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**Creating a Site of Memory:
the Tragedy of the Yezidis in Sinğār Reflected in Four Iraqi Novels**

Abstract

In her reflections on cultural memory, which “is based on communication through media,” Astrid Erll uses the term “remediation” in order to “refer to the fact that memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media: in newspaper articles, photography, diaries, historiography, novels, films, etc.” Some of these events may even become sites of memory. In my article, in relation to cultural memory studies, I contemplate the genocide of the Yezidis in the Sinğār district, which was committed by ISIS militants in August 2014 and in the following months, as reflected in four Iraqi novels written in the Arabic language. They are: *Raqṣat al-ğadīla wa-an-nahr* (“The Dance of the Braid and the River”, 2015) by Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *‘Adrā’ Sinğār* (“Sinğār’s Virgin”, 2016) by Wārid Badr as-Sālim, *Šamdīn* (“Šamdīn”, 2016) by Rāsīm Qāsim, and *Šazāyā Fayrūz* (“The Shattered Fragments of Fayrūz”, 2017) by Nawzat Šamdīn. By analysing the ways in which these writers depict ISIS persecution of the Yezidis, I aim to answer, among others, the following questions: What are their reasons for a literary documentation of these events? Is the iconic image of the genocide which emerges in the four novels similar to that outlined in the West media coverage? Therefore, the first part of the article concentrates on attitudes of the above-mentioned Iraqi writers to the Sinğār tragedy. In the second part, the plots of their novels are briefly described with the focus on how the reality intermingles with fiction. In the third and in the fourth parts, literary modes of expression, which serve to create a symbolic resistance of Yezidi victims against their oppressors, by giving them voice and showing alternative realities and fantastic events, are examined.

Keywords: the Yezidis, Sinğār, ISIS, cultural memory, modern Arabic literature, Iraqi novel

Introduction

In her reflections on cultural memory, which “is based on communication through media,”¹ Astrid Erll uses the term “remediation” in order to “refer to the fact that memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media: in newspaper articles, photography, diaries, historiography, novels, films, etc.”² In other words, “remembered events are transmedial phenomena, that is, their representation is not tied to one specific medium. Therefore, they can be represented across the spectrum of available media. And this is precisely what creates a powerful site of memory.”³ Furthermore, Erll explains the role of remediation in “creating and stabilizing certain narratives and icons of the past” on the example of September 11th attacks whose iconic image – the burning twin towers – became a transnational *lieu de mémoire*.⁴

In recent years, the world has witnessed many other shocking and painful events, caused, first of all, by wars and terrorism, some of which may also be transformed into powerful sites of memory.⁵ One of them is the tragedy of the Yezidi community in Sinğâr⁶ which began with the occupation of this Iraqi district by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant on 3rd August 2014. The Yezidis, who had been living on the margins of the Iraqi society since many decades and who had been facing numerous assaults, especially after 2003,⁷ were subjected to unspeakable, religion based atrocities of the war led by

¹ Astrid Erll, *Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory*, in: Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2008, p. 389.

² *Ibidem*, p. 391.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 394.

⁵ *Lieu de mémoire* can be defined, according to Pierre Nora, as “any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.” These words, written in the foreword to the English, shortened version of Nora’s *Lieux de mémoire*, were cited by: Patrick Schmidt, *Zwischen Medien und Topoi: Die Lieux de mémoire und die Medialität des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, in: Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Medien des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Konstruktivität – Historizität – Kulturspezifität*, de Gruyter, Berlin 2004, p. 26. On the “sites of memory” see also: Pim Den Boer, *Loci memoriae – Lieux de mémoire*, pp. 19–26; Udo J. Hebel, *Sites of Memory in U.S.-American Histories and Cultures*, pp. 47–60; and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War*, pp. 61–76, in: Erll, Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies*.

⁶ On the Yezidi communities of Northern Iraq, see for example: Christine Allison, *The Yezidi Oral Tradition in Iraqi Kurdistan*, Curzon Press, Richmond 2001, pp. 40–46.

⁷ See: Nelinda Fuccaro, *Ethnicity, State Formation, and Conscriptation in Postcolonial Iraq: the Case of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar*, “International Journal of Middle East Studies” 29/4 (November 1997), pp. 559–580; Irene Dulz, *Die Yeziden im Irak: Zwischen Musterdorf und Vertreibung*, LIT Verlag, Hamburg 2001; Irene Dulz, *Yeziden – Eine doppelte Minderheit im Irak*, “Der Schlepper” 18 (May 2002), pp. 27–28, Viewed 5 October 2017, <http://www.frsh.de/fileadmin/schlepper/schl_18/s18_27-28.pdf>; Eva Savelsberg, Siamend Hajo, *Gutachten zur Situation der Yeziden im Irak*, “Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien und Berliner Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Kurdologie”, 2005, Viewed 5 October 2017, <http://www.yeziden-colloquium.de/inhalt/gesellschaft/recht/Savelsberg_Hajo_Gutachten.pdf>; Irene Dulz, Siamend Hajo, Eva Savelsberg, *Verfolgt und Umworben: Die*

ISIS, which were officially recognised as genocide in March 2016.⁸ Starting from August 2014 and in the following months, members of this small religious minority lost their homes, some of them fled and found shelter in refugee camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, but many of them were killed (especially men and elder) in a variety of cruel ways or were abducted and enslaved (especially women and children).⁹ Millions of people all over the world have since learned about their sufferings through different media, such as television or recordings available on YouTube channels. “The Western media took notice” of the Yezidis because – as Cathy Otten claims – “they became the embodiment of embattled, exotic minorities against the evil of ISIS.”¹⁰

However, Christine Allison and Veronica Buffon, who analysed English-language media representations of the SiŃĀr massacre, “found that they focus predominantly on the bodies of suffering Yezidi women and on their sexual slavery” and that “the media gendering of the genocide does not match the collective nature of the trauma as lived and narrated by the Yezidis.”¹¹ In their article, they also stated that “In the international discourse, the women’s narratives of victimhood are privileged over men’s and the female voice is audible on the media (...) because it is in line with the brutality of ISIS.”¹² Thus, the sufferings of the female sexual slaves became an iconic image of the sufferings of

Yeziden im Neuen Irak, “Kurdische Studien” 4/5 (2004/2005), pp. 91–107, Viewed 5 October 2017, <http://www.yeziden-colloquium.de/inhalt/wissenschaft/Dulz_Savelsberg_Hajo_Yeziden.pdf>; Sebastian Meisel, *Social Change Amidst Terror and Discrimination: Yezidis in the New Iraq*, “The Middle East Institute Policy Brief” 18 (2008), Viewed 6 October 2017, <<http://dspace.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/27132/1/Social%20Change%20Amidst%20Terror%20and%20Discrimination%20-%20Yezidis%20in%20the%20New%20Iraq.pdf?1>>; Irene Dulz, Eva Savelsberg, Siamend Hajo, *Persecuted and Co-Opted – the Yezidis in the “New Iraq”*, “Journal of Kurdish Studies” 6 (2008), pp. 24–43; Mukhtar Lamani, *Minorities in Iraq: the Other Victims*, “CIGI Special Report”, January 2009, p. 7, Viewed 6 October 2017, <<http://dspace.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/24533/1/CIGI%20Special%20Report%20-%20Minorities%20in%20Iraq.pdf?1>>; Birgül Açıkyıldız, *The Yezidis. The History of a Community, Culture and Religion*, I.B. Tauris, London 2010, pp. 58–63; Paweł Siwec, *Mobilizacja polityczna irackich jezydów po roku 2003*, “Politeja” 11/3 (2004), pp. 335–343.

⁸ See: John Kerry: *ISIS is Committing Genocide in Syria and Iraq*, “The Guardian”, 17 March 2016, Viewed 6 October 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/17/john-kerry-isis-genocide-syria-iraq>>; Human Rights Council, *“They Came to Destroy”: ISIS Crimes Against the Yezidis*, 15 June 2016, Viewed 9 October 2017, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf>; United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, *UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: ISIS is Committing Genocide Against the Yazidis*, Viewed 10 October 2017, <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20113>>; Vian Dakhil, Aldo Zammit Borda, Alexander R.J. Murray, ‘Calling ISIL Atrocities Against the Yezidis by Their Rightful Name’: *Do They Constitute the Crime of Genocide?*, “Human Rights Law Review” 17/2 (2017), pp. 261–283.

⁹ See for example: Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports on the Yezidis since 2014; Irene Dulz, *The Displacement of the Yezidis after the Rise of ISIS in Northern Iraq*, “Journal of Kurdish Studies” 4/2 (2016), pp. 131–147.

¹⁰ Cathy Otten, *With Ash on Their Faces. Yezidi Women and the Islamic State*, Or Books, London 2017, p. 4.

¹¹ Veronica Buffon, Christine Allison, *The Gendering of Victimhood: Western Media and the Sinjar Genocide*, “Kurdish Studies” 4/2 (2016), pp. 191, 192.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 190.

the whole Yezidi community in the Singār area. Yet, the experiences of older women, children, young and old men were excluded from this “homogenized and undifferentiated” representation.¹³

In my article, departing from the assumption that literature takes part in the process of remediation of memorable events, I contemplate the genocide of the Yezidis in Singār as reflected in four Iraqi novels¹⁴ written in the Arabic language. They are: *Raqṣat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr* (“The Dance of the Braid and the River”, 2015)¹⁵ by Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq,¹⁶

¹³ Ibidem, p. 184. It is worth mentioning that the sexual enslavement of Yezidi women seems to be the main point of interest not only in the media coverage but also in the scientific discourse. See for example: Rukmini Callimachi, *ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape*, “Assyrian International News Agency”, 13 August 2015, pp. 1–4, Viewed 7 October 2017, <<http://www.aina.org/news/20150813132827.pdf>>; Martina Johansson, “Wartime Sexual Violence: The Case of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)” (Bachelor’s Thesis, Lund University, 2015), pp. 1–39, Viewed 3 October 2017, <<http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOID=5468180&fileOID=5468182>>; Sali Bitar, “Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War: the Case of ISIS in Syria and Iraq” (Master Thesis, Uppsala University, 2015), pp. 1–84, Viewed 3 October 2017, <<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:889178/FULLTEXT01.pdf>>; Beatriz Buarque, *The Violence Against Yezidi Women: The Islamic State’s Sexual Slavery System*, “Malala” 4/6 (2016), pp. 43–56, Viewed 1 October 2017, <<https://www.revistas.usp.br/malala/article/view/122158/118902>>; Suha Hazeem Hassen, “Investigating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War and a Tool of Genocide Against Indigenous Yazidi Women and Girls by ISIS in Iraq” (Master Thesis, Oregon University, 2016), pp. 1–122, Viewed 2 October 2017, <<https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/59346/HassenSuhaH2016.pdf?sequence=1>>; Sarwar Abdulrahman Omer, *Yezidi Women as Odalisques. A Historical Study about Yazidi Women’s Living Conditions under Rulings from Islamic States*, PAY Institute for Education and Development, Erbil 2016, Viewed 10 January 2018, <<http://payied.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/zhnany-ezedy-pdf.pdf>>; Peter Nicolaus, Serkan Yuce, *Sex-Slavery: One Aspect of the Yezidi Genocide*, “Iran and the Caucasus” 21/2 (2017), pp. 196–229; Marian Rizkalla, “Surviving ISIS: Life Stories of Yezidi Women” (Master Thesis, The American University in Cairo, 2018), pp. 7–137, Viewed 15 April 2019, <[http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/5619/Surviving%20ISIS%20final%2012.29.2018%20%20\(1\).pdf?sequence=3](http://dar.aucegypt.edu/bitstream/handle/10526/5619/Surviving%20ISIS%20final%2012.29.2018%20%20(1).pdf?sequence=3)>; Nikki Marczak, *A Century Apart: The Genocide Enslavement of Armenian and Yazidi Women*, in: Mary Michele Connellan, Christiane Fröhlich (eds.), *A Gendered Lens for Genocide Prevention. Rethinking Political Violence*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2018, pp. 133–162. See also other works on the genocide of the Yezidis: Jenni Porkka, “Terrorism and Genocide: The Islamic State and the Case of Yezidis” (Master Thesis, Uppsala University, 2017), pp. 1–96, Viewed 2 October 2017, <<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1109877/FULLTEXT01.pdf>>; Otten, *With Ash on Their Faces*.

