

RYOT Films presents

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# ON HER SHOULDERS

**A film by Alexandria Bombach**

94 min. | USA | 2018

[www.onhershouldersfilm.com](http://www.onhershouldersfilm.com)

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Nadia Murad, a 23-year-old Yazidi, survived genocide and sexual slavery committed by ISIS. Repeating her story to the world, this ordinary girl finds herself thrust onto the international stage as the voice of her people. Away from the podium, she must navigate bureaucracy, fame and people's good intentions.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS**

After surviving the 2014 genocide of the Yazidis in Northern Iraq and escaping sexual slavery at the hands of ISIS, 23-year-old Nadia Murad gave a testimony before the U.N. Security Council that was heard around the world.

Nadia suddenly became the face of the Yazidis – a historically persecuted and voiceless religious minority. Despite longing for a normal life away from the spotlight, Nadia takes on the role of an activist in hopes of halting the ongoing genocide and bringing ISIS commanders to justice. Repeatedly telling her harrowing story to journalists, politicians, and diplomats, this once ordinary girl is suddenly thrust into the alien world of advocacy on a global stage.

With intimate access into Nadia's day-to-day existence and a behind-the-scenes look at the often absurd juxtapositions of international politics and aid, we follow Nadia during the peak of her advocacy campaign.

A moving study of the dizzying path Nadia's life takes – from the refugee camps of Greece to soul-bearing media interviews, emotionally draining speeches in front of the U.N. and an endless succession of one-on-one meetings with top government officials – the film exposes the disparity between the toll the work takes on Nadia and her resolve.

Away from the podium and chaos, there are glimpses of Nadia as she once was – a strong-willed girl who dreamed of opening a beauty salon in her village.

As this resilient young woman navigates bureaucracy, politics and the cost of fame, the film deftly reveals the immense obstacles facing a vulnerable minority struggling to be heard.

With a formal precision and elegance that matches Nadia's calm and steely demeanor, filmmaker Alexandria Bombach brings us inside an exhausting, destabilizing journey fraught with personal pain and profound ethical urgency.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When Nadia Murad walks into a meeting – whether with a politician, a journalist or a diplomat – there is a sense of tension. Understandably, it seems that for many it's difficult to know what to say, what questions to ask, how to express that they care but at the same time not promise too much. They most likely know of her wrenching story before she starts, yet no matter how much detail she gives, they also know they couldn't possibly, truly understand her experience.

This is a film that explores that space – the distance between the victim and her voice, the fragility of human emotions that both provoke and hinder positive change, and the unbelievable resilience of a woman willing to sacrifice herself to play the media game that is modern advocacy.

The past three years of Nadia's life have been unimaginable. On August 3, 2014, ISIS declared that the Yazidi people of Northern Iraq had long been a shame to their idea of Islam, and set out to commit genocide. An estimated 5,000 people were killed in the weeks that followed, and over 7,000 women and children were captured to become sex slaves and child soldiers. Nadia was captured on the same day that ISIS killed her mother and six brothers. Eighteen members of her family were either killed or enslaved.

As she begins to tell her story, which I heard her recount over and over again, you might think that she would become used to it. But Nadia communicates the weight of her experience in her eyes. At the end of each and every meeting, through the business suits and flurry of handshakes, a long lens captures her sinking back into herself to recover – she is visibly drained.

I followed Nadia and the people working closest with her in the summer of 2016. From refugee camps in Greece to a memorial rally on the anniversary of the genocide in Berlin, to the House of Commons in Ottawa and the United Nations headquarters in New York, Nadia's life is in constant motion. What I saw was an exhausting process, with no real roadmap for success. I started to see her lose faith in outlets that she had entrusted with her story. It seemed the incessant barrage of questions from the media turned to "How did they rape you" more often than "What can be done for the Yazidis?"

The platform of the victim, the survivor, is nothing to be taken lightly. Nadia herself knows that her words have moved people to take action. It is my hope that the intimate access into Nadia's life off the podium will reveal the true struggles that a voiceless community faces in getting the world to act.

