

Murad vs. ISIS

Rape as a Weapon of Genocide



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ABSTRACT This article analyzes recent Iraqi texts, some authorizing and others condemning rape as a weapon of war. The focus is on Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) perpetrators of sexual violence, their Yazidi victims, and two women's demands for reparative, restorative justice. Held in sexual slavery between 2014 and 2015, Farida Khalaf and 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad published testimonials that detail their experiences. Determined to bring ISIS rapists to justice, they narrate the formerly unspeakable crimes that ISIS militants committed against them. Adjudicated as a crime against humanity at the end of the twentieth century, rape as a weapon of war, and especially genocide, no longer slips under the radar of international attention. This study argues that the Yazidi women's brave decision to speak out may help break the millennial silence of rape survivors.

KEYWORDS ISIS, Yazidis, rape as a weapon of war, crimes against humanity, fatwa

On October 5, 2018, the Nobel Peace Prize committee announced the year's winners: Denis Mukwege, a gynecologist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who treats rape survivors, and Nadia Murad, a twenty-five-year-old Iraqi Yazidi victim of ISIS sexual torture. Rape as a weapon of war and genocide has fully captured world attention.

Murad is the first rape survivor to be internationally recognized for campaigning on behalf of women who have been held in sexual slavery. In 2017 she published *The Last Girl*, her witness to the crimes ISIS committed against her and other Yazidi women. In what follows I analyze Murad's testimonial alongside an ISIS fatwa that perverts Islamic scriptures to authorize how and when the rape of women captives is permissible. The Nobel Peace Prize committee praised Murad

for refusing “to accept the social codes that require women to remain silent and ashamed of the abuses to which they have been subjected. She has shown uncommon courage in recounting her own sufferings and speaking up on behalf of other victims” (Norwegian Nobel Committee 2018). Murad has helped break the historical silence of rape victims on and off the battlefield.

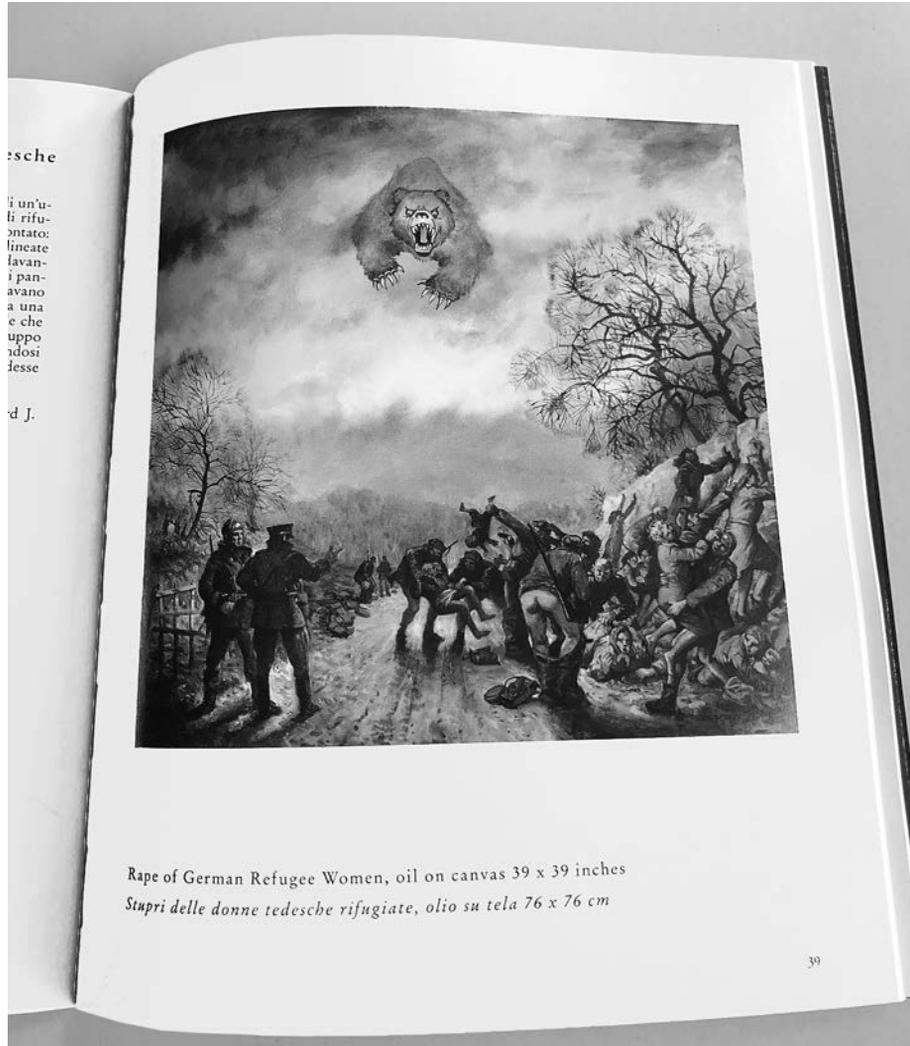
Building on a growing body of scholarship concerning women, rape, and war in the Middle East (Accad 1990; Al-Ali 2018; Al-Ali and Al-Najjar 2013; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Butler 2009; cooke 1987, 1996; Ekmekçioğlu 2016; Masmoudi 2015; Mehta 2014; Shirazi 2010), I draw connections between the late twentieth-century international criminalization of rape in war; ISIS instrumentalization of rape as essential to a militarized, masculinized, religious, and genocidal nationalism; and the growing number of women speaking out about sexual abuses they have suffered. As a transnational feminist literary scholar analyzing a pseudoreligious document and two memoirs of rape survivors from Iraq, I am keenly aware of Nadje Al-Ali's (2018: 2, 13–14) call for intersectional