¹⁴ It is worth adding that there are other novels in the Arabic language which tackle this topic, for example: *Sabāyā Singār* (Al-Mu’ssasa al-‘Arabiyya li-ad-Dirāsāt wa-an-Našr, Bayrūt 2016) by the Syrian writer Salim Barakāt, and *Banāt Hūdā* (Dār al-Fārābī, Bayrūt 2017) by the Lebanese writer Samīr Farhāt. Besides, there are nonfiction works containing testimonies of former Yezidi female captives, for instance: *Al-Mawt al-aswad. Ma’āsī nisā’ al-yazīdiyya fī qabdat Dā’īs* (Maṭba’at Hānī, Dahūk 2015) by the Kurdish author Hīḍr Dūmlī, and *Fī sūq as-sabāyā* (Manšūrāt al-Mutawassiṭ, Milānū 2017) by the Iraqi poet Duniyā Mīḥā’il. On the latter work, see: Ikram Masmoudī, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine: Two Accounts of the Yazidi Tragedy*, “International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies” 12/1 (2018), pp. 8–15.

¹⁵ Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *Raqṣat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr*, Dār al-Ma’ārif, Bayrūt 2015.

¹⁶ Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq was born in 1952 in Basra and currently lives in London; she has published 38 works (collections of poems, collections of short stories and novels) which were translated into multiple languages, i.a. French, English, Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Italian and German; she gained many Arabic and international literary awards. See: Ibidem, p. 137.

'*Adrā*' *Singār* ("Singār's Virgin", 2016)¹⁷ by Wārid Badr as-Sālim,¹⁸ *Šamdīn* ("Šamdīn", 2016)¹⁹ by Rāsim Qāsim,²⁰ and *Šazāyā Fayrūz* ("The Shattered Fragments of Fayrūz", 2017)²¹ by Nawzat Šamdīn.²² By analysing the ways in which these Iraqi writers depict ISIS persecution of the Yezidis, I aim to answer the following questions: What are their reasons for a literary documentation of these events? Is the iconic image of the genocide which emerges in the four above-mentioned novels similar to that outlined in the West media coverage? And, therefore, do the novels focus on the sufferings of enslaved Yezidi women and ignore the fates of their relatives? In what way does the literary image of these tragic experiences differ from the medial one?

Consequently, the article is divided into four parts, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first part concentrates on attitudes of the afore-mentioned Iraqi writers to what happened in the north-western part of their country and on their convictions about the meaning of their works in depicting these events. In the second part, the plots of their novels are briefly described with the focus on how the reality intermingles with fiction. In the third and in the fourth parts, literary modes of expression, which serve to create a symbolic resistance of Yezidi victims against their oppressors, by giving them voice and showing alternative realities and fantastic events, are examined. The reflection conducted in this article is put into the context of studies concerning the role of literature in creating cultural memory, especially those written by Astrid Erll, as it was already signalised.²³

Literature as documentation and commemoration

The four mentioned novels were published a year to three years after the ISIS attacks on the Yezidi community in the Singār district, which suggests that their authors felt a strong need to react quickly to these and subsequent events and to ascribe documentary

¹⁷ Wārid Badr as-Sālim, *'Adrā*' *Singār*, Manšūrāt Dīfāf, Bayrūt 2016.

¹⁸ Wārid Badr as-Sālim was born in 1956 in Basra and currently lives in Baghdad; he has authored several novels and other works, and gained many Arabic literary awards. See: Ibidem, pp. 405–406.

¹⁹ Rāsim Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, Dār as-Sāqī, Bayrūt 2017.

²⁰ Rāsim Qāsim, who died in 2019, was an Iraqi author of novels and short stories. He was awarded with the Aṭ-Tayyib Šālīḥ Prize for Creative Writing for his last collection of short stories in 2015. See: *Raḥīl ar-riwā'ī al-'irāqī Rāsim Qāsim*, "An-Nāqid al-'Irāqī", 18 June 2019, Viewed 18 July 2019, <<https://www.alnaked-aliraqi.net/article/64632.php>>.

²¹ Nawzat Šamdīn, *Šazāyā Fayrūz*, Al-Mu'ssasa al-'Arabiyya li-ad-Dirāsāt wa-an-Našr, Bayrūt 2017. The novel was first written in the Kurdish language and then translated into the Arabic language.

²² Nawzat Šamdīn was born in 1973 in Mosul; after his graduation, he had been working as a lawyer and then he devoted himself to journalism; he had been living in Iraq until 2014 when he moved to Norway; he has published several short stories and novels which were translated into Kurdish, German and English. See: Ibidem, pp. 281–284.

²³ In so doing, I follow other researchers who refer to the field of cultural memory studies and to the concept of "sites of memory" in their articles concerning modern literatures of different nations. See: Stijn Vervae, *Writing War, Writing Memory: The Representation of the Recent Past and the Construction of Cultural Memory in Contemporary Bosnian Prose*, "Neohelicon" 38/1 (June 2011), pp. 1–17; Imy Schweiger, *From Representing Trauma to Traumatized Representation: Experiential and Reflective Modes of Narrating the Past*, "Front. Lit. Stud. China" 9/3 (2015), pp. 345–368.

and commemorative functions to their literary texts. Three of them clearly expressed this need through different media. In her interview for the Arabic newspaper “Rā’ī al-Yawm”, Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq admitted that the immediate impetus for writing the novel “The Dance of the Braid and the River” was her emotions when she looked at a photo showing removed head of Rīḥāna on the Internet, the woman who belonged to a Kurdish division fighting with ISIS in the Syrian city of Kobane, and the head was held by the raised hand of an Islamist fighter. ‘Abd ar-Razzāq wrote her work in order to immortalize Rīḥāna and other female combatants who preferred to be killed in a battle rather than to become ISIS prisoners. For the author, her novel is thus a form of “a scream against injustice and silent human conscience, against ignorance and murderers who have made religion a means of killing and intimidating in order to destroy members of the Iraqi community and to control the riches of Iraq.”²⁴ After completing the novel, ‘Abd ar-Razzāq announced the project entitled “We resist terrorism through our works” and called on other Arab intellectuals to abandon silence and unmask the killers and their associates. She expressed her conviction that they could play an active and significant role in bearing the message of peaceful coexistence in the world.²⁵

As for Wārid Badr as-Sālim, during a meeting with the audience in the Kurdish House of Culture and Printing in Erbil, he described his 408-page novel “Sinḡār’s Virgin” as the first part of his “Iraqi epic” in which he wants to shed light on the collective misery of the Yezidi people to which they have been exposed over decades for political reasons. The author made clear in his media statements that one of the factors which contributed to the ISIS attacks on the Yezidis was the weakness of the Iraqi state, consisting of various antagonistically oriented religious and ethnic groups. Another factor was the betrayal of some members of the Iraqi society who joined the terrorists.²⁶ Moreover, As-Sālim mentioned how carefully he was preparing himself to write his work in order to depict “lots of the Yezidi pain”. He read sacred writings of the Yezidis and many studies on their religion, social structure, customs and history; he received information from Yezidi writers and other intellectuals; he visited camps for Yezidi refugees in Dahūk,²⁷ as well as the sanctuary of Sheikh ‘Adī in Lālīš;²⁸ and finally he talked with a number of Yezidi women and girls rescued from the ISIS captivity.²⁹ It is also worth mentioning that

²⁴ Ḥamīd ‘Aqabī, *Al-Kātib al-‘irāqīyya Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq: ar-riwāya al-‘irāqīyya ba‘da sanat 2003 šārat la-hā huwiyya ḡādida min wāq‘i al-mu‘ānat wa-al-qahr wa-šurūr Dā‘īs*, “Rā’ī al-Yawm”, 7 August 2016, Viewed 10 October 2017, <<http://www.raialyoum.com/?p=494430>>.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ *Riwāyat “‘Aqrā’ Sinḡār” li-al-kātib Wārid Badr as-Sālim fī nadwā ḥiwāriyya*, “Wakālat Anbā’ Zagros”, 25 May 2016, Viewed 10 October 2017, <<http://zagrosn.com/ar/14994-6>>.

²⁷ On the IDP camps in Dahūk, see: Dulz, *Displacement of the Yezidis*, pp. 140–141.

²⁸ For details concerning the sanctuary of Sheikh ‘Adī in Lālīš, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, pp. 133–146; Birgül Açıkyıldız, *The Sanctuary of Shaykh ‘Adī at Lalish: Centre of Pilgrimage of the Yezidis*, “Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies” 72/2 (2009), pp. 301–333.

²⁹ ‘Adnān Ḥusayn Aḥmad, “‘Aqrā’ Sinḡār”... waṭan maḥṭūf wa-tā’ifa mustabāḥa. *Riwāya ‘irāqīyya ‘an ma’sāil al-‘irāqīyyina wa-sabī an-nisā’*, “Aš-Šarq al-Awsat”, 5 April 2017, Viewed 10 October 2017, <www.asharqalawsat.com/2017/04/05/iraki-ya-irakiyya-an-masail-al-irakiyyina-wa-sabi-an-nisa/>.

As-Sālim dedicated his novel “to Nadia Murad, an ISIS slave girl... and the candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize.”³⁰

In turn, in his interview for the Iraqi television channel “Qanāt al-Fallūġa”, Nawzat Šamdīn emphasized that he had wanted to write in his novel about what had happened to the Yezidis and what had happened to Mosul, his hometown, which had also become a prisoner of the Islamic State. The Kurdish author said – clearly influenced by the experience of state censorship under Saddam Hussein’s rule – that in his opinion literary texts played a more important role than history books, since the voice of an independent writer could not be bought. His novel, which has been translated into Arabic and English, is then a loud voice about that which has been silenced and at the same time an attempt to pass on the voices of Mosul residents to other people; finally, it is an effort to make the public aware that the seizure of the city in June 2014 was not a sudden event, but was preceded by many years of radical activity which started in 2006, in the face of helplessness of the Iraqi government.³¹

Therefore, writing about the latest tragedy of the Yezidis, condemning the crimes conducted by ISIS, as well as pointing out to the responsibility of the Iraqi society for the emergence of the radical Islamist threat, is for each of these three authors a kind of moral obligation which they fulfil in their narratives. This results from their sense of a role that an Iraqi author must play, regardless of his or her ethnic or religious affiliation, in making all the Iraqi citizens aware of the need of solidarity with this neglected group, in order to preserve the unity of the state in the face of such an enormous danger as the Islamic State. No responsible Iraqi author should allow any of the communities making up his or her society to be marginalized, despite the political trends which have been ignoring their presence in the official historical narratives for decades. No responsible Iraqi author should let the memory of the recent Yezidi genocide be excluded from contemporary Iraqi collective narratives.³²

Researchers in the field of cultural memory studies often refer to these documentary and commemorative functions of literature which helps to remember events missing in history books. “The privileges of novels within the memory culture – as Birgit Neumann claims – include experimentation with new concepts of memory, giving voice to hitherto marginalized memories and ultimately making visible the processes of individual and collective memory-creation.”³³ Similarly, Ann Rigney confirms that “literature and other

³⁰ As-Sālim, *‘Adrā’ Singġār*, p. 11. On Nadia Murad, see her website: “Nadia’s story”, Viewed 10 October 2017, <<http://www.nadiamurad.org/new-page/>>. See also: Nadia Murad, *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State*, Tim Duggan Books, New York 2017.

