

**RIVER OF REMEMBRANCE: EXPLORING
COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN
ELIF SHAFAK'S *THERE ARE RIVERS IN THE SKY***

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English Language and Literature

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PREFACE

As water scarcity grows, sea levels rise around the world and scandals over the illegal dumping of sewage into our rivers and seas continue, a novel about the politics and preciousness of water is timely. The course of human history is intimately tied to the world's oceans and rivers, which sustain our very existence. This crisis demands a nuanced exploration of the intersections between environment, culture, and identity. Through the lens of storytelling, we can explore the intricate web of relationships between humans and the natural world, and uncover new perspectives on the value and meaning of water. By examining the complexities of our relationship with water, we can work towards a more sustainable future. The fate of our planet hinges on our ability to protect and preserve this vital resource. The consequences of inaction will be catastrophic, but the power to create change lies within us. As we navigate this critical moment in human history, stories have the power to inspire, educate, and motivate us to take action.

Elif Shafak, a unique and powerful voice in world literature, is a celebrated Turkish-British author and intellectual, who is renowned for her thought-provoking novels that delve into themes like identity, gender, politics, and culture. Elif Shafak has a wonderful skill of telling stories through the lens of the most unassuming of things and weaving a beautiful narrative of life that makes the reader feel connected. Her latest literary work, *There are Rivers in the Sky*, is the story of a vanished poem, two mighty rivers, and three extraordinary lives, all bound together by one drop of water (Blackman). With her signature style, Elif Shafak, presents another mystical novel in which time dissolves in the timeless water of two rivers and the characters who live beside them. The story flows like the rivers from ancient Nineveh to present-day

London, with characters of the distant past as bright and vivid as those of today.

This is a book about water, not just as a resource but as a source of stories and memories, about an ancient poem and rivers – those seen and unseen, about Mesopotamia, Nineveh and Constantinople. Through this narrative, Shafak finds the world in a drop of water, which raises big ideas of “who owns the past” with nuance and complexity. Elif Shafak ties together diverse time periods and places in a way that seems both natural and wonderfully unexpected.

The dissertation “River of Remembrance: Exploring Collective Memory and identity in Elif Shafak’s *There are Rivers in the Sky*” is a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the intricate relationships between memory, identity, and narrative. It comprises four chapters. The introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the study, offering a thoughtful overview of the subject matter and a detailed analysis of the text’s content. Chapter two, “The Drop That Connects”, explores the interconnectedness of collective memory and identity through the lens of a single drop of water. Chapter three, “Collective Echoes”, delves into the power of stories in shaping and understanding identity and shared memory while the concluding chapter summarizes key findings and reinforces insights from the preceding sections, offering a profound reflection on the significance of memory and identity. The final chapter concludes the exploration of how collective memory serves as a powerful repository of shared narratives, shaping the formation of individual and group identity as the characters grapple with the complexities of love, loss, and their struggle for redemption amidst overwhelming suffering.

Chapter One

Introduction

Climate change is disrupting weather patterns, leading to more frequent and more intense weather events, unpredictable water availability, exacerbating water scarcity and contaminating water supplies. Such impacts can drastically affect the quantity and quality of water that is needed to survive. Water and climate change are inextricably linked. Climate change affects the world's water in complex ways. From unpredictable rainfall patterns to shrinking ice sheets, rising sea levels, floods and droughts – most impacts of climate change come down to water. Climate change is exacerbating both water scarcity and water related hazards as rising temperatures disrupt precipitation patterns and the entire water cycle. Despite massive infrastructure investments, countries in the Middle East and North Africa region continue to face unprecedented water scarcity due to climate change, population growth, and socioeconomic development.

The Middle East and North Africa region is naturally prone to being hot and dry, in stark contrast with the rest of the world. The region's arid climate is the primary contributor to its perennial state of water scarcity. When coupled with the region's limited freshwater supplies and growing demand for water, virtually all Middle East and North Africa countries are facing elevated levels of water stress. The amplifying effects of climate change threaten to increase the gap between water supply and water demand in the region by aggravating drought conditions. The longer-term consequences of water scarcity that increase this imbalance extend

beyond insufficient water availability. Concerns over water quality, critical water infrastructure, and transboundary water cooperation may also compound the region's existing socioeconomic challenges.

Elif Shafak is a distinguished writer and public figure of Turkish and British descent, known for her profound literary works that explore complex themes. Born in Strasbourg, France in 1971, she spent her formative years in Ankara, Turkey, before moving to Istanbul for her education. With a writing career spanning over two decades, Shafak has authored numerous books in both Turkish and English, delving into topics such as identity, gender dynamics, politics, culture, and spirituality. Her unique writing style blends storytelling, poetry, and philosophy, reflecting her multicultural upbringing and experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society. Shafak's literary prowess has garnered global recognition, with her works translated into more than fifty languages and earning her prestigious awards such as the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres from the French government, the Pen Writers in Prison Award, and the Freedom of Expression Award from the Association of American Publishers.

Beyond her literary achievements, Shafak actively contributes to newspapers and journals, delivering speeches to esteemed universities and international forums, where she sheds light on various socio-political issues. The fabric of Shafak's personal life and experiences is intricately woven into her worldview and writing style. Growing up in a diverse family with a diplomat father and a journalist mother, she embarked on journeys to different countries, immersing herself in diverse cultures. Shafak has been candid about her battles with depression

and anxiety; themes she addresses in her non-fiction works. Moreover, she has faced persecution and censorship in Turkey due to her outspoken advocacy for issues like gender equality, freedom of expression, and minority rights. *There are Rivers in the Sky* written by Elif Shafak, is a tale of two great rivers-the Tigris and the Thames- and three remarkable characters living in the shadow of one of the greatest epic poems of all time - *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This ambitious, multi-perspective novel about the politics and preciousness of water spans across centuries from ancient Mesopotamia to contemporary London, with all narratives connected by a single drop of water. The story is a beautiful ode to the historic city of Nineveh, offering a thoughtful examination of how our relentless pursuit of “civilization” precipitates the erasure of our collective heritage, encompassing our histories, memories, losses, and the very essence that unites us. Informed by her diverse background and experiences, Elif Shafak is a cosmopolitan writer of Turkish descent, born in Strasbourg, France, who spent her childhood and teenage years in Madrid, Spain, and Amman, Jordan. She later settled and taught in Arizona before dividing her time between Istanbul and London. Shafak is known for her vocal criticism of the Turkish government and is a strong advocate for women’s rights and free speech. Her works faced accusations of “crimes of obscenity” by Turkish prosecutors in 2019, which led her to live in self-imposed exile in London.

In recent years, she has written some novels such as *The Gaze* (2000), *The Flea Palace* (2002), *The Saint of Incipient Insanities* (2004), *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), *Black Milk* (2007), *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009), *Honour* (2011), *The Architect Apprentice* (2013), *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016), *10*

Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World (2019) among others. Shafak's recent novel *The Island of Missing Trees* have been shortlisted for the Costa Novel Award. She is one of the best-selling authors in many countries around the world and her works have been translated into 55 languages. Shafak holds a distinguished position as a Fellow and a Vice President of Royal Society of Literature. In 2021, she has also been recognised by BBC as one of their most inspiring and influential women. As an advocate for women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and freedom of expression, Shafak is an inspiring public speaker and twice TED Global speaker. Her fierce advocacy for equality and freedom of speech has brought her into conflict with the increasingly repressive government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* has predominantly brought her into many book prizes including (but not limited to) Orange Prize for Fiction in London 2008, Marka Award 2010, Prix ALEF 2011. However, instead of the book prizes she successfully won, her publication of *The Bastard of Istanbul* led her into a legal accusation against her in 2006. She was accused of 'insulting Turkishness' by a nationalist lawyer, Kemal Kerincsiz, in 2006 due to the book's exposition of the 'Armenian Genocide'. Shafak's writing style harmoniously blends storytelling, philosophy, and poetry, as she navigates intricate themes such as identity, culture, history, gender, and spirituality, often infusing elements of magical realism and folklore. Her narratives captivate readers with vivid descriptions, multiple narrators, symbolism, and metaphor, while her multidimensional characters grapple with self-discovery, cultural identity, and personal growth. Shafak's prose, characterized by clarity, elegance, and lyrical qualities, resonates with readers on

both intellectual and emotional levels. While opinions on Elif Shafak's works vary across different cultural and linguistic contexts, her literary contributions have garnered global acclaim. In Türkiye, she is perceived as a pioneering feminist voice challenging traditional Turkish notions, although some criticize her for not being fully representative of Turkish culture. Conversely, in the United Kingdom and the United States, her works have been well-received, earning her awards and nominations. In essence, Elif Shafak's literary legacy transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, captivating audiences worldwide with her unique style and exploration of profound themes. The early decades of the twentieth century marked the inception of diasporic literature, denoting literary works penned by immigrant writers residing in various Diasporas. Elif Shafak's writing explores themes of diaspora and displacement, and she often highlights the experiences of marginalized groups. To effectively convey the messages, she opted to write in English, aiming to connect with a global readership. A shared set of themes began to crystallize among diasporic writers encompassing concepts such as home, exile, identity, hybridity, memory and displacement. Shafak's work often explores themes of identity, memory, and power in a postcolonial world gaining international recognition. Her expertise encompasses topics such as international politics, far-right populism, pluralism, and democracy. The history of humanity is marked by a long history of warfare and damage caused by conflicts. Many writers originated from disasters that befell humanity. Elif Shafak is one such author and her works centre around concepts of identity, memory, and power in the context of a postcolonial world, and have been widely translated and have gained international

recognition, but their reception in different cultural and linguistic contexts has been shaped by diverse factors. *There are Rivers in the Sky* is an elaborate and sprawling narrative that explores centuries, continents and cultures. The story centres around a lost poem, two grand rivers, and three individuals all linked by a single droplet of water. Spanning across different times, specifically the 19th century and modern times, the novel largely covers opposing phenomena such as love and loathing, memory and oblivion, tragedy and joy, all in the genre of historical fiction. Shafak's diverse background is reflected in her writing, which often draws upon her own experiences in different cultures. Her works extensively examine the intertwined relationships of identity, culture, and history, allowing her readers to engage with profound social and political issues. *There are Rivers in the Sky* vividly illustrates the pressing themes of displacement, memory, and hope that resonate throughout her narrative. The backdrop of historical and cultural upheaval serves as a critical framework against which her characters navigate their struggles. Displacement emerges as a central theme, reflecting the experiences of individuals uprooted from their homes, traditions, and identities.

