* serves as an example of the fight for humanity under a system designed to deprive people of their political position. She talked about the ISIS slave market in which women were valued, assessed, and distributed in practices that combined religious rationale with commercial transaction. The narrative of Farida Khalaf also exposed this structure, detailing her forced transport between multiple captors, each transaction reinforcing the logic of possession that

defined the lives of the Yazidi women under the caliphate. In *A Cave in the Clouds*, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed recounts how the militants attempted to reshape the Yazidi girls into ideological subjects through forced memorisation of Qur'anic verses, deliberate isolation from family, and imposition of rigid dress codes. These practices exemplified the “production of docile bodies,” where subjugation is achieved not only through violence but through the systematic reshaping of subjectivity (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 135). The necropower of ISIS operated not just as a regime of killing but as an apparatus of domination that sought to reconfigure life itself through these disciplinary and corporeal strategies.

The necropower of ISIS encompassed a deliberate eradication of the Yazidi cultural heritage along with a physical domination. Lalish temple, a repository of the Yazidi spirituality, was specifically targeted due to its embodiment of communal identity. UNESCO's documentation indicates a systematic pattern of cultural erasure aimed at disconnecting the Yazidis from their ancestral heritage (UNESCO 34). Necropower functions on both physical and symbolic levels. It eliminated life and the cultural frameworks that support it. Cultural erasure functions as a form of sovereignty, characterised by destruction. The ISIS assault on heritage aimed to eradicate not only the Yazidi population but also the fundamental conditions necessary for the survival of the Yazidi identity. The repercussions of the ISIS genocide continue to remain despite the loss of its territorial caliphate. Many of the Yazidis still continue to live in displacement camps throughout Iraqi Kurdistan. These are spaces of suspended political recognition that render them perpetually “in-between,” where individuals are caught between inclusion and exclusion, protection

and abandonment (Agamben, *State of Exception* 169). The genocide persists in a temporal form. It extends beyond the initial violence into the continual dispossession that determines the Yazidi life in the present. Fanon argues that colonial and genocidal violence “accumulates on the body” and continues long after the immediate act has ended (52). These camps appear to be humanitarian, but they reinforce conditions of statelessness and bureaucratic dependency, reflecting the principles of necropower. Procedural delays, insufficient healthcare, and persistent threats from militant remnants are faced by the survivors. The aftermath of genocide is characterised by gradual violence, and the systematic neglect worsens the trauma of captivity. Judith Butler observes that populations deemed ungrievable exist in circumstances where life is not safeguarded, resulting in perpetual precarity (*Frames of War* 25). The prolonged displacement of the Yazidis suggests a state of political abandonment.

How contemporary terrorism functions as a sovereign project rooted in necropolitical logic is clearly marked in the genocidal campaign of ISIS against the Yazidis and also other minority communities in Iraq and Syria. It is not simply an insurgency. The caliphate’s regime of mass massacre, cultural destruction, territorial domination and sexual slavery represented a systematic political structure where sovereignty was defined by the ability to decide on life and death. The governance of ISIS established necropolitical zones on an unprecedented scale, altering the landscapes of Sinjar, Mosul, Raqqa, and other areas into conditions where law and violence merged into the operation of a single sovereign. Foucault argued that modern power increasingly involves biopolitics and war, controlling people by

choosing whose life is worth protecting and whose death can be used for political purposes (*Society Must Be Defended* 254).

The geopolitical motives of terrorism are constantly evolving. The resurgence of ISIS groups in Iraq and Syria and the expansion of its affiliated groups in the Sahel, Afghanistan, and Southeast Asia, along with the intensification of extremist networks in digital spaces, indicate that the ideological and structural conditions facilitating the rise of ISIS persist unresolved. The caliphate, while having ceased to exist as a territorial entity, continues to influence through its necropolitical logic in various dispersed and decentralised forms. The instability of regional states, the sectarian conflicts, and the inadequacies of international methods for accountability contribute to the lasting impact of the ISIS strategies across the Middle East and beyond. This persistent instability underscores how necropower operates, not merely through immediate violence but also by establishing long-term political structures that enable extremist regimes to sustain themselves.

The contemporary struggle for justice emphasises that the effects of the ideological and tactical violence of ISIS extend far longer than its immediate military defeat. The violence directed at Christians, Yazidis, and Shia Muslims was not an act of involuntary brutality. It represented a deliberate strategy to reshape societal and sectarian structures in Iraq and Syria. The displacement, social fragmentation and the aftereffect of trauma are referred to as the “afterlife of necropower,” where systems of violence persist in shaping political realities even after their territorial decline (Mbembe 81). The ideological, social, and cultural repercussions of ISIS persist. It also necessitates accountability, the rehabilitation of

the survivor, and rebuilding the community to address the long-term effects of its actions. Judith Butler posits that violence, which renders specific populations ungrievable, extends beyond physical harm. It persists within the structure of abandonment that influences their futures (*Frames of War* 25). A state of perpetual marginality is demonstrated by the post-caliphate terrain.

The governing model of ISIS blended brutality and complexity. This has previous examples in contemporary militant movements that similarly merge repressive authority with fundamental state services to create alternative forms of sovereignty. ISIS was not a new phenomenon. Boko Haram in Nigeria has also controlled territories through public executions, systematic persecution, and mass abductions. The abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 constituted both a terroristic act and an assertion of authority, serving as an exhibition of necropower that signified control over society, territory, body and social reproduction (Human Rights Watch 112). Al-Shabaab in Somalia, implementing its interpretation of Sharia law while offering limited public services in areas overlooked by the Somali state, has sustained its authority through combining harsh enforcement with governance. Felter and Fishman observe that this hybrid governance model allows Al-Shabaab to function both as an insurgency and a proto-state. They transform political legitimacy in the regions they govern (45). Taliban is another example. The immediate return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021 shows how insurgent groups can become governments. After two decades of conflict with US and NATO forces, the Taliban's invasion of Kabul marked a transition from insurgency to de facto sovereignty. Ganguly and Fair argue that contemporary

jihadist movements are increasingly concentrating on establishing states rather than solely on causing instability (78). Taliban and ISIS differ markedly in ideology and governance. ISIS focused on apocalyptic expansionism and the Taliban emphasised nationalist theocracy, demonstrating the efforts of contemporary militant groups to replace existing states with alternative political structures. The distinction between terrorism and governance has become more ambiguous in modern sovereignty. Insurgent actors use necropower for governance. They establish themselves as political authorities with the capacity to change social order, administer justice, and allocate resources through oppressive measures.

These terrorist movements show a larger global trend in which extremist groups use violence as a form of authority to create rival regimes of power that go against the established ideas of democracy. ISIS is one of the components of a broader shift in militant politics. The cases of Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and the Taliban suggest this reality. The ability to govern is intrinsically rooted in the capacity to inflict violence. In terms of structure, territory, and ideology, these groups exist all the time, indicating the necessity of re-evaluating counterterrorism. It should be viewed not only as the suppression of armed groups. It is also an engagement with the social, political, and necropolitical systems that enable these groups to operate as sovereign entities. The global war on terror has predominantly been ineffective in dismantling terrorist organisations despite extensive military operations, drone strikes, and prolonged detentions. Instead of eliminating extremism, these strategies often replicate the conditions that enable terrorist formation. Contemporary authority functions not only through repression but also

through the generation of resistance, asserting that “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138). Guantanamo Bay Drone strikes, causing civilian casualties and unlawful executions, contribute to the narratives of victimhood and injustice that jihadist groups use for recruitment and radicalisation. These practices indicate the phenomenon known as the “boomerang effect” of counterterrorism. State violence re-emerges in the political sphere, catalysing a renewed insurgency (Byman 67).

ISIS transcends its territorial dominance with its attractive nature. Modern terrorism has a strong connection to global discussions of ideology, digital communication and identity. The influx of foreign fighters from Europe, North America, and Asia to join ISIS suggests that terrorism operates through transnational imaginaries rather than through localised grievances (Lister, *The Syrian Jihad* 94). Encrypted platforms, computer-generated echo chambers and social media networks accelerated the process of online recruitment, which enables the unrestricted circulation of jihadist propaganda across geographical boundaries. A dual purpose was served by Dabiq, the ISIS magazine. It acted as a recruitment tool and also presented a spiritual narrative that helped them reframe their violence as a global call to action that appealed to individuals seeking a sense of purpose and belonging (Winter 42). The formation of dispersed but unified militant communities, such as those associated with ISIS, was made possible through digital ecosystems. These platforms were used as mediums to spread their ideology.

Understanding terrorism only as a security threat neglects how it operates within the larger contexts of international politics. The perpetual presence of

extremist groups, manifested through organised insurgencies, decentralised lone-wolf attacks, or state-sponsored militias, indicates profound structural issues. State failure, foreign interventions, economic marginalisation, and unresolved historical grievances disrupt political stability (Byman 45, Cronin 102). Agamben provides a critical perspective for understanding the war on terror through his criticism of the contemporary state's reliance on perpetual states of emergency. Counterterrorism increasingly functions within a juridical framework characterised as "exceptional," which suspends legal norms and generates forms of violence that reflect the logics of the entities it aims to eradicate (*State of Exception* 32). Contemporary terrorism should be viewed not as an unforeseen event but as a political phenomenon arising from the convergence of failed states, global inequities, and the regulated systems of modern sovereignty. The emergence and decline of ISIS offer an essential understanding of both the operational mechanisms of a specific organisation and the wider development of terrorism in the twenty-first century. The unique combination of necropolitical governance, digital propaganda, and territorial control serves as a model for future extremist movements of terrorist groups, though only little possibility for any subsequent organisation that replicates ISIS in the same manner. According to Lister and Bunzel, ISIS's appeal stemmed not only from its military capabilities but also from its capacity to "redefine the contours of jihadist statehood" and establish its authority within both local and global networks (112, 56). This indicates that a strictly militarised approach to terrorism, which focuses on individuals rather than underlying structures, reproduces cyclical violence. Sustainable counterterrorism must address the political and social factors contributing to radicalisation, including ineffective governance, sectarian divisions,

economic marginalisation, and the lingering effects of foreign intervention.

Extremist groups will persist in exploiting grievances and the lack of state authority, adjusting their strategies even following significant military defeats in the absence of structural interventions.

Contemporary geopolitical crises, such as the violence in Ukraine, Sudan, Gaza, and the Sahel, demonstrate that terrorism has transcended hidden militant activity and is increasingly operating as a form of governance and statecraft. Byman notes that militant organisations have integrated violence into their administrative structures, obscuring the boundaries between political authority and insurgency (78). The war on terror, initially characterised as a civilisational conflict between order and barbarism, has evolved into a self-sustaining cycle where each act of terrorism prompts counterterrorism responses which often contribute to instability instead of reducing it. The analysis of the “reactive logic” of counterterrorism shows this dynamic by examining how states frequently address symptoms rather than root causes, which allows extremist ecosystems to keep evolving (Cronin 34).

Taking on new organisational structures, violent extremism keeps evolving. As civilians in Syria struggle with constant fear within a civil war that has lasted for more than a decade, ISIS continues to be a significant ideological presence (Lister, *The Syrian Jihad* 212). ISIS shifted from a territorial regime to a decentralised insurgency after the collapse of its proto-state, effectively conducting targeted attacks by making use of the residual networks, exploitable grievances, and ungoverned areas in Iraq and Syria. A 2023 United Nations report indicates that ISIS retains an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 fighters in the region, revealing its

organisational adaptability and the current shortcomings of local political structures (UN Security Council 15). This transition from caliphate to insurgency demonstrates the continual existence of necropolitical regimes despite the collapse of their territorial foundations. ISIS affiliates in Africa, Asia, and Europe have constantly strengthened their influence by strategically exploiting weak states, ethnic tensions, and local conflicts. ISIS-affiliated groups in West Africa and Mozambique have escalated their attacks, establishing zones of control in areas with a weak governmental presence (BBC, “ISIS in Africa”). The internationalisation of ISIS indicates that the collapse of the caliphate did not mark the conclusion of its agenda but rather its diffusion into various regional contexts, each influenced by distinct socio-political factors. The diversification of ISIS networks necessitates coordinated international strategies that tackle security issues alongside the structural injustices that enable extremist recruitment.

The Syrian Civil War continues to be a significant and destructive conflict of the twenty-first century, representing the relationship between local issues and the international power structure. The conflict persists in producing instability and humanitarian crises, despite the absence of territorial control by ISIS. Significant areas of Syria are not under the control of the Assad regime, particularly Idlib, which is administered by opposition groups and jihadist factions, including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). The reassertion of dominance by the Assad government in various regions, assisted by major military support from Russia and Iran, indicates the influence of international alliances on the duration and intensity of civil conflicts (Al Jazeera, “Syria’s Idlib”). These complexities show that the decline of ISIS did

not settle the crisis. It instead reshaped the patterns of violence, leading to the emergence of new forms of geopolitical competition, extremism, and state repression. These developments indicate that the legacy of ISIS extends beyond its previous territory and leadership. It continues to manifest in dispersed insurgencies, ideological networks, and geopolitical instabilities that shape global terrorism in the present context. To make sense of this legacy, we need to look beyond narratives focused on specific events and instead analyse the necropolitical, structural, and political factors that give rise to and maintain extreme movements in different power structures.

The humanitarian impact of the Syrian conflict is significant. More than 13 million Syrians require assistance, and millions are either internally displaced or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries (UN OCHA). The deterioration of infrastructure, constant warfare, and economic ruin have created a population that is inherently susceptible to exploitation, displacement, and radicalisation. The conflict in Syria, often misrepresented as a mere domestic civil war, is more accurately characterised as a complex geopolitical situation in which regional and international actors engage in competing strategic pursuits. Russia and Iran continue in their support for the Assad regime, while Turkey backs opposing groups in the northern region. The United States retains a weakened yet active presence in the northeast, aimed at fighting ISIS and assisting Kurdish-led forces (Reuters). Agamben refers to this situation as a “permanent state of exception,” where regular legal and political procedures are perpetually suspended, as a result of the entanglement of competing sovereignties, which has prevented any real political resolution (*State of Exception*

32). In this prolonged period of instability, extremist organisations have identified favourable conditions for growth. Despite the collapse of the ISIS territorial authority, jihadist groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have strengthened their influence in Idlib, indicating that the region is still vulnerable to new insurgency eruptions (The New York Times). The longstanding existence of these groups indicates the inability of the international community to tackle the structural causes of conflict, including political repression, sectarian fragmentation, uneven development, and historical grievances. These factors together generate what Mbembe describes as “death-worlds,” conditions where populations face continuous precarity and violence (80).

The fall of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024, represents a pivotal moment in the contemporary political terrain of Syria, possibly establishing the way for a more inclusive governance structure that will replace more than fifty years of authoritarian rule. The post-Assad landscape is marked by significant uncertainty. Approximately fourteen years of conflict have led to an estimated 500 thousand deaths and the displacement of more than 13 million individuals (United States Institute of Peace). Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa faces the challenging responsibility of establishing a political framework that effectively incorporates Syria’s varied ethnic, sectarian, and political groups, while also preventing the risk of a new sectarian conflict. The reintegration of armed forces, especially the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, into national security systems is essential for preventing the establishment of new areas of unregulated violence. The removal of Assad has disrupted established patterns of influence in the region: Turkey and

several Gulf states have taken steps to enhance their strategic involvement, while Iran suffered a considerable setback to its long-time regional goals.

The weakness of the post-conflict territories is further underscored by the current debates on justice and accountability. In his Facebook post, dated February 9, 2025 Murad Ismael, a Yazidi Member of Parliament, Iraq, condemned the decision of the Iraqi government to return 155 families linked to ISIS, stating that it occurred “at a time when their ISIS victims are still displaced, kidnapped, or migrants in different countries of the world”. In another post on February 11, 2025, he warned that “ISIS will start getting out of Iraqi jails and returning from the horror camps to their families after a long crime trip in which they have committed the most horrible crimes of murders, rapes, and extermination against the innocents” (Ismael). These statements highlight the persistent threat posed by returning ISIS affiliates. The broader challenges of post-conflict justice, rehabilitation, and accountability in Iraq are also underscored. The issue within the larger context of continued displacement, trauma, and isolation that affect the victims of ISIS atrocities is critiqued by Ismael.

To better understand the continued existence of terrorism, it is essential to look beyond historical interpretations by addressing the underlying structures that allow extremist groups to remain active. Crenshaw posits that terrorism often grows as an appropriate response to state failure, political exclusion, and systemic marginalisation. It produces conditions that make violence a strategic tool for political expression (384). Military solutions seldom address the root of grievances and may unintentionally intensify them, reinforcing the narratives utilised by

extremist actors (Feldman 57). A significant connection between political exclusion and socioeconomic inequality with recruitment into extremist movements is identified in studies. The importance of structured integration of education, employment, ideological intervention and rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism rates among former jihadists is also highlighted in some research (Hegghammer 82). The digital radicalisation indicates that counter-narratives and online engagement are essential for challenging the extremist ideology in the digital platforms (Neumann 21). Terrorism represents not only a security challenge but also an indication of underlying systemic failures. Modern states, by excessively utilising emergency powers detached from justice, may inadvertently generate the resistance they seek to eliminate. Institutional legitimacy, social cohesion, minority rights, and access to justice should be prioritised in sustainable counterterrorism. The trajectory of ISIS progressing to the establishment of a necropolitical state, culminating in its territorial collapse and its decentralised insurgency, represents the recurrent pattern of extremism when structural conditions are not addressed.

The rise of ISIS signifies more than growing sectarianism when it is placed within a wider geopolitical context. The Middle East faces a deeper crisis when different interpretations of religious meaning, political order, and moral legitimacy are in open conflict. An intra-Islamic civil war has emerged, and it leaves a global contestation over the very foundations of modern life. The nihilistic worldview of ISIS reveals that it is not just a religious dispute but a deeper dismantling of progressive and humanistic values within zones destabilised by geopolitical intervention, authoritarianism, and war (Gerges 37).

Chapter Three

The Yazidi Crisis: Religion, Rape and Repercussions

When killing is viewed as not only permissible but heroic behaviour sanctioned by one's government or cause, the distinction between taking a human life and other forms of impermissible violence gets lost, and rape becomes an unfortunate but inevitable by-product of the necessary game called war... Rape is more than a symptom of war or evidence of its violent excess. Rape in war is a familiar act with a familiar excuse. (Brownmiller 32)

There are moments in which the very fabric of humanity is torn apart, and what remains is not just suffering, but the unbearable question of how such suffering was ever allowed to happen. The historical trajectory of the Yazidis has destabilised the homogenising perspective of the modern nation-state. They have experienced centuries of persecution, which resulted in their cultural erasure. They have undergone a condition in which they think,

There is a life that will never have been lived, sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost. The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life... grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start. (Butler, *Frames of War* 15).

The Yazidis have lived a life that is not recognised as life by the hegemonic beliefs. They have been continuously displaced. They have always been positioned in the margins of dominant ethnic and religious taxonomies, where the sovereign power determines on what conditions the minorities can live or whether they should live at all. Their existence has been marked as heretical, placing them outside the moral realm of ISIS. The absence of justice sustains a condition that makes the life of the Yazidis remain continuously suspended between life and non-life. Violence against the Yazidis has been historically legitimised by misrepresenting them as “devil-worshippers.” ISIS took advantage of this vulnerable condition of the Yazidis and carefully organised genocide against the community. It was in 2014, when ISIS attacked the Yazidi community during their genocidal campaign, that this stigmatisation reached its apogee. They implanted the seeds of necropower for the extinction of the Yazidi cultural identity. ISIS violated the sacred tradition of the Yazidis, and they executed a systematic enslavement of the Yazidi women. Under the necropolitical regime of ISIS, the Yazidi bodies were disciplined, and they became “docile bodies” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 135), bodies that were stripped of ethical and political value. ISIS made possible the disciplinary submission because once a life is not apprehended as fully living, the body can be infinitely worked upon, destroyed, and controlled without any repercussions. The Yazidi life did not matter under the religious rationale employed by ISIS. In order to enslave, ISIS positioned the Yazidis as existentially disposable, excluded from the mainstream category of people who can live without fear. The Yazidi community that upholds an intricate, ancient belief system in the face of extinction in the

twenty-first century continues to live despite horrific violence, bearing witness to the paradox of human history.

The core faith of the Yazidis was used as a story to justify genocide against them. They believe in the veneration of Melek Tawus, a spiritual figure who has been consistently misinterpreted through an orientalist perspective. Such misinterpretations have historically served as justification for persecution, spanning from the massacres during the Ottoman Empire to the Arabisation attempts under Saddam Hussein.

Muslim Iraqis for reasons that have no real roots scorn the Peacock Angel and slander us for praying to him... many people in Iraq hear the story of the Peacock Angel and call us devil worshippers. Tawusi Melek is God's chief Angel, like Iblis, the devil figure of the Koran. They claim that our Angel defied Adam and therefore God. (Murad 28)

This misrepresentation of Tawusi Melek has long functioned as a political and religious weapon against the Yazidis. Nadia Murad's testimony underscores a paradox in the narratives of the Yazidi religion. The belief that affirms the spiritual values of the community is taken by others as a justification for their persecution. In the Yazidi case, theological misreading is not a benign misunderstanding but a persistent epistemic violence, one that has historically legitimised discrimination and, in the twenty-first century, became part of the ideological framework for genocide. The orientalist discourse frequently distorts minority faiths into "othered" constructions that serve political ends (Said, *Orientalism* 57), and the reduction of Yazidism to "devil worship" indicates this epistemic violence. Representing the

Yazidis as religiously deviant, culturally backward, and placing them outside the boundaries of the dominant religious order, ISIS made them the “other.” This systematic “othering” denied the Yazidis a political and an ethical value. It made their genocide appear permissible and inevitable.

Cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformation on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver... this process of conversion is a disciplined one: it is taught, it has its own societies, periodicals, traditions, vocabulary, rhetoric... (Said, *Orientalism* 67)

In August 2014, when the Islamic State started a targeted attack on the Yazidi community of Sinjar, a campaign officially recognised by the UN as genocide, this long-standing oppression reached an unparalleled level of intensity. The attack showed what Mahmood Mamdani describes as the conversion of difference into a “political identity to be eliminated” (13). Religious misrepresentation was utilised as both a theological and a military justification for extermination under the theocratic necropolitics of ISIS, which excluded the Yazidis from the category of lives that were deemed worthy of preservation. The genocidal violence of 2014 was not merely an isolated atrocity; rather, it was the result of centuries-long structural oppression that was rooted in religious vilification. The sexual assault on the Yazidi women during the ISIS genocide is one of the most heinous and organised forms of gendered violence in modern history. In the aftermath of the 2014 Sinjar assault, thousands of the Yazidi women and girls were subjected to abduction, sexual

enslavement, and torture. Nadia Murad in *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State* insisted that sexual abuse was not incidental but constituted the core mechanism of extermination, observing that “the destruction of a people began with the destruction of its women” (43). The Yazidi female body became the target of possession, domination, and destruction, fusing sexual violence into the necropolitical order of ISIS. The Yazidi women became the “other” of ISIS, and this discourse of “alterity” or “othering” normalised the sufferings of the Yazidis.

Farida Khalaf documented how the bodies of women were commoditised, circulated and sold as properties of the so-called caliphate in her work *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS: This Is My Story*. The subjection of the Yazidi women functioned as an ideological enforcement and a physical erasure. Rape and enslavement were mobilised as instruments of collective subjugation rather than individual violation in such practices of sexual terrorism. The pinnacle of necropower was revealed in their systematic execution of sexual slavery. It reflected the sovereign choice to impose death and dehumanisation upon living individuals (Mbembe 66). The Yazidi women lived in a liminal space, neither completely alive nor wholly dead. They were trapped in a condition of the living dead, experiencing forced sex, imprisonment, and violence. This brutality revealed the precariousness of their life. They lived without having the advantage of any form of protection and faced situations that led to continuous violations, disregarding the harm in it (Butler, *Frames of War* 25). The atrocities committed against the Yazidi women should be interpreted as intentional

mechanisms of necropower. The ISIS agenda aimed at erasing an entire community, exerting power over its most vulnerable and symbolically significant individuals.

Badeeah Hassan Ahmed in *A Cave in the Clouds* exposed the horrors of captivity in the experience of a young Yazidi girl who was repeatedly sold and stripped of her humanity, describing herself as “treated as property, as objects, not as people” (71). The Yazidi women were reduced to fungible commodities that explain what Carole Sheffield terms as sexual terrorism, “a system by which males frighten, and by frightening, control and dominate females” (171). ISIS weaponised sexual terrorism on a large scale, transforming the bodies of women into instruments for both ideological domination and communal destruction.

The psychological devastation of ISIS practices and also the systematic violation of the Yazidi women are represented in detail by Barbara White in her *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar*. Not only the inflicted physical trauma but also the eraser of cultural identity experienced by the Yazidi women in general, and Nadja in particular, was revealed in the narrative. ISIS shifted the Yazidi body into a site where law and humanity collapsed, leaving the subject exposed to violence without recourse. *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* by Dunya Mikhail detailed both the massacre and the regular attempts to escape, expanding this testimony into a geopolitical document. Mikhail revealed how ISIS exercised necropower, the “instrumentalisation of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies” (Mbembe 66) through survivor interviews and accounts of the “beekeeper” who risked his life to save women. The Yazidi women were suspended in a zone

between life and death. They were enslaved, violated, and dispossessed, but the international community remained silent to all those atrocities.

These narratives function both as a testimony and an indictment. They expose the logic of genocide in which the bodies of the Yazidi women were chosen as instruments of destruction. Sexual violence was not incidental to war but integral to the necropolitical agenda of extermination by ISIS. These narratives together constitute a multivocal and critical archive that explains the nexus of terror sanctioned by the state, religious persecution, and patriarchal violence. They exhibit the objectives of ISIS for this genocide. ISIS increased its control over the Yazidi inhabited regions through its dominant religious ideology, organisational structure, and gender politics using systematic violence, targeted abductions, and forced sexual enslavement of women. ISIS enacted its genocidal project, erasing subjectivity and weaponising women as instruments of terror. The female Yazidi bodies became a contested terrain on which ISIS most violently exercised its dominance. The Yazidis were aware of the systematic violence of ISIS against the Christians of Mosul and their own community. It emphasised the vulnerability faced by minority groups under extremist regimes. Heterogeneity and pluralism were violently erased within the territorial and ideological ambit of ISIS, showing its necropolitical control, where an individual's "humanity is dissolved to the point that the life can be said to be possessed by the master" (Mbembe 75). The immediacy of this existential threat is revealed in the words, "Salam is demanding that we all become Muslims. Every man and woman in the village must publicly declare their allegiance to Islam. In

three days, they will come back to hear our decision” (Khalaf 51). These words show the interplay between spiritual resilience and moral law.

We will never deny our Lord, Melek Taus! Never! How could we disavow His divine splendour? We are His people, the sons of Adam. So we were born. Better to die and accept exile... our faith is the most important thing of all. Never forget that. No matter what they do to us. Never forget our fundamental moral laws: respect your elders; never let your heart be consumed by feelings of envy or jealousy; never seek revenge. (Khalaf 52)

The mayor expressed his refusal to convert, saying that “there is no compulsion in religion” (Khalaf 54). It shows a form of ethical defiance, and it also foregrounds the resistance of embodied belief against imposed power and sexualized political violence. The Yazidis attempted to confront the epistemic violence of ISIS and also asserted the need to preserve their cultural and religious identity.

The Yazidis faced a moment of irrevocable violence on August 15, 2014. “I’ll never be able to forget that day for as long as I live” (Khalaf 55). It emphasised how systematic terror imposed a traumatic rupture of time and memory. She saw thirteen vehicles advancing towards her village, each carrying ISIS militants dressed in black. “They’re coming, they’re coming! They’re coming to kill us” (Khalaf 56). It expressed the fear and distress they felt at the sight of approaching ISIS vehicles. The villagers were ordered to assemble in the school building. ISIS militants demanded that the Yazidis bring all valuables, indicating a deliberate attempt to have material and physical control. Even the thought of resistance was impossible. The Yazidi men were executed largely, and the women were forced to listen to the

gunshots. Trauma became an embodied reality. “It is our destiny. They are going to kill us too, and there’s nothing we can do about it” (Khalaf 60). This revealed the helpless state of the Yazidis and the conceptualisation of death-worlds, where the violence of the sovereign treats certain people as socially and politically expendable. A gendered nature of necropower and sexualized domination was also expressed in the targeted execution of men and the subjugation of women. It reveals that the “sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule. The sovereign might kill at any time or in any manner” (Mbembe 78).

ISIS instructed the Yazidi women to get onto the trucks, strictly controlling their mobility and shifting their bodies to platforms for violence and domination. Nadia Murad and other Yazidi girls imagined getting a chance for escape, hoping that they would be left at the base of Mount Sinjar. “But the truck turned east and began driving away from Mount Sinjar... The moment it became clear that we were not being taken to the mountain, I was furious” (Murad 110). That moment highlighted the tension of those who were put into the position of vulnerability under extreme structural violence. The deviation of the truck toward the Solagh Institute brutally dissolved their hope. It signalled total control over the female body. The Yazidi female body became a site of war and oppression upon which ISIS enacted both literal and symbolic subjugation. How gendered bodies were made socially and politically legible as objects to be dominated and exploited was revealed through the captivity and commodification of the Yazidi women. Their physical and sexualized subjugation epitomises the violent inscription of gendered hierarchies. It turned their very existence into a

terrain of conflict, survival, and resistance. The deliberate deployment of power over bodies was made visible through the systematic subjugation of the Yazidi women. ISIS rendered them as sites for domination and also instruments for political terror. When they arrived in the Solagh Institute, an ISIS militant commanded, “First, take off your headscarves. Leave them here by the door” (Murad 111). It was a deliberate removal of cultural and religious marks. It stripped them of their Yazidi identity, and the female body stood fragile, and they were prone to abuse.

The captured women were confined to a single room and divided by their age and marital status. The ISIS militants started separating them into smaller groups. “Married women, over here with your children, but only the little ones. Older women and girls, outside” (Murad 113). Some of the women claimed themselves as married and presented the other children as their own to protect themselves. Their situation demanded strategic bodily performances revealing that the gendered bodies were not only socially constructed but also forced to perform regimes of violence. The refusal of the girls to be away from their mothers was violently addressed. “He pulled harder... shoved his hands under my armpit and picked me up off the floor, tearing me away from my mother and pushing me” (Murad 113). They transported the girls to Mosul, and the boys were taken to another bus. They wanted young boys to be their fighters and suicide bombers. The gender politics in their necropolitical logic revealed that certain bodies are preserved for exploitation while others are subjected to death or militarisation (Mbembe 74). A militant approached Murad and asked, “Will you convert? If you convert, you can stay here. You can be with your mothers and sisters and tell them to convert, too”

(Murad 117). She refused the demand for conversion, and it further elicited the threat of captivity and restricted mobility: “Then you will get on the bus with all others” (Murad 117). Her body was reduced to bare life and exposed to captivity and threat without protection from anywhere. The physical suffering of the captives was intensified under the conditions on the bus.

As the seats filled, the air quickly became heavy and hard to breathe, but when we tried to open the windows, a militant yelled at us to sit still... The smell of sweat and body odor filled the bus...vomiting created a sour odor that spread through the bus... We weren’t allowed to touch or talk to one another. (Murad 118)

The inability to communicate or provide physical comfort transformed the body into a space of imposed isolation and suffering. It strengthened the control of the militants over social and physical realms. ISIS’s control over the Yazidi women manifested both psychologically and physically. They reduced them to objects of ideological domination, public terror, and sexual exploitation. The female body, in this context, embodied the weaponisation of corporeality in modern conflict (Sjoberg 88).

