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Whose Body Is It? Religious Justifications, Patriarchal Control, and Female Bodily Autonomy in Nadia Murad's The Last Girl and Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT
This article compares Nadia Murad's The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State and Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971 to examine how gendered power continues to shape women's bodily autonomy during and after armed conflict. Using qualitative comparative textual analysis, close reading, and critical discourse analysis, it studies three related dimensions: ideological justifications for violence, the social afterlife of sexual violence, and the role of testimony in reclaiming narrative authority. Murad's memoir documents the Islamic State's persecution and enslavement of Yazidi women, including the use of extremist religious interpretations to classify and control captives. Saikia's oral history, by contrast, examines the varied experiences of women affected by the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and the tensions between public recognition as Birangona and the stigma some survivors continued to encounter. The article does not equate these distinct histories; instead, it identifies a comparative pattern in which women's bodies become sites through which political, religious, and communal authority is asserted. It argues that bodily autonomy depends not only on freedom from direct violence but also on social belonging and the ability to shape the meaning of one's own experience. Both texts function as feminist counter-narratives, although testimony is understood as a form of agency rather than a complete or automatic resolution of trauma.
Keywords: Bodily Autonomy; Feminist Historiography; Wartime Sexual Violence; Religious Authority; Survivor Testimony; Post-conflict Stigma

1. INTRODUCTION

Armed conflicts have persistently mapped their geopolitical boundaries and ideological victories upon women's bodies. While traditional military histories archive territorial annexations, troop deployments, and peace accords, feminist scholarship reveals that conquests inaugurate a prolonged, domestic theatre of discipline where female subjectivity is comprehensively dismantled. In post-conflict landscapes, the survivor's body rarely returns to private ownership; instead, it is conscripted into an ideological battleground of communal rehabilitation, genealogical paranoia, and moral surveillance. Patriarchal institutions—often operating under the authority claimed for religious doctrine—routinely demand that women bear the moral equilibrium of entire civilizations, transforming violated survivors into symbols of collective degradation or precarious national sanctity. This dynamic provokes an urgent theoretical dilemma: how do institutional theologies and post-war socio-political systems collude to deny women sovereignty over their own bodily existence?

This inquiry investigates the intersection of post-conquest trauma, religious moral governance, and gendered resistance through a comparative feminist analysis of Nadia Murad's The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State and Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971. While distinct in geopolitical geography, religious milieu, and historical lineage, both texts illuminate the second assault suffered by female survivors: the institutional policing that occurs once open armed clashes terminate, wherein patriarchal authorities invoke sacred codes to determine which bodies may belong and which must remain cast out.

In The Last Girl, Nadia Murad provides an unsparing autobiographical testimony to the 2014 genocidal onslaught executed against the ethno- religious Yazidi community in Sinjar. Murad dissects how the militant apparatus of ISIS constructed a bureaucratic apparatus of ideological justification, drafting codified religious edicts that systematically categorized non-Sunni female lives as permissible spoils of conquest (ghanima). Yet, the critical crux of Murad's witness extends into the tenuous realm of the aftermath. Following her escape, she confronts an internal cultural frontier: Yazidi communal and religious traditions in which questions of belonging and endogamy became especially fraught after sexual enslavement. Although the supreme Yazidi council under Baba Sheikh publicly welcomed survivors back into the Yazidi community, Murad depicts the continuing difficulties of displacement, social reintegration, and institutional treatment. Her testimony challenges representations that reduce survivors to objects of scrutiny, asserting that her survival is neither an exercise in passive victimhood nor a trophy for sectarian martyrdom, but an a demand for recognition, accountability, and structural change.

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A structurally convergent yet historiographically distinct landscape of post-conquest survival unfolds in Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh. Resisting the triumphalist, masculine historiography of the 1971 Liberation War, Saikia's text is an exercise in feminist recovery of oral testimony, assembling a polyphony of testimonies from women who survived systematic sexual brutality. Saikia illuminates the bitter friction between state-sponsored myth- making and lived bodily reality through the designation Birangona ("war heroine"), an honorific codified under Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Rather than guaranteeing restorative equity, this public recognition placed survivors within the national story of liberation, yet it did not necessarily prevent some women from experiencing stigma, family rejection, or social exclusion. Saikia illustrates how wartime religious nationalism and post-liberation national narratives could assign women symbolic roles while failing to address the diverse realities of their lives.

