



ARTICLE

Yazidi Stories: A Case Study of Resistance, Resilience and Political Erasure in Mesopotamia

Shakir Muhammad Usman 

Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia
Email: muk_shakir@hotmail.com

(Received 11 October 2025; revised 23 January 2026; accepted 28 January 2026; first published online 02 March 2026)

Abstract

This research examines the stories and experiences of the Yazidis, the Indigenous population of Mesopotamia. It especially focuses on the intersections of their political resistance, cultural resilience and the impact of long-lasting epistemic and colonial violence. Although the Yazidi community has been subject to external invasion and systemic persecution since the 3rd century CE (Potts, D. T. (2014) *Nomadism in Iran: From antiquity to the modern era* (Vol. xxv, p. 558). Oxford University Press. ISBN 978 0 19 933079 9; Usman (2021a) *Yazidis: A tale of a lost, found and misunderstood legacy in the light of mimetic theory*. *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture* (Vol. 28). Michigan State University Press, (2021b) *History of Shia, Sunnis and Yazidi Conflict: A Political, Social or Religious Conflict and its Impact on the Peace Process in the Middle East* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Innsbruck, Austria)), they were forgotten by most until they were last attacked in 2014 by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which resulted in abductions, mass murders, forced conversion and using rape as a genocidal tool to demoralise and humiliate the entire community and erase their identity. It is important to understand the voices and stories of Yazidi survivors and experts; therefore, while using a qualitative research methodology, this research gathers data through semi-structured interviews and a thorough literature review, which will then be analysed with the help of thematic analysis. As one of the objectives of this study is to deconstruct the idea of epistemic violence suffered by the Yazidis throughout their history, investigating and identifying recurring patterns of persecution, trauma and violence helps us understand the motives behind such atrocities. It is often observed that deep-rooted colonial legacies lack empathy and hinder the process of understanding the victims' narratives, and Yazidis have suffered the same. Finally, this research contributes to an already scarce literature on the history of Yazidi sufferings and documents the stories of a marginalised community. It also encourages the international community to understand the complexity of Yazidi sufferings and treat the Yazidi genocide as a resistance of survival.

Keywords: Epistemic violence; Ezidis; Yazidis; Yazidi genocide; Yazidi survivors; Yazidi persecution

Introduction

The Yazidi community, commonly known as one of the oldest existing ethno-religious groups in the Mesopotamian region, has suffered centuries of repression and marginalisation. Their oral traditions, spiritual connections to land and distinctive religious rituals are some of the testimonies of their cultural survival in the face of persecution. Having historically been located at the intersection of invasions, conquests and religious intolerance, the Yazidis have also been placed in the peripheries of political and scholarly discourses. These tragedies notwithstanding, their history of survival, faith and community maintains a strong tradition of resistance. While

using Yazidi stories, the study provides an in-depth analysis of the narratives of the Yazidi people to shed light on the overlapping resilience, political erasure and environmental belonging.

The Yazidis have attracted further international interest in the past years, particularly since the genocidal assaults by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014. The brutal attack in 2014 was not the first against the Yazidi community; they have suffered immensely throughout their history, but such attention, however, has frequently been cursory and has boiled down a rich history into a grim moment of horror. The purpose of the study is to go beyond the fantasy womb-like stories and provide a sober, multifaceted look at Yazidi narratives in their voices. Within the context of personal stories, group memory and cultural education, the study explains the compound organisational types of resisting the Yazidi people, especially regarding the land, identity and trauma. The focus on narrative as a survival praxis provides information on the way marginalised groups sustain knowledge, share trauma and transmit values across generations. Oral tradition and narrative praxis in the example of the Yazidis are not merely mnemonic strategies but also political and pedagogical processes that preserve the cultural heritage and create long-term intergenerational connections. The paper places the traditions of Yazidi storytelling in a wider context of the Indigenous and environmental education, with a high focus on land-based knowledge as the only resource for stable societal functioning. The lived experiences and epistemologies of the Indigenous peoples who are no longer in their ancestral lands should be given priority in decolonial imperatives and justice-oriented environmental education. The case of Yazidis is an urgent chance to increase the conceptual scope and teaching models of educators. It provokes the discipline to think about the interrelationship between trauma, displacement and genocide, besides the ecological knowledge and spiritual geography. It also provides a place to reimagine education as a caring, responsible and resistant practice. This article fills a gap in an understudied topic by focusing on the voices of Yazidi people and incorporating qualitative interviewing experience as an example of education that should be more inclusive, ethical and responsive. It claims that the Yazidi accounts cannot be reduced to a history of suffering but are pedagogies of survival that bear momentous significance to the way we perceive memory, place, justice and learning.

Yazidi stories are discussed in this paper as a form of environmental, ethical and political learning. Yazidi land-based knowledge and learnings are an Indigenous ecological worldview where land is not a place to turn to but a teacher and ancestor. These views are well-received by the modern research in the area of environmental education, especially the Special Issue on *Indigenous Philosophy and Land-Based Learning published in the Australian Journal of Environmental Education* (2023). The mentioned literature highlights the way Indigenous storylines foster ethical connections with the land, which is one of the primary focuses of the Yazidi existence. This study places narrative as resistance and environmental pedagogy by anticipating the Yazidi voices, especially by interviewing the survivors and the members of the community. Yazidi narration maintains the ecological knowledge, values passing and anti-colonial misrepresentations. Their experiences provide environmental education with a sense of urgency about the issues of trauma, displacement, ecological knowledge and Indigenous survivance.