– Alexandria Bombach

## BIOGRAPHIES

### **Nadia Murad**

Nadia Murad is a human rights activist. She is a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize, the recipient of the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize and the Sakharov Prize, and the UN's first Goodwill Ambassador for the Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. She has also received the Clinton Global Citizen Award, Peace Prize from the United Nations association of Spain, and was named 2016 Woman of the Year by Glamour Magazine. Together with Yazda, a Yazidi rights organization, Nadia is currently working to bring ISIS before the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity.

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### **Alexandria Bombach – Director, Cinematographer, Editor**

Alexandria Bombach is an award-winning cinematographer, editor, and director from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her first feature-length documentary, *Frame by Frame*, follows the lives of four Afghan photojournalists who are facing the realities of building Afghanistan's first free press. The film had its world premiere at SXSW 2015, went on to win more than 25 film festival awards and screened in front of the president of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani. Alexandria continued her work in Afghanistan in 2016 directing the Pulitzer Center-supported New York Times Op-Doc, *Afghanistan by Choice*, an intertwining portrait of five Afghans who must weigh the costs of leaving or staying as the country's security deteriorates. In addition to her feature documentary work, Alexandria's production company RED REEL has been producing award-winning, character-driven stories since 2009. Her 2013 film *Common Ground* unearths the emotion behind a proposed wilderness-area addition for a community in Montana as heritage and tradition are seemingly defended on both sides. Her Emmy award-winning 2012 series *MoveShake* captured the internal conflicts of people dedicating their lives to a cause.

### **Hayley Pappas – Producer**

Hayley Pappas is the Head of RYOT Films, where she runs all content and creative strategy – overseeing industry partnerships, content development, packaging and distribution, and all ancillary marketing campaigns. With RYOT, Hayley has produced a slate of award-winning docs, including two Oscar-nominated shorts, *Body Team 12* and *Watani: My Homeland*, as well as over a dozen virtual reality films with partners such as NPR and the Associated Press. She's sold work to partners ranging from HBO and MTV to Hulu and Apple. Her work has covered topics including sexual assault, solitary confinement and mass executions and has premiered at Sundance, Tribeca, SXSW, and Hot Docs among others.

### **Brock Williams – Producer**

Brock Williams is a Los Angeles-based producer working in both narrative and documentary film, and an alumnus of the Film Independent Producing Lab. With strong ties to Missouri and Texas, he has produced narrative feature films in those states, including *Box Elder* (2008), *Awful Nice* (2013) and *Slash* (2016). His first feature documentary as creative producer was *Killing Them Safely* (2015), and he was a consulting producer on Alexandria Bombach's first feature, *Frame By Frame* (2015). He also works as a documentary editor and photographer.

**Bryn Mooser – Executive Producer**

Bryn Mooser is the CEO and co-founder of RYOT. Acquired by AOL in 2016, RYOT is the leading immersive media company specializing in virtual and augmented reality. As a two-time Oscar-nominated filmmaker, Bryn has overseen the production of more than 200 linear and immersive films. RYOT's work has earned accolades across the industry, including 2 Emmys. Before starting RYOT, Bryn spent years as a humanitarian serving in the Peace Corps in Africa and working in Haiti, where he helped build the country's largest secondary school in Port-au-Prince. Bryn has been featured in WIRED, CNBC, Conde Nast Traveler and was an Esquire "American of the Year" in 2014.

**Matt Ippolito – Executive Producer**

Matt Ippolito is the VP, Strategy and Ops / COO of RYOT, where he leads content acquisition and business, legal, finance and day-to-day operations. Matt has executive produced films with premieres at Sundance and negotiated the sale of industry-leading original content including three series with Hulu. Prior to RYOT, Matt was an investment professional at US Renewables Group (USRG), a \$750M growth equity firm focused on sustainable technologies, where he pitched over \$20M of equity investments, structured \$20M of debt transactions, and negotiated the sale of four companies.

**Adam Bardach – Executive Producer**

Adam Bardach is a filmmaker, producer and production executive with over twenty-five acclaimed feature documentaries and nonfiction series to his credit. Most recently, Adam executive produced *Before The Flood*, directed by Leonardo DiCaprio and Fisher Stevens. The film reached more than 60 million people worldwide and surpassed a record-setting one billion minutes viewed across linear, digital, streaming and social platforms making it arguably one of the most watched documentaries in history and the most watched NatGeo film ever.