Cultural displacement involves immersing an individual in a foreign culture, often resulting in the gradual erosion of their native cultural ties. This separation can manifest psychologically, physically, or culturally, rendering it a significant contemporary theme. Notably, literature spanning from the 1980s to the present day has prominently featured this theme, particularly within the realm of postcolonial discourse and diasporic writings. Authors navigating multiple cultures tend to cultivate diverse perspectives, thanks to the multicultural lens they inhabit.

With globalization effectively shrinking the world into a global village, concepts like homelessness and alienation have become increasingly relatable experiences for a substantial portion of the population. This backdrop underscores the ongoing journey of identity construction, which invariably delves into a quest for authenticity. Assimilating into a new culture invariably entails adopting its practices, thereby giving rise to an identity that interweaves elements of both the native and host cultures, a hybrid cultural identity. The amalgamation of disparate cultural elements also serves to foster a hybrid identity. Individuals embracing bicultural identities attribute immense significance to their ethnicities, traditions, and overall sense of self. Shafak expertly captures the emotional toll that such dislocation inflicts, emphasizing the longing for belonging that accompanies the journey of her characters. This not only reveals their personal battles but also highlights the broader implications of societal change and migration.

Memory plays a central character in most of Shafak's novels. Be it the memory of a corpse in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* or the conflicting familial memories in *The Bastard of Istanbul*. In her more recent publications such as *The Island of Missing Trees*, her keen observation of relationship with history and the memories embedded within the collective consciousness of minority groups was given a new meaning. Memory studies is a multidisciplinary field which combines intellectual strands from anthropology, education, literature, history, philosophy, psychology and sociology; an international and interdisciplinary field of research that has grown significantly over the past decades. Remembering and forgetting are still intriguing subjects in

academia, particularly concerning the relationship between literary theory and memory studies, which often feature regular symposia and diverse programs.

The objects of the field are equally heterogeneous; memorials, paintings, installations, and what interests us in particular, literature, are being studied for their potential to represent the past in the present. Methodology, new perspectives and methods have been established in recent years, especially approaches that bring to the fore the entanglement of different acts of remembering. Memory stabilises grand narratives of history and power, as memory, remembering and recording are the very key to existence, becoming and belonging.

Memory is not simply an individual phenomenon, but is relational in terms of family and friends, and also societal and collective in terms of the social frameworks of social groups. Most studies of mediated memory tend to focus on elite-news media coverage of extreme events such as wars, political revolutions, assassinations, displacements, etc. and the field has a close relationship to Holocaust studies. Although no consensus exists either within or across disciplines on the very definition of collective memory and its ownership, there is agreement that such memory is shareable among members of a social group or community, be it a nation, an institution, a religious group, or a family. Memory was always a preoccupation for social thinkers, though it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that a distinctively social perspective on memory became prominent with the use of the term 'collective memory' by Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick and Robbins 105-40).

Memory research is closely linked to many issues at the forefront of contemporary political debate, particularly the political effects of the continuing presence of past hurts in the present. Scholarly interest in memory has resurfaced since the 1980s. While psychologists were more interested in memory from an individual perspective, sociological theorists emphasize the social and cultural bases of shared memories. The focus has generally been on “how these forms of remembering operate as collective representations of the past, how they constitute a range of cultural resources for social and historical identities, and how they privilege particular readings of the past and subordinate others” (Keightley and Pickering⁶⁷).

The interdisciplinary concept of collective memory emerged within the social sciences and humanities. Going back to the theories of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the attribute ‘collective’ that precedes the noun ‘memory’ implies that the process of remembering unfolds within societies. Individuals and collectives, therefore, remember in present social frames (Halbwachs). Moreover, through remembering, they each establish a continuity between the past, present, and future. This process, in turn, shapes their identities, behaviour, attitudes, and choice. In its collective form, memory thus is lifted out of the minds and brains of individuals and instead is socially generated in societal frameworks. In its collective form, memory works differently than the individual concept of ‘remembering’ would suggest. Even if remembering is a human cognitive capacity and memories are born in peoples' brains, we are unaware that we are but an echo. In describing the social process of remembering, collective memory is not about the past but is

firmly anchored in the present and future. Collective memory describes the process through which the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present. The past and the present in this view become two zones of the same domain. Notably, collective memory recalls past experiences, but it is about their present interpretation.

Collective memory's direct link to the social creation of identity renders the concept highly political. While sociologists ask what memory is, political scientists focus on what one can do with it. Once sociologists had firmly anchored collective memory in present social frames, political scientists hence began to examine the political struggle to manipulate and instrumentalize these frames. Collective memory seems to be shaped by schematic narrative templates, or knowledge structures that serve to narrate the story of a people, often emphasizing heroic and even mythic elements while minimizing negative or inconsistent ones. Perhaps the most interesting feature of collective memory is its restless nature. The past is continually being reshaped in memory and many conflicts around the world today reflect different interpretations of the past and about who owns history and memory.

Collective memory constitutes a communal reservoir of recollections, cognizance, and information within a social collective, inextricably linked with the formation and perpetuation of group identity. This phenomenon manifests as a socially constructed narrative of the past, moulded by shared experiences and a profound sense of affiliation, thereby influencing the group's self-perception and its situational awareness within the global context. Collective memory assumes a pivotal role in delineating group identity by furnishing a shared historical context,

axiomatic values, and a sense of teleological purpose. Through a dynamic process of negotiation and hermeneutic interpretation of past events, groups construct a narrative that reinforces their identity and axiological frameworks. This collective memory frequently becomes a locus of politico-ideological contestation and social dialectics, exerting a profound impact on power dynamics and interpersonal relations. Ultimately, collective memory is indispensable for comprehending and preserving cultural identity, with inherited narratives, rituals, and creeds contributing to the group's cultural ontology.

Her latest release, *There are Rivers in the Sky*, compels the reader to look beyond the conventional form of human memory expressed via mere speech or writing. This novel, much like her previous works, reflects the fluidity of existence. In *There are Rivers in the Sky*, memory is explored through various characters and themes, including the concept of perfect memory, the preservation of cultural stories, and the impact of trauma on memory. The novel highlights the power of memory as a connection to the past and a way to understand the present, while also acknowledging its fallibility and the potential for memory to be manipulated or erased. The characters' memories serve as a link to past events and historical figures, allowing them to connect with the experiences of others and understand the present context in the novel. The author uses the metaphor of water, specifically rivers, to link three characters — Arthur, Narin, and Zaleekhah — across centuries and continents, creating a delicate web of memory, history, and identity. The Thames in Arthur's London, the Tigris in Narin's war-torn Turkey, and the rivers in Zaleekhah's world serve not only as backdrops but as living symbols of the

transience of life, shaping the destinies of these characters. The novel suggests that memory can be a source of healing and a way to process trauma. By actively engaging with the past, characters like Zaleekhah are able to find meaning and purpose in their lives.

Shafak's novel explores the concept that water retains memories of its past forms. Shafak's homiletic narrator tells us that water can initiate the "melding of markers". Soon enough, our principal curiosity is about how these distinctly demarcated narrative sections might be brought together. As is Shafak's stock in trade, unlikely characters are united through vibrant recurring motifs, fabulist coincidences and rigorously highlighted thematic parallels. There is, perhaps, pleasure to be had in Shafak's corralling of divergent subject matter around ideas of the pull of the past and the endurance of water.

The novel's exploration of tough themes and complex issues, such as war, climate change, socio-economic differences, the loot and plunder of Middle Eastern artefacts, religious divisions and genocide, can sometimes be overwhelming for readers. Shafak creates a dense narrative that demands careful attention and could also induce some polarisation, especially with what is going on in the realm of geopolitics currently. The inclusion of magical realism adds another layer of intricacy, potentially confusing those who prefer a more straightforward storyline. This may lead to a reading experience that feels more challenging rather than engaging. When not managed well, this can alienate readers rather than draw them in. However, the beautiful prose, powerful analogies, well-crafted characters and the varied layers of meanings balance things out.

There are Rivers in the Sky is peppered with ancient anecdotes and descriptions of what prevails long after civilisations are destroyed is a definite lesson in history. More than the characters, it is the beautiful backdrops, brimming with past and cultural significance, that stand out. Ancient Nineveh, with its grandeur and mystique, emerges vividly. This city is located in Mosul, in present-day Iraq, at the confluence of the rivers, Tigris and Khosr, from where Noah's Ark left. In vastly different characters, locations and times we find connection and resonance. It was once an epicentre of innovation, where Mesopotamian scribes etched the earliest cuneiform scripts on to clay tablets. Still known for its beautiful architecture and monuments, the bustling streets and monumental structures of this area reflect the bygone era, as if the very walls hold the secrets of ancient wisdom and myth.

Similarly, the Yazidi villages, rich in their culture, come to life in equal measure. The traditions and rituals of these communities are not just elements of the story but dynamic forces that shape their world. Each festival, each customary practice, and every detail of daily life in these villages is portrayed with profound depth, becoming as memorable and impactful as the characters themselves. The backdrops showcase how they are intertwined with human experience, driving the story forward through symbolism and resonance.

Elif Shafak reflects on the intricate relationship between memory, conscience, and identity, a question that occupies their thoughts frequently. Hailing from Turkey, a country with a rich and complex history, they note that this heritage does not necessarily translate into a strong collective memory. Instead, Turkish

society often exhibits a form of collective amnesia, where the past is marked by numerous ruptures. These voids are frequently filled by ultranationalist or Islamist interpretations that offer grandiose narratives of the past.

However, when one begins to ask seemingly innocuous questions about the lives of ordinary people from diverse backgrounds, such as an Armenian silversmith, a Jewish miller, a Kurdish peasant, an Arab farmer, or a Greek sailor, the silence is palpable. Similarly, inquiries into the experiences of women in the Ottoman Empire, including those of concubines, are met with a lack of information. The storyteller believes that writers should not only be drawn to stories but also to the silences and the silenced narratives. By exploring these gaps, writers can uncover the complexities of the past and give voice to those who have been marginalized or forgotten.

In this pursuit, oral storytelling and oral history play a crucial role. While written culture may forget certain aspects of the past, oral culture often preserves these memories, helping us gain “a more precise insight into the peculiar qualities of this everyday form of collective memory” (Assmann 127). The storyteller highlights the importance of oral traditions in filling the gaps left by written records and in providing a more nuanced understanding of history. By embracing both the stories and the silences, writers can create a more comprehensive and empathetic portrayal of the past, one that acknowledges the diversity of human experiences and the complexity of collective memory and identity.