³¹ Nawzat Šamdīn... *riwā’ī min al-Mawṣil yuṣḍiru riwāyata-hu al-aḥīra “Šazāyā Fayrūz”*, “Qanāt al-Fallūġa”, 13 April 2017, Viewed 10 October 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1J37czzmyE>>.

³² For more on the historical narrative of state power and the narratives of ethnic and sectarian groups in contemporary Iraq, see: Eric Davies, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2005; Jordi Tejel et al. (eds.), *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, World Scientific Publishing, Singapore 2012.

³³ Birgit Neumann, *The Literary Representations of Memory*, in: Erll, Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies*, p. 340.

arts often appear as a privileged medium of oppositional memory” and stresses that “fictional narratives (...) can succeed in figuring particular periods in a memorable way and so provide a cultural frame for later recollections.”³⁴ She also notices that this is especially true for traumatic collective events because “fictional genres and literary modes of expression may simply provide the only forum available for recalling certain experiences (...) that are simple too difficult to articulate in any other way.”³⁵

Intermingling of reality and fiction

The intermingling of reality and fiction in literary texts is another issue that draws the attention of those who research in the field of cultural memory studies. For example, Astrid Erll considers the place of literature in the culture of commemoration. According to her, literature helps to recreate some elements of collective memory, because when components of non-literary reality are introduced into a literary text, they are freed from their original contexts. “In the medium of literature – as she puts it – these elements can be structured in a new way, but existing structures can also be enriched or reinterpreted by new elements.”³⁶ In turn, Birgit Neumann deals with the problem of *mimesis*. She argues that “novels do not imitate existing versions of memory, but produce, in the act of discourse, that very past which they purport to describe,” “they combine the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the forgotten, and, by means of narrative devices, imaginatively explore the workings of memory, thus offering new perspectives on the past.”³⁷ Therefore, firstly, novels focus on particular experiences of individuals, their actions, thinking and feelings and so they serve to evoke “the real” human experiences.³⁸ Secondly, they show a subjective experience of time by dissolving the chronological order of events.³⁹ This applies especially to literary texts depicting traumatic events which occurred in a real historical time, but which cannot be represented through realistic

³⁴ Ann Rigney, *The Dynamics of Remembrance: Text between Monumentality and Morphing*, in: Erll, Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies*, pp. 347, 350. Cf. Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung*, Metzler, Stuttgart 2008, p. 176: “Literatur prägt Kollektivvorstellungen vom Ablauf und vom Sinn vergangener Ereignisse, deutet die Gegenwart und weckt Erwartungen für die Zukunft. Aus der kollektiven Refiguration können aber auch tatsächliche Handlungen, von veränderten Formen der Alltagskommunikation bis hin zur politischen Aktion, hervorgehen.”

³⁵ Rigney, *Dynamics of Remembrance*, p. 348. Cf. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, p. 171: “Bedeutung als Medium des kommunikativen Gedächtnisses erlangt Literatur dort, wo sie traumatische Geschichtserfahrungen einer nahen Vergangenheit inszeniert.”

³⁶ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, p. 175.

³⁷ Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 334. Cf. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, p. 171: “Elemente der beiden außerliterarischen Bereiche des Realen und des Imaginären werden im Medium der Fiktion ‘irrealisiert’ bzw. ‘realisiert’. Durch diese Verbindungen von Realen und Imaginären werden kulturelle Wahrnehmungsweisen in der Fiktion neu strukturiert.”

³⁸ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, p. 171.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 336.

narration, because the trauma “becomes a condition that persists into the present.”⁴⁰ Thirdly, novels use different modes of representing the past – they often concentrate on an everyday experience, but they also may turn this experience into a timeless myth, take part in contestation or adopt a reflexive stance.⁴¹

How are then the grim reality experienced by Iraq’s Yezidis and fiction in the four analysed works combined? How are the afore-mentioned narrative devices employed? This part of the article, although it is the longest one, is devoted only to a brief description of the plots of the novels with a focus on intertwining of the realistic and fantastic elements. However, the symbolic meaning of the latter will be explained in one of the following parts of the paper.

The novel “The Dance of the Braid and the River” by Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq is divided into nine chapters, but there is no clear plot. Rather, we are dealing with the interweaving of various scenes, occurring in some vaguely located places. Therefore, the tragedies of the Yezidis in Singār are – as opposed to the other three novels – not the only subject in this work, as the author concentrates, among other things, on the Camp Speicher massacre⁴² and on the fates of the Kurdish women fighting against ISIS in Peshmerga troops.

Moreover, “The Dance of the Braid and the River” keeps a poetic and uncanny atmosphere which is specific to all the works of this female writer.⁴³ This atmosphere is created by introducing some unreal and visionary elements which will be mentioned below, as well as by using fragments of poems and rhetorical questions at the beginning of each chapter or in the middle of the chapters. The latter clearly point to the commemorative function of the novel. They either depict the Iraqi horror, for example: “The thieves enter the holes of the keys, they drink the water of life, and they leave it as a feast of garbage,”⁴⁴ “Are these created by God as all His creatures? Or did they come as a kind of altars? How can the hand of God be the hand of the murderer and the neck of the dead?;”⁴⁵ or underline the need to remember what has happened, for example: “In order for something to be born in our midst, we will stand one minute of silence every day,”⁴⁶ “I will become your eyes, I will see the earth and the sky and we will witness the event.”⁴⁷ The same poetic tone often returns in descriptions of suffering Iraqi people, for example: “The girl looked at the knife’s blade and begged the ISIS militant not to rape her (...)

⁴⁰ Schweiger, *From Representing Trauma to Traumatized Representation*, p. 361.

⁴¹ Erll, *Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory*, p. 392.

⁴² See: *Camp Speicher Massacre: News and Archives about Camp Speicher*, “Iraqi News”, Viewed 16 October 2017, <<https://www.iraqinews.com/tag/camp-speicher-massacre/>>.

⁴³ In an interview, the author stated that she deliberately introduced poetic elements into her novels, and so examined reality through fantasy. See: ‘Aqabī, *Al-Kātiba al-‘irāqīyya Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq*.

⁴⁴ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *Raqṣat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

so she chose to be killed. The spirits disappeared between the sand and the slopes of wild mountains... and the distant and close voices burned the hour of the artery cut.”⁴⁸

The novel is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. In the first two chapters, he presents some inhabitants of a Christian village who watch television news and tell each other stories about crimes conducted by ISIS, such as kidnapping Yezidi girls, murdering other members of their community and killing thousands of civilians during the seizure of Mosul in June 2014.⁴⁹ Among the inhabitants, there are two remarkable characters – one of them is Hāmīd, who is playing the flute and waiting for the return of his beloved Šīrīn fighting in the Peshmerga forces; and the second one is a mute boy of unknown origin, who is the only one in the village to see an angel who comes to the people and leaves ears on the thresholds of their houses. In chapter three, the narrator describes the situation in Mosul after the takeover of the city by ISIS militants, especially the ethnic cleansing and mass exodus of the Christian, Yezidi and Shabak population to the refugee camps in Iraqi Kurdistan.⁵⁰ Among characters depicted in this chapter, there is a Christian girl called Samīra and her unnamed mother, who witness the death of other refugees.⁵¹

In chapter four, the narrator returns to describe the villagers who are still listening to various horrible news of ISIS crimes. He also depicts the relationship between the silent boy and the angel and shows the flute player awaiting Šīrīn’s homecoming. In chapter five, there are scenes from both the Christian village and the refugees march towards the camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, during which they tell each other their tragic stories. In chapters six and seven, the action moves to a camp in the mountains where

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 116.

⁴⁹ On the seizure of Mosul in June 2014, see for example: Ned Parker, Isabel Coles, Raheem Salman, *Special Report: How Mosul Fell – An Iraqi General Disputes Baghdad’s Story*, “Reuters, World News”, 14 October 2014, Viewed 3 November 2017, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-gharawi-special-report-idUSKCN0130Z820141014>>; Judith Neurink, *ISIS in Iraq: The Fall of Mosul to the Jihadists Was Less of a Surprise to Baghdad than Many Were Led to Believe*, “The Independent”, 25 February 2016, Viewed 3 November 2017, <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-in-iraq-the-fall-of-mosul-to-the-jihadists-was-less-of-a-surprise-to-baghdad-than-many-were-led-a6895896.html>>; Anna Louise Strachan, *Factors behind the Fall of Mosul to ISIL (Daesh) in 2014*, “K4D Helpdesk Report”, Brighton 2017, pp. 1-8, Viewed 3 January 2018, <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/13051/K4D_HDR_Factors%20behind%20the%20fall%20of%20Mosul%20in%202014.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁵⁰ On the ethnic cleansing of religious minorities in Mosul and Northern Iraq and their mass exodus, see for example: Fazel Hawramy, Sam Jones, *Kurdish Forces on Alert as Charities Issue Warning over Mosul Exodus*, “The Guardian”, 11 June 2014, Viewed 21 November 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/kurdish-high-alert-iraqi-army-mosul-isis>>; United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June–5 July 2014*, pp. 18–20, 18 July 2014, Viewed 4 January 2018, <https://un.op.org/sites/un.op.org/files/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC%20Report_FINAL_18July2014A.pdf>; Martin Chulov, *Iraq’s Largest Christian Town Abandoned as ISIS Advance Continues*, “The Guardian”, 7 August 2014, Viewed 4 January 2018, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/isis-offensive-iraq-christian-exodus>>; Amnesty International, *Ethnic Cleansing on a Historic Scale: Islamic State’s Systematic Targeting of Minorities in Northern Iraq*, September 2014, pp. 21–23, Viewed 21 November 2017, <https://www.es.amnesty.org/uploads/media/Iraq_ethnic_cleansing_final_formatted.pdf>.

⁵¹ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *Raqsat al-ġadīla wa-an-nahr*, pp. 9–52.

Kurdish militants, including Širīn and Rīhāna, undergo training and discuss their dreams and goals. Finally, both women are sent to the Kobane front where they bear heroic death in a battle. At the place of Rīhāna's death, a tree with red trunk has grown which kills ISIS fighters who are looking for shelter under its branches. Chapter eight presents the tragedies of the Yezidis in the SiŃġār area such as seizure of their land and property, mass murders and slavery. While above the heads of people escaping towards the refugee camps, the angel rises. This chapter also includes a poetic description of the death of young Shi'a army recruits in Camp Speicher. At the moment they are shot in the back of their heads and thrown into the Tigris River, the spirit of Rīhāna hands them ears in order to help them in their passing into the afterlife. Chapter nine depicts the spirit of Rīhāna floating over the mountains of Kurdistan and dancing in *barzaḥ*, the place between heaven and hell, with the spirits of other fallen female Peshmerga fighters.⁵²

The novel "SiŃġār's Virgin" by Wārid Badr as-Sālīm, which was written in Baghdad from January 2015 till January 2016, is divided into five parts. Some fragments of the second part describe episodes that preceded events presented in the other parts. A total of 74 chapters, each bearing its title, is a symbolic reference to 74 raids (*farmān*) experienced by the Yezidis over the centuries.⁵³ In this work, changes in chronological order are accompanied by polyphony, since the third-person omniscient narrator often loses his voice in favour of main characters' internal monologues and dialogues. However, what is striking is that the narrator sometimes addresses his words, which are in bold in this case, directly to some protagonists, commenting on their words or deeds. The literary fiction by As-Sālīm includes – just as the novel by 'Abd ar-Razzāq – fantastic elements that will be mentioned below and discussed in one of the following parts of the paper. At the same time, the work was given some features of a documentary novel, as – besides recording the ISIS crimes through the eyes of its main characters – it also incorporates components of non-literary discourses, for example discussions about the Yezidis conducted by the Iraqi citizens on Internet forums and photos depicting some documents of the Islamic State and executions on its convicts. In addition, the author uses explanatory footnotes and provides information on religious worship and social structure of the Yezidi people.