Although I am not a Yazidi, I have been studying and researching Yazidis since the 1990s. I have lived with them in northern Iraq and worked closely with the Yazidi people in the academic field, in cultural work and in advocacy. My views are influenced by the fact that I live in the region, have multiple identities, and have a moral obligation to present Yazidi knowledge sensitively. There are responsibilities associated with my positionality: I must not engage in extractive research methods, I must adopt transparency with respect to interpretation, and I must place leadership of the voices of the Yazidi as authoritative representatives of their own story. I am not speaking on behalf of the Yazidi cultural background, but I am still answerable to the members of the community who gave their stories to produce this work. This study is thus representative of a relational obligation-non-indifferent distance. It is based on the principle of trust-building, the recognition of the power disparity, and adherence to amplification rather than interpretation of the Indigenous epistemologies.

Understanding the case of Yazidis through the lens of epistemic violence

Spivak (1988) coined the term epistemic violence to refer to the cancellation or silencing of the marginalised knowledge systems in the mainstream colonial or ideological systems. To the Yazidis, epistemic violence has been experienced in the constant misrepresentation of their religion and identity, and the most infamous being the label of devil worshippers, which was historically used to legitimize persecution. This framework is enhanced by scholars such as Dotson (2011), who explains the way in which the oppression of epistemology is practiced even in ordinary situations when the marginalised cases expect to be raped and to remain silent. This effect is extremely applicable to the experiences of Yazidis, since generations have understood that they are to avoid explaining their religious beliefs to prevent the risk of misunderstanding or even being killed. The notion of hermeneutical injustice described by Fricker (2007) sheds more light on how the Yazidis have been deprived of the interpretive space in dominant cultures to express their world views.

Nevertheless, a critical approach to epistemic violence has to be applied to postcolonial analyses. Dalit feminist academic Soundararajan (2022) claims that canonical postcolonial theorists such as Spivak are not very attentive to the power of caste hierarchies in defining the person as a subaltern. These criticisms can help us remember that domination is a multi-layered concept and that Yazidi marginalisation should be considered in the context of larger systems of ethnic, religious and geopolitical power. To Yazidis, epistemic violence is not just a figure of speech. It has led to direct contribution towards structural, cultural and physical violence. Orientalist authors such as Mingana (1916) and Wilson (1993) replicated the statements that Yazidis worship the forces of evil, which supported the wrong views in the minds of the people from the majority of Muslims as well as Western society. These stories assisted in the justification of the recurring massacres, forcible conversions and deprivation of political recognition. Epistemic violence is the main feature of the given article since the struggle of the Yazidis is essentially a struggle for control over narrative. They have depended as heavily on misrepresentation and erasure as on actual violence to be persecuted. The interpretation of this gives a very important background of resilience in the Yazidi practices of narratives.

Here, epistemic violence is instrumental to power. It is a broader colonial legacy, where the Indigenous knowledge is either deprecated or superseded by the colonisers' knowledge, which, in this case, was based on prejudice, bias and ignorance about Yazidis (Usman, 2021a). Consider living in a world where every aspect of your identity is continuously misunderstood. Your traditions, which you have inherited for centuries, are twisted and obliterated by the people who refuse to lend an ear. That is what has happened to the Yazidis for centuries. Though they express their belief in only one god, the Yazidis have been unjustly charged with devil worship. This lie has led to not just physical violence against them, but a wound that penetrates deep into the psyche and culture of their community. Their testimonies, their voices and their faith have been ignored and devalued and dismissed time after time by those in power (Usman, 2021b).

The allegation of worshipping the devil is an ongoing dilemma most Yazidis face in the modern world; they fight it back, but even though the international community is aware of their persecution, there is still a deep misunderstanding about their religion (Usman, 2021a). This stereotype is not just a mental mistake but also a kind of personal aggression. According to Yazidis, the answer to the question of whether they are the worshippers of the devil is not just a hypothetical argument; it is the essence of the questions of their identity, religious beliefs and the history of their deeds (Usman, 2021b). The pain implicit in these kinds of accusations cuts wounds that go beyond the corporeal world. Constant and consistent saying that one truth is wrong is extremely harmful and distortive to the very bones of the self, to the point that a person can be left without a shelter and without a direction to go. However, Yazidis continue to write about their history and their claim.