Placing Murad's contemporary Middle Eastern memoir alongside Saikia's retrospective South Asian oral archive enables an expansive feminist comparative methodology. It illustrates that the subjugation of women in the wake of armed conquest is not an anomalous byproduct of specific doctrinal fundamentalisms, but recurring patriarchal structures that must nevertheless be understood within their distinct historical and cultural contexts. Reading these works through feminist trauma theory and contemporary critical debates surrounding gendered agency, this study demonstrates that survival is an ongoing political labor rather than a mere consequence of bodily continuation.

Ultimately, this study asserts that authentic bodily autonomy requires dismantling both the militarized apparatus of war and the post-conflict religious, communal, and patriarchal frameworks that shape judgments about a woman's worth according to patriarchally imposed notions of moral contamination. By transforming silent trauma into resilient textual counter-histories, Nadia Murad and Yasmin Saikia refuse the roles of symbolic figures whose experiences are interpreted by others. Their works stand as essential testaments to the fact that surviving the consequences of war requires claiming uncompromised authority over one's own body, voice, and historical memory.

2.RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

This article is guided by three questions: (1) How do Murad and Saikia represent the ideological, religious, political, or communal frameworks through which women's bodies are controlled during conflict? (2) How do the consequences of sexual violence continue through family relations, social stigma, and contested belonging after conflict? (3) How do memoir and oral history enable survivors' experiences to challenge dominant narratives and reclaim interpretive authority?

The article's contribution is comparative rather than equivalential. It brings an autobiographical account of ISIS captivity into dialogue with an oral-history study of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War to show how bodily control and post-conflict exclusion operate through historically specific institutions.

The comparison therefore distinguishes ISIS's documented system of enslavement from the different military, political, and social dynamics represented in Saikia's work.

3.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To examine how female bodies are subjugated during armed conquest and subsequently disciplined in its aftermath, this study establishes a tripartite theoretical framework. Rather than viewing the female body merely as an anatomical target of physical violence, this framework interrogates the discursive machinery—religious claims and interpretations, national archives, and communal codes of honour—that dictates what a woman's body signifies once conquest is declared.

1. Intersectional Feminist Theory: Structural Vulnerability Beyond Gender

Rooted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's foundational articulation of(intersectionality in "Mapping the Margins" (1991), this theoretical lens posits that women's experiences of violence cannot be comprehended through the isolated register of gender alone. Vulnerability to violence and post-war marginalization is multiplied where gender converges with ethnic alterity, religious difference, social class, and political disenfranchisement.

In Nadia Murad's The Last Girl, the assault on Yazidi women was not merely an act of generic misogyny; it was systematically calibrated along fault lines of religious alterity and statelessness, enabling ISIS to designate an entire ethno-religious minority as spiritually and physically expendable. Similarly, in Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh, trauma is refracted through the shifting cross-currents of linguistic identity, ethnic belonging, class precarity, and post-partition religious fractures.(Intersectional feminist theory ensures that this comparative study avoids treating wartime sexual violence as a monolithic universal; instead, it illustrates how specific matrices of institutional power mark certain bodies as disposable during conquest and morally suspect in peacetime. The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria also

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documented ISIS's crimes against the Yazidis, including sexual enslavement, within its broader genocidal campaign. (Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic).

2. Religious Feminism: The Politics of Piety, Moral Governance, and Embodied Agency

This study mobilizes religious feminist criticism, particularly the intervention formulated by Saba Mahmood in Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject (2005). Religious feminism questions the secular-liberal presumption that female agency operates exclusively through explicit rebellion against sacred traditions. Mahmood demonstrates that agency can also be enacted through the complex, embodied realities of moral discipline, lived devotion, and ethical endurance within religious
ecosystems. This approach is complemented by Asma Barlas's critique of patriarchal Qur'anic interpretation, which helps prevent the conflation of extremist practice with Islam as a whole (Barlas).

This critical perspective is essential for evaluating the aftermath of conquest without reducing religion to a monolith of pure oppression. In The Last Girl, Murad deconstructs the extremist interpretations of religious doctrine promoted by ISIS to justify sexual servitude, while simultaneously depicting how genuine Yazidi communal faith—symbolized by the spiritual decree of the supreme leader Baba Sheikh—functions as an indispensable sanctuary for communal restoration and psychological healing. In Saikia's oral archive, religious and communal codes can be mobilized in social moral policing: post-war society weaponizes ancestral notions of chastity and honour (izzat) to ostracize survivors, even while the state manufactures heroic secular narratives. Religious feminist criticism enables this study to illuminate how female survivors navigate, negotiate, and reclaim selfhood within deeply entrenched moral landscapes, affirming their capacity for agency amidst sacred and secular demands. As Barlas argues, patriarchal readings of Islam should not be conflated with Islam as a whole; this distinction is especially important when analyzing ISIS's extremist claims (Barlas).

