

An Impetus for Survival: Cultural Memory in Nadia Murad's *The Last Girl*

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Dona Mariya Thomas

Register Number: 180011002132



The Post Graduate Department of English

Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara

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Certificate

Certified that this is a bonafide report of the project entitled *An Impetus for Survival: Cultural Memory in Nadia Murad's The Last Girl* done by Dona Mariya Thomas (Register No. 180011002132) for the fulfillment of the requirement for the M.A. degree in English under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2018-2020.

Project Guide:

Ms. Nasnin S.

Assistant Professor

Post Graduate Department of English

Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara

Ms. Lissy Kachapilly

Head of the Department

Post Graduate Department of English

Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara

Declaration

I, Dona Mariya Thomas, hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *An Impetus for Survival: Cultural Memory in Nadia Murad's The Last Girl* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Ms. Nasnin S. and Ms. Lissy Kachapilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

Date: 22-07-2020

Dona Mariya Thomas

Place: Thrikkakara

Register Number: 180011002132

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Chapter-1

Introduction

“Memory ... is the diary we all carry about with us” (Wilde 34).

The uniqueness of human beings lies in the gifted power of memory. The formation of memory in an individual is a gradual, complex and mysterious process. There still exist unanswerable questions regarding the memory power of humans which widened up contemporary research approaches to “memory studies”. Human life is controlled completely by their memory and the loss of memory is an unimaginable threat to a normal human being. The field of memory studies delves into various aspects of action and influence of memory in an individual. The function of the human brain is complicated which urges people to think on questions like ‘When does a child start to remember?’, ‘Why does loss of memory happen to some?’, ‘Why does amnesia occur?’, ‘Why do few memories haunt us?’, etc. Studies unravel the fact that traumatic experiences affect human memory in different dimensions. Generally, traumatic experiences might make a person physically and mentally weaker, and a few of those memories affect mental stability. At times, the power of memory can cure trauma and can be used as an aid to fight trauma with courage and strength. Memories of cultural beliefs in which one is born into can serve better as a tool to strengthen oneself. The memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* jointly written by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski empower their readers through the narration of a real story and shows how the past memory became a weapon to fight the traumatic experience.

It is believed that memory of an individual commences from their childhood. The culture in which one has been born into and brought up plays a pivotal role in

forming memory. Matthew Arnold defines culture as “the best thing that has been thought and said in the world” (qtd. in Harrison 101). Every individual has the power to connect instances in their life to their culture in which they were brought up. Cultural impacts include social, geographical, historical and religious factors and it has been imprinted intensely into the long term memory of an individual. The introduction of ‘Cultural Memory Studies’ has ushered the discovery of the relation between culture and memory in human life. Academic theories on cultural memory developed roughly around 1990.

In 1992, the concept of “cultural memory” was introduced by German Egyptologist, Jan Assman. Currently, Assmann is Professor of Religious and Cultural Theory at the University of Konstanz. Until 2003, he served as Professor Emeritus at the University of Heidelberg. A holder of a Dr. honoris causa title in Theology from the University of Münster, Assmann has authored several books, of which the following have been translated into English: *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (2005), *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs* (2002), *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (2001), and *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (1998). His publications cover the fields of Egyptology, focusing on interpretations of the origins of monotheism, reception of Egypt in the European tradition, history of religion, historical anthropology and other topics. In partnership with his wife Aleida, Assman began to develop a theory of cultural memory that has proven enduringly influential. In recent years, he has been focusing on the dimensions of cultural memory, in a distant timeline, dating back more than 3000 years (Meckien). Assmann defines cultural memory as the "outer dimension of human memory" embracing two different concepts: "memory culture" and "reference to the past" (“Cultural Memory”) which

links together history, anthropology and memory. According to Assman's notion of cultural memory, it can be considered as a link between the past, present and future formed through symbolic heritage embodied in texts, rites, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred scriptures and other media that serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated with what has happened. It crystallizes collective experiences of the past and can last for millennia (Meckien).

The memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* illustrates that 'cultural memory' acts as an inspirational source for the risky escape of Nadia Murad. Whenever terrorists tortured her physically and mentally, cultural memory acted as a source of hope and inspiration for survival. Even now her cultural traits provide Nadia Murad the motivation to live. In addition, the dissertation also focuses on the role of memoirs in the transmission of cultural memory to generations. The text narrates a remarkable true story of fear, suffering and survival. Among the different mediums to transmit memories to generations, written forms have a crucial role in transformation of historical facts from the ancient days. When compared to creative fictional writings like novels, short stories, etc., memoirs, autobiographies and biographies are the strongest media to express the voices of the suffered and survived and to induce the feeling of various experiences in its raw form. The memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* echoes the element of trauma suffered by Yazidis to the readers in a thought provoking manner.

The memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* jointly penned by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski is an account of Nadia's escape from ISIS captivity. In 2018, Nadia Murad was awarded Nobel Peace

Prize for her “efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict” (“The Nobel Peace Prize 2018”). Nadia Murad is the first Iraqi and member of the Yazidi community to be awarded the Nobel Prize. The Iraqi ethnic and religious minority community named ‘Yazidis’ descend from some of the region’s most ancient roots, who for a past few year, have faced executions for a reputation as ‘devil worshippers’. Yazidis were marginalized as they have the cultural practice of worshipping a fallen angel, *Tawuse Melek* or peacock angel, one of the seven angels they followed to worship. Yazidis of Northern Iraq were captured and killed brutally with the rise of a political terrorist group ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in 2013 who sought to demolish Yazidis entirely from the world. While genocide is the tool used by ISIS to kill men, rape was the weapon against women.

Nadia Murad is a 27-year-old woman who was treated as a sex slave by ISIS and her story of escape from ISIS is the central plot of the memoir. She is the founder of Nadia's Initiative, an organization dedicated to heal and rebuild lives and communities of survivors of genocide, mass atrocities. She was honoured with many awards- Sakharov Prize (2016), Nobel Peace Prize (2018), Council of Europe Vaclav Havel Prize for Freedom of Thought (2016), Clinton Global Citizen Award (2016), Hillary Clinton Award for Advancing Women in Peace and Security (2018), United Nations Association of Spain Peace Prize (2017), International DVF Award (2019), Bambi Award (2019). In addition to the memoir, the life of Nadia Murad has been adapted to a documentary titled *On Her Shoulders* directed by Alexandria Bombach in the year 2018. The co-author of the memoir, Jenna Krajeski, is a journalist and writer based in New York. Her works from Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Syria have been published in print and online in *The New Yorker*, *Slate*, *The Nation*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and others. For the past two years she has focused on the Kurdish

minorities in Turkey and Iraq. Currently, she is working as a human rights activist in Germany.

Nadia Murad Basee Taha was born in Kocho, a village in Iraq in 1993. She has been brought up in Kocho witnessing practices of Yazidis and listening to the Yazidi cultural stories which later turned as a lifeline to her to live courageously in the world of negligence. In 2013, her village was captured by ISIS, many men were killed, women were enslaved and Nadia was held as a sex slave. She was forcefully separated from her mother and abused sexually by more than ten militants. She had to witness her mother being tortured and listen to the sounds of genocide which took her brothers victims. She was forced to change her cultural identity through conversion of her caste. Even though these traumatized experiences possess power to disrupt mental stability and coherent memory, what makes Nadia unique is the courage she gained herself to have an attempt to escape. Even though she fails many attempts to escape from ISIS, her will power brought her success at last.

