

**Trauma and Testimony: A Study of Yezidi Narratives in Select Non-
Fictional Works**

A Dissertation Submitted

To

Sikkim University



**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy**

By

Jwmwi Basumatary

Department of English

School of Language and Literature

Sikkim University

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सामदुर, तादोंग - 737102
सिक्किम, भारत
03592-251212, 251415, 251656
फैक्स - 251067
वेबसाइट - www.cus.ac.in



6th Mile, Samdur, Tadong-737102
Gangtok, Sikkim, India
Ph. 03592-251212, 251415, 251656
Telefax : 251067
Website : www.cus.ac.in

सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय SIKKIM UNIVERSITY

(भारत के संसद के अधिनियम द्वारा वर्ष 2007 में स्थापित और नैक (एनएएसी) द्वारा वर्ष 2015 में प्रत्यापित केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालय)
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This work is being submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Department of English, School of Languages and Literature.

Jwmwi Basumatary
Jwmwi Basumatary

Roll No: 19MPEN02

Registration No: 19/M.Phil/ENG/02

Department of English

School of Languages and Literature

Sikkim University

[Signature]
Supervisor

Assistant Professor/एसिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर
Department of English/अंग्रेजी विभाग
Sikkim University/सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय

अध्यक्ष
Head
अंग्रेजी विभाग
Department of English
सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय
Head of the Department
Sikkim University

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This is to certify that the thesis titled “**Trauma and Testimony: A Study of Yezidi Narratives in Select Non-Fictional Works**” submitted to **Sikkim University** for the fulfillment of the requirement of the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in the **Department of English**, embodies the result of bonafide research work carried out by **Jwmwi Basumatary** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Association and fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

We recommend this thesis to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav

Supervisor

Department of English

School of Language and Literature

Sikkim University

Assistant Professor/एसिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर

Department of English/अंग्रेजी विभाग

सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय

Sikkim University

Dr. Rosy Channing

Head of Department

Department of English

Sikkim University

School of Language and Literature

Sikkim University

अध्यक्ष

अंग्रेजी विभाग

Department of English

Sikkim University

Sikkim University

School of Language and Literature

Sikkim University

सामदुर, तादोंग - 737102
सिक्किम, भारत
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फैक्स - 251067
ई - www.cus.ac.in



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“Trauma and Testimony: A Study of Yezidi Narratives in Select Non-Fictional Works”

Submitted by **Jwmwi Basumatary** under the supervision of Dr. Ram Bhawan Yadav of the Department of English, School of Languages and Literature, Sikkim University.

Jwmwi Basumatary
Signature of Scholar

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[Signature]
Countersign by the Supervisor

Assistant Professor/एसिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर
Department of English/अंग्रेजी विभाग
Sikkim University/सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak
knits up the O'er wrought heart and bids it break.

—Macbeth

1.0 Trauma-An Overview:

Trauma and its study, at present, form a constellation as a result of increased academic interest across disciplines. The surge in orientation by different disciplines towards 'trauma' stands to contribute to its theorisation and conceptualisation. The etymology of 'trauma' in its Greek root (τραῦμα) originally meant wound of the body. But the word has evolved since and it is now used to mean psychological wound, as well as extending its use to the disciplines as diverse as anthropology, law, history, memory studies, linguistics, literary studies and so on. Trauma as a field of study had its origin in the discipline of medicine and psychology in 19th century. It was Jean-Martin Charcot's classification of hysterical symptoms from his treatment of hysterical women at Salpêtrière hospital in France that inspired Pierre Janet and Freud with Josef Breuer to study hysteria. Their studies found that "hysteria was a condition caused by psychological trauma" (Herman, 1995:12) and this finding shaped the discipline of psychoanalysis in its future orientation towards trauma. However, the initial studies of trauma didn't have a smooth run. Its history informs of gap, discontinuity and forgetting just as what trauma with its symptomatic characters purports to be. Judith Hermann's book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political* gives a historical account of the diagnosis of 'trauma' from early studies of hysteria in 19th century to its listing in nosology as PTSD in the Diagnostic

and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd edition (DSM-MD-III) in 1980 by American Psychiatric Association. In her book she discusses the deep seated political and cultural underpinnings that facilitated the sudden emergence of hysteria and its passing into obscurity as pathology. She says that the study on “...the mystery of hysteria was intended to demonstrate the triumph of secular enlightenment over reactionary superstitions, as well as moral superiority of a secular world view” (1995:16) and “as long as the studies in hysteria was part of an ideological crusade, discoveries in the field were widely applauded and scientific investigations were esteemed for their humanity and courage” (1995:17) but after the ideological battle had been won with the establishment of Third Republic, the study didn’t garner much support. Furthermore, Freud’s discovery in *The Aetiology of Hysteria* (1896) “...that at the bottom of every hysteria there are *one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience*” (Freud, quoted in Herman, 1995:13) scandalized the ‘Victorian’ sense of propriety of Viennese society forcing him to abandon his study. In this way, the initial study of hysteria goes on hiatus. Then in the First World War, soldiers reported suffering from mental breakdown which Charles Myers termed as *shell-shock*, which shared some of the symptoms with hysteria. But it was initially looked down without recognizing its pathology, so much so that the British psychiatrist Lewis Yealland, “in his 1918 treatise, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare...* advocated a treatment strategy based on shaming, threats, and punishment” (Herman, 1995: 21). It took another World War, Holocaust and the Vietnam War followed by the anti-war social and political climate that brought urgency in reconsidering the psychological impact of war and atrocities. This renewed focus in the study of trauma paved way for its diagnosis as PTSD in DSM-III of American Psychiatric Association in 1980. With this diagnosis, trauma gets its long due institutional recognition.

1.1 Defining Trauma:

It is difficult to have one definition of trauma that sums up all its complexity. However, in order to proceed with the research, a working definition of trauma is attempted. As one of the earliest practitioners of psychoanalysis, Freud's observation of the traumatic will be helpful in order to have a provisional understanding of trauma. Speaking about 'traumatic neurosis' in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud presents his observation that traumatic neurosis shares characteristic symptoms with hysteria but "surpasses it as a rule in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment...as well as in the evidence it gives of a far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbance of the mental capacities" (Freud, 6) and he further states that "the dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright" (Freud, 7). From the observations, Freud then concludes:

We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. (Freud, 23)

Juliet Mitchell also defines that "A trauma, whether physical or psychical, must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss. The severity of the breach is

such that even if the incident is expected, the experience cannot be foretold” (*Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language*, 121).

Listing the symptomatic developments of PTSD, DSM-III describes “psychologically traumatic event” as “generally outside the range of usual human experience” and that “the traumatic event can be reexperienced in variety of ways” like in the most common way “the individual has recurrent painful, intrusive recollections of the event or recurrent dreams or nightmares during which the event is reexperienced” (APA, 1980:236). Latest edition of DSM-5 updates and expands trauma related disorders and characterizes trauma as:

“exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” either “directly experiencing the traumatic events”, or “witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others”, learning of the violent events occurred either actual or threatened death “to a family member or friend” that is followed by symptoms “of recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s)”, “recurrent distressing dreams”, “dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks) in which the individuals feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring”, “avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with traumatic events”, “avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders...that arouse distressing memories...” (DSM-5, 2013:271)

Thus, from the above stated characteristics trauma can be understood as an event or experience which breaches the 'protective shield' leaving a disturbing impact on a person hampering in the processing of that experience, the memory of which returns in the form of dreams.

1.2 Trauma and its Theorisation:

Since its inception in 19th century, the study of trauma has expanded and many disciplines have theorised and conceptualised it. However, considering the limitation on discussing the theorisation of trauma in every discipline, to navigate the orientation of present research, two different positions in literary studies in their approach to trauma and its theorisation are discussed here. These two different theorisations of trauma derive the central concept of trauma from the discourse of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, neuroscience, philosophy and so on.

Against the background of World War 2, Holocaust and the Vietnam War which occupied the space of public and academic discourse, 1990s saw a new trend in the literary studies that picked from the proliferation of writings on trauma and negotiated a new engagement. Cathy Caruth is credited for this new orientation of literary studies to trauma. From her reading of Freud and Lacan, Caruth theorises trauma as an experience incompatible with language. Considering trauma as a rupture and inassimilable experience that is not integrated in the cognitive process, Caruth theorises trauma as an experience living outside the range of language, knowledge and history. Furthermore, drawing from de Mann's problematisation of reference in relation to the corporeal and Bessel van der Kolk's neurobiological findings in *The Body Keeps the Score* that traumatic patients have their Broca's area shut which is responsible for speech function of brain when traumatic flashbacks are triggered, Cathy Caruth frames trauma as an

experience with no referential medium. Discussing Holocaust, she says that "Central to the very immediacy of this experience, that is, is a gap that carries the force of the event and does so precisely at the expense of simple knowledge and memory. The force of this experience would appear to arise precisely, in other words, in the collapse of its understanding" (Caruth, 1995:7). Caruth's take on trauma crystallizes it as an 'unclaimed' experience; unclaimed in the very moment of its occurrence and unclaimed by language and understanding in its delayed repetition because of the disruptive nature of it. This theorisation of trauma gets a popular currency and following in the academic field. After Caruth, Shoshana Felman also contends that trauma representation or its witnessing is not possible. Speaking of trauma testimonies, Felman says:

As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by the occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. What the testimony does not offer is, however, a complete statement, a totalizable account of these events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not process itself as a conclusion, as the constation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge. (ibid, 16-17)

This theorisation of trauma puts it as an extreme experience beyond comprehension and representation arguing for its being 'unspeakable'. This school of thought holds a dominant position in the contemporary academic engagements with trauma.

Against the theorisation of trauma advanced by Cathy Caruth, an alternative model of trauma developed which addresses the “unspeakable” aspect of trauma from various perspectives. This model, at the outset questions the “unspeakable” tag of trauma which serves the purpose of politics than the pathology. Naomi Mandel in her book *Against the Unspeakable* writes that trauma’s

...strategic designation as beyond the limits of language facilitates a certain safe distance of the object of study from the study itself, paradoxically reinforcing atrocity’s inaccessibility to knowledge in the context of knowledge’s production and practice. Such designation reifies the limits of language and of representation and facilitates the evocation of these limits and their wielding in a variety of spheres: political, critical, and aesthetic. (2006:13)

This discursive practice of the “unspeakable” denies an ethical response to the atrocity and succumbs to the tyranny of silence. Similarly, Dominick LaCapra is of the view that Caruth’s theorisation of trauma conflates “...discrete instances of historical loss with the foundational problem of structural absence in such a way as to universalize trauma and to frustrate any possibility of working-through. He contends that Caruth’s work reveals ‘the conflation of a putatively transhistorical condition of abjection with the specific problem of victimization, thereby both adding to the allure of victimhood and obscuring the status of discrete historical victims’ (LaCapra quoted in Bond and Craps, 79-80). Thus informed by various disciplines’ approach to trauma, pluralistic trauma theory looks at bridging the gap between experience, language and representation. In her book *The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma*, Annie G. Rogers informs that traumatized children act out trauma scenes even if they elect not to

speak. And a close psychoanalytic reading of and listening to the narrative accounts of those who speak reveal traumas which are not explicitly spoken but nonetheless present in the narrative. Therefore adopting different trajectory in trauma studies may redeem the voice from the silence of the “unspeakable”.

Mapping this new pluralistic approach in literary trauma theory, Michelle Balaev in his essay *Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered* (2014) contends a new conceptual orientation of trauma, that is, a determinant value of trauma may be achieved by taking into account the multiple contexts of experience occurred. He says, “If the larger social, political, and economic practices that influence violence are the background contexts or threats in the fabric of a traumatic experience in the first place, then trauma’s meaning is locatable rather than permanently lost” (Balaev, 2014: 8).

Thus informed by these two different theorisations of trauma which borrowed ideas from the classical as well as contemporary discourses on trauma from various disciplines, the present research intends to study the testimonial narratives of Yezidi experience, that is, of genocide and sexual slavery.

1.3 Trauma of Our Time-Yezidi Experience:

The relationship between humankind and violence is a puzzle for sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology and history alike. The archaeological sites and archaeological remains of battle from Mesolithic Period discovered in Sudan which is considered to be one of the earliest sites of battle dating from about 13000-14000 years back offers historicity of war and violence (Fred Wendorf). From the earliest battle sites in Mesolithic period humankind has traversed through Modern period and recorded 187 million deaths in 20th century alone as a result of war and violence (Hobsbawm, 1995: 12). While only two decades into the century, our century has also

witnessed its share of violence. The Iraq War, Afghanistan War, Syrian Civil War, Darfur Conflict, Second Congo War, Sri Lankan Eelam War IV, Rohingya genocide etc. are some of the most violent and destructive wars of the century out of which some are ongoing events.

One such violent and traumatic experience of this century is that of Yezidis. Yezidi is a distinct ethno-religious community mainly found in the northern province of Iraq bordering Syria but they are also found in “Eastern Turkey, Armenia and Georgia” (Asatrian and Arakelova, vii) including Iran. Yezidis were first recorded in history by “the 10th century Arabian historian Al-Samani in his book “Al-Ansab” (The Genealogies)” as “a group of Aztecs living in the Helwan hills (nowadays Northern Iraq/Kurdistan Region)” (Kizilhan, 2017: 334). On the origin of the name Yezidi, Zaïm Khenchelaoui says that “...it is thought to have come from Persian word *îzid* (Angel) or *Yezdân* (God), which is found in *Avesta*, whence the name *îzîdî* (‘worshipper of the Angel’ or ‘worshipper of God’) which they use for themselves” (*The Yezidis, People of the Spoken Word*, 1999: 20). They are one of the oldest groups of people inhabiting northern Mesopotamia predating Islam as “Iraqi scholar S.S. al-Ahmad considers it not impossible that a small group of Assyrians settled in the Lâlesh valley (the Mecca of Yezidism) after the fall of Nineveh in 613 B.C and passed down their religious practices there” (ibid, 21).

