

Shared Memory for Political Justice: A Study in Assata Shakur's

Assata: An Autobiography

Abstract

This research paper investigates politics of memory in Assata Shakur's autobiography Assata: An Autobiography. As an autobiography by an African American writer and a civil right activist, it recounts private 'self' of the author, prison life experiences, struggles obstacles and physical and mental tortures being an African American. The researcher, here ponders into why Assata Shakur, the author, feels important to explore her 'self' through the script-the autobiographical act, and for that draws theoretical insights of writing autobiography on 'politics of memory' from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative, Anne Whitehead's Memory: The New Critical Idiom, AvishaiMargalit's ideas on 'shared memory' from the text, The Ethics of Memory. This research renders to understand that the politics behind writing this autobiography is to empower and inspire African American people and abolish the racial discrimination in America. Moreover, as identity construction is a prime purpose of life writing, she also creates her identity as a rebellious, courageous African American female.

Key Words: Autobiography, Memory, Shared Memory, Racial Discrimination, prison

This research paper explores the politics of shared memory in Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* which shows Shakur's autobiographical account of her early life, her development of political consciousness, her militancy, and her experience as a fugitive, prisoner, and exiled citizen are carefully constructed as a direct response to this volatile social climate. It embodies the experience of Shakur who still lives in exile and dealing with the unresolved issues like racism, prison life and difficult repercussions of having chosen to speak up and out about one's place in

society. Between the years of 1968 and 1977 the United States federal law enforcement agencies were used as political tools to repress, oppress and silence black women revolutionaries. As she was an African American female, her personal story represents dishearten experience and history of collective memory of the black people during the civil right movement in America. Shakur's existence as a narrator and the protagonist retrospects her own life and the life of African American community. Shakur through this autobiography wants to reenergize the African American community. More importantly, she contemplates her pathetic experiences of prison life, devour the public concerns on freedom and conscience racism and slavery, inhuman, brutal practice, so that, she can reenergize and inspire to fight and eliminate racism from the American society. As writing autobiography is identity construction, she involves identifying herself to the public reader.

Through this research I have explored that there is always politics behind shared memory. The main politics of shared memory is to reenergize, aware, inspire and motivate black American people in the United States. In the *Assata: An Autobiography*, memory resembles the imprisoned past life and her childhood. On the other hand, memory is selective; people filter their memory according to what is meaningful in the present, so one can select the striking one and forget the others which is also the politics of memory.

Writing about the 'self' is remembering the past experiences recollected in subject's memory. Assata Shakur evokes her personal suffering due to white supremacy, dominating white culture and its traumatic and pathetic effects in imprison life, schooling, public place and the adverse effects of white American culture in African Americans people's physical and mental health.

Assata Shakur, African American activist spent her early childhood alternately with her grandparents in Willminton, North Carolina, and with her mother in New

York. She dropped out of high school at seventeen but returned to college during her early twenties, attending Manhattan community college and city college of New York. She was married for a year while in school and continued to use her married name. She became a student activist and participated in rent strikes, anti-demonstrations, and sit-ins, protesting racial injustice. In March 1977 Assata Shakur was convicted of murdering state trooper Werner Forrester, although medical experts testified that her injuries would have rendered her incapable of firing the fatal shot. She was imprisoned at the maximum security prison for women in Alderson, West Virginia, then moved to New Jersey's Clinton correctional facility for women. Two years after her conviction, she escaped from prison and was given political asylum in Cuba.

Assata: An Autobiography is a literary endeavor that contemplates Shakur's condition; her childhood memories, sufferings, ups and downs during the civil rights movements in America. However, she critically focuses on the adverse effects of slavery and white culture's effect on African American life. She, recounting her private experiences and her childhood memory of racial discrimination, tries to spread encouragement and enthusiasm among the black community who want freedom and equal rights. That is her primary politics of recounting her past memory in her autobiography.

Assata Shakur, through this autobiographical act, informs us that one of her relentless state-approved violence, courts, the law, and accusation after accusation. Her reflections of her early years devoted to the respectability politics of her grandparents (who believed that becoming an educated, well-dressed and wealthy member of the community could buy her a get-out-a-racism-free card), the internalized racism of the other black children in the schoolyard, and the conundrum of a lack of compassion from white teachers in desegregated schools, all set the path for Assata's later life as a black revolutionary. The lucid insights into racism so early in her life are some of the

hardest hitting in the book. At college, she encounters activists who expand her mind and make an indelible mark on her politics. She eventually rejected the name she was given at birth, dismissing it as her slave name.

Memory is subject of an autobiography which involves in meaning making process of the subject 'I'. It is simply an ability of a system to record information about things or events with the facility of recalling them later at will. Memory is a process of recalling and reinterpreting one's past endurance or events recollected in one's mental cognition. Memory can be personal as well as collective. Autobiography is an account of the subject's past experiences and their present remembrance. In an autobiography, the author recollects the past and explores with help of words with a desiring concern of constructing an identity and a particular discourse in society.