The dissertation tries to bring out the ways in which cultural memory is transformed into a healing power. A brief look at history proves that Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony' is prevalent from the earlier days- control over blacks by whites, upper caste over lower caste (eg. Brahmins v/s Dalits), males over females, political parties, Nazis over Jews, etc., which can be considered as a part of colonization and subjugation. A study on forms of subjugation unravels that it varies with respect to areas and communities but what remains constant is the strategy of 'otherness' that is used to establish dominance. Mostly the control over 'other' is established through the objective of culture which the dominant class themselves and make others believe that their culture holds supreme power in the world. The

dominant class also aims to imprint their culture on others and to annihilate the rest by the process of ‘othering’ with a tagline as ‘cleansing’ and claiming ‘them’ as uncivilized versus the civilised ‘us’. Religious fanaticism which has been described throughout the memoir is another solid form of ‘othering’. From social problems like racism, casteism, gender discrimination, etc., arise the concept of cultural trauma, which states that “cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander 1). In the present era, Yazidis all over the world suffer from a kind of cultural trauma as they were subjected to different traumatic experiences and due to the practice of cultural hegemony. In the memoir, the dominance of ISIS over Yazidis is vividly portrayed through the horrible experiences of Nadia Murad. The pain suffered by Yazidi women under the captivity of ISIS is evident from the line “when you are a sabiyya, you die every second of every day” (Murad and Krajeski 182). The memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* co-authored by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski unravels the fact that social and religious culture and the strengths of individuals are related. The pleasant memories of culture act as a source of inspiration especially when one faces a crisis in life. The life story of Nadia Murad cries out to the external world, the sufferings of their minority community and proves that the strong adherence to their cultural belief and practice were the only source of strength and inspiration that give solace to life at each stage of traumatic experience.

The second chapter of the dissertation provides a theoretical foundation to ‘cultural memory’ as proposed by Jan Assman. The chapter encapsulates the key points of cultural memory studies that include concepts like memory of collectives,

societies, or cultures and the contributions of major theorists of cultural memory such as Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assman, etc. The third chapter of the dissertation focuses on how the memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* by Nadia Murad acts as a site of cultural memory of Yazidism. The chapter underlines the fact that when ISIS attempts to annihilate Yazidis from world history, the memoir of Nadia Murad acts as a site of cultural memory that has the potential to make aware of their existential struggles and to foster coming generations by preserving their culture. Cultural memory should be more emphasized as it plays a greater role in transmitting memories whereas collective memory might later vanish or else may be biased with the speaker's personal interests with time. The fourth chapter encompasses the action of cultural memory in the life of Nadia and how cultural memory acts as a weapon in her life to resist and survive the catastrophe. A psychological study on the character Nadia Murad conveys that she gained the courage in her life even after varied forms of excruciatingly violent experiences only through her cultural memory which reflected in her during the times of existential crisis. A call back to her roots through memories boosted her attempt to escape and to fight for self-existence. The fifth chapter strives to prove that the memoirs incorporated with a cultural narration appear as a site of cultural memory and cultural memory is an aid for survival of humans in the light of Nadia Murad's memoir, *The Last Girl*.

Chapter 2

Recapitulation of Memory Studies and Cultural Memory

The world of theories consistently tries to trace the function of memory of a human being and attempts to theorize it to a closed and complete structural form. The study of memory is not particularly limited to any single discipline. On the contrary, memory is a transdisciplinary area of research that encompasses “sociology, philosophy and history, archaeology and religious studies, literary and art history, media studies, psychology, and neurosciences” (Erll, “Introduction” 2) and attempts to study facts related to memory. The vast complex questions centred around memory of humans and the scattered researches among various disciplines urge thinkers to bring the ideas of memory beneath a single umbrella, which gave rise to a new academic discipline called “memory studies”. Memory studies emerged as an academic discipline during the late twentieth century and has flourished during the last three decades with new findings and still expands with ongoing research. The number of texts as well as the launch of scholarly journals like *Memory Studies* brought more focus to this broad discussion and helped in developing the theoretical and methodological standards of the incoherent and dispersed academic field along with various scholarly organizations. The emergence of the discipline memory studies is described by *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* as follows:

This surge in memory research has greatly contributed to the way in which we consider a broad range of issues from the most basic biological and cellular encoding and retrieval systems to the ways in which political and cultural systems facilitate the remembering or silencing of historical events. As a result, the concept of “memory” is

now studied and taught across a wide range of academic disciplines from the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and the arts... Of particular interest are burgeoning attempts among memory scholars seeking to collaborate across disciplinary lines. The identification and acknowledgment of the interdisciplinary interest in memory has been referred to as “memory studies”. (Brown et al.)

It is even difficult as well as challenging to define the term “memory”. In each discipline, “memory” has different meanings, concepts and associated facts. Memorising and forgetting are two quotidian activities of the human brain. Though studies on memory lead to mysteries of forgetting and memorising; researchers, philosophers and writers attempt to theorise the process of memorisation. The development of memory studies is a journey through multiple concepts put forward by various researchers which are debated over the decades. The studies and controversial discussion on human memory was even prevalent from the age of Greek philosopher Plato. Many famous philosophers like John Locke, Hume, Nietzsche, etc. have contributed vastly regarding memory which provoked the rise of memory studies.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato claims that the mind is analogous to a wax tablet. To perceive is to make an impression on the tablet, leaving behind an exact image or representation of what was perceived.

Memory keeps the images and forgetting is a matter of losing them. In his *Confessions*, Augustine says perception deposits images of objects into the storehouse of memory and the process of recalling is the process of retrieving these deposits. Locke and Hume tell much the

same story, as do many other philosophers up through the 20th century.

(Frise)

Within a short span of time, the scholars of memory studies extended their focus on the socio- cultural influences on the processing of human memory and the relationship between culture and memory sprung as a key issue of interdisciplinary research across different parts of the world. The word “culture” and “memory” have different semantic connotations. Culture of an individual depends on ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class, caste and family groups. Even art forms, customs and practices can be described as culture. Raymond Williams, one of the influential figures of cultural studies suggests that culture is a way of life. “Culture is a social construct that is usually understood in and through the contents of its traditions—its feelings, modes of action, forms of language, aspirations, interpersonal relations, images, ideas, and ideals” (Rodríguez and Fortier 8). In other words, it acts as a process of remembering the past events through repetitions which is passed down through generations. This process of repetition marks a non-perishable image in the minds of people in their entire life. Culture has a great influence in the growth of an individual in every aspect especially in the formation of individual memory. Memory is bestowed upon individuals through their historical, social, and political context and so memory can never be rationalised apart from social forces. Elie Wiesel, Nobel laureate for Peace in 1928 opines that “Without memory, there is no culture. Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future” (qtd. in "Elie Wiesel Quotes").

As the academic discipline, memory studies advanced and established, sub branches have emerged, among which ‘cultural memory studies’ stepped as a highly

recognized branch of studies. In 1980, German Egyptologist, Jan Assmann and his wife Aleida Assman, advanced a theory with their notion of a 'Cultural Memory' which concretized the theoretical framework of cultural memory studies and also heightened the status of the academic discipline to worldwide recognition. As a term, cultural memory was introduced by Jan Assmann in his book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*.