Yezidism is a syncretic monotheistic faith which is thought to have been influenced by Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity including Islam. Although Yezidism as a faith has folk pantheon and local deities, Asatraian and Arakelova in their book *The Religion of the Peacock Angel* reason that Yezidism is a monotheistic faith in essence as the pantheon and local deities only exist to serve the functional role

in upholding the religious principles manifested in or through their supreme god *Xwadē*. They are of the view that:

The poly-variation in the Yezidis' religious thought, or rather, their dismembered representation of the divine entity or of god, is none other than the personification of the functional division of the divine, which has nothing to do with polytheism in its pure form, the essential nature of which does not change even in the presence of a manifestly principal divinity within the system of gods. (Asatrian and Arakelova, 1)

Yezidism identifies their God as *Xwadē* who created the universe “however according to the Yezidi tradition, despite being creator of the universe...” *Xwadē* is not directly “...concerned with the worldly affairs...”(Asatrian and Arakelova, 3) and rather he has relegated the responsibility of looking after the worldly affairs to a triad which consists of *Malak-Tāwūs* (the Peacock Angel), Sheikh'Adi and Sultan Ezid . Among the triad *Malak-Tāwūs* occupies most important place in Yezidi faith and life, for they pray to *Malak-Tāwūs* who is one of the most obedient of angels. However, the worshipping of Peacock Angel by Yezidis has been misunderstood by their Muslim neighbours. The myth surrounding the persona of *Malak-Tāwūs* as an expelled angel from heaven for disobedience to God added to the prejudice of Muslims who considered this apostasy a characteristic of Satan and branded Yezidis as devil worshippers. Fuelled by the prejudice, Yezidis have been persecuted in their century long history of existence with the Arab Muslims as one of the minorities. Jan Ilhan Kizilhan appropriately mentions that “74 genocides against the Yazidi have been carried out in the past 800 years by Islamised groups and states” (336).

But in the year 2014, Yezidis had their worst experience of persecution. This time an Islamic militant organisation named ISIS with the aim of establishing Islamic caliphate targeted Yezidis which amounts to ‘genocide’ as per the definition of the UNO Genocide Convention. On 3rd August, 2014 the Sinjar district where most of the Yezidis were concentrated was attacked and what followed after is one of the most horrifying accounts of the crime and violence of recent times. The ISIS militants drove them out of their homes to a school field where an estimated 5,500 Yezidis mostly men were murdered and 6,396 Yezidis, mostly unmarried girls and women were abducted and held captive. (Peter Nicolaus and Serkan Yuce, 201).The unmarried and married women were then sold in the ISIS run slave markets like cattle, and they were repeatedly raped and assaulted by their owner. They were also forced to convert and perform Islamic prayer before their sexual assault. The married and older women were made to do household chores including assembling bombs and rockets as testimonial accounts of the victims inform. The young boys are brainwashed and given training to fight for ISIS. The systematic attack on Yezidis with intention of annihilating the community by killing their men, abducting their women and raising their boys as militants inform of the horrors and trauma experienced by Yezidis.

It is against the background of recent violence and genocide, including gender and sexual violence carried out against Yezidis, the present research seeks to study the select trauma testimonies of the victims who escaped from ISIS captivity.

1.4 On Testimony:

As the present research intends to study selected trauma testimonies of Yezidi victims, a note on the term ‘testimony’ is advanced informing its use in the research. Testimony connotes different meanings in different contexts. Firstly, as a genre of *life-writing*

testimony refers to a discursive practice within the structural limits of genre in making public of a private 'self'. Speaking about the truth and its representation in testimony, Berel Lang says that "the term 'testimony' has formal standing especially when given under oath in legal or religious context. But the term's connotation, whatever the context, suggests authenticity, accuracy, precision" (Greenspan et al. 197). Mindful of traumatic experiences of Holocaust victims, Dori Laub says that "a protected space has to be provided, involving not only the physical place and the necessary time but also a totally present, committed, and attuned listener who is willing to accompany the witness on the journey on which she is about to embark" provided which testimony "comes into existence" (ibid, 2014: 199). He further states that:

By testimony, we often mean retellings as in judicial proceedings, in formal video archives, and in oral histories. We use the term 'testimony' elastically, I think, because it implies a general affirmation of truth, as in court proceedings or religious attestations. The term connotes truth value or sincerity of belief about truth... they are premised on a personal compact about truth, by survivor' commitments to provide accounts that are as accurate as they can. (ibid, 200)

Therefore testimony, first as a genre informs of its structural and discursive function and secondly it is assumed to have a truth value in the juridical and legal sense in the experiences that are unfolded. It also involves memory and the function of memory in neurobiological and political sense in the way experiences are remembered or recalled.

Though seemingly antagonistic, the terms like 'trauma', 'testimony' and 'Yezidi' are brought together in order to pursue this research with pertinent research

questions. In what way a functional link among these three words may be drawn is explained here. From the early discussion on trauma it is established that it involves an extreme experience with a deep impact on the psyche and testimony on the other hand connotes verbalizing the experiences suffered. Trauma with its characteristics features of repetitive return surfaces and makes itself fleetingly available and testimony by its very principle of summoning memory for a truthful account opens up their structural and conceptual spaces for Yezidi experiences which as discussed above is one of the most horrific and traumatic. Therefore a functional relation can be drawn among those three words and the meanings they entail in all their implication to pursue the research. It is under this consideration of finding a representative trauma testimony of Yezidi experiences, the present research is designed.

1.5 Authors and Texts:

Farida Khalaf was 18 years old when ISIS attacked her village in 2014. Before the coming of ISIS she dreamed of becoming the first Yezidi mathematics teacher in her village. Following ISIS attack, she along with other girls were taken to Syria and sold into sexual slavery. For about four months in her captivity, Farida experienced the most dehumanizing acts of sexual violence in the form of rape. Through her determination, one day along with five other girls she managed to escape from the ISIS camp and take shelter with a local family until their final escape to Iraq. Her accounts of horrific experience are co-authored with Andrea C. Hoffmann in her testimony titled *The Girl Who Beat ISIS: My Story*.

Nadia Murad won 2018 Nobel Peace prize for her activism of justice for the survivors of sexual violence and genocide. On the day ISIS attacked her village, six of her brothers were killed along with other men. Like other girls she was also held

captive in ISIS military camps where she was beaten, forced to pray and repeatedly raped. After her miraculous escape, Nadia decides to tell her story to the world and brings out the book titled *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against Islamic State* with Jenna Krajeski in 2017. This testimony contains a firsthand account of the genocide and sexual violence against Yazidis.

Dunya Mikhail is an Iraqi American poet. She was a journalist with *Baghdad Observer* in Iraq but following Saddam Hussein's listing of her as one of the enemies of his regime, she moved to USA in 1990s. Her works include *The War Works Hard* (2005), *The Iraqi Nights* (2014) and *In her Feminine Sign* (2019). Her first non-fictional work *The Beekeeper of Sinjar: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq* was published in 2019 which contains testimonial accounts of the survivors of ISIS atrocities. Her contact with a beekeeper named Abdullah Shrem whose messianic activism of smuggling the kidnapped Yazidi women from ISIS camps makes her privy to many dangerous and heroic rescue operations including many traumatic testimonies of the victims. The present text is written out of the testimonies she collected from her firsthand interview of the victims as well as the proxy testimonies through Abdullah.

1.6 Literature Review:

In order to map the area and function of research, theoretical approaches to trauma will be sought or modeled from existing literature.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence-From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) & Ruth Leys' *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), offer a genealogical survey of trauma. Both the texts offer the ideological and socio-political contexts under which the theory of trauma shaped and evolved.

Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), marks the beginning of literary trauma studies and offers an important conceptualization of trauma. In this text Caruth develops the concept of trauma as 'unspeakable'.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1991) explores trauma and its representation. In the text, Shoshana Felman particularly demonstrates the breakdown of referentiality in the face of trauma experience.

Supporting the theoretical position of trauma as experience beyond linguistic representation, Bessel van der Kolk in his *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014) provides neurobiological data. His study claims that traumatic patients during their recall of the experience have their Broca's area shut which is responsible for the speech function of human brain. This finding backs up theoretical assumption of trauma theory with empirical data.

Richard J. McNally's *Remembering Trauma* (2003) offers a new trajectory to trauma studies by highlighting that trauma can be remembered and spoken. He is also of the view that traumatic amnesia is an unfounded myth.

Naomi Mandel in her *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust and Slavery in America* (2006) warns about the tendency to render certain experiences unspeakable, which according to her serves ideological function privileging one narrative or event at the cost of another's oblivion.

In *The Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma* (2006), Annie Rogers suggests that the unsayable or traumatic experiences manifest itself through bodily

enactments as well as in the coded language and signifiers even in the subjects who are consciously reluctant to speak out. The Lacanian reading of the language and actions of trauma subjects according to her offers a way of tracing the unconscious repressed experiences.

Paul Antze & Michael Lambek edited *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (1996) and Urvashi Bhutalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998) offer understanding on memory and its function concerning traumatic events or otherwise. These books explore the cultural and political aspects involved in the act of remembering.

Michelle Balaev edited text *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* informs of a new pluralistic approach in literary trauma studies. The text suggests alternative roadmaps for literary engagement in order to understand under what configuration traumatic experiences may be brought to the system of language and representation.

Miriam Cooke's article titled *Murad Vs ISIS* published in *Middle Easter Women's Journal*, October 2019 offers a reading of Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against Islamic State* and Farida Khalaf's *The Girl Who Beat ISIS: This is My Story*. She analyses their testimonies for the story of persecution and slavery they experienced and concludes that these brave stories help in breaking the "the millennial silence of rape survivors".

Kevin O'Rourke's review of Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar-Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq* in *Michigan Quarterly Review* draws attention to the question of authenticity in some of the sources and testimonies collected in the text.

It also raises question to the space and tone of the author in between the stories of the rescued women.

1.7 Research Gap:

With regards to the Yezidi experience of genocide and captivity, there is no sufficient scholarship from trauma perspective. The paucity of academic interest in the recent Yezidi experience of persecution and genocide failed to create an episteme of their trauma. Furthermore the aporetic enigma of trauma regarding its articulation points towards theoretical or conceptual lacuna calling for a fresh and interdisciplinary approach to conceptualize trauma by studying the testimonies of recent time. The research gap in historicizing Yezidi experience and the theorisation of trauma regarding its ‘speakability’ opens up possibilities for apt and timely research intervention.

1.8 Research Question:

Following Cathy Caruth in her claim of trauma being unspeakable in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* the present research proposes following questions as research problems:

Can trauma be articulated?

Is testimony an adequate medium or genre to articulate trauma?

Is it possible to historicize trauma experiences?

Can the selected Yezidi trauma narratives create an alternative history and a body of knowledge?

1.9 Aims and Objectives:

- a) To contribute towards the evolving conceptualization of trauma of its being unspeakable or otherwise.
- b) To study the traumatic experience of ISIS persecution and violence of Yezidis by incorporating psychoanalytic literary criticism, linguistics analysis and memory studies that will interrogate the possibilities of interdisciplinary approach in its attempt of articulating trauma.
- c) To create a body of knowledge of Yezidi experience of trauma.

1.10 Method and Methodology:

The present research has an interdisciplinary orientation in the sense that the study of trauma involves theoretical and conceptual exchanges among disciplines. It will be a qualitative, textual interpretive research. And in order to conduct the research aligned with above stated objectives and research questions psychoanalytic literary criticism, trauma theory, memory studies will be taken as tools to analyse the selected texts.

1.11 Significance of the Research:

The significance of the proposed research lies in the fact that it will contribute in creating a body of knowledge of Yezidi community, their faith and traumatic historic experience which otherwise remain distorted or misinformed. The study of selected texts will also further contribute in creating an alternative history of Yezidis and humanize them.

1.12 Chapter Plan:

The present research has the following chapter scheme:

Chapter 1-Introduction

This chapter lays out the research orientation and the theoretical position of current research. It starts with the history of trauma theory and its contemporary trends and concerns. Then it introduces the texts and authors selected for the research. With the statement of research question and research objectives followed by method and methodology, the chapter offers a comprehensive roadmap which this research pursues.

Chapter 2- Trauma Site and Testimonial Register in Farida Khalaf's *The Girl Who Beat ISIS: My Story*

This chapter will study the above mentioned testimony and analyse how successfully testimony registers trauma in its narrative and what factors enable in the coming together of testimony and trauma in language. Given the antagonistic relationship between trauma and language, the framework under which language and trauma co-opt and co-participate in testimony will be explored.

Chapter 3- Witnessing Relay in Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq*

This chapter will analyse the narrative relay of trauma testimonies. The testimonies in the text are collected by the author that contain a range of materials in the form of interview transcripts of victims and proxy testimonies as well as the direct phone interview conducted by the author. The chapter will try to understand how these testimonies which are personal accounts as well as secondary proxy accounts create a network of trauma witnessing.

Chapter 4- Justice Through Memory: Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against Islamic State*

This chapter will study the act of remembering and how this narrative demands justice through its memory in the court of conscience of readers. While psychic process of trauma makes some victims want to forget events, this willful testimony of victim and her memory makes it an act of empowerment and demands justice. The act of remembering trauma can be a political act of resistance. The dynamics of memory in this text will be studied in perspective of memory studies and how memory actually resists power through the act of remembering.

Chapter 5- Conclusion

This chapter will offer a summary of the preceding chapters highlighting the research findings. It will offer a summation of the research with respect to the research questions posed as well as offer suggestions on the scope of future research in the selected area.