There are Rivers in the Sky is a love letter to water especially to the mighty and arcane Tigris and Euphrates. From Mesopotamia to Constantinople to the banks

of the River Thames, the story covers the multiple life cycles of a single raindrop, and the everlasting conquest for a poem lost to the waves of time, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Two great rivers and three lives connected by a single drop of water with one of our characters even being a hydrologist with an interconnected love story entwining rain, rivers and raindrops. The book delves into the climate crisis, the water crisis which truly make readers think about water in a different way; what we do as humans, where our water goes, how we can look after water, how water serves us and how we live on the same wavelength as it.

Elif Shafak in *There are Rivers in the Sky* has masterfully crafted an epic narrative that not only captivates readers with its terrific storytelling but also serves as a poignant reminder of the dual nature of humanity. On one hand, humans possess the capacity to create great art and achieve remarkable feats of civilization. On the other hand, they also harbour a profound ability to destroy and devastate, often driven by arrogance and frailty. This paradox is a recurring theme throughout the novel, highlighting the complexities and contradictions of human nature. The novel's exploration of this duality serves as a powerful commentary on the human condition, inviting readers to reflect on the intricate balance between creation and destruction that has shaped the course of human history. Through this exploration, the novel also underscores the significance of collective memory in shaping identity, as the characters' experiences and the historical events that unfold reveal the profound impact of shared memories and narratives on individual and communal identities, ultimately highlighting the complex interplay between collective memory, identity, and the human condition.

Chapter Two

The Drop That Connects

Following a long period of neglect, research on different facets of collective memory is now developing apace in the human and social sciences, as well as at their interface with psychology and neuroscience. This resolutely multidisciplinary renewal of interest in memory sciences has given rise to a plethora of concepts with diverse meanings within the social frameworks of memory: collective, shared, collaborative, and social memory. The purpose of the present study was to provide a conceptual overview from a historical perspective, and above all to clarify concepts that are often used interchangeably, even though they refer to very different realities. Based on recent research in psychology and neuroscience, we use the concept of collective memory to refer to the operations of individual systems of consciousness. Collective memory is not the memory of a collective, but that of its individual members, either as members of social groups of shared memory or as participants in social interactions of collaborative memory.

Drawing on the contributions of contemporary sociology, we show that social memory is not collective memory, as it refers not to individual systems of consciousness, but to social systems. More specifically, it is the outcome of communication operations which, through redundancy and repetition, perform a continuous and selective re-imprinting of meaning that can be used for communication. Writing, printing and the new communication technologies constitute the three historical stages in the formation and development of an

autonomous social memory, independent of living memories and social interactions. In the modern era, mass media fulfil an essential function of social memory, by sorting between forgetting and remembering on a planetary scale. When thinking about the articulation between collective memory and social memory, the concept of structural coupling allows us to identify two mechanisms by which individual systems of consciousness and social systems can interact and be mutually sensitized of schemas and scripts, and social roles.

The concept of collective memory in literature offers a nuanced understanding of how literary works reflect and shape the shared past of a group or society. This phenomenon transcends individual recollections, encompassing communal narratives, cultural symbols, and historical events that bind a group together and influence their identity. Through a critical examination of collective memory in literature, we can gain insight into the complex ways in which shared experiences, cultural traditions, and historical events shape a group's understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Collective memory plays a pivotal role in shaping a group's identity, providing a sense of belonging and continuity. By preserving and transmitting shared experiences and cultural values, literature helps to construct and reinforce collective memory, which in turn influences how a group perceives the world, their values, and their actions. The interplay between collective memory and identity is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the dynamic nature of memory and its susceptibility to reinterpretation and reconstruction.

The fluidity of collective memory is a crucial aspect of its nature, as it is constantly being reconstructed and reinterpreted based on present-day contexts.

This malleability is reflected in literature, where collective memory is often reimagined and reinterpreted through the lens of contemporary concerns and perspectives. By examining the ways in which collective memory is constructed, transmitted, and transformed in literature, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of memory and identity.

Collective memory's direct link to the social creation of identity renders the concept highly political. While sociologists ask what memory is, political scientists focus on what one can do with it. Once sociologists had firmly anchored collective memory in present social frames, political scientists hence began to examine the political struggle to manipulate and instrumentalize these frames. Ultimately, literature serves as a powerful tool for preserving, transmitting, and shaping collective memory, influencing a group's understanding of its past, present, and future. Through the exploration of collective memory in literature, we can gain insight into the ways in which shared experiences, cultural traditions, and historical events shape a group's identity and inform their values and actions. By examining the complex dynamics of collective memory in literature, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which memory and identity are intertwined, and how literature reflects and shapes our understanding of the world around us.

The relationship between collective memory and identity in literature is complex and multifaceted, with shared narratives and experiences shaping individual and group identities. Collective memory provides a sense of continuity and belonging, influencing how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world. Shared memories, such as historical events or cultural traditions, form

the foundation of collective identity, transmitted through stories, rituals, and cultural artefacts that shape a group's self-perception and understanding of its past. Literary works serve as powerful vehicles for transmitting and interpreting collective memory, drawing upon shared historical narratives, cultural myths, and social experiences to construct characters, plots, and themes that resonate with a particular community.

The interpretation of collective memory is also influenced by individual and group identities, which shape how memories are understood and remembered. People interpret events and experiences through the lens of their social and cultural background, leading to diverse perspectives on the same historical events. In diasporic literature, the relationship between collective memory and identity is explored in the context of displacement and cultural exchange, where shared memories of a homeland are preserved and transformed in new environments. Furthermore, collective memory can be manipulated and reinterpreted for political purposes, and literature can challenge dominant narratives, expose historical injustices, and promote alternative perspectives on collective memory.

Through literary works, we can gain insight into the ways collective memory shapes identity and informs cultural values. Examples of this can be seen in various literatures, such as American literature's exploration of slavery, the Civil War, and immigration, Japanese literature's grappling with the collective memory of trauma and its influence on national identity, and Iranian Baha'i literature's examination of how collective memory of persecution shapes the social identity of the Baha'i community. Exile and diaspora literature also explores the relationship

between collective memory and identity in the context of displacement and cultural adaptation. Ultimately, the dynamic relationship between collective memory and identity in literature demonstrates how shared pasts shape individual and group identities, influencing our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Aquatic memory is an emerging area of research in literature. It explores the symbolic and metaphorical use of water to represent the collective memories and experiences of individuals and communities. This concept explores the ways in which water, with its fluid and ever-changing nature, can serve as a repository of cultural knowledge, historical events, and personal narratives. Through the use of aquatic metaphors, authors can convey the complex and multifaceted nature of collective memory, highlighting how it can be both a source of healing and a reminder of trauma. By examining the role of water in shaping identity, cultural knowledge, and historical narratives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which collective memory is constructed, transmitted, and transformed over time. Ultimately, aquatic memory in literature offers a powerful lens through which to explore the intricate relationships between memory, identity, and the human experience.

The concept of aquatic memory in literature offers a profound lens through which to examine the complexities of collective memory, revealing how water shapes identity, transmits cultural knowledge, and embodies both the triumphs and traumas of human history. Water can serve as a repository of collective memory, holding the stories and experiences of those who have come before. The fluidity of water allows for the transmission of cultural knowledge and historical events across time and space, shaping the identities of individuals and

communities. By exploring the relationship between water and collective memory, we can see how aquatic memory can be both a source of healing and a reminder of trauma, underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of human experience. Ultimately, the concept of aquatic memory in literature provides a powerful framework for understanding the ways in which collective memory is shaped and transmitted. By examining the role of water in shaping identity, cultural knowledge, and historical narratives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of collective memory and its impact on individual and communal experiences. Through the lens of aquatic memory, we can see how the past continues to flow into the present, shaping our understanding of course

Elif Shafak's exploratory and spiritual storytelling blends historical fiction and magical realism seamlessly. She expertly uses fiction as a gentle but impactful form of activism, giving a voice to the silenced. This is a strikingly emotive narrative that highlights the ugly and beautiful truths of humanity. *There are Rivers in the Sky*, Shafak's beautifully written and heartfelt prose novel never shies away from the profoundly important issues. A delicately layered and deeply moving plot unfolds alongside the journey of a single drop of water, characters leap from the pages and tug at the readers heartstrings. She writes with a combined voice of empathy and outrage, which translates to an emotional rollercoaster for the reader. In *There are Rivers in the Sky*, Elif Shafak explores the interconnectedness of individual and collective memory and identity, particularly how they are shaped by displacement, migration, and the stories we inherit and create. The novel uses the motif of water and its symbolic connection to memory to examine how personal

experiences, both individual and shared across generations, contribute to a sense of belonging and self. A droplet of water brings together the epic tale of Gilgamesh from the library of the well-read yet cruel King Ashurbanipal in the forgotten city of Mesopotamia in 600 BC to three different stories in three different timelines. Elif Shafak's latest novel progress with a self-sustaining cadence not unlike that of rivers. To write a novel on water, Elif Shafak has turned herself into a river – depositing a book of all that she has carried within her. The result is tumultuous prose – substantial stories capable of anchoring at heart, a torrent-like flow which perceptibly slows down at points, and a flood of words that seem too busy to grasp in totality.

There are Rivers in the Sky charts a water droplet's journey, beginning with a raindrop stuck to the hair of the Assyrian tyrant Ashurbanipal, who ruled in the 600th century BC. The droplet evaporates – as does his civilisation – to return to Victorian England as a snowflake that makes its way to the mouth of Arthur, modelled closely on Assyriologist George W. Smyth. The novel follows Arthur as he leaves the Thames for the Tigris, lavishing attention to his inner world and the unique scholarly temper that leads him from the London slums to the halls of the British Museum where he translates The Epic of Gilgamesh. But we are also parallelly introduced to two more lines of story – one, a Yazidi girl Narin who prepares to leave the 12,000-year-old city of Hasankeyf in Turkey to visit the Tigris River in Iraq 2014, and two, a hydrologist Zaleekhah in 2018 London who takes up a home on a houseboat on the Thames when life does her dirty. Arthur, Narin and

Zaleekhah's stories progress like three streams but we read with the implicit knowledge that they will become one soon.