My interaction with the Yazidi community has turned into a continuing process. The first attention was caused by the experience of exposure to the news of the Yazidi genocide and the speech of Amal Clooney at the United Nations. An even further in-depth study of Yazidi belief systems showed Yazidism is not just another story of sorrow; it has a strong history of survival, a continuing sense of connection to a timeless system of traditions, and a strong sense of spirituality. What has impressed me the most is the fact that the Yazidis want not only to ensure their survival but also popularise their story and make their truth popular. They are very spiritual people having rich religious backgrounds whose voices have been misplaced since time immemorial. This means that my academic research into their history has highlighted the necessity to appreciate varying epistemic traditions, particularly those that were traditionally marginalised. This intellectual experience has been very enlightening in my educational path. It has shown that knowledge production is not just about the gathering of facts; it also involves the need to listen to the voices of those that history has left out in terms of their stories and history. The work is not academic per se; it is a very personal and ethical effort. Working with the Yazidi narratives, I mean that their epistemic work should be represented correctly and that their cultural life should find its reflection not only in the academic literature but also in the historical memory of humanity. Such stories represent a fight against epistemic violence that attempts to destroy them. In this regard, such stories must be actively listened to.

Methodology

The qualitative research design used the method of thematic analysis, narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to interview seven Yazidi interviewees (27–45 years old). The sample consisted of those who had been subjected to displacement, loss, or cultural activism following the 2014 genocide. The purposive sampling method enabled a more extensive range of views to be included in the community of Yazidi people, and the focus was specifically made on those who directly related their lived experience to the research questions (Tajik et al., 2024).

The semi-structured interview design allowed the conversational mode that would allow participant autonomy and concentration, at the same time, allowing the participant their agency in the narration of their experiences, as well as, bringing out the most salient elements of their lives. The interviews were recorded on audio, transcribed and coded in accordance with a theme-oriented analytical framework to recognise repetitive motifs and patterns (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The data were processed using NVivo software that facilitated the process of organising emergent codes connected to land, memory, resistance, gendered trauma and storytelling.

During the design of the research, ethics prevailed. Each of the participants gave informed consent and was guaranteed confidentiality. They were told that if they felt uncomfortable with any question or other factors during the interview, they could leave the interview at any time. In order to ensure confidentiality, privacy and safety of the participants, pseudonyms were used. The study followed trauma-informed procedures, which meant that the research participants were facilitated during the interview. The objective was not to collect the data but to partake in a respectful and mutual knowledge transfer (Isobel, 2021).

Although seven interviews do not reflect the whole Yazidi community, qualitative research aims at in-depth representation and not statistical generalisation. These stories provide common themes, cultural motives and teaching messages that are relevant among participants. The objective is not wholesome representation but clarity of the narrative topics that matter to environmental education and Indigenous epistemologies. All the quotes related to the statements made by Yazidis or community views in the text are either the direct interview information, the mentioned scholarship, or the author's personal observation over the years. It is also important to

mention that the Yazidi culture is underrepresented in the mainstream academic literature because the Yazidis have lived secretly for centuries due to the fear of persecution, which means that much of what is being explored in this article is new to the audience.

Historical background of Yazidis

The Yazidi religion is largely believed to be among the ancient, persistent religions in the Mesopotamian region. Dating back to the ancient Indo-Iranian culture, Yazidism shares some commonalities with Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and the local Mesopotamian spirituality. Yazidism represents a syncretic phenomenon focused on the belief in nature and cosmic equilibrium as well as worshipping one God, Ezid, Yazid, Ez da, Yazata, or Yazda (Usman, 2021a). Similar to Christianity, Yazidism also contains the idea of the trinity: Ez da, the Peacock Angel and Sheikh Adi. Land and place are not just important, but sacred to the Yazidi sense of divine immanence enshrined in the natural things of the world, such as water, fire, air, sun, mountains, springs and animals (Usman, 2021b; Bearman et al., 2002).

The Yazidis are the native population of northern Mesopotamia, especially modern-day Iraq, Syria, Iran and northeastern Turkey, which has been the vein of a deep spiritual and cultural backbone. Their holy places, including Lalish, serve not only as religious points, but also as histories, maps of the world and self-definition. The practices at these places entail the ancient knowledge and bind those in practices to a lineage that dates back centuries (Usman, 2021a). Irrespective of this long history, the Yazidis have been subjected to repeated bouts of persecution. They have survived numerous genocidal campaigns, also known as *firman*s in the community. The neighbours frequently organised these campaigns because Yazidi beliefs were viewed as heretical. Ottoman rulers, tribal militia and acts by a modern state have been engaged in the conversion, assimilation or destruction of Yazidi communities. Such acts of violence have been repeated many times and have substantially influenced the Yazidi collective memory and social structure (Usman, 2021b).

The last of these atrocities and one of the best-known was committed in 2014 when militants belonging to the ISIS initiated a fierce onslaught against Yazidi communities in northern Iraq in Sinjar. Hundreds of thousands were murdered, some taken prisoner along with their children, enslaved or forced into voluntary conversions, and women were raped, forced into marriage, or sex slavery (Usman, 2021a,b, 2022; Omarkhali, 2017). Many of these acts have been classified as acts of genocide by the United Nations, House of Commons and European Union, but redress has not yet been found. This genocide has resulted in thousands of displaced, traumatised and yet to fully settle in their ancestral rights to their homeland (Walker & Loft, 2022). The Yazidi history is not only a story of suffering, but it is also a history of amazing endurance. Yazidis have persisted through communal practices, rituals, oral culture and the spiritual strength to live and endure despite the great existential threat. Their existence is in resistance as they do not want to be written out of the history of Mesopotamia. It is not just a question of justice, but also crucial in the interpretation of the additional meanings of resistance, land and memory in the Yazidi life (Usman, 2021a,b, 2022; Omarkhali, 2017).