Chapter 2

Trauma Site and Testimonial Register in Farida Khalaf's *The Girl Who Beat ISIS-My Story*

2.0 Introduction:

'If I ever regained my freedom, I'd scream this injustice to the whole world' (Khalaf, 2016:137), this statement of Farida confronts the leading trauma theorists and their 'unspeakable' position on trauma. The statement is preceded by another statement 'No, there was one thing I know I'd never forget'. Thus, burdened with memory; which is the traumatic memory of rape and enslavement which she can't forget, Farida Khalaf's resolve of amplifying her injustice to the world brings antagonistic spaces of testimony and trauma together, implicating language and representation. While the dominant studies on trauma position it at the limits of meaning and language (Caruth, Felman, van der Kolk etc.), the genre of testimony in particular and life writing in general concerns itself with making public of the private self and its experiences. In the face of such contradictions and negation of each other Leigh Gilmore offers the following framework:

"Instead of claiming that language or representation is in an inimical or proscribed relation to trauma, I would argue for the importance of attention to specific formulations of trauma and to the range of settings in which they emerge." (*Limits of Autobiography*, 2001: 7)

Warning against the danger of generalizing trauma as unspeakable event, Dominick LaCapra says that:

“...an exclusive emphasis or fixation on unrepresentable excess may divert attention from what may indeed be represented or reconstructed with respect to traumatizing limit events...” (Writing History, Writing Trauma, 2014: 92)

A framework under which trauma is spoken or represented in language is *testimony-method* used in psychotherapy as a standard model for treating the patients with traumatic experiences. Agger and Jensen (1990) affirm the ritualistic and political value of the act of telling which prods the victims to language their experiences. The *politicization of therapy* noted by Kelly McKinney (*Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence*, 2007) informs of an understanding amongst a section of psychotherapists who consider taking trauma and its telling outside the clinics to the public sphere linking it to politics and justice as an ethical responsibility. These orientations position trauma not necessarily as an unspeakable experience but as one that may be brought out through the conduit of testimony enabled by contexts. Testimony therefore has the plethora of functions; as a subgenre of Life-Writing it stands to fulfill the role of presenting a life in coherent semblance anchoring the standalone fragments of trauma experience in its narrative, and furthermore as a testimony claiming the historicity of events it must produce its own evidence using language aided by memory.

This chapter will analyse Farida Khalaf’s testimony of her traumatic experience in *The Girl Who Beat ISIS-My Story* keeping in mind the central research question of trauma and its articulation.

2.1 Narrative Structure and Content of Farida’s Testimony:

The term ‘narrative’ has different contextual meanings and practices in different disciplines, at the same time it also shares thread of similarity. In literary theory, Narratology concerns itself with the underlying structures of story-telling and the way

these structures contribute in shaping a story. In the literary genre of Life-Writing in general and its various sub-genres like autobiography, biography, testimony etc. narrative refers to the trope of narrating that is based on a *life* as a subject. Narrative psychology conceptualizes narrative as a *root metaphor* (Theodore R Sarbin) for the meaning making process of humans in integrating events into a sequential frame. It investigates the storied nature of human mind and conduct. Pierre Janet used the term narrative in the context of memory to mean a sequential coherence of remembrance and termed it *narrative memory* to distinguish it from *traumatic memory* that remains fragmentary, isolated from the scheme of memory (van der Kolk & van der Hart, *The Intrusive Past*). In this research the word narrative is used to connote these cross-disciplinary and genre definitions and practices.

Farida Khalaf's testimony is a consciously crafted narrative. By 'consciously crafted narrative' it doesn't however mean that it is restructured and redrafted several times for aesthetic coherence. Rather, it is meant that the testimony reveals working of her conscious mind in organizing the past traumatic events in the frame of narrative. Her testimony was recorded behind the closed door of her container in the refugee camp with no one but her co-author Andrea C. Hoffmann and a girl to assist her with translation as Farida chose to speak in her mother tongue. The entire process of testimonial telling and recording happened verbatim in real time over a period of a few days which puts the possible question of the tailor-fitting of the narrative to rest.

Farida's testimony is centrally focused on her captivity and escape from ISIS. She gives graphic account of the abuses she experienced during her time in captivity. For the purpose of bearing witness to the traumatic events, her testimony is narrated in a liner sequence. The testimony bears the mark of a conscious narration of otherwise *punctual events* (Greg Forster) that stands apart from cognitive process of *schema*

(Bartlett). The conscious aspect of trauma narration in testimony positions the subject in the temporal zone of present from which the past experiences of trauma are summoned and organized into a narrative sequence.

Farida begins her testimony by giving a picture of her life before the coming of ISIS in her village. She recounts her fascination with mathematics and dream of becoming the first ever Yezidi mathematics teacher in her village school. The genealogy of Yezidi persecution as a result of prejudiced misinterpretation of their religion by Muslim neighbours which became one of the added reasons of their targeted victimization at the hands of ISIS is delineated. A hindsight recall of the events experienced and the sequencing of these experiences one after the other, from the cause to its effect highlights a conscious effort of anchoring the traumatic experiences in testimonial narrative. An indication of the conscious narrative is noted in the use of prolepsis in the testimony. Prolepsis is an anticipation of an action or event before it actually occurs. As a subject within those experiences, she had no foreknowledge of the events as they would turn out but benefited by hindsight she gives a proleptic indication in her testimony. Recalling her conversation with her father who assured her that the rising ISIS attacks in the nearest city of Mosul won't escalate to their village and should it come to pass they have him, Farida, Peshmerga army and the Almighty to protect themselves, Farida says "Even the advancing jihadists were powerless against my father's optimism. But that would soon change" (2016: 28). Two months from that optimism exhibited by her father, they find their village captured by ISIS where their men were killed, women and girls captured, sold in the slave market and sexually assaulted. Another example of prolepsis that may be illustrated here is when Farida says in the course of her testimony that "This hope would prove to be misplaced, however" (ibid, 53). The statement is made when Farida narrates the day they were

herded to the village school by ISIS men when her father was still hopeful that just as the USA helped those Yezidis hiding in Mount Sinjar by aerial bombing ISIS posts on ground, they would also be rescued. But the hope ends in the grave as almost all the men in the village were killed on the single day. The prolepsis here is not employed for aesthetic purpose of building suspense and thrill, rather the sequencing of events with prolepsis in the testimonial recall reveals the working of a conscious mind in integrating the *traumatic* into the mental process of cognition and its reproduction in language.

Another notable feature of this testimonial narrative is explanatory narrative of events that happened simultaneously elsewhere which she didn't know then but having the leverage of hindsight, in her testimonial recall Farida codes them in sequence for the complete understanding of the listener or reader. David Carr calls this the '*ex post* position shared by historian and (usually) the teller of stories'. He further asserts that "this position permits descriptions of events derived from their relation to later events and thus often inaccessible to participants in the events themselves" (*Time, Narrative, and History*, 1991:58). One illustration of this is found in her testimony where she recounts an incident from the day they were taken to the school in Kocho village. Locked upstairs in the classroom with other women and girls, she couldn't exactly know what was going on with the men downstairs except hearing some vague noise from talking. But with her knowledge of the event acquired later, she fills that gap as she recounts the episode in her testimony. Talking about Salam, a local ISIS recruit she says:

We heard him talking loudly to with the men downstairs. Later we found out that Salam was again asking them to convert to Islam. First in Arabic, then in Kurdish. I expect he wanted to make sure that they all understood him. ‘If you become Muslims, nothing will happen to you,’ he promised. ‘Anybody who is prepared to change his faith will be allowed to remain in the village. But we’ll expel the rest.’ We’ve decided no,’ our mayor said, replying for everyone. They muttered their agreement. ‘but if you will allow me, I will go and ask the women too. They should be able to decide for themselves’.

(2016: 56-57)

Similarly, another example of this is found in the testimony when she describes an episode where she and her friend Evin were locked inside the house while their captors were busy fighting elsewhere since a few days. Fanaticizing death upon their captors during the moment of temporary relief, they gossip about their fate in case their captors die. Farida recounts:

I mulled this over. What, according to ISIS law, happened to a ‘slave’ whose ‘owner’ had died? Would we be ‘bequeathed’ to someone else? Had Zeyad and Galib made provision for this? Later I found out that one of their religious leaders had issued a fatwa regulating these questions. It stipulated that, like all the other ‘assets’ of our ‘owner’, we would indeed be divided among his men. But luckily we didn’t know this while we were imprisoned in Deir er-Zor. (2016: 114)

In this way Farida's testimonial narrative bears the mark of a deliberate conscious attempt at reporting the events as clearly as possible. The testimony also uses association and logical inference to gauge the events and their meanings which occurred before or beyond her direct experience of those events. After the attack on Kocho village, married women were separated from the unmarried ones for sexual slavery while young girls were allowed to stay with their mothers. But during midnight, girls as young as ten or twelve years were also added in the group for the task. To this turn of event Farida surmises:

At midnight they then started bringing in the really young girls, ten- to twelve-years-olds, who they'd previously allowed to stay with their mothers. Over the course of the evening *there must have been a new order* from their boss that even the young ones were to be treated as 'women'. After all, the youngest wife of the prophet Muhammad was only nine when they got married.
(2016: 62)

Another example of this is evident in Farida's account of an episode where she along with Evin was taken by their owners to the district of Rabia, the sight of which she observes and surmises "The road leading there was unsurfaced and full of potholes. The district itself looked desolate too; ruins and rubble were all that remained of many houses. The Assad government must have attacked this part of the city from the air and most inhabitants have taken flight" (ibid, 84). These associations and inferences contextualize the events within testimony's narrative world and broaden the understanding regarding their occurrence.

The spontaneity of the testimony in disclosing traumatic life experiences and the scaffolds of explanation and surmises with the leverage of hindsight informs a conscious mind at work in organizing life shattering experiences in a coherent narrative. Farida's testimony thereby, stands to confront the popular theorisation of trauma that it can't be integrated in the cognitive scheme and that it is beyond language.

2.2 Memory at Work:

Trauma memory is characterized as memory that stands in isolation and repeatedly returns. It is not integrated in the normal or autobiographical memory. Pierre Janet distinguished between narrative memory and *traumatic memory*. By narrative memory he referred to the normal process of integrating the experiences. Bessel van der Kolk & Onno van der Hart also contend that "Narrative memory consists of mental constructs which people use to make sense out of experience" (*The Intrusive Past*, 427). On the other hand traumatic memory is unassimilated and unintegrated memories that repeatedly returns independent of conscious recall. Janet writes about his treatment of a patient named Irène who suffered from traumatic memory as a result of the loss of her mother whom she had been nursing for months. After the death of her mother, Irène kept on reenacting the scene of nursing her mother in bed. The traumatic memory in her case had not been integrated and schematized. Janet treated her by bringing her unassimilated experience into her consciousness and integrating it into the mental process after which she had reduced symptoms of reenacting the trauma memory (ibid).

Farida's testimony is a work of remarkable memory around the traumatic experiences which are considered to be resistant to assimilation in the cognitive process. Her testimony registers experiences in their minute details demonstrating the remarkable memory function. One demonstration of her prowess is the episode of

remembering the phone number of her friend's uncle. When they got hold of a functioning mobile phone in their bid to escape from the ISIS camp, they dialed all the numbers memorized by them but none worked. At last Evin mentioned of an uncle living in Germany but she had difficulty in remembering his number. Following Evin's cue that the number was written in red ink on the pinboard beside the phone in her house, Farida visualized the house in her mind which she had frequented several times and without much difficulty got all the sequence of the digits. With that call they made their first contact with the outside world. In return Evin's uncle provided them with the contact number of a smuggler who later rescues them.

With her strong memory function, Farida gives testimony of her traumatic experiences. She recalls the day ISIS attacked their village in minute details. When she saw ISIS men approaching her village in thirteen vehicles filled with heavy military weapons, she ran downstairs and informed her father "They're coming, they're coming!", "They're coming to kill us!" (2016: 54). The verbatim recall of Farida's testimony evokes the immediacy of experience. Following the ISIS occupation of their village, they were led to the village school which Farida recounts:

We packed up everything we possessed. Our three mobile phones, Mum's gold jewellery, Dad's car keys, our cash and our passports. Then we headed for the school. My father and I out in the front, with Delan and Serhad behind us. Mum was holding hands with my two younger brothers at the rear. I can still clearly remember what I was wearing that day: a black blouse and a long, brown skirt. I'd also wrapped a brown scarf around my head. These were the clothes of mourning, because

so many of our relatives had been killed in Siba and Sinjar.
(2016: 55)

Even the minor detail like a mathematics problem written on the black board from the previous session doesn't escape Farida's memory (ibid, 56). Farida also recalls the sordid detail of her first rape. She tells that after being brought to their new owner named Emir Zeyad, she and Evin were forced to take shower where she was stripped of her clothes. As they were forcefully scrubbed and beaten for resisting, they made a futile suicide attempt by pulling the bulb in the room to cause short circuit which was thwarted by their owner. Then they were hauled up in a room where they were brutally violated. They wake up next morning to find their entire abdomen in burning pain so much so that Farida couldn't relieve herself in the loo (ibid, 110-111). Farida vividly recalls not only one incident of rape but many horrors at the hands of ISIS in her testimony.