Thus, narrated memory of African American woman's experiences and thoughts, struggles, obstacles, physical, mental, tortures and her fugitive life. She articulates her past memory after being an asylum in Cuba. Thus, memory works as a subject to an autobiography.

In this line of argument, the researcher claims that Assata Shakur writes about 'the self' in order for reenergizing the black community in America. More importantly, she contemplates her pathetic experiences of prison life, devour the public concerns on freedom and conscience racism and slavery, inhuman, brutal practice, so that, she can reenergize and inspire to fight and eliminate racism from the American society. As writing autobiography is identity construction, she involves identifying herself to the public reader. However, her prime concern goes to reenergize, aware and inspire the black community for their freedom. Therefore, the researcher casts light on how and why she explores the 'self', why she gives more emphasis on her prison life experiences and how her past memory serves as a subject of life writing.

As a critic Errol A. Henderson tries to depict Assata Shakur's Autobiography as the 1960s Script of political development script in America and as the source of African American's revolutionary strategies:

The biggest problem, Shakur maintains, was of political development an overall ideology and strategy that stem from a scientific analysis of history and present condition. Again, her revolutionary nationalist perspective dovetails with Karenga's cultural nationalism admonition that blacks must develop a new plan of revolution for black people in America. (Henderson 192)

Clearly, one of the prime antagonisms in the black power movement is the one between revolutionary nationalists and cultural nationalists. It raises the issue of the progressive quality of black nationalism. This maintains that without a truly internationalist component nationalism was reactionary. But she failed to recognize the implication of the fact that African American national culture, where it obtains, is a pan-Africanist culture of many different African American cultures subsumed under the diasporic rubric.

As critic Joy James argument is different he talks about the master state and its dividing laws which divided the society in different layers in the name white supremacy:

Those of the "master state" those of the non-incarcerated abolitionist and advocate; and those of the "prisoner slave." ideologically, these narratives range from conservative and liberal to radical and at times complementary or contradictory, abolitionism; among African Americans, the most intensely policed in the United States, neo slave narratives possess no uniform ideology. (James 132)

Here, in such an environment, opposition to the status quo of American society, be it anti-capitalist, anti-racist or anti-war, was viewed as subversion, and any and all

means were employed by the master state to preserve the status quo of white supremacist domination and exploitation.

Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* instead of talking solely about the black culture and thematizes that how one can reach on top of success. Assata's penetrated past and outreaching success teaches us that if one has courage, passion, strong determination and feeling of communal hardships she/he can deserve his/her desired destinations. Her enduring and evocating past and struggle for the success inspire and reenergize the readers and the public audiences.

The author with her irrecoverable past memory wants to inspire for freedom and dismantle the black oppression and show the real picture of prison life Through this meaning making process with due interpretation of memory, she proves that the African American black community also has courage, power and strength to resist against prevailing dehumanizing oppression and inhuman brutalizing activities. That is to empower the black community for their better living in America. As a young adult, she knows how it feels to be oppressed by the standards society have set, to want a thinner lips and a larger hips and a prettier face and longer hair. This can't even be compared to the effects of racism and black oppression on blacks. The blacks are being oppressed since slavery began and several years after slavery is abolished. Indirect slavery still exists. From prisons filled with blacks and Third world people, to the shooting of several black people without justification by people with a better skin, to war against any movement set to liberate the blacks.

Assata's autobiography of personal hardships not only recounts her private issue as it has been textualized in *Assata: An Autobiography*. It shares the collective sufferings and shared memory of the black people and black female prisoner.

In fact, per idolization of the women's movement from the point of view of multiracial feminism would treat the late 1960s and early 1970s as its origin

and the mid-1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as a height. A time line of that period shows a flourishing multiracial feminist movement. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective Statement was first published; in 1979, *Conditions: Five*, the Black women's issue, was published, the First National Third World Lesbian Conference was held, and Assata Shakur escaped from prison New Jersey prison Activist. (Thompson 345)

Here, Becky Thompson, tracing the rise of multiracial feminism raises many questions about common assumptions made in normative versions of second wave history. Telling the history of second wave feminism from the point of view of women of color and white antiracist women illuminates the rise of multiracial feminism-the liberation movement spearheaded by women of color in the United States in the 1960.