3. Feminist Historiography and Memory Studies: Testimony, Memory, and Narrative Authority The third dimension of this framework draws upon feminist historiography and memory studies, which challenge the androcentric biases and calculated omissions of conventional historical archives. Dominant historical narratives consistently prioritize statecraft, diplomatic pacts, and military victories, consigning the violated female body to historical oblivion or reducing it to a silent national metaphor of collective grief.(Feminist historiography reclaims the oral narrative and the personal memoir as legitimate sites of critical counter-history. Sontag's discussion of images of suffering also cautions against assuming that witnessing necessarily produces understanding or ethical response (Sontag). Feminist work on memory also cautions that representations of suffering are shaped by the contexts in which they are produced and received (Hirsch; Sontag).

As articulated in feminist oral history scholarship, survivor testimony constitutes an politically significant act. Yasmin Saikia practices an recovery of oral testimony that uncovers silenced domestic histories and marginalized memories of 1971, while Nadia Murad utilizes autobiographical witnessing to convert private trauma into a rigorous legal indictment before the global community. Read through feminist historiography, both primary texts move beyond the mere documentation of atrocity; they enact epistemic agency, restoring the women's authority to articulate their own suffering, disrupt patriarchal historical amnesia, and reassert bodily autonomy on their own terms.

4.LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between war, gender, sexual violence, and women's survival has received considerable attention in feminist scholarship. Researchers have shown that violence against women during conflict cannot be understood merely as an individual act of brutality; it is also connected to wider structures of patriarchal power, political domination, and social control. Joan W. Scott explains that gender is a useful category for examining how power relations are constructed and maintained (Scott 1053–54). Similarly, Cynthia Enloe demonstrates how women's experiences are often shaped by militarism and political systems that normalize gender inequality. These perspectives provide a useful(foundation for examining how women's bodies and identities become targets of control during and after war. Feminist accounts of militarism and war likewise insist that gender is constitutive of conflict rather than a secondary topic (Enloe; Cohn; Sjoberg). Judith Butler's analysis of grievability offers a complementary way to consider how political frames determine which lives are publicly recognized and which are rendered disposable (Butler).

Nadia Murad's The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State offers a powerful account of the persecution and sexual enslavement of Yazidi women by ISIS. Through personal testimony, Murad reveals how extremist ideology was used to justify violence and the treatment of women as property. On page 137 of the edition used in this study, she describes how ISIS militants categorized captured Yazidi women as

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sabaya and used coercive religious conversion as part of their control over captives (Murad and Krajeski 137). This passage illustrates how religious claims can be manipulated to legitimize captivity and deny women their freedom and dignity. Murad's narrative therefore provides an important perspective on the relationship between religious extremism, patriarchal authority, and the commodification of women's bodies.

Murad's account also shows that the consequences of violence extend beyond the immediate experience of captivity. On page 180, she reflects on the separation of mothers from their children, revealing how ISIS's violence disrupted family relationships and attempted to control women's emotional and social lives (Murad and Krajeski 180). Her testimony demonstrates that wartime oppression affects not only the body but also family bonds, personal identity, and the possibility of rebuilding life after violence. By making her experiences public, Murad challenges the silence imposed on survivors and turns personal suffering into an act of witnessing and resistance.

A related but historically distinct perspective appears in Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971. Saikia examines the experiences of women affected by the Bangladesh Liberation War, particularly those whose suffering and memories have been marginalized in dominant narratives of national history. Her use of oral testimony challenges the tendency to remember war primarily through military events, political leaders, and national victories. Nayanika Mukherjee
likewise explores how sexual violence during the 1971 war has been remembered, represented, and contested in Bangladesh. Her work highlights the complex relationship between survivors' experiences, public memory, and the social meanings attached to wartime sexual violence (Mukherjee, Spectral Wound).

Saikia's discussion also demonstrates that the suffering of women does not necessarily end when a war is over. On page 138 of the edition used in this study, she discusses Beauty, whose identity as a war baby places her in a position of social marginality and emotional abandonment. The passage illustrates how the consequences of wartime violence may continue through rejection, stigma, and the denial of belonging (Saikia 138). This account expands the understanding of violence beyond physical injury, showing how postwar society can reproduce suffering by marginalizing those whose lives are connected to the conflict. Saikia therefore shifts attention from the event of violence itself to the lasting(social conditions that shape survivors' lives.