Discussing about Holocaust, Lawrence Langer calls the memory of traumatic experiences *durational time* which stays alongside the *chronological time* (*Admitting Holocaust*) and there are occasions when these times integrate yet distinctly stand apart as the memory of the traumatic past resists assimilation. Langer's hypothesis puts *durational time* (or trauma experience) with a persistent strength or power of self-autonomy. His study of Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies leads him to this conclusion. In Farida's testimony also the durational time or traumatic memory is seen alongside the chronological or narrative memory but with a difference. Unlike the trauma memory dictating the nature of narrative and function of memory, Farida's memory is seen to be in full possession of itself without the intrusion of trauma memory. In fact her recall of trauma experiences has a certain kind of agency. Regarding the day of 15th August, 2014 she says "I will never be able to forget that day

as long as I live” (2016: 53). That was the day ISIS arrived in her village which was the catalyst of every tragedy and trauma experiences she and her community experienced. This declaration of Farida establishes a different kind of relation between the victim and the memory of trauma. On that same day she saw her brother Delan and father for the last time. Her impression of the moment is recorded by Farida in her statement as “The last thing I saw of dad was a terribly sad look he gave me as he held hands with Delan and Serhad. ‘I have stored this memory forever in my mind’ (ibid, 55). This recall of the painful moment and the commitment to keep it alive challenges the dominant position of trauma theorists who consider trauma events as staying outside the reach of conscious engagement. Her take on the trauma and committing it to memory and reproducing it in her testimony shows trauma which was considered as uncontrollable event to that of manageable one to the bidding of mind, memory and thus language. Farida’s resolve of remembering her traumatic experience and committing it to her memory activates an altered form of relationship between trauma and memory. The altered relationship enables Farida to subject her traumatic experiences or memories to a conscious recall and to integrate it in the cognitive process that results in her testimony.

2.3 Triangulation:

In one of his essays, Ian Hacking writes about ‘*False Memory Syndrome (FSM) Foundation that was founded in 1992 in Philadelphia*’ (*Memoro-politics, trauma and the soul*, 29), the purpose of which was to question the veracity of the memories presented as testimonies of child sexual abuse by the victims as grown up in most cases against their parents and close relatives. The foundation viewed that the memories of

sexual abuse were false and engendered in psychotherapy. Elizabeth Loftus's study in the area of memory aligns with the central concern of the foundation that critically interrogates the victim testimonies which oftentimes are false due to the flexibility of memory. Even though the foundation's primary focus was on the childhood memories of sexual abuse which are recovered by the victims as grownups, in most cases in therapy sessions, it raises a legitimate question on the authenticity of the testimony. Keeping this in mind, triangulation of the testimony in order to purge it from the charge of false memory is important. Farida's Khalaf's testimony has two important aspects whose triangulation will help in establishing its authenticity and historicity. Firstly, the unfurling of the events in Iraq and their gradual impact on their lives is testified by Farida with dates. She tells about the incident of 6th June, 2014 when car bombs exploded in Mosul and the ensuing battle with Iraqi forces for the control of Mosul the following day on 7th of June and the final conquest by 10th of June. She also recalls the 1st of August, 2014 ISIS attack of a military position in Zumar and the fateful day of 15th August which she says 'I'll never be able to forget that day as long as I live', (2016: 53). That was the day on which her village named Kocho was attacked and they were taken prisoners while men were killed as expendables. All these events mentioned by Farida in her testimony are true historical events. Its triangulation with the external sources establishes the authenticity of her recall. Wikipedia Timeline on Iraq War (2014), United States Institute of Peace's "Iraq Timeline: Since 2003" confirm those events in their timelines. LSE Middle East Centre Report titled *A Demographic Documentation of ISIS's Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho* by Valeria Cetorelli, Sareta Ashraph confirms the event of 15th August attack of Kocho village and offers a documentation of the event and its human cost. In this way triangulating Farida's testimony of the events with external sources establishes the veracity and authenticity

of her testimony. Secondly, Farida's personal account of rape and sexual slavery are corroborated by the testimonial accounts of other Yezidi women victims. Even though the crimes of rape and sexual slavery do not leave any external marks in most of the cases like the sites of ruin in wartimes, these testimonial narratives can be probed by other similar narratives. Farida's testimony describes a procedure or mode of operation of ISIS in their enslavement of Yezidi women. ISIS militants would be completely brutal with Yezidi women. First they separate married women from the virgins, parade them like livestock for auctioning, they trade girl as young as nine year old for sex, and brutally abuse, rape, gang rape, and beat them mercilessly at the slightest pretext. They are forced to memorize Quran and pray daily and after the prayer, they are raped. These horrifying experiences of Farida at the hands of ISIS militants are the standard mode of operation which other Yezidi victims also report in their testimonies. Nadia Murad's testimony and victim testimonies in Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* affirm the similar nature of ISIS barbarity. Therefore the similarities in the testimonies of several victims who were not acquaintances and were not held captive together at the same time and place confirm its authenticity for no different people would be able to imagine similar story of rape and abuse in its exact detail.

Furthermore, the discovery of mass graves across Iraq documented in *Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL* published by United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2018 identified a total of 202 mass grave sites with an estimate of a '6,000 to more than 12,000 victims buried in these sites' (1). The official ritualistic burial ceremony of 104 Yezidi victims after their identification through DNA test in Kocho on 6th of February 2021 also lends credibility to Farida's narrative.

This way, triangulation with external sources and assessing the intertextual indications establish the authenticity and veracity of Farida's testimony as well as the testimonies in the following chapters.

2.4 A Psychoanalytic Reading of Farida's Testimony:

Psychoanalytic criticism is based on a classic methodology introduced by Freud based on the idea "...that writers create stories and characters that reflect their own unconscious psychology. A text is a mirror of the unconscious mind..." (Benjamin H. Ogden and Thomas H. Ogden, 6). Although Farida's testimony is not a narrative fiction, the Freudian and Lacanian model of psychoanalysis adopted in literary criticism may be borrowed here to analyze Farida's case. Farida is unapologetic about her past experiences in captivity; she gives a vivid narrative account of her ordeal not withholding her dehumanization and rape. She is sentient and cognizant of the word 'rape' in all its implication. She uses the word in her testimony to refer to the incident happening to the captured women including her friends. She uses the word to connote the physical and moral violation of women in general. As the captured women, rape was the most often repeated assault on these Yezidi women and hence Farida's testimony uses the word considerable times while describing this event taking place. However it is noted that Farida used the word 'rape' only to describe the rape of others but not in direct reference to herself. She used the word without difficulty while reporting that crime happening to someone else, or other fellow captives or her friend Evin. But in direct reference to her rape, she avoided using it. The one occasion she used the word rape in direct reference to herself also had Evin in the frame of reference. She says that 'Only my soul was able to roam freely, hovering somewhere above the room with the two Libyans. The men who were intending to rape Evin and me' (2016:

109). It shows her reluctance to take the ownership of the word and its connotation which is damaging from Yezidi social perspective.

Farida used the word rape with direct reference to herself only on two occasions and that was to describe the events of her potential rape which didn't take place or were thwarted by her. One example of this is from her captivity under Emir Zeyad. After his return from battle, Emir Zeyad planned to rape her and had her brought to another building occupied by him. She recalls the moment and says, "I didn't doubt for one minute that after the victorious battle Zeyad would be in the mood for a woman. He'd had me brought here to rape me again. There was no reason to assume any different" (ibid, 115). But before the crime took place, Farida tried to end her life by hanging herself and lay senseless on the floor from her fall as the veil she used to hang herself couldn't support her weight. This puts an end to Emir's plan of raping her on that day. Another use of the word in reference to her was when she anticipates her new owner Azzad's next move, whom she had badly hurt in her attempt to protect herself from his advances. She says, "What I dreaded more than any beatings was the rape which inevitably awaited me" (ibid, 151). But in this case the anticipated rape doesn't take place. On the other hand, the rapes that tolled on her, Farida didn't use the word to acknowledge them. Although she described her rape in vivid details, she didn't use the word. Instead she used euphemism to describe her rape but didn't utter the word. One occasion of her rape by her owner was described as 'I couldn't prevent Amjed from doing what he'd planned. When he finally got off me, I curled up into a ball and stayed on the bed, crying' (ibid, 137) without using the word.

Thus it is seen that Farida used the word comfortably as an abstract concept and reference point so long as an event it didn't happen to her. The reluctance to use the word informs the unconscious dilemma of acknowledging the fact of her rape which is

considered a grave miscarriage bringing shame and dishonor not only to the victim but to the entire family. Her testimony had informed this custom that a woman must preserve her chastity before marriage which her community ensures rigorously. In the face of such community norms with regards to women's virginity, Farida's reluctance of using the word rape with its devastating implication in reference to herself, informs her unconscious mind's dilemma about owning the word and its connotation and replacing it with euphemism. On the one hand the conscious narrative gives a graphic detail of her assault and on the other the unconscious process of mind does not recognize or acknowledge the event. The psychoanalytic reading of Farida's testimony reveals the conscious working of her mind that tries to give a coherent narrative of her experiences and simultaneously the subconscious fear of social rejection, stigma and taboo concerning her rape encodes the testimonial narrative where rape is used figuratively and euphemistically.

2.5 On Language:

A dominant position held in trauma studies has always characterized trauma as an experience beyond the reach of language. The disruptive experience is considered to have permanent impact in the person rendering him/her unable to articulate it. This theorisation of trauma downplays the role and potential of language. Following James Pennbaker's linguistics analysis of the people suffering from extreme events that predicted the severity of PTSD, a close reading of Farida's testimony reveals a clear cognitive process. While giving a testimony of her traumatic experience, Farida uses cognitive words, emotion words, positive and negative words abiding the linguistic coherence. The simultaneous use of person deixis i.e I, we, she, her and its frequent

alteration within a line or paragraph according to the need of reference in her testimony while narrating a life shattering experience with coherence reveals a language function that can accommodate trauma experience without disrupting its structural coherence. The conscious integration of the disturbing traumatic memories and their literal representation without breaking the narrative coherence in Farida's testimony suggests possibility of articulating trauma.

The analysis of Farida's testimony finds it filled with a tendency to tell her story and hold ISIS accountable for the crimes they committed against her community. Experiencing ISIS atrocities and their genocide against her community, Farida considers her living itself as an act of defiance. After immigrating to Germany where she studies to become a mathematics teacher as she had always wanted to, Farida says in her epilogue that "I survived to prove to them I'm stronger than they are" (2016: 199). The strong will to live and tell the injustice suffered by her and her community prods Farida to articulate her traumatic experiences in the form of testimony. In this way her testimony breaks what Miriam Cooke calls the "millennial silence of rape survivors" (*Murad vs. ISIS: Rape as a Weapon of Genocide*, 279) and provides with the discursive material and evidence of historical importance on the Yezidi experience.

Chapter 3

‘Witnessing-Relay’ in Dunya Mikhail’s *The Beekeeper of Sinjar: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq*

3.0 Introduction:

Dunya Mikhail’s *The Beekeeper of Sinjar: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq* is a collection of testimonies mostly of women escapees with a few accounts of children and male victims. The testimonies collected and translated (from Arabic into English) in this text have three distinctive characteristics which are highlighted here. The first category of testimonies in the text may be called ‘direct testimonies’; these are testimonies collected by the author herself through the phone interview as well as individual interview with the victim(s) at a location. The second category of testimonies are the direct interview transcript or voice records that the victims gave to someone else which the author used in this text. And the third category of testimony is the proxy testimonies, which are the testimonies on behalf of the victims told by a second person. From its (testimony’s) conception or coming into being in the sharing or telling of an experience to an empathetic listener in real space-time to its dissemination through verbal and written transcripts to the proxy testimonies, how does the ‘relay’ of witnessing the traumatic experiences take place across time and distance is analysed here. It also attempts at analysing the factors that mobilise or incentivise the testimonial narratives of traumatic experiences.

3.1 Witnessing-Relay:

In his book *Untimely Interventions: AIDS writing, Testimonial & the Rhetoric of Haunting* (2004), Ross Chambers used a term called ‘relay’ to describe a trope he found

in the testimonial writings which he studied in his book (37). By ‘relay’ he meant ‘a portability’ in the testimonial writings of those texts either through ‘reporting’ or ‘fostering’ the haunting experiences (ibid). He also viewed “the witnessing writer as a mediating agent, connecting or attempting to (re)connect those who cannot speak (the dead) and those (the living) who seem oblivious to their fate, as if it were not relevant to them” (ibid). Borrowing Chambers’ concept of ‘relay’ it is further extended to involve the individual victims who gave their testimonies of the traumatic experiences to the author. It also includes testimonies (direct interviews or interview via phone, voice recordings etc. done by the author’s journalist friends) which she collected from her secondary sources. The most important contribution to this extended concept of ‘relay’ in light of Dunya Mikhail’s text is Abdullah Shrem and his proxy testimonies which he shares with Dunya. As a volunteer smuggling the kidnapped women and children from ISIS captivity, Abdullah was privy to many testimonial accounts of the victims, which he presents to Dunya Mikhail. The concept of ‘relay’ in its extended meaning in this research is the process of witnessing the traumatic experiences through the act of victim’s telling of his/her experiences to an empathetic listener, a relay from its primary source to the secondary source as well as from the secondary proxy sources to its third stage destination in the author and from that to the reader in the body of the present text as the final site of witnessing.