Loosely based on the life of an Assyriologist called George Smith, Arthur sustains and drives the story (Faconti). The odds are stacked against him from the start. Born into poverty and surviving the cruelty that comes along with it, he manages to change the course of the future; and impact the ideologies of society with his talent, curiosity and dedication. In translating a cuneiform tablet, an excerpt from The Epic of Gilgamesh, a poem that predates the bible, his work launches a huge debate. Arthur's character pulled readers into the story and kept them completely invested. His vulnerability and resilience captured hearts of the readers. All the characters in the novel add texture and nuance. There is no shortage of themes and ideas brought to the forefront. It is an attentive and highly informative piece of literature. Water acts as both a healing force and a vital force reiterates the need for its protection. The narrative weaves in the effects of displacement, hidden rivers, sisterhood, fundamentalist cruelty, ancient civilisations, and the colonisation and rightful ownership of history.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest known written poem, and the stories from Narin's Grandmother, Besma represent the resilience and longevity of words and stories. Elif Shafak reveals the importance of oral and written storytelling, its effect on collective memory and its responsibility to both expose and preserve culture and history, as opposed to glossing over global inequality and injustice. It is something that needs to be protected.

Intriguing, informative and hopeful storytelling that engages, enthrals and educates. Literature such as this works to remove the ‘us vs them’ mentality. It asks us to go within and seek the humbling experience, in which we are less certain of our own 'truths' and therefore open to understanding more.

Water affects all of them and the reasons are not really fictitious. When we read of Narin and her healer grandmother talking of leaving a treasured hometown for Iraq’s Lalish, we remember how the story of the Turkish administration planning to douse Hasankeyf to build a dam had made global news in 2019. Arthur’s brother dies of cholera after he gives his family a ‘gift’ of two fresh jugs of water collected from a tap. Zaleekhah’s parents died in a flash flood. She is now researching the memory of water – the central theme of the book. If at any point the reader is at risk of forgetting that the ecological and historical significance of water is what drives the book, Elif Shafak is ready with a dialogue, a meditative line or the mention of a water-related tragedy.

That wayward and undying water droplet in Ashurbanipal’s hair returns from time to time in the nearly 500-page book, acting as further reminder of why we ought to take water seriously. Thanks to the sheer number of water-led experiences its characters are made to have, the novel is almost an encyclopaedia of everything water can cause to humans and animals. Shafak deploys no cunning in executing this making the role of water brazen throughout the book. Water is both the protagonist and the repository of all mystery in Shafak’s novel – the source of misery, the bringer of joy, easy to ignore, and as Robert Burns said of the Thames once, ‘liquid history.’

This is Shafak's twenty-first book and even though her style of writing leaves some unimpressed, that it resonates with many others is evident from the way her books climb to bestseller lists as soon as they come out. Her style is undoubtedly busy, unconventional word choices fall like fat droplets. The effect is pleasant and slows reading down at a time of fast-paced consumption.

The novel left readers battling a fundamental question of why three disparate people were chosen in disparate settings to tell this particular story. The answer is perhaps beyond the novel and in the author herself. As a person who has grown up all over the world but who considers Istanbul and London her two homes, it is no surprise that Shafak chooses protagonists who travel from the West to the East, Arthur, from the East to territory ravaged by the West, Narin, and from the East to the West, Zaleekhah's family. Elif Shafak is poised to straddle the eastness, the westness and the hodgepodge of mixed identities that she accords her characters with. These stories are her stories. The politics of one group towering over another is the politics of her lived life.

Arthur's description of new words bringing up sights, sounds, and tastes in his head provides insightful reminiscence of a TED Talk years ago where Shafak spoke of a young reader asking her if she could taste words. When Narin's grandmother speaks of healing ailments of the head with remedies passed down to her through her foremothers, we think of another TED Talk where Shafak mentions her own grandmother who also healed skin diseases with unconventional methods. To write a novel on water, Shafak turned her own life into the river that carried all that went into its pages. It is multi-layered, touching various subjects, from the

Yazidis, a religious sect that lives in the Kurdish area between Iraq and Turkey, victims of genocides, the latest by Isis in 2014, to the role of museums, and archaeology, today, to climate change, to buried rivers in big cities and the controversial theory of the “memory of water”.

An extraordinary concept that has been extensively researched and presented in a narrative that flows effortlessly, like a body of water. There is much to learn and it is likely inspire further reading and much consideration. Arguably, it is Shafak’s most important work yet. *There are Rivers in the Sky* will be read and studied for many years to come. The impact of the story will be vast, starting conversations that are urgent and necessary. In *There are Rivers in the Sky*, Elif Shafak’s homiletic narrator tells us that water can initiate the “melding of markers”. Soon enough, our principal curiosity is about how these distinctly demarcated narrative sections might be brought together. As is Shafak’s stock in trade, unlikely characters are united through vibrant recurring motifs, fabulist coincidences and rigorously highlighted thematic parallels.

There are Rivers in the Sky is a historical tale that blends seamlessly with the contemporary, and has a strong moral to the story particularly fashioned to hit the nail on its head, regarding today’s global scenario. As we flip through the pages, we will see the extent of careful effort put into researching the historical and cultural accuracy of all the stories in their respective timelines. Shafak narrates the stories unapologetically and is not scared to leave a bitter taste in the tongues of many. The dash of humour that she employed as a tool in her previous novels to veil the seriousness of difficult topics was replaced by a raw and accurate depiction of

incidents in this novel. She raises her strong and unwavering voice against the injustice imposed by the majority by wiping off the existence of an entire sect, a generation of memories and its storytellers. She reminds us of all the stories that should be treasured and how history has a way to repeat itself. She shoves the ugly truths about the violent acts of silencing into your face, will force you to unflinchingly stare straight into its eyes, and live with the shame you carry along. There is nowhere to hide when we read this book and that is exactly its intention.

This epic tale follows a single drop of water as it falls, evaporates, and transforms repeatedly and how it interacts with people across centuries. Shafak states that water is the consummate immigrant, trapped in transit, never able to settle. What ties these disparate times and people together is the metaphor of water: water in the sense of The Epic of Gilgamesh but also water in the depiction of the characters. Arthur is the oxygen atom, the centre. Narin is the left hydrogen atom and Zaleekhah the right, and as in the water molecule itself, the two women bend together over the course of the story while retaining their loose connection to the oxygen that binds them. Water also exists in the ancient cuneiform for that substance, which again appears in different contexts as the novel unfolds. “Water,” Elif Shafak declares, “has memory.” A single raindrop, perpetually ascending to the clouds and descending as rain or snow, ties her disparate threads together and, in doing so, reminds us that water gives life but can also destroy it. As this engrossing tale illustrates so beautifully, water deserves our respect and—in terms of our own self-interest, if nothing else our support. In Shafak’s book, *There are Rivers in the Sky* water also serves this purpose, both literally by creating the clay that becomes

written tablets, and metaphorically, in the forever reincarnated droplets of our existence.

In Elif Shafak's novel *There are Rivers in the Sky*, water is not merely a geographical feature; it serves as a profound symbol interwoven throughout the narrative. The rivers that flow within the story encapsulate the essence of memory and connection, acting as a conduit for the past while also nurturing the present. Water, in this context, transcends its physicality to embody emotions, relationships, and the intricate web of human experiences. It is through the lens of water that Shafak explores themes of time and continuity, suggesting that like a river, life is a constant flow shaped by experiences that shape individual identities. The motif of rivers is notably significant as it highlights the interplay between personal and collective histories. Just as rivers carve their way through landscapes, so too do memories shape our lives. The water 'remembers' the journeys it has traversed, carrying traces of the past while nurturing new beginnings along its banks. This concept resonates with the characters in the novel, who often confront their histories and seek connections with others. The rivers serve as a reminder that one's experiences are interconnected, weaving together separate lives into a larger tapestry of human existence.

Moreover, the symbolism of water reflects the fluidity of time. The passage of water can be likened to the passage of time itself, providing a backdrop against which the narrative unfolds. It mirrors the inevitability of change and underscores the transient nature of life. Through the recurring presence of rivers, Shafak invites readers to contemplate the enduring impact of memories and the bonds formed

between individuals, despite the distances that may separate them. The rivers, thus, become a powerful emblem of both personal reflection and collective understanding, echoing the universal search for connection amidst the currents of life. *There are Rivers in the Sky*, Shafak vividly illustrates the pressing themes of displacement, memory, and hope that resonate throughout her narrative. The backdrop of historical and cultural upheaval serves as a critical framework against which her characters navigate their struggles. Displacement emerges as a central theme, reflecting the experiences of individuals uprooted from their homes, traditions, and identities. Shafak expertly captures the emotional toll that such dislocation inflicts, emphasizing the longing for belonging that accompanies the journey of her characters. This theme not only reveals their personal battles but also highlights the broader implications of societal change and migration.

Memory plays an integral role in Shafak's storytelling, as characters grapple with their pasts while seeking to establish a sense of self in an increasingly fragmented world. Through poignant recollections and evocative flashbacks, readers are invited to experience the intricate tapestry of memories that shape the identities of each character. Shafak illustrates how memory serves as both a refuge and a burden, offering moments of solace, yet also confronting characters with unresolved pain and trauma. The interplay between memory and identity emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's heritage, suggesting that embracing the past can facilitate healing and understanding. Amidst the exploration of displacement and memory, Shafak weaves messages of resilience and hope throughout her narrative. Her characters exemplify the endurance of the human

spirit, demonstrating that even in the face of adversity, there exists an unwavering capacity for connection and compassion. By encouraging readers to reflect on their own roots and shared experiences, Shafak reinforces the notion that hope can emerge from the intertwining of individual and collective histories. Ultimately, through her rich and multifaceted portrayal, *There are Rivers in the Sky* inspires a deeper appreciation for the ties that bind us, emphasizing the importance of solidarity and understanding in overcoming the challenges of displacement and loss.