The author, through this autobiography, historicizes the unheard and unspoken voices of marginalized and suppressed American black people. Shared memory is the shared pool of same knowledge and information in the memory of one or more than a member of a social group. Shared memory not only merely personal but also memorization of happiness and sadness shared by the self along with collective members. Autobiography as a product of private/ personal remembering and account of subject "I"s experiences, it involves the process of identifying the self, and also healing the self. It also publicizes personal feelings, thoughts, experiences and worldly views of one's life. It works as meaning making because it has deep diverse meaning providing us with multiple meaning in form of memory. As this autobiography recounts Assata Shakur's private story but also the common history or the collective sufferings with the help of shared memory as she states: "I am gonna live as hard as I can and as full as I can until I die. And I am not letting these parasites, these oppressors, these greedy racist swine make me kill my children in my

mind, before they are even born" (134). This book creates her private identity of the shared groups or clan or tribe and the likes. Therefore, this autobiographical act records the unheard and unrecorded social events and black segregated history in an alternative way.

Memory works in *Assata: An Autobiography* to reenergize, aware and inspire African American people and fight against the racial discrimination. It works as the collective issues of imprisoned life of African American activists, victim of state sponsored lynching and state's biased law. She invests her more time on writing about prison life experience and its drawbacks among African American civil right activists as it was not merely personal.

In this respect, the researcher examines Assata Shakur's autobiographical act *Assata: An Autobiography* drawing theoretical insights from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's theoretical trajectory *Autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Anne Whitehead's *Memory: the Critical Idiom*, Avishai Margalit's ideas on 'shared memory' from *The Ethics of Memory* and other critic's ideas on autobiography and memory in order to support the researcher's claims. This study more dominantly focuses on the politics of shared memory of the author from autobiographical perspective and analyze how shared memory works in one's autobiographical act and how one shapes his/her memory in the shared Black milieu. Furthermore, as a black writer how/why Assata Shakur shapes her private memory and reinterprets her imprisoned past in her autobiography is the focal point of this paper.

Assata Shakur, an African American black women writer, a civil right activist contemplates her past memory in *Assata: an Autobiography*. As her autobiographical act, it rememorizes her past days and reinterprets in the present day. She memorizes her prison life experience and racial discrimination. Moreover, she recollects her

memory of her life's journey and recurring struggles to keep herself alive from white supremacy. So, her past memory serves as a subject to this autobiography.

Memory simply is an ability of a system to record information about things or events with the facility of recalling them later at will. Memory is a process of recalling and reinterpreting one's past endurances or events recollected in one's mental cognition. Memory can be personal as well as collective. To some extent, personal memory bounds with the collective memory as one share the collectivity in a particular zone As Assata Shakur states, "I am a black revolutionary of the wrath, hatred, and slander that America is capable of. Like all other black revolutionaries, America is trying to Lynch me" (71). Anne Whitehead also argues, "Memory is a specifically social phenomenon" (123).

Assata: An Autobiography reveals Assata Shakur's personal memory of the past but ultimately turns to be the public Shared memory of the collective hardships of the African American civil right Activist in particular and the United States in general. Therefore, the subject's journey in life is the journey of the shared community that is black American community. Anne Whitehead, similarly, argues that, "any given society is composed of a number of different groups. Each group, be it a social class, an association, a corporation, or a family, has its own distinctive memories, which its members have constructed, often over long period of time. Social memory is constantly transformed along with the groups themselves" (128). Memory is socially articulated and formed with a certain cultural and customary practices over a long period of time.

Avishai Margalit, in the same vein, argues that, "we usually care about our parents, children, spouses, lovers, friends, and by extension about some significant groups to which we belong" (32), as result, memory is, "the cement that holds thick relations together" (Margalit 8). As Assata Shakur States: "These people can lock us

up, but they can't stop life, just like they can't stoop freedom. This baby was meant to be born, to carry on. They murdered Homey, and so this Baby, like all our children, is going to be our hope for the future"(126). Memory, therefore, is socially and culturally articulated and framed in one's mind which is transformed with the collective artifacts shared by the family, community and or the society. Memory is not an isolated phenomenon rather it is the collective and social issues and subject as one's memorization bounds up with his/her surroundings and circumstances.

Life writing as remembering process the subject's memory is linked with the self's past experiences. Memory, whether public or private, is thus both the subject and the source of an autobiographical act. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, "The writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history. Memory, thus is both source and authenticator of autobiographical acts" (16). For Smith and Watson, memory is the subject, source and authenticator of an autobiography.

Assata Shakur while revealing the 'self' involves in a process of remembering and reinterpretation of the past in the present. She, with the help of her past experience of the prison life experience, raises the issue of racial discrimination in public accommodations and schools in America. Here her past memory is reinterpreted and rememorized. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue:

The process is not a passive one of mere retrieval from a memory bank.

Rather, the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering (Rose). Thus narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered. As Daniel L. Schacter has suggested, [M]emories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves. (16)

An autobiography, therefore is reinterpretation of the past events and experiences in order to deliver a certain meaning to the public audiences or the readers. While articulating the past, the autobiographical author tries to present the issues and actions as if they are socially and culturally or collectively meaningful. She/he undoubtedly involves in a knowledge making process.