3.1.1 Direct Testimonies:

In the ‘relay’ of trauma experiences collated by Dunya Mikhail, the first direct testimony is that of Nadia. Dunya talked to Nadia over phone with the help of her journalist friend. Nadia spoke in Kurdish which Dunya had translated in Arabic from Abdullah, Nadia’s cousin (this is how she came into contact with Abdullah, the source of the most of testimonies of the present text). As she heard Nadia speak, she felt

Nadia's pain although she didn't understand her language and "...imagined a butterfly's wings fluttering inside of her voice" (Mikhail, 2019:2). Nadia recounts her experiences vividly despite her ordeal. She recounts leaving her home and village after her husband announced the decision of leaving following his conversation with someone on phone. Remembering that fateful day she says, "That was a Sunday morning, the first Sunday in August, when we fled our home in the village of Sawlakh, east of Sinjar..." (ibid, 3). But unfortunately along with some two hundred villagers they were captured by ISIS militants on their way to the mountains. She recounts, "First they loaded the men, then the women and children, onto big trucks, taking us to Mosul" and "When they unloaded us in Mosul, they separated the virgins from the married women; they also set apart children over the age of twelve" (ibid, 3). From there, they were lodged in a school in Talafar where they were forced to recite Quran. After staying there for eighteen days they were taken to Raqqa in Syria and sold to different ISIS militants. Nadia recounts being bought by a Chechen militant who lodged her in a four-storey building in Tishreen Dam region. She was forced along with her three children aged six, five and one to recite Quran and pray with her owner. Along with that she was also made to work for twelve hours a day for them. Even her underage child was not spared. Her five year old daughter was given the dangerous task of tying the detonation lines of the bomb which they made. Along with working for them and being tortured for Quranic recitation, she was also physically abused. She was repeatedly raped by her owner under duress. She recounts being raped right in front of her children. After three months, when her owner left for fighting, Nadia and her children along with another woman and her children who were also held captive in the same building managed to escape after a call to Abdullah who oversaw their escape. Recounting her traumatic experience and eventual escape, Nadia says "I woke up from

a nightmare that still wakes me up every night: the man who bought me comes to kidnap me while I'm picking up tomatoes. I see myself naked and barefoot, like a newborn or the newly dead" (ibid, 7).

Nadia's testimony records her traumatic experiences in vivid detail. She remembers the precise moment, the day and month of their departure from her village. Her testimony with particular details reveals the conscious recalling and the work of memory at summoning the traumatic experiences and their reproduction in a coherent narrative. The recurrence of dream of her kidnap and her nakedness on the other hand reveals the persistence of trauma and her fear of it. Another addition to Nadia's testimony is Abdullah's report which he witnessed while visiting her. He tells Dunya that on his visit to Nadia, he saw her daughter telling her "*Mama, around this time you were taking off your clothes*" and the younger son repeating '*Allahu Akbar*' every now and then. Frustrated Nadia told them "*We have to forget. We are all very tired and simply have to forget*" (ibid, 14). Her repeated rape in front of her children who even didn't know the import of meaning of the dehumanizing crime taking place and their daily drill to commit Quranic verses in memory, unconsciously made them remember the trauma scene which their mother desperately wants to forget. Nadia's testimony reveals her unforgettable trauma experiences recalled and articulated in a coherent linguistic frame and Abdullah's addition to her testimony suggests the ossified trauma scenes in the memory of her children recalled or repeated by them on occasions.

In Dunya's collation of testimonies there are interviewed transcripts of two survivors, who are the brothers of Nadia Murad (a survivor herself whose testimony is the subject matter of analysis in the fourth chapter). Dunya Mikhail had recorded their testimonies through her telephone conversation with them separately. Khalid shares his experience of the traumatic day of the arrival of ISIS in his village and the killing of

men followed by kidnapping of the women. He recounts being taken by ISIS militants to a farm some fifty yards away from the village school in Kocho and made to stand in a row before they were shot and dumped in the irrigation pit on whose edge they were lined up. Every fifteen minute or so, a batch of Yezidi men were forced to line up in a row to face the gunshots fired by the militants. In both the batches before him, Khalid had his brothers who were killed, while he was in the third batch to take the bullet. He was shot thrice; one shot hit his leg and the other two hit his left hand. He miraculously survives gunshots along with his friend Idrees. Once the militants return to the school, Khalid struggles himself out of the pit and runs away from there. After crossing the farm road, Khalid lies down on ground to hide and waits till sunset upon hearing gunshots. When the gunshots subside, Khalid walks for about six mile despite the leg-wound which almost killed him as a result of blood-lose and dehydration. Finally at dusk he arrives in a village named al-Qabusiyah where he knocks at someone's door requesting for water to drink. Looking at his condition he is given shelter by the man of the house who is an Arab Muslim but doesn't subscribe to the ISIS ideology. The man stayed awake with Khalid for the whole night and served him juices to help with his wounds. After consulting his friends, the man contacts someone from Peshmerga who comes to take Khalid for further treatment after four days. On their way to the hospital in Zakho, Khalid requests the Peshmerga armies to go by the farm pit to look for his friend Idrees thinking to find him still there after four days as Idrees was also injured. Unfortunately they don't find Idrees. In the hospital Khalid undergoes operation but due to the damage in nerves, his hand remains paralyzed to this day. Fortunately though, one day he reunites with his nine year old daughter named Nazik, who had a miraculous escape from ISIS captivity.

Khalid's another brother named Sa'eed also survived the gunshot. He was in the batch before Khalid to face the gunshot and the person to shoot at them, Sa'eed tells was a neighbour. In the barrage of gunshot, Sa'eed and three others were wounded but they do not die. After the militants were gone to bring another batch of men for execution, Sa'eed and the others crawl up the pit. Giving in to his wounded neck, hand and leg, Sa'eed suggests his friend to leave him behind whose wound was not serious as his. Hiding for six hours, some hundred and fifty yards away from that mass grave, Sa'eed witnesses the genocide happening. At dusk, under the cover of a low-flying plane's noise, Sa'eed runs away from that place and after a long hour's walk reaches the village of al-Qabusiyyah. There he finds shelter with a good Muslim family. After six days, Sa'eed leaves for mount Sinjar, fainting a few times on the way as result of bleeding from his wound which started again due to walking. At last he was found by Patriotic Union of Kurdistan workers who handed him over to the Kurdish government. Then he was given medical treatment for his wound for about one and a half months. After that Sa'eed signs up for battle against ISIS. He is one among the fighters including Peshmerga to liberate Sinjar, where they discover the mass grave of the Yezidis.

Sa'eed and Khalid's telephone-interview which become testimonials articulate their respective trauma in clear and coherent language. Both of them remember the turn of the events on that particular day when ISIS militants execute Yezidi men in Kocho village and even though they were taken separately in batches, their experiences of facing the firing squad were similar. The unplanned questions and their answers suggest that their testimonies were neither an involuntary repetition of the trauma nor a fine tailored narrative but rather a conscious and spontaneous recollection articulated. This

establishes the fact that trauma can also be consciously recollected and articulated provided a context is created for its emergence.

Badia and Claudia are other survivors whose testimonies find place in Dunya Mikhail's text. Each of them recounts their painful experiences to Dunya. Badia was a girl of nineteen when ISIS arrived in her village named Kocho. She tells that they were taken to a school in Sawlakh, where married women were separated from the unmarried and children over six years were sent to training camps. The next day pregnant women and older women were killed and dumped in the pond of the institute (ibid, 64). From there, they were moved several times from place to place in Talafar and kept in subhuman conditions. They were not even given water. Recalling the episode she says: "Some of the women and children died of thirst. At that point a man showed up with a bucket of water. But before we could drink any of it, he threw in a dirty diaper. I don't know why he did this, but we drank the water any way, despite the filth" (ibid, 64). In order to save her three year old nephew, Badia claims herself married and the child as her son. When American Emir buys her along with her nephew and another girl named Nada, Badia thwarts his advances by claiming herself to be pregnant for some time. But unfortunately her deceptions are found out soon when her owner forces her to undergo pregnancy test. Discovering her to be unmarried and a virgin, her owner forces himself on her and sends the child for training in the camp. In order to bring her nephew back, Badia had to be obsequious towards her owner, accommodating to his demands which were sexual in nature. Few months into her captivity, when her owner goes to fight one day, Badia along with her nephew and Nada escape from the house by breaking the door with a metal tool. Finding a telephone booth she manages to make call at a number shared by a woman during her stay in the school. Two hours later a car picks them up

and takes them in a house where they stay for two days. After that they are taken to Turkey and from there to Iraq.

Unlike Nadia, Khalid, Sa'eed or Badia, the testimony of Claudia was not recorded over phone but rather in the personal meeting of the author with her. And unlike the previous survivors, Claudia is not a Yezidi rather a Christian woman married to a Muslim man much to the dislike of the parents of both. Dunya Mikhail meets Claudia during her visit to Iraq in 2016 in a Christian monastery of Dair Mar Elia and there she narrates her experiences. In 2014, one day when her husband doesn't return from work, Claudia waits for whole night in anxiety. Next day when she goes to her husband's workplace looking for him, she finds it occupied by ISIS. Upon discovery that she is a Christian, Claudia is detained. She was tortured with needle prick under her nail and her nail peeled off. When she regains consciousness she finds herself in a school with Yezidi girls of various ages. ISIS men abused and raped them with impunity there. She recounts the barbaric act of the rape of a ten year old girl named Lalish to whom she was drawn as she was about the age of her son. Claudia tells Dunya that:

She was exceptionally beautiful. Her braid was still tied the way her mother had done it for her. They took her away at night, didn't bring her back until morning. She came back with dried blood all over her feet. She was trying to walk but kept falling to the ground. She was naked, and they threw clothes on top of her...At night, she fell ill with a high fever...Every minute she said, "Oh, Mom." She was moaning like that for a full two months... (ibid, 192-193)

Claudia also recounts her gang rape by ISIS militants. Claudia recounts that she and a girl named Azab were gang raped by four men. She recalls, “They were partying—doing drugs and drinking—and they raped us, taking turns, one after another” (ibid, 193). But the barbarity didn’t end there as Claudia recalls, “The worst humiliation I ever felt was the morning that we were taken to the assembly hall outside the school. They didn’t let us wear our clothes. We came outside naked, and the guards harassed us and hit us. They raped us there in that assembly hall however they wished” (ibid, 193). Like many captured women Claudia also attempted suicide but was prevented by a sixty year old woman who gave her hope and optimism. Finally, Claudia’s neighbour named Ahmad, who recently started working with ISIS manages her escape. Free from captivity, Claudia fetches her children — a boy named Hawar and girl named Maryam — from her neighbour and walks with hundreds of people fleeing ISIS. Unfortunately Claudia gets separated from her son and loses him in the crowd.

The testimonies of Badia and Claudia also reveal the articulation of traumatic experiences in coherent narrative. The recollection of appropriate events to address specific questions of the author reveals an unhindered memory network and the articulation of the same in coherent narrative suggests sound language function both of which are supposed to be disrupted as a result of trauma according to the popular position on trauma. The testimonies analysed on the other hand testify to the fact of a conscious navigation of trauma memories and their articulation in language.

3.1.2 Indirect Testimonies:

The second category of testimony in the text is the transcripts of interviews given to journalists from whom the present author collected or borrowed those transcripts. One

such example is the interview of a mother and her two children aged three and seven who escaped from captivity. In their captivity they were underfed, beaten and made to make rockets for the militants. Failing to meet the daily quota of making rockets, they were punished severely and remained in fear. In the interviewed transcript it is observed that there was a stark difference in the articulation of trauma experiences of the two children and their mother. The three year old boy Hoshyar was asked 21 questions. His answers to all the questions were short and mostly laconic. However, his memory of the experiences is sound as he answered all the questions asked correctly, like the name of their owner, the place of their captivity and the task of making rocket etc. It is same with his seven year old sister Rula, who was asked 9 questions in total, which she also answered more or less laconically. Only in one case she volunteered offering her own surplus to the answer, deviating from the laconic answer. When asked if she learnt how to pray (the Islamic prayer which captives were drilled to memorize), she answered “Yes, but now I want to forget” (ibid, 12). Contrary to that, the mother named Raghda answered the 14 questions asked to her in more than one sentence with elaboration. The memories of the events experienced are intact with all three of them but in answering the questions, it is the younger ones who didn’t elaborate much. This reveals that trauma experiences have an impact on different age groups differently which facilitates or otherwise, in the articulation of trauma. This indirect testimony transcript also establishes the fact that a universal impact as well as assumption about trauma is limiting as each individual is affected differently from the other.

3.1.3 Proxy Testimonies:

In this research, proxy testimony is understood as a testimony proffered on behalf of the survivor by someone else. In the ‘relay’ of the testimonies discussed in the present chapter, Abdullah Shrem is the main thread. He is the one who brings diverse strands of

survivor testimonies and helps the author in weaving a tapestry of testimonial narratives. As a volunteer rescuing the Yezidi women captured by ISIS militants, Abdullah Shrem was privy to survivors and their traumatic stories which he shares with the author thus bringing out the testimonies which otherwise the world would have missed.

The first proxy testimony shared by Abdullah in the text is of Parveen, who could neither speak nor hear. He tells that Parveen was captured by ISIS on the day Kocho was attacked. When Nadia escaped from ISIS captivity, she mentioned of another captive held in the same building who couldn't hear or speak (ibid, 30). Nadia's description of the captive matched Parveen, whose brother then contacted Abdullah to trace her. On scouting the area mentioned by Nadia, they came to know that she had been sold to someone in Aleppo. Abdullah managed to recruit a poor widow in his rescue operation. He bought her a cart full of clothes worth a thousand dollars to hawk in the neighbourhood in exchange of the information regarding Parveen that she may gather while selling clothes in the area. After a month, Parveen's location is found. Abdullah asks her brother to send two pictures, one with him and Parveen in the frame and another with him alone standing beside a car with door open and motioning towards camera to enter into the car. When the widow shows her the first picture, Parveen recognizes her brother and starts crying. Then the widow leads her towards a car and when she shows her the second picture she understands what is expected of her and sits in the car. From there she was taken to Turkey and finally brought to Iraq. Abdullah tells that Parveen had been bought and sold ten times which she explained by using her fingers (ibid, 33). She was also the victim of rape and she had body marks as a result of beating by her recent buyer. She was made to understand the sign of her sexual duty; when her buyer threw a cloth on the floor she lay down, removing her

clothes. She was conditioned in Pavlovian way by brutal beating and torture. Parveen's explanation of her captivity and selling by using her fingers suggest that trauma—no matter how profound—surfaces its way towards certain form of mimetic representation.