The militant pacing the aisle was a tall man about thirty-five years old named Abu Batat...I felt his hand move slowly across my shoulder, brushing my neck, and then down the front of my dress until it stopped over my left breast. It felt like fire; I had never been touched like that before... Abu Batat reached inside my dress and grabbed my breast, hard as if he wanted to hurt me, and then walked away... Abu Batat continued to walk up and down the

bus, passing his hand over us as if we were not human, as if he had no fear that we would move or get angry. (Murad 119-120)

This signified the instrumentalisation of female bodies as mechanisms of terror and control. It manifested a form of corporeal domination that transforms the body into a political site of vulnerability. “Every second with ISIS was part of a slow, painful death of the body and the soul- and the moment on the bus with Abu Batat was the moment I started dying” (Murad 119). It suggested the inseparability of physical violence from psychic trauma. It clearly portrayed the capacity of the militancy to inflict systemic bodily and emotional subjugation. It was a savage intrusion of a stranger touching the body, leaving them in to position where they could not do anything. Their bodies were already controlled by fear under the conditions of captivity, and they could not resist. Their agency was lost, and the silence was produced through the threat of more cruelty. Sara Ahmed argues that fear is a political force that orients bodies towards compliance (62). ISIS used sexualized violence as a structural modality of control, converting female bodies into territories of enforced compliance, visibility, and terror. Within conflict, such sexualized acts reproduce hierarchical power structures, producing women as both corporal symbols and strategic instruments of ideological control (Sjoberg, *Gender and International Security: Feminist Perspectives* 88). The bodily integrity of Murad and other girls was forcibly negated, exposing them to repeated abuse and stripping their autonomy, producing a corporeal subject defined through subjection and exposure to harm. Their bodies were unprotected legally, socially, and politically. They existed only under the discretionary power of the militants. The bus became a microcosm of

structuralised violence. Every act of physical assault was embedded in a broader strategy of domination over female bodies and their agency.

The structurization of sexual violence within the apparatus of ISIS control was more exposed in the interaction between Nadia Murad and Commander Nafah. “Nafah was a terrorist, but didn’t ISIS have rules about how women were treated? Surely if they considered themselves to be good Muslims, they would object to the way that Abu Batat was abusing us” (Murad 122). Murad questioned Nafah asking, “You brought us here, on this bus. You made us come; we had no choice, and this man... he has been putting his hand on our breasts the entire time. He’s been grabbing us and he won’t leave us alone.” (122), assuming that Nafah would punish Abu Batat, but his response was shocking for her. “I don’t know what you thought we had taken you for. But you have no choice. You are here to be a *sabaya*, and you will do exactly what we say. And if you scream again, trust me; things will be even worse for you” (Murad 122). This clarified the systematic imposition of bodily subjugation.

It was for the first time I had heard the Arabic word applies to me. When ISIS took over Sinjar and began kidnapping Yazidis, they called their human spoils *sabaya* (*sabiyya* is singular), referring to the young women they would buy and sell as sex slaves. This was part of their plan for us, sourced from an interpretation of the Koran that had long been banned by the world’s Muslim communities, and written into the fatwas and pamphlets ISIS made official before they attacked Sinjar. Yazidi girls were considered infidels... raping a slave is not a sin. (Murad 122-123)

Gender, religion, and age determined their exploitation. The categorisation of the Yazidi girls as *sabaya* suggested the systematic commodification of female bodies. Murad says, “We were no longer human beings, we were sabaya” (123). It indicated the violent erasure of autonomy and personhood. Nafah’s assertion, “You are an infidel, a sabiyya, and you belong to the Islamic State now, so get used to it” (Murad 127), displayed the instrumentalisation of the body as a medium of terror. It was a strategy to assert absolute control and avoid resistance.

Nafah pushed the lit cigarette into my shoulder, pressing it down through the fabric of the dress and shirt until it hit my skin and went out. The smell of burned fabric and skin was horrible, but I tried not to scream in pain.

Screaming only got you into more trouble. When he lit another cigarette and put it out on my stomach, I couldn’t help it, I cried out... Nafah slapped my face hard, twice, and then let go of me. (Murad 127-128)

Any form of resistance or agency was strictly crushed without any delay. Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power explains the ritualised imposition of pain and surveillance. The body becomes an object and also a site of intimidation, shaped to produce compliance and docility (*Discipline and Punish* 138). The transformation of women into exchangeable commodities is expressed in the concept of “carceral feminism,” where sexualized abuse is normalised, structured, and used for ideological or economic gain (Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* 33). Sjoberg and Sandra Via further argue that the bodies of women in conflict act as symbolic battlegrounds, where corporeal harm communicates terror and enforces political domination beyond the immediate victim

(*Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* 112). ISIS enacted necropolitical control through these strategies, rendering female bodies exploited, watched, and dehumanised.

The systematic employment of sexual violence was explained by a woman who had arrived at the centre before Nadia Murad, “On the first day, on August third, about four hundred Yazidi women and children were taken here. It is an Islamic State centre, where the militants live and work. But it is also where we are sold and given away” (Murad 129). Women’s bodies were turned into instruments of terror and commodities within a genocidal framework where sovereignty exercises power over life and death through corporeal domination. When asked why she had not yet been sold, the woman explained,

Because I am married, they will wait for forty days before giving me to a militant to be his *sabiyya*... Each time they come, they take some of the women. They rape them and then they bring them back, or sometimes I think they keep them. Sometimes they rape them here, in a room in the house, and just bring them back when they are done...Some of the girls have committed suicide, or tried to, by cutting through their veins. (Murad 129)

It was a deliberate imposition of vulnerability and precarity on the Yazidi women. Their unrecognised lives were rendered socially and politically disposable. The practices of masking and self-harm reveal the fusion of resistance and trauma, showing how sexual violence was deployed as a tool of terror, control, and ideological subjugation.

Sexual violence functioned as a tool of social and political domination, and it was a strategy for subjugation based on gender. The systematic removal of the Yazidi girls from Sinjar and their circulation across Iraq and Syria revealed this tendency. It was not just an involuntary act. Rape and abductions were integral to the broader project of ISIS in establishing ideological and territorial control. By classifying girls as property to be gifted, sold, or exchanged, ISIS enacted a form of “social abjection”, rendering these bodies outside the protections of both law and community and constructing them as expendable instruments of power (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). ISIS transformed life into a calculable instrument of terror, determining not only who lives and dies but who is commodified for sexual exploitation. They institutionalised sexual slavery by carefully presenting *sabaya* in *Dabiq* and the Research and Fatwa Department pamphlets. It demonstrated the combination of bureaucratic rationality and extreme violence.

Foucault’s notion of “biopower” helps to contextualise this control, showing how ISIS exerted authority over the most intimate dimensions of human life, regulating reproductive and sexual capacities to consolidate power over populations (*The History of Sexuality* 136). The abduction of girls was a process of erasing subjectivity, where ideological indoctrination, sexual coercion, and material exploitation produce systemic domination over the Yazidi female body.

Rape has long functioned as a strategic weapon of warfare. It aimed not only at the individual suffering but also at the systematic subjugation of communities. Nadia Murad linked her experience to that of women in Rwanda by situating her suffering within a transnational continuum of sexualized violence. She thought that

no one in the world had been prosecuted for such war crimes until ISIS arrived in Sinjar (Murad 140). The targeted abduction of girls in Kocho embodies this structural violence.

The following day, a sheikh entered the room, enquired about the ages of several girls, and chose three young ladies from Kocho... They considered running away, but it was not feasible. They then made plans to end their lives because they believed that it would be more honourable to do so than to give in to the militants... But for them, that was equally difficult. They were aware that ISIS would not be disturbed by their passing and would not alter their course of action. (Murad 132)

Precarity of the Yazidi women and their controlled agency reflected the socially and politically mediated vulnerability of women. The predicament of these girls was framed by ISIS necropower as one in which sovereign power dictates both life and death, showing even suicide a form of impotent resistance. Foucauldian insights into disciplinary power further clarified the structure of ISIS domination. “Docile bodies” are produced through fear, anticipation, and psychological coercion, normalising sexual subjugation as an ideological tool (Foucault 136). Sexualized violence on the Yazidis acted as a deliberate technique of control, a mechanism that enforced ideological power, erased autonomy, and inscribed terror into both bodies and memory.

The systematic apparatus of sexual and social domination epitomised how ISIS employed gendered violence as a tool of structural terror in which the Yazidi

girls were forcibly entangled. In the slave market, militants examined and objectified the girls just like commodities. “How old are you? They are virgins, right?” (Murad136). The guard’s statement, “Of course! They are so young, and they are Yazidi. No Yazidi girl would have sex unless she is married” (136), suggests that “the burden of proving prior chastity, that is, virginity, falls on the prosecutor” (Brownmiller 370). Their virginity was verified in the presence of a physician. The obsession with virginity exposes what Jacques Lacan might call the male fantasy of *jouissance*, the drive towards an impossible satisfaction embodied in the untouched body (82). The violence here is not incidental but intrinsic to the structure of that fantasy. Possession of the body is only validated through the destruction of innocence. Male fantasies of omnipotence were performed and reproduced upon the virgins in the market, where they became not only an economy but also a stage for performance.

Salwan selected Nadia Murad and his appearance itself was terrifying. “He looked strong; he could crush her with his bare hands, and she thought of how easy she could be taken by him” (141), revealed the pre-emptive internalisation of vulnerability under conditions of extreme power. She negotiated with a smaller man, “Please, take me with him, I just can’t go with this giant” (Murad 141). Her choices were confined within a system designed for exploitation. Salwan asserted his authority, telling, “He can have you now. After a few days, you will be with me” (Murad 141). It underscored the inevitability of the structuralised violence imposed on the Yazidi women.

ISIS exercised sovereign power to decide life and death while reducing human subjects to instruments of terror (Mbembe 68). The fate of the Yazidi girls indicated the use of sexual slavery as a deliberate method of communal destabilisation and the enforcement of ideological supremacy. It demonstrated the merge of biopolitical control and gendered oppression. The slave market became a space where the violence was symbolic, exhibiting the Yazidi women as property and an instrument for the projection of the sociopolitical power of ISIS. Mbembe argues, “the slave’s humanity appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a home, loss of rights over one’s body, and loss of political status. The triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death” (74-75).

The ideological and violent rationale underpinning the systematic persecution of the Yazidis was expressed through Hajji Salman, Murad’s first captor.

Yazidis are infidels, you know. God wants us to convert you, and if you can’t, then we can do what we like to you... We came to Sinjar to kill all the men and to take the women and children, all of them. Unfortunately, some made it to the mountain. (Murad 146)

The strategic deployment of religious doctrine to legitimise genocide and sexual slavery was made clear. It positioned the extermination of men and the appropriation of women and children as divinely sanctioned. He reinforced the structural logic of domination by forcing Murad to convert her religion: “You’re my fourth sabiyya. The other three are Muslims now. I did that for them. Yazidis are infidels, that’s

why we are doing this. It's to help you" (Murad 147). When Salman, before raping her, demanded proof for Murad's menstrual status underscored how ISIS codified sexual domination within pseudo-legal parameters to regulate the bodies of their victims. Because of her menstrual cycle, he stopped himself from raping her, though she removed her clothing. "The Islamic State manual does not outlaw sex with *sabaya* who are menstruating, but it does say that the captor should wait for his slave to finish her menstrual cycle before having sex with her, to be certain that she is not pregnant" (Murad 147). It displayed the control of even the reproductive capacity as part of a broader system of subjugation and exploitation. "He never stopped touching me. My body hurt and went numb wherever Hajji Salman's fingers went. I was so scared to try to fight him off; besides, there was little point" (Murad 147). It made clear that the ISIS militants exploited the vulnerable position of the Yazidi female body creating terror.

To mask the execution of systematic rape, they perform the so-called "marriages" with their *sabayas*. Sexual violence became a religious ritual when Murad was taken before a judge and compelled to recite the *shahada*. Susan Brownmiller argues,

Rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood. (14)

Rape functions as “a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (15). Rape becomes a juridical act of domination when fear and subjugation are given the force of law. The forced confession of faith in torture is “the conversion of every conceivable aspect of the victim’s world into an agent of pain” (Scarry 35). The Yazidi women were forced to utter words that negated their identity, through which ISIS ensured that even speech was hollowed out by violence.

“As long as my soul, murdered by ISIS, could be in the afterlife with God and Tawusi Melek, then ISIS could have my body” (Murad 151), revealed Murad’s attempt to preserve spiritual integrity even when her body was reduced to an object of conquest. Taking the Yazidi women as interchangeable objects, ISIS denied their separation between spirit and flesh. Saidiya Hartman describes this condition in the context of slavery as “fungibility,” where the captive body “could be possessed, used, and replaced” (21). Women were not only raped but also stripped of family connections and reduced to commodities in the Yazidi “marriages.” Their degradation served both as a personal violation and also a collective wound to the Yazidi community.

With these marriages, ISIS continued their slow murder of Yazidi girls. 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. Taking our religion from us was the cruelest... Who was I if I wasn’t Yazidi? (Murad 151)

The Yazidi females were constantly reminded that they were nothing more than objects to be groped and mistreated. Murad was forced to “prepare” for Hajji Salman through bathing, shaving, dressing, and applying make-up into the image of desirability. “No matter how much lipstick I wore, the face in the mirror reflected exactly what I had been turned into, a slave who at any moment, was going to be a prize for a terrorist” (Murad 164). The very boundaries of her selfhood collapsed. The victim is forced to live in a body that is both alien and familiar, a place of disgust and dominance, which made her an abject. The mirror image was an encounter with abjection, where the self is confronted as object, emptied of agency. The body was violated, and she also experienced a psychic rupture of being forced to participate in one’s own commodification. “Take off your dress” (Murad 165), Hajji Salman’s command was not simply an order for undressing but a denial of symbolic protection. Luce Irigaray argues that patriarchal structure reduces women to “objects of exchange among men” (170). Nadia Murad was inscribed into an economy of visibility where her body’s only “value” lies in its consumability. They were forced to wear an abaya for prayer, and a sexually appealing dress was demanded for rape. It shows how women’s sexual difference is scripted through contradictory codes. It is always sanctified in modesty, violated in exposure; yet it always remained within male-defined desire. Hajji Salman raped her ruthlessly,

Each moment was terrifying. If I pulled away, he roughly pulled me back.

He was loud enough for the guards to hear- he shouted as if he wanted all of

Mosul to know that he was finally raping his sabiyya- and no one interfered. His touch was exaggerated, forceful, meant to hurt me. No man ever touched his wife like this. Hajji Salman was as big as a house, as big as the house we were in. (Murad 166)

This can be identified as the phallogentric logic of mastery, where male sexuality asserts itself through violence and spectacle. Here, rape becomes the grotesque parody of virility: a loud, forceful performance that requires witnesses, precisely because it lacks intimacy or reciprocity. The suffering of the Yazidi women was made into a spectacle of domination. It became a terrain of terror where femininity was scripted only through violation. “I was like a child, crying out for my mother” (Murad 166) marked a psychic regression in which trauma fractured the subject into pre-symbolic states. In this infantile position, violence cannot be fully articulated. The victim’s speech collapses into raw affect, outside language. What merges instead is a haunting silence that lingers beyond the assault. It is an afterlife of trauma that no testimony can fully capture.

Murad’s body became a site of constant occupation when she was raped daily. Whenever he had the available time, he raped her (172). Sexual violence became a routine, and it was carefully woven into everyday life under captivity. Rape is normalised as part of a daily schedule, showing how torture works by making pain “the primary model of reality” (Scarry 27). The constant reminder of the captor, “You are no longer a virgin, and you are a Muslim. Your family will kill you. You are ruined” (Murad 172), weaponised the cultural codes of honour and shame through which they internalised captivity. This threat took violence beyond

the moment of assault. It invaded her psyche, binding her through guilt, fear, and the destruction of belonging.

Judith Herman notes that the core of trauma lies in the “disempowerment and disconnection” of the victim (33). Salman’s daily abuse aimed not only at physical domination but also at dismantling her capacity to resist, even symbolically. She was beaten for crying or closing her eyes during rape. The systematic erasure of her humanity, reducing her to the barest category of possession, constituted the denial of her identity only as a *Sabiyya*. She was never treated as a wife. The punishment for escape was brutal. Salman’s words, “if you tried to escape, something really bad would happen” (Murad 174). When found attempting to escape,

Salman started beating me. The whip came down hard, over and over, so fast and with so much anger... I assumed he would rape me...A moment later, Moeteja, Yahya, Hossam and the three other guards walked in... I understood what my punishment would be... when I woke up in the morning, I was alone and naked. I couldn’t move... the bed still smelled like the men who had raped me. (Murad 174-175)

The use of her body by one man to another shifted her into an “open wound in the social body,” where the suffering of the victim is staged as a performance of power (Das 67). “I screamed for my mother and Khairy, my brother” (175) underscored how sexual violence ruptured family bonds, turning longing for family into a site of further pain. The act of gang rape exposed the necropolitical logic of ISIS. They wanted to strip women of their subjectivity by making their bodies interchangeable and vulnerable at will. Pain became the pedagogy of terror directed at the entire

Yazidi community. It was not just a private experience but a message to the public. In this sense, Murad's words, "the last thing I remember... was the face of one of the guards as he came forward" (175), captured the afterlife of trauma: a memory reduced to fragments, frozen in the moment of violation, where the face of the perpetrator became a permanent scar on her psychic landscape.

I went to the bathroom to take a shower. My body was covered in filth left by the men, and I turned on the water and stood under it for a long time, crying. Then I cleaned myself very well, scrubbing my body, my teeth, my face, my hair, and the entire time praying and asking God to help me, and to forgive me. (Murad 175)

It shows the impossibility of cleansing what Julia Kristeva calls the abject, a pollution that is not merely material but symbolic. The filth she tried to wash away was not only the residue of the violence of men but the internalised sense of being reduced to an object, stripped of dignity and identity. As Kristeva observes, the abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist..." (4). Murad's very selfhood had been shattered; no ritual washing could restore the boundaries between self and other, body and violation.

Her transfer to Hamdaniya, a city devoid of light and filled with the scent of decay (Murad 184), emphasises the necropolitical landscape in which she was trapped, spaces emptied of life and remade into zones of death and captivity. In this ruined geography, Murad's body became a fungible commodity. The devaluation of

women based on “virginity status” (Murad 184) starkly demonstrates what Catharine MacKinnon terms the political economy of rape: sexuality weaponised to establish hierarchies of value, where the female body functions as a tradable resource under patriarchal violence (“Rape, Genocide, and Women’s Human Rights” 12). Abu Muawaya’s assaultive gesture, grasping her jaw, pressing her against the wall, reinscribed her body as property. “Why are you not resisting?” (Murad 185). This question revealed a cruel demand that, to affirm male dominance, even resistance was expected. Murad’s reply, “What’s the point? It’s not just one man or two or three- you all do this. How long do you expect me to resist? (185) testified to the paradox of trauma. The survivor is forced to relive violence endlessly, until numbness becomes the only form of survival (Caruth 62). Their identity and choice were crushed by repeated rape. Her body no longer belonged to her. It did not even belong to one man. It circulated among “disposable people,” who are slaves who can be bought, sold, and discarded with impunity (Bales 16). Fear was transformed into indifference. It marked the collapse of subjectivity into bare life. Their existence was reduced to the repetitive use of the body as an instrument of gratification. Murad’s “numbness” (186) was not passivity but the aftereffect of relentless sexual slavery. It was the erasure of self through abjection, commodification, and repetition. The Yazidi women were not only dominated but also systematically dehumanised until they themselves felt emptied and alien to their own bodies. The structural logic of the sexual economy of ISIS was exhibited in their brutal acts.

It was clear that I didn’t belong to any particular man. 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...just waiting for the door to open and another militant to enter. This was my life now. (Murad 192)

It was a radical dispossession of her body. She was no longer tied to a single captor, and her body became a shared site of conquest and also a public zone of sexual access. Cynthia Enloe notes that in militarised contexts, women's bodies often function as "rewards" that circulate among men, reinforcing masculine cohesion within armed groups (67). The checkpoint became a microcosm of militarised patriarchy, where rape was a calculated act of dominance. "Please. I just came from other men this morning. My head hurts. I'm really sick" (192) was a desperate attempt by Murad to assert her humanity by appealing to pity. But the combatant reinforced Susan Brownmiller's argument that rape in war is not about sexual desire but about domination, "in the name of victory and the power of the gun, war provides men with a tacit license to rape. In the act and in the excuse, rape in war reveals the male psyche in its boldest form, without the veneer of chivalry or civilisation" (33). Murad's resistance to rape was reduced to a gesture that provoked rage rather than recognition. She was in a state of bare life, where individuals are reduced to biological existence, stripped of political and personal identity (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 12). She was no longer treated as a person but as an endlessly usable flesh, an "open" body without boundaries. Her shift to Hajji Amer temporarily altered this cycle. "It was strange to be with a man who didn't rape me the moment we were alone," Murad recalled (198). The very strangeness of this non-rape revealed how normalised violation had become. The absence of immediate

rape felt uncanny. She noted that Amer still committed an act of assault, although it did not involve rape (198), keeping her body never outside the economy of male dominance. “I don’t want to go to Syria! ... Don’t send me to Syria” (Murad 198). Each transfer deepened her vulnerability, and Syria was an unknown place of deeper exploitation and disappearance. All the incidents at checkpoints and their continuous shifting from one checkpoint to another man or place functioned as nodes of sexual slavery. The Yazidi women were circulated, devalued, and exchanged in this process. The body ceased to be private. It became a militarised space perpetually available for violation.

“Every sabiyya has a story like mine. You can’t imagine the atrocities ISIS is capable of... The men were all the same. They were all terrorists who thought it was their right to hurt us” (195). They considered it a divine duty to extinguish those who did not follow their path. Under ISIS, any space, houses, hotels, prisons, and even public roads became spaces for rape. The victims, including minors, were assaulted, irrespective of their age. The perpetrator disregarded all boundaries of consent and age. The captors committed violence without any consideration for the context. One girl was raped while sleeping, another while bound hand and foot, and another woman “right on the road, with the door open and [her] leg stuck outside the car” (Murad 195). It revealed rape as “a practice of dominance, not desire,” where violation persists under any condition in any location (MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 173). ISIS imposed necropower by making the Yazidi women permanently violable. These women were reduced to living corpses. They became embodiments of “ungrievable lives”, bodies stripped of worth, exposed to

endless violence without recognition (Butler, *Frames of War* 38). The bedroom, the prison, and the car, every place became an extension of a necropolitical order where women were positioned as disposable matter, their dignity spoiled alongside their freedom. A shared structure of subjugation is displayed in testimonies of all the Yazidi women. Each narrative suggests that sexual slavery was fundamental to the war apparatus of ISIS. By taking the Yazidi women as *sabaya*, they created a sexual market that collapsed the body into a consumable resource. These stories reaffirmed that rape was institutionalised as a weapon of war, and the Yazidi female body became its battlefield.

The Girl Who Escaped ISIS recounts the life of Farida Khalaf. She was forced to stand among other unmarried Yazidi women and girls who were waiting to be selected for transport. They were loaded onto buses bound for Mosul. It was a journey that marked the beginning of their objectification (64). Television reports had already circulated the incidents of Yazidi women taken as “wives” for ISIS fighters. Such news had been dismissed as a distant horror until Khalaf confirmed her own abduction as a reality. The bus stopped in a residential neighbourhood. More Yazidi women were crammed into already overcrowded rooms. The domestic space became a holding cell of terror (64). Beauty and youth were taken as criteria for the selection process of ISIS. It marked a preference for extremely young girls and virgins, exhibiting how sexual slavery was systemic. Religious and military discourses were used by the attackers to defend their acts:

Your fathers have offended God... According to the rules of war and religion, you are now our property. We have the right to keep you as slaves.

But we've decided to give you a chance. Those of you who are prepared to convert to Islam can become the lawful wives of our fighters. This is a unique chance for you. (Khalaf 68)

Enslavement was reframed as both a divine justice and a unique chance for others to join Islam as wives of jihadists. ISIS used religion as a weapon to sanctify sexual violence. People were forced to recite shahada, "*Ashadu alla ilaha illa allah* (I declare that there is no other God but Allah) *Wa ashhadu anna Muhammad rasulu allah* (I declare that Muhammad is God's messenger)." It exposed another form of oppression. The only escape from enslavement was conversion, which reduced faith into a tool of sexual control (Khalaf 69). When the Yazidi girls refused to convert, the ISIS militant warned them, "Well, you have sealed your fate" (Khalaf 69). At that moment, the girls experience a "social death" (Oliver 20): the stripping away of identities until their only life was to be lived as consumable objects within the ISIS war economy.

The threat of being sold at slave markets intensified their terror. The girls knew that forced "marriage" or slavery would not only subject them to repeated rape but also mark them as dishonoured within their community, rendering them unmarriageable and socially ostracised. As Khalaf recalls, many believed their lives were effectively over if chosen by a fighter (69). Shortly thereafter, buses transported them to Raqqa, de facto capital of ISIS, where militants announced with grotesque humour: "Fresh supplies! Lovely young Yazidis!" (72). This language used by ISIS objectified the Yazidi female body, and it suggested the collapse of women into fungible bodies. They were stripped of individuality and circulated as

resources within a patriarchal war economy. ISIS blended necropolitics with patriarchal ideology and reduced the Yazidi women to “fresh supplies” whose existence was measured only in terms of market value and sexual availability. ISIS institutionalised rape as both a spiritual weapon and a political economy of terror. The earlier threat of ISIS militants was revealed when Farida Khalaf and the other Yazidi girls were transported to Raqqa. They realised that they would be sold. It was no longer a threat but an institutionalised reality. They were imprisoned in a building which became a warehouse and also a slave market. The abducted girls were commodified and circulated in the building (Khalaf 74). Sexual enslavement was central to the governance of ISIS, and it functioned as a literal marketplace where women were transformed into products for consumption.

The first buyers were eager to see the new products. They treated the arrival of these young girls as an unveiling of commodities to be purchased. “They’re unmarried. Nobody has touched them. As I said, fresh goods” (Khalaf 76). The sex market reduced the humanity of the girls to their virginity. The exchange value of the slaves was determined by their virginity. Female sexuality is socially constructed as a resource, always available for the appropriation of men under patriarchal systems. Purity was violently re-coded as profitability upon the virgin body.

His fingers touched my lips. When he tried to push my jaws apart, my heart started thumping like mad... It was reminded of the livestock market in Kocho; this is how the men would check donkeys and cows before buying them... I bit him as hard as I could... He yelled, violently ramming the butt

of his rifle into my stomach. I bent over with pain. He kept thrashing me, and then I fainted. I'd lost control over my own body... For me, the world outside had ceased to exist. My consciousness had turned inward. (Khalaf 77)

Khalaf revealed the ontological destruction forced upon the Yazidi women by relating them to animal markets. The sovereignty of ISIS fighters allowed them to circulate women's bodies as commodities within a war economy, along with their right to kill. This logic was hit by her resistance, biting the buyer's hand. Though it was a momentary act, it reclaimed her body from being passive. But her resistance was immediately suppressed with a punishment. Her body became killable and punishable precisely because it was positioned outside the "grievable" realm of humanity. The market scene made the gendered dimension of genocide more visible. The Yazidi men were massacred in large numbers; at the same time, the Yazidi women were sorted, priced, and circulated in the sex markets. Khalaf and her friend Evin were left behind while fifteen other girls were chosen by the buyers. The choice was random, governing the fates of enslaved women (77). ISIS established a sexual-political economy in which virginity, youth, and beauty became the currencies of war.

There was no closing time at the slave market in Raqqa. The sales display was open around the clock. Men came into the hall at any time of day or night to inspect the wares. Some were seeking a slave for themselves... The Syrians, on the other hand, often already had a wife with them, but were

looking for one or two more to help out at home... Other men were sent by their bosses, who wanted some fun. (Khalaf 78)

The slave market became a site where the Yazidi bodies were repurposed as the raw material of the patriarchal project of ISIS. The endless transactions in the market revealed that the captivity was not just a loss of freedom, but it was a total reduction of women into objects of exchange. Catharine MacKinnon argues: “Sexuality is to feminism what work is to Marxism: that which is most one’s own, yet most taken away” (3). Here, the sexuality of the Yazidi women became the very terrain upon which ISIS inscribed domination, transforming the most intimate aspect of identity into a currency of war. ISIS justified enslavement through religious rhetoric, insisting that the Yazidis were not their equals, and therefore outside the circle of human protection (Khalaf 79). By declaring the Yazidi women as legitimate spoils of war, ISIS situated them in a state of exception where rape and enslavement were not crimes but acts of governance. The claim that “only Muslim women enjoy our protection” (Khalaf 79) revealed how the body itself became a site of sovereign violence, marked by the distinction between protected life and disposable life. “In reality, however, they must all have been aware they were committing a crime, because neither Islam nor any other religion in the world endorsed the trade of abducted women” (79). Khalaf and her friends directly challenged the interpretation of Islam by ISIS, telling their captors, “Your religion does not allow you to kidnap and sell women” (Khalaf 79). The performative power of speech was expressed in the verbal resistance, where even in conditions of subjugation, language can disrupt power structures which appear to be normal (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 2). The

captors' narrative of divine legitimacy was questioned by the girls, who lacked any power.

The language used in the market, “fresh goods,” “presents,” and “exchange products” (Khalaf 78), also underlined the logic of patriarchal power where women were reduced to commodities circulated among men. Rape in war is less about sexual desire than about “a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (Brownmiller 15). In Raqqa, this was institutionalised. It turned rape into both a weapon of terror and an economic system. The Raqqa slave market was not a mere episode of sexual violence. It was a carefully structured regime of power where the bodies of women were transformed into tools of both domination and transaction. When Khalaf was sold for a time at the hands of ISIS, “I’d have liked to know how much we cost. But I never found out” (Khalaf 86). It revealed not only the erasure of her subjectivity but also her ironic awareness of being reduced to a price. She became a participant and also a witness of her commodification, and the subaltern woman is often forced to speak her own objectification.

The ISIS market exhibited the logic of a necropower. It helps to realise how the Yazidi women, including Khalaf, existed in a zone of suspended life, where they were neither fully alive nor yet dead, but endlessly available for appropriation. “I bought them as virgins!” (Khalaf 101) became a marker of biopolitical control. ISIS had the power to inscribe value into flesh, using bodies as consumables. It was a sovereign act of defining whose life was disposable and whose body could be endlessly consumed. The suicide attempt of Khalaf

complicated the agency. On the one hand, it enacted as a refusal of forced subjugation, a withdrawal of the body from the sovereign who would own it. On the other hand, it tragically reflected the honour-based codes of the Yazidi community, where purity is tied to moral worth. The paradox of enslaved women was revealed in Khalaf's belief that she would die a pure and unspoiled person (Khalaf 95). As Mbembe argues, "In its desire for eternity, the besieged body passes through two stages. First, it is transformed into a mere thing, mere malleable matter. Second, the manner in which it is put to death-suicide-affords it its ultimate signification" (89-90). Everyone involved acted as though what they were doing was legal and normal (Khalaf 87). ISIS built a regime of truth in which slavery was coded as lawful, even sacred. Here, religion was instrumentalised as a discourse that authorised control of life, sanctifying otherwise criminal violence. Khalaf's rhetorical question, "How could these people justify their deeds before their God? Did they seriously believe, as they kept insisting, that He gave them the right to do this? Would He forgive them? (87), exposes the cracks in that regime of truth, refusing to let the discourse of the perpetrators go unchallenged.

The arrival of Khalaf and Evin in Abu Arram's house implies what Kevin Bales calls the commodification of flesh in contemporary slavery, where people are reduced to "units of labour or sex" that can be bought, sold, and discarded (*Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* 6). The Yazidi girls were not taken for individual gratification but as part of a systematic economy of female bodies. Abu Arram was not simply a captor but a trafficker, a broker in what Julia

O'Connell Davidson terms the “sexual economy of slavery” (30), where the female body is fragmented into exchangeable parts, “virgins,” “large breasts,” “young girls”, as overheard in the bargaining (Khalaf 110). Such language signifies what Catherine MacKinnon identifies as the sexual objectification of women, where women are stripped of subjectivity and turned into commodities for male consumption (*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 124).