discussions about challenges for transnational feminist politics [and the need to] look inward, name and confront those attitudes, norms, practices and relations that cannot be simply explained away by external and structural patterns, forces and processes. I would argue that this dichotomous approach—focusing on patriarchal cultural attitudes and practices on the one hand and imperialist policies and neoliberal economics on the other—is unhelpful and more reflective of specific, and often quite divergent, positionalities rather than the complex empirical realities we are facing as activists and academics.

The challenges Al-Ali highlights include solidarity with women and men survivors of torture even while steering between the Scylla of apologetic anti-imperialism that blames outsiders for all ills within and the Charybdis of myopic attention to local conditions that ignores the historical context. These are the issues that I engage in this article about the representation of rape as a weapon of war, ISIS strategic rape of women from the Yazidi community in northern Iraq, ISIS documents that legitimize rape of captives, and Yazidi women's testimonials that provide evidence of their resistance to ISIS crimes. These testimonials, which have undergone translation and possible reframing, are the only way that the sexual violence of ISIS members can be scrutinized, analyzed, and brought to justice.

Rape as a Millennial Weapon of War

Where does Murad's denunciation of ISIS fit in the long history of rape as a weapon of war? Part of war since antiquity, military rape has been not only tolerated but sometimes also celebrated in works of art. An early example comes from 753 BCE, when Romulus founded Rome, a city of men. Realizing that without women Rome



Rape of German Refugee Women, oil on canvas 39 x 39 inches
Stupri delle donne tedesche rifugiate, olio su tela 76 x 76 cm

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Figure 2. Joseph Sheppard, *Rape of German Refugee Women*. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

of sexual coercion in war had turned to disgust, as we can see in the *Horrors of War* series by Joseph Sheppard (fig. 2). Ragged Russian soldiers, their uniform pants down around their ankles, are as humiliated as the German women refugees they have just raped. They may have been humiliated, but few if any were punished. It is worth noting that at the Nuremberg trials Nazi rapists got away with their crimes, which were merely documented (MacKinnon 1994: 80). Although Local Council Law No. 10, which “provided the foundation for the trials of lesser Nazis by the Allied Forces, listed rape as a crime against humanity,” observes Rhonda Copelon (1994: 257), no one “was prosecuted.” Despite new concern about the systematic violation of women in times of conflict, the voices of rape survivors were not heard.