Autobiography is a meaning making process. The author identifies himself or herself for the sole purpose of bestowing some positive message. Assata Shakur, through the autobiographical endeavor *Assata: An Autobiography* tries not only to identify herself as a Black freedom fighter in America but as a common Afro American woman, victim of the state sponsored racial discrimination, a brave activist and human right activist. The autobiographical theorist Lind Anderson about the purposes of autobiographical writing in her book *Autobiography* states:

What the author of an autobiography is to try endowing his inscription within the text with all the attributes of face in order to mask conceal his fictionalization or displacement by writing. Autobiography thus procedure the fiction of figure in the place of self-knowledge they seek on which both the subject and autobiography's identity and dependent. (9)

Assata Shakur, as Anderson argues through *Assata: An Autobiography* tries to explore herself as a person with struggling past and as an inspirational figure ever in the black community in America. This autobiography with merely personal experiences creates her 'self' identity as a writer and also involves into the self-knowledge and the essence of articulation of her past life. It is worth investigating some of the tactics used against her by the state and comparing these across time. In her autobiography, Shakur opens with a shocking example of the terrorizing actions used against her by agents of the state. After being shot several times and taken to the hospital, Shakur was wheeled into a dark room and placed next to the dead body of her good friend and political

comrade, Zayd Malik Shakur. As she realized the horror of the scene before her, she was told by a trooper, “that’s what’s gonna happen to you before the night is over if you don’t tell us what we want to know” (8). As horrifying and disturbing as this encounter was, it was a common practice used by the slavocracy to intimidate and control slaves and maroons.

The word "memory" denotes one's ability to remember things. It is a period of time that somebody is able to remember events that happened in the past. People filter their memory according to what is meaningful in the present. Memory is selective so one can select the striking one and forget the others which is the politics of memory. Memory interprets the past events as people try to make link between past, present and the probable future.

Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith in their theoretical trajectory *Reading Autobiography: Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative*, talk about autobiographical identity and mentions, "an autobiographical act involves narrators "identifying" themselves to the reader that is writers make themselves known by acts of identification and by implication, differentiation" (32). As they argue, an autobiographical act involves the process of identifying the 'self' that the author to inspire the public sphere or the wider range of audience/ readers. Therefore, writing autobiography is a process of identifying the self to inspire the wider public audience. Assata Shakur, through this autobiographical writing, identifies herself one of those African American prisoner who inspires the wider audience revealing her private experiences:

They are more careful where and how they hit me now. I guess they don't want to leave any marks. One sticks his finger in my eyes. I don't know what he has on his fingertips, but whatever it is burns like hell. I think I am gonna be blind forever. He says he will keep doing it until I am completely blind. I

close my eyes and hold them as tight as I can. He strikes me a few more times. Some of the stuff gets into my eyes anyway. Burning tears pour down my face and my whole head is throbbing. I think he is going to keep on, but he begins to curse me, calling me all kind of nigger bitches. (11)

Here, Assata Shakur simply presents the pathetic terror, physical abuse, prolonged solitary confinement, separation from family, social degradation and humiliation condition of her as a black prison in American Jail. She shows the state troopers and official person's act of torture toward the prison. It is not the execution itself that serves this function, but specifically the torture of the victims bodies. This torture is reserve only for black victims of lynching because it constitutes a political message about race.

As Assata Shakur reveals the story of her devotion, struggle, passion and pursuits for a beautiful free and successful life and the humanitarian world where no people suffer due to racial discrimination. Along with her appealing childhood days and prison life, she shares collective story of the African American People. Practice of remembering is a technique of writing life narrative. She, in this autobiography, tries to chronicle the shared community and the cultural locations through her personal account. Neil J. Smelser, views, “as a system, a culture can be defined as a grouping of elements – values, norms, outlooks, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and empirical assertions (not always verified), linked with one another to some degree as a meaning-system” (37). It means to say that culture is a network of meaning-making systems that enhances and perpetuate the success of both individual and collective. Smelser further argues that:

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative effect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence

or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. The obvious observation to add at this point...is that if a historical event or situation succeeds in becoming publicly identified as a cultural phenomenon, then this certainly imparts an air of urgency – a demand for those who acknowledge it as such to come to grips with it. (44)

According to Smelser, personal memory is a collective response about both individual and collective reactions to widely felt, culturally disruptive events as open system responses. This serves her and the collectivity to recall the past and to create personal as well as collective identity. Shakur's personal Experience and history reenergizes, aware, inspires and motivates black American people in the United States. Thus, a private "remembering also has a politics" (Smith and Watson 18).

This autobiographical text serves as a cultural production of knowledge and identity as it recounts the history and hardships and upbringings using the tool of personal narrative. Autobiography is a story of a person and his/her life. It is always political, in a sense that, its motto is to speak out personal hardships, struggles, successes, achievements and as whole a personal history. As they state, personal story is social grain/product, so that she/he cannot remain outside of the society. Thus the cultural production of meaning is possible.