Another heartbreaking proxy testimony shared by Abdullah is that of Maha. She was a mother of four and pregnant for fifth time. On the day ISIS attacked their village, her husband was killed and she along with her children was sold to someone in Syria. After two months she gave birth to her fifth child. Five months into her captivity, her owner sold her eldest daughter who was fourteen to another man. Maha pleaded with the owner to let her daughter stay but to no avail. Realizing that her 12 year old daughter will be the next one to be sold, Maha runs away with her children when her owner was not at home. While asking for direction, unfortunately she is discovered to be a runaway *sabya* owing to her poor Arabic and returned to her owner. Furious at this dare, her owner ties Maha and her twelve year old daughter to the bed and beats them with all his strength. And the infants aged three months, eight months and three years are poisoned by the owner who died there in horrible pain right in front of Maha and her daughter. Maha was heartbroken and didn't move from the graves of her children for a few days and nights (ibid, 120). A sympathetic neighbour came to inquire and offered help, but Maha was deep in her sorrow to respond. But the daughter responded to the kind gesture of neighbour who gave them a cell phone to call. The girl contacted her uncle who then informed Abdullah. And finally with the help of Abdullah, Maha and her daughter were whisked away when her owner was not at home.

With his noble work, Abdullah thus brought back many Yezidis to their loved ones. Along with rescuing them, Abdullah also brought their testimonies to the public space. It was because of his heroic enterprise many women and children returned to their remaining family members. His contact with Dunya Mikhail provided her with

access to the individual survivors for their testimonies as well as many surrogate or proxy testimonies. Dunya Mikhail's text *The Beekeeper of Sinjar: Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq* which contains testimonies shared in varying positions and degrees of proximity i.e. direct testimony, indirect testimony and proxy testimony informs of the process of 'witnessing-relay' of the trauma experiences. The present text with its collation of testimonies of Yazidi genocide extends the process of 'witnessing-relay' one degree further by advancing these testimonies to the public space.

3.2 Triangulation:

The application of triangulation method helps in establishing the authenticity of testimonies shared in the text. Verification of the testimonies with the external sources is one such strategy. The other strategy is of internal verification which is the process of checking different testimonial accounts of similar incidents shared in the text and verifying their authenticity by comparing each testimony for conformity and deviation. The recurrent mention of the day of ISIS attack in Sinjar and its surrounding villages on 3rd August, 2014 by survivors in their testimonies is verified to be a true event based on the reports in newspapers and journals. LSE Centre on Middle East Report, June 2019 offers a detailed report on the said event. This establishes the authenticity of the testimonies which resulted from the tragic event of that day. The discovery of mass-graves in Sinjar on November 13, 2015 which Abdullah and Sa'eed mentioned is also found to be true upon triangulation with external sources. Along with other journals and commission reports, it was also published as a news item in *The Guardian* dated 15 Nov, 2015. Thus, the testimonies of the victims of the said events are established to be true. On the other hand, internal verification of the testimonies also helps in establishing their veracity. The testimony given by Nadia about her captivity and escape is triangulated by an interview transcript Dunya collected from her friend where

the interviewees give a similar testimony about their captivity and escape. The comparison of two or more testimonies of the same event for the conformity or deviation thus helps in authenticating the veracity of those experiences. Khalid and Sa'eed's individual testimonies describing the ISIS militants' shooting of Yezidi men by lining them in rows and dumping them in the irrigation pit confirm each other's testimonies. Furthermore, the testimony of Idrees, a friend of Sa'eed who also survived the ISIS gunshot that day matches Sa'eed's testimony which establishes the fact of ISIS killing of Yezidi men in Kocho. Apart from them, many women who were locked in a school after separating them from their men also saw the killing and dumping of men in the pit from the window of the school and confirmed the same in their testimonies. The testimonies of women, even though they were sold and enslaved in different places in Iraq and Syria confirm to the similar experiences of rape, abuse, forced conversion, compulsory Islamic prayer and further rape after the prayer. The testimony of similar experience of rape and abuse by every women survivor of ISIS captivity thus establishes the truth and authenticity of their testimonies. In this way, the testimonies shared in this text are triangulated and the veracity of those experiences is confirmed.

3.3 On memory:

Dunya Mikhail's text addresses some specific questions with regards to trauma and memory. While trauma is considered to be an experience too extreme to be registered in memory via consciousness, the testimonies presented in this text contradict this assumption and prove otherwise. In pursuit of the testimonies of Yezidi experience of persecution and genocide at the hands of ISIS, the author interviewed the survivors in person as well as over the phone. The spontaneous response to those questions by the

victims informs of the conscious channeling of the experiences in linguistic expression. The testimonial recalling of their experiences with precision that corroborate others' testimonies and the external documentation suggest that trauma events can be recalled and remembered. Among the many testimonial recalling of trauma experiences, a deaf and dumb girl named Parveen's explanation of her experiences by hand gesture reveals that trauma memories are also within the reach of conscious mind whenever required which can be represented in any form of expressions i.e. language, art etc.

3.4 On Language:

Contrary to the assumption that trauma cannot be articulated in language, a host of testimonies in the present text have shared the traumatic experiences in language. Most of the testimonies are in interview or conversation format between the victims and author where the victims were also interjected and asked questions that required them to quickly contemplate the question and provide appropriate answer. The appropriate answers to the questions asked despite having to relive the traumatic experiences in articulating them inform of the compatibility between trauma and language. Despite personally suffering trauma experiences and working with the traumatized people to rescue them, Abdullah's direct and proxy testimonial reports do have a coherent narrative. His language competence is unhindered when he narrates traumatic testimonies, both personal and proxy. The use of cognitive word, emotion word and appropriate deixis are discernible in his testimonies that suggest that trauma experiences can also be narrated in language without semantic deficiencies. Similarly the testimonies of other victims like Nadia, Badia, Khalid, Sa'eed, Claudia and others convey their experiences through the medium of language.

3.5 Motivation:

Abdullah is not only the central character of the present text but he is also the one who made it possible for this book to come into being by assisting the author with testimonies, contacts and interviews with the victims. Apart from risking his life in smuggling the abducted Yezidi women and children from ISIS captivity, he wanted their suffering to be known in the world. For this reason he volunteered to help Dunya Mikhail find the victims of ISIS enabled genocide and their testimonies for her book. While trauma condemns some people to silence, Abdullah—who experienced ISIS persecution and luckily escaped with personal losses of friends and family members to genocide—wanted to have their stories heard and known in the world. In his conversation with Dunya one day, Abdullah tells her, “I’m also very glad to have gotten to know you—it’s really important to me that your book sees the light of the day so that the whole world will know what’s going on here” (ibid, 30). He is so committed in his voluntary work that on the funeral day of his brother whose bones were recovered from the recent discovered mass graves in Sinjar, he leaves the ceremony on receiving a call from a captive who was trying to escape saying that “I must respond to his death by saving even more people from the hands of the killers” (ibid, 166). His desire for justice, peace and stability motivated him to continue with his herculean task and simultaneously provide Dunya Mikhail with the trauma testimonies in the hope that world will take note of their state. When Dunya asked him if his life would be in danger should this book be published, Abdullah replied in negative for the desire of their experiences being told and documented surpassed his personal welfare. On being told that unlike Scheherazade who saved her life with the tales she told, Abdullah, on the contrary might lose his life for the stories he told, he replies that “I’d be happy to be like Scheherazade” (ibid, 201). Abdullah’s example in telling his story and bringing

other people and their stories together establishes the fact that trauma experiences can be translated into language provided one finds a reason to do it.

Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar—Rescuing the Stolen Women of Iraq* in this way relays the witnessing of trauma through collation of the testimonial accounts from proxy testimony on behalf of an absent victim to the direct first person testimony via author to the readers as the final destination. The relay of trauma through such a network also theoretically stands to confront the position that it can't be articulated and emphasizes that coming together of certain factors like strong will, quest for justice, and empathetic listener etc. contribute in articulating trauma.

Chapter 4

Justice Through Memory: Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight Against Islamic State*

4.0 Introduction:

This chapter analyses the memory function vis-à-vis trauma experience. While the dominant discourse of trauma suggests its impact on memory function, this chapter looks into the ways remembering is practiced within a specific cultural or political context in order to historicize the experiences. Nadia Murad's testimony attempts to bear witness to the historic event of Yazidi genocide and sexual slavery of Yazidi women. The chapter analyses the configuration under which she manages to tell her story and if she is successful in her trauma articulation with the stated purpose of bearing witness and leaving historical evidence of the crimes committed against her community.

4.1 Trauma and Outside Address:

In his essay *Truth and Testimony: The Process and Struggle*, Dori Laub observes that Holocaust was an event without witness and says that:

...what precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, *the event produced no witness*. Not only, in effect did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witness of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible *and* deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims. (Caruth, 1995: 65)

And the reason for this is the strange subject position that victims find themselves in which “the very circumstance of *being inside the event* that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed. One might say that there was, thus, historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside and inside the event” (ibid, 66). It is only at a later stage, in the encounter between victim and listener in the enabling space of testimony, witnessing to the event takes place for the first time which remained un-articulated. The testimonial narrative thus seeks an outside listener or I-Thou equivalent of Martin Buber in order for its history to be witnessed belatedly and thus to acknowledge its truth, a process Dori Laub calls ‘historical retroaction’ (ibid, 66). The proliferation of Holocaust testimonies are examples of witnessing the event and reclaiming historical truth.

Nadia Murad’s testimonial narrative which she authored with Jenna Krajeski in the similar vein is an address to the readers to bear witness to the event she (and her community) suffered. Separated by history and context of Holocaust, Nadia Murad’s own experience as a *sabiya* (war bride) for ISIS militants and the gruesome event of the genocide of her community is the account she puts forward for the reader to be a party in witnessing a truth.

4.2 Memory Function:

Remembering is one of the most commonly performed daily activities in human life and yet it is one of the most complex processes to pin down to one single rudimentary

matrix to explain. The interdisciplinary field of memory research what is now termed as ‘memory studies’ considers a broad range of issues from the most basic biological and cellular encoding and retrieval systems to the ways in which political and cultural systems facilitate the remembering or silencing of historical events” (Adam D. Brown et al. 2009: 117). In their editorial piece Amanda J Barnier and Andrew Hoskins write about various disciplinary characterizations of memory:

...for instance, the ways in which the social sciences and humanities in the past decade increasingly have characterized memory in term of its supposed mobility, as ‘mobile’ (Hirsch, 2014), ‘travelling’ (Erll, 2011) and ‘multidirectional’ (Rotheberg, 2009). Its movement is considered as important as the memory itself, perhaps even more important. However, as the media of the digital era have become increasingly networked and accessible, it is not so much the movement of memory that defines it, not where it is located in time and space, but that its essential quality is its ‘connectivity’ (Hoskins, 2011) and its working ‘on-the-fly’(Hoskins, 2014). (2018:387)

Therefore given the diverse interest and range of methodologies employed to explore memory and memory function it is considered that “memory as a field of studies can’t be reduced to a single definition” (Adam D. Brown et al. 2009: 119). However the surging interest and the interdisciplinary negotiations on memory are opening space for the better understanding of memory and its process.

Nadia Murad’s testimony is a work of memory where traumatic, *episodic memories* (E. Tulving, 1983) are recalled and woven into the autobiographical memory

or what Pierre Janet calls *narrative memory* (van der Kolk & van der Hart). An analysis of her trauma memories from psychoanalytic perspective and situating her testimony within the immediate social and political contexts will help in answering the research question. A conscious recollection of the traumatic past is seen in the way the survivor recounts her experiences with a sense of urgency. Nadia's testimony encodes three different kinds of memories in order to project the historic experiences of trauma namely: collective memory, traumatic memory and narrative memory. Collective memory is understood as the shared repository of memories of a particular group of people or nation-state. Maurice Halbwachs clearly distinguished it from the individual memory and conceded that our memories do have the influence of the collective by saying "Our memories remain collective, however, and are recalled to us through others even though only we were participants in the events or saw the things concerned" (1980:23). Oftentimes it is synonymously and interchangeably used with 'cultural memory' which alludes to the practice of remembering and transmitting tradition, values as well as the history of the collectivity. In her testimony, recourse to collective memory is seen in the way she gives a contextual background to the Yezidi community and their persecution throughout history. As an oral community that has no written records of their past, Yezidis have transmitted their tradition and history through the collective practice of the cultural memories. It is this collective memory she turns to while giving her testimony. Introducing her Yezidi faith she says "Yazidism is an ancient monotheistic religion, spread orally by holy men entrusted with our stories. Although it has elements in common with the many religions of the Middle East, from Mithraism and Zoroastrianism to Islam and Judaism, it is truly unique and difficult even for the holy men who memorize our stories to explain. I think of my religion as ancient tree with thousands of rings, each telling a story in the long history of Yazidis.

Many of those stories sadly are tragedies” (Murad, 2017:6). The basic structure of Yezidi life and its operation centers around their faith and the central tenets of their faith and their history are preserved in and transmitted through the collective memory. Nadia also takes recourse from the same source of collective memory. Drawing from the collective memory Nadia tells about the myth of *Malak-Tāwūs*, a peacock angel who is entrusted with the responsibility of Adam on earth by God. But the fall of Adam is misinterpreted by Muslims as due to *Malak-Tāwūs* who then branded him as Satan and his followers as the devil worshippers which she says “is a misinterpretation, and it has had terrible consequences” (ibid, 28). The minority position of Yezidis followed by prejudiced interpretation of their faith by Muslims has made them vulnerable to persecution throughout history. She says that:

Yazidis survived generations of attacks that were intended to wipe us out, whether by killing us, forcing us to convert, or simply pushing us from our land and taking everything we owned. Before 2014 outside powers had tried to destroy us seventy-three times. We used to call the attacks against Yazidis as *firman*, an Ottoman word, before we learned the word *genocide*. (ibid, 6)

Nadia also takes recourse in collective memory to give an account of the first Yezidi settlement in Kocho in 1950s when a few Yezidi families bought the land from Arab farmers by hiring a Muslim lawyer whom they celebrate as a hero (ibid, 4). The collective memory of the Yezidi community is thus used in her testimonial recall that sets a contextual background to the immediate experience that Yezidis including Nadia herself find themselves with. The retrieval of Yezidi culture, history and religious teaching in collective memory by Nadia in her testimony is significant considering the

oral form of their knowledge exchange and transmission. It is even more significant considering the ISIS genocide of Yezidis which is *epistemicide* (B. Santos, 2014) in the true sense as the death of Yezidis would also mean the death of their history and knowledge system as this community does not have a written tradition.