Memory and identity landscapes

To the Yazidis, the land is not just a dot on a map, but a storehouse of memory, a storehouse of identity and a storehouse of spiritual nourishment. Sacred places such as Sinjar, Lalish, graveyards and *Mazars* possess ancestral, spiritual and cosmological importance. These sites are a living testament to the survival of Yazidi culture despite many centuries of persecution. According to Aya Shesho, “when I stand on Mount Sinjar, I do not feel the rocks and the earth; instead, I hear the prayers of my grandmother, the procession of our festivals, and our pain all integrated into the

soil” (Personal communication, June 5, 2025). Her statement points to the strong emotional connection Yazidis have with their native lands, despite displacement. In the case of Yazidis, land is an animate archive, which contains memory, identity and even spiritual presence or connectedness (Poelina et al., 2023). Meaningful locations such as Sinjar and Lalish represent the continuity of the ancestors and the form of relational land-based identity and education. “The Elders suggest that land-based education has the potential to develop students in ways that promote their individual and community well-being” (Hansen, 2018, p. 80). This land connection is reflected in the world Indigenous epistemologies of land, such as Cree and Métis attitudes to land. The environmental knowledge is coded in the form of seasonal rituals, pilgrimages and ecological ceremonies, which are part of the Yazidi tradition. The Yazidis connect the spiritual meaning with ecological changes as they also believe that environmental education is the key to survival. “The integration of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge into environmental education has the potential to improve our relationships with the environment” (Poelina et al., 2023, p. 273).

Memorial landscapes are also important post-2014 genocide. Several Yazidis view the reconnection with their lands of origin as a literal and spiritual reconstruction of identity. This return, however, is full of danger and politics. Returning Yazidis can frequently discover their villages to be ruined or seized by adversarial forces. Nonetheless, a strong feeling of a need to restore a sense of place exists. “They forced us out of our homes, but they could not take our memories. I dream every night to come back, to plant pomegranate and fig trees again, and to hear the chanting at Lalish” (Sheikh, personal communication, June 9, 2025). According to Yazidi tradition, memory is very oral and intergenerational. Lack of written scripture implies that narratives, music and ceremonies are reservoirs of historical and spiritual information. This orality presents a unique vulnerability of Yazidi knowledge systems by making it easy to be forgotten, yet very strong due to community recitation and repetition. Mourning and praise songs are simultaneously instruments of memory and pain (Ezidi, “personal communication,” August 3, 2025).

Viyan Haider highlighted the narrative aspect of preserving identity in the pedagogical sense. “When we tell stories or sing to a child, we do not just entertain them, we are gifting them with the knowledge of what they are as a people” (personal communication, June 10, 2025). These stories are frequently shared that focus on spiritual beings, lush green landscapes symbolising Yazidi prosperity, ecological aspects and resistance. This way, they encode knowledge about the environment in cultural memory. The environmental dimension of Yazidi storytelling informs us of the way the Indigenous knowledge system is incorporated within environmental education. Yazidi approaches to land, which consider land as a companion to cultural survival, can teach environmental educators that Western dualisms between nature and society are false. This wisdom enhances environmental literacy as it entrenches ecological ethics in story, memory and ritual. Land and memory also interact in rituals marking the changes of seasons, harvests and religious rituals. These rituals are indicative of culture and of the eco-conscious, as well as consciousness of the cycles of nature. The pilgrimages to Lalish at the seasonal level recreate the mythical journeys in which the Yazidis establish the connection with the land and strengthen the community. These symbolic exhortations can be seen as strong positions in opposition to the persecution and sociopolitical elimination (Haider, “personal communication,” June 10, 2025).

However, collective memory landscapes are facing more and more threats due to geopolitics and environmental pollution. Not only are the material heritage of Yazidi culture destroyed through the desecration of shrines, the pollution of water sources, and, conversion of communities into rural war zones, but the spiritual ecology of the culture is undermined. “I can say, what they have done to our land is also a kind of violence; they have soiled our springs, placed barriers before the shrine as though they intended to leave no trace that we ever lived at all” (Ilyas, “personal communication,” June 9, 2025). Their displacement has also added the trauma of exile to their lives. The refugee camps and diaspora groups cannot provide a sustainable environment, a continuing relationship with land, to a community, and Yazidis were not different; they also

lacked the rituals and customs to create spiritual spaces in exile, and relied on symbolic processes such as recounting their community histories. These incursions are part of a wider Indigenous agenda to reconnect spirituality, in the context of which memory is understood as a channel that connects fragmented geographies. Under the concept of environmental literacy, such practices are a challenge to the Western paradigm of bifurcation of land and identity (de Leeuw & Hunt, 2018). Yazidi stories teach educators to see land not as a passive area but as an active partner in creating cultural and ethical life. Place-based awareness, resilience and justice of students can be developed through the inclusion of Yazidi ecological accounts in the curriculum.