The turn of the new millennium seemed to inaugurate a new phase in the global awareness of war crimes against women. Transnational feminists working toward this goal of criminalizing rape in war at the highest level and raising international consciousness believed that the ICTY decision concerning rape as a weapon of genocide constituting a crime against humanity heralded a new era. The celebrations were premature. In what follows I will focus on ISIS and its documents about the treatment of women captives, since the organization's strategic mobilization of rape as a weapon of genocide merits particular attention.

ISIS and Fatwa 64

In 2014 ISIS surfaced as an outgrowth of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Its brutality included not only public beheadings but also religiously authorized rape of non-Muslims. ISIS functioned for three years as a state, with its capital in Syrian Raqqa, an army, a police force, an intelligence service, a national anthem and flag, but also, remarkably, a Research and Fatwa Department (Diwan al-buhuth wa al-ifta').

Women were crucial to the ISIS mission. Exploiting tribal rhetoric around honor and women's roles in safeguarding it, ISIS launched an international recruitment campaign. Lonely girls glued to social media were enticed to marry and provide "battle comfort" for fighters. A surprising number of young women packed their bags and made their perilous way to ISIS territory, where they were promised community and protection as long as they obeyed draconian medieval rules: "Failure to abide by these rules is punishable by lashing. Punishments may be carried out by the Al-Hisbah morality police but increasingly they are the responsibility of the all-female brigade, Al-Khansaa, which assists in monitoring adherence to dress codes and enforcing punishments" (AbuZayd, Muntarbhorn, and Paulo 2015). Beyond punishing wayward women recruits who did not fully submit to ISIS rules, the brigade seems to have served as a publicity stunt, with heavily veiled women sporting automatic rifles filmed patrolling small areas of ISIS territory. On May 27, 2017, the Saudi television network MBC launched across the Arab world a Ramadan television drama series, *Gharabib Sud* (Black Crows, a reference to Al-Khansaa women's appearance), that spectacularized the cruelty of these women. The main character is the widow of an ISIS commander and Al-Khansaa leader who polices women recruits and captives.

In August 2014 ISIS men invaded Yazidi Sinjar, in Iraq's northwestern Nineveh Province, where they killed thousands of men and abducted thousands of women. They explained their deadly actions in *Dabiq*, their official English-language publication: "After capture, the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the *shari'a* amongst the fighters who participated in the Sinjar operations" (AbuZayd, Muntarbhorn, and Paulo 2015; my emphasis). This insistence that they operate "according to the *shari'a*" marks many ISIS documents and

marriage verses, women captives' right to kindness with reciprocal obligation to provide sexual access sounds like married women's rights to dowry and maintenance and their reciprocal obligation to make themselves sexually available.

But, as in the marriage verses, there are rules to be followed. To begin with the Qur'an, let us briefly review the many categories of women a man may not marry. Verses 22–23 of Surat al-Nisa' list these women:

And do not marry any of the women your fathers married—though its past practice is excused—for it is an indecency, an abomination, an evil custom. Forbidden for you [to marry] are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your father's sisters, your mother's sisters, daughters of brothers, daughters of sisters, the foster-mothers who nursed you, the foster-sisters nursed with you, mothers of your wives, your step-daughters in your custody, [born] of the wives with whom you shared intimacy—though if you were not intimate, there is no blame upon you—wives of your sons who are from your loins, and two sisters simultaneously—though the past practice of all these is excused.