If collective memory is encoded to contextualize Yezidi experiences, episodic memory or the traumatic memory of Nadia's experiences gives immediacy to her and her community's trauma. Since the day ISIS carried out genocide in her village to her miraculous escape from ISIS captivity, Nadia has had series of trauma inducing experiences which she narrates in her testimony. After having separated from men and the married women on that fateful day of 15th august 2014, virgin girls were boarded in buses to take them to Syria, Libya and other parts of Iraq for sexual slavery. In one such bus, Nadia finds herself taken to Mosul for selling in the slave market. Nadia recalls one of her traumatic experiences there, the first physical abuse which she termed as 'slow and painful death' (ibid, 119). A militant named Abu Batat groped her breast in the bus. For more than an hour he would walk to and fro in the bus and specially pick on Nadia and continue his abuse which she recalls "...that moment on the bus with Abu Batat was the moment I started dying"(ibid, 119). Later that night after reaching an Islamic State center in Mosul, Nadia was punished for protesting her abuse and causing commotion during their bus journey. She was burned with cigarettes on her shoulder and stomach, spat on her face and slapped hard for her noncompliance (ibid, 127-128). Nadia recalls her dehumanizing traumatic experience of being sold in the slave market like animals where she was touched everywhere. She also gives testimony to her dehumanizing experience of having to strip for her owner named Hajji Salman who didn't rape her that night due to her period but touched her all over for the entire night (ibid, 147). The systematic attempt of annihilating Yezidis was noted by Nadia during

her captivity. She recalls her experience of conversion in the court where she was asked to recite *shahada* which is the declaration of one's faith in Allah and his prophet Muhammad and is one of the five commandments or Golden Pillars of Islam. As she was led to the court for conversion before the judge she prayed fervently in her heart to Yezidi God asking for forgiveness for her forced conversion which she is powerless to stop and prayed that she would always be a Yezidi (ibid,150). All these violations since the capture of her village to their selling in the market, the abuses and the conversion were felt like the slow execution of their soul by Nadia and she felt herself empty especially after her forced conversion (ibid, 151). That night Nadia had her self-shattering experience of rape by Hajji Salman (ibid, 166). From her many dehumanizing accounts of traumatic experience of rape, one that registers strongly in her memory is of her gang rape by six ISIS men. It was the punishment ordained by Hajji Salman for her attempt to escape. Nadia screamed and cried out for her mother and brother Khairy as she was brutally violated as a natural reflex for she always found them come up for her and console on every trifling misfortune of hers but to no avail. The most traumatic impression Nadia remembers from that event was the last man's face and his carefulness in removing his glass before raping her and placing them on the table very gently as though the glass will break (ibid, 174). This experience breaks in her consciousness a very shocking recognition of the male gaze or ISIS view of her in a totally dehumanized context without an iota of humane concern let alone sympathy or empathy. It was as though the sunglasses deserved a delicate treatment than Nadia, a human being.

As true to the character of trauma, a particular episode of Nadia's trauma memory repeatedly returns in her testimony. The withdrawal of Peshmerga army from her village in the middle of the night without informing the villagers is seen as a

betrayal by the Kurdish government and its army. Yezidi survivors of Kocho village consider this withdrawal of Peshmerga as a catalyst to the series of unimaginable misfortune and trauma. Farida Khalaf also mentions this episode in her testimony (2016:36). They believe that had they been informed by Peshmerga about their retreat, they all could have left the village with them before ISIS took them over. That decisive event and her perspective on it get mentioned six times in Nadia's testimony. The anger and resentment of that decision of Peshmerga withdrawal from her village was so deep seated in her mind that she didn't even consider identifying herself as a Yezidi victim in order to be admitted into the Kurdish territory where Kurdish Regional Government was running camps for them. She says, "But on that day I wasn't ready to forgive them. I didn't want them to think that, by letting me in, they were saving me when they could have kept my family from being torn apart before ISIS came to Sinjar" (Nadia, 2017:247). The events relating to their selling and buying from one owner to the other are also registered in trauma memory that seems to enact repetition in the way it is represented in language. She remembers "We would be bought at the market, or given as a gift to a new recruit or a high ranking commander, and then taken back to his home, where we would be raped and humiliated, most of us beaten as well. Then we would be sold or given to another militant, and raped and beaten by him, and sold or given, and raped and beaten, and it went this way for as long as we were desirable enough and not yet dead" (ibid, 161). This verbatim representation of the repetitive event of their commodification and trading for sexual function in her testimony informs the traumatic register of the events. This traumatic recall and its verbalization also shape the narrative structure of the testimony which will be discussed later.

The third kind of memory at work in the testimony is the narrative memory which "consists of mental constructs which people use to make sense out of experience

(e.g., Janet, 1928)” (quoted in van der Kolk and van der Hart, *Intrusive Past*, 427). The narrative memory in the testimony attempts at integrating the diverse traumatic experiences into a cognitive scheme. The integration of Nadia’s trauma memories with collective memory contextualizes the events and opens up a space for ethical response whether political, historical, philosophical etc. It is the narrative memory that brings together different memory impressions of the event and helps in figuring a gestalt body of knowledge of the experiences. Consequently the narrative structure of the testimony is also shaped by the function of narrative memory.

4.3 Narrative Frame:

Nadia’s testimony is shaped organically into a framed structure depending on the nature of her lived experiences and the intention of recounting those experiences. A conscious narrative drive of integrating diverse experiences into a coherent whole is the first impression that the testimony gives. The testimony is divided into three sections; the first section deals with her life before ISIS to the time of their arrival in her village. This section also contains historical representation of her mother’s struggle with life and marriage before Nadia’s birth. The second section contains her accounts of ISIS atrocities till the day she escaped from the clutches of her captor. And the last section deals with episodes of her shelter with a good Muslim family who arranges for her escape into Kurdistan and her current activism for justice of the survivors of war crimes. This is the conscious narrative grid of the testimony within which past experiences are integrated or accommodated. However, if the testimony consciously attempts at maintaining the sequence from past to present, at the same time the narrative structure also becomes porous with many running commentaries from Nadia’s present position as well as additional historical background, narrative digression that are placed to expand the narrative scope and contextualize the traumatic experiences.

One example of narrative digression is found when Nadia discusses about the kidnapping of two farmers from her village at the wake of ISIS uprising in early 2014. Right after informing the kidnap, Nadia puts this narrative recollection on hold and digresses to tell about the first Yezidi settlement and founding of her village Kocho followed by an explanation of the nature and character of Yezidism and how it was misinterpreted by their Muslim neighbours as a religion of the devil (Nadia, 2017, pp.4,5,6). Nadia also takes the *ex post* position like Farida Khalaf in her testimony (discussed in Chapter 2) to give a holistic representation of the experiences.

Another notable feature in Nadia's testimonial narrative is the coding of contrasts which for the sake of analysis may be termed as the *structure of opposites*. Nadia's recollection of the past and the general outlook on life is seen to be informed and directed by the so called structure of opposites. The ideas or facts that Nadia represents in her testimony are structured in the opposites. If she mentions of one positive thing or event, that is contrasted with the report of a negative idea or event in the very next sequence. Speaking about the kidnapped farmers from her village Nadia says, "One moment the men were lounging peacefully in the shade, and the next they were captive in a small room in a nearby village, home mostly to Sunni Arabs" (ibid, 1). And speaking about their village located in the northern part of Iraq protected by Mt. Sinjar bordering Syria, Nadia says "*The land that made us special also made us vulnerable*" (ibid, 2) because of the hostile relationship of their Muslim neighbours. The oscillation between the positive and the negative or its reverse is also seen in Nadia's account of her experience of being put up for the sale. The dehumanizing moment led the Yezidi girls including Nadia to consider suicide to avoid their violation by ISIS militants. But when a girl tries strangulating herself with a scarf they all rescue her from committing suicide. And on the contrary they reverse their plan of suicide

with that of looking for the chance of escape (ibid, 131, 132). Another example of this is found when Nadia recounts how she feared her first buyer to be extremely cruel judging from his bearing and physical appearance and in desperation fell at a pair of skinny feet she saw on the floor as she was looking down for fear and shame during her auction, requesting him to buy her instead, hoping that the man with skinny feet will be less cruel. But Nadia's prudence yields no fruit as the man turns out to be the cruelest one (ibid, 140, 141). This encoding of opposites is how Nadia visualizes life as a successive series of opposites between good and bad, positive and negative, hope and frustration and their reverse as well. The contrast of thoughts and ideas or the contrasts in testimonial recalling of the past is visible within a sentence, between one sentence and the other, within a paragraph as well as between a paragraph and the next.

Furthermore, Nadia's testimony is also marked by the emergence of the repetition of events as result of the traumatic memories that tends to be repetitive. The repetitive rape and abuse at the hands of ISIS is registered and in the testimonial recall these come out in its sequence of repetition. On the other hand the episode of Peshmerga army's withdrawal from her village is a onetime event but it is consciously recalled six times. This way the nature of the experience and its conscious or subconscious internalization shape a narrative frame in the recall of those events as this testimony reveals. However it is to be noted that unlike the dominant trauma theorists' position that repetitive nature of the trauma memories prevent it from integration and coherent representation, the recurrence of selective episodes over the other in Nadia's testimony in no way deforms or hinders the memory function or the narrative flow of testimony. The conscious narrative frame enabled by a strong will to tell her injustice manages to integrate or accommodate the life-shattering experiences into a seemingly coherent narrative.

4.4 A Psychoanalytic Reading:

Subjecting Nadia's testimony to psychoanalytic reading discovers a psychic function at work vis-à-vis trauma experience. In her testimonial narrative, Nadia presents her traumatic experiences, collective memory of her community as well as her thoughts in the structural formation of contrasts which was discussed as *structure of opposites* in the previous section. Her recollection and thoughts are presented within the narrative and linguistic structure that bear the mark of contrast. If she mentions about a positive or good thing, it is contrasted with the alternative turn of that event or thing in the next sequence. Although some of the events naturally occurred in the sequence of positive to negative or vice versa, the pattern of contrast in organizing the material of her past experiences and collective memories throughout the testimony suggests a psychic mechanism at work that positions experiences within the structure of opposites. Nadia describes her mother's scramble for birth control before her conception that she didn't want any more children after bearing eleven sons and daughters but the moment Nadia was born she instantly bonds with her. Nadia reminisces about her desire to live in her village forever and tells about the looming threat of displacement. She recalls their hope for protection from their Arab neighbours only to be forsaken and remembers their relief when Peshmerga arrives in their village to protect them only to discover that they are left to themselves at the crucial hour of need. She also recalls how she pleaded at the ISIS check point to be spared but despite her frail health condition she was raped by the two militants on the same day. She recalls the visit of American soldiers in her village inquiring about their wellbeing; especially one American soldier who gifted her with a ring which she preserved as one of her prized possessions. In contrast to that, her testimony also recounts her treatment at the hands of ISIS militants who dispossessed her of her virginity which is considered the most valuable asset of an unmarried girl in

many societies including hers. The running feature of contrasts throughout the testimony as the sequence of events or the movement of her thoughts can be analysed with the use of Freud's concept of *fort-da* game as an analogy.

Freud developed the concept after watching an eighteen months old boy playing a peculiar game. He observed the child throwing away a wooden reel over the side of his cot that was held by a string and say 'o-o-o-oh' and while pulling it back after sometime, he uttered *Da* in joy. Observing this game of the little boy Freud concluded that what the child was playing was actually an enactment of his separation from his mother and her return. When the child threw away the reel and said 'o-o-o-oh' that was equivalent of German word *fort* meaning *go away* to mark the absence of his mother and when it was pulled back with an expression '*Da*' which actually means *there*, meant the return of his mother. This was the child's way of dealing with a painful situation. By repeating it several times, the child was trying to get mastery over his situation by pulling the reel returned to him '*Da*' after throwing it away '*Fort*' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 8, 9,10).

Nadia's testimonial narrative with characteristics of opposites; in describing a positive event succeeded by a negative or reverse, the positive contemplation altering into negative and vice versa resembles *fort-da* psychic mechanism discussed by Freud. Situating one positive experience with negative and the repetition and alteration of the sequence by recalling different experiences from the past, what the testimonial narrative of Nadia does is an attempt at having mastery over it or normalizing the experiences. The compulsive repetition of trauma known as *acting out* according to Dominick LaCapra "...invalidates any form of conceptual or narrative closure, and it may also generate resistances to the role of any counterforces..." (2001:23) but the concept of "*working through* trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate

affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation” (ibid, 42). The ‘structure of opposites’ in Nadia’s testimony is therefore a psychic function that is *working through* the traumatic experience of her sexual slavery and genocide of her community and attempt of articulating it from the space having her agency rather than pathology defined neurosis.