The captivity within the dungeon embodies Michel Foucault's analysis of carceral power. The toilet under surveillance and the prohibition of unsupervised bodily functions recall Foucault's notion that control extends not only to what bodies do but to how they excrete, eat, and inhabit space (*Discipline and Punish* 148). Under Abu Arram, the bodies of women were reduced to biological survival: not to die from hunger or dehydration, but never permitted dignity (Khalaf 103). When Abu Arram sold Khalaf and Evin to Emir Zeyad, they became tokens of alliance, reward, or domination. Within the militarised culture of ISIS, a woman, as a reward for particular achievements (Khalaf 117), epitomised as the “patriarchal bargain”, here reversed, is not negotiated by women but by men using female bodies as currency of loyalty and masculine prestige (Kandiyoti 276). The Emir's phrase, “It's time we had a little fun now” (Khalaf 116), exposes the banal normalisation of rape as both leisure and military ritual. When Khalaf and Evin attempted to flee for the second time, Abu Arram sold them to Emir Zeyad, commander of the Bater division in the Syrian province. His unit was also called the Beasts. Abu Arram said, “You'll be begging to come back here” (Khalaf, 114). The “Beasts” of Zeyad's unit enacted the necropower of ISIS; their sovereignty lay in deciding not merely who

may live and die, but how women live as “living dead” (Mbembe 92). For the Yazidi women, existence was a suspended state of being owned, circulated, and used without consent, neither free to die on their own terms, nor free to live. Their status as rape-slaves epitomises what Jacqueline Rose observes of sexual violence in war: that rape functions not just as personal violation but as a political weapon, inscribing domination into the very flesh of women (142).

In the aftermath of systematic sexual violence, Khalaf and Evin awoke in a condition of radical disembodiment, waking trapped between life and violation. Their garments, still stained with sperm and blood, made them feel irredeemably sullied (Khalaf 120), forcing them to confront what Victimology scholars term sexualized trauma, where the body becomes the unwilling repository of violation beyond erasure (van der Kolk 97). Khalaf thought,

Of course, I knew that I was not to blame, not directly at least; I’d done everything in my power to stop it. The men had simply been physically stronger. And yet I was tormented by a bad conscience as far as my family was concerned. Hopefully, my parents and brothers will never find out what happened to me. (121)

Khalaf was worried about how her family would take it when they came to know about what ISIS had done to her body. Rape with cultural shame is what Judith Herman frames as the “social extinction” of survivors within honour-bound communities (72).

The usual expectation that survivors should restore their dignity through purification was disrupted by their forced refusal to wash to avoid appearing disgusting. It was a resistance that critiques the stigmatising script of the sexualized body. This act became a “counter-aesthetic resistance.” Deviation becomes a survival strategy, a way to reclaim control when autonomy has been stripped (Sedgwick 45). A ritual of dehumanisation was performed in the commands of ISIS, “Get undressed!” and also in the tearing of veils (Khalaf 118). Here, the veil was redefined as a marker of disgrace, which was traditionally a symbol of modesty and faith. Khalaf’s body was made hyper visible and ungrievable in the forced removal of her veil, and it also ruptured her subjectivity. Khalaf’s self-condemnation, “I was tormented by a bad conscience as far as my family was concerned” (121), revealed the destruction of agency not only in life, but also in the ethics of survival. Their bodies survived, but their social life and inner peace remained victims of violence.

ISIS weaponised slave ownership as a mechanism of domination, which was revealed in the separation of Evin and Khalaf when Galib sold Evin. Their request to remain together was denied. This denial was not merely an administrative cruelty, but it was a calculated severance of female solidarity. It was a tactic identified as the structural function of rape in warfare, isolating the victims to strip them of their collective agency. Khalaf attempted another suicide in her despair, underscoring the psychological effect of captivity. Survival itself felt like complicity in one’s own dehumanisation. Susan Brownmiller, in her *Against Our Will*, argues that rape in

wartime is not a by-product of male aggression but a deliberate military strategy which is designed to terrorise and destabilise communities (31).

Zayed laid me across a table and got someone to fetch some electric cable.

Then he flogged me as hard as he could... He flogged my back until the blood started to flow beneath my blue dress. A group of about twenty men was standing watching. They were accompanying his violent rage with cries of *Allahu Akbar*... He kept trashing me ever more wildly... He abused my entire body. He whacked my face with the pole, injuring my left eye... I think he wanted to kill me, or at least he didn't care whether or not I survived. (Khalaf 130)

It was an act of spectacle intended to affirm extreme dominance and to inscribe terror onto the Yazidi community as a whole. Punishment was made a public spectacle. Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* argues that the tortured body becomes the stage upon which power enacts its sovereignty (34). Here, the bleeding body of Khalaf was converted into a realm of domination. The cruelty of her punishment intensified by the ritualistic cries of *Allahu Akbar* sanctified violence and inscribed it as divine justice (Khalaf 130). The logic of necropolitics was reaffirmed in the deliberate targeting of every part of her body. It was not just a control of life and death, but of the body in the punishment became a disposable and mutilable object (Mbembe 80). Khalaf was placed on the threshold between living subject and corpse (Khalaf 130). "I still bear the scars today of his inconceivably brutal actions" (Khalaf 130) revealed how degradation extended beyond sexual violence into the annihilation of bodily dignity. Elaine Scarry has argued that

physical pain destroys language and selfhood, reducing the body to pure suffering (29). “How much longer did I have to put up with this torture? When would I finally be released from my ordeal?” (Khalaf 131) showed this condition. She was suspended in a liminal state of existence and obliteration.

This incident was followed by her selling for “fifty bucks” (Khalaf 141), illustrating the commodification of the Yazidi women’s bodies under the regime of ISIS. Rape was embedded within a marketplace of sexual slavery. Even medical treatment was not aimed at protecting her dignity or making her cured, but it was intended to preserve her value in the slave economy. Studying sexual violence during the Balkan wars, Dubravka Zarkov explains how rape operates as a performative assertion of ethnic cleansing and how it transforms the bodies of women into “territories of conquest” (78). The Yazidi women were reduced to interchangeable objects within the larger project of both ethnic and religious erasure of ISIS. The body here became not merely a victim but a symbolic battlefield. Her body remained alive, but only as an instrument for trade, torture, and spectacle.

The sexual slavery of the Yazidi women reduced them to “subaltern bodies.” They became sites upon which power inscribed its domination without ever allowing speech or consent (Spivak 28). Khalaf was raped at the hands of Amjed, and it revealed how the ISIS system of sexual slavery relied on the normalisation of women as disposable property. His words, “I have a right to you!” (Khalaf 148), exposed the spiritual and juridical logic that ISIS invoked to transform rape into a form of control. The feminist legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon argues that rape in contexts of systemic subjugation is not simply an act of sexual gratification, but it is

an “institution through which women are socially subordinated” (171). In this case, male sovereignty performed on her body became the literal terrain on which ISIS exercised its power.

ISIS captivity reconstituted the Yazidis as objects in a war economy. They repeatedly got transferred between men, whether through barter, gift, or sale. In ethnic conflicts, women’s bodies are deployed as “the borders of nations, simultaneously violated and exchanged to redraw political geographies” (Zarkov 83). Khalaf and Evin got exchanged, and they were circulated not as subjects but as fungible tokens of male allegiance and power. The compulsory prayer was a symbol of what Michel Foucault terms as “disciplinary power”, the attempt to not only subjugate the body but also to regulate their beliefs and subjectivity (*Discipline and Punish* 136). They justified rape using religious doctrines, which intensified the nature of the violence. It attempted to erase the Yazidi identity by forcing Islamic supremacy on the captive body. Butler reminds us that the body is never merely biological but “a social phenomenon that is constituted through power” (*Bodies That Matter* 2). Khalaf expressed her defiance in her refusal of both forced marriage and rape, “But I don’t want to marry you! Do you understand? I’m not going to marry any of you pigs! I don’t belong to you!” (159). She tried to reclaim her selfhood in the face of ontological erasure. She experienced a “living dead” condition. The Yazidi women in general and Khalaf in particular were trapped between death and survival. Their bodies were commodified and violated.

A Cave in the Clouds foregrounds the radical violence of ISIS as a regime of necropower. It gives a detailed description of the abduction and enslavement of

Badeeah Hassan Ahmed. “They’ll sell the virgins...the girls...first” (Ahmed and McClelland 69). The statement encapsulated that the lives of the Yazidi women were reorganised into a necropolitical economy, where bodies are classified and disposed. The virgins are not preserved but targeted. Their sexual purity was transformed into a commodity of conquest. ISIS exercised “terrorist assemblages,” in which gender, sexuality, and race become mobilised as technologies of power (Puar xxiv).

Necropower under ISIS is not merely the power to kill, but the power to instrumentalise life as prolonged suffering. Even in captivity, they tried to console themselves, believing, “what will happen to you is not love or marriage. It is abuse and violence and war” (Ahmed and McClelland 69). Necropower destroys social categories themselves. Marriage was no longer an institution of love but a mask for enslavement. It became a grotesque parody that normalised rape as a lawful possession. Wendy Brown argues that the violence under fundamentalist regimes “converts women’s bodies into political terrains, staging grounds for the spectacle of domination” (153). Trapped in a biopolitical void, the helplessness of the Yazidi women emerged where the ordinary boundaries of law, intimacy, and dignity collapse. The imagery of the “dark tunnel” (Ahmed and McClelland 69) signified not just personal despair but the temporality of necropower. It was a suspension in which the Yazidi women were kept alive only to be repeatedly violated. They experienced a “slow death,” where life was sustained not to flourish but to endure degradation (Berlant 95). Captivity was not a momentary rupture. But it was an extended condition of unfreedom, planned to extract maximum submission. The

helplessness here lies in being forced to live in death daily, a state that forecloses agency.

Badeeah Ahmed renamed herself as “Mama” to her nephew (Ahmed and McClelland 62) to protect herself from immediate rape, and this shift explained the perversity of necropower. Within violence, these maternal roles were not natural choices but forced performances. In contexts of mass violence, “life is snatched from its ordinary flows and turned into a zone of impossible witness” (Das 16). ISIS weaponised necropower not only through killing but through the production of living death. The Yazidi women like Badeeah Ahmed were not simply enslaved, but they were also suspended in a zone where their existence was stripped of rights. They were reduced to tradable flesh and continuously trapped within an interminable temporality of atrocity. Helplessness was the deliberate attempt of the necropolitical order of ISIS.

The Yazidi genocide was not just a religious crusade. It was equally a necropolitical project of historical erasure and capitalist exploitation of a minority community.

The Arabs under Saddam Hussein rewrote history, claiming they were the first inhabitants of the region. But the Yazidi, the Assyrians, the Christians, and the Jews lived in this area of Iraq long before Islam and the Arabs... It was Saddam’s attempt to Arabize the country, so that he would be the president for life, ruling over them and all the oil. (Ahmed and McClelland 75)

This erasure suggests Michel-Rolph Trouillot's idea of silencing the past, where the rewriting of history becomes an act of power that justifies domination (26).

Successive Iraqi regimes created conditions in which their disposability under ISIS would appear natural. The Yazidis were framed as infidels, and their bodies were used.

There's a market they take the girls to. They also sell us over the internet.

Men come here and look around, take who they want. Daesh thinks they're waging a war for Islam. They think they're shahids and freedom fighters...

They are capitalists. They are getting rich off kidnapping and selling us.

(Ahmed and McClelland 82)

When Navine revealed this, the atrocity of ISIS was exposed as a grotesque marriage between necropolitics and neoliberalism. Under the rhetoric of jihad, ISIS justified its violence. But in practice, they operated as traffickers and profiteers. The bodies of the Yazidi women thus became commodities in a digital slave market.

The horror intensified in the testimony of Navine, "I've also heard that Daesh abducts children to kill them. To become suicide bombers. Child soldiers" (Ahmed and McClelland 83). Children were not merely killed, but they were transformed into weapons, embodying death as a mode of existence. Mbembe says, the suicide bomber,

Transforms their bodies into a mask that hides the soon-to-be-detonated weapon...the weapon carried in the shape of the body is invisible... The body does not simply conceal a weapon. The body is transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense. (88-89)

Childhood itself was exposed to violence and death. The helplessness of the Yazidi women emerged not only from their sexual enslavement but also from the collapse of the future where even the lives of their children are co-opted into the machinery of war. ISIS took religious devotion as spectacle while embedding atrocity in the logic of accumulation. Trafficking, rape, and child soldiering are always core strategies of domination. Under conditions of necropolitical violence, “the body becomes a disposable resource, endlessly circulated within regimes of profit and power” (Braidotti 196). The Yazidi existence was both erased from history and endlessly exploited in the present. The Yazidi captivity can be situated within a longer genealogy of slavery, where the label *sabaya* is used to legitimise sexual enslavement as a continuation of ancient practices.

In old times, when women and children were caught up in battle, the victor divided them among its soldiers to encourage them to keep fighting. It's as if the past two centuries don't exist for these men, as if they don't know that slavery has been abolished. We were not caught up in a battle with our side being the loser. We were brutally kidnapped. These men are human traffickers. Most Muslims and mullahs say Daesh is not Islam. If Daesh wins, the world will be a dark, horrible place. (Ahmed and McClelland 95)

The anachronistic violence of ISIS was revealed here. It was a regression that negated two centuries of abolitionist history to re-establish the bodies of women as spoils of war. Slavery reduced them to fungible property (Patterson 38). Captivity under ISIS enacted a condition of living as socially dead, denied identity, autonomy, and futurity for the Yazidis.

“I can tell your age, and I can tell you’re a virgin” (Ahmed and McClelland 128) stating this, Emir exposed that Badeeah Ahmed was manipulating her age. The captors were having obscene precision with which enslaved women were commodified. The female body was reduced to a measurable and examinable commodity. Rape was not an incidental cruelty for the Yazidis but the primary axis of control, forcing the conversion of body into object through pain and violation (Scarry 52). Al-Amriki dragged Badeeah Ahmed by her hair, raped her repeatedly, and he also announced the sale of Eivan, which would further hurt her. This violence in necropolitical sovereignty showed the power to decide who must endure a “living death” (Mbembe 82). The private sphere of motherhood and the future of survival got shattered, raping a mother and selling her child. Even women who attempted escape were subjected to humiliation, “smacked,” “spat on,” and “kicked in the rib cage” (Ahmed and McClelland 136, 153). Through regular cycles of degradation, ISIS enforced total subjection. “I had no hope of leaving this city, where even the women had been brainwashed to abuse other women and girls. I fought crippling fatigue and increasing thoughts of suicide” (153). It clearly suggested that ISIS extended its necropolitical control by making women a weapon against one another. They dismantled the boundaries of solidarity and also produced a regime of

internalised violence. This could be a colonisation of subjectivity under rape warfare, where women are forced into replicating structures of domination against themselves and others (Oliver 97). Trauma here is not a residual effect. It is an intended strategy of domination, a psychological necrosis that leaves the Yazidi women suspended in the “impossibility of bearing witness” (Laub 79). The bodies, memories, and children of the Yazidi women were not only appropriated but systematically dismantled to uphold the violent necropower of ISIS.

ISIS strategically retools both religious doctrine and geopolitical grievances into a necropolitical project that weaponises the bodies of women. Al-Amriki transformed himself from a disillusioned American to a militant jihadist,

My Syrian friends called me to say they were creating a worldwide caliphate, and they asked me to join them... In America, people are jealous and godless... I hate President Obama. If ever got the chance, I would behead him. I hate America and I hate everything American. (Ahmed and McClelland 160-61)

It revealed not only his personal hatred for Western modernity but also gave an idea about the recruitment logic of ISIS that framed violence as redemption. He positioned himself as a spiritually reborn and legitimised the sexual violence he committed as an extension of divine duty. Badeeah Ahmed expressed her hatred too: “I was angry at America: a nation that had so much but still created animals like al-Amriki” (Ahmed and McClelland 161). The ISIS regime produced “necro-worlds”, “death-worlds,” spaces where individuals were “kept alive but in a state of injury, in a living death” (Mbembe 80). It blurred the boundary between life and death,

manifesting a condition in confinement, relentless cycles of rape, and psychological manipulation.

You have a choice not to do what you are doing. You have a choice not to oppress others. You have a choice not to kill people weaker than you. You have a choice to not take girls and women against their will... I don't know a lot about Islam, but I am sure Allah is about love and respect, too. You've got it wrong. (Ahmed and McClelland 162)

Badeeah Ahmed exposed the hypocrisy of the claimed religiosity of ISIS and her captor. They relied on selective Quranic verses. The scripture was not interpreted holistically, but they reduced it to an instrument of domination. The reading of Islam by ISIS, in this case, functioned as an epistemic violence. The selective reading helped them erase the subjectivity of Yazidi women, reinscribing them solely as sexual commodities.

ISIS extended its strategies of necropower into domestic spaces, also. They did not limit it to the battlefield. When al-Amriki left for the battlefield, he locked Badeeah Ahmed and Navine in a house with “ample food” and warned them of punishment if they attempted to flee,

If you stay here with me, we'll have a nice life. I won't sell you to anyone else... You won't escape. I've heard the Yazidi girls like you, who have been married to Daesh men, are killed when they return to their people. Your own people don't want you back... Yazidi men are killing their women. Fathers are killing their own daughters. (Ahmed and McClelland 168)

Al-Amriki imposed upon the slaves a “state of exception,” where law was suspended, and the captive was reduced to bare life (Agamben, *State of Exception* 83). Rape became a fundamental rule of governance within this suspended legality. Judith Butler reminds us, “the body is never fully one’s own; it is always in the hands of others” (*Precarious Life* 26). The bodies of the Yazidi women became a space upon which ISIS articulated sovereignty and extreme humiliation. His warning displayed a psychological approach ISIS employed to keep the captives in control. The continuous threat of escape helped them plant the seeds of mistrust among the captives about their own family and community, “What if Al-Amriki was telling the truth? What if our brothers and fathers, after years of being held down by Saddam Hussein and now Daesh, were killing us? What if I managed to make it back to Iraq with Eivan only to face my own death?” (Ahmed and McClelland 169). The communal solidarity upon which the base of their religion was rooted got fragmented here. Kelly Oliver argues that sexual violence is not merely about bodily violation but also about “undermining the victim’s capacity for social recognition and relationality” (22). ISIS fused physical violence with epistemic terror and ensured that the Yazidi women inhabited a space of radical abandonment. Al-Amriki epitomised the cruelty of the necropolitical rule of ISIS. The Yazidi women were made killable, violable, and ungrievable. They were trapped in a continuum of suffering where even survival became a form of death. The goal of ISIS was not only territorial conquest but also the systematic destruction of the Yazidi existence through the destruction of women’s bodies, hopes, and communal trust.

Dunya Mikhail also documents the systematic brutality of ISIS against the Yazidi community by threading survivor testimonies into a collective narrative of dehumanisation in her work *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*. Abdullah Shrem, who is central to this work, was a former beekeeper in Sinjar. After the genocide, he became a rescuer. He shifted himself from tending hives to smuggling captives. ISIS transformed life into an economy of captivity, which necessitated the help of people like Abdullah, risking their lives to rescue the Yazidi women and girls. Mikhail's metaphor of the bees captured the paradox of vulnerability and resilience. The Yazidi women were relentlessly hunted like bees; they got uprooted from their homes, and commodified in slave markets that reduced them to sexual property, and at the same time, they also carried the instinct to survive and return. Abdullah's mission, "From bees to beasts" (Mikhail 17), captured the grotesque inversion of care into cruelty. He redefined his nurturing labour to undo the predatory violence of ISIS. The Yazidi women were auctioned in the *sabaya* markets, and they were even awarded as prizes for Quran recitation contests. It showed how the female body became an object of reward in a grotesque spiritual economy. Michel Foucault terms this as the biopolitical regulation of life, where sexuality itself is disciplined and instrumentalised by structures of power (*The History of Sexuality* 139). Here, rape and enslavement functioned as mechanisms of social control, and they turned the Yazidi women into sites of exchange and symbolic humiliation.

"The sabaya market opens every day at specific times on Telegram, an encrypted messenger" (Mikhail 27). The horror of the Yazidi women's lives lay in the routinization of sexual slavery. ISIS used digital platforms as an extension of its

battlefield. They turned the encrypted apps into auction houses. The Yazidi girls were paraded as commodities on such platforms. The cruelty became more intense when the families were forced to encounter photographs of their daughters displayed for sale. Susan Brownmiller argues, “rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear” (391). Under the necropolitical regime of ISIS, rape was shifted from an act of individual aggression to a structural tool of domination. It aimed at dismantling the integrity of the Yazidi community through the systematic violation of women’s bodies. Sexual violence in such contexts is “a practice through which men create and maintain power over women” (MacKinnon 82). Rape was bureaucratized and normalised as part of its genocidal methods, as exemplified in the online slave markets of ISIS. Advertising the Yazidi girls as prizes for religious competitions suggested how ISIS sought to collapse violence into a ritual and how they legitimised atrocity under the guise of divine duty. The body of a Yazidi woman was weaponised as both a prize and a punishment. Her commodification erased her individuality, and it also reinforced the vision of total control. The Yazidi female body, deployed as a weapon to terrorise both the victims and their communities, was stripped of individuality and circulated as property.

The strategies that ISIS used for transactions in the slave market exposed the calculated commodification of the Yazidi female bodies under necropolitical rule.

Daesh only forces women to wear the hijab when they’re outside the house or when an unrelated man comes to visit. But they dress them up in modern

clothes, when they're put up for sale or when they're forced into sex... Each woman was posing in front of the camera with a sad expression on her face. The captions underneath read 'Girl #1,' 'Girl #2,' and so on... Daesh believes that any woman he 'buys' actually becomes his wife: a woman who will cook for him and satisfy his sexual needs, both before and after prayer. (Mikhail 28-29)

This slave market turned the Yazidi women into mere disposable property, and their worth was measured by the currency of ransom or sexual availability. Under the necropower of ISIS, the Yazidi women were denied speech and agency. They were reduced to silent objects in a patriarchal transaction where their voices could not interrupt the circulation of their own bodies. The violence was not only physical but symbolic. Pain became a language written upon the body, erasing subjectivity. Women's bodies were turned into surfaces upon which ISIS staged its sovereignty. The difference between slavery and marriage was collapsed in the ISIS regime. Angela Davis has observed that under systems of slavery, the violation of women's bodies was normalised as labour and reproductive utility (23). ISIS replicated this logic by folding rape into daily domestic rituals. The Yazidi women were expected to satiate the sexual needs of ISIS militants before and after prayer (Mikhail 29). Ritual practices and their clothing functioned as a marker of subjugation. The fact that survivors returned still clothed in the garments of their abduction underscored the permanence of captivity, where the very fabric of their bodies and clothes became archives of trauma.

Sexual slavery destroyed individuality and transformed the Yazidi women into beings reduced to biological existence without political or social recognition. Mikhail documented the narratives of so many Yazidi women who had undergone sexual slavery by ISIS. The story of Parveen, who was deaf and dumb, was one among them.

The man who bought her would beat her whenever she failed to comprehend what he was saying- he didn't use signs the way everyone in her village had... She had already been bought and sold ten times... she still had marks all over her body from being beaten... It was his custom, whenever he wanted to have sex with her, to throw some thin cushion on the ground; she learned that this meant she had to take off her clothes and lie down. (Mikhail 33)

Parveen was subjected to beatings whenever she failed to respond "correctly." Her disability was weaponised against her as a pretext for extreme brutality. Her repeated sale marked her not as a person but as a commodity endlessly circulated. Her body functioned not as a self but as a site of sale. The ritual with the cushions revealed how, under captivity, meaning itself was rewritten by violence and ordinary gestures were saturated with the expectation of rape. Torture does not merely cause suffering; it reorganises the reality of the victim, disrupts the language, and replaces it with the forced submission of the body (Scarry 27). Parveen's world was reduced to a rule of violation. "One day, when a guest came over, he threw the same cushion down on the ground so that the guest could have a seat. Parveen didn't notice this guest in the room, so she lay down as quickly as she always did" (Mikhail 33). This tragic misinterpretation resulted in brutal punishment, "instead of

raping her, he grabbed a wooden cane and beat her until it broke” (Mikhail 33). The body itself became the only “language” of survival for Parveen but even that survival mechanism failed. The sheer arbitrariness of the cruelty of ISIS was revealed, and pain itself became the tool of control. The extremity of the necropolitical order of ISIS could be realised in this act. The total authority of the captor lay not only in determining whether a woman would live or die, but in scripting her every bodily gesture. It blurred the distinction between sex and punishment, and ritual and rape. The object was endlessly exchanged and brutalised, and her humanity was systematically effaced.

Maha was another Yazidi woman whose story revealed the genocidal mechanics of ISIS. They executed her husband and buried the elderly women and children alive, exemplifying the administration of death, a coldly rationalised effort to treat human beings as “superfluous matter” to be eliminated from the social world (Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* 12).

Maha was pregnant when they took her and her husband, and four kids from Kocho. Her husband was thrown into a ditch and killed along with the other men... The men from Daesh didn’t force them, and instead dug a big ditch: they threw all those grandmothers and grandchildren into the ditch and covered them with dirt. They buried them alive. The younger women and children, about six hundred in all, were sold in bulk to a Syrian merchant for a hundred and fifty dollars each. A man named Khalid bought Maha. (Mihail 119)

Under ISIS captivity, Maha and her daughters suffered a condition in which the enslaved person was stripped of autonomy, family, and community. They existed only as properties. It suggested how ISIS normalised a slave economy and how they catalogued and exchanged the Yazidi bodies as in a market trade. Under slavery, the body becomes “an abstract vessel of value” whose suffering is both invisible and exploitable (Hartman 79).

Khalid tied Maha and her daughter to the bed and beat them with all his strength. The three babies were in horrific pain because of the poison he had given them. They died just like that, in front of their mother and sister. Khalid buried them in the garden because they're infidels and they don't deserve to be buried in graves. (Mikhail 120)

Their death was not only physical but symbolic. It was a complete denial of even the dignity of mourning, where the lives of the Yazidis became ungrievable. The sale of her fourteen-year-old daughter further revealed the manifestations of this systematic assault. Her body became the battlefield upon which ISIS waged war against the Yazidi identity itself. Her narrative exposed the necropower of ISIS. And how they produced spaces where the Yazidi life was reduced to bare survival. Even the Yazidi infants could be declared unworthy of graves. Under ISIS, the bodies of women were at once violated, traded, and discarded. Her story revealed the cruelty of ISIS not as chaos but as structure. It was a regime built upon extermination, enslavement, and the violent inscription of power onto the most intimate sites of existence.

Nadja in *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar* by Barbara White recalled the abruptness of the ISIS attack, the intrusion of gunfire at 2:30 a.m., which dismantled

the very rhythms of their peaceful domestic life, and the attack forced the Yazidi existence into a new order of dispossession (White 88). White positioned Nadja's story within the landscape of the Yazidi genocide. The invasion of ISIS on August 3, 2014, marked a systematic reconfiguration of human lives into categories of terror, violence, and expendability.

The Yazidis had been aggressively hunted, but this time they would be slaughtered in a fashion foreign to warfare for the modern day, and their story would remain a scar on the entire world for decades to come... From a peaceful village...to people running, screaming and falling over dead bodies. The men had been executed... the women and little girls were being separated from the boys and the young men. (White 100)

ISIS militants were everywhere. The corpses left to decompose in public view, with "maggots and flies had now begun crawling in and out of their mouths and noses" (White 101), became "lifeless bodies reduced to the status of simple skeletons... simple relics of an unburied pain: empty, meaningless corporealities: strange deposits plunged into cruel stupor" (Mbembe 87). ISIS transformed death into a disciplinary mechanism, leaving bodies to rot in the open space. They executed terror on the landscape and forced survivors to inhabit an environment filled with decay. The cruelty was a pure enactment of sovereignty through spaces where people were condemned to slow and degrading forms of existence and extinction (Mbembe 87). "Nadja was to learn that more than 5000 women were taken to be used as sex slaves, with an estimated 2000 women who would still remain in captivity. They would most likely never see their families" (White 101). ISIS

transformed the Yazidi female body into a site of political inscription, and they erased the boundary between ethnic cleansing and sexual domination. The Yazidi women were treated as trophies of conquest and objects of humiliation. ISIS used sexual slavery as an economic transaction to gain profit, and it was also an instrument of cultural erasure. They had rewritten the meaning of life by selling and reselling the bodies of the Yazidi women. It was an undoing of the Yazidi continuity. The collective fabric of the Yazidi life got dismantled. The brutality of ISIS cannot be read merely as episodic acts of cruelty. It must be theorised as a deliberate strategy of domination in which killing, displacement, and sexual slavery functioned as interdependent modes of control. The Yazidi genocide becomes a politics of death as well as a politics of violated bodies. The personal sphere of sex and reproduction was transformed into the battlefield of extermination.

Nadja's family was trapped in their village under ISIS control. The horrifying knock on the door and the sudden presence of armed militants disrupted the domestic security into a scene of terror,

The invaders were organised for a military takeover of a quiet mountain people who kept to themselves... Many were slaughtered unmercifully. Children were buried alive in small mass graves. Women were rounded up and carted off like cattle... ISIS insisted that they were the chosen ones to carry on the cleansing. (White 105)

Nadja's father was shot dead in front of her. She could see "his brain and bone fragments splattered and hit a nearby car" (White 105), and his body was discarded "like regular rubbish" (White 103). This scene indicated the reduction of the human

body to waste, a corpse expelled from the symbolic order, stripped of dignity, and transformed into a spectacle of horror (Kristeva 3).

The gendered nature of this violence was revealed more cruelly in the assault on Nadja's younger sister, Nasima, who was raped publicly at the age of ten.

One man took Nadja's little blonde-haired, blue-eyed sister by the arm. He forcibly ripped her away from Rooba's arms. Then, another man pushed his way forward and they seemed to be fighting over Nasima... The man, who won the argument, began to tear off Najda's little sister's clothes. Then the unthinkable happened. The man who considered himself a victor, raped little Nasima in front of everyone. She was only 10 years old. (White 106)

Her body, thrown to the ground "like a bag of old trash," (White 107) became a terrain on which ISIS executed its ideology of domination. Rape became a political weapon, designed to humiliate the Yazidi community collectively. "These beasts were ready not only to take the village, but leave indelible marks of cruelty burned into each woman and child's memory forever" (White 106). The soldiers who carried out such cruelties were not exceptional monsters but ordinary men performing violence within an organised system that normalised atrocity. It was a bureaucratisation of evil that left lasting scars on survivors like Nasima. Her walking dead existence testified to the enduring violence inflicted on the Yazidi women and children.

The transportation of Najda to Raqqa was not simply a relocation. It was the inscription of her body into a violent patriarchal economy. Najda became, in Simone

de Beauvoir's terms, the "absolute Other," a being whose existence was reduced to servitude in a male-dominated world (16). The denial of food, water, or dignity during the twelve-hour journey shifted the Yazidi women into what bell hooks names "commodities of patriarchal consumption," stripped of agency and subjected to domination that masqueraded as order (*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre* 47). The so-called slave markets in Raqqa revealed the terrifying clarity of this ISIS violence. "Trading and treating the women like you would at a sheep sale or furniture auction... these women to them were just objects to be beaten and raped" (White 114). This commodification of the human bodies showed that rape was not an isolated act of violence but "the logical outcome of a culture that eroticizes domination" (Dworkin 182). It was embedded in the ISIS governance, sanctified and ritualised as a reward for its fighters.

