

# Victimhood as Process: A Critical Discourse and Systemic Functional Study of Trauma, Identity and Agency

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This paper examines the discourse of two testimonies by Greek actors through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a particular focus on victim narratives. By employing Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), this research aims to explore how language and experience are presented in the emergence of trauma, identity and shame (Laughlin, 2025; Knoff, Vasterling & Verfaellie, 2023). This research draws on narrative processing in post-traumatic experiences, exploring how verbal, relational, mental and material processes are used to present meaning in the context of abuse.

In the transitivity system, “processes” refer to the verbs that represent actions, states, or emotions, while “participants” are the entities involved in these processes. By closely examining the types of processes and the roles that participants play, we can gain insight into how social actors engage in various activities and how these engagements contribute to their representation. Verbal processes foreground the transition from silence to public speech, situating testimony as an act of hermeneutic justice that challenges social silencing (Alyce & Taggart, 2023). Relational processes of identification and classification recontextualize past experience within contemporary frameworks of harm and recognition, resonating with discourse on the social construction of victimhood (Chouliaraki, 2024). Mental processes reflect delayed cognition, memory inhibition and embodied recall, consistent with findings on trauma narrative characteristics and shame-sensitive practice (Laughlin, 2025; Knoff et al., 2023). Material processes encode embodied action and turning points that embody survival and constraint.

Across both narratives, victimhood emerges not as static identity but as linguistically and experientially negotiated, shaped by familial response, institutional context and ongoing negotiation of disclosure, shame and solidarity. The analysis highlights how language choices encode both concealment and revelation, illustrating how victimhood and agency are dynamically reconstructed through discourse.

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