Archive of the silenced: epistemic violence and cultural erasure

Over the centuries of persecution, the Yazidi communities have maintained their heritage through the ways of resistance to erasure, which involved storytelling, ritual and cultural preservation (Underwood, 2017). These forms of resistance, which are usually unpredictable, are inculcated in the daily activities that rejoice and assert life, selfhood and society. This non-obvious, but eloquent, kind of covert aggression maintains cultural memory and asserts identity even in the most dangerous situation, challenging dominant discourses that aim to make Yazidis be seen as invisible or defenceless, and anticipating resilience based on survival. Stories have historical memory, create a moral framework, and maintain community through myth, memory and metaphor (Fisher & Zagros, 2015). Hama Khalil mentioned, “My mother has told me the story of Sheikh Adi and the blessed olive tree. It refreshed me about who I am and what we need to save each time” (Khalil, “personal communication,” July 28, 2025). These narratives impart moral precepts and cosmic knowledge, bringing together past, present and future societies in a collective sense of destiny. By transmitting these stories, a process of resistance to genocide and persecution occurs, for the resilience is ingrained in the daily language and memory. These practices are transnational to the diaspora communities. Yazidis reproduce rituals such as the New Year celebration, seasonal songs and cycles of stories in the community centres, homes and online. Such actions uphold cultural integrity, which provides meaning-making sans homeland. The narration is also healing. Common stories breathe the personal agony into the social memory and allow people to be united and process different feelings. These narratives are modified to suit new settings, including elements of refuge, exile and reconstruction without prejudice to an original set of cosmological values.

Oral storytelling is a collective enterprise, in which communities are supported, cultures are unified, and identities are formed. There is a power for the individual, and for society, more generally, when stories are shared, and thus knowledge is passed from one to another (Friskie, 2020, p. 19).

In diaspora, such a form of narrative resistance is particularly powerful as Yazidis have to recreate cultural worlds beyond their ancestral territory. Diasporic narrative, therefore, is a two-fold performance of safeguarding memory and meaning-making in new contexts. New scenarios of storytelling are in community centres, online resources, as well as family get-togethers, giving older forms of storytelling different contexts within the same meaning. Such domains are essential spaces of contact that enable a form of identity-maintaining contact in displacement and exile trauma. Most respondents in the study placed priority on preserving ritual and spoken customs even during the Exile. Aya Shesho discussed how her family celebrates the Yazidi New Year by using coloured eggs, singing, and wheelbarrows of blessings: Even though not in Sinjar, we do it every year. It links us with our heritage and to one another (Shesho, “personal communication,” June 5, 2025). The rituals provide symbolic groundings to undo the experiences of loss and atomisation that result from forced migration. Diasporic Yazidis use ritual practice to negotiate

loyalty as they determine their place on the territory and maintain congruity between cultural continuity and foreign land, which enhances community affiliations despite the distances between them.

When we say survival here, it is not simply physical survival but cultural, spiritual and environmental survival. The current work is an attempt at memory and story writing in opposition to structural silence. One poignant remark was made by Maria Ezidi, who said that Muslims and Christians attempted to kill our spirit and our culture by erasing us, yet they did not remember that we carry our culture in our voices (Ezidi, “personal communication,” August 3, 2025). Biological sustainability is directly associated with cultural continuity, as such, highlighting the sense of narrative inherency required to achieve continuity in terms of shared identity and anticipatory cohesion. The very process of survival is one of the manifestations of resistance to the elimination of the Yazidi cultural heritage (Haider, “personal communication,” June 10, 2025).

The role of storytelling is a form of therapy. When the trauma narratives are sought in safe communal environments, they will support emotional processing and strengthen the belongingness within the community. N. Ilyas states that “Storytelling was a form of releasing the pain and letting people share a burden with them. This witnessing transforms the introspective suffering into the collective memory to promote compassion and assistance. Moreover, storytelling can be employed to reconstitute the traumatic experiences by offering a path to recovery and rediscovering agency” (Ilyas, “personal communication,” June 9, 2025). These texts are dynamic, and they evolve with the modern realities. These narratives that have been coming up after the 2014 genocide combine ancient tropes with new realities of refuge, asylum and rebuilding, and demonstrate the extreme plasticity of the Yazidi community in a fast-changing environment. These life-moving narratives thus indicate how identity is negotiated continuously under challenging situations (Kaplan, 2022).

The incorporation of such stories into multicultural education would require the treatment of the themes of genocide, resilience and Indigenous knowledge, and the provision of counter-histories that would legitimize oral traditions. By challenging hegemonic discourses, these stories help the learners to view history as a lived experience and not a fixed record, which allows them to develop empathy and critical thinking about the wrongs and survival. By claiming sovereign agency to their stories, the Yazidis establish the right to construct their histories, facts and destinies. This pedagogical and political position opposes the institutions that have traditionally marginalised the community and insists on their being a part of global conversations on justice, memory and belonging. Yazidis bring hitherto unknown strands of history into the limelight, thus reversing erasure by default (Kizilhan, 2024).