Self-righteous Muslim men often prayed before or after raping the girl or woman, and sometimes explained how they were saving her soul by making her Muslim through sex rather than her willing conversion. She may even be considered Muslim just because a man forced himself upon her. An automatic conversion while he raped her of all dignity. (White 114)

The power and dominance of men were sanctified by law or religion, where "women's violation becomes not only permissible but righteous" (MacKinnon 23). They transformed atrocity into a moral order by sanctifying rape and considering gendered subjugation as sacred. "The fighters would tell them it was their right to 'marry' (rape) them as spoils of their involvement in war" (White 115). They even forced the mothers to witness the rape of their children. The boundary between

maternal love and violence was collapsed. “The ISIS soldiers behaved like a bunch of wild beasts” (White 113). The subaltern woman was silenced, and her suffering was instrumentalised as a message to the community (Spivak 92). ISIS weaponised this silence and used rape as a language of terror directed at the Yazidi identity itself. The horror of assault was domesticated into an everyday ritual, and the oppressed body became a site of entertainment (Ahmed 119). The abyss between the humanity denied to the Yazidi women and the inhumanity cultivated by their captors was revealed in the banality of the marketplace, which was filled with chatting, laughing, and bargaining. Audre Lorde insists, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (112). ISIS employed the oldest “tools” of patriarchal violence, rape, enslavement, and humiliation, and strengthened them with religious beliefs. It was not a random savagery but a calculated system of domination. ISIS designed this economy of gendered terror to rupture families, desecrate identities, and erase the Yazidi existence. “Sex was one of their weapons. Nadja had no concept of rape. She had no real concept of sex at all. It was never discussed in their household” (White 120). The image of Nadja, who was unaware of why her body was taken, revealed how ISIS used even innocence as a tool to dominate the body. Their integrity was eternally lost, and they were denied articulating their suffering. Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery* that, “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (1). Najda had no prior consciousness of sexuality to which she could return. Her trauma was something written on a blank slate violently and irrevocably.

Rooba, Najda's precious mother, became the recipient of serving a filthy, disrespectful beast. She was not only forced to bathe him, but then he demanded that she perform the lewdest of sex acts with this vulgar human being up to three times a day... It was her punishment for being a woman who was not a virgin. (White 128)

Rooba suffered a cruelty that revealed the ISIS vengeance. Given to a soldier who had lost his legs in battle, she became a receptacle for his emasculation. He imposed both his physical dependency and his rage upon her body. He demanded care, forcing her into repeated sexual submission and then compelling her to "return him to his chair" after violation (White 128). Rooba's story is not reducible to victimhood. She carried herself with the "politics of resistance within the intimate" (Rich 282). She refused to allow her forced rapist the victory of possessing her spirit. "Rooba was a strong and resilient woman. She was facing each day with tears, but with the courage of a lioness. She would not let him win... She formed a makeshift noose and slipped it gently over her head. She kicked the chair aside and died" (White 129-130). Her suicide was not an escape, but it was an act of abjection turned into agency, transforming what the world designated as filth, despair, and worthlessness into a decisive gesture of freedom (Kristeva 4). Rooba interrupted the cycle of sexual terror by choosing to die. "There is no doubt that human beings are resilient when they have to be, but at gunpoint they have only two choices: comply or die... She had won" (White 129). The very space meant to destroy her witnessed her refusal to lose. Here, the body becomes "a piece of metal," a weapon whose purpose is to produce eternal life through sacrifice. The body duplicates itself: it is

both flesh and metal, mortal and transcendent. In death, the body “literally and metaphorically escapes the state of siege and occupation,” no longer contained by domination (Mbembe 90).

“Najda was ambiguous about how to feel about her mother taking her own life” (White 132). Rooba’s suicide was unbearable and, at the same time, empowering for the daughter. It was unbearable because it confirmed the absolute violence of the ISIS world, and it was empowering because it proved the indomitable courage of her mother. Rooba transformed her body into her final weapon in a space where women’s bodies were repeatedly reduced to spoils. It was a blow to her captor’s belief that the ownership was eternal. She mastered her death, proving that even within a regime built on rape and humiliation, a woman could still decide how to narrate the final chapter of her body. On the other hand, Nadja was dragged “like a limp rag doll” (White 138); her body was used as an object that could be whipped and discarded. The essence of wartime rape was revealed in the actions of the soldier. It was not an act of uncontrolled lust, but a conscious assertion of dominance (Brownmiller 391).

He clawed at her clothing and ripped her dirty dress from her frail little body.

He saw that she was menstruating... Because she was bleeding, he turned her around with full force, pushed his way into her body, raping her from behind. She felt a hot knife going in and out of her rectum... When he had finished with her, he dropped her to the floor like so much trash. (White 139)

This violence sharpened the brutality of ISIS. Najda expected that her bleeding might stop the rapist, but it only deepened her shock when he instead intensified his

violence. Treating her as “trash,” the rapist erased her female subjectivity. Catherine MacKinnon notes that “sexuality under conditions of inequality becomes the medium through which dominance is expressed” (*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 176). Here, the female body was reduced to nothing but a site of violation. Menstruation, the very sign of fertility and life, turned into a condition for further violation.

She waited night after night to hear the door shut after the last soldier left and not hear the sound of the lock... Many times, just one after another until she lost count. On one horrible occasion, she had lost count after 21 men had viciously had their way with her. Everything imaginable was done to her sexually. Sometimes there were two men at a time. They wanted to rape her of her soul. (White 175)

The violence was not confined to the body alone, but it tried to destroy the identity and annihilate selfhood. Trauma is not merely an event but an “unclaimed experience” that continues to rupture the present (Caruth 4). Nadja lost her very soul after being raped repeatedly. She was circulated “like a well-worn clothing” (White 169). It marked the commodification of her body within the ISIS slave system. She was exchanged as fungible property, not merely sold. The Yazidi sex slave was always an “available body,” stripped of name, identity, and history.

All the Yazidi women were subjected to the same violence, and they experienced brutal rape throughout their captivity. They were treated as objects to be bought at the market, gifted to a fighter or a commander. They could be taken home to be raped and beaten.

The rape was the worst part. It stripped us of our humanity and made thinking about the future- returning to Yazidi society, marrying, having children, being happy- impossible. We wished they could kill us instead. ISIS knew how devastating it was for an unmarried Yazidi girl to convert to Islam and lose her virginity, and they used our worst fear- that our community and religious leaders wouldn't welcome us back- against us.

(Murad 161)

When the captor grew tired, the woman would be sold again or given to another, and the cycle of rape and humiliation would continue until her body was considered undesirable or until she died (Murad 161). This system was not random. It was institutional. The administrative setup of ISIS-like markets to classify, price, and distribute women, legal codes to legitimise enslavement, and religious edicts to sanctify rape clearly marked the necropower they exercised on the Yazidi community. Sexual violence became a form of governance, designed to terrorise and dominate the vulnerable. Even the reproduction of the Yazidi women was weaponised. It was religiously permissible for ISIS militants to impregnate the Yazidi women, as mentioned in the fatwas issued by them. The wombs of women turned into sites of ideological warfare due to these forced pregnancies. This biopolitical violence of ISIS aimed at erasing the Yazidi identity, and they implanted their vision of the future. Mbembe notes, “to occupy the body is to control its material, symbolic, and reproductive functions” (81). The bodies of the Yazidi women were transformed into carriers of an imposed lineage, severing cultural continuity and deepening trauma.

Gendered life, normally constructed through daily acts and choices, was violently re-scripted by the militarised male gaze. The Yazidi women, such as Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed, and Nadja, were stripped of individuality, reduced to bare bodies under the control of men. ISIS erased their social and legal personhood, leaving the Yazidi women in a liminal state between life and death. Propaganda and theology erased their suffering from recognition, transforming them into symbols of conquest rather than subjects of grief. Butler argues, “When lives are not apprehended as lives, that is, when they cannot be humanised, then violence against them is not only permissible but inevitable” (*Precarious Life* 20). Thus, the Yazidi women were confined to what Butler calls a zone of “ontological precarity” (*Frames of War* 1).

A dreadful fact that has afflicted humanity for ages is the use of sexual violence, especially rape, as a weapon of war. Offenders have used this terrible strategy in conflicts all over the world to establish power, sow fear, and demoralise people. Rape as a weapon of war refers to the strategic use of sexual violence, including rape, to spread terror, demoralise communities, and exercise control over populations during armed confrontations. This horrifying strategy has been applied in a number of conflicts throughout the world. Rape as an instrument of war is not a recent development. But it was not until recent decades that the international community started to acknowledge and deal with this problem as a serious breach of international law and human rights. To accomplish the strategic goals, rape has been used by opposing forces throughout history. From ancient conflicts to contemporary conflicts, sexual violence has been used to impose dominance and control. Rape as a

weapon of war has its roots in the past. Subjecting women to sexual abuse as a means of dominance and depleting people was frequently done by the armies in the conquered lands. Women were often molested alongside the destruction of cities and villages. They served as a sombre reminder of the power of the conqueror and the helplessness of the defeated. Then this early instance of sexual violence, the use of rape as a weapon of war in modern battles was more organised and systematic. The horrific reality of rape as a weapon of war has been thrown into the global spotlight in recent decades. It necessitates renewed efforts to address and also to prevent such crimes. The Rwandan Genocide, the Bosnian War, the Rohingya crisis, the Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Manipur issue in India are some of the incidents that exhibit the prevalence of this technique in different parts of the world. Rape serves as a deliberate strategy of racial and ethnic cleansing. Sexual violence in conflict zones always has adverse effects on people, family and also on society. It leaves behind deeper wounds that extend to the body that experienced it.

Rape has always been used as a technique to terrorise, punish, and wipe out communities. Sometimes, as a type of reward, commanders permit their soldiers to rape women and girls. During times of war, sexual assault is sometimes done in broad daylight and by multiple perpetrators. To avoid the moral transgression of rape, organisations like Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq have incorporated religious aspects into their practices. Since the dawn of civilisation, slavery and the slave trade have persisted across the world. “Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life” (Mbembe 75). To terrorise individuals and

force them from their homes, whole populations have been purposefully eradicated using sexual abuse as a weapon. Genocide and ethnic cleansing have been used to describe the onslaught on the Yazidis in Iraq.

The Yazidi women were taken to Mosul to be sold as sex slaves, much like the “Korean Comfort Women” who were held hostage at “Comfort Stations” and forced into sexual servitude by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied nations and territories before and during World War II. There are many parallels between the experiences of comfort women and Yazidi women who were exploited and subjected to sexual assault by ISIS. Both groups experienced routine sexual assault and exploitation at the hands of the military. A system of sexual slavery was instituted by the Japanese army during World War II, enslaving hundreds of thousands of Asian women and girls (Kim et al. 58). ISIS also kidnapped thousands of the Yazidi women and girls and forced them into prostitution, raped and sexually assaulted them, and then forced them into marriage in a similar way. Severe physical and mental suffering as a result of being deprived of fundamental human rights had been experienced by both groups. The Japanese military forced women and girls into sexual slavery, where they endured horrifying physical and sexual torture. They frequently had to live in filthy conditions with limited access to medical treatment, food, and water (Kim et al. 59). Under ISIS captivity, the Yazidi women were denied access to fundamental human rights like food, water, and medical care, in addition to suffering from physical and mental abuse. It was not easy to receive justice and compensation for the harm they endured. Another significant resemblance was the stigma and shame that both groups of women had experienced.

Due to the stigma associated with sexual assault and prostitution, comfort women were frequently shunned by their families and communities, and many of them spent decades keeping their experiences a secret. Similar discrimination and stigmatisation have been experienced by many sexually assaulted Yazidi women in their own communities; some of them have even experienced family rejection. As Susan Brownmiller argues,

The reality of rape is that victimized women have always been reluctant to report the crime and seek legal justice-because of the shame of public exposure, because of that complex double standard that makes a female feel culpable, even responsible, for any act of sexual aggression committed against her, because of possible retribution from the assailant (once a woman has been raped, the threat of a return engagement understandably looms large), and because women have been presented with sufficient evidence to come to the realistic conclusion that their accounts are received with a harsh cynicism that forms the first line of male defense. (387)

Catharine MacKinnon stresses that rape in war is a deliberate tool of genocide: “rape is to women what lynching has been to blacks: a way of terrorising the group” (*Are Women Human?* 263).

Rape was a language of domination for ISIS. The Caliphate used the bodies of the Yazidi women as war trophies, a proof of conquest, and a religious propaganda. ISIS strengthened its claim over the life and death of the Yazidis through each assault. It helped them expand their rule into the most intimate spaces of the body. In a death world, prisons, slave markets, and rape camps became spaces

where the Yazidi women were forced into the condition of the living dead. Elaine Scarry observes that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language”

(4). ISIS weaponised this dominance over speech. They put the Yazidi women to silence through systemic rape and torture. Cultural memory and political agency of the Yazidis were attempted to be erased. Religion, sovereignty, and identity were dismantled and rewritten by force on the bodies. The necropower of ISIS took its route on the bodies of the Yazidi women, turning them into a battlefield and a grave.

Chapter Four

Writing Against Erasure: The Politics of Yazidi Survival

“Survivors are not only the victims of violence; they are the authors of its memory” (Hirsch 9). The Yazidi women have employed their personal narratives as a weapon against the genocide committed by ISIS, and they positioned themselves as a powerful agency to expose the atrocities that they have endured for a long time. Their voices, which come out in the form of autobiographies, memoirs, public speeches, interviews, and digital platforms, resist the necropolitical logic that targeted them by reducing their existence to a bare life. The Yazidi women who were devoid of identity, freedom, and even voice tried to recapture their agency as subjects by giving voice to their trauma. The dehumanisation process and the gendered violence of ISIS are strongly challenged through their narratives.

The Yazidi women consider writing as a performative act of survival and renewal. Memory, as well as the ethical demand for narrating pain in a world that prefers to avoid helping the vulnerable, reconstructs their subjectivity (Gilmore 14). The voices of the Yazidi women shifted the epistemic portrayal of a victim to one who resists. Their stories are no longer confined to the personal realm; rather, they become “standpoint epistemology,” in which the lived experiences of vulnerable women provide a platform of knowledge production and political intervention (Harding 56). This shift from trauma into testimony is not only cathartic but it becomes revolutionary. The continuous erasure enacted by terror regimes is violated through their narratives from the systematic silencing; they reclaimed the

sovereignty to narrate. The ideological patterns of the ISIS necropower are largely challenged by these self-narratives. ISIS governs through the instrumentalisation of death and the calculated exposure of certain populations to violence. In the face of the destructive apparatus, the literary works of the Yazidi women reclaim individuality, existence, and identity. Instead of merely documenting pain, they question the politics of disappearance.

By telling the story of survival, the Yazidi women subvert the ISIS necropower that aimed to belittle them in the past. The bold decision to tell the story makes a serious threat to necropower, which Mbembe defined as “the practice of exercising sovereign power by determining how bodies are exposed to death” (68). Under the rule of ISIS, the Yazidi women were subjected to physical brutality and they were also symbolically excluded from the realm of justice. But the Yazidi women were not ready to accept the conditions of total rejection. They asserted grievability, under which a life is recognised as worthy of mourning and protection and, thereby, reaffirming themselves as subjects who can be in the human domain.

A significant form of epistemic resistance was established when the Yazidi women decided to speak out. Trauma challenges the linear narration, and it continuously resists simple comprehension, and insists a return through indirect means (Caruth 5). Being both shattered and insistent, the testimonies of the Yazidi women occupy a paradoxical space. The violence they experience has been

documented; at the same time, they disrupt all the narratives that have historically tried to conceal violence based on gender. In a world where cultural taboos and social stigma suppress any discussions on rape and sexual violence, these narratives disrupt the patriarchal system that demands the erasure and complete silence of violated female identities. The political agenda of genocide is also revealed through their writing.

By publicising the tragedies of captivity, the Yazidi women broaden the scope of political discourse. Their writings act as “counter-memory,” which is a way of remembering that attempts to oppose histories written from the above and also the dominant ideologies (Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 160). The Yazidi narratives reveal that resistance is an active involvement and participation in the political sphere. It is not merely about enduring. The aftermath of unaddressed trauma is inscribed in their voices, and it provides a discourse of justice that questions the regime that attempted to destroy them. The UN speech, social media testimonies, and other global engagements reinforce the voices of the Yazidi women. It turns them into transnational acts of resistance. The system of domination that tries to silence marginalised voices is challenged through these public expressions. By making their presence visible in the digital space, the Yazidi women try to overcome the geographical and cultural limitations imposed on them by trauma. Digital space provides them a discursive environment where their subjectivity is asserted and largely communicated. These stories, shared through interviews, online campaigns, and activist groups such as Yazda, Nadia’s Initiatives, The Yazidi Legal Network, Sinjar Academy, and others, become “critical

fabulation,” a creative strategy for reclaiming agency for people who otherwise would be reduced to just numbers or permanently muted narratives (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 11). These digital expressions are not merely a static document of suffering, but rather they function as radical counter-narratives. The ideology of necropower, which attempted to destroy Yazidism, is greatly challenged. This global exposure and online presence make the Yazidi survivors reclaim their representational agency. The Yazidis have started with a post-traumatic becoming in which they realise that they do not have to limit themselves by being a victim or by patriarchal expectations. By reimagining ‘precarity’ linguistically and politically, they create “a liveable life” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). A space for communal memory, justice, and the future is created through their digital activism, which is more than just a means of resistance.

The Yazidi women were not only targeted for murder during the genocidal campaign of ISIS, but also subjected to a systematic apparatus of gendered violence, sexual enslavement, forced conversions, and ritualised rape, all of which were aimed at performing both cultural erasure and bodily subjugation. This exhibits necropolitics, which Achille Mbembe defines as the exercise of sovereign power through the deliberate exposing of specific communities to death and subjugation (67). This theory is expanded upon in the Yazidi example, which shows how sexual subjugation, a form of domination that renders the bodies of women into contested terrains of war, is another way that necropower is exercised. The ontological reduction imposed on the Yazidi women is best described by Giorgio Agamben’s concept of *homo sacer*, which refers to people who are denied political and legal

status and whose lives may be slaughtered but not grieved (*Homo Sacer* 83). Their suffering was deliberately organised by ISIS, a state-like apparatus, which established a regime in which female bodies were violated continuously.

It was on a gendered axis that the necropolitical logic was operated. The bodies of women became platforms through which ISIS reinforced its domination ethnically and religiously. They were more than the spoils of war. “Some lives are perceived as more grievable, more worthy of recognition, protection, and mourning than others,” which marked it clear that the distribution of ‘grievability’ is essentially unequal (Butler, *Frames of War* 15). The Yazidi women were dehumanised through radicalised religious beliefs and also through the rigid patriarchal concepts of sexual domination. By being the targets of ethno-religious identity and also gender, the Yazidi women were rendered ungrievable twice. In their vision of sovereignty, ISIS marked the erasure of the Yazidis as fundamental. When the Yazidi women articulate trauma, they experience “the capacity to speak from trauma without being reduced to it” (Gilmore, *Tainted Witness* 23). The ISIS-imposed ‘bare life,’ a life denied of social, political, and moral value, is refused. Through writing, they rebuild the subjectivity that ISIS attempted to crush. When they write, it is writing from the ashes and “writing from the margins constitutes both an epistemological disruption and a political act” (Mohanty 57). In writing, the agency over their identities, culture, bodies, and historical place is reclaimed. They critique the international community, which regularly failed to address this issue in meaningful ways, and they also confront the religious patriarchy of ISIS. Their

voices challenge the different ways of oppression but also question the global power that kept them invisible.

The geopolitical underpinnings of the violence are elided, and the humanitarian gaze of the West, which reduces trauma to spectacle, is resisted through their testimonies. The writings of the Yazidi women reposition themselves as political agents by rejecting the role of passive victims. They demand justice, recognition, and concrete action. They want their narratives to be taken as interventions that can change the discursive and material conditions in which they have continuously suffered. For the Yazidi women, writing is a continuation of struggle, a reaffirmation of the self against the mechanisms of erasure. It is not just a postscript to survival. The ideological structure of terror that ISIS aimed to impose is disrupted. Silence was a tool to seal their objectification and disappearance. The state of being invisible is subverted when they choose to narrate, shifting the pain they experienced into epistemic and political capital. Gayatri Spivak argues that the speech of the subaltern is often disqualified by dominant structures (78). But the Yazidi women rupture these dominant structures by producing texts that demand legibility on their own terms. They reframe their subjectivity by redefining life worth grieving and remembering, and become active in the public domain rather than remaining in the darker realm as victims. Writing becomes a denial of ontological erasure. They resist the barbarism of ISIS and also undermine the necropolitical order they try to impose. "Grievability is a precondition for the apprehension of life as a life" (Butler, *Frames of War* 14), but the Yazidi women go even further, and they do not just say that they are grievable; they write that they are

still becoming in the face of death. The Yazidi narratives reveal a radical politics of the future. They do not want to be forgotten in the conscience of the world. They fight for a historiographic representation and existence rather than merely acknowledging. They demand life with agency and voice, resisting death.

The writings of the Yazidi women survivors, including *The Last Girl* by Nadia Murad (2017), *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS* by Farida Khalaf (2016), *A Cave in the Clouds* by Badeeah Hassan (2019), *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* by Dunya Mikhail (2018), and *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar* by Barbara White (2018), portray a significant discursive intervention into the “epistemic violence” which suppresses the subaltern voices within the patriarchal and imperial knowledge systems (Spivak 271). Through their right to tell their stories, the survivors challenge the historical and ontological erasure. They not just testify to trauma but assert their presence, and actively engage in the political sphere.

ISIS imposed sexual slavery, mass abduction, and forced conversion upon the Yazidi women. More than being acts of barbarism, they also become an existential assault that is organised to eradicate cultural identity and communal bond. Erasure involves a deeper geopolitical indifference and a lack of humanitarian concern that go beyond the rationale of the genocide committed by ISIS. Necropolitics represents the sovereign authority to decide who is allowed to live and who is condemned to die; it is in this condition that the Yazidi women were made objects to be killable and ungrievable. Their accounts reshape the political identity, memory, and visibility through which they challenge the act of forgetting. The Yazidi women challenge the unequal distribution of grievability in

contemporary geopolitics. Through testimonies, they make their lives publicly grievable and politically visible. The involvement of global political, legal, and humanitarian mechanisms that facilitate the conditions of captivity is revealed in their writings. By drawing on their lived experiences, they provide legal evidence for prosecuting ISIS militants. Emerging from extreme circumstances, the “limit-case autobiographies” document the social and historical factors that generate such violence (Gilmore 14). The memoirs of the Yazidi survivors become extreme examples where the self is articulated at the boundaries of human experience, but they resist invisibility. The Yazidi women become active subjects in history. They do not want to be mere passive recipients of humanitarian aid. Their narratives criticise and question the global politics of abandonment that directly or indirectly gave a fertile land for the necropolitical regime of ISIS to flourish, demanding recognition and redress for their existence.

The process of writing manifests as an important means of reclamation and defiance. These narratives represent a deliberate choice to reject the status of ‘the living dead’ within the necropolitical governance (Mbembe 71). Khalaf says,

In captivity, we’d defied these criminals. But we had to resist them now as well... Every day we’d have to defend ourselves against this destructive force, which even from the past threatened to swallow us into a black hole...

It was a constant battle. It is a constant battle. But I will win it. (202-203)

This is a counter-discursive tactic which can be seen in the testimonies of the Yazidi women. Her testimonial becomes a purposeful assertion of truth that confronts the necropower of ISIS. It creates a new political arena for the Yazidi women as active

participants in justice. Rather than being victims, they want to make their survival a resistance. The female body, which was subjected to violation and commodification under ISIS rule, is reinterpreted through narrative as an agency of survival. The act of narrating trauma empowers survivors to “regain authorship over [their] body and [their] world” (Brison 60).

Farida Khalaf in *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS* tries to give strength to those who are with her, telling, “You mustn’t believe them. They’re just trying to make us lose heart” (Khalaf 173). This reveals the inner resilience and defiance that they embody. Barbara White’s protagonist defies the reduction to mere victimhood in *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar*. She reconstructs her existence as a testament of resilience and existence (White 104). The intricate and embodied identities that resist any forms of reduction are portrayed in their writings. The idea “talking back” reveals a politically charged reclamation of voice where the speech act itself becomes a radical tool of identity formation and liberation (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 9). A new form of subjectivity is asserted in narrating their survival that is not subjected to victimhood but rooted in resistance. Their narratives are memorials, living blueprints for survival, and insurgent declarations of dignity. The Yazidi women remake the world from the margins through writing.

In *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*, Nadia Murad offers a disturbing account of her abduction, enslavement, and escape from the clutches of ISIS. *The Last Girl* functions as a strategic act of political resistance. She refuses to remain within the realm of victimhood and tries to deconstruct the ideological mechanisms that made the Yazidi women disposable.

This memoir, though written within the shadow of genocide, challenges the necropolitical regimes. Through writing, she reasserted their humanity and the generative power of voice. The experiences of Nadia Murad reveal a state of exception, a condition in which law is suspended, and humans become *homo sacer*, where they can be killed without consequence (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 80). The occupation of Sinjar by ISIS in August 2014 showed the deployment of this logic for the Yazidis. Men faced mass massacre, while women and girls were subjected to transportation and distribution within a sexual slave market. When Murad was captured and transferred to Mosul, she became aware of the necropolitics, where sovereign power exercises control by distributing death and managing vulnerable bodies. In Mosul, the Yazidi women were reduced to mere objects, existing only as tools for oppression. Murad asserts small but critical acts of resistance even within the context of terror. When she was forced to convert to Islam under the threat of violence, she rejected, “They could tell me what to say, but they couldn’t make me believe it” (Murad 127). The subaltern resistance often emerges in “unheard refusals,” acts that are not always recognisable but disrupt hegemonic power (Spivak 270). The internal struggle of Murad to surrender her beliefs becomes an unheard assertion of agency.

The acts of hiding her face in a niqab and running away are not just a physical escape, but they are also a symbolic blow to ISIS control. The necropolitical spatial order in which the Yazidi women were commodified, monitored, and rendered immobile is disrupted when she moves from captivity to autonomy. This act of flight is a ‘tactic,’ a momentary appropriation of power in a

new form by the powerless (de Certeau 37). Murad turns the object of her visibility and control into a means of agency and invisibility by using the niqab, a dress imposed by ISIS that oppressed her. This is not mere cleverness; it represents a redefinition of space, identity, and power. The niqab functioned as a mechanism of control under the rule of ISIS, reducing the identity of an individual to obedience. Murad uses it strategically and thereby throws that logic of ISIS off. Her hiding becomes a refusal, a reclaiming of movement in a space that tries to hold her. A space is never neutral; it is always gendered, politicised, and contested (Massey 179). Murad's movement across that space, redrawing the boundaries of freedom through embodied resistance, is not just escape. It is an act of insurgent cartography.

The tension between surveillance and opacity in necropolitical regimes was visible in her escape. The escape of Murad using the niqab signified a rejection of the visibility on which the power of ISIS depended. She asserted her right to move without being observed, and thereby challenged the principles of surveillance. Her journey of freedom retraced the forced displacement of the Yazidi women in captivity. She subverted the very structure of genocide and inscribed a new trajectory, one of survival, defiance, and reasserted the lost subjectivity. Right from the moment she was caught, Nadia Murad was filled with a strong desire to fight back. She was not just trying to stay alive and escape during her imprisonment, but she was also constantly thinking of justice. In *The Last Girl*, she expressed her idea of justice and how it went far beyond the symbolic punishment,

Not just the leaders like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi but all the guards and slave owners, every man who pulled a trigger and pushed my brothers' into the

mass grave, every fighter who tried to brainwash young boys into hating their mothers for being Yazidi, every Iraqi who welcomed the terrorists into their cities and helped them... they should all be put on trial before the entire world, like the Nazi leaders after World War II, and not given the chance to hide. (Murad 142)

Murad talked about a global stage of justice where no one can hide, like the Nuremberg Trials that happened after the Holocaust. It was not out of anger that she was determined but because she believed that memory should be used as a tool against people who escape from crimes they committed. She planned to tell the court everything Salwan did to her, and she prayed to God that Salwan would be caught alive when ISIS was destroyed (Murad 143).

In its depiction of women within the structure of ISIS, her narrative disrupts the binaries of perpetrator and victim. Many women were submissive, but some of them resisted. She recounted the story of a foreign fighter's wife who played a crucial role in an attempt to escape,

One girl from Kocho was given a cell phone by the wife of her captor, a foreign fighter who had taken his entire family with him on the long journey from their home in the West to Syria. At first, the wife had been enticed by Islamic State propaganda, but quickly she became appalled by the enslavement of Yazidi women. Because of this woman, the Yazidi girls in the house were able to coordinate being smuggled out of Syria to safety. (Murad 154)

This reveals how humanity is never entirely eradicated even under oppressive regimes. It also reveals the contradictions within the gendered violence of ISIS, where female complicity and subversion co-exist.

Her story is more than just a witness statement. It becomes evidence and accusation in the moral terrain of pain, resistance, and justice. The Yazidi genocide cannot be reduced to a footnote of history, is ensured in her insistence on remembrance and accountability. It becomes a demand for global juridical call and an indicator of conscience. This creates an “ambivalent structures of power” that shape precarious lives (Butler, *Frames of War* 43). In such ambivalent situations, even the individuals embedded within violent regimes open the possibility for unexpected acts of resistance. The action of an ISIS fighter’s wife who helped the escape of the Yazidi girls is an instance of this disruption. A more disturbing dimension is also presented in her testimony, which shows the cruelty of other ISIS-affiliated women who internalised and enacted the patriarchal violence of ISIS.

Murad writes,

But there were stories of women who were even crueller than the men. They starved their husbands’ *sabaya* and beat them out of jealousy or anger, or they were easy targets. They might have thought of themselves as revolutionaries, even feminists, and they had told themselves that violence towards a greater good was acceptable. (155)

The text forces us to question how gendered power is performed in necropolitical regimes. Achille Mbembe states that necropower is not just the power to kill, but also the ability to use pain and control to make “the generalised instrumentalisation

of human existence” (67). These ISIS women rationalised violence as an ideological participation, not just as a blind obedience to male power. The brutality in their language revealed how discourses of power distort under supreme authority. Their positive involvement in the cruelty exposed how gendered power could be manipulated, enacted, or resisted in necropolitical spaces. Murad says:

When I think about bringing ISIS to justice for genocide, I feel some pity for the women. I understand better how people could see them as victims. But I don’t understand how anyone could stand by and watch while thousands of Yazidis are sold into sexual slavery and raped until their bodies break. There is no justification for that kind of cruelty, and no greater good that could come out of it. (155)

Murad criticises with evidence, and she is politically aware and morally grounded in her writing. Murad denounces the role of some women, and she does not want to take all women in one group, knowing the reality that some women are ideologically trapped. She reveals that gender is not used to determine guilt but rather agency, support, and deeds. She confirms the facts that when some groups are harmed by systemic power, it does not mean they are powerless to commit harm. Her testimony challenges reductionist narratives that ignore the role played by female perpetrators under necropolitical regimes, and it also demands a gender-inclusive justice.

The Islamic State established an industrialised system of sexual slavery, where the bodies of the Yazidi women were repeatedly violated, used as goods, and treated as less than human. Her narrative reveals a systemic approach of gendered terror that governed through well-organised patterns of domination and resale. This

apparatus reduced women to interchangeable objects within a wartime economy of rape

Yazidi women were all victims of the same violence. They could be bought at the market, or given as a gift to a recruit or a high-ranking commander, and then taken back to his home, where they would be raped and humiliated, most of them beaten as well. Then they would be sold or given to another militant and raped and beaten by him, and sold or given or raped and beaten, and it went that way for as long as they were desirable enough and not yet dead. (Murad 161)

This exemplifies the logic of necropolitical sovereignty, which deliberately manages death and suffering as a means of exercising power. The Yazidi women are reduced to disposable commodities within a ruthless hierarchy of power due to the cyclical nature of captivity, abuse, and exchange. Their worth is contingent upon their reproductive capacity and perceived desirability. The repeated words of ISIS, “sold or given or raped and beaten” underscored the mechanism of objectification that erased the Yazidi identity. The necropolitical structure left no space for resistance or recognition.

