



by Ronya Othmann
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Fiction

Seventy-four *Vierundsiebzig*

review

'Seventy-four' is a unique and vital novel that documents the Yazidi genocide.

Othmann herself is an integral part of this auto-fictional text, in the form of a twenty-five-year-old journalist named Ronya who lives in Leipzig. From 2018 she embarks on several trips to Kurdistan – the Kurdish areas in Iraq and Syria – to visit relatives and talk to survivors of the Yazidi genocide. Between 2014 and 2017 the Islamic State killed thousands of Yazidi men and trafficked thousands more Yazidi women and girls. This was the latest episode in a long history of persecution of the Yazidi people.

Ronya writes about her experiences in the form of travel notes. She describes eating with relatives, going to the supermarket, drinking tea, and smoking cigarettes. Alongside these everyday events, relatives and acquaintances tell her about the atrocities the Yazidis had to endure. Ronya also conducts formal interviews with victims and activists, some of which she tries to publish in German newspapers.

In between her trips, Ronya spends a lot of time in the library in Leipzig, researching Yazidi history. She gets involved in the media coverage of the international response to the genocide and the trials of members of the Islamic State. She recalls visits to museums in Berlin and Iraq, as well as conversations with her father and her

siblings.

Ronya reflects insightfully upon her own role within the Yazidi community, as well as her writing process. 'Seventy-four' documents her attempt to answer the question: how can someone who was not directly affected by the genocide, but whose ethno-religious group was its victim, write about it? The narrator positions herself as a witness to these historical events, but struggles to find a language for them. This struggle is reflected in the book's circuitous form and distinctive style, combining the features of report, diary, essay, and travelogue. The humanity of the narrator stands in stark contrast to the inhuman events she recounts. The novel is a sensitive exploration of the ethics of writing about violence.

The historical facts in the novel are well-researched, and Othmann's – or her auto-fictional narrator's – reflections are serious, self-critical, and detailed. 'Seventy-four' is a moving testament to the genocide and to the enduring sufferings of the Yazidi people, raising awareness of a minority that continues to be persecuted.

Sold in: Slovakia TERST o. z.

Find out more:

<https://www.rowohlt.de/buch/ronya-othmann-vierundsiebzig-9783498003616>

press quotes

“You have to admire the strength and nerve Othmann must have needed to participate and observe in this way. And her narrative skill, which she owes to her breathtaking literary reportage. She is a great writer.”

Ronald Düker, Die Zeit, 21st March 2024

“This book is scarcely to be borne. But that’s precisely why it needs to be read.”

Leander F. Badura, der Freitag, 14th March 2024

“Othmann constructs a literary form that is all her own. She writes lists, minutes, reports, and is even able to poeticise the barren landscape shimmering in the sun ... In Seventy-Four, she has created a monument that is absolutely necessary.”

Gerrit Bartels, Der Tagesspiegel, 18th March 2024

about the author



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Ronya Othmann was born in Munich in 1993 to a German mother and a Kurdish-Ezidi father. She writes poetry, prose and essays and works as a journalist. Her writing has earned her much acclaim, including the Open Mic Poetry Prize, and the Caroline Schlegel Prize for Essay Writing. She was awarded the Mara Cassens Prize in 2020 for *Die Sommer* (The Summers, trans. Gary Schmidt, 2023), and the Orphil Debut Prize, the Horst Bienek Prize and the Horst Bingel Prize in 2022 for her poetry collection *die verbrechen* ('the crimes', 2021).

Vierundsiebzig ('Seventy-Four') was nominated for the prestigious German Book Prize and won the Düsseldorf Literature Prize in 2024 and the Erich Loest Prize in 2025.

Previous works: Die Sommer, Hanser (2020) • Die Verbrechen, Hanser (2021) • Vierundsiebzig (2024).

Previous translations: The Summers, Wisconsin University Press (2023).

Find out more:

<https://www.instagram.com/ronyaothmann/?hl=de>

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