Undoing epistemic violence in academic knowledge production through survivors'participation: learning from the experiences of Yazidi survivors

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UN/DOING EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

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Farida Global Writing Collective

Undoing Epistemic Violence in Academic Knowledge Production through Survivors' Participation: Learning from the Experiences of Yazidi Survivors

Abstract *In this paper, common experiences of survivors of the Yazidi genocide of being silenced in academic knowledge production processes and (higher) education are discussed (as examples of doing epistemic violence). Based on this, we formulate recommendations to the academic community and derive first proposals for the implementation of these in the areas of research and teaching (as examples of undoing epistemic violence). By this means, we want to contribute to a process that initiates a thorough discussion on the ethical, equal, and permanent participation of survivors in academic knowledge production processes.*

Keywords *survivors, silencing, epistemic violence, epistemicide, decolonising academia*

1. Introduction: consulted and yet unheard

Farida Global Organisation (FGO) is a non-profit organisation founded and led by survivors of the Yazidi genocide – فرمان , vocally translated as *farman* in Kurdish-Kurmanji – and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Together with members of their community and supporters, they have advocated for survivors' protection and rights since their escape from captivity at the hands of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In this framework, survivors' testimonies and perspectives are crucial not only when it comes to criminal investigations. Survivors are key bearers of knowledge in various contexts such as politics, journalism and academia.

Hence, on one day in 2021, members of FGO currently located in Germany raised the following question: "How does it feel, as a survivor, to talk with journalists and researchers on subjects so intimate, so personal, so momentous, that it seems almost impossible not to cross the line between professional and personal space?"

As survivors shared more insights and details of their diverse experiences in knowledge production processes, the conversation grew into a discussion. Over the following months, testimonies and statements were collected, many of them dealing with experiences of being excluded, overheard, ignored, and silenced, both on an individual and a structural level, while being interviewed and allegedly heard. This was the beginning of an ongoing, self-initiated, participatory research process aimed at reflecting on questions of epistemic violence in processes of knowledge (re)production and distribution, as well as corresponding challenges, especially in (higher) education and academia.

This article provides the space to share some of the research process' outcomes and put forward our recommendations and proposals from a survivor-centric perspective that we have developed so far. By this means, we aim to address mechanisms of epistemic violence at work, and we call for granting the self-determined participation of survivors in academic knowledge production processes.

While our process is initiated and led by survivors, it also includes diverse contributions of survivors and supporters outside of FGO. The Farida Global Writing Collective – the collective author of this article – was formed as a mechanism to support and assist individual survivors in writing their expert knowledge down and connecting it to relevant disciplines. Thus, the authors of our writing collective are situated in diverse social and epistemic positions and informed by different perspectives and contexts. The Farida Global Writing Collective aims at developing and expanding in the future. It is not linked to specific individual authors but is open to changing authorships, as long as the authority and authorship of survivors are acknowledged. This acknowledgement already starts with the chosen terminology: Survivor – الناجيات, vocally translated as *najiaat* in Arabic – is a self-chosen term. Contextualised in human rights-based and community-centric approaches, the term aims to respectfully address women who survived ISIS captivity and to pay tribute to their strength and

dedication, as well as their important role within the community. Hence, the word is not only relevant in the context of FGO's work but amongst many survivors of the Yazidi genocide (فرمان) and ISIS survivors of different gender identities more generally, though another self-chosen terminology is of course respected. At the same time, we know and acknowledge that the term survivor is used as a self-description by many others whose human rights have been violated and infringed. And even if the term is not used to describe one's own experiences of (epistemic) violence, some of the experiences and demands we present below might be shared. We, thus, want this article to be understood by all those who see their experiences reflected here as an invitation to raise their voices and join our cause.[1]

By positioning our process within the framework of critical – decolonial and feminist – research approaches in section 2, we introduce dimensions of silencing and, therefore, of doing epistemic violence. We relate these dimensions to the knowledges of survivors regarding different forms of silencing that were inflicted on them. To deepen the understanding of concepts previously discussed, we employ a format that we conceive of as a testimonial collage (section 3), through which survivors' testimonies are contextualised into the broader debate in their own words and language. In section 4, we seek to go beyond mere criticism of the status quo and propose ways of undoing epistemic violence. With recourse to the dimensions introduced in section 2 and testimonies shared in section 3, we outline recommendations directly speaking to the described challenges, asymmetries, and limitations in academic knowledge (re)production and (higher) education. Furthermore, we move towards a position of action and change-making, by deriving concrete proposals from the presented recommendations. All of this is to be understood as in progress and as an invitation, particularly to other survivors who experience silencing and epistemic violence, to join the debate and share their knowledges, experiences, and recommendations. Hence, we aim to contribute to a process that initiates a thorough discussion on the ethical, equal, and permanent participation of survivors in academic knowledge (re)production processes (section 5).