Storytelling: a survival and resistance tool

The Yazidi resistance strategy is comprised of survival and storytelling. Despite the years of persecution, Yazidis repeatedly recount stories, hold rituals and maintain their culture to avoid eradication. These practices of resistance, which are delicately incorporated into everyday life, perpetuate individuality, belonging and continuity. According to Yazidis, storytelling serves as cultural memory and intergenerational resistance, historical event preservation, articulation of ethical systems and social solidarity support of myth, memory and metaphor (Erll, 2011). Particular power of such narrative opposition can be found in the diaspora where Yazidis make worlds of their cultures outside the homeland, and their genre to preserve the memory and make meaning in the new situations.

Among the respondents in the current study, the emphasis on the continuity of a ritual and oral tradition became very strong even in the times of exile. Such ceremonies are practiced by my family during the Yazidi New Year with coloured eggs, singing and blessings: Even when we are not in Sinjar, we do this every year. It takes us back to the past and to each other (Shesho,

“personal communication,” June 5, 2025). These rituals are a symbolic representation of a complicated process of displacement and reflect an active process of memory and storytelling, which cannot be institutionalised or silenced (Ezidi, “personal communication,” August 3, 2025). There is also a healing potential in the story itself. Under safe and encouraging circumstances, traumatic events may promote emotional processing and communal solidarity; it is the process of letting the pain go and sharing it with others (Ilyas, “personal communication,” June 9, 2025).

The contemporary Yazidi stories that became available after the 2014 genocide incorporate traditional storylines and styles with new experiences of escape, refuge and reconstruction. These are mixed tales of the resilience of certain shrinking Yazidi identities. The world does not know, but these stories have been around in the Yazidi community for centuries, teaching us how to preserve our environment, how to defend our motherland, and how to protect our identity. These stories can be incorporated into the larger consideration of genocide, resilience and Indigenous knowledge in education, particularly in settings that have multicultural populations (Khatun, “personal communication,” August 2, 2025). Yazidi oral tradition interprets the main pattern of history and promotes the effectiveness of oral tradition in education. By resisting in the form of preserving and protecting their environment, Yazidis assert a narrative of sovereignty (the right to construct their own pasts, presents and futures). This action is didactic and political and challenges systems that have long been inclined to categorise the Yazidis and emphasise their position in the global justice, memory and belonging discourses (Khatun, “personal communication,” August 2, 2025).

In conclusion, Yazidi identity is based on storytelling. It conserves ecological information and strengthens communal ethics as well as maintains resilience intergenerationally. Narrative praxis educates on environmental stewardship and recognises water, mountains and soil as entities that are sacred. Storytelling in the context of diaspora is a source of cultural orientation and a pedagogical instrument. Families reconstruct rituals, songs and seasonal ceremonies which bear ecological instructions. These performances reveal the aspect that story can be used as ecological education, which provides paradigms of decolonial environmental education. The act of resistance by maintaining cultural continuity gives Yazidis narrative sovereignty, or the right to shape their past, present and future. Narrative sovereignty questions both the prevailing structures that have historically distorted the identity of Yazidi people and places Yazidi knowledge in the global context of environmental justice.

The gendered trauma and politics of healing

The genocide of 2014 reflected numerous types of violence against women and girls, causing unprecedented gendered atrocities against Yazidi women and girls. War and genocide weapons, such as kidnapping, sexual slavery, forced conversion and systematic rapes, are not only crimes against the individual but also crimes against the culture and communal integrity of the Yazidi society (Khatun, “personal communication,” August 2, 2025). This premeditated attack on social connections and subsequent childbirth potential placed trauma at several levels. Nevertheless, Yazidi women have also led the survival and resistance sector. Their tales indicate the extent of trauma and also the recovery power. Shams Khatun recalled that the ISIS terrorists attempted to crack me, yet I am alive and stronger than before. I keep telling my daughter that she is sacred, that we are sacred. We testify to the fact that survivability itself can be a space of reclamation and strength and not a state of victimhood and weakness. The resilience of the women after the occurrence of genocide disrupts the victim rhetoric, labelling them as important agents of cultural renewal and leadership (Khatun, “personal communication,” August 2, 2025).

The scars left on the traumatised Yazidi women are interfaced with the generations. Although Baba Sheikh welcomed the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) survivors, they are shamed, silenced and isolated in patriarchal and conservative environments. Most of them prefer to remain

silent because of the fear of humiliation or revenge. Concurrently, female-led supportive networks have developed among Yazidi people, which provide safe spaces of healing and empowerment. These grass-roots initiatives offer fundamental guidelines towards group recuperation, usually incorporating time-honoured practices with modern treatment regimes (Ezidi, “personal communication,” August 3, 2025). The stories of healing tend to focus on land reclamation, cleansing rituals and narration. Several ritual ceremonies took place at Lalish, under the clear sky, surrounded by the trees, greenery and light, to welcome back and reintegrate the survivors into the Yazidi community. In many cases, these rituals play a role not only spiritual but a psychological one as they help the survivor become a member of the community once again (Ezidi, “personal communication,” August 3, 2025). Local healing practices make dominant Western theories of trauma hard since they do not address issues of spirituality and community. These customs provide a complete model of trauma healing which interweaves spatial, environmental, ritual and narrative aspects, thereby upholding identity, dignity and social relations.