From the very first page, Shafak's prose flows like the rivers she describes—sometimes languid and reflective, other times rushing with urgency. Her words have a hypnotic quality, drawing readers into a world where the boundaries between past and present, myth and reality, blur like watercolours on a damp canvas. Shafak's genius lies in her ability to weave these disparate threads into a cohesive whole. As the stories unfold, we begin to see the invisible connections—a single drop of water that travels through time, carrying memories and stories from one era to the next. The author's exploration of water as both life-giver and destroyer is particularly poignant. In one breathtaking passage, she poignantly describes that water is the consummate immigrant, trapped in transit, never able to settle. It remained hidden under the fossil-filled earth for tens if not thousands of years, climbed up to the skies and returned to earth in mist, fog, monsoon or hailstorm, perpetually displaced and relocated. This metaphor not only applies to the element itself but also to the characters in the novel, each of whom is, in their own way, displaced and searching for belonging. *There are Rivers in the*

Sky explores several significant themes, including the nature of memory and forgetting, the impact of colonialism and cultural appropriation, the plight of marginalized communities, the environmental crisis and our relationship with water, the power of storytelling and oral traditions, and the search for identity and belonging. These themes are intricately woven together to create a nuanced and thought-provoking exploration of the human experience, highlighting the complexities of memory, the importance of cultural sensitivity, and the need for empathy and compassion in the face of adversity. While these themes could easily become overwhelming in less skilled hands, Shafak navigates them with grace and nuance, never allowing the message to overshadow the story.

There are Rivers in the Sky is a triumph of storytelling, a novel that manages to be both intimately personal and sweepingly epic. Elif Shafak has given us a work that is at once a love letter to the power of narrative, a plea for environmental and cultural preservation, and a deeply moving exploration of what it means to be human in a world that often seems bent on forgetting its past. Like the rivers it celebrates, this book will carry you along on its current, sometimes gently, sometimes with heart-pounding intensity, but always towards something profound and beautiful. It's a journey well worth talking. There are Rivers in the Sky is not just a book to be read – it's a book to be experienced, savoured, and remembered. Like water, it will find its way into the cracks and crevices of our mind, nourishing your imagination and leaving you forever changed. There are Rivers in the Sky is a triumph of storytelling, a novel that manages to be both intimately personal and sweepingly epic. Elif Shafak has given us a work that is at once a love letter to the

power of narrative, a plea for environmental and cultural preservation, and a deeply moving exploration of what it means to be human in a world that often seems bent on forgetting its past. There is a raindrop in the beginning of the book that keeps evaporating and reappearing centuries later which while this might be scientifically possible, as a literary device is just extraordinary. Shafak knows, and so do her readers, about humanity and its echoes and connections and we don't need a constantly reappearing drop of water to remind us. Even the depiction of the rivers the Thames and the Tigris are not mere backdrops in this novel; they are living, breathing entities that influence and reflect the lives of the characters. Shafak's description of the Thames in Arthur's time is particularly vivid. This personification of the rivers adds depth to the narrative, turning them into silent witnesses to human struggles and triumphs across centuries.

At the heart of the novel lies *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the oldest known works of literature. Shafak uses this ancient poem as a thread to connect her characters across time. Arthur becomes obsessed with translating the epic, Narin's grandmother tells her stories inspired by it, and Zaleekah finds unexpected solace in its verses. The inclusion of the *Gilgamesh* epic adds a layer of mythological resonance to the story, reminding us of the timeless nature of human experiences and emotions. One of the most compelling aspects of the novel is its exploration of memory—both individual and collective. Arthur's photographic memory is both a blessing and a curse, allowing him to escape poverty but trapping him in painful recollections. Narin, facing the loss of her hearing, desperately tries to memorize the sounds and stories of her culture. Zaleekah grapples with memories of her

parents and her failed marriage. Shafak poignantly illustrates how memory shapes our identities and how its loss can be devastating. The idea that water retains memories while humans forget serves as a powerful metaphor for the transience of human existence and the enduring nature of the natural world.

Moreover, the novel is also a critique of colonialism and cultural appropriation. Through Arthur's storyline, Shafak offers a nuanced critique of British colonialism and the appropriation of cultural artifacts. As Arthur becomes involved in the excavation of Nineveh, we see the complex dynamics of power, knowledge, and ownership play out. The author doesn't shy away from addressing the ethical implications of removing artifacts from their native lands. Shafak brings attention to the often-overlooked plight of the Yazidi people through Narin's story. The descriptions of the ISIS attacks on Yazidi villages are harrowing and heartbreaking, shedding light on a tragedy that deserves more attention. The author's empathy for her characters shines through, making their suffering palpable to the reader.

Shafak's writing style in *There are Rivers in the Sky* is nothing short of mesmerizing. Her prose flows with the rhythm of a river, sometimes calm and reflective, other times rushing with urgency. She has a gift for vivid imagery that brings her settings to life, whether it's the squalor of 19th-century London or the sun-baked landscapes of Iraq. *There are Rivers in the Sky* is a triumph of storytelling, a novel that manages to be both epic in scope and intimate in its portrayal of human experiences. Shafak has created a work that is at once a historical saga, a contemporary drama, and a timeless meditation on the power of

water and memory to shape our lives and our world. *There are Rivers in the Sky* weaves these stories through time and space. Water has always been the essential element of life and development. Serving both as a source of life and an omen of death, rivers like the Tigris and the Thames transcend history and destiny. Shafak manages to integrate numerous elements in her work with thorough, meticulous research. The novel's exploration of tough themes and complex issues, such as war, climate change, socio-economic differences, the loot and plunder of Middle Eastern artefacts, religious divisions and genocide, can sometimes be overwhelming for readers. Shafak creates a dense narrative that demands careful attention and could also induce some polarisation, especially with what is going on in the realm of geopolitics currently. The inclusion of magical realism adds another layer of intricacy, potentially weaving the story through a shared sense of memory and identity. *There are Rivers in the Sky* is peppered with ancient anecdotes and descriptions of what prevails long after civilisations are destroyed is a definite lesson in history. More than the characters, it is the beautiful backdrops, brimming with past and cultural significance, that stand out.

Ancient Nineveh, with its grandeur and mystique, emerges vividly. This city is located in Mosul, in present-day Iraq, at the confluence of the rivers Tigris and Khosr from where Noah's Ark left. It was once an epicentre of innovation, where Mesopotamian scribes etched the earliest cuneiform scripts on to clay tablets. Still known for its beautiful architecture and monuments, the bustling streets and monumental structures of this area reflect the bygone era, as if the very walls hold the secrets of ancient wisdom and myth. Similarly, the Yazidi villages, rich in their

culture, come to life in equal measure. The traditions and rituals of these communities are not just elements of the story but dynamic forces that shape their world. Each festival, each customary practice, and every detail of daily life in these villages is portrayed with profound depth, becoming as memorable and impactful as the characters themselves. The amalgamation of the backdrops showcases how they are intertwined with human experience, driving the story forward through symbolism and resonance.

Chapter Three

Collective Echoes

The emergence of collective memory in recent decades has opened various tangents around which the frameworks of memory, trauma, and nostalgia can be re-imagined and re-examined. The notions of memory and collective memory and the complex relation underlying their mutual interaction is a recent development in memory studies. The concept of collective memory- particularly its interplay with individual memory, trauma, and nostalgia- is a relatively new area of study in the field of memory studies. This area explores how shared past experiences, represented through narratives, memorials, and other cultural expressions, shape individual and group identities, and how these shared memories are reconstructed and reinterpreted over time.

Collective memory refers to the shared recollections and associated symbols and practices of a specific group. It's not just about remembering the past, but also about how that past is remembered and used to construct social identities, shape political discourse, and even justify current actions. While individual memories are personal and subjective, collective memory is a social construct, shaped by group interactions and cultural norms. The relationship between these two is complex, with individual memories often being influenced by and contributing to collective narratives. The study of collective memory intersects with the study of trauma and nostalgia, as shared experiences of trauma can be passed

down through generations as part of collective memory, while nostalgia can be a way of coping with or idealizing the past.

Life changes through time, thus people's identity is changing as they move from one place to another. The environment and the circumstances surrounding them control both their personal and cultural identities. As cultures mix together, limits between self and other become unclear, and people no longer have an obvious sense of their identities. Identity is never fixed. Identity is always related with a sense of place, time and a relationship with others. Our identities are moulded by both external influences like social interactions, cultural norms, and personal experiences and internal factors like our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. These forces can be constructive, like the deposition of sediment that builds land, or destructive, like erosion that wears away at the banks. Ultimately, identity, is a dynamic entity, constantly in flux, yet retaining a core sense of itself. Identity retains traces of our past experiences, shaping our present and future. Shared memories, whether of significant historical events, cultural traditions, or even everyday experiences, form the basis of a group's identity. Collective memory provides the raw material for identity construction, while individual identities contribute to the ongoing process of shaping and reshaping collective memory.

Elif Shafak's *There are Rivers in the Sky* built around a tiny drop of water, a seemingly insignificant entity, paradoxically underscores the profound significance of freshwater in the context of the climate crisis, where the delicate balance of our planet's hydrological cycle is under threat, and the very fabric of life is intricately tied to the availability and sustainability of this precious resource. It's

easy to forget that despite the abundance of water around us, in the form of rain, flash floods, and rising sea levels, we're living in a time of water scarcity. There isn't enough freshwater, and this is not a theoretical debate, especially for those from the Middle East. Seven out of the ten most water-stressed nations in the world today are in the Middle East and North Africa. This means our rivers are dying, and it has severe consequences, particularly for women, children, and minorities. Women are often the water carriers, and when there's no water nearby, the distance they have to walk increases, unfortunately increasing the possibility of gender violence. Everything is connected – water scarcity, climate crisis, gender violence, and racial inequality. We tend to think they're in separate boxes, but they're intricately linked.

To understand how connected we are with each other and with nature, we need to look no further than the journey of a single drop of water. The water that exists in the world today is the same water that has been here since the beginning of time. It flows, is unevenly distributed, and circulates continuously. We haven't invented new sources of water; it's the same water that's present in every river, every tear, and every glass of water we drink. Water is still one of the biggest mysteries in our lives. It doesn't behave in the way we expect it to, and surprisingly, the number of scientists who study water is relatively small.

The concept of water memory is also intriguing, and it's an area that deserves more exploration. *There are Rivers in the Sky* begins with an appealing magical realist proposition: it will follow the lifespan of a raindrop, as it is consumed, subsumed and transformed across continents and centuries. From first

page to last, this novel is colored by the water sign. It begins with a raindrop and ends with a flood. Any drop of water at all holds the secret of infinity, Elif Shafak tells us; water has memory, and rivers are especially good at remembering. The two rivers most prominently featured here are the Tigris and the Thames. Both of them are fed by various affluents, and many currents compose their flow. The same is true of this novel, which melds several different stories surging up from different times and places.