We wish for this discussion to persist for as long as needed – until all those unheard and silenced in the current academic and educational system can be heard. For researchers and academics, for others working in the educational system, for policymakers and those with the power to

contribute to changing the current system(s), and for those who simply want to be allies to our cause or to lend a friendly ear, this is a call to deeply listen to the following testimonies of epistemic violence, and to take related recommendations and proposals to improve the current system into consideration.

2. Silenced. Or: do you know what *farman* is?

> "Silenced. We fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain." (hooks 2000 [1989]: 209)

In processes of transitional and restorative justice, knowledge (re)production heavily depends on the knowledge, testimonies, and statements of survivors of violent conflicts and severe human rights violations. Therefore, these processes would be impossible without the remarkable strength, persistence, and devotion of survivors to speak about their stories, suffering, and related needs, and those of their communities. Hence, survivors' participation is not only an integral part of social, legal and political processes that follow conflicts, human rights violations, or even genocide, but moreover substantially contributes to global knowledge (re)production processes more generally. This also applies to academia and particularly to academic disciplines such as Peace and Conflict Studies, International Relations (IR), and Development Studies, which often deal with violence "as something else that happens somewhere else and is committed by somebody else" (Brunner 2021: 198). Consequently, for instance, the trans-local continuity of violence often experienced by people fleeing war and persecution is just as much ignored or underestimated as, more generally, violence that is non-physical and covert.

Despite the seemingly even increasing demand for first-hand and embedded knowledges, colonialism has made a lasting impact on who is understood as an equal contributor to the academic debate and who is

only perceived as an object of research (Grosfoguel 2007; Kilomba 2019; Brunner 2020: Chap. 3). Both on the individual and structural level, such forms of objectification, and the marginalisation and devaluation of their own knowledge – in other words, their silencing – are particularly difficult for survivors who have suffered attempts to silence them at the hands of the perpetrators of the human rights violations inflicted on them and, furthermore, by the structures and institutions that still affect their lives.

Our article deals with both forms of silencing as outlined by the anti-racist and feminist author and activist bell hooks (2000). We will talk about "the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak" (hooks 2000: 209), hence, those forces that find their extreme if not ultimate expression in past and current practices of "epistemicide" (Santos 2014). Given the fact that almost 300,000 Yazidis continue to live in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps in Iraq without access to adequate housing, healthcare, education, and employment more than eight years after ISIS attacked Sinjar in August 2014, experts such as Jan İlhan Kızılhan urged that without serious political efforts, Yazidism may not survive the "ongoing threat of cultural extinction" (paraphrased in O'Connor/Burç 2020).

Such forces "that silence us, because they never want us to speak" (hooks 2000: 209) do not necessarily have to be physically violent or otherwise overt. In many contexts, they are 'at work' in covert and institutional forms of silencing and epistemic violence (Emerick 2019). The latter holds true for the silences in public and research debate when it comes to the concept used by the Yazidi community to describe the experiences of genocide and atrocities: *farman* (فرمان). After 74 فرمان inflicted on Yazidis, the term is recursive in Yazidi folklore and history, and it is how Yazidi survivors and the community know and understand their experience.[2] Because the academic community has so far made few attempts to grasp the term and thereby describe survivors' experiences in their own words, we think it is imperative that we use the term فرمان when we speak about the Yazidi experience.