Assmann defines cultural memory as the "outer dimension of human memory" (1992: 19), embracing two different concepts: "memory culture" (*Erinnerungskultur*) and "reference to the past" (*Vergangenheitsbezug*). Memory culture is the way a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from one generation to the next, rendering it possible for later generations to *reconstruct* their cultural identity. References to the past, on the other hand, reassure the members of a society of their collective identity and supply them with an awareness of their unity and singularity in time and space—i.e. an historical consciousness—by *creating* a shared. ("Cultural Memory")

The theory attempts to relate three poles namely memory (contemporized past), culture and the group or society. There are six major attributes for Jan Assman's concept of cultural memory which includes 'the concretion of identity', 'capacity to reconstruct', 'formation', 'organization', 'obligation' and 'reflexivity'. 'The concretion of identity,' is the stored knowledge of a group which derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity and is retrieved in a positive or negative sense from the foreign groups. 'The capacity to reconstruct' within its contemporary frames of reference exists in potential historical archives as texts, images and rules of

conduct- cultural memory always relates its knowledge to actual and contemporary situations by appropriations, criticisms, preservation or transformations. The ‘formation’ incorporates crystallization of communicated meaning in collective shared knowledge. The ‘organization’ is constituted by the institutional buttressing of communication and the specialization (practices) of the bearers of cultural memory. The ‘obligation’ constitutes a clear system of values and differentiations which structure the cultural supply of knowledge and the symbols. Finally, the cultural memory is ‘reflexive’ in three ways: firstly as practice-reflexive which includes rituals, proverbs, maxims, etc., secondly as self-reflexive which draws itself to explain, distinguish, reinterpret, criticize, censure, control, surpass, receive and thirdly reflexive as a projection of self-image of the group through its own social system (Olick et al. 213).

The origin of contemporary research in cultural memory can be traced back to two key figures of memory studies Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg of the 1920s. The concept of cultural memory has been evolved from Maurice Halbwach’s concept of collective memory (*mémoire collective*) and Aby Warburg’s art-historical interest in a European memory of images (Bildgedächtnis) which secured prominence in the 1920s. Through the concept of collective memory, Halbwachs “attempted to establish that memory is dependent on social structures” (Erl, “Introduction” 14) by opposing Sigmund Freud and Henry Bergson, who were more concentrated on memory at individual level. The concept of ‘cultural memory’ got its birth from the idea of Halbwachs’s notion of collective memory. Building on Maurice Halbwachs's notion of collective memory which states memory is a social phenomenon as well as an individual one, Jan Assman adds a cultural dimension to memory. Jan Assman

coined a term 'communicative memory' or everyday memory to replace the term collective memory for deeper understanding:

The term "communicative memory" was introduced in order to delineate the difference between Halbwachs's concept of "collective memory" and our understanding of "cultural memory" (A. Assmann). Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity. Halbwachs, however, the inventor of the term "collective memory," was careful to keep his concept of collective memory apart from the realm of traditions, transmissions, and transferences which we propose to subsume under the term "cultural memory". (Assman, "Communicative" 110)

The distinct feature of cultural memory lies in its assurance of cultural continuity by preserving the past through cultural mnemonics like texts, rites, monuments, celebrations, objects, sacred scriptures, tools, material symbols, writing techniques, and institutions. Cultural mnemonics can also be described as 'sites of memory' or 'memory figures'. In such a way, cultural memory can be regarded as objectified and institutionalized memories that can be stored, transferred and reincorporated throughout generations. On the other hand, Communicative memory is limited to the recent past and "is characterized by a short term (80 to 110 years), from three to four generations" (Meckien). This makes aware that cultural memory differs from collective memory with respect to their limits of time. Jan Assman and Aleida Assman states "Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is

maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these figures of memories” (Olick et al. 213). The transmission of collective knowledge of culture through generations preserves cultural identity.

Assmann argues that every culture connects every one of its individual subjects on the basis of shared norms (rules) and stories (memories; Erinnerungen) to the experience of a commonly inhabited meaningful world. It is only because of this experience that individuals are able to frame their personal identity through the orientating symbols of identity of their social world, symbols which are embodied in the objectified forms of a commonly shared cultural tradition. (Harth 86)

The greatest benefaction of the theory of cultural memory is that it structured and strengthened a connection between time, identity, and memory in three dimensions of the personal, the social and the cultural level. The functioning of cultural memory sums up that the formation of memory is a gradual process in which everyday interaction has a great part to play. “A change of frames brings about forgetting; the durability of memories depends on the durability of social bonds and frames” (Assman, “communicative” 111). Jan Assman explains the functioning of cultural memory which knits the aspects of time, identity and memory as follows:

External objects as carriers of memory play a role already on the level of personal memory. Our memory, which we possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with "things," outward symbols... Things do not "have" a memory of their own, but they may

remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other "lieux de memoire." On the social level, with respect to groups and societies, the role of external symbols becomes even more important, because groups which, of course, do not "have" a memory tend to "make" themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions. (Assman, "Communicative" 111)

The introduction of theory of cultural memory is further rooted in questions like why humans give importance to cultural identity and emphasizes the remembering of culture by an individual. Cultural identity simply means people's beliefs and lifestyle that makes them what they are. The process of remembering one's culture can be expounded in its full essence only by comparing it with forgetting or losing memory. "Research shows that there is a definite relationship between occurrences of emotional, psychological or physical trauma and memory" (Casa Palmera Staff). This problem highlights the importance of cultural memory that the dissertation focuses on. Humans tend to hold on to his/her culture tightly in their minds that has been familiarised by them from the first day of their life. A person's culture would enable humans to withstand catastrophe without losing memory and thus cultural memory can be considered as a healing power.

The various forms of agony and trauma can be cured by remembrance of their cultural beliefs and practices which have the power to soothe people during the time of crisis. If one has a strong cultural taste, their present events would always be

influenced by their cultural past. Especially during the time of impasse, one can combat the situation if his/her individual memory could travel back to their cultural beliefs. Human memory is aided by culturally specific schemata, actions by culturally shared norms and values and second hand experiences are assimilated into the personal wealth of experiences (Erll, "Introduction" 97). Thus, cultural memory has the potential to save people from the greatest disaster of losing memory. Cultural memory helps the traumatized to improve their power of resistance and regain cultural identity. One such example that is to be discussed is the recovery of people from holocaust memories which sought to the surge of many academic disciplines including trauma studies and cultural memory studies. We owe the theoretical origin of cultural memory to Germany, not redefined as the Berlin Republic, that had surmounted its post-war history.

Such processes of self-definition...are based on the selection of points of reference from the past that support, legitimize, and illustrate a collective's desired self-image. In a reunited Germany, this selection was particularly focused on the crimes of the Nazi dictatorship and the erection of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe in Berlin—in the very spot where the Berlin Wall had stood until 15 years earlier—is the most visible sign of this self-definition through a commitment to collective remembrance. (Pethes)

The occurrence of traumatic events can be considered as the result of the veins of hegemony that pump consensual supremacy in the society. Colonialism is one other evil that tries to subjugate people via rule by consent. Basically, culture can be considered as the weapon to politicise hegemony to 'other' people. The dominant

group uses various forces to subjugate the so-called 'other' which results in traumatic experience. In such cases, the memory of their cultural beliefs and practices can become a weapon against them to resist strongly and fight back to their ordeals. Jan Assman extends his studies from concentrating on cultural memory "from the Egyptians, Babylonians, and the Osage Indians down to recent controversies about memorializing the Holocaust in Germany and the role of memory in the current disputes between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East and between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland" (Assmann and Livingstone). This dissertation focuses particularly on how cultural memory assisted Yazidis of Iraq to overcome traumatic experiences and to fight back against ISIS and white colonisers respectively.

In addition, the dissertation also emphasizes the role of memoirs as a historical record to transmit cultural memory. Writings can be regarded as a solid form of 'site of memory'. Memoirs help in transferring the cultural beliefs and practices and also make aware the readers about the threats of one's cultural existence. In cultural memory studies, the beginning of theories is believed to be based on the publication of Walter Benjamin's address book which was written during his forced exile due to his Jewish heritage. It gives an outline of the period of National Socialism and the Second World War.

