

7-9-2023

Arts & Literature: Voices of Kurdish Women Survivors: Healing Through Wounds of Genocide

Sarwa Azeez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp>

Recommended Citation

Azeez, Sarwa (2023) "Arts & Literature: Voices of Kurdish Women Survivors: Healing Through Wounds of Genocide," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1: Article 7.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.17.1.1967>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol17/iss1/7>

This Arts & Literature is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

Arts & Literature: Voices of Kurdish Women Survivors: Healing Through Wounds of Genocide

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to Graham Mort, a remarkable writer, editor, and professor from Lancaster University, for his invaluable support and guidance in allowing me to contribute to the transformative Kurdish women's project, "Many Women, Many Words." This project has served as a profound inspiration, motivating me to delve into the collective traumatic experiences of women. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my dearest friend and mentor, Muli Amaye, writer and professor at The University of West Indies, for editing my poems and believing in them. Thanks for my supportive professors at the University of Lincoln-Nebraska during my master's program. The invaluable feedback and unwavering encouragement you provided were truly priceless.

Arts & Literature: Voices of Kurdish Women Survivors: Healing Through Wounds of Genocide

Sarwa Azeez

About the Poems

The Kurdish genocide tragically stole a generation; yet, little attention has been given to the profound anguish endured by women left without husbands, fathers or sons. The poems "Alive," "Waiting," "To Hawa," and "But Then Their Eyes Retained Everything" venture to unveil novel perspectives on the vast expanse of war, violence, trauma, and healing. They explore the impact of Saddam Hussein's genocide on women during and after the war, its impact on subsequent generations, and the reflections of women on the implications of the Al-Anfal campaign, which spanned from 1986 to 1989. Similarly, the poem "Her Tongue Refuses to Recall," tells the tale of a resilient Yezidi woman who, like thousands of others, was tragically enslaved by the Islamic State, also known as Daesh, during their invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan from 2014 till 2017. By placing women at the forefront instead of the periphery, these poems attempt to enhance our comprehension of how these atrocities have affected families, intimate relationships, and the unique vulnerabilities faced by women.

But Then Their Eyes Retained Everything

His paintings
fragments from the story
my mother told us
my mother's mother told her
that went like:

*We lived
freely
in our own land
then had to stop
living
the way we used to.*

My favorite painting
is a lonely horse
running through the woods.

I wonder which part of the story it is:
*The horse loses his rider
The rider loses his horse*
What did they witness
before their bond shattered?

A village may lie buried
their pulses still linger
within his brush strokes
within my mother's stories
within the eyes of the lost horse.

Alive

That is what everyone says in our neighbourhood,
there is something weird about
the way pure¹ walks.

She walks gently,
each step placed
with care on the ground.

Perhaps she never saw
her husband screaming
when they buried him alive.

But we know
each step she takes feels like
treading over his beating heart.

To Hawa²

if you were a forest
birds would sing
through your broken branches
and sooth

if you were a mountain
clouds would hover
along your crooked shoulders
and remind
you of your strength

if you were a beach
waves would crash
from your ocean's edge
wakening
your slow heartbeats

if you were a desert
breezes would whisper gentle
over your soft curves
to shake
your brooding silences

if you were a tunnel
hope would find you
and fill the void up
with lights and fire

but you were only a girl
with war wounds
a wheelchair
a dream to walk again

¹ *Pure* stands for auntie in Kurdish. It is used to refer to middle aged or older women.

² In 1991, during Gulf War, Hawa was only 5 years old when her spinal cord was damaged in one of Saddam's bombing attacks by shrapnel leaving her lower limbs paralyzed. In May 2023, Hawa died from body sores associated with her never healed shrapnel wounds.

Waiting

You still think it's 9 in the morning,
When you were eating breakfast.
They came and took him away.

They said that soon he would return.
Decades passed with no trace of him.
You still think it's 9 in the morning.

From dusk till dawn you listen
To the footsteps, the moments when
They came and took him away.

Every day you sit where you have been,
Staring at plates, at cups and bread.
Yet, nothing can keep this void at bay.

There are thousands of women like you
Whose clocks froze the minute
ZILs³ came and took their men.

How many more socks you will have to knit
For him and your never born child?
You still think it's 9 in the morning
When they came and took him away.

Her Tongue Refuses To Render

*We had a serene town with markets, stores
temples.*

She means before their capture.

*What did you witness
after...*

Therapist asks.

Her mouth begins to wither
but eyes want to take over.
Darkness.

The survivor answers
in a weak whisper.

The tongue
that has been once
engulfed in hatred
and fear
refuses to render
the amount of pain
been thrust into her.

³ ZIL also called ZIL-131 is a general purpose 3.5 tons 6x6 army truck designed by Russian vehicle manufacturer ZIL.
ZIL's were used widely by Iraqi army in Saddam's time.