ISIS established a surveillance-driven ecosystem rendering the act of escape nearly unattainable and impossible. Nadia Murad reveals this threat of ISIS,

Hajji Salman always warned her that if they tried to escape, they would be punished severely. ISIS hung their photos at checkpoints, and residents in

Mosul were instructed to return slaves to the nearest Islamic State centre.

They were told there was a five-thousand-dollar reward if they did. (161)

The Caliphate's reign of terror extended beyond the private space of captivity and went into the civic structure of the Islamic State. It was not just physical confinement but also an organised pattern of surveillance and betrayal that blurred the boundary between the civilian and enforcer, reinforcing the subjugation of the Yazidi women. ISIS deputed the local population through financial reward, with which they transformed public space into a terrain of threat. Photographs pinned to checkpoints, watched by strangers, and also hunted for rewards. Women's bodies were violated publicly, rendering them hyper-visible in their subjugation. The sovereign power suspends legal protections, and in this condition, the Yazidi women become figures excluded from the law but totally exposed to the violence of law. They were denied their rights, citizenship, and even humanity, existing only as a 'living dead' within a regime that normalised their degraded state. Towns, streets, and checkpoints no longer functioned as zones of safety in necropolitical space, but these spaces became extensions of the camp.

"Try to escape, it doesn't matter. Even if you make it home, your father or your uncle will kill you. You're no longer a virgin, and you are Muslim!" (Murad 162). ISIS implanted a fear of rejection in the minds of the victims, thereby subjugating them psychologically. It was a fear of rejection from the very communities and families to which they longed to return. ISIS enacted violence not only on the body but also through the body. They were successful in making the Yazidi women internalise this fear to an extent. ISIS made use of the cultural stigma.

The Yazidi women who internalised this fear experienced a double captivity. They were already under the control of ISIS and were also dominated by the fear that freedom itself would mean an expulsion from their own families. Murad reclaims her voice from the dominance of silencing, and she also disrupts the system that defines her by her violation. She reveals the psychological tactics used by ISIS to maintain control. The threats were designed to make victims believe that they could never return to their families with dignity. Murad narrates how she has responded to the violence. She remained passive and did not fight back when her captor Hajji Salman, or anyone else, came to rape her. She just closed her eyes and wished for it to be over. “While other girls punched and bit their attackers, I only cried” (Murad 162). The internal conflict faced by many survivors was highlighted here. The shame of not resisting made her feel bad, even though she did it under constant threat. “Because I didn’t fight back the way some other girls did, it doesn’t mean I approved of what the men were doing” (Murad 163). Kelly Oliver discusses this issue in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, where she explains that survivors are often pressured to appear heroic or completely powerless, with little space for the complex ways people cope with trauma (92).

Cultural expectations that can deepen the psychological harm caused by violence were a reason for Murad’s guilt. She challenges the idea that survival should look in a particular way by being brutally honest about her experience. She believes that people are interested in genocide because of the sexual abuse. She criticises that tendency, saying, “I want to talk about everything, the murder of my brothers, the disappearance of my mother, the brainwashing of the boys, not just the

rape” (Murad 162). The Yazidi suffering under ISIS was widespread and affected entire families and the community. A thorough understanding of the violence is made possible through her testimony. It was not just an individual experience of pain, but the pain was part of a broader system of genocide. She resists the condition of being reduced to a symbol by telling her story in all its complexity, and she becomes a powerful witness to her communal loss and survival. The tendency of the global audience to focus narrowly on sexual violence is challenged by her determination to narrate all the details of her experience. Rape was one of the dimensions of the genocide, and she refuses to let her story be reduced to that single dimension of suffering. Murad attempts for a more complete account, and it includes the gendered nature of violence and also addresses the psychological manipulation, the loss of family members, and the cultural destruction. She challenges the oversimplification and commodification of victimhood. Murad tries to restore the depth of the Yazidi suffering and how humanity is denied to them.

The Last Girl reflects on her recurring hopes of escape under ISIS control. Within a necropolitical order, these dreams emerge as small acts of resistance. Even in the threats expressed by her captor, Hajji Salman, Nadia could get the paradoxical signals that escape was at least imaginable: “If you try, Nadia, you will regret it, I promise you. The punishment won’t be good” (Murad 168). ISIS uses this warning to instil fear, but it indirectly gives them hope that escape attempts have occurred. The threat unintentionally reveals the fragility within the control of ISIS, and it keeps alive the hope of Murad. Even imagining a way out becomes a subtle form of

resistance. Through hope, they mentally survive in a system designed to extinguish autonomy. It is the ideological rigidity of ISIS that provides her a way to escape.

The biggest mistake they made was dressing us like all the women in Mosul, in the anonymous black abaya and niqab. Once we were in that clothing, we blended in... It was impossible to tell who might be a Sunni woman going to market and who might be a Yazidi girl escaping her captor. (Murad 168)

A tool of control used by ISIS, the dress made mandatory, itself became a loophole. ISIS unintentionally undermined its own surveillance apparatus by enforcing anonymity through this *abaya*. ISIS meant to erase the Yazidi identity and impose submission by making them wear this dress, but it became a means of camouflage and escape. The systems of domination often carry within them the seeds of their own subversion. Murad's escape disrupts the spatial and symbolic order ISIS tried to enforce. Her escape is not just a personal victory. The *abaya* ironically enabled a form of resistance. They imposed this dress to render the Yazidi women invisible and also to exercise control. The same invisibility became a crucial tool for subverting the surveillance of ISIS. The use of the *abaya* as a tool to escape indicates that systems of power often generate the conditions for their undoing. Regulation and control can produce the very tactics by which resistance emerges.

The visualisation of escape shows how imagination itself becomes a space of agency. She plans her escape and disguise meticulously and rehearses religious phrases,

I imagined myself climbing out of the big window in the kitchen, putting on my abaya, and blending into a crowd... If anyone tried to talk to me, I would just say that I was a Muslim from Kirkuk trying to visit my family...I memorised the short opening verse from the Quran... My Arabic was perfect, and I already knew the shahada. (Murad 169)

These are more than fantasy. Those without institutional power resist domination by manipulating the systems that constrain them. Murad temporarily assumes the identity of her oppressors by learning the Quranic verses and mimicking the Islamic rituals. It is a strategic performance necessary for survival. This imagined freedom leaves her between a fragile hope and a deep despair: "I knew it was an impossible plan... I would go over my fantasies and have to admit to myself that they could never happen, and then I would fall into such a deep sadness that I would pray for death" (Murad 169). Her longing for death is a refusal to accept a life shaped by captivity, violence, and dehumanisation. Even hope becomes precarious within the necropolitical regime that ISIS tries to impose. The Yazidi girls shared ideas of escape whenever they got a chance. During a conversation between Murad and Lamia, they expressed their desire to escape, but the guards under watch made their plans for escape impossible (Murad 170). They built a quiet but powerful collective resistance through these secret exchanges. The solidarity in the desire to survive was strong among the Yazidi slaves. It indicates a "communion of survival," where oppressed individuals, even under extreme conditions, draw strength from communal knowledge and shared dreams (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 130).

Escape involves mental endurance, imaginative resistance, cultural mimicry, and strong support. Simple acts of resistance and rebellion arise even within a necropolitical system designed to erase agency. Her attempts to escape expose the structural weaknesses within the regime of ISIS control. Her first escape attempt, though, failed, is a courageous act. It does not extinguish her desire for freedom,

I found an abaya and slipped it on over my dress... With my body halfway through the window... I moved my feet... I heard the sound of a gun, I froze, my body folded over the windowsill... I quickly heaved myself back up... falling onto the floor below it, my heart racing with fear. (Murad 174)

That was her first attempt to escape, which encapsulated the tension between domination and resistance. The act of crossing the physical boundary of captivity becomes an assertion of will and personhood within a system that treats individuals as objects of control and violation. Power seeks to produce docile subjects, but it cannot fully erase the potential for resistance. Even in the most imposed environments, the subject retains the capacity to act against domination. The attempt to escape symbolises an embodied resistance. Disregarding the threat of death, she continued her attempts to flee. It shows a persistent selfhood that refuses to be silenced or broken. The more she experienced violence, the more strengthened she became. No gang rape shattered her spirit and will. “Nothing but the illusionary rejection of death that has already occurred” (Mbembe 87). She began to see her pain as evidence for future injustice. She transformed herself from a victim figure to a figure of moral authority, imagining a day her captor would be held accountable,

When I fantasize about putting ISIS on trial for genocide, I want to see Hajji Salman, like Salwan, captured alive. I want to visit him in jail...I want to see how he looks and hear how he talks without the power of ISIS behind him. I want him to look at me and remember what he did to me and understand that this is why he will never be free again. (Murad 177)

Her imagination revealed a shift from silence to voice and from invisibility to representation. Mbembe states,

In the logic of survival, the horror experienced upon seeing death turns into the satisfaction that the dead person is another. It is the death of the Other, the Other's physical presence as a corpse, that makes the survivor feel unique. And each enemy killed makes the survivor feel more secure. (88)

Wanting her captors to end up in jail and put on trial, Murad expressed this unique feeling. She saw those who managed to escape as symbols of bravery and resilience,

When they ran, where did the escapees go? How did they get through the checkpoints in Mosul? How did they know where to run through the fields, who might help them, and who would turn them in, how long could they go without dying of thirst? They were so brave to try. (Murad 178-79)

These examples became sources of strength. In the "manichean world," the colonised subject is completely dominated by the coloniser's violence. Even within such extreme conditions, a communal spirit that defies total control gets revealed (Fanon 36). A reclamation of the self that was capable of thinking, feeling, and resisting was formed even in the imagination of the process of escape. The final

escape of Murad was the result of accumulated strength, careful planning, and also it became a slow breakdown of the psychological dominance of ISIS over her,

For the first time since being punished by Hajji Salman, I thought about escaping. The torture at the checkpoint and the promise that I was going to go Syria had reignited the urgency to flee. I walked to the front door to see if the militant had, by some miracle, let it unlocked... I gave it one last pull, and it swung open. (Murad 200)

The unlocked door was not just an accident. It clearly marked a crack in the structure of oppression. Murad was able to recognise it timely and her escape attempt was a result of an uncontrolled hope. “They thought they had me forever. They are wrong” (Murad 202). She chose danger and uncertainty over the certainty of ISIS captivity, through which she directly challenged the necropolitical system that ISIS tried to enforce, where life and death were tools of control. The statement “They are wrong” was a rejection of a system built to erase the Yazidi identity and agency. Murad reclaimed authorship over her own life. She shifted herself from a victim to an agent, from a captive to a storyteller. The escape was a deeply emotional and psychological journey marked by a hope filled with fear and uncertainty. It was not just physically leaving the chains of ISIS. She was aware that her path was dangerous and unpredictable, but she moved through Mosul, a city controlled by a necropolitical regime. “I didn’t walk a straight line. Instead, I move between parked cars, turned corners at random, and crossed and recrossed the same streets over and over... my heartbeat so hard in my chest that I worried the people I

passed would hear it and know what I was” (Murad 206). Under the rule of “necropower,” even public spaces are controlled by a sovereign power that decides even the slightest movement of others. She was not confused in her movement; rather, it implied a strategy to survive in a space where being seen, or even heard, could mean death.

“My abaya helped me blend in, but I didn’t feel invisible, as I’d hoped I would. All I could think about as I walked was the moment they would catch me” (Murad 207). She was particularly conscious of her surroundings,

As I passed each house, I imagined walking up to the door and knocking. Would the family that answered turn me right away? Would they send me back to Hajji Salman? Islamic State flags from the lampposts and over gates reminding me that I was in a dangerous place. (Murad 207)

She could not be free from the threat of betrayal even out of her captivity. She thought of placing her hope on poor families, believing they might be more compassionate and trustworthy,

If any Sunni in Mosul was going to help me, it was most likely to be a poor Sunni, maybe a family who’d stayed only because they didn’t have money to leave... that night with nothing to guide me and no reason to trust one stranger over another, I just wanted to find a family like mine. (Murad 208)

Murad understood the social dynamics of the time to which she belonged then and decided to take a risk even in extreme conditions. She took it as a last chance God

had given her. Though afraid, she refused to turn back. Her final decision to knock on a green door revealed this courage. “I beg you. Help me. My name is Nadia. I am a Yazidi from Sinjar. Daesh came to my village, and I was taken to Mosul to be a *sabiyya*. I lost my family” (Murad 209). It was not just a plea for shelter but speaking out who she was, she tried to reclaim her voice, identity, and story. She did not present herself as a victim, but as a person with history and dignity. “I thought the more they knew, the more likely they were to help me. They were a family, so they were capable of pity and love” (Murad 210). She then believed in the power of compassion.

Nadia Murad appeals for ethical action by giving voice to her trauma and turning her personal testimony into a tool to defend against the atrocities. Her words are a plea for solidarity and protection. Life was not easy under the moral terrain of the authoritarian rule, which was revealed when the Sunni family admitted that they disliked ISIS but “none of them had done anything to stop them” (Murad 213). Under necropower, both action and inaction involve immense risk. Ordinary people did not have any other choice but to be passive, being caught in a system that suppressed resistance and fractured trust. But by choosing to protect Murad, the Sunni man Hisham emerged as a deviant from those who were permanently suppressed under ISIS. He took it as his moral responsibility to help her escape, giving an assurance in his words to her brother, “I am a good person, and I won’t hurt your sister” (Murad 214). It became a powerful ethical statement in a world where violence and betrayal had become normalised. His trustworthiness challenged the erosion of communal bonds destroyed by ISIS.

The Last Girl shows that escape is not an endpoint but an ongoing process involving fear, uncertainty, and reliance on the moral courage of others. Her escape became more than an individual fight. There was a coordinated effort and a hidden network of resistance behind it. The organised escape reflected a deeper structure of an underground web of the Yazidis and Arab allies defying ISIS through the acts of sheltering and transporting. It was not an open rebellion, but they were secretly risking their lives to help others. Survival under necropower required not only courage but also community, support shaped by solidarity, secrecy, and small acts of subversion.

The smuggling networks functioned as informal systems operating in the vacuum left by the collapsed state institutions. Nadia Murad's escape was supported by them. These networks relied on individuals with knowledge of local geography and militant behaviour. They used taxi drivers, undercover informants, and women couriers. These people made use of their familiarity with checkpoints, escape routes, and ISIS routines to navigate through systems of control. Yael Navaro-Yashin explains, such "grey zones" of survival give rise to "phantom states," where the lines between resistance and complicity become blurred (107). The Yazidi men who undertook these smuggling operations acted with a political conviction within this "phantom economy." They also occupied a liminal role as brokers mediating between the captives and their freedom. Economic gain was also a motive behind such operations. It was a painful realisation for Murad, "As in any business, competition has developed...since it has become clear that smuggling *sabaya* is a good way to make money during wartime" (219). It is still an uncomfortable truth at

the heart of many contemporary resistance narratives. The path to freedom often requires payment. Liberation is often shaped by a profit motive rather than a moral duty. In the case of the Yazidi women, “each operation began in panic and chaos. But after the family of the victim managed to get enough money together, it would begin to unfold like a business deal, employing a system of smugglers” (Murad 219). Here, rescue is commodified. Feminist analyses of wartime economies largely criticised this tendency, where the bodies, labour, and suffering of women are often treated as currency within systems of exploitation (Tickner 57). The smuggling networks enabled escape, but at the same time, they revealed the cost of survival in war. This reduced their freedom to a service exchanged for profit. Resistance is not romanticised in this context, but instead it is framed as a morally ambiguous process shaped by desperation, opportunism, and structural inequality.

The assumed identity and performance as a Sunni wife revealed a forced enactment of femininity as defined by sectarian and patriarchal norms under ISIS. The instructions, “don’t act afraid... keep your voice low” (Murad 233), served as a codified script of gendered invisibility. Murad participated in the performativity of gender by embodying docility, heterosexual partnership, and subdued demeanour. This was an identity constructed through the repetition of norms, acts, and gestures in a regime of power (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 178). Her survival depended on this performance, not because she identified with it, but because it followed the ISIS-sanctioned model of submissive womanhood. Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou theorise this imposed role as the “performative politics of the precariat”. It is a condition in which marginalised subjects are compelled to adopt contingent,

situational identities to access protection, mobility, or recognition (91). By faking her identity, Murad was having a tactical negotiation with a necropolitical order that disciplined bodies and identities, instilling fear and surveillance. Survival for her became a performative labour of affect, silence, and bodily discipline. The shift from forced invisibility in ISIS-controlled spaces to restricted visibility in humanitarian zones marked the cyclical precarity faced by survivors, even after escape. The journey from captivity was not a direct transition to freedom. It was a continuous movement between states of precarity, shifting the survivors from the abjection of sexual slavery to the liminality of refugee status. The paradoxes of resistance revealed in the narratives of the Yazidi women made it clear that escape often depended upon structures that replicate subjugation. The Yazidi survival itself was mediated by complicity, economic transaction, and spatial marginalisation.

The threat of capture remained ever-present even in the final stages of her escape. She saw her photograph posted alongside other escaped *sabaya* at a checkpoint in Mosul. The strong surveillance system of ISIS monitored and reclaimed the escaped Yazidi women. The necropower of ISIS extended beyond physical confinement. Her photograph itself became a site of vulnerability and evidence for how the Yazidi women remained subjects of control even in a journey towards escape. The Kurdish checkpoint, which they thought was a safer territory, did not mark an end to scrutiny. The PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) guards interrogated her, verifying the documents, “Who are you? Why are you going to Erbil when one ID says Mosul and the other says Kirkuk?” (Murad 259). The scepticism, even in zones outside the ISIS control, revealed how refugee identity

was always met with suspicion. PUK and KDP rendered the Yazidi suffering a terrain of political contestation. Borders are maintained not only to protect but also to police and politicise the displaced. The journey may be one of survival, but it is always marked by repeated confrontations with mistrust and necropolitical residue from the authority.

“We were exhausted... I realised that only way was I stopped pretending and admitted who I really was.” She revealed the truth, “I’m Nadia. I am a Yazidi from Kocho. My ID is a fake. I got it in Mosul, where I was held captive by Daesh. This man helped me escape” (Murad 260). It was a deeply political act of vulnerability. Such disclosures constitute a “performative exposure of precarity,” where the subject places themselves at risk by making visible their dispossession and dependence on others (Butler, *Frames of War* 151). Her revealing of the true identity made a rupture in the strategy of concealment that had ensured the survival till that moment. She exposed herself and her rescuer to potential retribution. This was further complicated by the response of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The soldiers who were shocked at the truth wanted to record her story. “Nasser has taken a huge risk coming with me, and his whole family is still in Mosul. If anyone knows who he is, he could be hurt, or his family could. Besides, why do you want to tape this? Who will see it?” (Murad 260). The ambivalence of post-trauma testimony was revealed here by compelling a survivor to share her story when she was not ready. The need of the survivor for safety and agency became irrelevant before the urgency to record her trauma. The PUK breached the ethics of protecting the survivor by releasing the footage despite their assurances. “The video seemed

like the ultimate betrayal of Nasser, and I hated PUK Aayish for giving it to the news, no doubt to make themselves look better than the KDP, who they insisted had abandoned the Yazidis” (Murad 265). This was another blow upon her already wounded self. She was learning that,

My story, which I still thought of as a personal tragedy, could be someone else’s political tool, particularly in a place like Iraq. I would have to be careful about what I said, because words mean different things to different people, and your story can easily become a weapon to be turned on you.
(Murad 265)

Larger geopolitical agendas often caused adverse effects upon the Yazidi survivors, where survival testimonies became sites of contested meaning. They were exploited by competing interests in the post-conflict landscape of Iraq.

A deliberate attempt to preserve the self that was shaped by cultural and communal codes on honour, chastity, and gendered respectability was revealed in Murad’s initial refusal to disclose and admit the rape that had happened (Murad 262). It was not a denial of what had happened. Her silence functioned as a safety measure in a society where “Yazidis are conservative, sex before marriage is not allowed” (Murad 262). A deep stigma is often attached to sexual violence in patriarchal contexts. This silence is not an absence but a saturated space of deferred speech. It is a “dense zone of meaning” where the unsaid bears the weight of social and emotional survival (Das 84). Female survivors often experienced the trauma of violence and also the burden of narrating that trauma in spaces where victimhood, honour, and credibility are precariously negotiated. The complex politics of

testimony were underscored in her narrative. Institutional actors might exploit the voices of survivors for political visibility, especially within conservative societies and in post-conflict regions. They sometimes failed to offer meaningful protection and an environment for surviving the wounds. The post-violence subjecthood of the Yazidi women was exposed in the way the Kurdish forces treated Murad's escape. Physical liberation did not guarantee her autonomy over her story. Her voice became vulnerable to manipulation. Both militant and state actors made use of her words for their benefit. Her writing emerges as a critique of social, cultural, political, and institutional structures that continue to regulate the voices and bodies of survivors. Her memoir becomes a living document of how survival entails the current negotiation between speech, silence, and power.

The emotional collapse that followed her physical escape revealed that trauma persisted beyond spatial borders. Her arrival in Erbil marked the start of a slow reintegration into a life beyond captivity. When she saw a Yazidi woman of her mother's age,

All the restraint I had tried to practice since leaving the Islamic State house in Mosul left me. I went crazy. I screamed with my entire body... I cried for my mother, I cried for my brothers... for my sisters who were still in captivity. I cried because I had made it out. (Murad 268)

This uncontrolled physical response underlines the embodiment of trauma, suggesting that the memory of violence is stored not only in the mind but in the body itself. Cathy Caruth posits that trauma is not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence. It returns later, often through involuntary responses like screams and

bodily breakdowns (4). “Be patient. Hopefully everyone you love will come back. Don’t be so hard on yourself... Leave everything to God. We Yazidis don’t have anyone or anything except God” (Murad 269) expressed the support of the elderly woman in her grief and a reminder to rely on God. This functioned both as comfort and as a survival mechanism using one’s own culture. The Yazidi beliefs become a source of resilience and symbolic refuge in the face of genocide. This spiritual dependency reflects a secular faith, a belief in the enduring continuity of one’s people and culture under erasure.

Murad’s farewell to Nasser, her rescuer, was suffused with gratitude, guilt, and sorrow. “Don’t believe anything Daesh said about Yazidis. I’m crying for you, because you did this for me. You saved my life” (Murad 271). When a Sunni man helped her escape, it dismantled the dehumanising propaganda of ISIS. Murad asserted the Yazidi agency in acknowledging the courage and solidarity of Nasser. The passive victimhood was transformed into an active remembrance and compassion. “If there are other girls in Mosul who want to escape, they can call us, and we’ll try to help them” (Murad 271). These words of Nasser enacted as a form of resistance rooted in affective solidarity. Sara Ahmed notes, “Affective economies” function by circulating emotions like care, fear, and guilt across bodies and borders, creating attachments that challenge regimes of violence (45). Her trauma was on the threshold of its ethical and political translation. She carries the weight of those still captives, stepping into a world where her suffering will become public testimony. Her commitment to telling the truth becomes a form of narrative resistance. It insists on collective healing through solidarity, justice, and a

continuous refusal to forget. Nadia Murad experienced a physical displacement of escape along with an emotional weight of bearing trauma,

I had escaped ISIS and was with my family, but still I felt like my life...would be just one long chain of miseries. In one misery, I am captured by ISIS, and in the next, I am living a life of total poverty, with nothing, no place to call my own, reliant on others... only waiting for the camp to be built... waiting for Kocho to be liberated and my sisters to be freed and my mother to be rescued. (277)

Her suffering and helplessness were part of an extended continuum of war, poverty, gendered violence, and displacement. Her narrative blurred the temporal boundary between captivity and freedom. It suggested that trauma reverberates in the afterlife as much as in the event itself. It was not easy for her to recount her experiences of trauma in a society where people considered rape a shame. The Yazidi survivors of rape often experienced this paradox: the compulsion to speak and also the impossibility of fully articulating the experience before the public. Murad needed an emotional space to disclose the full extent of her suffering, including the sexual violence, which she found in the embrace of her aunt. This moment of confession was socially transformative rather than being a personal catharsis. "It was a relief to tell someone, and I stopped worrying that Yazidis would reject me or blame me for what happened. So many of us had been killed or kidnapped by ISIS that those of us who survived had come together and tried to repair what was left" (Murad 278). The cultural stigma attached to rape in conservative communities was a matter of concern for many of the Yazidi survivors because sexual purity was closely tied to

their familial honour. Shared vulnerability and grievability can reconstitute social bonds and ethical recognition that were once foreclosed by normative structures (Butler, *Precarious Life* xii). The experiences of Murad embodied this shift, reframing silence and stigma into solidarity and survival.

“Most of the escaped *sabaya* were tight-lipped about their time with ISIS, as I had been at first, and I understood why. It was their tragedy and their right not to tell anyone” (Murad 278). The silence of these *sabaya* exposed the complex relationship between trauma and testimony. This silence becomes a “postmemory,” where trauma is transmitted through indirect or second-hand remembrance. What is not said can always carry as much weight as what is spoken (Hirsch 9). These women wanted to protect themselves from further psychological harm. But there was always a social expectation for them to speak as representatives of suffering. Respecting the silence of others, Murad decided to share her story, upholding the politics of narrative agency. In a state of trauma, both speaking and keeping silent become valid acts of resistance. The social system that once sustained her life: family, education, safety, and belonging, had collapsed, changing the course of her future. She mourns the loss of a cultural and social world. The conditions in refugee camps, marked by poverty, uncertainty, and marginalisation, extended the logic of violence and displacement even after captivity. Murad’s experiences in Zakho shifted her into a new kind of positive struggle. It was a struggle involving memory, healing, and the ethics of narration. Her voice was evolved into a powerful form of resistance. In choosing to tell her story, first in fragments, then in full, she reclaimed authorship over her violated body and disrupted life. She was resisting the brutality

of ISIS and also the cultural silencing that trauma often imposes upon the survivors. She was relocated to a refugee camp in Dohuk. Her life there was shaped by grief and absence.

“Throughout the camp, people struggled to recreate the lives that were stolen from them” (Murad 281). The refugee camps often function as a “space of exile,” a temporary and marginal space that preserves life, reinforcing a condition of political abandonment (Agier 2). Residents of the camp attempted to continue with their routines, cooking traditional meals, maintaining cultural rituals, and socialising. But the camp remained drenched in the emotional weight of trauma. It was devastating for the Yazidi men as they had lost their traditional gender roles and also their economic agency. “There was no work, and they did not have cars to go to the city for jobs. Their wives, sisters, and mothers were in captivity, and their brothers and fathers were dead” (Murad 281). This reality suggests the “descent of the ordinary” and how violence infiltrates everyday having long-lasting effects on routine life (Das 6). The Yazidi sufferings had gender differences and the Yazidi women carried the visible wounds of captivity and sexual violence, but men faced a different kind of trauma rooted in unemployment, powerlessness, and the guilt of survivor. The disruption of family and social roles led to trauma, embedded in the broader social fabric. The camp functioned as a liminal space. It became a zone of suspended time, where survival was defined by waiting rather than rebuilding. Moments of resilience and agency started to find their place in the stagnant camp life. The formation of Yazda was an example. An organisation for the rights of the Yazidis was established soon after the Kocho massacre. “Yazda, which was being

led by a group of the Yazidis living all over the world who had dropped everything in their lives to help victims of the genocide, was quickly becoming the main source of hope for the Yazidis everywhere” (Murad 282). Yazda represented a form of diasporic solidarity that transforms tears into activism. Judith Butler suggests, when grief becomes publicly shared and acknowledged, it can generate new forms of political mobilisation (Butler, *Frames of War* xviii). Yazda helped to reconstruct a sense of collective identity grounded in justice and advocacy.

Efforts to reclaim agency were evident in everyday acts of rebuilding. The attempt to learn German by Murad, Dimal, Adkee, Miran, Jilan, Katherine, and Lamia was such an act. It was a symbolic step toward imagining a future beyond trauma. They tried to redefine themselves through learning a Language. It allowed the survivors to participate in new social and cultural contexts. Even after a deep catastrophe, the human capacity to begin again is central to political and personal renewal (Arendt 176). The experience of the Yazidi refugees in Dohuk could not be seen only as one of suffering, but also as one of transformation and resistance. Survivors challenged the conditions of victimhood imposed upon them through cultural adaptation. Their actions reflected a broader struggle for dignity, autonomy, and future possibility. The fear induced in the Yazidi women by ISIS that they would not be accepted by their community for losing their virginity intensified the trauma. The anxiety of whether the *sabaya* who had been enslaved, raped, and forcibly converted to Islam would be accepted back into the Yazidi faith was dominant. “No one was sure how the escaped *sabaya* would be treated by the holy men. We had converted to Islam, and most of us had lost our virginity... we knew

these to be sins worthy of expulsion from Yazidi society” (Murad 295). These fears of expulsion put them in a “bare life”, a condition in which individuals are denied their social and political recognisability. Communal codes connecting religious purity with honour risked the lives of the Yazidi women, and they were cast into a form of social death. The Yazidi spiritual leader, Baba Sheikh, affirmed the dignity and the belonging of survivors. It marked a departure from such cultural practices.

Former *sabaya* would be welcomed back to society and not judged for what had happened to us. We were not to be considered Muslims because the religion was forced upon us, and because we had been raped, we were victims, not ruined women...our religious leaders wrote a dictum telling all Yazidis that what had happened to them was not their fault...they should welcome *sabaya* back to the community with open arms. I have never loved my community more than in that moment of compassion. (Murad 295)

It represented a crucial ethical turning point. It challenged patriarchal norms where purity was important. It also redefined the Yazidi identity in more inclusive and trauma-informed terms. The Yazidi leadership disrupted the necropolitical logic imposed by ISIS, resisting the erasure of the subjectivity of women and reaffirming their place within the community. They did not allow the violence to define their fate. The Yazidi society chose to embrace a form of healing rooted in spiritual solidarity. This decision became a counter-discourse to the intended destruction of ISIS. It was the success of the Yazidi community over the necropolitical agenda of ISIS. They were not rendered socially dead as it was planned by ISIS. The strategy of ISIS was not only to exterminate the Yazidi lives but to destroy the Yazidi

identity from within. They made the violated women ungrievable and socially abject. But the decision of the Yazidi religious leadership to welcome back the *sabaya* without any prejudice was an act of defiance. It rescued the Yazidi women from the symbolic zone of death into which ISIS had thrown them. The Yazidi leadership reasserted their ethics of inclusion and care by publicly declaring their dignity intact.

Immediate psychological healing was not possible as far as the Yazidi survivors were concerned. Intense bodily alienation and emotional fragmentation were continuously experienced by many survivors continued to experience them. The limits of symbolic and institutional gestures in addressing the deep injuries of sexual violence were revealed.

Nothing the Baba Sheikh said or did could make us feel completely normal again. We all felt broken. Women went to great lengths to try to purify themselves. Many survivors underwent ‘re-virginization’ surgery, repairing the hymen in the hope of erasing the memory and the stigma of rape. (Murad 295-296)

This choice was not condemned by Murad. “How could a ‘simple procedure’ erase the times Hajji Salman raped me, or when he had allowed his guards to rape me as punishment for trying to escape?... Still, I understood why other girls would do it” (Murad 296). The Yazidi girls were seeking any kind of solution for their pain. They wanted themselves to be free from the existential rupture that sexual violence produced. The scars, both visible and invisible, remained sites of unresolved pain

and contested meaning. Post-genocidal rehabilitation was not a restoration of the old order. It was truly a new entry into a fractured ontology.