Individual memory is not always a lateral reproduction, but an effort to render the continuity in change realistic. Personal memory of events is frequently practiced in imaginative form. Imagination is both a disposition and a powerful self-tool. AvishaiMargalit, in his book *The Ethics of Memory*, talks that memory has two types; shared memory and common memory. For him shared memory is experienced in different angle by individuals but common memory aggregates the memory of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experiences individually. As in the *Assata: An Autobiography* goes back to her past life and

remembers her past events time and again. An autobiography recounts the story of the shared collectivity. It engages recollecting due past events and memories of a person which are implicitly or explicitly connected to the society, culture and the nation as a whole. The subject's past is articulated in an autobiography as it is rememorized with shared social phenomena rather than merely private memory. AvishaiMargalit argues:

A shared memory is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode-for example, the memory of the people who were in the square, each experiencing only a fragment of what happened from their unique angle on events- into one version. (51-52)

As he argues one's memory always closely ties with his/her social cultural backgrounds and transforms from merely personal to the shared collectivity. Memory, in a sense, is a discursive subject as it is formed by the social, cultural and professional engagement of a person. Assata Shakur identifies separation as an essential feature of being an African American. For Shakur, exile meant not only separation from the land in which she was born, it meant the inability to be with her young daughter, her aging mother and grandmother, and her political comrades.

We can not remember in demand. Memory has involuntary characteristics. Individual memory is involuntary whereas voluntary memory can be exercised on demand. Memory is not an obligation of each one to remember all. Remembering and forgetting may not be proper subject for moral and ethical decrees and evolutions. We cannot be morally or ethically praised for remembering, or blamed for failing to remember, if memory is not under our control. So, individual memory cannot move on demand. At one point, Avishai says, "When history is contrasted with memory, history is habitually labeled as cold, even lifeless, whereas memory can be vital, vivid

and alive” (67). He concludes it by saying, stories of past are concrete and lived experience than critical history. He further says:

Stories about the past that are shared by communities are as a rule more vivid, more concrete, and better connected with live experiences than is critical history. There is nothing remarkable about this claim, and all we have to do is to see if it is true. But I believe that shared memory as a cement for the community involves a far more ambitious sense of live memory, a sense not unlike the one involved in revivification through myth. (67)

Therefore, at the very general level memory refers to the process of faculty where by events or impressions from the past are recollected and preserved. Collective memory shapes the story that group of people tell about themselves linking past, present and future in a simplified narrative. It is what keeps the past-on at least a highly selective image of it alive in the present.

Memory is a meaning making process. Assata Shakur's memory and her remembrance of her past life in American jail creates a discourse that even a black woman, victim of state sponsored racial discrimination, illustrate black girl can inspire and change herself, community nation and the globe as a whole if she destined towards with courage, strong determination and power to face every obstacles and endurances. Assata lives her playful child ages in Bricktwon section of Jamaica New York with her family. She lives her happy life until she was convicted in 1977 of killing New Jersey state trooper, Werner forester, on the New Jersey Turnpike, She had to face a brutal prison life experience in cell. She runs throughout the brutal days in and days out. She mentions her prison life experience as:

The food in workhouse was horrible. Actually, it was disgusting. The food there is worse than the food in any jail that I have been in since, and that is quite an accomplishment. I would sit and wait for lunch or dinner, hungry as

hell, and they would bring me some greenish brown iridescent chunks floating around in a watery liquid (liver stew, they called it) or some lamb fat floating around in some water which was supposed to be lamb stew. And the nasty looking, foul smelling stuff tasted much worse than it looked. The place was infested with flies and so was the food. The only thing edible was eggs, when they had them, and mashed potatoes. (80)

She memorizes her nightmarish experience in cell in order to show the real condition of black prison in American cell. Shakur's experience is no less oppressive or horrendous because she is in a county jail as opposed to a state or federal prison. The treatment and condition Shakur endures not only discourage other activists, but to break their spirits. She endures physical and emotional abuse and deprivation. She is a subject to unsanitary condition that endanger her health. The health of her unborn baby. The imprisonment and condition she faces to live in without having even been convicted of a crime have just as many implications about the injustice in this country as does those cases where guilty verdicts are handed down and people serve time in state or federal prison.

Life narrative involves remembering and remembering the bygone days and articulates the 'self' through words. As they state "We construct our autobiographies from fragments of experience that change over time" (Smith and Watson 16). That is we inevitably invest our memory into complex constructions that become the story of our lives. Assata Shakur in her autobiography remembers her most striking events and experiences of the past. She only focuses more on her unforgettable memories rather than the every minor details of her through life until production of this autobiography.