The publication of Walter Benjamin's address book is, therefore, an exemplary case for the reversal or change of perspective that marks the beginning of all theories of cultural memory: the transition from personal memories, which are tied to the lifespan of an individual, to

the formation of a memory, which is available to a group of people and across generations. (Pethes 2)

Thus, Assman's notion of cultural memory acts as a connecting point of the past, present and future through codes, religious rites and festivals and canonical texts on the one hand, and in the Freudian psychodrama of repressing and resurrecting the past on the other. For him, the culture of a society assists human life in many ways. This dissertation ventures to comprehend how cultural memory assists humans to find their own space in society to establish their existence especially at a time of crisis. Based on Assman's theory of cultural memory, this dissertation proceeds further by focusing on the cultural memory that strengthened Nadia Murad with resistance and will power to fight back ISIS even today. Also the dissertation aims at bringing out how memoirs become a valid source of cultural memory through the book, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* jointly written by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski.

Chapter 3

The Memoir as a Trail of Yazidis

George Meredith, English Victorian poet and novelist states, “Memoirs are the backstairs of history” (qtd. in “George Meredith Quotes”). The memoir *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* (2017) jointly written by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski, will surely exist as a solid historical record for future generations, in which the Nobel laureate, Nadia Murad recalls her horrendous past of days in captivity combined with socio-cultural background of Yazidism and politico-historical background of the second Iraqi civil war. This chapter intends to prove that a memoir can express the life story with deep intensity and it exists as a site of cultural memory of Yazidism, a race on the verge of extinction.

A predominantly Kurdish speaking group, the Yazidis are one of the most endangered religious minorities. They make up around 50000 souls and inhabit a wide area stretching across eastern Turkey, northern Syria, northern Iraq, and western Iran (Allison). The historical attacks against Yazidis convey that they live in threat of their genocide due to forces on them by other cultures. Even today, massacres of Yazidis take place in different parts of the world. The memoir, *The Last Girl* jointly underlines that humanity ‘othered’ the Yazidi community by proclaiming “Yazidis to be *kuffar*, unbelievers worthy of killing” (Murad and Krajeski 5). They were considered as “devil worshippers” and they have been consistently victimised to be the ‘other’ because of their non-Abrahamic religion. The attack in Kocho village in Iraq, where Nadia was born, vividly portrays that they had been ‘othered’ by Sunnis, Kurds and above all, ISIS. Thus Yazidis struggle hard to find an existence in the world. Murad also points out how Yazidis are even discriminated against in the Iraqi

map. “It leaves out Yazidis or labels them as “other” (31). Though, people of certain cultures have been ‘othered’ by the entire world due to their cultural beliefs and practices, for them their culture is of utmost importance. Nadia Murad states:

Today there are only about one million Yazidis in the world. For as long as I have been alive—and, I know, for a long time before I was born—our religion has been what defined us and held us together as a community. But it also made us targets of persecution by larger groups, from the Ottomans to Saddam’s Baathists, who attacked us or tried to coerce us into pledging our loyalty to them. (6)

In addition, Nadia Murad reminds how even Yazidis were not given any place in the Constitution of Iraq. In her memoir, Nadia Murad shares her experiences where she finds her community being discriminated. Her memoir can be considered as a source of cultural memory for Yazidis as she portrays her cultural beliefs and practices in it. She gives a picture of Yazidi celebrations, customs, practices and the ways of their life in her memoir. Thus Nadia Murad uses her memoir to be a culturally rooted text which clarifies and represents her religion.

Yazidism is an ancient monotheistic religion, spread orally by holy men entrusted with our stories. Although it has elements in common with the many religions of the Middle East, from Mithraism and Zoroastrianism to Islam and Judaism, it is truly unique and can be difficult even for the holy men who memorize our stories to explain. I think of my religion as being an ancient tree with thousands of rings, each telling a story in the long history of Yazidis. Many of those stories, sadly, are tragedies. (Murad and Krajeski 5)

Yazidis do not have a solid canonical text. They transmit their religion orally. The religious values are embedded within them by the family and society in which they live. Religious leaders exist as the major source of transmission of their religion. The tragic case of Yazidis indicates that the religion which does not have solid canonical text, the people find it easy to interpret their beliefs intentionally to destroy them. “People say that Yazidism isn’t a “real” religion because we have no official book like the Bible or the Koran” (Murad and Krajeski 28). In addition, killing their religious leaders can cease the transmission of religion. When ISIS captured Kocho, one among the militants said, “When we took the ram, it was like taking your tribal leaders, and when we killed the ram, it meant we planned on killing those leaders” (14). The dominant group always establishes different strategies to make use of the ‘othered’. Nadia Murad gives examples of how throughout history, her community was targeted by the dominant groups of the society. “In the mid-1970s Saddam began forcibly moving minorities, including Kurds and Yazidis, from their villages and towns into cinder-block houses in planned communities, where they could be more easily controlled, a campaign people call the “Arabization” of the north” (21). Nadia Murad states “attacks and persecution scattered us and decreased our numbers, making it even harder for our stories to be spread orally, as they are supposed to be” (29).

In such a vulnerable situation in which one community lacks a religious text and the dominant group aims to vanish an entire culture by diminishing the sources of oral transmission, memoirs written by the survivor’s act as a source for living.

The histories of sexual, racial, and class identities have all been enriched by the recovery of letters, diaries, and memoirs, as well as by

the establishing of biographical counter-cultures. Such work is often avowedly inspirational in its aim, offering a sense of historical solidarity for oppressed minorities, and seeking to record counter-cultural memories that official cultures tend to repress or try to forget. (Saunders 327)

To spread power, the dominant group makes use of yet another strategy which is to spread wrong notions about the minority community to the entire society. It includes terming the minority community as terrorists, sex rackets, Maoists, etc. While considering the case of Yazidis, “Yazidi girls were considered infidels, and according to the militants’ interpretation of the Koran, raping a slave is not a sin” (Murad and Krajewski 123) and they are given the tagline as ‘devil worshipers’. The BBC news in 2014 outlines the massacres against Yazidis is based on misinterpretations. The news declared as such:

The ongoing persecution in their heartland of the Mt Sinjar region west of Mosul is based on a misunderstanding of their name. Sunni extremists, such as IS, believe it derives from Yazid ibn Muawiyah (647-683), the deeply unpopular second caliph of the Umayyad dynasty. Modern research, however, has clarified that the name is nothing to do with the loose-living Yazid, or the Persian city of Yazd, but is taken from the modern Persian "ized", which means angel or deity. The name Izidis simply means "worshippers of god", which is how Yazidis describe themselves. (Magazine Monitor)

Nadia Murad opens up about incidents that made people misunderstand the Yazidis. Nadia expounds that conversion is seen as betrayal in their society but still

Yazidis do not kill women and men who leave their faith. The revenge of Sunnis for death of a young Yazidi woman named Du'a Khali was stoned to death by her relatives after they suspected that she wanted to convert to Islam and marry a Muslim man. This incident made the people to have hatred towards Yazidis. This also created a violent attack in Kocho by killing twenty-three Yazidi passengers in a bus which created mental depression which is evident from the words of Hezni "Maybe it is worse to survive" (Murad and Krajeski 49).