To address epistemic violence within academia, we will furthermore speak about the second form of silencing outlined by bell hooks and discuss "the forces that say speak, tell me your story" (hooks 2000: 209)

and the role of research that "collect[s] stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification" (Tuck/Yang 2014: 223). We understand instances as well as more repetitive and reliable practices of silencing, to take up a distinction made by Kristie Dotson (2011: 241), as critical expressions of doing epistemic violence in academia, though these can also be found in other arenas of knowledge production, such as journalism, documentary film-making and the fine arts.[3] As Barrett Emerick (2019: 35) points out: "[S]ilencing can involve violations of a person's epistemic capacities, thereby undermining or diminishing their ability to serve as a giver and receiver of knowledge, and short-circuiting their ability to interpret the world in a way that is meaningful and that fits with their experience." In this article, we will focus on this second form of silencing, taking into account the frequent interweaving of both forms, which the not-naming of فرمان also shows.

Although the academy – as an institution of research and higher education – is not the only place where epistemic violence exists (and persists), with our article we aim to contribute to a thorough discussion that, referring to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, takes on the "burden of speaking in/to the academy" (Tuck/Yang 2014: 226). According to the authors, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's popular question "Can the subaltern speak?" "said more transparently, […] *can the subaltern speak in/to the academy*?" (Tuck/Yang 2014: 225). The related post-/decolonial, anti-racist and feminist critique seems familiar. Nonetheless, it is immensely relevant to repeat and keep in mind that Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak is not based on the assumption that no one at the margin speaks or resists. Rather, it draws critical attention to the social structures and processes – discursive as well as material (Brunner 2021: 201) – of epistemic violence that silence these voices. This occurs not only through explicit exclusion or erasure, but also when subaltern voices are disqualified (for instance, when they are dismissed as merely authentic or subjective), or when they are silenced by researchers or other so-called experts speaking on behalf of 'the Others' and occupying their stories (Kilomba 2019: 26).

Speaking in and to the academic community, we aim to join the call for a research praxis that "does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise"

(Tuck/Yang 2014: 231). Flowing from a position and praxis that acknowledges survivors as both strong and wise givers and receivers of knowledge, the following section puts the experiences of those in our Farida Global Writing Collective who identify as survivors of the ongoing فرمان at the centre of the discussion: namely, Farida Khalaf, Sanaa Alneamat, and Intisar Oso. We understand the format employed as a testimonial collage. Due to the fact that experiences themselves are often shared or even collective ones, reflecting on the entire community and not just the experiences of survivors who are part of FGO or of our writing collective, those quoted will not be named individually. Forming an assemblage of different testimonies that together aim to stand for those who have been silenced and overheard until today, they speak to both forms – or forces – of silencing outlined by bell hooks as well as the complex intersections of the two. We are aware that, though our collage may reflect the experiences of many, it may omit the realities of others. To account for limitations and gaps in our perspectives, we want the following collage to be understood as a call to other survivors to fill in their contributions and address the silences they experience.

3. Testimonial collage: doing epistemic violence in (higher) education and academia

Many of us – survivors of the فرمان – have experienced multiple forms of discrimination and stigmatisation within the educational system even before ISIS attacked Sinjar. Nevertheless, for almost all of us on August 3rd and August 15th, respectively, the life we had known until then forcibly ended. It, too, meant a violent interruption or even severance of our education, for many at a young age: an attempt by violent forces that never wanted us to speak in the first place, with the aim of silencing our voices forever.

> "Before ISIS captivity, my life was relatively quiet, a normal life, and it was beautiful. […] We never believed that a day would come when our cities, our schools, and our dreams of the future, of education, would be destroyed. […] With the murder of my family members, we also lost their wonderful talents, their knowl-

edge, and our joint dreams. My brother was in his first year at the University of Mosul. He was a very talented and dedicated student. There was no secondary education in Kocho, which is why he travelled to other cities. With his studies, a dream came true for all of us, the dream to go to university. He interrupted his studies and returned to Kocho because other radical groups attacked and killed Yazidi students in Mosul. He was killed by ISIS like my father. I do not want their names to be forgotten. Hearing my father's name provides me with incredible strength, the strength to continue the work I am doing now."