Fatwa 64 rules about women the militants cannot rape (the term used is *wat'i'a*, lit. “trample underfoot or to have sexual intercourse”) disturbingly echo these marriage verses that specify women with whom a man has a blood or foster relationship that precludes contractual marriage, or *nikah*. For example:

If the owner of a *sabiyya*, who has a daughter suitable for intercourse, has sexual relations with the latter, he is not permitted to have intercourse with her mother and she is permanently off-limits to him. Should he have intercourse with her mother then he is not permitted to have intercourse with her daughter and she is to be off-limits to him. And if the *sabiyya* is owned by a father, his son cannot have intercourse with her and vice-versa. Moreover, intercourse with his wife's *sabiyya* is also not permissible. The owner of two sisters is not allowed to rape both of them; just one. The other sister is to be had by him, if he were to relinquish ownership of the first sister by selling her, giving her away or releasing her. (Why Evolution Is True 2015)

While the language sounds Qur'anic, the meaning is not: the prohibition relates to captives that the owner cannot rape, and not the women a man cannot marry. Q4: 24 specifies that *nikah* to *muhsanat* (or free women) provides men sexual access when “you seek [them] with your property, taking [them] in marriage, desiring chastity and not committing fornication [*ghayr musafihin*].” A dowry must be paid to *muhsanat* for a marriage to be legitimate; without it the relationship constitutes the crime of *musafaha*, or *fornication*. A way out for the poor or stingy man comes in Q4: 25, where whoever “cannot afford the means to marry believing *muhsanat* may marry from among your believing young slaves [*min ma malakat aymanukum min fatayatikum al-mu'minat*].”

that the captive seamlessly becomes a slave and is thus subject to rules found in the Qur'an and early legal doctrines. However, the *sabiyya* is not automatically a slave. The *sabiyya* is neither *milk al-nikah* nor *milk al-yamin*; she is a captive, who can become a slave only if the imam (in this case it would have had to be the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi) assigns her as such to her captor.⁹ In October–November 2014 the Research and Fatwa Department released *Su'al wa-jawab fi al-sabi wa al-riqab* (*Q & A about Captives and Slaves*), a document that differentiates war captives and slaves. The section “The Captive” deals with *sabaya*, not slaves. When asked to respond to the question, “What is a *sabiyya* [the term they used was the masculine *sabi*]?” the answer came: “She is a woman from among *ahl al-harb* [the people of war] who [has] been captured by Muslims” (see MEMRI 2014).¹⁰

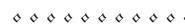
Why did the Research and Fatwa Department devote a section of this 2014 document to *sabaya*, and why did they use the term *sabaya* only in Fatwa 64? I suggest that they did so because the muftis were clear about what they were legislating. ISIS was engaged not in a war but in genocide, an unprecedented concept not only in Islamic jurisprudence but also in pre–World War II international law. We cannot evaluate ISIS as Islamically compliant or deviant without considering the role of genocide in the organization's thinking. A modern crime against humanity, genocide is not about taking prisoners but about inflicting physical or social death on members of the loathed group. There was not even a word for genocide before a Jewish refugee from the Holocaust, Raphael Lemkin, coined the term in 1944 and persuaded the United Nations to adopt the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, often called the Genocide Convention (Facing History and Ourselves n.d.). Since the goal of genocide is to destroy a people physically, psychologically, socially, and culturally, the relationship between a captor and his captive is not *long-term* as in the connection between a male owner and his female slave. The goal is *short-term*: to destroy the bodies and identities of the people slated for annihilation. The relationship between ISIS captors and captives lasts only as long as it takes for the captive to be dealt physical or social death.

ISIS legerdemain with the marriage verses was calculated to persuade men ill-versed in Islamic scripture or foreigners who do not understand Arabic yet are familiar with its affect to commit crimes against humanity and God. Familiarity with Qur'anic language would make Fatwa 64 religiously valid and a legitimate empowering performance of hypermasculinity. Yazidi women's testimonials describe captors praying before and after each rape (Khalaf 2016: 148). The rapists seem to have been conditioned to think of God before and after the violation. In its insertion between two embodied acts of ritual veneration, the rape is masked as an act of devotion, presumably acquiring a spiritual aura. Without access to the voices of these men, it is impossible to know what they really thought, but it is possible, however incredible, that they believed their hypermasculinized behavior would help create their Islamic nation through the destruction of another.