In the first part of the novel, titled "The Province of SiŃġār", a 40-year-old Yezidi man named Serbest (Sarbast) and an 18-year-old nameless Muslim man, whose parents were killed during the attack on the town of SiŃġār in August 2014, come back to their hometown, which is still controlled by the ISIS militants. They stay at the house of a nameless pregnant widow and tell her that they returned to find Serbest's daughter, called Nuštumān, who was kidnapped by the occupiers. Their return was possible because Serbest, who now uses the name Āzād, obtained from God, through a carrier pigeon, a document enabling him to move freely in the caliphate area. Over the following days

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 53–136.

⁵³ As-Sālīm, 'Aḍrā' SiŃġār, p. 153. On the 74 persecutions of the Yezidi community, see for example: Buffon, Allison, *Gendering of Victimhood*, p. 186; Dulz, *Displacement of the Yezidis*, p. 136.

and weeks, both men experience the grim reality of the town of Singār where all the Yezidis, who have stayed here, must use their new Muslim names and surrender to the new rulers. Every week, after the Friday noon prayer, they are forced to watch public executions of people found guilty of breaking Islamic law. Despite the bloodshed they both see on a daily basis, they are determined to remain in the town. The Muslim man begins to work for the ISIS militants in order to get information about the missing girl. He accompanies his Chechen employer and visits a training camp for “the cubs of the caliphate” (*ašbāl al-ḥilāfa*).⁵⁴

Serbest and his companion also get to know better some residents of the town of Singār who hide their secrets. The nameless widow, who witnessed the murder of her husband, has been pregnant for thirteen months because she decided that she would not give birth to a baby until the invaders had disappeared from her town. What is also strange in this literary figure is that she has the gift of talking to animals. Salār, a fruit seller at the market, has been hiding his children in a well behind his house for many months, and Serbest, who is often visits him, listens to their suppressed singing. In turn, Dilšād, a police officer working with ISIS under the Muslim name ‘Abd al-Ḥāfiz, is torn because of his double identity. On the one hand, he suffers because of his collaboration and executing orders of the invaders during the day, and on the other hand, he secretly says his Yezidi prayers at night.⁵⁵ There are also two other extraordinary characters in this part of the novel. The first one is ‘Aydū, a madman living in the streets of Singār, who kills an Afghani ISIS leader in the town. After some time, he is captured and sentenced. During the public execution of burning him alive in a cage, which the other male protagonists are watching, ‘Aydū is miraculously saved by a falcon which lifts him to the sky. The other character is an old man called ‘Afdāl, who refuses to convert to Islam. Because of this, he is thrown off the roof of his house. At the point of his fall, a fig tree starts to grow and the nameless widow takes care of it, since she knows that ‘Afdāl’s house will once become a place of pilgrimage to the grave of this martyr.⁵⁶

In the second part of the novel, titled “I am Nālīn, the Sister of the Hereafter”,⁵⁷ the narrator describes Serbest during his stay in a camp for Yezidi refugees in Dahūk,

⁵⁴ On “the cubs of the caliphate”, see for example: Kara Anderson, “*Cubs of the Caliphate*”. *The Systematic Recruitment, Training, and Use of Children in the IS*, “International Institute for Counter-Terrorism”, 6 March 2016, pp. 1–51, Viewed 5 December 2017, <file:///C:/Users/HP%20Notebook/Downloads/ICT-Cubs-of-the-Caliphate-Anderson.pdf>; Sara Mahmood, ‘*Cubs of the Caliphate*’: *The Islamic State’s Focus on Children*, “Counter Terrorism Trends and Analyses” 8/10 (2016), pp. 9–12; John G. Horgan, *From Cubs to Lions: A Six Stage Model of Child Socialization into the Islamic State*, “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism” 40/7 (2017), pp. 645–664; Gina Vale, *Cubs in the Lion’s Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory*, “International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation Report”, Department of War Studies, King’s College London 2018, pp. 1–27, Viewed 14 April 2019, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cubs-in-the-Lions-Den-Indoctrination-and-Recruitment-of-Children-Within-Islamic-State-Territory.pdf >.

⁵⁵ On the Yezidi prayer, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, pp. 103–104.

⁵⁶ As-Sālim, ‘*Aḍrā’ Singār*’, pp. 19–132.

⁵⁷ See: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, p. 100: “Every Yezidi has to have two brothers (sisters) of the hereafter – one a sheikh, and the other a pīr. (...) The brother (or sister) of hereafter is a kind of guardian angel who protects and assists

where he met the nameless Muslim man. After hearing the news that pregnant Yezidi girls, who had been raped by the ISIS fighters, returned to the camp, and his daughter was not among them, Serbest decides to live with his companion in a cave at the top of the mountain towering above the camp, where he remains desperate until he receives the Islamic State's document from the carrier pigeon. One day, the nameless man brings Nālīn, the sister of the hereafter, with whom he previously visited the Yezidi sanctuary in Lālīš, to their cave. The woman, who struggles with the traumatic experience of rape, realises how bad Serbest's mental state is and how rebellious he is against the Yezidi religion. When he goes to his cave, Nālīn tells the Muslim man her dramatic story and emphasizes: "You are the son of SingĀr, the heir of the catastrophe, the young historian and the little witness with whom the testimony grows. One day you will come back there and you will see its tragic form."⁵⁸

The third part of the novel, titled "The Province of Mosul", focuses on the Muslim man living in Mosul, for which he leaves with his ISIS employer in the hope of finding information about Nuštumān. In his free time, he walks along the streets of the city and looks at how it has changed under the occupation and how its inhabitants suffer. He also witnesses public executions. In order to bring the testimony of ISIS barbaric crimes to the world, he uploads in internet cafes under the nickname "The Son of SingĀr" videos he took with his mobile phone during the executions which he watched in his hometown. The Muslim man becomes more and more interested in the fates of the Yezidis about whom he has not known much before. He starts to visit online forums where some Iraqi citizens exchange information about the origin and beliefs of this religious minority. Interestingly, among the Iraqis whose words are cited here, is the author of the novel himself who admits in his entry that he had the opportunity to visit the camps for Yezidi refugees in Dahūk and the sanctuary of Sheikh 'Adī. He wanted to see their religious rituals and daily habits because he was preparing himself to write a novel about kidnapped Yezidi girls. Then, As-Sālīm briefly characterizes Yezidism as a religion worshiped by this closed community and depicts the beautiful location of the shrine in Lālīš. Moreover, he adds a photo of him in a traditional Yezidi outfit, which was taken near the bas-relief of a black serpent at the entrance to the sanctuary,⁵⁹ to his entry.⁶⁰

In the fourth part of the novel, titled "Nuštumān", the narrator continues the story of the Muslim man living in Mosul, who witnesses and documents the daily horror of this city. Since his new Kuwaiti employer is interested in buying a slave girl, the boy accompanies him in the search and gets to know where Yezidi *sabāyā*, "the spoils of

his/her protégé throughout his/her life during big events such as the haircut rite, baptism, circumcision, marriage and death." See also: Garnik Asatrian, *The Holy Brotherhood: the Yezidi Religious Institution of the "Brother" and the "Sister" of the "Next World"*, "Iran and the Caucasus" 3/4 (1999/2000), pp. 79–96.

⁵⁸ as-Sālīm, 'Aḍrā' SingĀr, pp. 217–289.

⁵⁹ On the black serpent at the entrance to the sanctuary of Sheikh 'Adī in Lālīš, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, pp. 81, 141; Peter Nicolaus, *The Serpent Symbolism in the Yezidi Religious Tradition and the Snake in Yerevan*, "Iran and the Caucasus" 15 (2011), p. 50.

⁶⁰ As-Sālīm, 'Aḍrā' SingĀr, pp. 290–327.

war”,⁶¹ are sold. When the Kuwaiti man leaves Mosul in order to fight in Aleppo, he demands that the nameless man marries his slave girl. Nārīn, whose Muslim name is ‘Ā’iša, gradually becomes accustomed to the man who gains her trust. While her health deteriorates, the girl shares with him the story of her sexual abuses by succeeding ISIS fighters and describes the conditions in which Yezidi female slaves were held captive. Via the Internet, the man manages to contact her mother in a refugee camp.⁶²

In the fifth part, titled “The Province of Siŋgār”, the narrator returns to tell the stories of Serbest and other characters remaining in Siŋgār. While the town is under fire, one of the hidden Salār’s children dies and Serbest helps him to perform a Yezidi funeral ritual.⁶³ Besides, the main protagonist visits ‘Afdāl’s house. Looking at the growing fig tree, he speaks to the martyr who tells him that his daughter Nuštumān is an idea which will turn into hope.⁶⁴

The novel *Šamdīn* by Rāsim Qāsim presents – according to the words of its narrator – two visions of what has happened in the Siŋgār district since August 2014. The first one is “our vision of the events”, which is an attempt to describe the ISIS attacks from the perspective of the Yezidis and the Iraqis who witnessed them; the second vision is the inner experience of the main heroine, a Yezidi girl named Šamdīn. The narrator encourages the reader to join him and enter the girl’s special world. She is in a state of deep trauma as she “went into the dark tunnel in which she travels at a high speed through the labyrinths (...) when she was despaired and desired death.”⁶⁵ The narrator also points out that both of these visions are interwoven in the novel. “Our vision of the

⁶¹ On the ISIS concept of “spoils of war”, see for example: *The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour*, “Dabiq. The Failed Crusade” 4 (2013/2014), pp. 15–17, Viewed 5 December 2017, <<https://www.ieproject.org/projects/dabiq4.pdf>>; Mah-Rukh Ali, *ISIS and Propaganda: How ISIS Exploits Women*, “Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism”, Oxford 2015, pp. 17–20, Viewed 7 December 2017, <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Isis%2520and%2520Propaganda-%2520How%2520Isis%2520Exploits%2520Women.pdf>>.

⁶² As-Sālim, *‘Aḍrā’ Siŋgār*, pp. 328–371. For more on the story of Nārīn, see: Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 20.

⁶³ On the Yezidi funerary ceremonies, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, p. 103.

⁶⁴ As-Sālim, *‘Aḍrā’ Siŋgār*, pp. 372–398.

⁶⁵ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, pp. 7–8, 34. On the post-traumatic stress disorder among Yezidi survivors, see for example: Veysi Çeri et al., *Psychiatric Symptoms and Disorders among Yazidi Children and Adolescents Immediately after Forced Migration Following ISIS Attacks*, “Neuropsychiatry”, 15 September 2016, pp. 145–150, Viewed 10 November 2017, <<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F62Fs40211-016-0195-9.pdf>>; Serhat Nasiroğlu, Veysi Çeri, *Posttraumatic Stress and Depression in Yazidi Refugees*, “Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment” 12 (2016), pp. 2941–2948, Viewed 10 November 2017, <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5115679/pdf/ndt-12-2941.pdf>>; Eda Erdener, *The Ways of Coping with Post-war Trauma of Yezidi Refugee Women in Turkey*, “Women’s Studies International Forum” 65 (2017), pp. 60–70; Jan İlhan Kizilhan, Michael Noll-Hussong, *Individual, Collective, and Transgenerational Traumatization in the Yazidi*, “BMC Medicine” 15/198 (2017), pp. 1–4, Viewed 16 April 2019, <<https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s12916-017-0965-7>>; Serhat Nasiroğlu et al., *Determinants of Psychiatric Disorders in Children Refugees in Turkey’s Yazidi Refugee Camp*, “Psychiatry and Clinical Psychopharmacology” 28/3 (2018), pp. 291–299, Viewed 16 April 2019, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/24750573.2017.1422958?needAccess=true>>; Pia Jäger, *Stress and Health of Internally Displaced Female Yezidis in Northern Iraq*, “Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health” 21 (2019), pp. 257–263.

events” concentrates on Šamdīn’s family and on other inhabitants of their village, who return to the ruins of their homes after the liberation of the Singār area by the Kurdish and Iraqi troops. They undertake the laborious rebuilding of their former lives and tell each other what has happened to them over the last months. Šamdīn is with them, sealed inside her inner world and narrating the successive stages of her captivity. Thus, in this literary fiction, which is divided into nine parts, the reader is dealing with a constant change of viewpoints (although the stories are told by the omniscient narrator) as well as with a disrupted narrative.