"Before the فرمان, I was a student at the University of Mosul in Iraq. If you hear this, you might think that I led a normal student life but sadly as a Yazidi girl, I had to wear a Hijab because I was afraid that I was recognized as Yazidi. And already at that time, there were Yazidi students who were abducted. It was my father's dream to see me graduate from university. One time, he said: 'I will do anything so that all my children can go to school. It is my dream that all of you become university graduates.' Unfortunately, my father's dream will never come true. It is likely that he, my mother, and two of my brothers were killed by ISIS. My three sisters and I were abducted and sold into sexual slavery and had to endure the cruelties of slavery in Syria. My dream, the dream of my father, and the dreams of thousands of Yazidis were destroyed on the day ISIS attacked Sinjar: August 3rd, 2014. I still hope that one day, at least his dream I graduate from university may become true."

The time held in captivity varies from one survivor to another and extends to more than eight years and counting. Both on the individual and collective level, the destruction caused by ISIS has long-lasting effects: As many universities and schools were either destroyed, located in the then-ISIS territory, or in territory that remains unsafe until today, neither in the past years nor today have we had the possibility to return to the places where we had previously studied, where we had been part of the educational and academic system, where we had had a seat at the table in schools and universities. Thus, we remain(ed) without access to formal education.

This exclusion remains a reality for survivors both inside and outside Iraq: In Iraq, this holds true for many in our Yazidi community even before the latest فرمان – until today. Outside of Iraq, this holds true for us as refugees, non-citizens, and non-native speakers of the respective language.

Everywhere, this holds true for us as survivors of فرمان and CRSV, and includes gendered dimensions and furthermore relates to the socio-economic disadvantages directly related to rebuilding our lives as IDPs in Iraq or as refugee survivors elsewhere.

The lack of attention given to accessing education for survivors by governmental and societal actors both inside and outside Iraq seems to be closely linked to the stigma around the mental health of survivors. It is related to the assumption that long periods of rehabilitation projects (which, to this point, do not exist) would be necessary before survivors of the فرمان can rejoin (higher) education and academia. What seems to be a protection measure is misguided, as many of us voiced that rejoining the educational system would contribute to our mental health and empower us to rebuild our lives, and that being heard and acknowledged as the agents of change that we are in the public and academic discourse would contribute to our healing and a sense of self-efficacy.

> "When I arrived in Germany, I was very motivated. I wanted to learn and missed university a lot. I would have even gone back to school to make this happen, but I was told this was impossible for bureaucratic reasons. Then, over time, you lose hope that you will be allowed to learn and given the chance. If they had spread more information about alternative ways of access to academic education, things may have been different. We are human beings, we want to be part of the different spheres and sectors of society. We want to improve our lives despite the trauma we have been through. But there was no information about universities for survivors. I am sure this is also because of the stigma about the mental health of survivors and their assessment of survivors' capacities. But they should have asked us: many women were able and willing to return to the education system. On the contrary, it would have been good for many of us because it gives us purpose, self-confidence, and the chance to build a future. You become a person with agency again, you are given the chance to deal with your past. School and education have been important objectives for me personally throughout my life, but also for my […] family. I studied because I was fascinated by the fact that I could learn about the environment, nature, and people in it, the big connections of this world. Even if ten survivors would not have been interested, for some – like me – this would have meant the world and it would have helped me tremendously to overcome trauma. Any of my examples could have motivated and given

courage to others who were still too traumatized and afraid. This is not only true for university education."

From our perspective, rather than focusing on assumed (in)abilities, actors of the educational and academic systems should review existing mechanisms of exclusion and allow survivors to overcome administrative and logistical barriers. For many of us, barriers to (higher) education remain in place due to destroyed school or university certificates. In our experience, both in and outside Iraq, the rules of access to the educational and academic system are very rigid, often inconsistently applied, and confusing, which leads to a lack of inclusiveness.

At the same time, the rules themselves, not just their implementation, are the reasons for experiences of exclusion and of being silenced. For instance, for those who are considered too old under current law to return to the formal education system after captivity and/or whose certificates are not recognised, it is difficult – and without individualised and tailored support almost impossible – to return to or become part of the academic debate through formal education.

"Some of us have never heard of a survivor who had been to university in Iraq and made it back to university in Germany. Others know survivors who made it back to university. It very much depends on the local support structures and often the support by dedicated individuals, especially if documents and certificates are missing. Hence, there are immense differences in who can build on previous educational attainments and can thus access (higher) education and who has to start from zero. Children who arrived in Germany are the only ones who will have low-threshold access to the German educational system and, hopefully, will be given the chance to go to university when they are old enough to speak and teach about our stories and our communities suffering."