“Water...the strangest chemical, the great mystery. With two hydrogen atoms at the tips, each bonded to a single oxygen at the center, it is a bent molecule, not linear. If it were linear, there would be no life on earth..... no stories to tell. Three atoms join to form water: H-O-H. Three characters connect across borders of time and place and together they make this story....” (Shafak 19).

Wrapped around the history, science, the neglect, burial and abuse of rivers, the theme of this novel connects all of those who appear in the book in some way with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Shafak’s latest book, *There are Rivers in the Sky*, is an elaborate and sprawling narrative that explores centuries, continents and cultures. The story centers around a lost poem, two grand rivers, and three individuals — all linked by a single droplet of water. It is also a novel that reflects on the persistence of global inequality: the image of the apocalyptic flood appears in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* before the Bible; the lapis lazuli tablets on which the poem is carved end up in Victorian imperial museums; the displaced and captured child from a war zone might represent the chance of a healthy new organ to her rich, western counterpart.

The author uses the metaphor of water, specifically rivers, to link three characters Arthur, Narin, and Zaleekhah — across centuries and continents, creating a delicate web of memory, history, and identity. The Thames in Arthur’s London, the Tigris in Narin’s war-torn Turkey, and the rivers in Zaleekhah’s world serve not only as backdrops but as living symbols of the transience of life, shaping the destinies of these characters. Spanning across different times — specifically the 19th century and modern times — the book largely covers opposing phenomena such as love and loathing, memory and oblivion, tragedy and joy, all in the genre of historical fiction. The story is a beautiful ode to the historic city of Neneveh (now modern-day Mosul) in Iraq. It invites us to consider the consequences of the destructive actions that are frequently rationalized as “civilization” while also revealing the lasting components that unite humans, which are histories, memories, losses, and desires. While much has changed in human life over the years, some things still tell a story in a circular fashion, and that, at once, horrifying and comforting. In the ruins of Nineveh, an ancient city of Mesopotamia, there lies, hidden in the sand, fragments of a long-forgotten poem: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In Victorian London, an extraordinary child is born at the edge of the dirt-black River Thames. Arthur’s only chance of escaping poverty is his brilliant memory. When his gift earns him a spot as an apprentice at a printing press, Arthur’s world opens up far beyond the slums, with one book sending him across the seas: Nineveh and its Remains. In Turkey in 2014, Narin, a Yazıdı girl living by the River Tigris, waits to be baptized with water brought from the holy Lalish in Iraq. The ceremony is cruelly interrupted, and soon Narin and her grandmother must journey across war-

torn lands in the hope of reaching the sacred valley of their people. In London in 2018, broken-hearted Zaleekhah, a hydrologist, moves to a houseboat on the Thames to escape the wreckage of her marriage. Zaleekhah foresees a life drained of all love and meaning, until an unexpected connection to her homeland changes everything. A dazzling feat of storytelling from one of the greatest writers of our time, Elif Shafak's *There are Rivers in the Sky* is a rich, sweeping novel that spans centuries, continents and cultures entwined by rivers, rains and waterdrops.

Where history, memory, and rivers converge in a spellbinding narrative, *There are Rivers in the Sky*, serve as both a haunting refrain and a poignant reminder of our complex relationship with the most essential element on Earth. In this sprawling, ambitious novel, Shafak weaves together three seemingly disparate lives across centuries and continents, all connected by the ebb and flow of two mighty rivers: the Thames and the Tigris. From the very first page, Shafak's prose flows like the rivers she describes—sometimes languid and reflective, other times rushing with urgency. Her words have a hypnotic quality, drawing readers into a world where the boundaries between past and present, myth and reality, blur like water colours on a damp canvas. The stench of the polluted Thames in Victorian London, the scorching heat of the Iraqi desert, and the gentle lapping of water against a houseboat in modern-day Chelsea are rendered with exquisite detail. The grime feels tangible, the dust seems almost tasteable, and the whispers of the river echo through the prose. *There are Rivers in the Sky* spans three intertwining timelines and locations, each reflecting the transformative power of water, history, and human resilience. The narrative begins in 640 BCE in ancient Mesopotamia, where

Assyrian King Ashurbanipal reigns over Nineveh, a city on the banks of the Tigris River. Ashurbanipal, a ruler of great intellect yet brutal power, commissions the creation of a grand library. His reign ends in ruin, but from the ashes of the library emerges a remarkable relic—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of humanity's oldest known works. This epic would come to shape the lives of three other characters across centuries.

In 1840 London, Arthur Smyth, born in the slums by the River Thames, possesses a brilliant memory and an innate talent for languages. Despite his abusive family background, Arthur's gift for memorization secures him an apprenticeship at a printing press. He becomes fascinated by ancient civilizations, especially Mesopotamia, after witnessing artifacts like the lamassus, colossal stone sculptures from the Tigris, being transported to the British Museum. His interest deepens when Charles Dickens introduces him to the book *Nineveh and Its Remains*.

Through intense study, Arthur uncovers cuneiform tablets that reveal a flood story similar to the biblical Noah's Ark, propelling Arthur into an obsession with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Arthur's discovery brings him fame, and he is selected for an archaeological mission to Nineveh to uncover missing lines from the Flood Tablet. Before leaving, Arthur is coerced into an engagement with Mabel, a decision that weighs heavily on him. In Constantinople, Arthur explores the city and encounters a qanun, an ancient musical instrument that fascinates him. He witnesses a fire at a brothel and saves the qanun, an act that connects him to a mysterious woman, Leila, a Yazidi diviner in the village of Zêrav, near Nineveh. During his stay, Arthur learns that Leila has foreseen a massacre of Yazidis, which

will soon unfold. Arthur eventually uncovers the missing lines of the Flood Tablet, but when he returns to England, he is trapped in a domestic life with Mabel. After years of longing, Arthur returns to Zêrav, only to find the massacre has devastated the Yazidi community. As he searches for Leila, Arthur contracts dysentery and dies, with his body buried near the cemetery where Leila's family lies.

In 2014, Narin, a Yazidi girl living in Turkey, is diagnosed with a rare illness that will cause her to lose her hearing. Her grandmother, Besma, takes her on a journey to Iraq to complete her baptism before Narin's deafness takes hold. The journey is disrupted by the rise of ISIS militants, and they are captured. Besma is killed, and Narin is sold into captivity. In 2018, Zaleekhah, a hydrologist of Turkish descent, moves into a houseboat on the Thames after separating from her husband. She grapples with her past, especially the loss of her parents in a flood on the Tigris River when she was a child. Zaleekhah's life becomes further complicated when she uncovers the truth about her uncle's involvement in trafficking Narin as an organ donor for his granddaughter. In a final act of redemption, Zaleekhah and her lover, Nen, work to rescue Narin from captivity. The novel concludes with Zaleekhah and Nen meeting Narin at a cemetery in Hasankeyf, where they connect with the spirits of their ancestors, symbolizing the healing of past wounds.

The novel presents a profound exploration of collective memory and identity, masterfully weaving together the lives of its characters across centuries through the threads of shared cultural heritage, historical trauma, and personal experience. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a foundational text of collective memory, serves as a catalyst for the characters' journeys, profoundly influencing their

understanding of themselves and their place within the world. For Arthur, the discovery of the epic and its flood narrative sparks a lifelong passion for ancient civilizations, shaping his identity as a scholar and explorer. His experiences are informed by the collective memory of the academic community, as he engages with the works of predecessors like Charles Dickens and grapples with the implications of his findings. The weight of this collective memory is palpable, as Arthur's obsession with the epic becomes an all-consuming force that drives him to uncover the secrets of the past, even as it threatens to consume him.

As Arthur's story intersects with that of Narin, a Yazidi girl living in Turkey, the narrative highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of collective memory and identity. Narin's identity is deeply rooted in her Yazidi heritage, which has been shaped by centuries of collective memory and cultural tradition. Her experiences of trauma and displacement are filtered through the lens of this collective memory, as she navigates the complexities of her own identity and sense of belonging. The historical trauma inflicted upon the Yazidi community is a stark reminder of the power of collective memory to shape individual and communal experiences, and the ways in which the past continues to haunt the present.

Zaleekhah's journey is marked by a complex interplay between collective memory and personal identity, as she grapples with the legacy of her family's past and the historical events that have shaped her community. Her experiences as a hydrologist, working to understand the power and beauty of water, serve as a metaphor for the complex relationships between collective memory, identity, and the natural world. The flood that killed her parents serves as a traumatic event that

has shaped her understanding of herself and her place in the world, and her quest for redemption is deeply tied to her desire to make sense of this event and its impact on her life.

Through their stories, the narrative highlights the ways in which collective memory can both unite and divide individuals and communities, influencing their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. The novel suggests that collective memory is a double-edged sword, capable of providing a sense of shared identity and purpose, but also of perpetuating historical grievances and reinforcing social boundaries. Ultimately, the novel argues that a nuanced understanding of collective memory and identity is essential for building bridges between different cultures and communities, and for fostering a deeper appreciation of the complex and multifaceted nature of human experience. As the characters' stories converge and intersect, they illustrate the enduring power of collective memory to shape individual and communal identities, and to inform our understanding of ourselves and our place within the world. The narrative also explores the tension between collective memory and personal identity, highlighting the ways in which individual experiences can be both shaped by and depart from the collective narratives that surround them. The characters' struggles to reconcile their own identities with the expectations and assumptions of others serve as a powerful reminder of the complex and multifaceted nature of human experience, and the importance of approaching collective memory and identity with empathy, understanding, and a deep appreciation for the complexities of human experience.