**Marie Therese Guirgis – Executive Producer**

Marie Therese Guirgis is Head of Production and Development at RatPac Documentary Films. Since joining RatPac in 2013, Marie Therese has developed and overseen production of such films as *Night Will Fall* by André Singer, *Chuck Norris VS Communism* by Ilinca Calugareanu, *The 100 Years Show* by Alison Klayman, *Author: The JT LeRoy Story* by Jeff Feuerzeig, and *Before The Flood* by Fisher Stevens. Prior to joining RatPac, Marie Therese produced award-winning feature films and documentaries and also worked for many years in film distribution, most significantly as SVP, Distribution and Acquisitions at Wellspring, a renowned director-driven independent distributor. Her previous producing credits include Ira Sachs' *Keep The Lights On*, Julia Loktev's *The Loneliest Planet*, Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation*, and Rupert Murray's *Unknown White Male*.

**Alison Klayman – Executive Producer**

Alison Klayman is a Sundance-winning director and producer. Her feature documentary *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* about China's most famous artist/activist was awarded a Special Jury Prize at the festival in 2012 and went on to be shortlisted for the Academy Award. The film earned two Emmy nominations, a Director's Guild of America Award nomination and a duPont-Columbia Journalism Award. Alison also directed *The 100 Years Show* about Cuban-American painter Carmen Herrera, and executive produced the Peabody and Independent Spirit Award winner *Hooligan Sparrow* about Chinese human rights champion Ye Haiyan. She has a new Netflix Original feature documentary set to debut in 2018.

**Elizabeth Schaeffer Brown – Co-Producer**

Elizabeth Brown is a resource mobilization and communications professional focused on projects designed to counter violent extremism through education, partnership development, fundraising, branding, and media. She has worked in some of the world's most vulnerable areas to strengthen international and local justice systems, expand access to digital education while protecting the rights of women and girls. Elizabeth has been working with the Yazidi community since August 2015 when she traveled to Iraq with Luis Moreno Ocampo, Kerry Propper and Murad Ismael to launch a case against ISIS from genocide crimes against the Yazidi people. She is co-founder of Uncommon Union and a founding member of Nadia's initiative.

**Patrick Jonsson – Composer**

Patrick Jonsson is an Emmy-nominated film composer. In 2013 Patrick scored *Bends*, directed by Flora Lau, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival as part of 'Un Certain Regard.' He went on to score the Academy Award and BAFTA-nominated feature documentary *Virunga*, directed by Orlando von Einsiedel and executive produced by Leonardo DiCaprio. More recently he wrote the music for Academy Award winning Netflix short documentary *The White Helmets*, also directed by von Einsiedel, for which he was nominated for a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Music Composition for a Limited Series, Movie or Special.

Patrick's other credits include BBC Three drama *Five By Five* starring Idris Elba and directed by Kate Herron; the acclaimed documentary *Frame By Frame*, directed by Alexandria Bombach and Mo Scarpelli, for which he was nominated for Best Documentary Score at the Hollywood Music in Media Awards 2015; and *Moon Shot*, a documentary web series for Google produced by JJ Abrams/Bad Robot.

**About RYOT**

RYOT is an Emmy Award-winning, Academy Award-nominated media brand that specializes in exceptional video content in traditional and emerging formats. It comprises RYOT Films, a prolific film and television development shop that creates both short and feature-length content; RYOT Studio, a next-generation creative studio that provides premium, end-to-end content marketing solutions; and RYOT Lab, a technology and innovation hub that capitalizes on emerging formats including AR and VR. RYOT is part of Oath, a global media technology company and dynamic house of brands people love.

## CREDITS

### **Director**

Alexandria Bombach

### **Producers**

Hayley Pappas

Brock Williams

### **Executive Producers**

Bryn Mooser

Matt Ippolito

Marie Therese Guirgis

Adam Bardach

Alison Klayman

### **Co-Producer**

Elizabeth Schaeffer Brown

### **Composer**

Patrick Jonsson

### **Editor**

Alexandria Bombach

### **Additional Editor**

Michael Bucuzzo

### **Creative Consultant**

David Wilson

### **Editing Consultant**

Douglas Blush A.C.E.

### **Director of Photography**

Alexandria Bombach

### **Additional Cinematographers**

Karee Maxson

Sam Kretchmar