For survivors living in Iraq, Article 6 of the Iraqi Yazidi Survivors Law[4] is a first attempt to address the lack of access to formal education. Survivors and those of us covered by the provisions of the law have the right to return to school and shall be exempted from age requirements in the future. Nevertheless, for accelerated schooling, it is still true that there are only two schools in two different regions. Hence, survivors would need

further logistical support measures such as transportation and accommodation to access these schools.

Hand in hand with the former go experiences of being silenced and overheard in the research process, of being treated as a mere means to an end, by those who want us to speak – in the role, to the extent, and on the contents they select. Many of us have been asked to share our stories and testimonies for research and other knowledge (re)production processes. Hence, we have in some ways been acknowledged as bearers of knowledge, since our contributions have been used by researchers for their research and academic careers. Nevertheless, we have seldom been included in these processes and treated as the (re)producers of knowledge in our own right and on our own terms.

> "Almost all academics […] take advantage of the situation of survivors. Most survivors don't get much from speaking out – no compensation, no participation, no opportunities – though they are constantly given a sense of responsibility to speak. We have the right not to be taken advantage of, and the right to education applies to us as well. If the فرمان had not happened, I would have graduated from school by now, so I would become a teacher. […] We had to start from zero, but I know my rights and we have the right to education and the right to being heard, too."
>
> "How many students have graduated because of an interview with me. Many have said that the professor found it very special. I am pleased about that. What pains me is that I am always allowed to give information, but I am never part of the discussion. How often my role is limited to recounting my dreadful experiences over and over again. [...] I also often feel that I am not being heard. Why are the points and [concepts] that are important to me passed over? I couldn't find them, but that could also be because after the interview I often don't know what's happening with the text or it is written in a language or style I don't understand. If we don't get support, we can never bring our perspective to the table, never be an equal part of the discussion, and never improve our lives the way others our age do because we don't have the opportunity to study. And we don't get compensated for our work in this area, which we all do voluntarily and often at a cost. This is despite the fact that I was studying in Iraq before the فرمان and was always at the top of my class, despite the discrimination I already experienced before the فرمان."

"Many researchers only hear and write what they want, in their own interest and not in the interest of survivors. This is especially difficult for illiterate survivors. Often, there is no effort to truly include these survivors and to find other solutions here – for example, recording written texts to audio formats when asking for consent – and always provide survivors and their families with the full material of interviews, etcetera."

By describing our individual and collective experiences of limited access to academia and (higher) education, we aim to stress that these mechanisms of exclusion do not only harm survivors. From our perspective, they have also led and still lead to severe limitations in the knowledge (re)production process, where existing knowledges are ignored, neglected, or even destroyed on an ongoing basis. As a system of discourse and debate, excluding our knowledges and ways of knowing is impeding (academic) knowledge (re)production itself.

There are different ways of knowing and systems through which knowledge is (re)produced, maintained, and disseminated in different communities. Yazidis have been and still are exposed to unimaginable suffering. After 74 فرمان inflicted on our community, فرمان have not only shaped our history, religion, culture, and language but furthermore how we know the world and pass on knowledge from one generation to another. It is yet to be scientifically proven that the atrocities and genocidal acts committed by ISIS – the latest of 74 فرمان – also constitute what we understand as attempted "epistemicide" (Santos 2014) – a systematic attempt to destroy the Yazidi knowledge system and basis. Nevertheless, in our language, religious practices, and culture, these attempts at destroying our knowledge, killing bearers of knowledge, and preventing our knowledge from being passed on are deeply ingrained.

"In our religion, there are several theories and arguments why it is that Yazidism was mostly passed on orally from generation to generation. Though there are different chains of argument, all of them relate to religious persecution: one saying that there is no holy book because they were destroyed in genocidal acts; and another saying that due to religious persecution, our religious beliefs could never be written down because it was too dangerous. Hence, the oral transmission of Yazidism is in large part due to the many, many فرمان and atrocities that

were brought upon our community. Keeping a written record of our religious beliefs and customs would have been little help in the face of destruction, persecution, and annihilation. Many people do not understand how much our community, our culture, our religion, and the knowledge of our community have been shaped by the many atrocities."