Unlike in the two previously described novels, no fantastic, supernatural elements are included in this work. The only uncanny imagery are Šamdīn’s visions, occurring at the time when she is held captive; these are reminiscences of women enslaved in an unspecified past, during an assault on a tribe in the desert and a pirate attack on a seaside village. Šamdīn, who as a follower of Yezidism believes in reincarnation,⁶⁶ is convinced that these are the memories of similar experiences of her other incarnations in the past.⁶⁷

The first part of the novel describes the above-mentioned return of the Yezidi inhabitants to their ruined village of Ruštī and the efforts they undertake to restore their everyday life despite the tragedies which each of them has experienced in their own way. Among them there are elderly men and women who are anxiously awaiting any news of their children. Unfortunately, Šamdīn, who is the only young person who has come back and who could inform them about the fates of their offspring, is unable to contact them. Whereas in the second part of the novel, the narrator goes back to events preceding the ISIS attack and depicts the idyllic and peaceful life of the villagers in July 2014. He shows Šamdīn, along with her family, who is waiting for her wedding with her fiancé Āzād in autumn. Although rumours of Mosul’s occupation by Muslim radicals are spreading across the village, its inhabitants distrust that their lands and they themselves could become their subject of interest.⁶⁸

The third part of the novel depicts the day when the village of Ruštī is taken over by the ISIS fighters. The inhabitants are gathered in a square in order to announce them that they are under control of the caliphate and those who resist are publicly shot. The villagers are segregated and the young girls are taken to another place by bus and then kept in a school for many hours. In the fourth part, the narrator focuses on Šamdīn’s experiences and thoughts while she is imprisoned with other women in a school hall. She realizes how tragic their situation has become at the moment they are told to choose between becoming wives of ISIS militants after their conversion to Islam and slaves in case of their refusal. Šamdīn notices that the leader of the group of fighters who captured her village is interested in her, so she tries to disguise herself by tearing her hair and wounding herself. A friend of hers, a teacher called Salār, engages in a dialogue with

⁶⁶ For more on the Yezidi idea of reincarnation, see: Victoria Arakelova, Tereza Amrian, *The Hereafter in the Yezidi Beliefs*, “Iran and the Caucasus” 16 (2012), pp. 316–317.

⁶⁷ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, pp. 63, 80, 90–91.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 6–47.

the chief of the ISIS militants and agrees to leave the room with him, together with her disabled brother, because she believes that she can convince him to release them.⁶⁹

Some chapters of the fifth part of the novel show the inhabitants of Ruštī who succeed in rebuilding not only their houses but also their shrine.⁷⁰ Šamdīn's father, Zirkār, decides to leave in search for his sons, Dūstū and Ḥadar, who managed to escape with their flock of sheep on the day when the ISIS attack took place. Zirkār sets out for Mount Singār and meets his sons at the summit. They tell him how, together with other Yezidis, they have been repulsing subsequent attacks of the Islamist fighters who have failed to capture the mountain.⁷¹ The sons, who have arranged their lives in a mountain village, do not want to return to Ruštī with Zirkār because they know that their sisters have lost their honour in ISIS captivity.⁷² In turn, other chapters of this part show Šamdīn who, held captive, is thinking about what will happen to her, her sisters and other women in the room. When Salār returns after the kindly ISIS chief is killed and when they are told that they will soon be separated and handed over to the fighters, Šamdīn and other women start to panic.⁷³

The sixth part of the novel is devoted exclusively to the Yezidi women in captivity. In some chapters, the narrator describes Šamdīn who – as a spoil of the ISIS commander – is left alone in the school hall with Salār's impaired brother, after other women have been deported. Some chapters present Šamdīn's younger sisters, Nāzik and Rūnāk, who at the time of a slave auction decide to convert to Islam in order to protect their honour. Whereas other chapters depict Salār who, as a slave, goes to the caliph's palace and is killed by the ruler.⁷⁴

One chapter in the seventh part of this work describes Šamdīn's father, Zirkār, who leaves Mount Singār, and ponders over the future of his oldest daughter and other Yezidi women who – having lost their honour – have lost their former place in their hermetic society and that is why many of its members will no longer accept them. All the other chapters of this part show Šamdīn's fate: she is first left in the school room for a long time, and then transferred, with the Salār's handicapped brother, to an abandoned church

⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 49–83.

⁷⁰ On the importance of village shrines in the Yezidi ritual life, see: Eszter Spät, "Holo holo Tawûsî Melek, holo holo şehidêt Şingalê": *Persecution and the Development of Yezidi Ritual Life*, "Kurdish Studies" 4/2 (2016), p. 157.

⁷¹ On the Singār Mountain's siege, see for example: Birgül Açıkyıldız-Şengül, *The Yezidis. An Ancient People, Tragedy, and Struggle for Survival*, in: Paul S. Rowe (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Minorities in the Middle East*, Routledge, London-New York 2019, p. 152.

⁷² On the religious purity of Yezidi women and the importance of endogamy in the Yezidi communities of Northern Iraq, see: Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, pp. 45–47, 153–155. On the concept of honour (*namûs*, *şaraf*) in the traditional Yezidi discourse, see also: Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism in Europe: Different Generations Speak about Their Religion*, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 39–41. For detailed information on honour and "honour killings" in some circum-Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Central and South Asian cultures, see: Diane E. King, *The Personal is Patrilineal: "Namus" as Sovereignty*, "Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power" 15 (2008), pp. 317–342.

⁷³ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, pp. 85–109.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, pp. 111–137.

in which her new owner, Abū Qatāda, is hiding her because she has not been registered as a slave girl. The man wants her to be his wife voluntarily and plans to give the boy as a gift to his sheikh in Saudi Arabia. However, when Šamdīn hears Abū Qatāda talking about his plan on the phone, she starts screaming and pulling ropes of the church bells. The ISIS commander then rapes her and takes the boy with him.⁷⁵

The eighth part of the novel opens with Zirkār's homecoming and his conversation with his wife, Rūz, about the depopulation that threatens the village in a few years if young men do not marry the disgraced girls. All the other chapters of this part focus on Šamdīn, handed over by Abū Qatāda to one of his subordinates, who transports her to his room in a military base that he shares with four other men. The girl, who is in a terrible physical and mental state, is again threatened with rape, but one of the roommates of her new owner decides to buy her in order to protect her. The Yemeni fighter, who wants to redeem his mistake of joining the radical fanatics, leaves Šamdīn under the care of a Christian nurse, whom he has also saved from death. The woman takes care of the girl in a hospital until the liberation of Mosul takes place. Then Šamdīn goes to a temporary refugee camp, and from there to her village where her parents see her sitting at the ruins of their house.⁷⁶

In the ninth part of the work, the narrator returns to tell the story of the inhabitants of Ruštī who continue to rebuild their village. Šamdīn, who has been repeatedly examined by UN medical committees, is given the chance to go for a long-term treatment in Germany in the company of her father.⁷⁷ In the last scene of the novel, her mother Rūz speaks with a friend of hers about the unknown fate of the five thousand missing young women and men.⁷⁸

The novel "The Shattered Fragments of Fayrūz" by Nawzat Šamdīn, which consists of 34 chapters, describes an unfulfilled love story between a young Muslim man, Murād, and a Yezidi girl named Fayrūz, enslaved by the Islamic State. In contrast to the three afore-mentioned novels, it keeps the chronology of events since spring 2013 until the time when Mosul was still remaining under the control of the caliphate. However, similarly to these novels, the narrative changes from the third-person narrative of an omniscient narrator describing Murād's fate to Fayrūz's first-person narrative of her captivity. Besides, no fantastic and uncanny elements are entwined here.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, pp. 140–170.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, pp. 171–193.

⁷⁷ See: Khanna Omarkhali, *Transformations in the Yezidi Tradition after the ISIS Attacks: An Interview with Ilhan Kizilhan*, "Kurdish Studies" 4/2 (2016), pp. 148–154; Dara Mohammadi, *Help for Yazidi Survivors of Sexual Violence*, "The Lancet Psychiatry", 26 March 2016, pp. 409–410, Viewed 19 November 2017, <<https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S2215-0366%2816%2930004-9>>; Inga Gerdau, Jan Ilhan Kizilhan, Michael Noll-Hussong, *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Related Disorders among Female Yazidi Refugees Following Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Attacks – A Case Series and Mini-Review*, "Frontiers in Psychiatry", 13 December 2017, Viewed 19 April 2019, <<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2017.00282/full>>; Thomas McGee, *Saving the Survivors: Yezidi Women, Islamic State and the German Admissions Programme*, "Kurdish Studies" 6/1 (2018), pp. 85–109.

⁷⁸ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, pp. 191–202.

The first six chapters of the novel describe the ISIS attack on a Yezidi village in the Singār district and the preceding events. Murād, who has studied veterinary medicine in Mosul, returns to his native Muslim village east of Mount Singār where he sets up a chicken farm. On 3rd April 2013, while walking around his village, he sees a Yezidi girl sitting on the road. She is selling onions, and he immediately falls in love with her. For many months, he comes to this place and without saying a word watches the girl who probably – like the majority of the Yezidis in Singār – does not speak the Arabic language.⁷⁹ He even convinces the residents of his village to increase the consumption of onion, so he has a reason to approach the girl. Meanwhile, the girl does not understand his behaviour and worries that he will hurt her. Then, the news that the Islamists took over Mosul come to the Muslim village. At this time, Murād begins to sell chickens in Yezidi villages in order to find out where the girl who sells onions on the road lives. One day, the girl's village is attacked by ISIS fighters; male inhabitants are shot dead and women are loaded onto buses and driven in an unknown direction.⁸⁰

In chapters seven and eight, Murād learns about the deportation of the Yezidis from their villages, so he goes to the girl's house, but he does not find her. The young man decides to join the supporters of the caliphate in order to search for her, even though he knows her name only. He takes advantage of the fact that his uncle is a high ranking ISIS commander in Mosul. With his help, Murād receives several jobs, but none of them allows him to move freely in the city and its vicinity.⁸¹ In turn, in chapter nine, Fayrūz tells the story of her imprisonment along with other women in a school room. One of them is Širīn, a doctor working in the town of Singār, who is trying to talk to ISIS fighters about the fact that the prisoners are protected by international laws, but she is beaten by them. Soon, militants come and take some slave girls with them. Fayrūz stays in the school room with her aunt, her two younger sisters, and Širīn.⁸²

In chapters ten and eleven, the narrator describes Murād living in Mosul controlled by ISIS. He works as an assistant in an intelligence group and in his spare time, he searches for information about the sold slave girls. One day, at work, he meets an unusual man, Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm, known under the nickname of “Hajji Owl”, who evokes fear in his co-workers because they believe that he is the vision of death. For many decades, Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm has been making lists of dead people in Mosul, regardless of the changing political powers. Even the Islamists need his help because they are especially concerned about the deaths of foreign militants. Therefore, he can travel around the city in a car driven by a chauffeur, and due to the large amount of work he needs to have a helper.⁸³ Chapter twelve shows Fayrūz who, along with her aunt, sisters and other women, is transferred to the building of a former jail where the ISIS fighters are residing. The girl works as a kitchen assistant, her aunt cleans and washes clothes, while the wounded Širīn lies in

⁷⁹ On the Kurdish language spoken by the Yezidis in Singār, see: Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, pp. 19–22.