In its thoughtful and nuanced exploration of these themes, the novel provides a rich and compelling portrait of the human experience, one that invites readers to reflect on their own relationships with collective memory and identity, and to consider the ways in which these concepts shape their understanding of themselves and the world around them. By examining the intersections and tensions between collective memory and personal identity, the novel offers a profound exploration of the human condition, one that underscores the importance of empathy, understanding, and connection in navigating the complexities of our shared world. The novel's portrayal of the characters' journeys is both poignant and thought-provoking, highlighting the ways in which collective memory can be both a source of strength and a source of conflict. The characters' experiences serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of approaching collective memory and identity with sensitivity, nuance, and a deep understanding of its complexities. In conclusion, the narrative offers a profound exploration of collective memory and identity, one that highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of these concepts and their role in shaping individual and communal experiences. Through its nuanced and thoughtful portrayal of the characters' journeys, the novel provides a rich and compelling portrait of the human experience, one that invites readers to reflect on their own relationships with collective memory and identity, and to consider the ways in which these concepts shape their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Arthur Smyth, the central figure of the 19th century narrative, is a complex character marked by both intellectual brilliance and social disadvantage. Born into

squalor along the River Thames, Arthur is given little chance for a prosperous life due to his abusive father and mentally unstable mother. However, his prodigious memory and natural talent for languages set him apart from others in his social class. These traits earn him an apprenticeship at a publishing house, where he becomes fascinated with ancient civilizations, particularly Mesopotamia. His encounter with the British Museum's exhibits, especially the lamassus from the Tigris River region, sparks a lifelong obsession with the ancient world, culminating in his deep involvement with *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Arthur's intelligence and curiosity drive him to a position where he deciphers cuneiform writing, uncovering ancient tablets that allude to a flood myth similar to that of Noah's Ark, long before the Bible. His discovery elevates him into the academic and public spotlight.

However, his personal life is marred by a strained engagement with Mabel and an unfulfilled yearning for the discoveries he left behind in Nineveh. His passion for the Yazidi culture, particularly his attachment to Leila, a seer from Zêrav, defines his emotional journey. His tragic end, having contracted dysentery while searching for Leila, emphasizes his enduring devotion to a place and people he could not leave behind. In death, Arthur is remembered for his intellectual legacy, as well as for his compassion toward the Yazidis, highlighting the theme of forgotten histories.

Narin is a ten-year-old Yazidi girl caught between the pressures of her culture and the catastrophic events of her time. Diagnosed with a disorder that will soon rob her of her hearing, Narin becomes the focus of her grandmother Besma's efforts to baptize her in a sacred Iraqi temple before she loses her hearing. Narin's

story is one of both innocence and tragedy. Her family's journey to complete her baptism is disrupted by the rise of ISIS and the looming destruction of her homeland along the Tigris River. The threat of violence forces Narin's family to flee, and she finds herself caught up in the harrowing brutality of war. As her grandmother shares the wisdom of their culture, Narin learns about the family's deep connection to water, with the ability to douse for water being passed down through generations. Yet, Narin's fate is grim as she is abducted by ISIS militants after a failed escape to the Sinjar mountains. Sold into captivity, she faces immense trauma but remains a symbol of the resilience of her people. Her story, intertwined with the past, brings together the fates of various characters, including Arthur, whose past gift to the Yazidis in the form of the qanun offers a moment of symbolic connection across time. Narin's survival and eventual return to the Hasankeyf cemetery bring a sense of closure, as she becomes a living testament to the enduring pain and perseverance of the Yazidi community.

The Yazidis are a religious minority who occupy parts of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran—the region that was known in ancient times as Mesopotamia. The Yazidis are predominantly ethnically Kurdish and practice a syncretic religion with ancient roots. The Yazidis were gaining geographical territory and political influence during the 13th and 14th centuries, earning the ire of Muslim rulers in the areas surrounding their homelands by the early 15th century. This led to the beginning of a series of massacres and forced conversions that the Yazidis have continued to experience into modern times. A large portion of the Yazidi community emigrated to Germany in the second half of the 20th century. In the book, Narin's relatives

who live in Hanover unsuccessfully try to convince her family to join them in Germany, where it will be safer for them. Part of the historical persecution that the Yazidis have faced originated in a power struggle between the community and their neighboring Islamic rulers. However, it persists in part due to an enduring misunderstanding about their religion and community. Zaleekhah's narrative is both a personal and professional journey marked by emotional turmoil and an exploration of her heritage. A hydrologist by profession, Zaleekhah struggles with her personal life following her divorce. She retreats to a houseboat on the Thames, seeking solace and distance from the chaos of her past. Orphaned at a young age after the tragic death of her parents in a flood by the Tigris River, Zaleekhah was raised by her wealthy uncle, Malek. This traumatic loss has a lasting impact on her, influencing her emotional decisions and worldview. Her character is defined by her scientific mind, but also by the emotional weight she carries due to her past. Zaleekhah's story takes a turn when she learns of her uncle's plans to obtain a kidney for her cousin Lily, only to discover that the source is a Yazidi girl—Narin—whom he plans to purchase. This revelation causes a deep moral conflict within Zaleekhah, who is forced to confront the complicity of her family in the commodification of suffering. Her growing relationship with Nen, an Irish woman who shares her fascination with Mesopotamia, provides her with the emotional support to confront her uncle and attempt to rescue Narin. Zaleekhah's arc culminates in her journey to Hasankeyf, where she and Nen help Narin escape the horrors that have been inflicted upon her. Zaleekhah's story is one of reconciliation—of reconciling with her past, with her heritage, and with her sense

of justice. Through her connection to the rivers of her homeland and her involvement with Narin's liberation, Zaleekhah's character embodies both the pain and hope that runs through the book's central themes of memory, history, and healing.

The novel *There are Rivers in the Sky* presents a rich and complex exploration of various themes that are intricately woven throughout its narrative, featuring water as a recurring motif that symbolizes both life and the interconnectedness of all things, while the Tigris River serves as a symbol of the cultural and historical heritage of the region, connecting the characters and their experiences across time and space. The novel emphasizes the importance of memory, particularly collective memory and cultural memory, and how ancient stories and traditions continue to shape the present, with *The Epic of Gilgamesh* serving as a powerful symbol of cultural memory and heritage, resonating deeply with the characters and highlighting the enduring power of ancient stories to shape human experience and identity.

The novel also explores the complex interplay between collective memory and identity, highlighting how shared experiences, cultural heritage, and historical events shape individual and communal identities. Furthermore, the novel touches upon the exploitation of ancient artifacts and the loss of cultural heritage, highlighting the importance of preserving and respecting cultural artifacts, and the need for sensitivity and understanding in the preservation and display of cultural artifacts. Ultimately, the novel showcases the power of storytelling as a vital tool for understanding the past, connecting with others, and navigating the present, with

the characters' experiences serving as a powerful reminder of the importance of storytelling in shaping human experience and understanding, and the enduring power of storytelling to shape human experience and understanding, and the importance of preserving and respecting cultural narratives.

The author's focus varies between her characters, making the experience of reading about each almost like reading three different books. By far the most detailed and appealing story is Arthur's; it fits squarely in the realm of historical fiction as Shafak takes a deep dive into life for the lower classes in Victorian London. Based on George Smith — a self-taught Assyriologist who was the first to translate *The Epic of Gilgamesh* into modern language — this remarkable man rises from tosher (someone who scavenges in the sewers) to expert on cuneiform. The section is crammed with tiny details that bring the period to life. For example, Arthur buys eel pies as a treat for his brothers and reads by the light of the moon because his family has no money for lamps or candles. Often persecuted throughout history, people from this sect were victims of genocide by the Islamic State from 2014-2017. Yazidi experiences, wisdom, and values are depicted through the character of Narin's grandmother. While this part of the novel is set in more recent times, some of the concepts it contains are ancient. And finally, Zaleekah epitomizes the struggles of many modern women still trying to establish a place for themselves in the world. She's at a crossroads in her life, wrestling with depression and unable to move forward. Her story might be the least interesting simply because it's so familiar to many of us; she's a typical woman on a voyage of self-discovery. This part of the novel is primarily bildungsroman.

One of the brilliant aspects of the novel is the author's ability to merge these three completely different storylines into a compelling whole. Shafak excels at connecting characters from different time periods. The use of water as a central metaphor for life and continuity is a recurring theme where she stated that while it is true that the body is mortal, the soul is a perennial traveler not unlike a drop of water representing both the transient and enduring aspects of life. All the characters are connected by that drop of water as it completes its long cycle of falling as rain, flowing out to sea. *There are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafak is a beautifully complex story that spans multiple generations and locations. The novel intricately weaves together the lives of King Ashurbanipal in ancient Nineveh, King Arthur of the Sewers and Slums by the River Thames in the 1800s, Narin by the River Tigris in 2014, and Zaleekah by the River Thames in 2018. Through these interconnected storylines, Shafak explores the profound impact of water as both a life force and a symbol of change, connection, and continuity. Shafak's masterful storytelling creates a seamless blend of characters and timelines, offering a narrative that is both rich and deeply satisfying. Shafak expertly interlaces the characters in each chapter into a cohesive and compelling whole. Each storyline, whether ancient or modern, feels essential and beautifully developed. The novel is meticulously researched, and its historical accuracy, which prompts to delve deeper into the real history of Emilia Bassano is the craftsmanship of Elif Shafak where she showcases her master brain of skillful narrative. The book explores significant themes such as the cycles of nature and history, the fragility of peace, and the importance of small acts of

kindness. The reflection on how minorities live outside “clock-time” is particularly thought-provoking.

This novel is a sweeping epic that masterfully weaves together the lives of its characters across centuries, with water serving as a potent symbol of memory, history, and the interconnectedness of human experiences. The story of Arthur, a historical figure inspired by George Smith, is a fascinating exploration of the human obsession with knowledge and discovery. Arthur’s rare condition of hyperthymesia allows him to recall vast amounts of detail, and his encounter with the book *“Nineveh and Its Remains”* sets him on a quest to uncover the secrets of ancient Assyria. Through the character of Zaleekhah, a water scientist, the novel sheds light on the pressing issues of climate crisis and water scarcity. The ways in which humans have sought to control and manipulate water resources are highlighted, from burying rivers in concrete to weaponizing water in times of conflict. The devastating impact of these actions on communities and ecosystems is starkly portrayed.

The story also delves into the history and struggles of the Yazidi people, who have faced persecution and violence throughout history. The novel highlights the dehumanizing effects of labeling and stereotyping, and the ways in which these attitudes can lead to violence and oppression. Through the characters’ experiences, the novel explores the complex interplay between collective memory and identity, revealing how shared experiences, cultural heritage, and historical events shape individual and communal identities. The novel’s exploration of collective memory and identity is a powerful commentary on the human condition, inviting readers to

reflect on the intricate balance between creation and destruction that has shaped the course of human history. The research that has gone into crafting this narrative is staggering, but the characters and plot twists are so compelling that the book never feels overwhelming. Instead, it is a rich and immersive exploration of the human experience, full of fascinating historical insights and poignant reflections on the nature of passion, memory, and identity. This novel is a powerful exploration of that very question, and the ways in which collective memory and identity shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

There are Rivers in the Sky is a stunning and moving novel that beautifully explores the human experience through the lens of water and its many roles in our lives. From its historical depth to its modern reflections, Shafak's novel is a remarkable achievement that resonates long after the final page. This is a story that beautifully captures the interconnectedness of human lives and the continuous flow of history and nature. Memory is the lifeblood of this novel, running through it like an undercurrent. Arthur's brilliant memory gives him a rare opportunity to escape his circumstances, but it also traps him in the trauma of his past. Narin clings to the memories of her people's traditions as her world is torn apart. Zaleekhah, through her research into water, learns that memories never disappear they lie dormant, waiting to be rediscovered.