In light of the above, to pass on our knowledges and our ways of knowing is hence not just our wish, it is imperative to the survival of Yazidism, and it is our responsibility.

4. Recommendations: undoing epistemic violence in (higher) education and academia

As members of the Farida Global Writing Collective, it is impossible to ignore the responsibility that comes with the knowledge of the experiences of (other) survivors and with our own experiences as survivors. The testimonial collage almost painfully illustrates that survivors experience(d) different forms of silencing: not merely at the hands of the perpetrators of the human rights violations inflicted on them, and by discriminatory and exclusionary structures and institutions in the (higher) education and academic sector that affect their lives, but additionally through rules and their (incoherent) implementation, through unethical, objectifying, and victimising research practices that treat them merely as a means to an end, and through dismissing or ignoring their communities' ways of knowing. Further, we have shown that these different forms and forces of silencing are intricately interlinked. Survivors who lost their educational certificates due to forces overtly aiming at silencing them, and who thus cannot enter German universities until today and hence seldom partake in academic discourse as equal participants may serve as a symbol for this linkage. Lastly, the example of the Yazidi community shows that silencing can impact not only the epistemic capacities of individuals but of communities as a whole. With almost 300,000 Yazidis remaining in IDP camps inside Iraq and many thousands living as refugees outside of Iraq, without systematic access to (higher) education, the exclusion from formal education and the

academic discourse will continue into the unforeseeable future. Therefore, the individual and collective experience of being silenced continues.

Hence, researchers and educational actors should acknowledge and support survivors not just as givers and receivers of knowledge, but furthermore as individual and collective bearers of knowledge in their own ways and in their own right. In this regard, we do not only want to expose epistemic violence both on an individual level and as a common experience for many. We aim at participating in the change that we think is urgently needed: at un-doing different forms of silencing and epistemic violence. Hence, we put forward two key recommendations and develop correlated proposals on how current shortcomings, limitations, and barriers in knowledge (re)production and distribution processes, especially in (higher) education and academia, can be effectively counteracted, re-formed, or even re-designed.

Though this section again speaks mainly from the perspective of those in our writing collective who identify as survivors of the ongoing فرمان, we believe that at least some of the recommendations put forward might give guidance and input for other survivors who seek to overcome patterns of silencing and epistemic violence.

(1) *Respectful treatment of the resources of survivors*: From our perspective, the respectful treatment of us – as survivors of the فرمان and as human beings – and our material and immaterial resources is key.

On the material level, we should be adequately and equitably compensated for our financial and emotional efforts, as well as the investment in time connected with our contributions to academia and other knowledge production processes. Considering social inequalities and asymmetrical 'starting points' regarding education and employment opportunities but also from an ethical perspective, it seems unacceptable that many of us have experienced having to cover travel, accommodation, and food costs related to our contributions to research and academia. Many of us have not been adequately compensated for our financial, mental, and time investments, for example, if we have to take the day of the event or interview off and – due to mental distress – sometimes also the surrounding days as well. The fact that we, despite these costs, still participate in such events is

often related to the strong sense of obligation that – by participating – we can do something for other survivors, our families, and our community.

On the immaterial level, our recommendation is closely tied to information on فرمان, which is provided by us as survivors of the فرمان and by our communities through painful processes of interviews and consultations. This holds particularly true for those fields of knowledge that are potentially triggering or re-traumatising for survivors and our families or that cause mental distress. We, therefore, call on researchers and students to make greater use of the available information instead of relying on us to repeatedly retell our stories. No survivor should be interviewed about the human rights violations inflicted on them and their communities by ISIS, in particular not about CRSV, unless survivors express the wish to speak about their experiences and/or unless further information is critical, for instance in the framework of criminal or reparations proceedings.