How could this outrage have found acceptance? Ariel Ahram suggests an answer. He argues that ISIS authorities were adopting practices found in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. During the 1980–88 war against Iran, prisoners of war (most of them men) were raped; during the attempted genocide of Kurdish separatists in the north, Iraqi men systematically raped Kurdish women; and during the ethno-sectarian war following the 2003 American invasion, thousands of women disappeared and many were raped (Ahram 2015: 61–64). Although this brief history is important, it is incomplete. Without contextualizing his account within the long transnational history of rape in war, Ahram essentializes Iraqi men's brutality. To say that men across time have used rape as a weapon of war does not relativize ISIS crimes; it situates their deployment of rape as a weapon of genocide in a genealogy of militarized, masculinized criminal behavior. Such a situating demands deconstruction of the process as it happens in a particular place and time. To understand and contest the violence of ISIS men who obeyed orders to kill, maim, and rape those whom their leaders declared enemy, we have to see where their actions fit over time. ISIS men do not stand in for Iraqi or Arab or Muslim men. They do not exemplify a regional or religious culture of gender violence. What they do represent is extreme evil, not only because they raped Yazidi women and killed their men but also because they used Islam and pseudoreligious language to justify their crimes.

The International War against Rape as a Weapon of War

How have international organizations addressed the violations of Yazidi women? In the new millennium resolutions, conferences, and official statements about rape as a weapon of war have proliferated (Pankhurst 2003). In October 2000 the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution (SC Res) 1325, a.k.a. "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS), which "formalized the view of sexual violence as a legitimate international peace and security issue" (Kirby 2015: 459).¹¹ Many Security Council resolutions followed. In 2007 multiple UN agencies collaborated to produce the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict (United Nations n.d.). In 2008 SC Res 1820 called for criminalizing acts of sexual violence as a tactic of war, ending impunity for perpetrators, protecting women and girls in UN-led security endeavors, and including women in peace processes.¹² In 2010 SC Res 1960 prescribed monitoring, analyzing, and reporting conflict-related sexual violence, and the secretary-general appointed a special envoy on sexual violence in conflict (see United Nations 2010). In 2013 SC Res 2106 and 2122 strengthened monitoring and promoted women's involvement in peace processes (United Nations n.d.). Working with the 2012 International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict, Physicians for Human Rights (2012) collaborated with Nobel Peace Prize laureates, international advocacy organizations, and regional and community groups "to stop rape and gender violence in conflict [and] create a world without war, rape, and gender violence where women and men are equal." In 2014 William Hague,



a former UK foreign secretary, convened a summit of 120 nation-states to address the issue of rape as a weapon of war, and the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative published its statement on international best practices (Kirby 2015: 457–58).

None of these actions and declarations concerned ISIS. Not until May 7, 2015, did international scrutiny turn to ISIS. It was then that Zainab Bangura, UN special envoy on sexual violence in conflict, warned that ISIS had “institutionalized sexual violence and the brutalization of women as a central aspect of their ideology and operations, using it as a tactic of terrorism to advance their key strategic objectives” (United Nations 2015). Bangura urged the international community to make ISIS accountable for crimes against humanity. More than a year later, however, nothing had been done.

Absent international action, two Yazidi women became their own plaintiffs and advocates, knowing that they must tell their traumatic experiences for justice to be dealt. Farida Khalaf and Nadia Murad produced memoirs that may someday serve in a court of law to indict ISIS criminals for perpetrating attempted genocide. Much depends on the power of the story and the identity of its narrator for the memoir to succeed in making its human rights claim.