The entire world turns a blind eye when a particular community suffers through inhuman behaviours. Nadia Murad feels her race was abandoned by the entire world. She even accuses the media of being myopic towards the yazidis. Her community was always treated with an air of irrelevance. Through the memoir *The Last Girl* co-authored by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski, Nadia Murad proclaims "The media weren't even reporting on the siege of Kocho...They don't have time to think about us" (68). Global attitude towards the Yazidis was arrogance and hatred as the community had no representatives in media nor politics to explain the harsh reality of their situation. In this dire event of the community lacking a proper voice in the world, Nadia Murad's voice becomes a strong representation of her community through her memoir. She strongly believes the gravity of preservation of her religion and that the entire world should know about their suffering. Writing can be used as a weapon to transmit one's culture and Nadia's choice of writing her memoir apposite as a figure of cultural memory. She does it, being a dutiful Yazidi in order to responsibly preserve her culture. She says in her memoir, "I knew that the religion lived in the men and women who had been born to preserve it, and that I was one of them" (29).

One's nation is a place that provides one with the feeling of unity. But for Yazidis in Iraq, they were not even provided with any consideration from their own nation where they struggled to find their own space. "State curriculum was clear about who was important in Iraq and what religion they followed. In the memoir *The Last Girl*, Nadia Murad claims "yazidis didn't exist in the Iraqi history books I read in school, and Kurds were depicted as threats against the state" (30). Even when history is narrated, school textbooks or other forms of media never provided or considered the existence of Yazidis. It represents the vulnerable situation faced by the minority communities of the entire world. Nadia Murad was ambitious to contribute something valuable to the history of Iraq to heighten the status of her community from mere existence to acknowledgement. The inhuman experience through which she had gone through sharpened her ambition and her memoir will become a symbol of her fulfilment of ambition. The following lines in Nadia Murad's memoir are a sign of her desire:

Young Yazidis loved our religion but also wanted to be part of the world, and when we grew up into adults, I was sure we would become teachers ourselves, writing Yazidis into the history lessons or even running for parliament and fighting for Yazidi rights in Baghdad. I had a feeling back then that Saddam's plan to make us disappear would backfire. (35)

The memoirs are a point of reference to the future generation. Being a religious minority, the culture of Yazidis cannot be easily transmitted to the next generation, especially with existing members being exponentially murdered. As they lack a religious text, the memoirs act as a source for reference and thus as a 'figure of

memory'. The reference to records of the previous generation enables them to know more about culture and thus to build a strong relation with the past. Thus memoir acts as a link between past, present and future and hence concretising the cultural identity of Yazidis. In a way, memoirs are a process of remembering.

Memory and processes of remembering have always been an important, indeed a dominant, topic in literature. Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, they re-examine the relationship between the past and the present, and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfil for the constitution of identity. (Neumann 333)

She provides the readers with a wide range of knowledge on her culture and thus the coming generation can build strong unity and a clear and concrete cultural identity. In the memoir, Nadia Murad expounds the ways in which she acquired the beliefs which can be a model for other Yazidis.

My mother taught us how to pray—toward the sun in the morning, Lالش during the day, and the moon at night. There are rules, but most are flexible. Prayer is meant to be a personal expression, not a chore or an empty ritual. You can pray silently by yourself or out loud, and you can pray alone or in a group, as long as everyone in that group is also Yazidi. Prayers are accompanied by a few gestures, like kissing the red and white bracelet that many Yazidi women and men wear around

their wrist or, for a man, kissing the collar of his traditional white undershirt. (Murad and Krajeski 29)

Along with the cultural beliefs, Nadia Murad also outlines the peaceful relation they tried to maintain with other cultures. “Men who were invited to hold our baby boys during their ritual circumcision—and from then on bonded to that Yazidi family as a *kiriv*, something like a god-parent. Muslim doctors travelled to Kocho or to Sinjar City to treat us when we were sick” (Murad and Krajeski 4). Nadia Murad also remembers the close relationships between Sunni villages and Kocho that her community was particularly known for. This indicates that even if people shared peaceful relations, the dominant group aims to annihilate them to extend their power. They treated the guests, especially Peshmergas, with utmost respect. Yazidis of Kocho even treated the peshmerga like honoured guests. They were treated with proper courtesy and lavish meals. Families even slaughtered their lamb to feed them. Nadia Murad states in her memoir, “our faith is in our actions. We welcome strangers into our homes, give money and food to those who have none” (115).

Other cultural information includes details of their livelihood in the village Kocho. Most of the Yazidis were farmers and shepherds. They cultivated onions and tomatoes in the field. Each family in Kocho owns sheep. Nadia Murad says that the annual shearing of sheep was a celebration in itself. The details of their festivals are also elaborated in the text. She gives her experience of celebrating a festival named *Batzmi*, “a holiday observed mostly by Yazidi families originally from Turkey” (76). A brief account of Yazidis’ new year celebration is also portrayed in the memoir of Nadia Murad:

Our New Year is in April, just as the hills in Northern Iraq glow with a light green fuzz...April is the month that holds the promise of a big profitable harvest and leads us into months spent outdoors, sleeping on rooftops, freed from our cold, overcrowded houses. Yazidis are connected to nature. It feeds us and shelters us, when we die, our bodies become the earth. Our New Year reminds us of this. (37)

An account of Yazidi weddings is poured into the minds of readers which is better made evident through photographs in the memoir. Weddings were elaborated with classic Yazidi music and dance.

According to Paul Connerton, the body can also be seen as a container, or carrier of memory, of two different types of social practice; inscribing and incorporating. The former includes all activities which are helpful for storing and retrieving information: photographing, writing, taping, etc. The latter implies skilled performances which are sent by means of physical activity, like a spoken word or a handshake. These performances are accomplished by the individual in an unconscious manner, and one might suggest that this memory carried in gestures and habits, is more authentic than 'indirect' memory via inscribing. (Polkest)

Photographs often turn out as a figure of memory. "Photographs provoke acts of memory recalling us to things, places, and people. They establish connections across time and space, including chains of association. What will be dredged up in memory's driftnet cannot be predicted in advance: an item of clothing or decor in a picture can spark connections and associations" (Roberts). Nadia Murad's family

always used to preserve photographs which were forcefully destroyed by her mother to hide out their identity from ISIS. After capturing, ISIS destroyed things that symbolises Yazidi identity which vary from ration cards to minor photographs. Nadia Murad's "house was full of family photos... These photos told the history of our family" (Murad and Krajeski 83) and she recalls the burning of those photographs by her mother while writing her memoir. Nadia Murad has also added photographs which perform as a symbol of identity to her memoir. Photographs meant a lot to her which made her hide it even from burning it by her mother. After seeing the burning of photographs by her mother, she was forced to think "our past is ashes" (84).

Through the incorporation of a few preserved photographs, the memoir makes readers aware of the customs, costumes, practices and social background of Yazidis. She even describes the costume of Yazidi through the attire of her nearest ones. "My father was known around Kocho for being a very traditional, devout Yazidi man. He wore his hair in long braids and covered his head with a white cloth" (16) while women wore white dresses and headscarves.

The memoir is also a site that lets people know the various food habits of a particular community. In Kocho, bread was the major food that they consumed. To Yazidis, each loaf was considered to be holy, "not just the holiday loaf baked for Batzmi, is holy to Yazidis" (Murad and Krajeski 84). Nadia Murad also describes how it was given a sacred place in their entire life. Mostly the bread was made by mixing it with sheep's butter. The Yazidis even believe the food they prepare has the power of protection for them. When they left their home to gather at the school as per the instruction of ISIS, Nadia Murad prayed "May the God who created this bread help us" (90). Thus, for Yazidis the bread acts as a symbol of protection just like how bread saves one from hunger.