The Yazidi women enacted a radical form of survival in refusing shame and reclaiming their voice. It resisted the dehumanisation of ISIS. Murad's journey began to shift from survival to activism within the liminal geographies of the refugee camp. Yazda and fellow survivors like Dimal catalysed a pathway out of the stagnation she experienced after escape. A symbolic re-entry into a world that had long failed to protect her was made possible through her migration to Germany. It was more than physical escape. Even that process was structurally difficult: "Twelve days, every day going to a different office, to be fingerprinted, to have photos taken and to get vaccinated against various strange diseases" (Murad 300). The trauma of war gave way to a new phase of precarious belonging. Murad and Dimal went to Lalish before leaving Iraq for Germany.

Dozens of former *sabaya* flooded the streets of the holy village, crying and praying, dressed in mourning black. Dimal and I kissed the door frame of Sheikh Adi's temple... praying for the safe return of everyone who was alive, for happiness in the afterlife... for ISIS to have an answer for what they did to us. (Murad 297)

These acts and prayers transformed Lalish into both a sanctuary and a symbolic tribunal.

New layers of existential precarity were introduced in their migration to Germany. "It was harder for Yazidis in other countries. Some refugees had arrived

in places where it was clear they weren't wanted; no matter what kind of horrors they were escaping" (Murad 300). It exposed the conditionality of Western hospitality. Grief becomes political in contexts where certain lives are rendered more grievable than others. "Other Yazidis were trapped in Iraq, desperate for the opportunity to leave," and the temporality of waiting became "another kind of suffering" (Murad 300). Nadia Murad emerged onto the global stage by addressing the United Nations forum on minority issues in November 2015. It was a shift from a survivor into a witness within the international moral and legal order.

I wanted to talk about everything- the children who died of dehydration fleeing ISIS, the families still stranded on the mountains, the thousands of women and children who remained in captivity, and what my brothers saw at the site of the massacre. I was only one of hundreds of thousands of Yazidi victims. My community was shattered, living as refugees inside and outside Iraq. There was so much the world needed to hear about what was happening to Yazidis. (Murad 299)

This was the first time she addressed a larger audience with her story. Her activist trajectory was made official by Yazda. Her testimony moved between the intimate and the geopolitical realms. It was a genocide marked by deferred justice and global inertia. She urged the need to establish a "safe zone for religious minorities in Iraq, to prosecute ISIS for genocide and crimes against humanity" (Murad 300). Through her public speech, she made it clear that the abuse of the Yazidi women should be there in a war crime committed by ISIS. "Yazidism should be taught in schools from Iraq to the US, so that people understand the value of preserving an ancient

religion... Yazidis, along with other religious and ethnic minorities, are at once made Iraq a great country” (Murad 300). She resisted the epistemic erasure ISIS imposed and asserted the dignity of the Yazidi religion. Through writing genuinely and making public speeches with clarity, she exhibited the politics of Yazidi survival, and it was a blow to the necropower of ISIS. “I knew that if my story were to have any impact, I would have to be as honest as I could... deciding to be honest was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made, and also the most important” (Murad 300). She revealed the painful reality of being taken as a *sabiyya* and getting raped. This declaration captures the ontological burden borne by survivors. They have to live both as a witness and a wound in a world where remedial measures may never arrive.

It was Murad Ismael, co-founder of Yazda catalysed the transition of Nadia Murad from survivor to globally recognised activist. This organisation was committed to rescuing, supporting, and advocating for the Yazidi survivors. Murad remained in a liminal state and was uncertain about her future in exile. She “wanted to feel useful,” but had to envision a trajectory for her own agency. It was then that she met Murad Ismael, who invited her to work with Yazda, where she could “see her future more clearly...After I met Murad, I started to become the person I am today” (Murad 302-303). Murad found a community of shared experience within Yazda, and it was also a platform for legal and cultural reparation. She “worked alongside all the men and women with Yazda to help survivors like her who have to live every day with what they have been through,” channelling personal loss into a

political strategy of visibility and action (Murad 303). Her narrative became central to the international campaign for justice.

The terrorists didn't think that Yazidi girls would be able to leave them, or that we would have the courage to tell the world every detail of what they did to us. We defy them by not letting their crimes go unanswered. Every time I tell my story, I feel that I am taking some power away from the terrorists. (Murad 303)

These testimonies, though "hard to hear" (Murad 304), played a critical role in giving global recognition for the Yazidi genocide and initiating conversations about rebuilding Iraq. "Our stories... have made a difference," (Murad 304). It was a testament to the potential of survivor-led activism. "Justice is all Yazidis have now, and every Yazidi is part of the struggle" (Murad 304). In the wake of genocide, the survivors wanted to safeguard a threatened cultural identity. "People who were farmers, students, merchants and housewives have become religious scholars... teachers... and human rights activists like Nadia" (304). This shift was a form of cultural resistance, a refusal to allow Yazidism to vanish with the lives lost at Kocho.

She transformed her pain into political testimony, standing at the UN headquarters in New York. Her activism reached a symbolic zenith when she became the United Nations' Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. "My story, told honestly and matter-of-fact, is the best weapon I have against terrorism, and I plan on using it until those terrorists are put on trial" (Murad 306). Here, narrative became a mechanism of justice. Her articulation of

trauma functioned as a testimony. Murad reclaimed her narrative power by refusing the silencing often imposed on survivors of sexual violence and ethnic cleansing. Her wish “to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine” (306) is a universal plea for the end of genocidal violence. She tried to reclaim the Yazidi female body, a site ISIS had marked for domination and erasure. Murad explained the horrors of her captivity not to sensationalise but to expose sexual violence as a deliberate instrument of war. She did not allow the violence to remain unspeakable. Her work functioned as a counter-memory, a memory that challenged dominant historical narratives by preserving the truths of the marginalised (Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 160). She writes, “They wanted to wipe us from history, but now the world knows who the Yazidis are” (209). Her testimony has rewritten the fate of the Yazidi community.

The activism of Nadia Murad traces the transformation of testimony into international justice; at the same time, the narrative of Farida Khalaf shifts the lens back to the moment of captivity. The possibility of resistance must be imagined within conditions of extreme constraint itself. *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS*, by Farida Khalaf, provides an account of survival from within the very heart of the ISIS apparatus. It offers insight into how the agency operates not only in political forums but also in confined and terrorised spaces. The question of escape was not merely a logistical challenge for the Yazidi women and girls under the captivity of ISIS. It was a symbolic articulation of selfhood within the structure of domination. The idea of escape remained a collective horizon of hope even in conditions of extreme torture and brutality. Longing for escape was always deeply rooted in spiritual

endurance: “Lord, please let everything turn out all right. Let us find a way to escape them” (Khalaf 109). The brutal stillness of captivity was disrupted by this prayer uttered in a whisper. It operates as a subaltern futurity, a radical vision of survival that emerges from the margins. It insists on a future even when none seems possible. Khalaf and her fellow captives enacted this futurity through action on the first night of captivity under Abu Arram. They thoroughly searched the prison for any points of weakness despite being physically dominated and spatially disempowered. “That window is only fastened with wire” (Khalaf 108). This became their site of possibility. Khalaf loosened the wire “with the tips of her fingers” (Khalaf 109). It became a “tactic”, a momentary act of resistance performed by those who stood without the privileges of institutional power (de Certeau 37). This was an act of quiet subversion that transformed the prison space from a zone of absolute control into a fugitive agency. The will and the means to resist remained intact even in total captivity.

They were charged with tension, anticipation, and hope. “My heart was thumping euphorically. All my fellow prisoners crowded around me. In total darkness, I pushed up the window, and we breathed in the fresh nighttime breeze... It was a massive moment. All that separated us from freedom was a window shutter!” (Khalaf 109). It was more than a fleeting act of defiance. The necropower ISIS tried to impose was ruptured in any small act of resistance. In that moment of hope, the captives experienced the performative force of appearance in a regime that worked for their erasure. To breathe freely was to rupture the ontology of captivity. The shift between hope and repression was rapid and punishing under such regimes.

The moment of hope was violently redirected into submission just when the captives touched the edge of possibility,

Abu Arram switched on the light and saw the six of us gathered around the open window. We stared at him as if we'd seen a ghost... 'What are you brats up to? He yelled... Do you really think you can take me a fool like that? You don't behave like that with me, bitch! Do you understand? (Khalaf 109)

This violent interruption was the logic of necropower. It was a system that governed through the calculated distribution of death and the containment of life (Mbembe 80). The attempt indicated that resistance was never wholly extinguished, even within this violent regime. They could crush it or momentarily suppress it. But it was never absent as Khalaf portrayed it. The captives gathered around the window, imagining freedom, which was itself a form of solidarity for escape. It was a gesture towards a future that is not yet realised, but relentlessly hoped for.

They did not stop with this attempt to escape, even though they got caught and warned, "Maybe you could try the other window... There was the other window! In the heat of the moment, Abu Aram hadn't fixed a lock to that one" (Khalaf 112). They kept on trying all the possible ways to get out of ISIS captivity. "We've done it! We're out!" (Khalaf 113). The moment of happiness revealed the "insurgent ground" of the enslaved. It was the ephemeral space where rupture, refusal, and the yearning for freedom arise even within systems that make such freedom structurally unattainable (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 74). "An overwhelming feeling of joy pulsed through my body. I swiftly put on the Islamic

clothing so we wouldn't be stopped and locked up again" (Khalaf 113). Her immediate decision to wear Islamic clothing did not signify submission; instead, it portrayed a form of subversive mimicry. It was a performative strategy of camouflage. This act of escaping served as a form of defiance. It made her navigate through frameworks of her oppressors and gradually disrupt their control. It demanded a deep understanding and adaptive intelligence. They thought they could be free. But they were caught again, "You damned devil children. Didn't I tell you it wouldn't end well?" (Khalaf 113), and the resulting sale of the girls to "Emir Zeyad... also known as the Beasts" (Khalaf 113) marked a brutal intensification of grievable life. There was a systematic devaluation and also a commodification of bodies that were deemed outside the frame of normative humanity. Though they were rendered fungible within the necropolitical economy of ISIS, their spirit of resistance was not extinguished. Evin had given Farida a hope again, "Don't lose heart, Farida. We'll find a way home" (Khalaf 136). It reaffirmed a relational ethics of survival. What made them alive was not just an individual's willpower, but it was the strength of solidarity that the captives maintained. These girls constructed spaces of care, belief, and psychic resistance against the attempts of ISIS to dehumanise and erase. Survival itself became a form of protest.

The individuality of the Yazidi women amid the fractures of dominance was dealt with in Khalaf's narrative, dismantling the dominating apparatus of ISIS. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari assert in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, resistance often manifests as "lines of flight", ruptures that are not merely spatial escapes but ontological acts of becoming, insurgent redefinitions of the self within

oppressive systems (18). Such attempts of escape were highlighted in Khalaf's continuous refusals to surrender. Even after repeated violations and thwarted attempts, she was still trying. Her determination constructed an emancipatory politics from deep within its core of captivity. Her suicide attempt was a crucial turn in her resistance narrative, where she began to employ a strategic revolt. She was literally and metaphorically enclosed in the "container." Even in complete enclosure, she was keen to observe the patterns of the guards, studying their routines and mapping out possibilities for escape. She became an "embodied agency under duress," a form of political subjectivity cultivated within the very structures designed to remove it (Butler, *Frames of War* 16). Her resistance was shaped by a deep knowledge situated in her environment. It was a tactical reappropriation of captivity into a space for resistance. "We've got to create the opportunity ourselves" (Khalaf 164). The tactical resistance reached its crucial moment when the girls decided to search a soldier's backpack inside the container where they were kept captives. "Our 'owners' would send us in groups of three to look after the containers of all their friends and colleagues... Let's search his backpack. Maybe we'll find something we can use!" (Khalaf 165). A proactive subversion of the passive endurance was shown through this immediate thought of searching the owners' belongings. They searched for the instruments of escape in the captors' tools, which they used to control. Maps, Phones, and SIM cards became counter-surveillance devices in the hands of those who were meant to be subjugated. They cried out of joy when they got a cell phone with a SIM card. "We're only going to take the card... Don't be stupid, Farida! The SIM card is the most important thing. He'd notice if we took his phone" (Khalaf 166). The most responsible and vigilant words

of Evin revealed that their defiance was not impulsive, but it was grounded in observation and meticulous planning. Enslaved people often enacted subtle forms of rebellion through careful, hidden acts rather than explicit revolt (Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 68). The resistance of the Yazidi girls was collaborative, embodied, and often unnoticed. They challenged the reductive portrayals of victimhood. An agency rooted in improvisation, relationality, and expected risk was asserted through their acts of escape. “There was a room where the ISIS soldiers stored items... We immediately caught sight of three phones on the shelf... We’ve got to risk it now...and in a flash, one of the cell phones had vanished beneath her cloak” (Khalaf 167). The girls redefined the forced labour under captivity into a secret intelligence mission searching for something that could help them. The politics of being invisible was revealed here. Resistance that was possible through secret plans exploiting the moments at hand helped them subvert the structure of surveillance and domination.

“Uncle, we don’t have much battery or credit left... Me and seven other girls were abducted and are being held captive in an ISIS military camp. The camp is about an hour out of Deir ez-Zor, near the Omar gas field” (Khalaf 169). Khalaf remembered the phone number that was given to her long time back, and even her memory of it became a survival tool. It was not simply a call for help but was a geolocate act of resistance. By seeking help from family, they transformed the act of resistance into a political intervention. Feelings of love and hope flow through networks and bodies in “affective economies” (Ahmed 29), and they enable agency and allow life to persist in the face of adversity. “Heavens! Leave this with me. I’ll try to find someone who can get you out of there” (Khalaf 170). This response of

Evin's uncle was so comforting and equally motivating for them. They reconfirmed their existence within the structure of social belonging that could transcend captivity.

We were almost bursting with confidence and rekindled hope. Finally, we'd established contact with the outside world. Finally, someone from one of our families knew we were here. Finally, someone was looking after us. Now we were convinced that everything would turn out fine. (Khalaf 170)

They all embraced each other, marking a critical shift from forced alienation to the power of communication. A small contact with the outside world functioned as a restoration of their political subjectivity under the necropolitical regime of ISIS, where individuals were reduced to bare life. Their attempt to communicate with the outside world was highly political. It ensured the re-entry of the Yazidis into agency, future, and history. They got a call back, which largely disappointed them, making a change in the emotional and political geography of their captivity.

The man says the place you're in is too dangerous... It means he can't go there... I know you're disappointed. But believe me, I've been calling around all day along, trying everything. You've got to escape from the camp... I know you can do it. I'll give you the number of the man to contact when you're out... I'm really very sorry. I'd love to be able to do more for you. But it is not in my power. (Khalaf 172)

The external world revealed itself as being incapable of breaching the tightly woven necropolitical apparatus on which the ISIS camp was built. "Our container was in

the middle of the camp and thus surrounded on all sides by the soldiers' billets as well as guards" (Khalaf 172) became an epistemic closure. It became a space where even the thought of escape was not possible. But they were not ready to be submissive to ISIS without even trying. Their resistance could be described as a "counter-conduct". It was a resistance that emerged within the very conditions and institutions that tried to govern their life (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 202). Their refusal to be submissive was a reinforcement of the possible within necropower that tried to control the possibility. It is a politics of subversion from within. It mobilised the shattered hope. The resistance was against the larger structure that made their suffering invisible to the world. The feeling of reimagining possibility was not the same for all the captives. Some of the captives were psychologically paralysed and trapped. ISIS used emotional blackmail strategically. Khalaf shared the reluctance of Sumeya and Reva to try escaping with them. "They threatened to fetch both girls' mothers here as 'replacement' if they dared to attempt to flee" (Khalaf 172). ISIS intensified its domination by creating different forms of vulnerability.

Khalaf, in her attempt to escape, was intellectually, strategically and spatially sensible. She examined the container thoroughly to find an aperture which could help her dismantle the tight network of that space. When she found a door which could be easily opened, they realised, "Can you see how fear makes you blind... But if we rid ourselves of our fear, we can do it" (Khalaf 173-174). This realisation led them to an epistemological rupture. Fear inhibited their perception, and it made the captives metaphorically blind to the endless pathways of escape. It revealed the

internalised domination of fear where continuous exposure to violence and subjugation made the subjects unable to recognise the material availability of freedom right in front of them (hooks 118). ISIS militants came under extreme pressure from an internal fight with other jihadis on December 13, 2014. It unexpectedly destabilised the surveillance apparatus of the camp. In a moment charged with urgency and clarity, Farida recounts: “The men bought us some abayas, the black full-length cloaks, with matching face veils... This is a gift from heaven. These robes will make us invisible” (Khalaf 174). The *abaya*, which marked the religious patriarchal control, was suddenly re-signified as a tool of tactical evasion. This act exemplified what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak theorised as “strategic essentialism.” (Spivak 214). The marginalised subjects became capable of temporarily mobilising imposed identities. They were aware of transforming the religious symbols into instruments of resistance.

“Everything was coming together: the unlocked backdoor, the abayas we needed as a disguise, the empty camp, the phone number of the man we could contact the moment we escaped. This was our chance” (Khalaf 174) produced a now-time. It acted as a revolutionary rupture in the chronological time that opened the possibility for action. Ceasing the right moment was not a result of a mere observation of opportunity at hand, but it was also a reassertion of temporality from below. They interrupted the time by making use of it against the backdrop of slow violence. In that moment, the oppressed subjects attained total control of their narrative and future. But the uneven terrain of resistance was revealed in the stepping back of some captives, proving that not all who were oppressed were in a

position to act. The psychological weight of necropolitical terror was underscored in their hesitation. The threshold between survival and rebellion was in the hands of ISIS. The decision to escape itself was a reclaiming of subjecthood and political life. It was a passage from bare life to intentionally making their world. The escape was both literal and metaphorical. It was a movement away from the prison of terror into the uncertain terrain of freedom. “We started to run. We ran blindly in our bare feet, unable to see where we were heading... We seemed to have nobody on our tail” (Khalaf 178). The cold, darkness, and rain become symbolic of the ambiguous nature of freedom itself. It was not only a moment of triumph, but rather it marked a passage into a space where precarity continued to dominate. “Precarity exposes our social vulnerability to the other” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 20).

“We came across a sign saying ‘Hasakah.’ We knew we were heading toward the Kurdish city” (Khalaf 179). The political geography mattered a lot during the escape. This Kurdish space was contrasted sharply with other territories under ISIS. Spatially and ideologically, this could be taken as a land of safety, but only potentially because the safety of the vulnerable was always mediated through the willingness of others to act in solidarity. The imagination of getting a helping hand from the outside was shattered when Khalaf and her friends contacted Mustafa Hamu. “I’m afraid I can’t help you. You have to understand, I can’t get drawn into an adventure like that” (Khalaf 181). This response of the rescuer made Khalaf lose all hope,

I couldn’t understand why the man was so uncooperative. My friends and I had risked our lives to escape from the camp. He couldn’t just leave us in the

lurch like that. But he refused to change his mind... We realised that this man was not at all interested in our plight. He was a businessman, coolly calculating his entrepreneurial risk. (Khalaf 181)

Survival was privatised, and under necropolitical conditions, rescue, protection, and even recognition became profit-oriented. Survival was no longer considered a human right but a business transaction. The lives of the survivors were commodified in the absence of institutional frameworks to guarantee safety. They had to barter for their existence in an indifferent world.

In contexts of displacement and fear, human beings became precarious. They stood in the midst of helplessness and decided to seek help from a house. “We’re in desperate circumstances, and we need your help. Our lives are in your hand... We were held captive and ran away... We urgently need your help” (Khalaf 185). The vulnerability of fugitive bodies was exposed here. The householder immediately refused the request, “That’s impossible! I ought to go right now and inform the military” (Khalaf 185). It registered a moment of moral panic, and they felt a potential threat. “If you’re a good man and believe in God, then help us! If not, hand us over to ISIS” (Khalaf 185). This emotional and ethical provocation from Evin worked. There was no space for compassion, but it became a business purely: “Maybe we’ll get a reward from their families if we help them” (Khalaf 185). They could then experience a gesture of care and consideration. That was the first instance where they got praised rather than punished for resisting domination. “I finally felt human again, and felt too that I was being treated like one” (Khalaf 187).

Escape is never complete until it is met by a human community willing to recognise it as legitimate. Within the economy of survival, the smuggler Mustafa Hamu became a paradoxical figure. “I was sure the man earned a huge amount of money for his services. And yet I can’t regard his work as anything but honourable. Without a professional helper like him, we’d never have been able to get away from the Islamic State” (Khalaf 192). The moral binaries often imposed upon smugglers in warzones were complicated in Hamu’s role. Within the structure of necropower, Hamu acted as a subversive agent. Making escape from zones of abandonment possible, he intervened in the logic of death imposed by ISIS. The border was not a geopolitical line alone but also became a space of exception where the rules of law were suspended. “It doesn’t matter. The PKK, which controls the border on our side, and the Peshmerga on the Iraqi side have agreed to let through the Yazidi returnees even without passports” (Khalaf 192). Khalaf’s disbelief in this suggested how the Yazidi survivors inhabit a liminal identity outside the protection of state law. “An odd feeling of euphoria came over me at the thought of putting a foot in my homeland again... My heart began thumping wildly” (Khalaf 194)

“You’re alive, you’re alive. Nothing else matters” (Khalaf 194). These words of her uncle Adil helped her reaffirm survival, and it restored her to the symbolic order from which she had been forcibly cut out. “To be grievable is to be acknowledged as a life that matters, one whose loss would be mourned and whose presence is politically intelligible” (Butler, *Frames of War* 15). Under ISIS, the captives were situated in a “derealized” zone where life could be expended without any harm (Butler, *Frames of War* 33). The moment of recognition became a

symbolic resurrection in which Khalaf felt that she was alive. She could regain her identity and also her ontological status as a subject capable of being loved, seen, and heard. The journey of escape from Hasakah to Derikk became a metaphysical passage, a return from the necropolitical margins into the domain of life that mattered. It became a form of defiance against the erasure imposed by the Islamic State. Her return to Iraq was a confrontation with its erasure. “We did not go back to Kocho; our home there didn’t exist anymore” (Khalaf 195). Home was no longer a spatial or emotional refuge after the genocide. It became a site of loss rather than belonging. Only a dislocated self remained. The identity of the survivors was denied socio-political agency and legal protection, making their survival contingent, not guaranteed. The refugee container near Dohuk was a spatial manifestation of the “differential allocation of precarity.” Certain lives are systemically exposed to displacement, neglect, and ungrievability in the socially and politically produced conditions (Butler, *Frames of War* 25). The shift from Kocho to a camp container became more than a geographic shift in their life. It also enacted a transformation of subjectivity. These spaces were not neutral zones of refuge. But they stood as biopolitical thresholds where life was regulated, surveilled, and rendered barely sustainable. Their life was preserved in the camps, but it was neither empowered nor fully recognised. The Yazidi survivor was no longer captive, yet still not free; no longer invisible, yet still marginalised, where survival was offered without sovereignty.

Khalaf met with the harrowing uncertainty of her fate, “We don’t know for sure, Farida. Your mother and the little boys are probably still imprisoned. We

suspect they're in Tal Afar or Mosul" (Khalaf 195). This ambiguity in the life of her family caused a psychic rupture.

That was like a knife in my heart. My poor mother! Had she endured the same as me? Had she been sold as a slave too? I'd have been willing to offer myself immediately to the terrorists to take her place. For how could I enjoy my own freedom if she was still imprisoned? (Khalaf 196)

The uncertainty formed an epistemic violence. Cathy Caruth conceptualised this as "the trauma of survival" (100). It was not simply living through violence, but continuing in the wake of what cannot yet be mourned or known. She experienced an emotional and ethical impasse. Her freedom rendered a site of unbearable ethical dissonance. It was a freedom hollowed by the continued captivity of another. What remained unsaid and unresolved haunted her voice. It revealed how trauma got multiplied in the gaps between self and other, responsibility and freedom.

The relief at having succeeded in our escape gave way to a black mood. It was like making a mockery of my own rescue; without family, my newfound freedom was all of a sudden pointless... I understood that my old life was irrevocably over; it would never be the same as it once was. (Khalaf 196-197)

It marked the entry into "the afterlife of violence," where subjectivity was reconstituted through the painful continuity of a changed new life (Das 8).

The necropolitical logic of ISIS continued to reverberate in the refugee camp through mechanisms of moral judgment. The camp became a site of "symbolic

violence” where the invisible and the normalised systems of domination reproduced social hierarchies through misrecognition (Bourdieu 170). This was explicit in the judgement of an elderly woman in the camp, “Our poor girls, defiled. They’ll never be able to marry. No man will take them as their wives now. Their lives are ruined forever” (Khalaf 200). This revealed the cultural codes that exist in their community or in any community where womanhood was equated with sexual purity. The social worth of a woman was measured based on her capability to get married. The survivors were discarded first by the physical violence of ISIS, and then by a communal belief that treated them as irreparably defiled. They became subjects of social death, stripped of relational belonging and civic recognition (Patterson 5). Violence outlived the battlefield, and it continued in the lives of the Yazidi survivors. Khalaf’s journey made it clear that survival was not the end of violence, but it was often a continuous haunting through the very discourses and institutions meant to offer refuge.

My heart was pounding like mad and I could barely hold back the tears. I hid under my blanket, not wanting to see anyone. So that’s what they really thought of us... Her savage judgement had broken my spirit, something that ISIS with all its cruelty hadn’t managed. Why should I show my face outside the camp if people were gossiping about me behind my back? What point was there in go on living? (Khalaf 200)

The refugee camp reproduced another kind of violence, subtle, social, and deeply wounding. She was being reduced to a dishonoured body. “I was nothing, a nobody, a stranded girl burdening my relatives. I had no future. Perhaps it would have been

better not to return to this world” (Khalaf 200). Her state of being “a nobody” clearly exposed the lingering effects of necropower. It destroyed not only bodies but also the meaning and value of life. She felt that her life no longer mattered. By being an ungrievable subject, she got excluded from social recognition.

The emergence of a counter-narrative was marked by Evin. “Listen, we didn’t fight all these battles with the jihadis only to allow ourselves to be browbeaten by our relatives. We mustn’t stick our heads in the sand” (Khalaf 201). Evin had given her the confidence to resist the moral policing of their own community. The feeling of shame was further disrupted with the help of Afrah Ibrahim, a social worker. Her open talk helped Khalaf, “It’s essential that you get checked up by a doctor because your ‘owners’ may have infected you with a disease... Don’t worry. Every disease can be treated and cured” (Khalaf 202). From the domain of communal dishonour, Khalaf could reclaim agency over her body and place the body within health and healing. Afrah depathologized the survivors. The focus was shifted from moral purity to recovery and resilience. She redefined the concept of honour, “Don’t listen to them. If you give licence to such thoughts, it’s like giving those ISIS criminals permission to abuse you again... You haven’t lost your honour. On the contrary, you were brave and have every reason to go through life with your head held high” (Khalaf 202-203). It was a return to social recognizability for lives previously deemed unworthy (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). At times of utmost negativity, the confidence given by real supporters would become a life-changer.

We mustn't give our tormentors the power to continue to destroy our lives. In captivity we'd defied these criminals. But we had to resist them now as well. I understood that the fight was far from over. Every day we'd have to defend ourselves anew against this destructive force, which even from the past threatened to swallow us into a black hole... No, I had refused to allow myself to be browbeaten in captivity...by other people who thought I'd lost my 'honour'... It was a constant battle. It is a constant battle. But I will win it, as I have all my battles up till now. (Khalaf 202-203)

The battle against jihadist captivity then shifted to a battle against communal misogyny within the community. She reclaimed her subjectivity. She was determined to resist consciously and regularly. Both terrorist brutality and patriarchal complicity were challenged by the narratives of the Yazidi women.

Every day more returnees arrived at the camp. Many of the girls my age were on the verge of a mental breakdown... quiet a number of them tried to kill themselves out of shame, or they started harming themselves... At night we often hear screams echoing around the camp... It was as if our tormentors were grasping at us with their filthy hands, even beyond captivity. (Khalaf 205)

The camp became a site where grief, shame, and trauma were remembered and relived. Cathy Caruth explains that trauma disrupts the linearity of time and fractures communal bonds, making the suffering of one person reverberate among others (24). Even in the physical absence of the captor, the survivors were dominated by the fear given by ISIS of their cultural rejection of women who lost

their virginity. The self-harming and suicidal thoughts of the Yazidi girls exemplified this. They were not directly targeted for death but remained exposed to social erasure, marginalisation, and psychological decay. Working along with Afrah Ibrahim, Khalaf and Evin, they positioned themselves not only as survivors but as caretakers to offer support to the affected ones.

A new door was opened for them when a German delegation visited the camp in March 2015. Their proposal offered a chance for resettlement for the Yazidis. It was a path away from Iraq and toward a different future. This opportunity brought hope and dilemmas,

On the one hand, leaving my country behind seemed like a betrayal. On the other hand, I had to accept that I had absolutely no future here at the moment. I couldn't even finish my schooling. Instead, I was getting wary looks from people. Maybe new opportunities would open up for me in Germany. (Khalaf 208)

The tension between the desire to remain connected to one's homeland and the need to migrate to survive expressed her internal conflict. It also revealed a negotiation between rootedness and exile, identity and escape.

Her narrative did not follow a linear path from escape to liberation. Trauma re-entered through her body and emotions when her mother had escaped. "My mother was nothing but skin and bones. She looked terribly old and emaciated. Her dark hair was streaked with grey, and deep furrows lined her face" (Khalaf 210). Her body itself became a text of survival. It was marked by grief, starvation and

prolonged exposure to violence. Veena Das notes that the body in such contexts bears the imprint of history, where trauma inscribes itself not just in memory but in skin, voice, and gaze (67). Her mother's return made their regrouping and union possible. Recognising the reality of their land, her mother said,

There's no future for us in Kocho anymore. How could we live there after all that's happened? We'd never feel safe again... take this opportunity. Maybe you can start a new life there. There's no fresh start here, you know that.

People are too caught up in their old ways of thinking. (Khalaf 215)

A decolonial clarity was offered in her mother's voice. It was awareness that physical return to the homeland did not guarantee psychological, emotional or political recovery. The very idea of "home" got shattered. It became within the failed structures that could have upheld the safety and dignity of it. The idea home was irrevocably destroyed.

Khalaf's departure to Germany was an attempt to reorient her toward futurity. It was a determination to reimagine herself beyond the ruins of Kocho. She refused to stay in a land of wounds and pain, but she became a carrier of their testimony. She emerged as a living archive through resilience still possible. Her relocation was of dislocation too. "Since summer 2015, I've been living in Germany... You'd think I'd have been delighted, finally, to go somewhere at peace. But adapting to this new, strange world has not been a simple process for me" (Khalaf 216). The psychic wounds of war remained unresolved, though she had crossed into a nation at peace. "I wanted to leave all the horror in the past. But it haunted me in Germany too, for of course I carry it within me" (Khalaf 217). The

trauma she experienced in her land also migrated with her. It resisted containment by national borders or therapeutic settings. The body became a site where political violence materialised and lingered, even long after formal protection was granted (Butler, *Frames of War* 21).

In Germany, the location of Khalaf and her family was kept a secret. It underscored their continued vulnerability. Safety became a managed condition. It was not a liberated one for the Yazidis. The stateless refugee was stripped of full political belonging (Arendt 267). Her identity was suspended between categories. She was not wholly a citizen, not fully in exile, marked always by the violence caused by her displacement. Khalaf tried to reclaim her agency within this vulnerability, “When I’ve finished school in Germany, I’ll study to become a math teacher as I’ve always wanted to. The fanatics who degrade us and treat us like objects are not going to stop me from pursuing this goal. I survived to prove to them that I’m stronger than they are” (Khalaf 218). Survival became a deliberate act of political defiance. The move from precarity to recognizability marked a shift from bare life to subjecthood. The ungrievable subject articulated futurity within institutional and discursive frameworks (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). Her determination to pursue education functioned as a counter-narrative to the dehumanising ideologies that tried to erase her. Her healing process was layered and accumulative: “She has learned to accept that the violence inflicted on her is part of her story... Farida has won the fight against ISIS and can live her life with her head held high” (Khalaf 225). Andrea C. Hoffmann observes, Khalaf defeated the terrorists twice. Once by escaping their physical violence. And the second is by

banishing the terror from her head. This battle was perhaps the more difficult of the two” (Khalaf 225). The victory over her psyche underscored that survival was the reclamation of inner life from its residues.