Khalaf's 2016 book *The Girl Who Escaped ISIS: This Is My Story* takes the reader on her journey from Kocho, her village near Sinjar, to the holding pen in Raqqa where with other girls she was daily offered to customers.¹³ She describes the happy mood of the Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian, and Tunisian captors with their long hair, beards, turbans, black uniforms, and weapons when they unlocked the women's prison to usher in new customers “to inspect the wares” (Khalaf 2016: 75–78) (fig. 3). Saved by epileptic fits, nineteen-year-old Farida (a pseudonym) is not bought until a Libyan takes his chances. The day-by-day narration intensifies to minute by minute as her plans for escape turn to suicide attempts. The Libyan sells Farida to the chief of a unit known as *al-wuhush*, or the Beasts. Although the rape is passed over with suspension points, Farida does not shy away from describing the pain and shame (119). Apparently aware of fatwas like Fatwa 64, Farida describes her captor unrolling a mat in preparation for this “rape as a form of worship” (148). On December 13, 2014, after enduring months of sexual torture, Farida finally escapes (174).

Back with her family in the camp, she discovers that the Yazidi community that has suffered so much at the hands of ISIS members has stigmatized the *sabaya*. For the Yazidi refugees in the camp, rape dishonored their community in a way that other crimes could not. It is crucial to note that this negative reaction to rape survivors is widespread, but especially so in societies governed by an honor code that demands sexual purity of women before marriage and dire punishment for adultery afterward. The Yazidi women had to deal with the double jeopardy of rape and then rejection by their own community.

Farida's despair turns to defiance when she realizes that surrender to rumor and innuendo will hand ISIS a victory. With the help of a camp social worker, Farida

for the truth that is not an objective fact but an auratic sense of the experience that exceeds the individual. Survivors of large-scale traumatic events, write Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler (2003: 38), “become by extension witnesses for those absent and unable to bear witness themselves, and this is an essential part of the genre of *testimonio*.” The witness embodies the collective trauma even when her words cannot reach us directly but must be translated and arranged. Like other witnesses to atrocities who do not speak an international language, Farida had to tell her trauma through an intermediary. In the process, the text risked acquiring the Menchú effect. In the attempt to build “a sense of solidarity with the witness . . . the politics of production and consumption of the text” may be ignored to establish “the witnessing ‘effect,’ a concept that should be understood both in terms of the noun — an effect — and in terms of its rarer usage as a verb — ‘to effect change.’ Testimonials as artifacts include both meanings of the term” (57). Suspending critical inquiry into the accuracy of the text, the reader can hear the survivor testifying to the translator with the hope that the story can effect political change. The value of a testimonial “lies in its mere existence and in its enactment of the doubling effect of the witness [despite possible exaggeration] to attract the attention of an otherwise indifferent audience” (Douglass 2003: 72–73, 77).

When so much is at stake — the truth of a narrative detailing the plight of a people threatened with genocide — it is important to contextualize Farida’s story. Its truth can be tested in a number of ways. First, the short time that elapsed between the event and its telling mitigates doubts about the reliability of memory over longer periods of time. Second, although Farida may have absorbed and narrated others’ traumas as her own, her story is no less true, only less individual, and this may be better for a court of law: “There was only one thing we wanted now: to survive this nightmare and bear witness” (Khalaf 2016: 155). The autobiography that “transforms itself into social biography” may persuade a jury otherwise skeptical of an individual claim (Douglass 2003: 83). Third, her version can be validated through comparison with others. Many media outlets have published interviews with *sabaya* and their health-care providers that tell similar versions of sexual slavery (Human Rights Watch 2015). Since August 2015 Hanene Zbiss, editor of *Iraqiyat*, an electronic magazine, has published several articles for the quarterly publication *Women across Frontiers* that tell similar Yazidi survivor stories.

However, the most powerful verification of Khalaf’s story comes in a parallel account: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad’s 2017 memoir *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State* and a complementary 2018 documentary, *On Her Shoulders*. In 2017 no one could have imagined such a sequel to the ISIS genocidal campaign against the Yazidis, and so in what follows I examine the strategies Murad chose to turn her individual story into a class-action suit.

sabaya are collected in a pamphlet issued by ISIS's Research and Fatwas Department. And it is sickening, partly because of what it says and partly because of how ISIS says it, so matter-of-fact, like the law of any state, confident that what they are doing is sanctioned by the Koran. . . . "It is not permissible to separate a mother from her pre-pubescent children," the Islamic State pamphlet on *sabaya* reads. (139, 188)

By the time Murad is ready to publish her story, she has learned about ISIS's cruel modus operandi and its fantastic imagining and codification of what it alleged was legal under Islamic law. She is sickened by its representatives' matter-of-fact tone and the assumption that ISIS laws were like those of any state. How can these men delude themselves into believing that the Qur'an sanctions their crimes? Her citation from the pamphlet about the right of a *sabiyya* not to be separated from her children recalls Fatwa 64 and the distortion of Qur'anic language in order to authorize crimes against humanity.