A gendered, trauma-sensitive approach defines the constraints of international humanitarian responses. Yazidi women’s cultural needs were either not tackled or were addressed insufficiently in aid programmes. One of the participants added, “When they gave us tents and drugs, they never inquired what our souls could have needed. We used our songs, we used our rituals, we used our people, we used our stories, and we used our environment to heal and to support each other” (Khatun, “personal communication,” August 2, 2025). This divide demonstrates the wider problem of cultural competence and survivor-driven interventions not receiving enough attention when it comes to humanitarian assistance. True healing does not only call upon physical assistance; it also entails acceptance of cultural sovereignty and agency (Wise et al., 2024).

Yazidi activists in the diaspora have set about writing and filming survivor accounts, as well as advocating on Yazidi issues. The work debunks patriarchal sexual standards as well as colonial symbolism of victimisation. It not only asserts Yazidi women as survivors, but also as knowledge keepers, leaders and healers. These stories challenge two-dimensional characters and bring women and their roles in trauma and healing to the forefront. Schools have to appreciate such gendered aspects of violence and resilience (Haider, “personal communication,” June 10, 2025). When genocide is taught without any lessons on sexual violence or environmental disaster, important pieces of the puzzle are removed. The inclusion of the voices of Yazidi women in the learning curricula produces a more just and fair representation. This kind of inclusion leads to the development of critical awareness of the intersectional character of trauma, culture and gender, thus creating a more extensive awareness and feeling of empathy. The testimonies of Yazidi women should play a crucial role in achieving a full picture of communal trauma and imagining the comprehensive patterns of healing and conservation. The Yazidi women’s experience gives rise to the need to redefine justice that goes beyond the legal to cover spirituality, relational practices and pedagogical practices. The acknowledgement of their lived realities helps to build an inclusive notion of justice and, as a result, create openings in which restorative forms of action can be taken to emphasise healing rather than punitive actions.

For the community, the Yazidi women have become the main tool of survival and rebuilding. Their stories do not allow the interpretation of victimhood, including sacredness, dignity and power. The healing rituals are frequently carried out in the sacred places, such as Lalish, where the water, fire and open sky rituals encourage the integration and recovery of the spirit. Such practices have a disruptive effect on Western paradigms of trauma, as they predetermine community, land and spirituality. Diaspora activists compile survivor testimonies, build support groups, and spread their message on the international level, developing the cultural record and fighting the silencing of their voices by patriarchal as well as colonial forces. The current understanding of the intersection of land-based healing and trauma pedagogy is useful to environmental education. The inclusion of the experiences of Yazidi women helps educators to see how environmental degradation, gendered violence and cultural survival are interrelated.

Conclusion

The Yazidi community has had a history of marginalisation, genocide and displacement. However, their stories reveal incredible strength and cultural persistence using the means of narratives. Using the narratives of the survivors of the Yazidis, this paper explains how stories are seen as cultural archives or even political performances, and so refute most historical claims and usurp the ownership of the body and the freedom of choice. By introducing Yazidi voices to the education sector, emerging epistemologies are disrupted, and the knowledge systems of the Indigenous people are enfranchised. This project will entail broad-based efforts directed at the decolonisation of the curriculum, pedagogies and research methods that have traditionally been biased toward other non-Western views. The process revitalises the academic research and promotes social justice through the justification of an alternative experience of epistemology.

Memory, identity, land, epistemic justice and gendered trauma are some of the themes that illustrate the intricate ways in which the Yazidis move through survival and regeneration. Their stories do not simply describe their sufferings, but they are pedagogies of resilience, which have far-reaching consequences in environmental edification and decolonial learning. These tales focus on an interconnected association between individuals and their earthly heritage that includes environmental stewardship as the indivisible element of healing and justice. By prioritising these themes, such a study helps educators and scholars rebrand traditional structures that divide cultural viability and ecological health. Our result is intersectionality in the Yazidi experiences, which demonstrates the necessity of education that can concurrently address the aspects of historical trauma, gendered violence, land and cultural continuity struggles.

The Yazidi practice of being environmental custodians highlights the importance of place-based learning, spiritual ecology and oral tradition as important in developing ethical relationships with land and community. It demands that education be reconsidered as a practice of solidarity and care and that students recognise land as not only a resource but also a living being, which needs to be revered. The paradigm shift is consistent with the larger practice of increasing the voice of Indigenous and marginalised groups in sustainability discourses and focusing on interconnections and shared responsibility.

This study is not supposed to be an all-inclusive representation of all the Yazidi voices, but it attempts to revive the suppressed voices that have been neglected. Thus, it adds to the growing scope of the research that predicts marginalised experiences and advances educational equity. The work is based on eyewitness accounts and culturally specific stories and criticism of the loss and falsification that have long plagued Yazidi historiography. It explains how participatory and qualitative research can help overcome epistemic violence and create a more equal epistemic space, which will spark a scholarly discussion, policy changes and community-based interventions that will ensure Yazidi autonomy and dignity.