Peter Levine developed a therapy model called ‘pendulation’ for treating the patients with traumatic stress by leading them to relieve the bodily sensation or the distressful thought and stay with that for a while and after that urged them to focus on the happy sensation or positive moments of life. By this somatic experience of pendulation he attempts to make his patients realize “the body’s *natural restorative* rhythm of contraction and expansion” which “tells us that whatever is felt is time-limited...that suffering will not last forever” and says that this “Pendulation carries all living creatures through difficult sensations and emotions” and “it requires no effort; it is wholly innate” (2010: 79, 80). Borrowing Levine’s concept of pendulation in the psychoanalytic reading of Nadia’s testimony offers an explanation for her so called ‘structure of opposites’ that the oscillation between positive and the negative in her testimonial recall is an innate process in grappling with a traumatic experience. Therefore both Freud and Peter Levine’s respective concepts shed light on the inner psychic mechanism involved in the process of telling traumatic experiences.

4.5 On Language:

A focus on the linguistic function of Nadia’s testimony reveals sound narrative and expository skills. She uses the past tense to describe her experiences maintaining the temporal distance between the past events and the present subject position. The deixis

position of the subject with regards to the past events is maintained with consistency. The testimony has a coherent narrative syntax followed by logical explanation and additional narrative to contextualize a particular event or events described. With regards to her traumatic experiences, in their articulation a clear cognitive process is observed with appropriate use of affective words, positive and negative words as well as emotion-words. To code the contrasting conative positions or events, coordinating conjunctions are used as grammatical tools to give syntactically coherent linguistics presentation. The recall of disturbing memories with some of the experiences which surface in repetition in the narrative doesn't resist their translation in the language.

4.6 Triangulation:

Scrutinising Nadia's testimony by adopting triangulation strategy helps in ascertaining the veracity and authenticity of the experiences claimed. The events she mentions are historical moments which are recorded in public and academic discourses. Triangulation of Nadia's claim with those external sources establishes the truthfulness of her testimonial report. She mentions the honour killing of a Yezidi girl named Dua Khalil for her alleged conversion to Islam in order to marry her lover who was a Muslim. In retaliation, the affronted Muslims especially the radical fundamentalists kill twenty-three Yezidis by stopping the bus they were travelling by. The Amnesty International, UK press release on 2nd May, 2007, confirms the occurrence of honour killing almost after a month. Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin's article in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 2012 gives a detailed analysis of the event occurred with its ensuing turn in the killing of 23 Yezidis in retaliation (2, 9). Her recall of 14th Aug, 2007 incident of the twin bombings in the town of Siba Sheikh Khider and Tel Ezeir

that left hundreds of people dead (Nadia, 2017: 47) is triangulated with The New York Times online report, 22nd August, 2007. The testimonial report of the ISIS attack in the villages of Sinjar on 3rd August 2014, the day her village was captured and the summary execution of men and capture of women for sexual slavery on 15th August 2014 find detailed mention in LSE Middle East Centre Report titled *A Demographic Documentation of ISIS's Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho* by Valeria Cetorelli, Sareta Ashraph. Nadia recalls of their religious guardian Baba Sheik's announcement welcoming the returning Yezidi women from ISIS captivity back in the society declaring them as innocent and pure, which is an edict from the office of Baba Sheikh that censures Yezidis from mistreatment and stigmatization of the victims (2017: 295). That reference is also discussed by Peter Nicolaus and Serkan Yuce in their paper published in *Iran & the Caucasus* journal where they reproduced the official edict of Baba Sheikh as documentary evidence (210-211). Triangulating Nadia's testimonial recollection of events with the external sources thus proves their historical veracity and lends credibility to her testimony. Similarly the confession of private experiences of her rape and abuse although occurred in the confinement to the exclusion of others can also be verified by focusing on the details she offers. Nadia recounts her dehumanizing experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her owners. First she was separated from her mother and grouped with unmarried girls and then taken to Mosul where she was sold in the slave market. She was made to dress up and put on makeup for her owner and before her rape was forced to do Islamic prayer along with her abuser. She was bought and sold from person to person, all of whom treated her similarly with absolute brutality. Her experience of confinement and rape are similar to survival narratives or testimonies of the other women whom she didn't meet or know. Farida Khalaf's account and the survivor narratives in Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* also

affirm the similar bureaucratic-like precision in torture and abuse. The reported testimonial narratives of Yezidi *sabiyas* or sex slaves in this way establish the authenticity of Nadia's narrative.

Kristen Chick in her feature article published on The Christian Science Monitor mentions about Nadia Murad's 2015 speech before the UN Security Council which was criticized for misstating the length of her captivity. She was faulted for stating the duration of her captivity as three months whereas it was only a few weeks (*Reluctant Champion*). However this incident should not be taken as an opportunity to delegitimize Nadia's claim and deny the authenticity of her experience. In her psychological study of the kidnapped children and their time perception Lenore Terr discusses about psychological processing of time by the victims either in the durational shortening (*Time and Trauma*, 641) or durational prolongation (ibid, 642) as a defense mechanism. The confinement in dark rooms not in sync with the real time leading to recourse in biorhythm as the only reference point for time perception sometimes result in the skewed time perception. Nadia's projection of the duration of her captivity in her speech which was questioned by the critics was an aberration but her testimony doesn't have distorted time perception. The logical connection of the events in temporal sequence is found in the testimonial narrative of her experiences. Furthermore, triangulating her testimony with that of her half brother Sa'eed in Dunya Mikhail's text *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* confirms her captivity as not less than thirty-eight days as opposed to the iconoclastic supposition of shorter duration of Naida's captivity.

Establishing the authenticity of the testimony by triangulation method thus purges the victim or survivor narratives from the sin of what is popularly known as 'Menchú controversy' (Gilmore, 2001) in academic field.

4.7 Motivation:

Power always seeks to silence those who are within the ambit of its hegemony. It ensures their silence through the system of discipline (Foucault), ideology and discursive practice for its sustenance. Nadia's testimony is a firsthand example of the function of power in its ruthless persecution of a community by ideological investment in delegitimizing their faith, supported by the discursive practice of ISIS which lends credence to their persecution, leading to Yezidi genocide and sexual slavery of their women with absolute impunity. However much powerful the power that be, it is not immune in its throne for the subversive tendency of the subjects within its hegemony that keeps challenging it every which way ranging from small gesture to that of revolution. Surviving such traumatic experience which dominant trauma theory considers unspeakable because of the nature of it, how and why Nadia's testimony surfaces in language is explained here.

Judith Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery* describes that the recovery of trauma patients "unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central task of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life" (1995:155). The establishment of safety mentioned by Herman can be expanded to include the social safety along with the physical safety of the victim from further threat. The social safety can be ensured by the practice of uncensorious identification of the victims in social space. Nadia had the good fortune of perceived social safety in the edict of Baba Sheikh who urged Yezidis to treat returning women victims with kindness and not to blame them for the misfortune of rape. As described in the second stage of trauma recovery by Judith Herman, mourning the dead in her family and

mourning over her own tragedy also took place followed by third stage that is reconnection with ordinary life (ibid, 155). Judith Herman further describes that while:

Most survivors seek the resolution of their traumatic experience within the confines of their personal lives... a significant minority, as a result of the trauma, feel called upon to engage in a wider world. These survivors recognize a political or religious dimension in their misfortune and discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action. (ibid, 207)

Nadia is one such survivor who is motivated towards activism. Her testimony as well as her activism is motivated by an ethical and political call. She wants ISIS militants held accountable for Yezidi genocide and war crimes including rape. She had advocated for the right and dignity of refugees, victims of war crimes and rape in international platforms including the UN Security Council. She considers her testimony an extension of her activism through which she wants to educate people about their plight.

In their study Agger and Jensen discusses about the psychological torture that is used to break the psychological defense mechanism of the political prisoners by adopting methods like threats and humiliating treatments like nakedness and sexual torture etc (1989: 306) and referring to Chilean psychologist Lira and Weinstein's study of such political prisoner and exiles (ibid, 307) discusses about the testimonial method used in therapy sessions to document the experiences as evidence "to let the world know" the process which has a retributive quality because "by testifying against the torture, one also becomes part of the struggle against torture" (ibid, 315). They also claim that this testimony has a ritualistic value and healing quality (1990: 115). Placing

Nadia's testimony within the theoretical and methodological position of the studies mentioned above thus explains the emergence of her testimony. Losing six of her family members on a single day, having her family torn apart, witnessing the genocide against her community and experiencing the worst form of sexual violence like rape and gang rape, Nadia Murad had running fantasy of seeing her tormentors tried in the court of justice for all the crimes they committed (2017:142, 176). Along with the genocide committed against her community, Nadia also becomes aware of their absence or erasure from Iraqi history. She remembers studying history texts in school which didn't have any mention or representation of Yezidis (ibid, 30) which can be termed as *epistemicide*. Her testimony, therefore, against the immediate context of politics, culture and justice is an act of remembrance that documents the traumatic experience of Yezidis at the hands of ISIS militants at the present as well as their persecution throughout history, and creates a discursive body of knowledge about their experience. Her testimonial recall in this way is a discursive challenge to the majoritarian narrative of Iraq's history and an alternative history of Yezidis, especially their contemporary persecution and genocide by ISIS. Through the act of remembering her and her community's ordeal, Nadia Murad seeks justice not only in the international forums but also in the court of conscience of the readers or listeners of her testimony. In her public speech in Geneva Nadia said that "I want to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine" (2017:306) and urged the world leaders to act for that. As for her, she only has her story and memory which she wants to share which is characteristic of what Milan Kundera says "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 1980:3) and hopes to become a history teacher to write Yezidi history someday against their silencing and

erasure (Murad, 2017:35). Thus it is observed that a strong will, followed by enabling- contexts prod trauma to emerge in language and amplify its articulation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The present research was conducted with the objective to find out if trauma could be articulated and if Yezidi testimonies could create an alternative history or body of knowledge.

In Chapter 1, the Yezidis and their current predicament is discussed with a brief account of their history. In light of the traumatic experience of Yezidis and the popular contemporary theoretical stance on trauma as ‘unspeakable’, the research question of how and if at all the select Yezidi testimonies are articulating trauma is proposed. To build the research around stated questions, methodological orientation and research methods are laid out. And the selected texts are analysed using psychoanalytic criticism, linguistics, memory studies as tools.

In Chapter 2, the analysis of Farida Khalaf’s testimony finds a strong tendency to share the injustice suffered by her and many like her. This tendency propels her traumatic experiences towards language and articulation. The study also finds that the contemporary assumption of trauma as a standalone fragment of memory, un-integrated in cognitive schema and hence beyond the representation in language as not the universal characteristics of trauma applying to all and sundry. Traumatic experience, nevertheless painful was rather subject to the conscious recall in case of Farida. Even the registering of trauma in her memory had been a conscious bid of her mind as she resolves not to forget those experiences. The findings in Chapter 2 thus affirm the research question of trauma articulation and language’s ability to accommodate the experience.

In Chapter 3, analysis of Dunya Mikhail's *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* finds that trauma and its telling can be relayed from a victim to the listener and so on to the multiple cycles where trauma testimonies are shared and circulated. The factors that facilitates in the creation of such a network of witnessing-relay are political as well as technological. The desire and need of Abdullah Shrem (the fountain source of the most of testimonies) of having their traumas known by the world is one driving force of the trail of witnessing-relay found in the text. His is a desire driven by political consideration of their trauma being known by the world for the potential end to their suffering. On the other hand, the technological advancements made the long distance communication and real-time interviews with the victims possible by coordinating time and distance and the technology enabled transcript materials of trauma testimonies shared with the author also eased the process of collection of testimonies for her. Therefore the coming together of political motivations and technological advantages helped in the creation of a network of witnessing relay of the traumatic experiences. This chapter also finds that each individual is affected differently by the trauma experiences.

In Chapter 4, the analysis of Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl* finds the act of remembering around trauma experiences. It finds that trauma event can be subjected to the act of remembering and recalled accordingly thus answering the research question. The analysis also finds the psychological process in trying to get mastery over the traumatic experience as the analogy of *fort-da* game with regards to Nadia's repetitive recollection of particular episodes followed by structures of opposites in her narrative suggests. Unlike selective amnesia around deaths and killings of women and children within Sikh families during the partition of India and Pakistan in Urvashi Bhutalia's *The Other Side of Silence*, Nadia Murad's elective remembering of her traumatic

experiences gives it a political dynamic as she uses her testimonial remembering to bring her community and their suffering to the world's attention. The political considerations of the justice for Yezidis and bringing ISIS militants to book prodded her to articulate her trauma. The findings in this chapter also suggest that trauma can be articulated provided certain contexts are created for its emergence.

In the concluding Chapter 5, the findings of the present research may be highlighted as follows:

Findings:

- 1.) Trauma can be articulated provided an enabling context is created. The enabling context is the combination of variables and factors like the presence of a sympathetic listener, a safe and non judgmental social space, victim's physical and mental threshold and the *survivor's mission* of bringing justice to the victims.
- 2.) There is no such inherent qualitative difference in trauma experiences that render it either 'speakable' or 'unspeakable', rather it is the coming together of so many variables that make speaking of it possible or otherwise.
- 3.) Trauma is not universal in the way it impacts people. Each individual reacts to trauma individually in exclusion to the others.
- 4.) Testimony is one medium to articulate trauma out of many genres.
- 5.) The select testimonies create a body of knowledge regarding the Yezidi community that breaks all the stereotypes which was the cause of many tragedies.

6.) The testimonies also provide material evidence by virtue of articulating their experiences corroborated by external signs of destruction of their land and society which consequently create a history of the Yezidi experiences which will serve to save them from oblivion as their genocide was designed for.

Trauma studies is now on expansion in its interdisciplinary negotiations and it has a scope for further research in many unexplored avenues as the understanding of trauma from cross-disciplinary perspectives will greatly enrich the people from academics to the commoners in its new theorisation, therapeutic orientations as well as to the encoding of its definition in law and justice. Yezidis on the other hand are an extremely vulnerable group of people in Middle East, whose experiences as studied in the present research, demands not only a political intervention to their immediate predicament but an academic interest and research intervention as well. Trauma studies and the Yezidi community therefore offer a scope for future researchers to do newer and richer research.

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