The linear or reductive narratives of victimhood were defied in Khalaf’s trajectory. It was not confined to a passive script of suffering. Her story revealed the “complex architecture of survival”, a configuration marked by rupture, support, and the will to reconstitute selfhood (Butler, *Frames of War* 34). Her desire to be a math teacher was an act of narrative reclamation. Khalaf resisted the necropolitical logic in choosing to define her beyond the violence imposed upon her. She was no longer a subject of objectification. She became an agent of knowledge, reclaiming her life not without trauma, but through it.

Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar portrayed escape as a rebirth into agency. It was a moment where resistance was inscribed from the traumatised body. Nadja’s will to survive remains undiminished even in the unbearable suffering she endured under ISIS captivity, “Hope was still springing in Nadja’s broken heart” (White 144). It was paradoxical that they should carry hope within fragmentation. She inherited that strength from her mother, “She had been taught by the best to never give up. Rooba was not only her mother but her best friend on earth. Rooba did not let ISIS win, and neither would Najda” (White 171). Rooba’s memory became a guiding force for Nadja to live. It was not her hallucination that her dead mother continued to speak to her, “Whenever she felt she would fail, she heard her mother’s sweet voice whispering to her from some eternal canyon. It seemed to say, Nadja, live” (White 171). That had given her the strength to regain her subjectivity rather than being an

object of ISIS. The captors who once denied Nadja her power were then called “animals.” It was a reversal of the colonial gaze that made the oppressed reclaim their moral authority. She enacted survival in her escape. “She tried the door. It was unlocked and just waiting to be opened” (White 176). The door was not a physical barrier alone, but it functioned as a “threshold” between bare life and potential life, a space where transformation became possible (Agamben, *Means Without End* 67). The unlocking of the door suggested that captivity was never absolute.

Nadja, when she “dropped down on fours to crawl out,” expressed a primal regression, a necessary submission before re-emergence. She reclaimed her dignity in this vulnerable posture. “A blaze of victory and excitement ran through her so fiercely that she would remember that feeling for the rest of her life” (White 176). This paradox of the trauma was illustrated at that moment. Even in its most painful moments of trauma, there can be lights of clarity, power, and resistance. Nadja’s realisation that this would be her only chance to gain freedom was an embodied declaration of subjecthood attained through pain and risk. Crawling, hiding, and rising, Nadja made the intricate movements of her escape where the body served as a locus for the enactment of both violence and healing (Das 101).

Although in great pain, she moved stealthily like a cat, and then cautiously rose up and began to walk. Every step was painful with her whole body hurting, but she was responding to the sweet invitation of freedom. She was afraid for her life and flooded with great expectations at the same time.

(White 176)

The word “invitation” came from the heart. It presented freedom as a call, not just as a destination. It became a force that drew her toward life. Her body became both archive and testimony. It preserved the pain of captivity even when moved toward liberation. It was not a passive survival. It was a deliberate attempt to dismantle the necropower of ISIS. The fragile threshold between terror and hope that defines the Yazidi resistance was revealed in her act. Nadja reclaims authorship over a narrative that ISIS attempted to erase in reclaiming her body and movement over immobility. She was escaping the space of death. “She did not even want any of the girls to follow her as they would slow her down on that sacred mission” (White 178). It revealed not her selfish interests but how resistance took shape as a solitary and urgent need within such necropolitical terrain. It was driven by instinct and a fierce will to survive, making it both sacred and perilous. The urgency and desperation of her escape were further revealed when she forgot her shoes in her hurry to leave captivity. “Her feet getting sliced like raw meat” (White 177) became a metaphor for the cost of the body in liberation. The wounds she incurred were not markers of helplessness but evidence of her movement toward freedom. That helped her transform from a passive victim into an embodied subject. Pain did not paralyse or stop her; it became the force that propelled her forward.

She did not have clarity on where she was walking. Her destination was vague, “some surviving cousins or friends in a small village”, and she “did not know how she would get there” (White 177). This uncertainty mirrors the broader ambiguity faced by genocide survivors. Their future is largely unplanned and undefined. “She was determined to keep heading east and then south, where the

safety to at least breathe again would lie” (White 178). Despite her exhaustion, she kept walking. She became an image of grievability in action. She asserted her right to live, even in a terrain that made life unlivable.

Nadja had made a run for it and nothing or no one would get in her way. She was breathing fresh freedom and her revenge was in the face that she would not be touched by these cruel animals ever again. She had taken off running, tasting victory in every step. Food and water were distant thoughts in her mind. The fresh air and no one claiming her body for that moment was incentive enough. (White 197)

The terrain of power shifted when the Peshmerga soldiers found her. At first, they thought, she might be “strapped with bombs.” Even in escape, the survivor’s body was caught within the threat of surveillance. She had undergone a trauma-induced muteness; “she had not responded to any of their commands.” But “from her looks, they understood that she was innocent” (White 179). They recognised her innocence, reading the pain inscribed on her body. In spaces marked by extreme violence, the body often becomes the first and final medium through which meaning is communicated and compassion enacted (Das 101).

“They invited her to walk through a door. A door of safety and comfort” (White 200). This door was a powerful metaphor. It was unlike the ones she had crawled out of. It did not symbolise escape but asylum. It was a door of re-entry into a world where life was possible and where subjectivity was recognised. In Yazidi escape narratives, doors often appear as thresholds of transformation, from captivity to liberation, from silence to voice. With the strength of having endured the trauma,

Nadja crossed this threshold. Nadja's narrative was a lived critique of the structures that left certain lives disposable. She voiced her resistance through her barefoot journey, her passage through the symbolic door of rescue, and also by evading death. Her agency was not erased by violence but forged through it. It was Amir, the Peshmerga commander escorted Nadja to Sege, a Christian village.

He was a Muslim and she had no other recourse but to trust him... she was in another difficult situation. Nadja had to depend now on this Muslim man and his forces if she wanted to live. She had no other choice.... After being abandoned and abused, Nadja sensed real love flowing from a man that she had never met before. (White 200)

Her journey entered the "sanctuary stage" in the aftermath of trauma. According to Herman, this stage marked the first step toward recovery. The survivor sought safety before they could articulate their trauma (155). However, safety would not immediately lead to speech or healing. Arrival in Sege did not prompt her to tell her story or even express her feelings. It provoked a desire to withdraw completely: "She just wanted to hide for eternity with no one asking her questions" (White 205). The interior of trauma got expressed in her wish to be invisible, acts of covering her face, and avoiding questions. Cathy Caruth explains that trauma is often an "unclaimed experience, one that cannot be fully known or processed at the moment it occurs. It returns belatedly, expressed through physical distress or emotional muteness rather than narrative coherence" (4). The "inner storm" metaphor for her ongoing psychological turmoil illustrates that trauma continued to live in the body. Her silence was a symptom of survival where healing became longer and nonlinear.

“The physical injuries due to the rapes, and pains from the beatings could prove much easier to heal than the mental abuse and loss of her family that she had endured” (White 14). The bifurcation between physical and psychological wounds became sharply evident here. The enduring nature of psychological trauma was expressed in this dichotomy. It was brutal, particularly for women whose bodies had been politicised and militarised by systemic sexual violence. The body became a medium through which shame, grief, and memory were communicated. The physical trauma of the Yazidis was measurable, treatable, and even visible. But the psychic wounds they had inflicted were beyond what medicine or care could reach. The post-conflict humanitarian response had its limits, which were proved by her internal storm. Villages like Sege provided temporary solace for her. But nothing could address the necrosocial condition she endured, the living dead situation imposed by such cruel regimes. Nadja’s silence was a survival strategy. She maintained control over her fragmented subjectivity in choosing not to tell her story. She defied the demand for healing in performance that was often accompanied by humanitarian rescue.

A deep symbolic confrontation with the afterlife of violence had been seen in Nadja’s relocation to a trauma clinic in Germany. It was more than a geographical shift. Though physically distanced from ISIS territory, Nadja inhabited “the endless impact of trauma in the present,” a space where memory resisted erasure and healing became a paradox (Caruth 11). The trauma clinic served both as a sanctuary and a symbolic enclosure. It was a site that acknowledged the threat experienced by survivors even in exile. Nadja was housed in a facility designed “to help destroy any

memories that had violently fleeced her of her childhood.” She was confronted with the unbearable truth that healing could not be administered like medicine, but it must be lived through in layers of haunting (White 20).

Barbara White presented Nadja’s recovery not as a linear or redemptive one. Nadja was depicted as fragmented. She was portrayed as a soul inhabited by memories that were violently imposed upon her: “None of those inflicted memories were hers but imposed and perpetrated on her by ‘human beings’ who conducted life lower than any animal” (White 20). She lived in a necropolitical condition where sovereign power exercised violence not just to kill, but to keep certain lives unliveable and also turning their bodies into battlegrounds (Mbembe 80). She had the challenge to reclaim authorship over a life repeatedly violated and overwritten by ISIS. Germany offered her physical safety. But her psychological state remained deeply precarious. “She was as fragile as worn lace. Her memories had devoured her hopes, as they were still so fresh in her mind” (White 25). “She could not foresee any chance of real recovery, full or even partial” (White 24). It destabilised the humanitarian ideal of the refugee as a “rescued subject.” Her identity was suspended between trauma and uncertain recovery. The self was formed through social exposure, injury, and vulnerability. Nadja’s subjectivity emerged from the very precarity that was meant to destroy her. It was shaped “from the outside, from our social lives, from the threats and injuries we receive” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 23).

Anger emerged not as a destructive force but as a generative one in this bleak psychological terrain. Nadja’s fury became a survival instinct. She “had to remind herself every morning that she was in a safe place” (White 25). It was an act of

emotional labour that underscored the regularity required to root her in the present in a state where the past continued to intrude. This anger was redefined as agency in female trauma survivors. Sara Ahmed contends that female survival is not merely about endurance but about “refusing to adjust to a world that accommodates violence” (235). Her anger was an insistence on a future not wholly scripted by the violence of the past. She significantly resisted a complete closure. Her insistent hope, though fragile, did not signify any resolution, but it was an ethical decision to live with trauma. She did want to survive by forgetting, but by learning how she should be remembered on her own terms. Nadja embodied “a history not owned” but continually lived through, a wound that shaped but did not fully define the survivor (Caruth 63).

White did not portray healing as an endpoint. But it was a slow, gradual process that unfolded within the space of post-trauma care. The German trauma clinic had assigned Elza to look after her. “These caregivers were handpicked to tenderly unwrap the painful layers of losing family, home and dignity... She did not patronise Nadja, but served her like she had been a captured queen... She desired to see Nadja rise like a phoenix out of the ashes of despire” (White 17-19) Trauma-informed care provided a regular support, “She could call Elza any time of the day and night” (White 19). Healing emerged through this sustained presence rather than any medical treatment. Elza’s commitment to those “who were violently broken and wounded” (White 17) changed the reductive humanitarian framing of survivors as passive victims. The ethics of care were deeply political. It did not take the survivor as a problem to be solved but as a subject in process. Elza positioned Nadja within a

symbolic realm of rebirth and resistance. Elza stood as a symbol that reframed victimhood as latent sovereignty. There has always been a human tendency to treat survivors as passive recipients of aid. These benevolent frameworks appropriate and silence the voices of the oppressed (Spivak 287).

Healing was a dialogic process that was made possible through continuous presence and emotional support. “Elza saw Nadja’s physical and emotional shock was so recent and brutal... She was so young and had been so innocent. She prayed that there would come a time Nadja would feel compelled to grab onto some kind of anchor of help and hope” (White 20). She had shown an awareness of the temporality of trauma. Trauma often resisted chronological resolution and recurs in waves. Nadja became the “derealization of the Other.” Her sufferings were unintelligible within the frames of justice or grief. Elza decided to share her own story of rape with Nadja. It collapsed the hierarchical distance between caregiver and survivor. “Listening to the wound of the other” was a mode of witness that emphasised vulnerability, not authority (Caruth 8).

A strong and caring individual is not just born, but has been transformed through many fires and this was one she needed to share in. The sufferings of another could change the listener because she knew in her heart that the outcome had to be more profound than those painful moments shared.
(White 214)

Resilience emerged through shared suffering and reciprocal recognition. Elza shifted the trauma narrative into a space of co-witnessing, where healing was constituted relationally. Nadja began to perceive Elza as “a woman who had experienced such

terrible human tragedy on such a deep personal level” (White 214). This recognition became an eye-opener, where trauma revealed a hope and a possibility. “She had examined the life of this precious woman and concluded that she wanted what Elza had. She flew like a bird with no more apparent chains” (White 216). Healing became aspirational. It was no longer an isolated individual misery. Trauma is transmitted through silences, gestures, and narratives (Hirsch 106). Elza did not erase her suffering, but she refigured it into strength. She could become a roadmap for the unfolding subjectivity of Nadja.

Nadja was trying to compose herself... She also, was shameless and free from her captors... Nadja realised that her rapists still controlled her very thoughts and ultimately her actions, even though they were miles away... She could hold on to the shame, or let it fly away and set it free... she would have to grow with the memories, taking total control over her own future. Her life was in her own hands, or some unseen force that could guide her through this ugly mental maze. (White 217)

This haunting was the “descent of the social into the body,” where violence altered the self, interrupting temporality, subjectivity, and voice (Das 6). The psychic residue of political atrocity got sedimented in the body, shaping agency. Nadja’s dilemma marked the emergence of narrative re-ownership. She struggled to rewrite and to re-narrate. She was floating between being acted upon and choosing to act. “She could not change her past, but she could do plenty about her future” (White 227). This moment disrupts the sovereign logic of necropower that made certain bodies disposable, forcing them to inhabit a “death-world,” where existence was

reduced to a “state of injury” (Mbembe 81). Nadja politicised her pain by transforming memory into action.

Now in some small way she was determined to find her own voice again.

She chose to rise above her pain and breathe again, and was determined to begin some hope of new life... Nadja wanted... every woman to know how abuse looks when it dresses up behind religion or racism to show itself, and the ravished angels left behind in its horrid path. (White 227)

By choosing to testify, Nadja enacted a mode of resistance which essential to ethical survival. The grievability of life is politically constructed; some losses are rendered visible while others are obscured (Butler, *Frames of War* 20). Nadja reclaimed visibility for lives that were marked by unacknowledged suffering. Her speech disrupted the imposed silence. In refusing to remain voiceless, Nadja asserted the political value of all subjugated lives. “She was forgiving every captor, every rapist, every neighbour who had betrayed their families” (White 228) marked a radical break from the necropolitical violence. Forgiveness became an act of self-sovereignty: “She was letting them all go” (White 228). Her choice was not to be governed by vengeance or haunted endlessly by her abusers. Nadja reclaimed her emotional and moral agency. ISIS tried to systematically erase the Yazidi women through physical domination and psychological terror, but her decision affirmed a life lived on her own terms.

Nadja, once reduced to a body outside the protection of law, began to reconstruct a life suffused with agency and meaning. In Elza, she found a model of survival. She was gradually getting freed from the psychic grip of trauma,

Nadja was being released from the darkness in incremental steps... she had been introduced to ‘the Light’... Forgiveness was slowly and remarkably cleansing her soul from every rape and assault that she had suffered for almost one year of her young life... She never wanted to return to those awful pits of bondage and despair again. (White 231)

Healing was a steady reclamation of vitality from a life once structured by exhaustion and injury. ISIS imposed a structure where time was suspended in fear, control, and suffering was resisted through healing, which transcended the usual concept regarding healing. Mourning, when made public and narrativised, can become an act of reworlding, a way to recreate the social order after violence has dismantled its foundations (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22).

Nadja’s voice moves toward a global call to justice: “It is very important to tell our stories because the world should know what happened to us, so that it doesn’t happen again” (White 233). Her testimony becomes an ethical intervention in the global memory of atrocity. Nadja reclaims narrative authority, voicing trauma, resisting the erasures that often follow gendered violence. She repositions the Yazidi woman not as an object of pity but as a historical subject who confronts and disrupts the biopolitical regimes that made their life miserable. She refuses to be forgotten and transforms her wounded past into a weapon against future silence.

In *A Cave in the Clouds*, Badeeah Hassan Ahmed documents not only the brutality of ISIS captivity but also the quiet resilience of the Yazidi girls who sustained their agency in the face of dehumanisation. Through acts of memory, hope, and relational solidarity, these young women resisted both the terroristic

regime of Daesh and the cultural stigma that often awaited them upon return. Rather than presenting a narrative of passive suffering, Badeeah Ahmed foregrounds a politics of endurance, an insistence on living in conditions designed to destroy life.

Even in captivity, girls like Badeeah Ahmed and her friend Navine preserved a private world of dreams, a space untouched by physical domination. This inner life functioned as a form of resistance rooted in the precarious ontology of being human: the fact that vulnerability, far from negating agency, can become the very basis for resilience and ethical relation (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22). Navine's advice to Badeeah Ahmed, "Keep your dreams alive and separate from these men. The one thing they cannot take from you is your will to live. Only you can give that way" (Ahmed and McClelland 84), reclaims the will to live as a site of autonomy. In choosing to hope under conditions of forced captivity, the girls resisted the creation of "death-worlds", spaces where individuals are subjected to a form of living death, stripped of personhood and social meaning (Mbembe 92). Their survival was not merely biological, but existential, a defiant reclamation of inner life amid systemic efforts to extinguish it.

When the girls contemplate escape, their actions are not driven by naive optimism but by a pragmatic understanding of the power dynamics embedded within their captivity. Navine's reflection, "The guard may do things to you, Badeeah. He seems different. He's not respected by the others. If I can get him to take us out of the building, maybe he'll let us go. Maybe he'll even help us return to Iraq. It's our only hope" (Ahmed and McClelland 104), reveals a form of situated agency. Rather than waiting for external salvation, the girls identify fissures within the power

structure, specifically the marginal position of the guard within the ISIS hierarchy, as a potential site of disruption. Their resistance is not reactive but strategic, grounded in a careful reading of the social order that governs their lives.

The acquisition of Ameen's phone number through their friend Salwa marks another act of clandestine resistance where oppressed individuals cultivate survival through improvisational networks. Badeeah Ahmed's choice to memorise the number becomes a quiet but potent gesture of defiance, one that affirms the value of relationality under siege. Judith Butler argues, precarious lives endure not in isolation but through "social networks of care and recognition" that make liveability possible amid abandonment and terror (*Precarious Life* 34). These informal circuits of hope, friendship, coded plans, and memorised details become the infrastructure of their potential escape, challenging the dominant narrative of helplessness often imposed upon captives.

The failure of Badeeah Ahmed and Navine's first escape attempt foregrounds the fragility of resistance within spaces governed by sovereign cruelty. The guard's belief that "they would be too afraid to escape" is not only miscalculated but also results in intensified brutality. When they are caught, the punishment is exacted with theatrical violence: "Al-Amriki, their owner, beat both of them. He kicked both in the rib cage. Slapped their cheeks and spat on their faces. To hurt Badeeah more, he took Eivan with him and later announced that he had sold him" (Ahmed and McClelland 167). In this scene, Mbembe's theorization of necropolitics as "the power to expose a whole population to death" (Mbembe 82) materializes through the performative infliction of pain, not merely to discipline, but

to dismantle the interpersonal bonds that constitute the girls' sense of self. Violence here becomes relational: it aims to annihilate not only bodies but attachments, thereby intensifying the condition of disposability.

Al-Amriki weaponises the patriarchal structures of the Yazidi community to deepen the captivity of girls. Before leaving for the frontlines in Kobani, he warns: "You won't escape. I've heard that Yazidi girls like you, who have been married to Daesh men, are killed when they return to their people. Your own people don't want you back. Yazidi men are killing their women. Fathers are killing their own daughters" (Ahmed and McClelland 168). This manipulation is not merely psychological but structurally embedded. By invoking the threat of honour-based violence, he collapses the sense of refuge and belonging of the girls. His strategy mirrors what Butler describes as the uneven distribution of grievability, wherein certain lives, particularly those marked by sexual violation, are rendered unworthy of mourning or social reintegration (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34). In such moments, necropolitics and sociocultural stigma converge, turning communal norms into another mechanism of control.

A Cave in the Clouds reveals that the Yazidi girls enacted forms of resistance through imagination, memory, care, and strategic agency that disrupts the necropower of ISIS. They sustained their will to survive through dreams and solidarity. They defied everything that sought to erase them. In captivity, all the Yazidi women and girls looked for every way to get out.

Al-Amriki, Badeeah Ahmed's captor, informed of his departure for the frontlines in Kobani. "A wave of excitement pulsed through me. This time I would

find a phone and call Ameen” (Ahmed and McClelland 168). But the hope of the Yazidi women captives was always cut off by ISIS using communal fears as a threat: “My thoughts tumbled and crashed into each other” (168). Necropower of ISIS produced subjects who internalise their own dispensability. The violence disabled the will to escape by embedding fear in the very psyche of the captive, telling “Yazidi men are killing their women. Fathers are killing their own daughters” (Ahmed and McClelland 168). Badeeah Ahmed was aware of the communal practices that were so strict. “A few girls had been murdered for falling in love with non-Yazidi boys. When I asked my mother why, she said the Yazidi control of girls was a dark shadow” (Ahmed and McClelland 168). Even the dream of survival was haunted by the possibility of symbolic death in her own community. A differential grievability was formed in this lived reality. Social legibility determines the value of life. Sexually abused Yazidi girls were denied grievability; they became unworthy. Their suffering or death may not provoke collective mourning, or even recognition. The very survival of the girls became an insurgent act within such a framework. It was a powerful refusal to accept the erasure that both cultural norms and Daesh attempted to enforce.

The Yazidi girls channel their fear into resistance amidst this tide of fear. They shifted themselves from emotional imprisonment to active defiance. “I ran back to his room and pulled apart his bedding, hurling it across the room. No maps, but underneath the mattress, I found his phone” (Ahmed and McClelland 171). The phone became a symbolic artefact of structural inequality. It was a reminder of the freedom, safety, and recognition. The girls tried to preserve themselves, though they

were positioned outside the patriarchal and imperial legitimacy. “Navine had discovered a hammer buried under the cleaning supplies in the kitchen” (172), a domestic object turned into a weapon of escape. As she “pounded at the lock on the front door until eventually it yielded” (172), the act becomes emblematic of feminist insurgency from within the home-space, reframing objects of care and maintenance into tools of subversion and mobility. In this moment, their literal exit from the house becomes a symbolic breach of the structures, both ideological and material, that confined them.

This act, crossing the threshold, is profoundly symbolic. It marks a rupture in the spatial and psychological architecture of captivity, asserting the agency of girls in both literal and figurative terms. In Judith Butler’s theorisation, stepping outside such a structure is not merely physical movement but a political gesture that reclaims grievability, the right to be recognised as a life worth mourning, remembering, and protecting. The emergence of the girls from the house thus becomes a radical assertion of personhood, defying the conditions that sought to render them disposable.

As Badeeah Ahmed prepares for a second escape attempt, the consequences of failure grow increasingly severe. “They knew they would be punished severely if they were discovered escaping a second time. Badeeah Ahmed might even face the death penalty for lying under oath in the Quran” (Ahmed and McClelland 176). Here, religious doctrine becomes a disciplinary apparatus, weaponised to enforce obedience and instil fear. The body of the Yazidi woman becomes a contested site where theological, political, and patriarchal forces converge. Some lives are made

more vulnerable by the very social and political systems that deny them recognition or protection (Butler, *Frames of War* 25). Simultaneously, this threat of execution reflects a necropolitical order, the sovereign's power to define who may live and who must die, and to produce obedience through the spectacle and threat of death. Despite the overwhelming atmosphere of fear, the girls act decisively. With the help of an old man, they contact Ameen: "He asked for the number and dialled it for her. They got Ameen. He said, 'Someone named Nezar will come for you. The password is his name. Do not open the door to anyone but him. Nezar is a human smuggler. He will get you out of Syria'" (176). The reliance on Nezar, an agent outside any state-sanctioned rescue apparatus, highlights the structural absence of justice for women like Badeeah Ahmed. Instead, hope resides in fugitive solidarities and informal networks that operate in the shadow of law. This moment illuminates the entangled nature of resistance and illegality, where survival often depends on transgressing the very boundaries that the state, religion, and patriarchal order have constructed. As such, the escape of the Yazidi women is not just a flight from physical captivity but a movement through and against intersecting regimes of control.

The anxiety of Badeeah Ahmed during their escape is portrayed with harrowing immediacy: "With every step, I cringed, expecting to be captured. With every step, I envisioned al-Amriki pulling up beside us in a white SUV. He'd shoot Nezer and take Eivan away, maybe this time making him one of their suicide bombers. Navine and I would surely be sentenced to death" (Ahmed and McClelland 179). This imagined scenario, though unrealised, reflects the lingering

presence of death as a psychological reality. Necropower is not merely the sovereign right to kill, but the way terror and death seep into everyday life, producing a subjectivity that is haunted, uncertain, and fragmented (Mbembe 71). The trauma of living under the constant threat of capture, violence, or execution transforms survival into an extended emotional labour, one that does not end at the border of safety but continues to shape the psyche.

A new layer of fear emerges upon reaching the refugee camp, fear not of ISIS, but of the judgment of her own community.

On my first night in the camp, before I could even settle in, Kocho's visitors had streamed into their caravan to welcome me back. Women cried and pulled me into their arms... I noticed I could not look at people the way I used to. When my eyes caught someone else's, I blushed and looked quickly away, as if all my secrets had been revealed. A part of me feared, despite being assured otherwise, I would be sent away if anyone discovered what al-Amriki had done to me. (Ahmed and McClelland 202)

The affective dislocation expressed here, shame, avoidance, and fear, signals the internalisation of sexual violence as social contamination. Despite the embrace of her community, Badeeah senses that her body bears marks of transgression within a cultural framework that ties women's value to purity and familial honour. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that the subaltern woman is often overdetermined by cultural codes and denied her voice within dominant structures of representation (287). Badeeah Ahmed's apprehension about being sent away is not just a personal fear; it speaks to the structural silencing of women whose bodies

have been violated, rendering them both victims and symbols of communal dishonour. Her shame is not self-generated but imposed through socio-cultural scripts that continue the work of oppression long after the captors have disappeared. The persistence of these scripts illustrates how violence is not only enacted by ISIS but is also reproduced within patriarchal frameworks that stigmatise survivors, especially those marked by sexual exploitation.

Badeeah Ahmed's escape signifies a moment of tactical success, and her narrative resists any reductive framing of freedom as a singular or conclusive act. The psychological and cultural residue of captivity reveals that liberation is not merely the crossing of a threshold, but an ongoing negotiation with structural gendered violence, within the zones of conflict and spaces presumed to be safe. Her story, therefore, demands a reconceptualisation of emancipation: not as a finite moment of release, but as a prolonged, often painful struggle for autonomy, recognition, and self-restoration.

The path to recovery for survivors of gender-based violence is rarely linear. In *A Cave in the Clouds*, the post-captivity experience of Badeeah reveals the embodied dimensions of trauma that persist beyond physical rescue. Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, emphasises that healing necessitates "reconnecting with ordinary life," yet trauma often severs the survivor's ties to self, body, and community (195). Badeeah Ahmed's relationship with her own body, marked by aversion and alienation, testifies to this disconnection. Badeeah hated her body. Whenever she got up and walked around, she felt wounded, judged, and shamed (Ahmed and McClelland 209). Her internalised guilt transforms her physical self

into a site of humiliation and social contamination, reflecting how the bodies of women in wartime are not only violated but symbolically inscribed with the violence itself.

The communal space of the refugee camp emerges as an alternative site of care and resistance, a place where affective solidarity becomes the foundation of healing. bell hooks argues that healing begins in environments where marginalised voices are not only allowed to speak but are met with compassionate affirmation (*All About Love* 215). This is exemplified in a pivotal moment of emotional release, when Badeeah Ahmed recounts: “I felt my stomach twisting. A fury buried deep inside of me began to rise. Like a demon, it flew up and took hold of my body. I leapt to my feet, growled, and raised my fist to hit Sozan” (209). This eruption of long-suppressed rage is a necessary stage in recovery, the reclamation of agency through confrontation with pain. Sozan, rather than pathologising the outburst, offers an embodied method of trauma processing: “Punch, kick, anything, just start getting it out. Badeeah Ahmed, we need to move your healing along now. It’s time you came back to join the living” (209). It makes clear that healing is not about silencing or soothing, but about activating the body as a site of expression and release.

A Cave in the Clouds critically interrogates the distinction between consent and coercion within contexts of captivity, directly challenging the patriarchal and legal discourses that often obfuscate these boundaries in conflict zones. Sozan’s affirmation, “It is a war crime, not love. Not a marriage. And he forced you to convert to Islam. So, rest your fears. Your spiritual elders have already

acknowledged that you and the others did nothing wrong” (Ahmed and McClelland 211), disrupts the normalisation of sexual enslavement and forced religious conversion as wartime inevitabilities. This moment reclaims interpretive authority for the survivors and reframes their experiences within the lexicon of international human rights law, which identifies such acts as components of genocidal strategy (UNHCR, *Sexual Violence in Conflict*). Recognition, in this context, is not merely symbolic but restorative, a means to recover subjecthood eroded by coercive domination.

The narrative also articulates healing as a recursive and layered process, resisting closure and instead emphasising emotional labour and temporal complexity. This is vividly captured in Sara’s metaphor: “Healing is like peeling an onion, finding those demons that keep us stuck. Just when one is found and discarded, another one appears underneath. But eventually, for those brave and determined, what lies at the very bottom is love and light” (Ahmed and McClelland 214). The metaphor underscores the iterative nature of trauma recovery, aligning with Cathy Caruth’s assertion that trauma is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again” (11). Trauma is not a singular rupture but an echo that demands ongoing narrative reconfiguration. The onion becomes a powerful symbol of this recursive process; each layer peeled not toward resolution but toward the possibility of reconstituting the self in fragments.

Badeeah Ahmed hesitates to share her story with international media in the beginning,

CNN, BBC, and The New York Times wanted to interview women who had been abducted by Daesh... Our elders believed the first genocides we faced came after we shared our spirituality and mysticism with non-Yazidi. Our enemies had become afraid or jealous of our power and control (Ahmed and McClelland 216).

This reluctance exemplifies what Shoshana Felman terms the “crisis of witnessing”, a paradox where the act of testimony risks violating the sanctity of identity and retraumatizing the speaker, even as it is necessary for justice and historical record (5). In the Yazidi context, silence has historically functioned as a protective mechanism, a way to guard both the self and the sacred from external violence and misunderstanding. Yet Badeeah Ahmed’s decision to speak, “Being brave meant facing our fears. The world needed to know what had happened to the Yazidi. The time had passed where keeping our culture secret gave us safety” (217), marks a pivotal transformation: her voice becomes an instrument of resistance, memory, and political reckoning.

By choosing to collaborate with the International Organisation for Migration and travelling to the United States to testify about the genocide, Badeeah enacts a form of narrative activism. Her participation mirrors the “juridico-political project of truth-telling,” where survivor testimonies challenge dominant discourses and assert moral authority in the global public sphere (Gilmore 3). In this sense, her speech acts are not only declarations of survival but confrontations with the mechanisms of silencing that enabled violence in the first place. The post-escape phase of *A Cave in the Clouds* underscores that healing from gendered violence entails more than

personal recovery; it demands narrative agency and political engagement. Badeeah's trajectory reveals that trauma testimony is not merely retrospective; it is also insurgent, rewriting the terms of recognition, justice, and dignity through an ethic of voice.