Memory and testimony are central to Saikia's approach. On page 153, she discusses Firdousi's desire to narrate her experience in her own words.(Saikia explains that Firdousi's memories of wartime violence are intertwined with earlier experiences in her family history, demonstrating that trauma is often narrated through a broader personal history rather than as an isolated event (Saikia 153). This approach recognizes survivors not simply as sources of historical information but as individuals who interpret and communicate their own experiences. Their narratives complicate official accounts of war and create space for experiences that have often remained unheard.

The question of women's agency also requires attention to the relationship between gender, religion, and power. Saba Mahmood challenges(assumptions that women's agency must always take the form of open resistance to established authority, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of how women act within restrictive social and religious structures. Asma Barlas, meanwhile, examines patriarchal interpretations of Islam and questions the assumption that such interpretations are inherent to the religion itself. These perspectives are relevant to Murad's account because they help distinguish the actions of extremist groups from Islam as a diverse religious tradition. They also encourage a careful examination of how religious interpretations may be mobilized to authorize or challenge women's subordination.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality further helps explain why women's experiences of violence cannot be separated from their wider social identities and circumstances. Gender interacts with religion, ethnicity, family position, and social status to shape both the experience of violence and the treatment of survivors afterward. This perspective is useful for reading Murad and Saikia comparatively: Yazidi women under ISIS faced persecution connected to their religious and ethnic identity, while women
affected by the Bangladesh Liberation War encountered different forms of stigma shaped by wartime sexual violence, family relationships, and postwar social expectations.

Scholarship on conflict-related sexual violence cautions against treating rape as either an inevitable by-product of war or a uniform strategy used by every armed group. Dara Kay Cohen examines how recruitment practices and group dynamics can shape patterns of wartime rape, while Elisabeth Jean Wood stresses variation across armed organizations and conflicts.(Sara Meger's feminist political
economy approach further situates sexual violence within the political and economic structures of war. These studies support a careful distinction in the present comparison: ISIS's system of enslavement is documented as a specific ideological and institutional(practice, whereas Saikia's account requires attention to the different military, political, and communal dynamics of the 1971 war (Cohen; Wood; Meger). Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz provide a policy-oriented overview of sexual violence in armed conflict (Bastick et al.). El-Masri examines

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possible legal routes for prosecuting ISIS for sexual slavery (El-Masri), while the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documents crimes committed against Yazidis (Independent International Commission of Inquiry).

Research focused on Yazidi survivors also underscores that liberation does not automatically resolve the effects of captivity. Hawkar Ibrahim and his co-authors document an association between traumatic exposure, perceived social rejection, and mental-health outcomes among Yazidi women and girls who survived enslavement and genocide. Gina Vale similarly argues that the consequences of ISIS captivity extend beyond the moment of escape and affect the wider Yazidi community. Johanna E. Foster and Sherizaan Minwalla add an important caution about public testimony: survivors may regard speaking out as necessary while also experiencing pressure, emotional costs, and risks when their stories are reported without adequate care. These findings reinforce the need to analyze testimony as a form of agency without assuming that disclosure itself resolves trauma or restores autonomy (Ibrahim et al.; Vale; Foster and Minwalla). Human Rights Watch's investigation, based on interviews with Yazidi women and girls who escaped ISIS captivity, also documents organized rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and family separation (Human Rights Watch).

Scholarship on Bangladesh's 1971 war likewise demonstrates that public commemoration can coexist with silencing and stigma. In an earlier study, Saikia examines how official and national narratives obscure the varied experiences of people affected by the war. Mukherjee's research on the public secrecy of rape and on the representation of women who experienced wartime sexual violence as a "horrific sublime" shows how the figure of the Birangona can become a powerful national symbol while flattening survivors' diverse experiences. These analyses help contextualize the present paper's focus on the gap between public recognition and everyday social belonging (Saikia, "Beyond the Archive";

Mukherjee, "'Remembering to Forget'"; Mukherjee, "The(Raped Woman"). Mukherjee's later study of the politics of commemorating wartime rape further cautions against allowing the public figure of the(Birangona to stand in for survivors' varied lives (Mookherjee, "Historicising the Birangona").