We, hence, propose the development of guidelines that are to be implemented specifically and systematically in concrete research and knowledge production processes. They will give research teams, including survivors, the tools to facilitate their collaborative process in a survivor-centric, psychosocially- and trauma-informed, and participatory manner. Acknowledging asymmetries in power, resources, and time, the guidelines will raise awareness on issues related to the respectful treatment of survivors. During the respective processes, they will provide guidance on how agreements and monitoring mechanisms should be designed to meet survivors' material and immaterial needs. We aim to develop such guidelines soon at FGO. In this way, we hope to assist not only researchers but particularly survivors, who will be supported by setting new standards, so that survivors have a full say regarding their knowledges, while acknowledging that they are full participants in knowledge production processes, and receive compensation, payment as well as visibility and recognition for their contributions.

(2) *Improved access to (higher) education, training opportunities, and other qualification measures*: Complementary to an improved consideration of our resources, we call for access to (higher) education, training opportunities, and other relevant qualification measures. As outlined in section 3, the lack of access is rooted in different individual and structural factors, such as our (lack of) access to documentation and certification, to infor-

mation, and counselling, and in socio-economic conditions. We hence call for low-threshold solutions that address survivors' barriers to accessing all levels of education and our related needs holistically.

In addition to measures that tackle the mentioned barriers, we advocate for teaching formats in which survivors can participate in diverse self-chosen roles, as well as for spaces for exchange, shared support, and synergies amongst survivors (at best joining from different contexts, countries, and experiences).

Firstly, we propose developing teaching formats that will be implemented together with one or more collaborating universities in which university students and their instructors learn and teach together with survivors. In this framework, diverse forms of participation for survivors that correspond to their wants and needs should be considered, for instance, participation as a visiting student (in German: *Gasthörer*in*) with subsequent awarding of credits and a certificate, or participation as a co-instructor with an honorary contract and a certificate of employment. Survivors should furthermore be provided with the opportunity to attend lectures and seminars in any discipline they wish, including language classes and introductions to research methodologies and academic work.

Secondly, an even more inclusive space should be developed and provided, preferably on a repeated basis, such as an annual, one-week academy. This event should be developed based on a thorough needs assessment amongst survivors as it is intended to provide a special place of learning, empowerment, and growth for those who are particularly vulnerable. This includes the elderly as well as people who would otherwise be silenced due to their location, housing situation, and lack of infrastructure – for instance, survivors living in IDP camps. We also refer to survivors who would otherwise not be able to participate due to their socio-economic status, limited (digital) literacy, or who do not have access to the relevant technical equipment and/or digital infrastructure.

One overarching aim is to provide survivors with the (academic) repertoire to become part of the (academic) discourse. Therefore, formats are needed that provide the space to thoroughly address survivors' needs and wants in the fields of (1) academic literacy, research, and writing to empower survivors to raise their voices through their own research and texts; (2) public speaking to empower (more) interested survivors to give their own

speeches and presentations; (3) language support; and (4) psychosocial mechanisms of self-care.

Long-term, we believe that epistemic violence can only be 'undone' through transnational, intersectional, and inclusive programming. This is applicable to all the recommendations and proposals mentioned above but further holds true for mechanisms already in place outside of FGO, for example in light of admission tests recently adopted by many German universities, scholarship programmes both for high school and university education, and cooperation between universities in teaching and research. Furthermore, improved access to employment in the academic sector is a field that needs to be addressed systematically. And we want to participate in these processes.

Most of the aforementioned proposals are not only important to improve survivors' personal and professional lives, but furthermore stand in acknowledgement of قركرن as an attempted "epistemicide" (Santos 2014) that needs to be counteracted globally so that our knowledges are not to be destroyed forever. In this context, we also call for more survivor-centric and participatory research on the subject itself, including systematic needs assessments to ensure that survivors' needs are truly heard and understood.

5. Outlook: demanding a permanent and equal seat at the table of academic discourse

> "Many survivors have lost trust in telling their stories and giving their testimonies, they don't believe in it anymore and they have no trust in the process. They think that if they speak out, their stories and perspectives will be used by organizations or individuals for the benefit of others, often without even remaining in contact. This is true for all countries. Survivors need a lot of support and they have a lot to say, but they have lost their trust to speak out and make claims. This is why many remain in silence today, remain silenced in their justified claims. We need to re-open that door for survivors, for them to have a seat at the table, by winning back their trust through credible actions and the knowledge that they will be treated ethically, respectfully, and fairly."