⁸⁰ Šamdīn, *Šazāyā Fayrūz*, pp. 5–60.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 61–71.

⁸² *Ibidem*, pp. 73–84.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, pp. 85–105.

a separate cell and is taken care of by an Afghan doctor. Šīrīn knows that after she has recovered, she will become a sex slave, so she decides to take her own life, first by starving herself and then piercing her veins with a syringe. Some other girls break their shoulders in order to avoid sexual enslavement, but their supervisors threaten them with death and force all the imprisoned Yezidi women to embrace their new faith.⁸⁴

In chapters thirteen and fourteen, the narrative focuses on Murād who becomes Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm's assistant, and thus gains the opportunity to move freely around Mosul as well as the access to the vast wealth of information about the deceased. In turn, in the next two chapters, Fayrūz describes how about 60 jailed women are forced to learn the principles of Islam in order to be married to radical militants. In addition to that, her aunt, Nadīma, is raped by the head of the prison.⁸⁵ In chapter seventeen, the place of action is Murād's village where his brother, Widāḥ, a member of ISIS, organises a public reception of his guest, 'Abbūd – his uncle and an important commander in the caliphate who was once exiled from his family. Whereas in the next chapter, the narrator shows Murād conversing with Hajji Owl about the old man's attachment to Mosul and about the causes which led to the takeover of the city by the Islamists.⁸⁶

Chapter nineteen depicts the moment when Fayrūz, along with other women, is taken away by bus from the prison building where her aunt is detained. Then, the next chapter switches to the story of Murād who tells Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm about his love for Fayrūz. The old man decides to help him to find her and buy out some other Yezidi slave girls. Whereas the following chapter presents Fayrūz who, together with other women, is held for two weeks in a palace and prepared for sale. During a bombing of the palace, her youngest sister is killed.⁸⁷ Chapter twenty two follows Murād and Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm who are still searching for information about the sold Yezidi slave girls; they participate in auctions and hide the women they bought in the house of Hajji Owl; afterwards, they help them to get across the borders of the caliphate. In the next chapter, Fayrūz ponders about her pain after losing her sister and talks about further preparations of the enslaved women for sale, which finally takes place. Chapter twenty four shows Murād's and Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm's further efforts to buy and save other Yezidi women from whom they seek information about Fayrūz. In chapter twenty five, the girl and her sister are sold to an ISIS militant, called Abū Duḡān, in whose house she is persecuted by his jealous wife, and so he is forced to sell them.⁸⁸

Chapter twenty six depicts Murād and Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm attending a sermon in the mosque during which an imam explains the reasons why the practice of sexual slavery is allowed in Islam. Hajji Owl enters into a discussion with him, indicating that this procedure goes against the Qur'an. In the next chapter, Fayrūz talks about her being sold to another fighter, named Abū Qatāda. In his house, she encounters another Yezidi slave woman,

⁸⁴ Ibidem, pp. 109–117.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, pp. 121–150.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, pp. 152–169.

⁸⁷ Ibidem, pp. 170–193.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, pp. 195–230.

Faryāl, who warns her against the wife of the militant. Despite her superficial courtesy and compassion, the Muslim woman obeys her husband completely and soon she assists him in beating Fayrūz, who threatens him with self-immolation in order for him not to touch her. Abū Qatāda takes the heroine's sister and threatens to sell her.⁸⁹

Chapters twenty eight to thirty as well as chapter thirty two focus on Murād and Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm who go to the prison where Fayrūz was detained a few weeks earlier. At this time, Hajji Owl realizes that they are followed by ISIS militants, but says nothing to Murād. The young man, after smuggling another slave woman outside the caliphate, returns to his native village because his father dies. Meanwhile, Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm is arrested and charged with treachery. Murād, with the help of his uncle, is cleared of suspicion. Upon his return to Mosul, he observes the public execution of Hajji Owl.⁹⁰

In chapters thirty one and thirty three Fayrūz is still suffering in Abū Qatāda's house. After some time, the girl, desperate to see her sister, agrees to spend the night with the fighter, but her sacrifice is in vain. In this situation, Fayrūz manages to escape his house along with Faryāl, but when they are on the street, she decides to return so as not to lose the only chance to find out about the fate of her sister. In the last chapter, Murād decides to return to his village in order to exercise his father's last will.⁹¹

Voices of oppressed people

In reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony,⁹² Astrid Erll argues that literary works are multi-voice media representing various discourses.⁹³ It is due to the fact that literary figures present their different, unique perspectives, "which offers insight into their level of information and psychological dispositions as well as the norms which govern their actions;" and thus allows the negotiation of collective memories.⁹⁴ Thus, polyphony is often performed through the first person narrative: a protagonist describes his or her everyday experiences that are a part of collective experiences in dialogues with other characters, so that he or she becomes an observer or a witness to what happened or what happens. The reader gets to know not only his or her words, but also the inner world – his or her thoughts and emotions, formulated in internal monologues. In Erll's opinion, this is a unique feature of literary texts. It even becomes a privilege, when it comes to expressing experiences which are difficult to describe in other ways, especially the traumatic ones.⁹⁵ The first person narrative is a typical strategy of the

⁸⁹ Ibidem, pp. 231–245.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 246–258, 267–269.

⁹¹ Ibidem, pp. 260–280.

⁹² Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (ed. and transl.) Caryl Emerson, (intro) Wayne C. Booth, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, pp. 6–8.

⁹³ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, p. 171.

⁹⁴ Neumann, *Literary Representations of Memory*, p. 338.

⁹⁵ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, pp. 195–196.

so-called “experimental mode” of the rhetoric of collective memory, which offers the reader “an illusion of sensuous perception of a very definite fictional world” and evokes “a real experience”.⁹⁶

In all the above-mentioned novels this kind of rhetorical mode prevails, since the narratives generally concentrate on the everyday life of the protagonists, interrupted by unusual events which change their fates completely. Moreover, not only are their fates and their coping with the new brutal reality shown, but also their words and inner feelings. In this way, they become representatives of certain attitudes of the Iraqi citizens in the face of the ISIS threat. In this part of the article, only some of the voices of victims and witnesses who appear in the works are presented as examples. Due to the limited size of the paper, no further attention is given to oppressors who are usually different ISIS commanders and fighters in these texts. However, it is worth mentioning that these characters are rather flat – evil, cruel, possessed by a desire to destroy others and to dominate female bodies. Their way of speaking illustrates their religious beliefs, especially in the scenes when they talk with the representatives of the Yezidi community in order to prove them that they, as “the worshipers of Satan”,⁹⁷ deserve death. But there are also some exceptions among the literary figures of the Islamist fighters who understand that they have been deceived by the promise of a glorious life. So, these protagonists decide to redeem their faults by helping the victims, just like the Yemeni fighter depicted in the novel by Qāsim.

Although “The Dance of the Braid and the River”, because of its poetic nature, does not show as many details of the everyday life as the other three novels, it exposes attitudes of the female heroines, Rīḥāna and Širīn, who voluntarily leave their peaceful lives in their villages to fight the enemy threatening the existence of their community. In the mountain training camp, they both talk and meditate on the need to sacrifice their dreams of marriage and family with fighters who train with them, for a higher purpose. Then, they both make their decision, go to the front in Syria and die.⁹⁸

The novel “SingĀr’s Virgin”, due to its volume and function of “the Iraqi epic”, presents in detail its protagonists’ different attitudes to what has happened to the Yezidis, which they reveal in their dialogues and internal monologues. For example, ‘Aydū, the madman living in the streets of SingĀr, is the only one who has the courage to tell others what he thinks about the collaboration of some citizens of the town, most of which belong to the local Arab tribes, with the occupiers. The main hero, Serbest, who

⁹⁶ Ibidem, p. 192. The term “modes of collective memory” means the strategies which enable collective memory to find its manifestation in literary texts; it was coined by Astrid Erll who defined five types of these modes: the experimental mode, the monumental mode, the historicizing mode, the antagonistic mode, and the reflexive mode.

⁹⁷ On the allegations of devil worship among the Yezidis and the ISIS propaganda, see: *Revival of Slavery*, pp. 14–15; Wiktor Pastucha, Aleksandra Szychalska, *How Islamic State Uses Propaganda in the Service of Genocide*, “The International Academic Forum”, 4 April 2016, Viewed 15 December 2017, <<https://think.iafor.org/islamic-state-use-propaganda-service-genocide/>>.

⁹⁸ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *Raqṣat al-ġadīla wa-an-nahr*, pp. 79–94.

observes him walking in the streets, concludes in his internal monologue that “when one madman stays in the town, its memory will not be forgotten.”⁹⁹ Thus, it can be assumed that ‘Aydū symbolizes the voice of a free man who, in spite of his weakness, exclaims the truth in the face of the powerful enemy and is ready to die for it. In turn, Dilšād, the policeman collaborating with the Afghani ISIS commander in Sinğār, Hajji Ḥān, is not able to oppose him directly, for fear of losing his life and of revenge on his family. In conversations with his Islamist superior, he uses a rhetoric typical of the followers of the caliphate. When the Afghani commander orders him to cut off the head of anyone who will dare to resist him, to forget that he once studied a “forged” history of Iraq and to remember that he is now a fighter in the path of God, Dilšād flatters him in saying that a great history began after the caliphate was created. However, in his mind, the protagonist tells Hajji Ḥān that the Yezidis, as descendants of the Babylonians and Assyrians, are the heirs of the centuries-old traditions.¹⁰⁰ Then, he concludes with bitterness that the Afghani commander does not care about anything, because he thinks of killing only since he is a creature made of dust, blood, dead nerves and vengeful soul, and his only occupation is the annihilation of others. That is how the literary figure of Dilšād symbolizes another kind of resistance against the invaders, performed by those Yezidi inhabitants who have stayed in the occupied places in spite of mortal danger. This kind of resistance seems to be unspectacular and hidden but still important for the survival of the Yezidi community and the preservation of its identity. This is clearly stated by Serbest as well as by the narrator who addresses Dilšād with the following words: “(...) do not leave your personal story of the town, so as not to be wasted by the troopers of religion in ignorant fatwas and fermans. You are the son of distant history (...).”¹⁰¹

The perspective of the main character in the novel, Serbest, who is broken after the loss of his daughter and feels guilty because he has not saved her, is also worth considering. In his conversations with the nameless widow and Nālīn, Serbest states that the occupied Yezidi towns and villages will no longer be as before, because the Sinğār area, with its geography, history and religion, has been lost since the Yezidis have been living in a legendary, exaggerated history, and now they have been left on the margins of the cursed history of Iraq. They have been functioning in social isolation and illusion of being protected by their religion, while other civilizations have been developing and threatened their existence many times. The last invasion has made him convinced that if the Yezidis want to survive, they have to leave behind some of their customs and no longer obey their religious orders so strictly, because Yezidism is responsible for what has happened to them recently. In a sense of great bitterness, he comes to the conclusion that he has to create a new religion and become its prophet. In turn, both women, with whom he discusses, try to persuade him that both the Iraqi history and other religions

⁹⁹ As-Sālim, *‘Aḍrā’ Sinğār*, pp. 54–56.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. some statements of Yezidi women who were interviewed in refugee camps in Iraqi Kurdistan, in: Rizkalla, “Surviving ISIS”, p. 125.

¹⁰¹ As-Sālim, *‘Aḍrā’ Sinğār*, pp. 38, 67–72, 167.

are guilty of the sufferings of the Yezidis, who have survived as a religious group for centuries, and that what is happening to them now is once more a great test of their endurance.¹⁰² In this way, the voices of Serbest and the two women represent a discussion within the Yezidi community about the (un)necessity of adapting their way of living to the requirements of the surrounding reality.