Another symbol that acts as a strong site of cultural memory is monuments. To Yazidis, Lalish was a sacred monument that underlined their belief. “The temples are made of ancient stone and decorated with symbols taken from our stories... even though we can pray anywhere, prayer in the temples of Lalish is the most meaningful” (Murad and Krajeski 294). Nadia even remembers the day she got baptized at Lalish, when she was sixteen years. Lalish exists as a symbol of hope. The ritual of tying knots of silk fabric established the hope in all Yazidis. The memory of Lalish gives solace and inspiration to live. “Yazidis believe that Tawusi Melek first came to earth to connect human beings to God in a beautiful valley in northern Iraq called Lalish” (292). Her love towards her religion and culture enabled her to overcome the fear. Nadia Murad wants her religion to survive and overcome the struggles. Readers can comprehend her strong adherence to her religion through the lines, “Now I pray for the survival of my religion and my people” (29).

The genocides of Yazidis resulted in a huge decrease in their populations and the trauma made Yazidi women mentally weak. These instances symbolize that Yazidi culture is in a state of extinction. This memoir also aims to make people aware of her religion and their sufferings. The written document of her suffering is a form of her confirmation that her memoir will become a cultural monument filled with cultural memory for the entire world and thus her religion would live through it.

I propose that when reading and writing memoirs, it would be profitable to learn more about the purposes and functions of memory, whether long- or short-term, explicit or implicit, episodic or semantic. The operations of memory being as essential to memoir as, say, metrics is to poetry, the more we know about memory—from

psychological, philosophical, and scientific perspectives—the better we can understand the complex art of memoir. (Atwan)

Thus, some memoirs emerge as an authoritative site for cultural memory. The memoir of Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* cries out her struggles with inhuman experience which will make the coming generation aware of the hardships of Yazidis. Also being a site of cultural memory, through memoir Nadia writes down her communicative memory for the reference of future generation and thus writing a memoir acts as a site for transformation of communicative memory to cultural memory. Memoirs can express the real experience in its raw form and it can make others convinced about the hidden face of the world witnessed only by certain people.

Chapter 4

Cultural Memory as an Aid to Circumvent the Odds

Nadia Murad's life shows the ways in which cultural values have been imprinted in the minds of Yazidis. It is evident that what one hears always influenced them in many ways. Above all, her family and the place she was raised were elements of great influence which embedded the cultural values into the long term memory of Nadia Murad. Thus she was moulded to be strong like her mother even after the deadly experiences. She proves Yazidism is not only a religion; it is a way of life which imparts high cultural values that induce personal growth. Thus, the text *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* proves "culture is a strong part of people's lives. It influences their views, their values, their humour, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears" (Axner) which further decides the actions of each individual in accordance with the present situation.

Even today, attacks against Yazidis are prominent. The attack of Kocho village where Nadia was raised is one just example for the vulnerability faced by the Yazidi community. "On August 2014, the so-called Islamic State (Da'esh) attacked the ancient community of Yazidis of Mount Sinjar, massacring hundreds of men, enslaving thousands of women and children, and driving the population of some 350,000 Yazidis into camps for internally displaced persons in the Kurdistan region" (Allison). The very incident turned Nadia's life upside down. She was used as sex slave by ISIS and was ruthlessly abused by many militants. "ISIS tried to silence Nadia when they kidnapped and enslaved her, rape and tortured her and killed seven members of her family" (Clooney xi), but Nadia got over the shock and the memoir expounds how her cultural memory was the strongest medicine for her to overcome

the traumatic memories. At present, her cultural memory energised her to work strongly as a human activist. Nadia Murad's life represents the brutality of humanity against minority communities. Nadia Murad recollects her fearful experiences in her memoir.

Every Islamic state member treated me cruelly, and the rape was always the same, but I remember a few small differences between the men who abused me. Hajji Salman was the worst, in part because he was the first to rape me and in part because he acted the most like he hated me. He hit me if I tried to close my eyes. For him, it was not enough just to rape me – he humiliated me as often as he could, spreading honey on his toes and making me lick it off or forcing me to dress up for him. Morteja acted like a child who had been allowed a treat he had been whining for when he came to rape me, and I will never forget the other guard's glasses, the way he was so gentle with them and so vicious with me, a person. (Murad and Krajeski 185)

Nadia Murad recalls the punishment given to her by militants for screaming when she was being abused: "Then he spat in my face... Nafah pushed the lit cigarette into my shoulder, pressing it down through the fabric of the dresses and shirts I had layered on that morning, until it hit my skin and went out ... I tried not to scream in pain. Screaming only got you into more trouble" (127). In these tumultuous situations, it is necessary for Yazidis to find something pleasant in their life to live on. Their cultural beliefs and practices had helped them a lot to find their own place in this world. "Yazidis and other minorities are good at adjusting to new threats. Nadia Murad explains how Yazidis get used to the oppressions through the message, "you

have to be if you want to try to live something close to a normal life in a country that seemed to be coming apart ... We would, over generations, get used to a small pain or injustice until it became normal enough to ignore” (12). As Nadia today works as a human rights activist after enduring a huge amount of traumatized experience, the readers can conclude that she gained her will power and strength through her beliefs that were transmitted to her by the cultural background in which she was raised. Nadia Murad remembers that “colourful images of the peacock decorate many Yazidi houses, to remind us that it is because of his divine wisdom that we exist at all” (27).

After her escape, Nadia Murad visited the sacred monument of Yazidis situated at Lalish, where she gained strength and relief. The holiness of the place helped her to get rid of scaring memories and to gain stability in her life through redefining her identity. Nadia Murad states, “we needed temples and the solace they offered” (295). The healing words of their religious leader, Baba Sheikh are yet another source of inspiration that moulded Nadia into a strong woman today. “The Baba Sheikh met personally with escaped survivors, offering guidance and reassuring us that we could remain Yazidis” (295). Nadia Murad felt proud of her religion when it accepted the women as victims rather than as ruined women. The memory of Lalish where she was baptized always reminds Nadia of her cultural identity.

At first, when ISIS came to Kocho, the Yazidis never wanted to leave Kocho where they believed to be safe. “Yazidis have been persecuted for centuries because of our religious beliefs, and, compared to most Yazidi towns and villages, Kocho is far from Mount Sinjar, the high, narrow mountain that has sheltered us for generations” (Murad and Krajewski 4). To Yazidis, the place where they live is of extreme importance. “The Yazidis’ link with their homeland is a crucial part of the

faith” (Allison). The culture is constituted by the pleasant memories of one’s land which includes interesting sights of the land which calls one back to their homeland. Nadia Murad has never missed to write about the various sights of her village that lies deep inside her mind and her strong attachment to the sites enabled her to draw it through the words and has thus successfully imprinted the imagery in the readers too. When Nadia recalls her life in Kocho, she reminds herself even the minute factors of happy life in Kocho. In the opening of the first chapter, Nadia narrates her joyful childhood in Kocho. Her love for her land is even expressed in the lines in which she recalls her childhood games which include creating miniature Kocho out of discarded boxes and bits of trash. After capturing the Yazidis of Kocho including her, their belief of protection by their homeland might have shattered, but they did not entirely lose belief in their religion. Including Nadia, Yazidis believed something better in favour that God might perform on them. Even during the days of captivity, she goes back to the memory of her homeland. ISIS sold the Yazidi girls as sex slaves, also termed as *sabaya* to other militants of power. When Nadia was chosen by Haji Salman as a *Sabaya*, she was asked from where she was and while she answered she was from Kocho, she was taken back to fond memories of her land and her mother. Even her travel to the refugee camp reminded her of Kocho village where she was raised. “The roads leading to the camp was narrow and made of dirt. It reminded me of the road into Kocho before they paved it...I tried to imagine that I was actually going home” (Murad and Krajeski 280).