Memory, as a subject of an autobiography, is not only merely personal but also memorization of happiness and sadness shared by the self along with collective

members. Autobiography as a product of private/personal memory, remembering and accounts of the subject-'I's experiences, it involves the process of identifying the self, and also healing the self. It also publicizes personal feelings, thoughts, experiences and worldly views of one's life. Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* is a product of personal experience represents the shared collectivity and the shared issues and memories of African American people.

The author raises the issue of her imprisoned life the racial discrimination in public accommodation and schools in America with the story of the 'self', it no longer remains merely personal, rather the story of the subjugated and suppressed Afro-American people. It postulates the collective memory through the personal depiction as, "we cannot remember on demand. We may of course use helpful, indirect methods of remembering-trying to recall where we last used the keys, where we went afterward, and so on-with the hope that reconstructing what we did will lead us to where we put the lost keys" (Margalit 56).

Collective memory and its study deals with the memories shared by or within a group. French sociologist Mauriac Halbwachs, highlights the social dimension of the process of memory in his fundamental works on collective memory, and in "The Social Frames of the Memory" postulates:

Collective memory is shaped by social frame works, which are created by communicative acts within social groups such as families, religious communities, occupational group or social classes. Specific milieus of remembrances are created, in which not only the composition and orientation of a social group is of importance for a memory shaping process, have within that group. This leads to the creation of particular images of the past, which are highly influenced by the present. (131)

As Halbwachs argues, *Assata: An Autobiography*, shares the common story of the African American people. Shakur depicts African American people's life, sufferings, viciousness of the police, brutalizing acts of white people during the civil right movement in America positioning herself within her communal group. By discovering aspects of the African past, such as dance, music, and religion that have been preserved in Cuba, Shakur has redefined her African American memory. At the same time, her life in Cuba should not suggest a clean break from U.S. communities of struggle in which she once participated. Shakur feels a deep sense of loss in being separated from her family, friends, and comrades in North America. Thus her fugitive figure with becomes a way to imagine a black identity irrespective of national context, allowing Shakur to remain opposed to the U.S. state while firmly grounded in a Black U.S. community of struggle.

Assata Shakur, claims 'the self' creates the history of the margin as an autobiography shares the collectivity and the subject's collective experiences. The context or the social circumstances specifies the memory of the subject. "How people remember, what they remember are historically specific" (Smith and Watson 17). As Shakur speaks on black liberation Army and she wrote this autobiography in 1987 while living exile in Cuba hoping for a new world. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that, "a particular culture's understanding of memory at a particular moment of its history makes remembering possible for a life narrator. Narrators at a crossroads of competing understandings of memory" (17). As they argue some cultural practices, historical moments, specific zonal place, monuments and the personal embodiment make narrator remembering, understanding and interrogating the past. Shakur reminds every detail of her childhood and imprisoned life and its torturous moment with the wound that 'the state' has made. As she visualize the court room "The marshals drew their guns and forced us to lie down on the floor with our arms spread apart. We lay

there while they stomped our backs and kicked us as they handcuffed our hands behind our back. I will never forget the haunting scream of that child as she watched her father being brutally beaten"(129). Here embodiment works as a site of memory.

The author writes about 'the self' in order to bestow a message to the reader. Life writing invests some ideologies. They remember the past and explore in the past for the future generation. Life writing and the process of remembering blends past with present for future, therefore, "remembering also has a politics" (Smith and Watson 18).

This autobiographical text serves as a personal experience of knowledge and identity as it recounts the history of hardships and upbringings using the tool of personal narrative. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith suggest:

How the politics of remembering what is recollected and what is obscured - is central to the cultural production of knowledge about the past and thus to the terms of an individual's self-knowledge. Auto biographical narratives as we will see signal and invite reading in terms of larger cultural issues and may also be productively read against the ideological grain. (19)

As they argue autobiography is a story of a person and/or his/her life. It is always political, in a sense that, its motto is to speak out personal hardships, struggles, successes, achievements and as whole a personal history. As they state, personal story is social grain/product, so that she/he cannot remain outside the society. Thus, the cultural production of meaning is possible. Even an autobiography recounts the story of the shared collectivity. It engages recollecting due past events and memories of a person which are implicitly or explicitly connected to the society, culture and the nation as a whole.

Remembering is one of the techniques of depleting the past. Remembering and memory is the subject of self -narrative. It is not an entirely privatized activity but is a

situated in cultural politics and collective activity. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith state “on a daily basis we move in and out of various communities of memory, religions, racial, ethnic, and familial” (20). Shakur, in *Assata: An Autobiography* recollects her own friends, familial, Black community and the collective memory. The autobiography serves as a collective production of meaning or knowledge which is historically formed and constructed. Thus, this autobiography not only shares personal subject but also the collective matters.