In the novel *Šamdīn*, the most important one is the voice of the main heroine who represents the voices of all the captured and humiliated Yezidi women. The girl, both in her inner monologues and in her dialogues with other women who are imprisoned with her in the school room, describes not only their tragic situation but also reflects – in a sophisticated way which seems to exceed her simple village education – on the perpetual struggle between men and women, in which the latter always become victims of male lust; on the evil in human nature, embodied by the ISIS militants; as well as on the desire of killing which makes human beings, in spite of their civilizational development, return to their original, wild nature.¹⁰³ Then, *Šamdīn* meditates on the essence of wars fought over thousands of years in which the weak ones were taken slaves by the stronger ones, their homes were plundered and their properties confiscated:

But it is strange that these things happen in the twenty-first century under international governance, laws and conventions, which have been adopted by all states (...) to ensure safety and protection of nations and human beings as well as preservation of their rights to a free, dignified and peaceful life. So, where are these conventions and agreements established in the laws of the United Nations? Where are those treaties? How do such things happen and how can the community be destroyed in front of the eyes of the world at a time where information reaches all around the Earth's surface in seconds and minutes? How can it happen to the community which has its entity, history, land and language? How can it be destroyed and robbed in front of the eyes of the world? Where is the international community? Where are the United Nations? Where?¹⁰⁴

Beside the voice of *Šamdīn*, which seems to represent not only the voices of the Yezidi slave women but also the voices of all the Yezidi people asking for international help and restoration of justice, the voice of her father, Zirkār, plays a significant role in the novel. As it was already mentioned, the man reflects ruefully about the lost honour of the captured Yezidi women and the burdensome social custom which excludes these women from the community, and even allows its members to take their lives, although

¹⁰² Ibidem, pp. 186, 252–267. Cf. some statements of Yezidi women, who were interviewed in refugee camps in Iraqī Kurdistan, about their faith in God which help them to endure their suffering, in: Rizkalla, “Surviving ISIS”, pp. 125–126.

¹⁰³ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, pp. 63–64, 79, 90, 97–98, 114, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, pp. 123–124.

they are innocent victims. This custom is followed by Zirkār's sons who deliberate whether to kill Šamdīn, and eventually they choose to live away from her so as not to lose their own honour. Whereas Zirkār is understanding and forgiving, not only towards his own daughter, but also to all the wronged Yezidi women; firstly because of his parental affection which is stronger than the strict social norm; secondly because of his own experiences in captivity; and thirdly because of his awareness of that following the tradition blindly will cause irreparable damage to the Yezidi community which will die out or decay if men refuse to marry dishonoured women, which has been, after all, the intention of the oppressors.¹⁰⁵

In the novel "The Shattered Fragments of Fayrūz", the main heroine depicts her suffering and the sufferings of other women in ISIS captivity, but she does not ponder on their fates like Šamdīn does, the afore-mentioned protagonist in Qāsim's novel. However, the literary figure of Fayrūz, with her words, thoughts and deeds, symbolizes all the tormented Yezidi women. She is predominantly weak and helpless, but sometimes she finds strength in order to resist the oppressors, as in the scene when she is leaving the prison building on the bus and realises that her aunt is not with her; she pounces on an ISIS guard, yells and demands that he brings her; in fury she bravely attacks the persecutor, but in consequence she is beaten.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Murād, the Muslim man who falls in love with her and risks his life in order to find her and to save some other enslaved Yezidi women, does not reflect much on his actions – he only does what he believes he should do. Hence, Murād epitomizes all the Iraqīs who, regardless of their religious affiliation, instinctively help the oppressed people.

A more complex character in the novel by Šamdīn is Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm, an old man who – with considerable irony – witnesses the ISIS activities in his beloved Mosul. He clearly expresses his opinion to Murād when he states that radical militants have been deluded by promises of gaining women and wealth under the cloak of religion. He explains to the young man how it happened that they took the control over the city. Hajji Owl also considers that there should be a change in Islam so that such phenomena as the rise of extremist groups do not repeat in the future. Although Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm has been trying to remain neutral towards the successive rulers of Mosul for decades, influenced by Murād's selfless dedication, he now decides to abandon his non-commitment since "he wants to devote something for life, because he has devoted all his life for death." He admits to Murād that in his dreams he sees the dead people whose names he has been writing down for years and maybe there would have been a chance to save them if he had given up the idea of his neutrality. So, Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm not only helps Murād in saving some enslaved Yezidi women, but also sacrifices his own life by loudly announcing in the mosque that what ISIS does to these women is against the meaning of the Qur'an. Moreover, before the judge reading his sentence, he states that Mosul will never belong

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, pp. 106–108, 156. See the information on the call of the Yezidi leader Baba Sheikh to welcome back abducted women and girls in their community, in: Omarkhali, *Transformations in the Yezidi Tradition*, p. 149; Marczak, *A Century Apart*, pp. 149–150.

¹⁰⁶ Šamdīn, *Šazāyā Fayrūz*, p. 177.

to the caliphate.¹⁰⁷ That is how Hajji Owl, through loud and uncompromising exclamation of truth and exposing his life to deadly danger, reminds the literary figure of the madman ‘Aydū in the novel by As-Sālim.

The imagination that brings hope

In her reflection on how collective memory finds its manifestation in literary texts, Astrid Erll argues that the above-mentioned “experimental mode” of the rhetoric of collective memory is often accompanied by the “monumental mode”. In her opinion, literature is characterised not only by depicting particular experiences but also by its monumentality. She refers to Aleida Assmann who writes that monuments are “signs that encode messages which should survive in time.” The “monumental mode” points out to the “distant horizon” of a culture and usually relates to rituals and myths. Then, Erll states that thanks to the combination of these two modes, an everyday detail can be read in the medium of fiction as a meaningful element of cultural memory; and conversely, every mythical event introduced into the narrative structure of a fictional text can have implications on ordinary experiences.¹⁰⁸ The fusion of everyday events and myths seems to be of particular importance in texts depicting traumatic experiences, since “literature possesses the potential to heal the individual and the collective by restoring meaning where it has been destroyed by trauma.”¹⁰⁹

The combination of the experimental and monumental modes occurs particularly in those of the analysed novels in which the intermingling of realistic and fantastic elements is extensively employed, that is in the novels by ‘Abd ar-Razzāq and As-Sālim. In the novel “The Dance of the Braid and the River”, the uncanny atmosphere is created by the presence of beings belonging to the beyond who appear among ordinary people. One of them is the female angel who leaves ears of grain at people’s doors or hands them to those who will soon die. It is difficult to say unequivocally what this character symbolizes in the novel. In the opinion of the Iraqi researcher, Asmā’ Ġarīb, the female angel embodies the author herself and the ears are her prayers for the suffering Iraqis.¹¹⁰ But the angel is not the only creature in this text who helps the dead people to enter their afterlife by giving them ears since the same is done by the spirit of Rīḥāna for the dozens of young men killed in Camp Speicher. The spirit of Rīḥāna dances with the souls of the dead men on the Tigris River, which is a quiet witness to their homicide. The title of the novel refers to this dance exactly. Besides, the spirit of Rīḥāna dances

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, pp. 131, 164–169, 178, 196–198, 231–236, 255.

¹⁰⁸ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, pp. 192–198.

¹⁰⁹ Schweiger, *From Representing Trauma to Traumatized Representation*, p. 348.

¹¹⁰ Asmā’ Ġarīb, *Ġadaliyyat al-ḥā’ fī sardiyyāt Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq “Raqsat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr” wa-“Ḥa-mūt” ka-numūdaḡayni li-ad-dirāsa wa-al-baḥṭ*, “Ar-Riwāya.Nat”, 2 March 2016, Viewed 15 October 2017, <<http://alriwaya.net/جدلية-الحاء-في-سرديات-وفاء-عبد-الرز/>>. Cf. the information about angels escorting human souls to the afterlife in the Yezidi beliefs, in: Arakelova, Amrian, *Hereafter in the Yezidi Beliefs*, p. 311.

with the ghosts of the other female Peshmerga fighters who were killed in combat. This is their dance of testimony and they will dance until the earth is free from ISIS.¹¹¹ Moreover, the spirit of Rihāna is an avenger who every day kills ten combatants of the caliphate approaching the magical tree which grows at the place of her death. The tree transforms into *gūl*, an evil spirit, which squeezes the men while the spirit of Rihāna hovers over it.¹¹² That is how a mythical time is introduced and the boundaries between the present and the future, the mortal existence and the afterlife are eliminated. In this way, those who were killed, i.e. the ISIS victims, continue their lives in the hereafter and in the memory of those who have survived.

The novel “Singār’s Virgin” can be read – as Ikram Masmoudi explains – “as an antidote to the real world of IS’s brutality that posits a mythical world able to alleviate the deep pain of pervasive loss through the weaving together of magical and fantastical elements with historical events and through the invocation of the extraordinary as part of the ordinary.”¹¹³ In this literary text, extraordinary events happen at the moments of some protagonists’ death. ‘Aydū, the madman from the town of Singār, is rescued at the time of his execution by a big falcon which opens his cage hanging over a burning pile. He is “a sacrificial victim whose salvation is the salvation of Singār.”¹¹⁴ However, Dilšād, the policeman collaborating with ISIS, suggests the reader that this could be just an illusion because he says to his wife that when ‘Aydū was burnt, he felt that he was burnt with him and his soul transformed into ashes.¹¹⁵ In turn, when another citizen of Singār, ‘Afdāl, is thrown from the roof of his house because he refuses to converse to Islam, his body is absorbed by concrete as if by a sponge. His murderers come down from the roof and see a very deep hole. They feel scared, so they tell people that the unbeliever fell into a hole in hell. After a few days, strange lights are seen in the old man’s house, so the inhabitants of the town of Singār start to believe that this is the light of his soul. Then, they see a fig tree rapidly growing in the hole and decide that in the future ‘Afdāl’s house will be a *mazār* – a Yezidi mausoleum and a place of pilgrimage.¹¹⁶ This is also emphasized in the final scene of the novel, when Serbest enters the *mazār* and contemplates: “This is Lāliš, which was born in captivity, blood, bullets, fear and death. This is the poor man’s house which will become one of the symbols of survival that will bond the Yezidi people in the face of the most dangerous catastrophe which threatens them. It is a symbolic grave of Yezidism during the invasion and occupation (...).”¹¹⁷ That is how these two unusual events, which carry the reader from the time of death

¹¹¹ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, *Raḡsat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr*, pp. 118–121, 132–133.

¹¹² Ibidem, p. 106. For more on Rihāna and other unusual characters, for example the blind boy, see: Šuhrat Bulḡūl, *Taḡalliyāt an-nasaq al-‘aḡā‘ibī fi riwāyat “Raḡsat al-ḡadīla wa-an-nahr” li-al-adība al-‘irāqīyya Waḡā‘ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq*, “Maḡallat Ğīl ad-Dirāsāt al-Adabiyya wa-al-Fikriyya” 3/19 (2016), pp. 49–60.

¹¹³ Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ As-Sālim, *‘Aḡrā’ Singār*, pp. 198, 201.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 129. For more detailed information on Yezidi mausoleums, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, pp. 146–175.