The paper also draws selectively on scholarship concerning trauma, testimony, memory, and representation. Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman offer influential accounts of trauma and its aftermath; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub examine testimony as a complex act of witnessing; and(Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory provides a framework for considering how violence and its traces may be carried across generations. These frameworks are not interchangeable, and the present study does not diagnose the women represented in either primary text. Rather, they help clarify why testimony, memory, and the social reception of survivors' accounts are central to feminist historical analysis (Caruth; Herman; Felman and Laub; Hirsch). Veena Das's study of violence in everyday life also helps frame how the consequences of extraordinary violence may persist within ordinary social relations (Das).

Taken together, these studies establish an important foundation for a(feminist comparison of Murad's The Last Girl and Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh. Both works reveal how women experience violence within broader structures of power, and both show that the effects of conflict may continue through social exclusion, disrupted relationships, and struggles for recognition. However, their narrative approaches differ: Murad presents an autobiographical account of captivity and public testimony, while Saikia reconstructs women's experiences through oral histories and the study of collective memory.(Reading the two works together makes it possible to examine both the shared patterns of gendered oppression and the differences between their historical and political contexts. The present study builds on this scholarship by exploring how religious or communal justifications,(patriarchal power, trauma, memory, and testimony shape women's subjugation and survival after war.

5.METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative feminist textual methodology to examine gendered violence, women's subjugation, and survival in Nadia Murad's The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the(Islamic State and Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971. It combines close textual reading with critical discourse analysis to explore how violence against women is represented, justified, remembered, and challenged in two distinct historical contexts. While Murad presents an autobiographical account of captivity and sexual enslavement under ISIS, Saikia draws on oral histories to examine women's experiences of the Bangladesh Liberation War and the social consequences of wartime violence.

The analysis focuses on passages concerning the control of women's bodies, the use of religious or communal ideologies to justify violence, the social treatment of survivors, and the role of memory and testimony in reclaiming agency. Relevant passages are selected on the basis of their direct relevance to these themes and

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examined within their textual and historical contexts. The study then compares the two works to identify shared patterns of gendered power, as well as differences in the ideological, political, and social structures that shape women's experiences. This approach avoids treating the two conflicts as equivalent and instead considers how distinct forms of power produce related forms of subjugation and exclusion.

The comparative analysis is organized around three analytical dimensions. First, religious and ideological justifications of violence examines how ISIS invokes religious interpretations to legitimize the enslavement of Yazidi women in Murad's account, while Saikia's work is examined in relation to the political, military, and communal forces surrounding wartime sexual violence in Bangladesh. Second, postwar stigma, honour, and social exclusion investigates how survivors and their families experience the continuing effects of violence through silence, marginalization, and(contested social identities. Third, testimony, memory, and women's agency explores how autobiographical narration and oral history preserve experiences that dominant historical narratives may overlook and how survivors' accounts challenge imposed silence and reclaim interpretive authority over their lives.

The findings are interpreted through feminist scholarship on gender and power, intersectionality, religious authority and agency, and historical memory and testimony. These perspectives provide a framework for understanding how gender intersects with religious identity, ethnicity, nationalism, and social status. Rather than assuming that the two texts present identical experiences or conclusions, the study attends to their narrative differences and the specific historical conditions represented in each work.

The study is limited to a close reading of the two selected primary texts and does not claim to represent all survivors' experiences or either conflict in its entirety. Its contribution lies in bringing these distinct narratives into dialogue to examine how gendered violence is legitimized, how its effects persist beyond conflict, and how women's testimony challenges the structures that silence or marginalize them.

6.TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Legitimation, Political Conquest, and the Commodification of the Female Body

A comparative reading of Nadia Murad's The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State and Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971 reveals how gendered violence operates within broader structures of ideological domination and patriarchal power. Rather than treating sexual violence simply as an individual act of

brutality, both works invite an examination of the political, religious, and communal conditions through which women's bodies become objects of control. Joan W. Scott argues that gender is a constitutive element of social relationships and a significant means through which power is expressed (1053–54). This perspective provides a foundation for examining the relationship between military conquest, gendered subjugation, and the denial of women's autonomy in the two texts.

In The Last Girl, Murad documents the persecution of the Yazidi community and the enslavement of Yazidi women by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Her account demonstrates how ISIS employed selective religious interpretations to justify the persecution of a religious minority and the sexual exploitation of captive women. On page 137 of the edition used in this study, Murad describes the classification of captive women as sabaya and the coercive conversion imposed on a young girl (Murad and Krajeski 137). This episode illustrates how religious categorization can be mobilized to deny individuals the right to determine their own identities. By reducing women to a category associated with captivity, ISIS sought to legitimize their subordination and make their bodies available for the exercise of male power. Legal scholarship also examines the routes available for prosecuting ISIS members for sexual slavery and related crimes (El-Masri).