Assata Shakur's prime concern behind exploring her 'self' is to reenergize, aware and inspire African American people and fight against the racial discrimination. She invests her more time on writing about prison life experience and its draw backs among African American civil right activist as it was not her merely personal problems. She writes:

Those who dared to speak out against the injustices in this country, both Black and white, have paid dearly for their courage, sometimes with their lives. Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, the Rosenbergs, and Lolita Lebron were all charged with crimes because of their political beliefs. Martin Luther king went to jail countless times for leading nonviolent demonstrations. Why, you are probably asking yourself, would this government want to put me or Ronald Myers in jail? In my mind, the answer to that is very simple: for the same reason that this government has put everyone else in jail who spoke up for freedom, who said give me liberty or give me death. (239)

This visualizes the pathetic and horrendous condition civil right activist in America. Shakur recalls the names of other freedom fighters who have gone before and celebrates their place in a continuum of struggle. It not only deflecting attention away from the uniqueness of the individual, but also of giving voice to the stories of those

who have been silenced (through detention, death or denied access to public media). This is the perfect example of what has been going in America. Throughout America's history, people have been imprisoned because of their political beliefs and charged with criminal acts in order to justify that imprisonment. She talks about unjust law and appeals to the black men and women to fight for equal right.

Assata Shakur confesses her own experience of imprisoned life as her private story represents the collective sufferings. The representation of the relation between Shakur's personal experience and its articulation of the social reality provokes the fact that to be personal is to be public. A person is an inseparable organ of the whole structure of the social relations. A personal story counts as an objective history of the period and place. That's why she memorizes her past sufferings and experiences of her imprisoned life:

They kept me under those blinding lights for days. I felt like I was going blind. I was seeing everything in doubles and triples. The internal search was as humiliating and disgusting as it sounded you sit on the edge of this table and the nurse holds your legs open and sticks a finger in your vagina and moves it around. She has plastic gloves on. Some of them try to put one finger in your vagina and another one up your rectum at the same time. (120)

Here we see Shakur's experience with what could easily fit into the categories of humiliation and physical abuse when she was moved to Riker's Island prison, Shakur was subject to the routine sexual violation that is part and parcel of both the prison and plantation systems about the process of strip searches from other Panthers who had been imprisoned.

Assata Shakur states that women's house of detention at Rikers Island another incident:

When I refused examination out of the infirmary and they called the goon squad. They jumped on me. They had me on the floor eventually my arm and leg were chained. The cuffs cut into my skin (the scars are still visible), and my wrists were bleeding. Later I found out that I had received an infraction for slapping an officer in the face while they were beating me. (205)

It reveals how institutionalized practices of sexual abuse, rooted in slavery, are rerouted and reinscribed in modern penal culture. The sexual invasion and humiliation imprisoned women experience is seen as a necessary routine, just as the abuse and humiliation enslaved women were subjected to was not considered rape by the dominant ideological and legal structures of the time

Assata Shakur, through her personal agony and pain, urges women to fight against racial discrimination. Assata involves identifying herself to the public reader and wants to eliminate and abolish racial discrimination through social awareness and fighting against the state.

Black brothers, Black sisters, I want you to know that I love you and I hope that somewhere in your hearts you have love for me. My name is Assata Shakur (slave name jonneschismard), and I am a revolutionary. A Black revolutionary. By that I mean that I have declared war on all forces that have raped our women, castrated our men, and kept our babies empty bellied. We have declared war on the rich who prosper on our poverty, the politicians who lie to us with smiling faces, and all the mindless, heartless robots who protect them and their property. (71)

She wants to unite the black community against the white supremacy as Margalit Says "Memory is the cement that holds thick relationship together"(8). Shakur wants to collect all the black people in one place to fight against the racial discrimination that has been deeply rooted in America, she fight for freedom for those victimized African

American people and raise their voice throughout her life. She not only desires to eliminate racial discrimination but also other suppressive activities including inhuman acts of state troopers. For the very purpose she contemplates her agony and the very extraordinary journey towards success with uncountable obstacles, hardships, struggles, thirst, hunger and starvation. Shakur mentions, "It is our duty to fight for our freedom, it is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains" (75). Her story, therefore, reenergizes African American People in the globe to their desired successful life. She struggles herself for her better future and her community but indeed she always determined to contribute something better for the world. She devoted her life for the African American people.

Assata Shakur always cherishes African American Culture and lifestyles though she vehemently segregated in America. She spends most of her fertile age in prison but she always keeps on longing that soil and freedom of her Community. She became nostalgic during her life struggle behind the bars and even when she underwent writing about herself. AvaishaiMargalit claims that nostalgia is an important element of shared memory and argues that, "shared memory may be an expression of nostalgia. Nostalgia, I hasten to say, is an important element of communal memory" (61-62). Her childhood memory haunts her badly as she remembers:

Every day when we drove from the house on Seventh Street to the beach, we passed a beautiful park with a zoo. And every day I would beg, Plead, Whine, and nag my grandmother to take me to the zoo. It was almost an obsession. She would always say that "one day" she would take me, but "one day" never came. I would sit in the car pouting, thinking how mean she was. I thought that she had to be the meanest look on her face of the earth. Finally, with the

strangest look on her face, she told me that we were not allowed in the zoo.