The Yazidi stories, which have been passed down through generations in the form of life stories, are attached to holy places and passed down orally. They also force viewers to think seriously, study diligently and be humble and godly. Although the stories might not be serious enough to warrant formal recognition, they need to be thoroughly engaged in the process of therapy, i.e., in the form of empathy, sympathy and support. By internalising these stories, people get to remember the complexity of connections between cultural survival, environmental sustainability and social justice, and thus have a chance to observe and take part in a long-term fight towards a world in which everyone lives with dignity and respect.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank the entire Yazidi community, especially the women survivors, for their resilience. They have inspired me in so many ways to continue exploring their fight against oppression. This research is another step towards understanding Yazidi identity.

Ethical statements. This research was conducted according to the PMU Research Ethics Committee guidelines.

Financial support. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

References

- Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative re-search. *Qualitative Sociology*, 42(2), 139–160.
- Bearman, P., Bianquis, T., Bosworth, C. E. D., van, E., & Heinrichs, W. P. (2002). *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Vol. XI, New edn.) Koninklijke Brill.
- de Leeuw, L. & Hunt, S. (2018). Unsettling decolonizing geographies. *Geography Compass*, 12, e12376. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12376>.
- Dotson, K. (2011). Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing. *Hypatia-A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 26(2), 236–257. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23016544>.
- Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fisher, T., & Zagros, N. (2015). Report from Iraq: Religion lends Yazidis a profound resilience in the face of persecution. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/report-from-iraq-religion-lends-yazidis-a-profound-resilience-in-the-face-of-persecution-48127>.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.
- Friskie, S. (2020). The healing power of storytelling: Finding identity through narrative. *The Arbutus Review*, 11, 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.18357/tar111202019324>.
- Hansen, J. (2018). Cree Elders' perspectives on land-based education: A case study. *Brock Education: A Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 28, 74–91. <https://doi.org/10.26522/brocked.v28i1.783>.
- Isobel, S. (2021). Trauma-informed qualitative research: Some methodological and practical considerations. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, 30, 1456–1469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12914>.
- Kaplan, E. W. (2022). Refuge and resistance: Theater with Kurds and Yazidi Survivors of ISIS. *Humanities*, 11(5), 111. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11050111>.
- Kizilhan, J. I. (2024). Transgenerational traumatization in the Yazidi Community. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 123(4), 840–847. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-11381041>.
- Mingana, A. (1916). Devil-worshippers: Their beliefs and their sacred books. *The journal of the royal asiatic society of great Britain and Ireland*, 48 (3), 505–526.
- Omarkhali, K. (2017). *The Yazidi religious textual tradition: From oral to written. Categories, transmission, scripturalisation and canonisation of the Yazidi oral religious texts*. Harrassowitz.
- Poelina, A., Paradies, Y., Woollorton, S., Guimond, L., Jackson-Barrett, L., & Blaise, M. (2023). Indigenous philosophy in environmental education. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 39(3), 269–278. <https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2023.28>.
- Sheikh, H. (2025). *Personal communication*, Al Khobar, KSA.
- Soundararajan, T. (2022). *The trauma of caste*, North Atlantic Books. ISBN 9781623177652.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the Subaltern speak? *Die Philosophin*, 14(27), 42–58. <https://philpapers.org/rec/SPICTS>.
- Tajik, O., Golzar, J., & Noor, S. (2024). Purposive sampling. *International Journal of Education and Language Studies IJELS*, 2(2), 2 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijels.2025.490681.1029>.
- Underwood, E. (2017). Surviving genocide: Storytelling and ritual help communities heal. *Science Magazine Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.science.org/content/article/surviving-genocide-storytelling-and-ritual-help-communities-heal>.
- Usman, S. M. (2021a). *Yazidis: A tale of a lost, found, and misunderstood legacy in the light of mimetic theory*, Contagion: Journal of violence, mimesis, and culture (Vol. 28). Michigan State University Press.
- Usman, S. M. (2021b). *History of Shia, Sunnis and Yazidi conflict: A political, social or religious conflict and its impact on the peace process in the Middle East* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Innsbruck).
- Usman, S. M. (2022). History of Yazidi genocides, mass atrocities, forced conversions, and persecutions in the Middle East. In *International Conference on "Genocide in the Memory of People," Organized by the Center for Genocide Studies*. University of Duhok. <https://doi.org/10.54809/jkss.viSpecial.138>.
- Usman, S. M., Bhatti, A. G., & Imran, M. (2021). Epistemological violence against the Yazidi community: A historical perspective. *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(8), 3585–3602. ISSN 1567-214x.
- Walker, N., & Loft, P. (2022). *Atrocities against the Yazidi religious community*. House of Commons.
- Wilson, P. L. (1993). *Sacred drift: Essays on the margins of Islam*. City Lights Books.
- Wise, S., Jones, A., Johnson, G., Croisdale, S., Callope, C., & Chamberlain, C. (2024). Healing and wellbeing outcomes of services for Aboriginal people based on cultural therapeutic ways: A systematic scoping review. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 74(1–2), 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12759>.

Author Biography

Shakir Muhammad Usman is a peace & conflict studies scholar and historian working as a Chair at the College of Sciences and Human Studies, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, Saudi Arabia. He earned his PhD and MA degrees in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. He has served in various educational institutions and organisations worldwide. His research interests include Yazidi studies, genocide studies, peace & conflict studies, disability studies, gender studies, the history of the Kurds & the Middle East, the role of AI in education, and the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in socio-economic developments.