On the other hand, many geographical features of the village were a hope and was an aid for them to escape. The inhabitants of a land would know the features of the particular land better than anyone else. It paves the way to escape at times. Many had stayed in the mountains at Kocho to hide from ISIS. Yazidis trusted the mountain

to protect them from persecution because “over generations, Yazidis had fled to the safety of its caves, drunk from its streams, and survived on figs and pomegranates picked from its trees” (Murad and Krajeski 62). As the mountains are surrounded by temples and sheikhs, they believed God must be watching them closely. Hezni had escaped through the mountains on his foot as he knows all the corners of his village well. Khaleed’s escape after being shot at genocide is only due to the geographical conditions which include presence of hays at different sites of Kocho. “When the militants on top of the truck began firing, Khaled threw himself between two of the round bales of hay that were scattered across the farm and stayed there until the sun went down, shaking and nearly passing out from pain, all the time praying that a strong wind didn’t roll away the hay bales, exposing him” (106).

For Yazidis, as of their land, stars, sky and moon were of utmost value. When Nadia Murad was under captivity, she says, “the sky reminded me of an ancient love story my mother used to tell us called Layla and Manjum” (123). The remembering of the story was a kind of relief to her. Moon and sky were like godly figures to them. They often prayed to the moon during the time of crisis which fills them with hope. She recalls her mother performing prayer by interpreting the presence of the moon. Nadia Murad states “When the moon first appeared in the sky as a crescent, I would find her in the courtyard, lighting candles” (18). When ISIS surrounded the village of Kcocho, they prayed together to moon.

“look at the moon” ... yazidis believe that the sun and the moon are holy, two of God’s seven angels, and the moon that night was bright and big, the kind moon that would have lit up our farm when we worked at night and kept us from tripping on our farm when we

worked at night and kept us from on our walk home. “We are all praying to it right now. Tell the people in Kocho to join us”. (86)

Family can be considered as the place where cultural values are being poured down to the younger ones ever since the day of their birth. Nadia was born to a large family consisting of eight brothers. Families of Yazidis were large and she states the reason for it as that the “large families were the best way to guarantee that we didn’t die out completely” (15). This underlines the cultural trauma they suffer and the fear of their extinction.

It is clear that family memories belong primarily to the field of communicative memory, with its focus on everyday life, face-to-face interaction, oral communication, and its restricted time span of about three to four generations. However, communicative memory is linked to Cultural Memory and cannot be separated from the latter's myths. One striking example is how the Bible and other "cultural texts" (J. Assmann, 2006) shape family memory and provide cultural paradigms to interpret events that occur in small communities. Family memory is a framework of communicative remembering, which intersects with, feeds into and draws on, may be congruent, overlapping or at odds with the Cultural Memory. One of the most interesting questions in studying family memory is how culturally available narratives and images shape or are refracted by family remembrance-as well as vice versa, how family memories are translated into Cultural. (Erl, “Locating” 312)

Her mother, Shami's influence in her life concretised her internal mental strength and her character with unique boldness that is lacking in other girls. Shami's children were abandoned by her husband along with her after his new marriage, but Nadia's mother without losing courage, lived for her children being an inspiration and role model. Nadia Murad states "I wanted to be like her in every way, except I didn't want to be abandoned" (Murad and Krajeski 18). She remembers her mother as beautiful and religious. Shami had never gone to school and even the religious stories were unknown to her, but Nadia Murad recalls Shami's statement usually being told to her during the time of fear "God will protect the Yazidis" (25). The memoir mentions exact words of Shami indicating that her mother's statement echoes even today in her ears. Nadia Murad declares "there are so many things that remind me of my mother. The color white. A good and perhaps inappropriate joke. A peacock, which Yazidis consider a holy symbol, and the short prayers I say in my head when I see a picture of the bird. For twenty-one years, my mother was at the centre of each day" (25).

For Nadia, separation from her mother by ISIS was heart-breaking but her mother's memories still urge her to live courageously. Even the words of her mother provide her life with hope at the time of crisis. While Nadia Murad finds her niece, Katherine, who is scared, she consoled her with the words of her mother: "I told her, taking her hand. 'Everything is going to be alright.' It was what my mother told me, and even though I hadn't believed her, it had been her job to stay hopeful for her children just as it was now my job to stay hopeful for Kathrine" (51). Even while Peshmerga left Kocho in the hands of ISIS, her mother used to tell them, "we have to pray, God will save us" (61). When ISIS captured ID documents of Yazidis, Nadia Murad kept her mother's ration card tucked into her undergarments. It was a source of

her mother's memory. In the painful situation, she states that she held it in her hand for a moment, remembering her mother.

Her father was another source of inspiration, who poured human values in her life. His friends used to say that he always did what he felt as right. Nadia Murad describes "My father wasn't a bully, but he fought if he had to. He had lost an eye in a farm accident" (16). Once her father saved a Kurdish man and let him sleep in his house and when the police came, he told "I helped him because he is a man and I am a man" (17). Nadia Murad remembers these dialogues with pride and shows that one's parents play a central role in character formation in their life. Her father's personality might be a reason for what she does today to the welfare of people.

During the tough times, seeing her family members were a great source of hope and solace. After recalling the moment of her visit to Jilan and Nisreen, her sister-in-law and her niece while she was in ISIS captivity, she says "I had never been so happy to see anyone in my life" (181). When Nadia Murad was under ISIS captivity, she was brutally raped by many militants. Her punishment for being caught during her attempt to escape from one of the militants, Haji Salman creates a whirlwind of hurt in the readers' minds. Haji Salman commanded her to remove her clothes and she was thrown for whoever willing to abuse her. Nadia Murad screamed while being gang raped. She states "When you are a sabiyya, you die every second of every day" (182). She writes in her memoir that she screamed for her mother, and for her brother in memory of them who came whenever she needed them while she was in Kocho. Her expectation that her family would somehow save her was the only source of breath in her life. Even the militants reminded her as she is no longer a virgin, her family and community will abandon her. But Nadia never loses her will

power. She believed she could escape one day and she recollected her brother's phone number. At last her expectation that her family will be coming to help her comes true. Her brother Hezni strived for her escape and even today he works for saving Yazidis from the brutal hands of devilish humans. Even after she had been punished several times for her attempt to escape, her hope in God prompted her. When she got the final chance to escape, Nadia Murad was caught in a dilemma which questioned her whether she should try for an escape. But her belief in God reinforced her. Her memories of God catalysed her actions. She herself was led to the thought, "God has given me this chance and has made it easy for me to leave that house" (207).

The days in captivity made Yazidi women reluctant to have food and water and the only thing they needed was the presence of their near ones. But even not having food for a few days does not affect them because of their cultural practice of fasting. Nadia Murad reminds "In December we fast for three days to atone for our sins" (29). Yazidis also fasted in atonement for their sins and thus it must have made Nadia and other Yazidis enough to tolerate hunger and helped to gain mental strength. At the time when Nadia met Katherine during captivity, Katherine was looking weak and when Nadia showed concern about her situation she replied, "I'm fasting so that God might help us" (159) and Nadia gives an account of the ritual of fasting in the Yazidi community. "Yazidis observe two official fasts a year and we can choose to fast at other times, to reinforce our commitment to God and open up our communication to Tawusi Melek. Fasting can give us strength rather than take it away" (159).