The significance of this episode extends beyond the immediate experience of captivity. The language used to classify women establishes an ideological distinction between those entitled to exercise power and those whose autonomy can be denied. In this context, the female body becomes a site of domination justified through ISIS's particular extremist religious interpretation, while the captive woman's identity is defined by the authority of her captors rather than by her own beliefs or choices. This reading is consistent with Scott's argument that gender relations are closely connected to the organization and legitimation of power (1067–68). Importantly, the analysis concerns ISIS's particular ideological practices and should not be generalized to Islam as a whole.

Saikia's work presents a different historical configuration of gendered violence. Her oral histories examine women's experiences during the(Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and the ways those experiences have been represented, remembered, and marginalized. Women's bodies became entangled with competing claims about religious identity, national belonging, and collective honour. In contrast to Murad's account of religiously justified enslavement, Saikia examines how wartime sexual violence and its subsequent interpretation became embedded in the political and social histories of Bangladesh. Her approach complicates national narratives that

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privilege military events and political achievement while giving insufficient attention to women's experiences (Saikia 137–53).

The comparison therefore reveals both convergence and distinction. In Murad's account, ISIS's religiously framed classifications contributed to the legitimization of captivity and sexual enslavement. In Saikia's work, women's experiences must be understood in relation to wartime violence and the contested construction of national memory. These contexts should not be treated as identical. Their comparative significance lies in showing how political and ideological systems can make women's bodies sites upon which authority, domination, and collective identity are asserted. Scholarship on wartime sexual violence in other settings, including the former Yugoslavia, provides comparative context but cannot substitute for attention to the specific histories examined here (Stiglmayer).

The Afterlife Of Violence: Communal Honour, Social Exclusion, And Inherited Stigma

A central contribution of both texts is their attention to the consequences of violence beyond the immediate circumstances of war. Physical captivity or armed conflict may end, but the effects of violence can continue through disrupted family relationships, social rejection, and the stigmatization of survivors. This persistence may be understood as the social afterlife of violence: the continuation of suffering through the attitudes and practices that shape survivors' lives after the immediate threat has passed. Research on conflict-related sexual violence further warns against treating all cases as identical or assuming that sexual violence always serves a single strategic purpose (Wood; Cohen; Bastick et al.).

In Murad's narrative, the separation of mothers from their children reveals the extent to which captivity disrupts intimate relationships and family continuity. On page 180 of the edition used in this study, Murad reflects on the separation of women from their children under ISIS (Murad and Krajeski 180). This episode broadens the understanding of violence beyond bodily injury by drawing attention to the destruction of familial bonds and the emotional consequences of forced separation. The experience of captivity affects not only individual survivors but also the relationships through which personal identity, belonging, and emotional security are sustained.

The aftermath of persecution also raises questions about the relationship between survival and communal belonging. For Yazidi women, return and reintegration involved negotiating the consequences of violence while attempting to rebuild their lives. A careful feminist reading must acknowledge the complexity of these experiences rather than assume that all survivors encountered identical reactions from their families or religious institutions. The broader issue is how survivors negotiate the consequences of violence while seeking recognition, security, and the restoration of their autonomy. Empirical research with Yazidi survivors similarly identifies perceived social rejection as an important factor in the aftermath of enslavement (Ibrahim et al.).

In Saikia's account, the persistence of violence becomes visible through the social marginalization of women and children whose lives were shaped by the war. On page 138 of the edition used in this study, Saikia discusses Beauty, whose identity as a war baby is associated with emotional isolation and a diminished sense of belonging (Saikia 138). Her experience illustrates how the consequences of wartime violence may extend across generations. A child can become the object of social judgement because of the circumstances of birth, even though the child bears no responsibility for the violence that produced those circumstances. The stigma attached to such an identity can therefore reproduce the effects of war within family and community relationships long after the conflict has ended.