Because we were Black. (39)

Here, she valorizes her childhood days and her childhood memory and sees the segregated south. Black people were forbidden to go many places, and that included the zoo.

She hereby, subtly shows her departure from the totally North American livelihood. She criticizes the segregated Jim Crow law. Furthermore, her very private feeling lets the reader to their Childhood and urges to remember even a little for some betterment.

Assata Shakur is an “America’s Most Wanted” because of association with organizations that actively condemned the policies and actions of the United States government towards American peoples of African descent. Shakur was on trial because of their political beliefs and that is what defines her as political activist. Assata Shakur raises the issue of inhuman acts of White American people, as she states:

Any Black person in amerika, if they are honest with themselves, have got to come to the conclusion that they don't know what it feels like to be free. We are not free politically, economically, or socially. We have very little power over what happens in our lives. In fact, a black person in amerika isn't even free to walk down the street. Walk down the wrong street, in the wrong neighborhood at night, and you know what happens. (86)

Here, she picturizes devastating social scene of American society during the civil right movement, by showing this condition of American society. Black people can never be free in a country that is not free. They can never be liberated in a country where the institutions that control their lives are oppressive. They can never be free while black are oppressed. Or while the American government and American capitalism remain intact.

Life in the US in the 50s was tough if you weren't white. The civil rights movement was slowly trying to undo centuries of damage and change government policy, but there is no doubt that as a black child born in the 1940s, Shakur's life was permeated by racism in a way that seems almost unimaginable today. Born JoAnne Deborah Byron in Queens, New York, she moved with her grandparents from New York to Wilmington, North Carolina, to live in the house that her grandfather had grown up in. It was a time of segregation, of "Coloured Only" and "White Only" signs, and Jim Crow laws. As a result of the prejudice shown, Shakur's grandparents drilled into her the idea of personal dignity.

This memory work projects the author's collective remembering offering readers a possibility of identifying themselves with their stories. The narrator makes an act of remembering for a significant theme or message. Regarding autobiographical memory Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, "Life narratives, depending on the memory they construct, are records of acts of interpretation by subjects inescapably in historically time, and in their relation to their own ever-moving pasts" (24). As they argue, Shakur also historicizes herself and interprets her past experiences and the affecting social cultural circumstances as memory involves in a meaning making process. This is meant to say that past is constructed in autobiography with some motives.

Assata Shakur's *Assata: An Autobiography* as a memory work suggests the collective issues of imprisoned life of African American activists, victim of state sponsored lynching and biased law. These all issues are tactically presented in this autobiography in order to make people aware about these unjust, inhuman, segregated condition of African American people. One's memory always closely ties with his/ her social cultural backgrounds and transforms merely personal to the shared collectivity. Memory in a sense, is a discursive subject as it is formed by the social, cultural and

professional engagement of a person. It shares the common sufferings, happiness, rituals and social values and norms positioning of a social group. Shakur memorizes her past events and experiences and incorporates her personal feelings and understandings connecting with the collective Black people's issue of imprisoned life.

Through this memory work postulating her personal courageous even also struggling and painful life story, Assata Shakur reenergizes the African American people to raise their voice against the racial discrimination, inhuman act of state troopers. Her autobiography helps to inspire and empower the African American people. Assata teaches new left organizers, scholars, and activists many lessons. First, even though their names are rarely mentioned, the U.S. effort to murder and erase political prisoners such as Assata Shakur and her comrades continues into the present day. This means that the left must not only “say her name,” but also join organizations that are committed to fighting back against the ongoing effort to destroy and neutralize U.S. Political prisoners. Second, Assata’s historical trajectory shows the importance of developing solidarity with oppressed nations and peoples under the attack from U.S. imperialism.

Autobiography as a memory work reinterprets and recaptures the author's past in the present days. It is a meaning making process through which the writer bestows a message to the wider audience or the readers. Assata Shakur also bestows a message that even a black person can be a change maker in the society if they have courage, strong determination and enduring power to tackle and absorb the upcoming obstacles as she always does throughout her life. As writing an autobiography is identity construction, she involves identifying herself to the public audience or the readers.

Assata Shakur contemplating the ‘self’ reenergizes the whole African American people living in America. She, through this autobiography, tries to aware and inspire to fight against the inhuman activities of white imperialism. Her memory

work is helpful enough for raising a public conscience that racial decimation is inhuman and brutal, thus it must be eliminated and abolished from the United States with joint efforts of all black male and female.

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