In *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, Dunya Mikhail constructs a fragmented and affectively charged portrait of the Yazidi survival under the Islamic State, one that fundamentally disrupts conventional paradigms of post-trauma recovery. Rather than depicting survival as a discrete moment of rescue or triumph, the text resists closure by foregrounding the temporal and corporeal residues of violence. The narrative diverges significantly from the tightly structured first-person memoirs of the Yazidi women such as Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, or Badeeah Hassan, whose works centre on the psychological aftermath of captivity through an individualised lens. In contrast, Mikhail's approach is polyvocal and dispersed; the story unfolds through an assemblage of oral testimonies mediated by Abdullah Shrem, translator, rescuer, and interlocutor. This narrative technique decentres the solitary survivor-hero figure and instead highlights the communal infrastructures that make survival possible.

Escape, in Mikhail's narration, is not a singular act of defiance or a finite crossing into safety; it is a collective process, enacted through interdependent networks that stretch across terrain, time, and trauma. The testimony of one survivor encapsulates this shared affective landscape: "Their souls haven't moved on, they never will. That's why their bodies hurt so much. Staying alive doesn't mean permanent survival. Anyway, what is survival when calamity survives along with

you? To survive all alone is the worst kind of survival” (Mikhail 16). This articulation complicates the concept of survival by exposing its latent incompleteness and haunting excess. The survivor’s words evoke “the confrontation with an event that... has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 4), a rupture that persists through belatedness and reiteration. Trauma, therefore, is not confined to the moment of violence but continues to reassert itself in the very act of surviving. Survival is not the end of violence but its extended terrain. The phrase “calamity survives along with you” marks a refusal of closure, positioning survival as an unfinished temporality in which bodily pain and memory remain saturated with the past. Moreover, the assertion that “to survive all alone is the worst kind of survival” reorients the understanding of resilience: it is not autonomy but relationality that constitutes the possibility of endurance. By dispersing authorship across multiple voices and filtering them through Shrem’s mediation, Mikhail constructs an ethics of testimonial relay, a resistance to narrative totality, and a commitment to bearing witness across fragmented subjectivities. *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* insists that survival, in the aftermath of genocidal violence, is not a coherent or redemptive telos, but rather an ongoing entanglement of memory, pain, and fragile solidarity.

Survival, in the context of *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, is not merely the preservation of biological life but a precarious and deeply affective negotiation with memory, abandonment, and the enduring fractures of communal betrayal. The survivor’s poignant declaration, “to survive all alone is the worst kind of survival” (Mikhail 18) amplifies precariousness as a shared condition of human vulnerability that is unevenly distributed and systematically denied under necropolitical regimes.

The genocidal campaign of the Islamic State against the Yazidis, which included mass executions, sexual slavery, forced religious conversion, and displacement, constituted not only an assault on individual bodies but also a calculated dismembering of the communal networks that had once sustained the Yazidi life and spirituality. By attacking both the physical and relational dimensions of existence, ISIS rendered the Yazidi survival a fragmented, isolated endeavour, stripped of the affective solidarities that render precarious life bearable.

This rupture in communal survival is further exposed through the complex, perilous processes of escape narrated by Dunya Mikhail. The figure of the rescuer, Abdullah Shrem, emerges as a counter-agent within a terrain dominated by coercion and betrayal. His underground network operates in radical defiance of ISIS's sovereign control, enacting what Michel de Certeau would call "tactical resistance" within spaces of occupation. However, these tactics are deeply fraught. The narrative recounts,

Sometimes Daesh will propose letting the sabaya return to their families in exchange for a large sum of money... Yet there are others who... ambush the go-between when he shows up, killing him despite their previously agreed-upon arrangements. About twenty-five percent of direct purchases from Daesh ended up with our smugglers getting ambushed (Mikhail 19).

This grim statistic reveals the inherent instability of resistance in a landscape where terror governs trust, and where transactions meant to rescue lives are weaponised as traps. The smugglers, often unpaid, unarmed, and operating from a deep sense of moral and communal obligation, exemplify resistance from the margins, a resistance

that is at once affective and embodied. Their vulnerability and expendability, juxtaposed against the ruthless calculus of the operations by ISIS, render them potent figures of ethical insurgency. They subvert the structural violence of necropower not through open combat but through the reactivation of care and relationality within a shattered terrain. *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* presents escape not as a linear path to freedom but as an arena where precarious bodies navigate the contradictions of agency, survival, and sacrifice under regimes that monetise death and betrayal.

The rescue operations chronicled in *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* unfold with intimate, high-stakes urgency, a quiet defiance enacted through tenuous lines of communication and deeply personal risks. Mikhail recounts that such operations often began with a whisper of possibility: “a phone call, a kidnapped woman trying to reach her family” (20). From this fragile tether, Abdullah Shrem would instruct the family to discreetly share his number with the captive, allowing her to make direct contact. These acts of contact, illicit under the Islamic State’s surveillance apparatus, mark the beginning of resistance: improvised coalitions built through affective connection, risk, and mutual care. The communication channels themselves function as sites of subversion, asserting the captive woman’s residual agency within a system designed to erase it.

In the context of the totalizing control of Daesh, these tactics manifest as untraceable phone calls, smuggled coordinates, and clandestine movements across terrain monitored by violence. They are not only logistical manoeuvres but also deeply symbolic acts of refusal, refusals to accept the definitions of sovereignty,

captivity, or legitimacy of ISIS. The October 2014 rescue of Marwa, though only briefly mentioned, becomes emblematic of this tactical insurgency. Her liberation, like many others, is not merely a recovery of one body from captivity; it is an act that fractures the necropolitical regime that sought to impose death-in-life upon the Yazidi women. It contests “necropolitics”, the state’s capacity to decide who is disposable, who can be subject to slow death, and whose life is rendered ungrievable. Each rescue thus reverses the necropolitical decree: it affirms the grievability and value of lives that ISIS had designated as expendable.

These rescues operate outside the official channels of state or humanitarian intervention, revealing the failure of international mechanisms to protect the Yazidi women and the necessity of grassroots, embodied activism. By reclaiming the lives of the “stolen women,” these operations reassert the possibility of relational survival in a context otherwise dominated by isolation and silence. They become not only logistical achievements but ethical interventions, insisting that even in conditions of absolute abandonment, care, courage, and collective action endure.

By centring the fragmented, often invisible acts of those who rescue, resist, and reclaim, Dunya Mikhail reconfigures *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* as an archive of resistance rather than a chronicle of passive suffering. Her narrative foregrounds the precariousness of embodied life, the interdependence and vulnerability that become politically salient under regimes of violence. In this light, survival is not portrayed as a completed achievement or moment of triumph, but as a recursive, ongoing process, a fragile and persistent negotiation of agency amid threat. Rather than closure, survival here is a practice: a continuous, corporeal, and communal defiance

of erasure, organised through relationships, memory, and movement. Mikhail's work thus contributes to what Saidiya Hartman might call a "counter-archive", a narrative structure that resists dominant histories and preserves the residual, fugitive truths of subaltern resistance (*Venus in Two Acts* 11). *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* destabilises conventional tropes of victimhood and insists on the political significance of everyday courage under necropolitical siege.

The act of escape, for the Yazidi women, is not a discrete moment but a continuum of resistance, one that begins on the violated body and extends into the discursive realm. *The Last Girl, A Cave in the Clouds, Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar, The Girl Who Escaped ISIS*, and *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* portray that escape transcends the physical act of flight. It is an epistemic rupture, an ethical refusal, and a political gesture that reclaims voice and subjectivity from the abyss of dehumanisation. Each narrative reveals the conditions of precarious life under the genocidal regime of Islamic States, which operationalised what Achille Mbembe terms the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (72). These were not just regimes of violence; they were infrastructures of erasure.

The testimonies of the Yazidi women rupture that necropolitical order. By asserting memory, articulating pain, and demanding recognition, their narratives become acts of survival that are also acts of resistance. Far from being passive victims, figures such as Nadia Murad and Farida Khalaf emerge as what Judith Butler describes as "grievable lives", those who challenge their reduction to *homo sacer* by insisting on their humanity (*Precarious Life* 34). Testimony is not just a recounting of suffering for them; it is a political intervention. Writing becomes an

extension of the escape itself, a form of narrative insurgency against the silencing mechanisms of terror. Murad powerfully asserts, “My story, told honestly, is the best weapon I have against terrorism” (223). Her claim encapsulates the central argument of this study: that storytelling, in the aftermath of atrocity, becomes a mode of female resistance and juridical reclamation. These memoirs do not merely document survival; they demand justice, visibility, and a reconfiguration of the global discourse on violence, memory, and resilience.

Moreover, these narratives construct an ethics that dismantles reductive binaries of victim and perpetrator, emphasising the fluid, contingent, and relational dimensions of resistance. In *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, escape is portrayed not as an isolated triumph but as a fragmented, collective endeavour, mediated through informal networks, emotional solidarities, and spontaneous acts of compassion that rupture the violent order imposed by ISIS (Mikhail 151). In *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar* and *A Cave in the Clouds*, escape is further marked as a gendered and affective labour. Both Nadja and Badeeah Ahmed navigate their captivity through emotional intelligence, coded communication, and strategic complicity, drawing on bonds with other women to survive the brutality of sexual enslavement. These instances illustrate the circulation of emotions like fear, hope, and solidarity that constitute forms of political resistance under conditions of domination. These texts do not merely document the Yazidi suffering under ISIS; they indict a global politics of abandonment that renders such suffering peripheral. By narrating survival not as heroic rupture but as enduring presence, persistence, remembrance, and speech, they force a critical reassessment of what constitutes resistance. Judith Butler argues,

“Only under conditions in which life is perceived as precarious is there the potential for a new understanding of social and political responsibility” (*Frames of War* 43). The testimonies of the Yazidi women enact precisely such a demand: to be recognised not merely as survivors of atrocity but as ethical subjects who reconfigure the terrain of human rights, justice, and historical memory.

In the wake of genocidal violence, the self-narratives of the Yazidi women emerge as insurgent epistemologies, acts of writing that resist both the physical annihilation organised by ISIS and the symbolic erasure perpetuated by global silence. *The Last Girl*, *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, *A Cave in the Clouds*, *Nadja: The Pearl of Sinjar*, and *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS* do not simply recount trauma; they reframe the politics of visibility and voice by transforming pain into testimony and survival into authorship. These narratives perform what Leigh Gilmore defines as the work of the “tainted witness”, testimonies that do not seek validation from institutional frameworks but instead expose their inadequacy in accounting for gendered violence and stateless suffering (15). The Yazidi women write from positions rendered illegible by dominant humanitarian and legal paradigms, yet their accounts assert narrative authority in the very spaces meant to silence them. By reclaiming authorship over their own histories, they challenge the conditions of epistemic injustice and produce a counter-archive that foregrounds female resistance, collective memory, and the radical demand to be heard. Their writings do not merely document atrocities; it contests the systems that allow such atrocities to be forgotten.

These narratives challenge what Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies as the systemic “silencing” of marginalised voices in historical production, the process by which events and actors are selectively excluded from the archive (26). By narrating the unspeakable, the Yazidi women re-enter the global discourse as epistemic agents, unsettling necropolitical frameworks that reduce them to bare life. These texts invert that logic through narrative self-assertion. Their speech disrupts the sovereign fantasy of total erasure. These women become politically significant subjects, and their grievability is not granted by the state but claimed through narration. Writing, then, becomes an ontological stance, an insistence on being, despite the apparatuses of annihilation. Butler suggests, “To be grievable means that a life has value... is worth preserving” (*Frames of War* 15). The stories of women call for a reimagined justice, one that privileges survivor epistemologies over institutional metrics and centres resistance over rescue. These narratives enact a female politics of refusal, refusal of invisibility, silence, and submission. Their insistence on narrating the intimate geographies of captivity and survival unsettles the binary of hero and victim, foregrounding instead “the chorus of minor voices” that speak from within violence without being entirely defined by it (Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* 12). These women write from what bell hooks describes as the margin as a site of resistance, transforming narrative from a tool of representation into a weapon of survival and reclamation.

The writings of the Yazidi women constitute a living archive of resistance, one that not only mourns the dead and names the disappeared but also demands a world in which such mourning is no longer necessary. In refusing erasure, these

narratives claim not just memory, but futurity. They compel us to recognise testimony not as a backward glance at suffering, but as a forward-facing call to ethical, political, and scholarly responsibility. Writing against erasure, then, is both an epistemic and ethical act. It restores stolen subjectivity and ensures that the violence endured is not swallowed in silence. As Chimamanda Adichie warns in her critique of the “single story,” the denial of narrative multiplicity is a form of oppression in itself (Adichie). The Yazidi women’s self-narratives disrupt the “single story” imposed by ISIS, of victimhood, silence, and death, by producing a counter-archive of resistance, memory, and radical survival.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

“It happened, therefore it can happen again...and it can happen anywhere” (Levi 27). Genocide is always a calculated political project designed to erase people deemed undesirable. Ideologies of militant nationalism, racial supremacy, religious intolerance, and territorial domination have historically prepared the ground for genocide. Such projects frame certain populations as disposable. Raphael Lemkin defined genocide as the organised destruction of a national, ethnic, religious, or racial group as such, through the imposition of a new order, mass killing, and cultural annihilation (79). Genocide has always combined physical destruction with cultural erasure, whether it be the Holocaust, where the Nazis tried to exterminate Jewish identity, or in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, where ethnic hatred culminated in the slaughter of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Ordinary citizens in genocide were mobilized into violence through propaganda that portrayed their neighbours as existential threats, demonstrating how deeply necropower enters the social body.

The contemporary world is not an exception to this phenomenon. These dynamics have merely evolved in the current scenario. The apparatuses of state and non-state actors have repeatedly relied on necropolitical strategies to consolidate power and control. Myanmar, where the Rohingya were subjected to ethnic cleansing, and Darfur, where systematic attacks on villages were conducted under the banner of counterinsurgency, are two of the examples. Achille Mbembe argues, “To be sovereign is to exert one’s control over mortality and to define life as the

deployment and manifestation of power” (66). It is transforming the entire minority population into targets of destruction. The logic of extermination erases languages, traditions, and memories that threaten dominant orders.

Gaza is a living example of this necropolitical calculus. The targeting of civilian lives, indiscriminate bombings, and starvation reflect a deliberate strategy of making life unlivable for the entire community. As recent reports have noted, a form of collective punishment is formed by weaponising famine and infrastructural collapse. It disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, including the elderly, children, and the displaced (“What makes Israel’s starvation of Gaza stand apart”). It is evident that biopower, the regulation of life, shifts into necropower when certain lives are no longer seen as worth preserving. Modern forms of sovereignty weaponise both life and death against populations already rendered precarious. The war in Gaza epitomises this. Starvation, siege, and bombings are deliberate strategies of governance aimed at erasing an entire community’s will to survive. Human rights organisations have warned that under international law, the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure, restriction of their food and medical aid, and mass displacement constitute potential acts of genocide (Vox; “Genocide in Contemporary Conflicts”). Gaza is emblematic of a global necropolitical order where civilian lives are systematically reduced to damage. Their existence is tolerated only within the narrow boundaries set by state or military imperatives.

It is not only in the Middle Eastern or African contexts that necropower operates. With equal force, it works in South Asia and East Asia also. In Kashmir, decades of insurgency and counterinsurgency have produced a necropolitical terrain

where life itself is precarious. Suicide bombings such as the 2019 Pulwama attack, the April 2025 Pahalgam massacre, where militants killed 26 tourists, display how both militants and the state sustain a cycle that reduces entire populations to zones of death. The recent ethnic and religious violence in Manipur reveals how sexual violence, displacement, and militarisation produce minority communities vulnerable to elimination. In East Asia, unresolved tensions on the Korean peninsula transform nuclear brinkmanship into a necropolitical performance. They held millions hostage to the sovereign capacity for absolute destruction. These cases show that necropolitics is a structural logic of modern sovereignty. It works even within democracies and it also structures the violence of terrorist organizations. In the 9/11 attacks organised by Al-Qaeda and in the 2014 Yazidi genocide by ISIS, terror functions as a calculated performance of power. Such acts are designed to instil fear and dismantle communal bonds. It announces the sovereignty of perpetrators over life and death. They justified aerial bombings as security and mass executions framed as a religious duty. The outcome of such violence is always the same. It is the erasure of minority communities by denying them the protections of law, history, and memory.

The Yazidi genocide of 2014 marks that the necropolitical logic is not a relic of the past. The self-proclaimed Islamic State launched a campaign of extermination against the Yazidi community in Sinjar on August 3, 2014. They declared the religious beliefs of the Yazidi minority group heretical. The commemoration of the eleventh anniversary of the Yazidi genocide on August 3rd, 2025, cannot be seen only as a ritual of mourning. It is a stark reminder that vulnerable communities,

ethnic, religious, or otherwise, continue to be marked for elimination in the twenty-first century. This continuity between past and present indicates a grim truth. Genocide is not an accident but a planned political strategy. It is a mechanism deployed by powerful actors. States, militias, or terrorist organisations work in a way to eliminate dissenting identities, impose ideological homogeneity, and restructure demographics. The difference is made disposable, and death becomes a tool of governance.

This thesis, “Resisting Necropower: A Study of Select Yazidi Women’s Narratives,” investigated how the testimonies and literary accounts of the Yazidi women resisted the genocidal violence and the systematic erasure under ISIS. This study outlined the Yazidi community, their ancient religious traditions, and the targeted violence they endured during the rise of ISIS. The wider frameworks of genocide studies, theories of biopower and necropower are used for the analysis.

The first chapter dealt with the methodological basis of the work. Applying the theoretical perspectives of Achille Mbembe, Judith Butler, and Giorgio Agamben, this study analysed the Yazidi women’s narratives. It highlighted how lived experience disrupts the grand narratives of religion, war, and terrorism that often reduce communities to silence or anonymity. A review of existing literature revealed two tendencies, the tendency of viewing the Yazidis through the lens of victimhood and humanitarian crisis by the global scholarship, and how their cultural and narrative agency is relatively neglected. This research attempted to analyse that gap by emphasising how the voices of the Yazidi women functioned as counter-discourses.

The second chapter has evaluated the rise of ISIS and its deployment of necropower, which must be situated within the long duration of colonial legacies, authoritarian governance, and sectarian fragmentation in Iraq and Syria. The collapse of state authority and the erosion of social order created a fertile ground for ISIS to weaponise death. They transformed violence into a performative spectacle. The beheading videos of the group revealed how necropower was staged to inscribe terror across global audiences. It collapsed the boundary between local domination and transnational propaganda. The chapter has further shown how the Yazidis became emblematic victims of this necropolitical regime. Their persecution was structurally embedded in the ideological project of ISIS, where religious difference was cast as an existential threat. The syncretic faith of the Yazidis positioned them as targets for extermination. This chapter highlighted how ISIS exploited structural vulnerabilities, economic deprivation, sectarian marginalisation, and the vacuum left by failed states to normalise a politics of death. By situating ISIS within the broader genealogy of terrorist groups, it examined the persistence of necropolitics as a governing strategy of power. Domination was achieved through a planned exposure to death. The brutalities of this regime were catastrophic for a vulnerable community like the Yazidis. It revealed the deadly convergence of history, politics, and ideology in creating genocidal violence.

The third chapter examined how ISIS weaponised sexual violence as a central expression of necropower. The bodies of the Yazidi women were taken as battlefields upon which terror was enacted. The testimonies of rape, enslavement, and physical abuse show how ISIS destroyed their very sense of self, stripping them

of cultural, religious, and familial ties. This necropolitical strategy exhibited how the bodies of women had been used for enforcing domination and erasing identities. It exposed the sheer brutality through which ISIS imposed its power. The chapter also revealed how the uniqueness of the Yazidi religion and culture became a reason for their persecution. Their syncretic faith, practices, and ancient rituals were often misunderstood by outsiders as devil worshipping. They were recast by ISIS as evidence of heresy and targeted for eradication. The distinctiveness of the Yazidis was the reason for their suffering and, paradoxically, the foundation of their survival also. The chapter was an attempt to make clear that the necropower of ISIS was about symbolic domination, where the destruction of culture, memory, and identity was as important as the destruction of bodies. Social stigma, fragmented families, and forced pregnancies marked these women with scars that outlived the territorial control of ISIS. Their trauma signified how necropower continued through mechanisms of cultural dislocation and social exclusion and how it perpetuated erasure even after liberation.

The fourth chapter revealed how the narratives of the Yazidi women functioned as acts of survival and political resistance. They transformed the silenced trauma into a language of testimony. The Yazidi women, such as Nadia Murad, Farida Khalaf, Badeeah Hassan, Nadja, and those Yazidi women represented in *The Beekeeper of Sinjar*, revealed how writing and storytelling shifted trauma to become an intervention against erasure. These women exposed the systematic brutality of ISIS, reclaiming agency over their violated bodies and shattered identities. Their texts acted as counter-discourses, challenging the necropolitical order that tried to

make them voiceless. These women emerged as advocates, leaders, and symbols of justice, bridging the gap between personal grief and global awareness. The chapter highlighted how initiatives like shelters, educational programs, and advocacy campaigns became political acts that changed the Yazidi women from victims to subjects of history. Their resilience carried a double weight: it affirmed their personal capacity to endure and simultaneously embodied the collective struggle of the Yazidi community.

The truths of these women that were meant to be buried by violence were revealed. They transformed wounds into testimony and testimony into resistance. Their voices articulate a politics of survival where memory, identity, and justice coexist. It ensured that the Yazidi suffering cannot be erased from historical consciousness. The narratives of the Yazidi women against the necropower of ISIS exposed a brutal truth that the genocide was part of a recurring global pattern where vulnerable communities were targeted for erasure. The bodies of women are turned into weapons of war, from Bosnia to Rwanda, and in Gaza and Sudan, and in many other conflict areas. The Yazidi genocide demonstrated how faith marked a group of people for extermination. The bodies of women became both the terrain of conquest and the means of cultural destruction.

The relevance of this research lies in its attempt to disrupt the silence upon which such violence depends. Placing the testimonies of the Yazidi women at the centre, it insists that survival is not only the endurance of life but also the preservation of memory. Their voices resist the erasure intended by ISIS. Through

feminist and postcolonial frameworks, it reveals that necropower operates across time and space. It continues to shape the lives of the most vulnerable in the present.

When the Yazidis commemorate the eleventh year of their genocide, it becomes evident that the act of narrating trauma itself is a refusal of silence. It is a survival against necropolitical erasure, and a call for recognition. It extends beyond the Yazidi case into the broader struggles of vulnerable communities across the world. It compels recognition that genocide is recurring in new forms. It calls attention to how sexual violence in war, the weaponisation of religion, and identity have been normalised. Listening to and recognising survivor voices is a political imperative. It is a refusal to allow silenced histories to vanish. To forget is to consent to repetition; to listen is to resist. Genocide begins with erasure, but survival begins with voice. The narratives of the Yazidi women challenge silence.

The story of the Yazidis is of the enduring vulnerability of communities caught at the crossroads of history and power. As this research has demonstrated, the necropolitics of ISIS weaponised religion, culture, and the bodies of women to enact erasure. The emergence of ISIS cannot be attributed simply to sectarian hatred. It was largely influenced by the disintegration of the Iraqi state after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Policies like the disbanding of the Iraqi army and de-Ba'athification resulted in the loss of livelihoods and social status for thousands of individuals. It created resentment, humiliation, and radicalisation. They restructured the political landscape of Iraq, enabling extremist organisations to strengthen their territorial control, power, and legitimacy. Perhaps the Western intervention, expressed under the guise of democracy and ensuring security, contributed to the

conditions that made possible the emergence of ISIS. Western foreign policy in the Middle East might have consistently strengthened the regional conflicts. The interventions, framed within the discourse of human rights, democracy, and security, often perpetuate cycles of violence that produce the very terror they attempt to eliminate. Extremist organisations like ISIS should be understood as manifestations of wider structural deficiencies inherent in global power politics. The violence against marginalised people, including Kurds, Yazidis, Palestinians, Rohingya, Dalits, Kashmiri Muslims, Uyghurs, Tigrayans, and many more, shows the unequal distribution of safety, protection, and recognition of suffering within the international system. In conflict zones, the bodies of women serve as a space for the assertion of sovereignty. The dominant manifests power through displacement, sexual violence, and social death. The Yazidi genocide is a critique of a global system that allows certain lives to be expendable. Necropolitical violence flourishes in contexts of state failure, lack of accountability, and the prioritisation of strategic interests by global powers over human security. It indicates that the fight against extremism is linked to the pursuit of justice, ethical governance, and the safeguarding of lives made most vulnerable by history.

Western involvement in current necropolitical regimes is evident in the conflicts in Gaza. The continuous provision of weapons, diplomatic protection, and selective enforcement of international law facilitates mass destruction and displacement. These practices reveal the inconsistency in the stated commitments to universal human rights. These actions indicate a structural pattern in which geopolitical alliances take over ethical accountability. A similar rationale is

applicable in Syria, especially in Aleppo, where patterns of intervention, proxy warfare, and strategic neglect have converted an urban centre into a place with numerous losses to civilians. Western engagement shifted between militarisation and withdrawal, resulting in a context where humanitarian concern operated more as a geopolitical calculation than as an ethical imperative. Women's bodies have always experienced sexual violence, displacement, and erasure, highlighting how gendered vulnerability is treated as an aftereffect in necropolitical governance.

In South Asia, the prolonged militarisation in Kashmir has established conditions similar to zones of bare life. The entire community is regulated through surveillance, detention, and the suspension of rights. The mass rapes, forced disappearances, and sexual torture of Kashmiri women display how necropower legitimises violence as a form of security. Extensive detentions and curfews deepened alienation after the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, perpetuating cycles of radicalisation instead of addressing them. The role of gendered violence as a tool for ethnic cleansing and social domination is clearly revealed in Manipur, where the public stripping, assault, and displacement of minority women happen. The regular exercise of necropolitical power is concealed in the reference to national security in Kashmir and the Northeast, where women's bodies serve as platforms for the violent inscription of sovereignty, exclusion, and punishment. Necropower may be perpetuated even by state practices, global challenges, and a continual neglect of justice in favour of power.

Kurdish women fighters in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey have been internationally recognised as symbols of resistance against ISIS. The

repeated abandonment of these women makes them subject to Turkish military assaults. A consistent pattern of geopolitical instrumentalisation is evident here. The mobilisation of their bodies and labour occurs when it is strategically advantageous. They get discarded when their assertions of autonomy threaten the sovereignty of the state. Stateless nations become insignificant within global security frameworks. The denial of Kurdish self-determination highlights a wider necropolitical framework wherein the value of women's lives is dependent upon their usefulness to external agendas. Modern sovereignty consistently manifests through gendered vulnerability. It converts women's bodies into the landscape for the exercise of power, security, and domination.

Western institutions' emphasis on the testimonies of the Yazidi women in global forums is often questionable. It serves more as a symbolic acknowledgement than as a genuine commitment to solidarity. It is masking greater failures in responsibility. The reconstruction efforts in Sinjar are stagnant, accountability for ISIS crimes is inconsistent, and thousands of Yazidis still remain in prolonged displacement. Recognising the voices of the Yazidi women may lead to humanitarian tokenisation. Trauma is recognised verbally without resulting in rebuilding, justice, and political protection.

The Yazidi crisis has continued without a solution for over a decade since the genocide. Mass graves are being discovered, thousands of women and children remain missing, and displaced families struggle with life in camps. They feel insecure and experience administrative neglect. It highlights the limitations of global focus. They circulate the testimonials but do not focus on lasting political action.

Nadia Murad and Farida Khalaf have turned their personal survival into transnational advocacy, but their narratives may be more fully incorporated into liberal humanitarian frameworks that celebrate resilience. Those frameworks do not address the underlying conditions that created vulnerability.

The presence of NGOs and humanitarian initiatives in the Yazidi regions necessitates a close look. These interventions offer critical relief, but they have limited funding cycles that emphasise immediate response rather than sustained political empowerment. Humanitarian governance often replaces substantial state accountability. It maintains dependency and marginalises the Yazidis from making decisions regarding rebuilding, returning to their land, and security. Activism based in Europe or North America remains disconnected from the daily struggles of individuals residing in the camps of Iraq and Syria. It highlights a gap between global advocacy and local survival.

The genocide against the Yazidi people cannot be treated as a historical event of the past. It continues as a condition that involves statelessness, displacement, and slow violence. The military defeat of ISIS did not put an end to necropower. It continues through political abandonment, delayed justice, and the suspension of the Yazidi life in areas of indefinite waiting. The resistance of the Yazidi women in their writings, testimonies, and political activism must be interpreted as a critique of global responsibility as well as a means of survival.

If Western intervention was instrumental in creating the geopolitical divisions that caused the rise of ISIS, then honouring survivor-advocates without any genuine efforts for rehabilitation, restitution, and legal accountability constitutes

a form of moral evasion. The Yazidi case necessitates an examination of the concept of survival following genocide. The existence of survivors lingers in a state between remembrance and erasure, visibility and neglect. Recognising the narratives of the Yazidi women involves addressing the global structures that enable their precarious survival. The Yazidi struggle thus speaks to the world at large. It reveals that the fight against necropower is about demanding a liveable future. Until that demand is met, not in words but in material transformation, the genocide persists.

Recommendations

This study situates the narratives of the Yazidi women within the framework of necropower, gendered violence, and resistance. It opens up significant pathways for future research. The Yazidi narratives invite sustained critical engagement in the chapter of history. This research has shown how the voices of the Yazidi women resist necropower, but the significance of this extends beyond a single community. The testimonies of the Yazidi women are critical interventions in debates on justice, trauma, and memory. Beyond the immediate context of genocide, their narratives attempt to expose the embodied violence of ISIS and the broader structures of biopolitical and necropolitical domination, demanding continued scholarly engagement. It raises questions on how the bodies of women become battlegrounds during genocides, how memory negotiates trauma, and how storytelling itself can be a political act.

Future research may extend the discussion by situating the experiences of the Yazidi women within a comparative framework of genocide and gendered violence. The Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, and the continued suffering of the Rohingya or Palestinians reveal similar patterns where sexual violence and religious identity are mobilised as instruments of erasure. This comparative study may help to exhibit transnational patterns of how the bodies of women become battlefields in genocidal projects. It also shows how narrative and testimony function as counter-discourses against erasure.

The Yazidis, after being displaced to Europe, North America, and other places, produce diasporic narratives that can be another important area for future research. The experiences of survivors are translated through linguistic, cultural, legal, and political procedures when they relocate across national boundaries. The Yazidi women who narrate their experiences in exile often do so through translation, NGO platforms, or international courts. Traversing through cultural and political boundaries, their voice raises questions about representation, agency, and the ethics of witnessing. Future research may focus on how global audiences consume and respond to such narratives. It can also look at whether they foster meaningful solidarities or risk re-inscribing orientalist stereotypes. The examination of diaspora writing may raise enquiries regarding memory, belonging, and the reconstruction of identity beyond the immediate context of violence.

Future research can use digital humanities tools to document and preserve narratives of survival, displacement, and resistance. Digital mapping, interactive archives, and oral history platforms provide a new realm for visualising the spatial and temporal aspects of genocide. Diaspora settlements, relocation routes, mass burials, and rescue networks can all be mapped to reveal the hidden structure of survival. Digital archiving may also raise ethical questions regarding consent, ownership, and representation.

Conflict-zone literature can be one of the important areas for future research. Scholars may expand the Yazidi context to incorporate recent violence, including Gaza, Kashmir, Myanmar, and Afghanistan. Narratives from these regions deal with an imposed silence, extermination, occupation, and sexual violence. Comparative

analyses of this literature may help to reveal how testimony evolves in instances of geopolitical erasure, deeper conflict, and surveillance. An analysis of these literary works, together with the Yazidi testimonies, can enhance the understanding of how marginalised communities express resistance when formal political channels are unavailable.

The narratives of the Yazidi women must be read as part of a global archive of survival against necropolitical regimes. Future research may continue to analyse them as political and historical texts that intervene in discourses of power, justice, and human dignity.

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