When, like Khalaf, Murad (2017: 142) dreams of a trial "before the entire world, like the Nazi leaders after World War II," her autobiography morphs into the collective Yazidi biography: "Every *sabiyya* has a story like mine. You can't imagine the atrocities ISIS is capable of until you hear about them from your sisters" (195). *The Last Girl* traces a transition that Douglass and Vogler understand to be part of the process of survival from trauma. They stage the transition as a progression from "witness as victim to witness as survivor, and to witness as performer, telling the tale of survival as a form of self-therapy and inspiration for others" (Douglass and Vogler 2003: 41). This narrative of evolving from victim to survivor to performer has indeed provided inspiration for others. Relatively quickly, Murad became the international celebrity advocate on behalf of the Yazidi community. An invitation to the United Kingdom "to tell officials what had happened to me" changed her life (Murad 2017: 297). Her journey takes her from Iraq to Germany to Switzerland, where in November 2015 she addresses a UN forum on minority issues. "It was the first time," she recalls, "I would tell my story in front of a large audience" (299). This first public speech projected Murad onto the world stage.

Alexandria Bombach's 2018 documentary *On Her Shoulders* follows Murad through the maze of international meetings, interviews, and formal presentations and elaborates on some of the details in *The Last Girl*. We are shown the behind-the-scenes life of a reluctant advocate for survivors of ISIS's attempted genocide. Before each media interview or public address, viewers watch Murad carefully crafting words so as not to exceed her allotted time while retaining the impact of the message: ISIS must pay the highest price for its crimes. A young man from Yazda, a Yazidi nongovernmental organization set up to defend *sabaya*, supports her during shaky moments and quietly celebrates her victories. She has grown confident in the power of her story to bring ISIS to trial: "I know now that I was born in the heart of the crimes committed against me [and will use the story] until those terrorists are put on trial. There is still so much that needs to be done. World leaders and

us. . . . Justice will forever be out of reach if we allow the evidence to disappear” (Walker 2017). She demanded that the ICC “prosecute the world’s most evil terror group” (Guest 2017). Catherine Powell (2017) advises caution. She points to the flaws in this appeal: ISIS never had international standing; Iraq has not joined the ICC; and the ICC cannot function unilaterally. Consequently, it is unclear which national or international body should be responsible. It remains a hope, however dim, that the enormity of ISIS crimes may change international criminal court norms and procedures.

At the least, ISIS promises of social death for the *sabaya* may fail, and if so it will be due to the women’s daring to tell all. Every time she tells her story, writes Murad (2017: 303), she feels that she is “taking some power away from the terrorists.” Not all her efforts have succeeded. In July 2017 she went to Israel, hoping that members of the Knesset would formally acknowledge the Yazidi tragedy as genocide. They did not, even though the US House of Representatives, the British House of Commons, Canada, and France had done so in 2016. Undaunted, she kept going. In August 2017 she persuaded Iraq to “let the Security Council appoint a panel of independent investigators to gather evidence of the most serious crimes committed by the Islamic State, and not just those against Yazidis” (Sengupta 2017). Her diplomatic shuttling back and forth between international decision-makers came to a head on September 21, 2017, when the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2379 (United Nations 2017). The United Kingdom proposed to establish an international investigative team to work with Iraqi prosecutors and judges to collect disappearing evidence of genocide. This historic resolution begins to address a problem that stretches beyond ISIS to all in situations of conflict who assume that they can rape with impunity.