The forced conversion of Yazidi women was common practice in captivity. ISIS wants to annihilate the cultural identity of all Yazidis and they urge people

forcibly to have faith in other religions. The conversion and neglecting Yazidism was much painful practice for Yazidism. She has stated “taking our religion from us was the cruellest” (151). After Haji Salman forcefully converted Nadia, even then her hope and strength was her religion. She clearly recalls her troubled mind and prayer during those moments. “I prayed to god furiously to forgive me for what was about to happen. I will always believe in you, I prayed. I will always be Yazidi” (150).

Nadia Murad, in her memoir *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State*, accounts her story of escape from ISIS and from haunting memories. Memorising and forgetting are a normal phenomenon to a human brain. But to forget what one tries to forget or the memories which one is reluctant to think is quite a difficult phenomenon. Life during the days of captivity is something that one struggles to forget. Memorising the traumatic experience will lead an individual into a state of trauma. To have an escape from the traumatic situation, one’s memory should own something solid that could induce a feeling of solace. “Traumatic transmissions are articulated over time not only through social sites or institutions but also through cultural, political, and familial generations, a key social mechanism of continuity and renewal across human groups, cohorts, and communities” (Amilivia). The story of Nadia Murad through her memoir suggests cultural memory owns the greater part of one’s memory and that it has the potential to bring one back to the normal state of life. This chapter endeavours to apprehend the way in which the cultural memory served as a weapon to resist and to gain strength for Nadia Murad who belongs to a Yazidi community.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“Memoir is about handing over your life to someone and saying, this is what I went through, this is who I am, and maybe you can learn something from it” (qtd. in “Jeannette Walls Quotes”).

The subjugation of the Yazidis can be seen as a microcosm of the treatment towards minority communities all over the world. The life of Nadia Murad proves that cultural memory of Yazidis has a strong potentiality that develops the personal growth of each individual through reinforcing resistance power with the aid of ‘figures of memory’. Today, Yazidis remain as an endangered race. The world, turning a blind eye to the sufferings of Yazidis makes their situation vulnerable. Genocide and sex slavery by ISIS symbolise the level of degradation faced by the Yazidis. Yazidism is a religion that is to be preserved just like the other religions for the mental growth of people of the particular community. In the hegemonic world, where the fight due to religion, culture, race, etc. exists, many minority communities like Yazidis struggle to find their own existence due to the loss of self-identity.

Even today Nadia Murad lives with the memories of her family, livelihood in Kocho and credence in Yazidism. Nadia Murad’s current room is decorated with the photographs of her mother and Katherine. The monument at Lalish healed her mental wound. The religious stories that echo in her ears along with the statements of her dear ones strengthen her. Yazidism which urges people to live close to nature induced Nadia Murad to find solace even in nature. Thus memories of culture strive to vanquish her haunting experiences that include watching her mother and brothers

being marched off to their deaths, her days of captivity where she had been traded from one ISIS militant to another, brutal rape by a group of men until she was unconscious, forceful conversion and forced dressing as prior preparation for rape. Nadia Murad through her memoir *The Last Girl*, exemplifies that in one's life, cultural memory performs the greatest role beyond comprehension to humans. Human memory is something that cannot be comprehended fully by science and the physical world. The action of cultural memory is magical and its healing power can be considered something that cannot be healed by medicines. Throughout centuries, people have been 'othered' based on their race, caste, culture, gender, etc. all over the world and a turning through the pages of history proves that one's cultural memory has the capability to strengthen a suffering human's mind with hope, inspiration and resistance power.

Along with getting rid of traumatic events from opening up her life story to the external world through writing a memoir, her choice of self-healing is blended with reassurance of her cultural continuity through the memoir. The memoir of Nadia Murad exists as a manner of preserving her cultural memory, as she describes the features of her culture along with her struggle for survival. In a situation where Yazidis are being attacked, their sites of cultural memory are being destroyed, decreasing in number of men to carry forward generation, the memoir *The Last Girl* turns out as a figure of cultural memory for future generations to link the past, present and future. The memoir unveils the truth behind the false accusations against the Yazidi religion and now, it has secured a place in historical records as the text outlines the history and struggles of their religion. The element of truth in memoirs is comparatively high as compared to other non-fiction and so the readers are aroused with empathy and thus, get attached to the text as if they are witnessing the events in

front. The memoir, *The Last Girl*, has the potential to make readers aware about the sufferings of her community in its raw form. As the memoir of Nadia Murad epitomizes the healing power and acts as a reference point of cultural memory, other survival stories that function similarly include the memoirs of stolen children (for example, *My Place* by Sally Morgan), North Korean defectors (for example, *In Order to Live* by Park Yeon-mi), holocaust victims (for example, *The Diary of A Young Girl* by Anne Frank), etc. This underlines the fact that the preservation of cultural memory should be promoted for betterment of growth of moral values of society and also to have an escape from the tumultuous sphere of society.

In addition to the existential crisis that they suffer, Nadia Murad's memoir can be considered as an outcry for cultural liberalism for all minority communities who are being dehumanized, downtrodden, suppressed and marginalised by power and force. According to Amal Clooney, a human rights lawyer who wrote foreword for Nadia Murad's memoir states, "Nadia has not only found her voice, she has become the voice of every Yazidi who is a victim of genocide, every woman who has been abused, every refugee who has been left behind" (xi). What takes place in the so-called civilized world is really a matter to ponder upon: refugees are denied a place to live with freedom, dignity and equality; people fight each other in the name of religion, women are being used as sex slaves, rape becomes a weapon to fight which indicates a reconstruction of what Yazidis went through in Iraq. Cultural liberalism could be attained only through preserving cultures. The first and foremost measure to preserve culture should be through education which has the power to mould people to develop a respect between cultures. It has the power to broaden minds, cultivate camaraderie and respect for varied cultures other than only focusing on one's own. Education, therefore minimise attacks based on religion and ethnicity. Nadia Murad's

memoir explains that the attacks of Yazidis increased in Iraq as misinterpretations about Yazidi culture spread because their history of existence was not even included in the school history textbooks of their own country. Nadia Murad proclaims “I later thought that those books must be one reason why our neighbours joined ISIS or did nothing while the terrorists attacked Yazidis” (Murad and Krajeski 30). Secondly, preservation of figures of cultural memory should be considered, so that the holiness, along with the healing power of it could be used as human strength. For example, the feeling of relief that Nadia Murad experienced after visiting Lalish; even its architectural style, the celebrations, the rituals, and the threads used for prayer are part of cultural belief and practice. Through her memoir, she reminds the readers about how the ritual of tying knots of silk fabric by praying promoted hope in her. It is alarming to note how even in the present era, people find pride and morality in causing destruction in the form of genocide, destruction of monuments, places, and texts, etc. in the name of religion. In between, the world forgets about what is real human suffering.

“War, civil disorder, terrorism, theft, neglect and vandalism are just some of the factors that have contributed to the accidental or wilful destruction of our heritage” (Jayaram). These distractions are an evil to society and should be controlled to ensure the peaceful existence of humans. The most authoritative wing of the world that can bring out a change in safeguarding human rights is the United Nations General Assembly. Universal Declaration of Human Rights has to be more focused towards such issues that safeguard the existence of all communities. Even if Article 27 of UDHR states “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its

benefits” (United Nations), the authority should take up responsibility to ensure what the articles state is being enforced.

In a world where religion is seen as a dividing power, Nadia gains courage and strength from her memories of the Yazidi culture to which she was born into. Today, while all Yazidis are on the verge of extinction due to blindness of the entire world towards the attack against them, her memoir, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity and My Fight against the Islamic State* remain as a ‘figure of memory’ to the future. As a part of humanity, respect towards each culture has to be trained and cultural memory in a human has to be strengthened, so that, like Nadia, many could resurrect through the cultural memory that concretizes faith, resistance and thus pave way to survival.

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