Those of us (members of the Farida Global Writing Collective) who made the experience of being excluded from (higher) education and research or of being instrumentalised within this framework are not just disappointed: We have decided not to turn away in resignation, but to demand concrete changes. For this reason, we are willing to share our own experiences and pain. We hope that our concrete recommendations will provide academics not only with food for thought but orientation and direction on the subject and on urgently needed steps.

As outlined in the introduction of this article, we want our recommendations and proposals to be understood as (forever) in-progress, as they are an invitation, particularly to other survivors experiencing silencing, to participate. By our example, we hope to contribute to the change we want to see in the academic world in order to make it a truly inclusive place, one that draws synergies and knowledges from many different epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies. One that includes, values and upholds the perspectives of those whose knowledge is under the permanent threat of being silenced forever. We address all survivors who have been disappointed and disillusioned, with the hope to re-build trust and the message that a permanent and equal seat at the table of academic knowledge production is worth fighting for.

At the same time, our recommendations should not be understood as a burden to academia or individual researchers, but as an integral and mandatory part of knowledge (re)production. There has to be a change in perception of what is too often and too carelessly taken for granted. Therefore, we hope that academics will recognise the benefits of our proposals, as they offer the opportunity to address existing gaps and limitations in academic knowledge and in practices and relationships of knowing. We do not simply propose new guidelines or teaching formats: We propose the first steps to undo epistemic violence in academia and beyond. In the long run, we need not only seats for survivors at the table of academic discourse, but a new table, in order to make substantial changes.

1 Please contact us if you would like to get in touch, learn more about our work, or share your insights: writingcollective@faridaglobal.org.

2 Etymologically, *farman* is a Persian term that was carried on in the old Turkish language. Historically, *farman* was a royal edict, which means an irrevocable royal decree, issued by the then head of state. For example, in the time of the Ottoman Empire, *farman* meant an order issued by the Ottoman Sultan or one of his governors, for instance to arrest or release a person. The term continued to be used for orders issued by the Ottoman authorities which related to the mass killing of a group of people. In the latter context, *farman* was accompanied by a Muslim religious fatwa that permitted the killing and/or captivity of the respective group and the seizure of their lands. The Kurdish word فرمان thoroughly reflects this experience of extermination and of genocide inflicted on Yazidis. According to the widespread counting among Yazidis, 74 فرمان have taken place over the centuries. "[T]he Yezidi conflict has been going on for several centuries. Due to the forcible Islamisation of Kurdish areas in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, an unbelievable odyssey of persecution and forced Islamisation of Kurds, and thus Yezidis, has taken place until the present day. They have always been victims of massacres under the Ottoman and Persian Empires. Numerous *fatwas* 'allowed' for Yezidis to be killed, robbed, displaced, and forced to convert to Islam since their ancient religion was thought not to be accepted by Islam. In our day, ISIS uses the same false arguments to justify its genocide against the Yezidis" (Kızılhan in Omarkhali/Kızılhan 2016: 150).

3 On possible connections, similarities and differences between silencing and epistemic violence, see the detailed discussions by Dotson (2011) and Brunner (2020: Chap. 3). Here, Brunner also gives an in-depth overview of corresponding concepts in post-/decolonial and feminist literature.

4 On March 1, 2021, Iraq adopted the Yazidi Survivors Law, which provides for the establishment of an administrative reparations programme that meets survivors' (human) right to reparations. In addition to a monthly reparation payment and other benefits, Article 6 guarantees that "survivors and those covered by the provisions of this law have the right to return to their studies and shall be exempted from the age requirement".

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Abstract *In diesem Beitrag werden Erfahrungen besprochen, die Überlebende des Völkermords an den Jesid*innen mit Silencing in Prozessen der akademischen Wissensproduktion und in der (Hochschul-)Bildung gemacht haben (als Beispiele für Doing Epistemic Violence). Darauf aufbauend formulieren wir Empfehlungen an die Wissenschaftscommunity und leiten erste Vorschläge für deren Umsetzung in Forschung und Lehre ab (als Beispiele für Undoing Epistemic Violence). Auf diesem Wege möchten wir zu einem Prozess beitragen, der eine eingehende Diskussion bezüglich der ethischen, gleichberechtigten und beständigen Teilhabe von Überlebenden in Prozessen akademischer Wissensproduktion eröffnet.*

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