In 2016 Murad founded Nadia’s Initiative, a registered 501(c)(3) organization “dedicated to advocating for victims of sexual violence and rebuilding communities in crisis. Nadia’s Initiative challenges world leaders to push past the status quo and assume a responsibility to act — to make ‘never again’ a reality, not an empty promise. Words without action is benign neglect and inflicts the same harm and suffering as the perpetrators of mass atrocities and sexual violence” (Nadia’s Initiative n.d.).

In October 2018 this extraordinary woman won the Nobel Peace Prize. In its announcement of the prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee (2018) stated: “This year marks a decade since the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 (2008), which determined that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict constitutes both a war crime and a threat to international peace and security.”

Conclusion

Writing about the vital importance of life narratives for making human rights claims, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith (2004: 3) insist that

first time in almost thirty years about their experiences in Serbian rape camps during the early 1990s (Turton 2017).

In telling their stories, Khalaf and Murad, as well as Egyptian, Syrian, and Bosnian rape survivors, have begun the process of recovery with dignity.¹⁹ We are now more than ever aware of the pervasiveness of rape in war. Does this matter in a society not at war? Yes, because military norms and values often shape domestic legal practices (Feinman 2000). We are seeing connections between the criminalization of rape in war at the highest levels and the growing number of women across the world speaking out about the sexual abuse they have suffered on and off the battlefield. The January 2017 Women's March in Washington, DC, which led to the #MeToo movement, has encouraged women everywhere and in all walks of life to denounce perpetrators and to announce local campaigns, like #AnaKaman (Arabic for MeToo) (Bou Matar 2018).

Although men in all parts of the world at war still rape, their actions are now more likely to be publicized, represented, and sometimes prosecuted. Breaking the silence matters. It allowed Murad (2017: 306) to close her book with the words "I want to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine." Yazidi women's brave decision to speak out may empower other rape survivors, but only if their message is heeded, their cause supported, and their example followed.

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13. The book was one of the 2016 PEN Translates awards.
14. The interviewer, Lynne Freeman, is interested in Hoffmann's engagement with Khalaf, but she never asks why the book is written in the first person. See Freeman 2016.
15. In late 2014 Khurto Hajji Ismail, or Baba Sheikh, the spiritual leader of the Yazidi community, initiated the process of taking the women back despite their forced change of religion and sexual violation.
16. Skeptics have criticized the focus on the rhetoric of legal responsibility at the expense of enforcement measures. Acknowledging the difficulty of obtaining information from survivors, Paul Kirby regrets the emphasis on militaries that overlooks civilians. Pointing to the prohibitive costs of international tribunals, Kirby (2015: 462, 466, 470–71) urges the United Nations to support individual state trials rather than assume full responsibility for criminal prosecution. I question Nicola Henry's (2014: 96–97) complaint that the prioritization of rape in war risks marginalizing other forms of violence against women in a civilian context.
17. Sandesh Sivakumaran (2010: 260–64) argues that sexual violence against men has as long and as silenced a history as that of women because of the widespread stigma against homosexuality (see also Kirby 2015: 469–70).
18. On November 24, 2015, UN Women launched a sixteen-day campaign highlighting the role of art in raising consciousness about violations Arab women faced during and after the Arab Spring. They organized "a silent theatre event performed by Syrian girls in Zaatri refugee camp in Jordan as well as a poetry and theatre festival in Amman" (UN Women 2015).
19. The Iraqi novelist Shakir al-Anbari (2017: 21, 58, 63) denounced the sexual torture Iraqi women endured at the hands of ISIS *wuhush*, or beasts, and their religious extremist predecessors who five years before the formation of ISIS had used similar forms of violence. On July 20, 2017, a year after Khalaf published her story, Heiza Shankal gave an international press conference about her three years in sexual captivity. Speaking in Kurdish, Shankal told Samuel Osborne (2017) of the *Independent* that she was returning to Sinjar to join a Yazidi women's military unit to fight the ISIS men who had raped, sold, and bought her.

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