Elif's writing is compelling because she takes abstract, philosophical concepts and makes them deeply personal. The rivers in this novel are more than just geographical features; they are metaphors for the flow of time and history, constantly shaping the lives of the characters. As she poignantly states on the back

cover of the book, “Water remembers. It is humans who forget.” This sentiment forms the heart of the novel — a reminder that our stories, even when seemingly forgotten, live on in the world around us. The blending of history, mythology, and contemporary issues is masterful. The novel touches on themes of colonialism, religious persecution, and global inequality, but these themes are never forced; they arise naturally from the characters’ experiences. History is not just something that happens to others it is something that we are all a part of, a constant flow that shapes us and our identities.

In the end, *There are Rivers in the Sky* leave readers both uplifted and contemplative. It’s a novel that doesn’t offer easy answers but instead invites the reader to sit with the tension between memory and forgetting, between past and present. The author allows us to explore the complexity of the human experience, reminding us that beauty often lies in uncertainty. The novel was thoroughly captivating, Elif Shafak’s masterful weaving of ancient history into the narrative of the three main characters. The interconnected stories, which span different time periods, are skillfully crafted to build tension and suspense, offering subtle hints about the characters’ fates throughout the book. The novel tackles weighty issues, such as the rise of ISIS, the destruction of valleys due to dam construction, and the removal of historical artifacts, with emotional depth and nuance. The appreciation for the author’s meticulous research is evident, as the book covers a vast array of topics while maintaining beautifully told stories that evoke strong emotions. The love for the book is palpable, and it has inspired exploration of more historical content, including listening to qanun music, studying the geography, and reading

The Epic of Gilgamesh. The novel's impact is undeniable, leaving a lasting impression and solidifying its place as one of the novels dealing with the intersection of collective memory and identity.

In There are Rivers in the Sky, Elif Shafak masterfully explores the profound impact of collective memory on individual and communal identity. The novel's characters are each shaped by their unique experiences and memories, which are in turn influenced by the broader historical and cultural contexts in which they live. Through the lens of collective memory, Shafak reveals how shared experiences and narratives can both unite and divide individuals and communities, highlighting the complex and often fraught nature of collective memory. The Tigris and Thames rivers serve as a powerful symbol of the flow of time and memory, underscoring the ways in which the past continues to shape the present. The novel suggests that collective memory is not just a matter of recalling historical events, but also of understanding the emotional and psychological resonance of those events. This nuanced exploration of collective memory and identity invites readers to consider the ways in which our shared experiences and narratives shape our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

The novel's portrayal of the Yazidi people's experiences of persecution and genocide is a stark reminder of the devastating impact of collective trauma on individual and communal identity. Yet, it also highlights the resilience and strength that can be drawn from collective memory and cultural heritage. Through its richly detailed narrative and complex characters, the novel offers a profound exploration of the interplay between collective memory and identity, and the ways in which our

understanding of the past shapes our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In the end, *There are Rivers in the Sky* is a testament to the power of storytelling to shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. The novel's exploration of collective memory and identity serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving and respecting cultural heritage, and of the need to approach the past with nuance and sensitivity. As the characters' stories unfold, we are reminded that the past is never truly past, but continues to flow through the present, shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Ultimately, the novel invites us to reflect on the ways in which our collective memories shape our shared humanity. With its masterful storytelling and profound insights, *There are Rivers in the Sky* leaves a lasting impact on its readers. The novel's exploration of the human experience is both deeply moving and thought-provoking. It is a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and compassion in bridging the gaps between different cultures and communities.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

In the vast expanse of human experience, collective memory and identity are the building blocks that construct our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. *There are Rivers in the Sky*, an extraordinary concept that has been extensively researched and presented in a narrative that flows effortlessly, like a body of water. While water is a powerful theme in this book, there are at least two others that are important: the impact of writing and storytelling

In *There are Rivers in the Sky*, Elif Shafak explores the cyclical nature of history, where events from the distant past echo in the present, shaping individual destinies. This theme is encapsulated in the constant presence of the Tigris and Thames rivers, both symbolic of the flow of time and memory. The characters' lives are all intricately tied to these rivers, suggesting that history repeats itself through water, which transcends geographical boundaries and eras. From the ancient ruins of Nineveh and the discovery of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to the modern struggles of Yazidis and the traumas of displacement, the novel shows how the past continuously resurfaces.

Water, a force of both life and death, holds the stories of those who lived before. This idea of repetition is also seen in the recurring motif of water's power to both preserve and erase memory, suggesting that while humans may forget, the natural world embodied by rivers remembers. The novel offers a meditation on how the struggles of one generation can reverberate through time, influencing future

generations, especially when ancient wounds are not fully healed. Another profound theme in *There are Rivers in the Sky* is the long-lasting impact of trauma, both personal and collective, and how it passes through generations. Shafak delves into the painful legacies of violence, displacement, and loss, which are central to the characters' stories.

The Yazidi people's history of massacres and their continuous struggles against oppression permeate Narin's journey, and these themes resonate deeply with the tragedies faced by Arthur and Zaleekhah. Shafak further explores how trauma can become embedded in cultural memory, not only through personal experiences but also through collective histories. This trauma is both a source of suffering and an impetus for survival, as seen in the Yazidis' continued fight to preserve their culture and beliefs. The novel portrays how trauma is inherited, a cycle that can either bind generations in shared suffering or act as a catalyst for healing, depending on how individuals and communities confront it.

Identity takes centre stage among Shafak's themes, deftly explored through a diverse cast that underscores the potential for harmony amid differences. Her narratives mirror the postmodern quest for identity fluid. Intricate, and shaped by tradition, history, language, and locale. *There are Rivers in the Sky* Intricately weaves the theme of collective memory, delving into collective remembering and forgetting within the realm of fiction. The novel's concern revolves around the dynamics of collective memory's presence and absence within modern societies. It navigates the interplay between shared recollections and their impact on present realities and future trajectories.

In this novel, Shafak intricately weaves together themes of identity and the burdens of cultural heritage, as seen through the personal and historical trajectories of her characters. For Zaleekhah, the daughter of Turkish parents, her identity as an immigrant in England shapes much of her internal struggle, particularly as she contemplates her past and her place in the world. The weight of cultural memory is felt acutely by each character, as they grapple with their ancestral histories while forging their paths. Narin, through her grandmother's teachings and stories, inherits a sense of belonging to her Yazidi roots, yet she is thrust into the chaos of modern political conflicts that threaten to erase her heritage.

The connection to collective memory and identity becomes even more profound in the context of water: the Tigris and Thames serve not only as geographical markers but as metaphors for the fluidity and instability of identity. The rivers represent how one's sense of self is constantly shaped, eroded, and reshaped by both external forces and the remnants of the past. The characters in Shafak's novel struggle with the weight of history whether it be the historical trauma of their people or the legacy of ancient civilizations and their journeys reveal how collective memory can either be a source of strength or a burden that keeps them anchored to the past.

Shafak's novel underscores the transformative power of language, storytelling, and myth in shaping one's self and understanding of the world. Each of the three protagonists Arthur, Narin, and Zaleekhah uses language, either through books, oral traditions, or personal narratives, to reclaim a sense of agency in their lives. For Arthur, his fascination with ancient languages and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

opens new intellectual and emotional worlds, allowing him to connect with distant cultures and ideas. His ability to read cuneiform is not merely academic but becomes an act of resurrection, giving voice to forgotten histories. Similarly, Narin's grandmother, Besma, tells stories that preserve the Yazidi culture, despite the imminent threat of obliteration. The power of myth is particularly evident in the way *The Epic of Gilgamesh* intertwines with the characters' lives, providing a framework for understanding their own journeys. For Zaleekhah, language becomes an instrument of healing, both in her scientific work as a hydrologist and in her search for emotional truth. Through these characters, Shafak shows that storytelling and myth are not only tools of historical preservation but also methods of self-reconstruction. Language, in its many forms, allows the characters to navigate the complexity of their identities and histories, offering them both solace and clarity in times of crisis.

At the heart of *There are Rivers in the Sky* is the exploration of love, loss, and redemption. The narrative weaves a tapestry of intimate relationships that reflect the characters' attempts to find meaning and connection amidst overwhelming suffering. Arthur's love for Leila, which is never fully realized, represents the theme of love lost to history and circumstance. His tragic end and his search for Leila after her family's massacre reflect the deep ache of unfulfilled desires. Zaleekhah's relationship with Nen is a tender yet fraught exploration of love and self-discovery. Zaleekhah's emotional turmoil stemming from her separation from her husband, the death of her parents, and her complex ties to her uncle pushes her toward a journey of healing, one where love becomes a

transformative force. Shafak masterfully weaves together narratives across different time periods and cultures, demonstrating how seemingly disparate lives are connected through shared human experiences and the enduring power of stories. The search for identity amidst chaos, the longing for home, and the encroachment of trauma across generations. Water serves as a powerful Metaphor for life, memory, and history, connecting each Character's narrative while illustrating the trials each faces in Their respective timelines. As the novel closes, the river, often a symbol of continuity and change, reminds us of the unending cycles of human Experience, and how the stories of the past echo into the lives of those in the present. Each character represents a fragment of a larger tapestry woven by the currents of time and fate grounding their individual journeys in the profound legacy of their shared history.

There are Rivers in the Sky serves as a powerful testament to the significance of collective memory and identity. Through its masterful narrative, the novel showcases how shared history and cultural heritage shape individual lives, and how stories like *The Epic of Gilgamesh* continue to resonate with contemporary struggles. The novel's use of water as a symbol of memory and identity highlights the enduring power of collective narratives, connecting characters and places across time and space. Ultimately, *There are Rivers in the Sky* demonstrates that collective memory and identity are intricately woven together, forming a complex and ever-evolving tapestry that reflects the diversity and depth of human experience, and it is through this lens that we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

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