Nayanika Mukherjee's 'The Spectral Wound' provides a significant framework for interpreting this contradiction in Bangladesh's postwar(history. Mukherjee examines how the public recognition of rape survivors as birangona, or war heroines, intersects with the social meanings attached to sexual violence and national honour. The designation sought to incorporate women's suffering into the national narrative of liberation; however, symbolic recognition did not necessarily eliminate the stigma or marginalization experienced in everyday life. Mukherjee's analysis shows how public commemoration can coexist with social exclusion and how representations of survivors may reduce complex lives to the experience of sexual violation (Mukherjee, Spectral Wound).

Read comparatively, Murad and Saikia reveal that survivors may confront forms of subordination that continue after direct violence has ceased.(Their experiences are historically different, but both texts draw attention to the relationship between bodily violation, family disruption, and social belonging. The concept of the social afterlife of violence thus helps explain why survival cannot be measured solely by escape from captivity or the formal conclusion of a war. It also requires attention to the social conditions under which survivors attempt to rebuild their lives.

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Testimony, Memory, and the Reclamation of Narrative Authority

Although both works document profound suffering, neither should be(reduced to a narrative of female victimhood. Murad's autobiographical(testimony and Saikia's oral historiography also challenge the exclusion of women's experiences from dominant accounts of violence and history.

Their different narrative methods create opportunities to examine how survivors reclaim authority over the representation of their lives.

In The Last Girl, Murad transforms personal testimony into a public challenge to the denial of Yazidi suffering. By narrating her experiences of persecution and captivity, she contests the categories imposed upon her by her captors and asserts her right to interpret what happened to her. Her testimony also brings the experiences of other Yazidi women into a wider discussion of persecution and accountability. The memoir therefore functions not simply as a record of personal suffering but as an intervention in the public understanding of gendered violence.

Nevertheless, testimony should not be treated as an automatic or complete form of liberation. Public narration cannot erase trauma or restore everything that has been taken from survivors. Its significance lies in its capacity to challenge the authority of perpetrators and dominant narratives to determine how violence is understood. Murad's account establishes the survivor as a speaking subject whose experiences demand recognition rather than as a passive figure represented exclusively by others.

Saikia's approach differs in its emphasis on oral history and the plurality of women's experiences. On page 153 of the edition used in this study, she discusses Firdousi's desire to tell her story in her own words and explains that her memories of wartime violence are intertwined with earlier experiences in her family history (Saikia 153). This passage challenges the assumption that traumatic experience can be isolated from the broader(circumstances of a person's life. Firdousi's narrative situates the memory of violence within a longer personal history, emphasizing the connections between family relationships, earlier experiences, wartime suffering, and subsequent survival. Felman and Laub's work on testimony is useful here because it treats witnessing as a complex relational process rather than a transparent transfer of experience (Felman and Laub).

Saikia's method also raises important questions about historical representation. Oral testimony brings marginalized experiences into historical discussion, but collecting and interpreting these accounts requires attention to the relationship between the survivor's voice and the(researcher's analysis. The women whose stories appear in the book should not be treated merely as sources of evidence for a predetermined argument. Their accounts retain individual meanings and differences that complicate any attempt to construct a single, unified narrative of women's experiences during the war. Veena Das's account of violence and everyday life is also useful for understanding how the aftermath of violence is lived within ordinary relationships and social worlds (Das).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is useful here because it draws attention to the ways gender interacts with other structures of power and social identity (1244–45). Murad's experiences are inseparable from the persecution of Yazidis as a religious minority, while the experiences represented by Saikia are shaped by the historical and social circumstances of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Neither text suggests that women experience violence in precisely the same way. Instead, they demonstrate how gender intersects with religious identity, community membership, and social status to shape both the experience of violence and its aftermath.

The comparison between Murad's autobiographical memoir and Saikia's multivocal oral history consequently reveals two related forms of(testimonial agency. Murad's narrative foregrounds the authority of an(individual witness, whereas Saikia's work draws attention to the plurality of memories that complicate official historical narratives. Both approaches challenge the exclusion of women's

experiences from public memory.(Testimony becomes a means of preserving marginalized histories and contesting the assumption that survivors must remain silent or allow others to determine the meaning of their experiences.

Comparative Synthesis: Toward a Transnational Feminist Counter- History

The comparison of Murad and Saikia identifies three interconnected dimensions of gendered power: the ideological legitimation of violence, the persistence of social exclusion after conflict, and the reclamation of narrative authority through testimony. These dimensions establish the basis for a transnational feminist reading without erasing the historical differences between ISIS's persecution of Yazidis and the experiences of women affected by the Bangladesh Liberation War.

The first dimension concerns the ways ideological and political systems define women's bodies and regulate their autonomy. Murad exposes how

ISIS used religious interpretations to legitimize the enslavement of Yazidi women. Saikia, by contrast, examines how women's experiences of wartime violence became entangled with the political and communal meanings of the 1971 conflict and its subsequent remembrance. The comparison does not equate these mechanisms; rather, it

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demonstrates that gendered violence must be understood in relation to the specific systems of power within which it occurs.

The second dimension concerns the continuation of violence through the social treatment of survivors. Murad's account of family separation and Saikia's discussion of Beauty's marginalization demonstrate that the consequences of conflict may persist through disrupted relationships,(stigma, and contested identities. The survivor's struggle is therefore not limited to escaping physical danger. It also involves negotiating the social conditions under which she can recover a sense of belonging and exercise control over her life.

The third dimension concerns memory and representation. By narrating her experiences, Murad challenges the ideological justifications surrounding the persecution of Yazidis. Through oral history, Saikia brings women's memories into a broader historical account that cannot be reduced to military events or national achievement. Both texts reveal the importance of allowing survivors to participate in defining the meaning of their experiences rather than representing them solely through the categories imposed by perpetrators, communities, or dominant historical narratives. Butler's account of grievability also offers a way to question why some lives become publicly mournable while others remain marginal to dominant narratives (Butler).

Ultimately, the feminist significance of these works lies in their examination of the relationship between bodily autonomy, social recognition, and narrative authority. They demonstrate that the

consequences of gendered violence can persist beyond the immediate circumstances of conflict, while also showing how testimony challenges the silencing of survivors. Their narratives do not suggest that speaking publicly eliminates trauma or automatically restores justice. Instead, they establish testimony and historical remembrance as important means of contesting marginalization and preserving experiences that might otherwise be excluded from public understanding. Read together, Murad and Saikia contribute to a comparative feminist account of subjugation and survival that recognizes both the enduring effects of violence and the importance of women's authority over their own stories.

7.CONCLUSION

This comparative inquiry demonstrates that the formal cessation of military conquest rarely signals the restoration of women's bodily autonomy. Rather, the end of combat frequently inaugurates a quieter, domestic theater of subjugation where survivors confront communal stigma, familial policing, and the continued regulation of their bodies in the name of(collective honour. By placing Nadia Murad's The Last Girl into dialogue with Yasmin Saikia's Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh, this study exposes a structural patriarchal continuity across disparate geopolitical and theological terrains. In Murad's testimony, an extremist theocratic bureaucracy codified the abduction and commodification of(Yazidi women as religiously framed justification. In Saikia's oral archive, wartime mass rape functioned to inscribe borders and enforce communal humiliation during the 1971 war. Across both contexts, women are denied recognition as autonomous individuals and reduced to ideological territory to be conquered, disciplined, and spoken for.

Crucially, both texts reveal that the trauma of conquest does not dissipate with physical liberation. Murad's account of bureaucratic enslavement unmasks how fundamentalist ideology manufactures legitimacy for the trafficking and enslavement of human beings; yet, her narrative also illustrates that religion is not an immutable instrument of oppression. The unprecedented intervention of the Yazidi spiritual leader, Baba Sheikh, highlights the capacity of religious traditions to extend pastoral compassion, formally re-consecrating returning women within the sacred fold even as survivors navigated lingering domestic whispers in displacement camps. Concurrently, Saikia complicates celebratory accounts of national liberation by exposing the bitter irony of the state-bestowed title Birangona ("war heroine"). While the Bangladeshi state publicly recognized survivors as Birangonas, while some survivors continued to face stigma, family rejection, and social exclusion. Read together, these accounts illuminate the stark dissonance between the public glorification of women's suffering and the private denial of their social legitimacy.

Ultimately, the central feminist contribution of this paper lies in reframing survival after conquest not as passive endurance, but as an insurgent act of epistemic reclamation. Murad transforms personal testimony into public advocacy and a demand for accountability, while Saikia's use of oral history recovers the multi-vocal, contradictory memories of women whose lives resist containment within heroic state archives. Both works construct crucial feminist counter-histories that place women's interpretive authority at the centre of historical understanding. The true cost of armed conquest cannot be measured solely by territorial annexations or treaties of peace, but by the conditions under which survivors are permitted to live, remember, and belong. As Murad and Saikia attest, survival becomes transformative only when the female voice is no longer treated as a sorrowful archive of victimhood, but recognized as an authoritative declaration of bodily autonomy and self-determination

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