¹¹⁷ As-Sālim, *‘Aḡrā’ Singār*, pp. 128–132, 394–398.

to an imaginary, miraculous and mythical time, symbolize the survival of the Yezidi community in spite of its genocide. They may also, as some researchers suggest, be designed to ease the reader's burden who in this novel is confronted with many detailed descriptions of tortures on the ISIS victims.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, in "Singār's Virgin", there are portrayals of some characters equipped with special powers, first of all the nameless widow. She opens the door of her house to Serbest, the main protagonist who returns to occupied Singār, as she did for many other inhabitants of the town and neighbouring villages who – unlike him – wanted to escape from this place. In the opinion of Ikram Masmoudi, her house functions as a mythical place, as a sanctuary "in which the vulnerable and strangers can find refuge".¹¹⁹ In the eyes of the narrator, the nameless widow is an archetype of a mother and embodies femininity since the times of the ancient Babylonian Empire. The widow herself says to Serbest that she is a free creature despite the surrounding horror, because she has inherited an infinite imagination from her ancestors, as if the old time was flowing in her veins. Thus, she is able to create an alternative reality.¹²⁰ Then, she tells the man the story of her great-grandfather who was a shepherd wandering with his flocks in the Singār area. One day, he saw *hūrīyya*, a beautiful female paradise being, bathing in a pond in a wood and he dared to approach her. They fell in love and had many children and grandchildren who were born in wonderful ways, for example from an ear or a drop of rain. The man became immortal, just like his wife, and after many years they both disappeared and no one knew what had happened to them. Thus, the shepherd became an ancestor of all the Yezidis since one of their legends tells that they are descendants of a man and a *hourī*.¹²¹

Moreover, the uniqueness of the nameless widow manifests itself in the fact that she can overcome the forces of nature. Despite being in her 13th month of pregnancy, she has still not given birth to her child, because she decided that the baby would not see Singār as long as it is controlled by ISIS. In this way, on the one hand she protects herself against being raped by the extremist fighters or their supporters, and on the other hand, she protects her child who should not become a martyr. "Her body – as well as

¹¹⁸ Cf. 'Alī Ḥasan al-Fawwāz, *Riwāyat "'Adrā' Singār"*. *Hilīn Singār al-maḥṭūfa aw Nuštumān Ṭarwāda*, "Al-Ġadīd" 18, 1 July 2016, Viewed 17 October 2017, <<http://aljadeedmagazine.com/?id=1537>>. Some scenes of violence in the novel were mentioned in: Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 18.

¹¹⁹ Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 17.

¹²⁰ On the construction of history and the concept of time in the Yezidi oral tradition, see: Allison, *Yezidi Oral Tradition*, pp. 68-74; Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *History in an Oral Culture: the Construction of History in Yezidi Sacred Texts*, "The Journal of Kurdish Studies" 6 (2008), pp. 84-92.

¹²¹ as-Sālim, *'Adrā' Singār*, pp. 78-79, 173-178. Cf. the information on the origin of the Yezidi people, in: Eszter Spät, *Shahid Bin Jarr, Forefather of the Yezidis and the Gnostic Seed of Seth*, "Iran and the Caucasus" 6 (2002), pp. 27-56; Artur Rodziewicz, *The Nation of the "Sur": The Yezidi Identity Between Modern and Ancient Myth*, in: Joanna Bocheńska (ed.), *Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities. The Call of the Cricket*, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer 2018, pp. 287-292; Artur Rodziewicz, "Milete min Êzîd". *The Uniqueness of the Yezidi Concept of the Nation*, "Securitologia" 1 (2018), pp. 69-72. On the Yezidi concept of houries, see: Arakelova, Amrian, *Hereafter in the Yezidi Beliefs*, p. 314.

her home – represents sanctuary of magic and safety.”¹²² What is more, she is also protected by her husband’s drop of blood which has still not dried at the place where he was killed by some local Arabs collaborating with the Islamic State. Besides, when one of her husband’s killers tried to touch her belly, he immediately fell dead, bitten by a serpent. In her conviction, God avenged against him, by using the sacred serpent from the sanctuary in Lālīš.¹²³

What is also uncanny is that the nameless widow has the ability to talk with animals. She often carries on conversations with a raven, which brings her news about what is going on in the Singār district, and with a falcon which she is in a romantic relationship with because the bird is a free creature. The Iraqi author of short stories, Rağd as-Suhayl, suggests that, according to Yezidi beliefs, the falcon may be an incarnation of the widow’s deceased husband.¹²⁴ Yet, the same gifts are bestowed upon some other characters in the novel. One night, when Serbest stands on the roof of the widow’s house, he suddenly sees a silver light of a star that comes close to the man and begins to talk with him about his daughter. The star says that she feels sad because of the fate of the people in Singār. Despite the fact that the area has drown in darkness, she and other stars are trying to light up the nights of its Yezidi inhabitants.¹²⁵ Whereas the Muslim man and Nālīn, the sister of the hereafter, during their climb to the top of the mountain, where Serbest resides in a cave, talk with a butterfly which informs them about the man’s condition.¹²⁶

The novel “Singār’s Virgin”, as ‘Alī Ḥasan al-Fawwāz rightly points out, can be considered in terms of magical realism in view of the way the realistic and fantastic elements are combined. The latter often belong to the religious and cultural heritage of the Yezidi people, which seems to be fascinating and mysterious even to the Iraqi readers. These fantastic elements of the literary fiction symbolically endow the Yezidis with extraordinary powers which help them to confront their oppressors successfully. In this text, they can even pass from the real time of their deaths to a magical time of their survival,¹²⁷ because – as the nameless widow states – “hope creates imagination and imagination creates hope.”¹²⁸

It is also worth mentioning that the title of the novel which directly refers to Nuštumān, Serbest’s daughter whom he cannot find, symbolically refers not only to all the lost

¹²² Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 19.

¹²³ as-Sālim, ‘*Adrā’ Singār*’, pp. 82–87. On the symbolic meaning of the serpent in the Yezidi (and Kurdish) tradition, see: Açıkyıldız, *Yezidis*, pp. 159–162; Nicolaus, *Serpent Symbolism*, pp. 52–65.

¹²⁴ as-Sālim, ‘*Adrā’ Singār*’, pp. 15–16, 106–108, 159–161, 377. Cf. Rağd as-Suhayl, *Wārid Badr as-Sālim kaṣaṣa ‘umq ġurh Singār fī ‘amal fannī wa-waṭā’iqī ḥaṭīr yastaḥiqqu at-tarğama wa-at-taṣwīr fa-ḥarb al-irhāb fikriyya awwalan wa-aḥīran*, “Mu’ssat an-Nūr li-at-Ṭaqāfa wa-al-‘lām”, 4 April 2016, Viewed 20 October 2017, <<http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=298793>>. Cf. another interpretation of the personification of animals in the novel, in: Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 18.

¹²⁵ Cf. the information on Yezidi folk beliefs concerning stars, in: Perochak Patgambar, *Some Natural Phenomena and Celestial Bodies in the Yezidi Folk Beliefs*, “Iran and the Caucasus” 10/1 (2006), pp. 22–23.

¹²⁶ As-Sālim, ‘*Adrā’ Singār*’, pp. 94–97, 240–247.

¹²⁷ Al-Fawwāz, *Riwāyat “‘Adrā’ Singār”*.

¹²⁸ As-Sālim, ‘*Adrā’ Singār*’, p. 143.

Yezidi girls, deprived of their purity, but also to the virginity of the town of SiŃĀr and the SiŃĀr province – its history, legends, traditions and customs which have been cruelly erased along with the extermination of its inhabitants. At the same time, as Ikram Masmoudi puts it, “the idea of the feminine, the virginal and the immaculate is a symbol for a compensatory, spiritual mode of existence in the face of the rape and ethno-religious cleansing facing the town. It is this transcendent feminine spirit and strength that the novel imagines as a powerful fortress holding out against the savage actions of IS.”¹²⁹

Conclusions

In his novel, Rāsim Qāsim compares the ISIS invasion of SiŃĀr to a plague of black locust which destroys everything on its path. He also stresses that the traces of its deeds will remain distinct for hundreds of years in the memory inherited by future generations.¹³⁰ Thus, it is so important for him, as well as for Wafā’ ‘Abd ar-Razzāq, Wārid Badr as-Sālim and Nawzat Šamdīn, to include into the cultural memory of the Iraqis not only the memories of the ISIS brutality but also the memories of the sufferings of the Yezidi people. With the sense of moral obligation, empathy and solidarity with this oppressed minority, these and other Iraqi intellectuals have started to write about the Yezidi genocide in order to create “a history from below”, because “literature has the ability to circulate memories of certain historical events” and to turn them “into sites of memory, stressing what should be remembered in the long term” – as Stijn Vervaeet puts it, referring to the contemporary war literature in Bosnia.¹³¹

Undoubtedly, the kidnapping and sexual enslavement of the Yezidi women was one of the ISIS cruel acts against the Yezidi community, which have drawn the biggest attention of the above-mentioned authors and so become the main motifs in three of the four analysed novels. The descriptions of these acts are based on conversations with abused Yezidi women, as in the case of As-Sālim, as well as on media information, which seems apparent following the comparison of the contents of the works and the contents of various publicist articles and scientific studies on the subject.¹³² Of course, in the literary works, which are a concise representation of reality, the reader does not deal with such a large amount of detailed information about the everyday realities of war led by ISIS as in the case of media reports. However, through a deeper reflection on the fate of the

¹²⁹ Masmoudi, *Gender Violence and the Spirit of the Feminine*, p. 16.

¹³⁰ Qāsim, *Šamdīn*, p. 27.

¹³¹ Vervaeet, *Writing War, Writing Memory*, p. 9.

¹³² Cf. Otten, *With Ash on Their Faces*. The author provides the historical and political background on the genocide in SiŃĀr, as well as describes the clashing political influences in this area, in order to highlight the tragic fate of the Yezidis, which is reconstructed in the book on the basis of interviews conducted with Yezidi men and women. Otten raises similar dilemmas like those raised by the authors of the analysed novels, which concern, for example, the acceptance of former enslaved women by the Yezidi community. See also: Omer, *Yezidi Women as Odalisques*. The author included in his research, among others, interviews with abused Yezidi women and ISIS documents testifying to the scale of the sex slavery.

Yezidi people, which is often missing in press articles, the novels make the picture of their sufferings more comprehensive, and sometimes more appealing to the reader than facts and figures. In their own way, these works participate in the remediation of the events in the Sinğār district and in the process of transforming the stories about sexual enslavement of Yezidi women into a site of memory, an iconic image symbolizing the tragedy of the entire Yezidi community.

Thus, it can be said that the iconic image of the genocide against the Yezidis which emerges in the analysed novels is similar to that outlined in the West media coverage to a certain degree. The stories of the captured Yezidi women presented in these works resemble in many details testimonies of actual ISIS victims, which were published in various media. However, unlike Christine Allison and Veronica Buffon, I cannot state that this image of the enslaved Yezidi women is exaggerated in the four novels to the point that it overshadows the plight of other Yezidis. The stories of the abducted women are placed in the context of the stories of other members of their minority, who have also suffered persecutions, especially those of their relatives. Many of the above-mentioned literary characters speak with their own voices to shed light on various difficult situations which the Yezidis have faced since August 2014. The voices of the protagonists, such as that of Serbest, the father who lost his daughter, and Dilšād, the policeman forced to collaborate with the Islamist militants – both from the novel by As-Sālim, help the reader to view these events from a wider perspective. Moreover, the complex picture of hardships endured by the Yezidi people is complemented in these narratives by the voices of some extremist fighters, using in their dialogues with the Yezidi captives a rhetoric typical of ISIS; as well as by some voices of the Iraqi Muslims who, like Murād and Ḥalīl Ibrāhīm in Šamdīn's novel, are even ready to risk their lives in order to help the innocent victims. The use of these voices seems to be particularly significant in making the Yezidi genocide a part of the Iraqi collective memory.

It should also be emphasized that the novels by Wafā' 'Abd ar-Razzāq, Wārid Badr as-Sālim, Rāsīm Qāsīm and Nawzat Šamdīn not only depict various kinds of experiencing the events in Sinğār and Mosul, but also tackle the great dilemmas which the Yezidis will have to face in the near future, such as the issue of possible changes in their social and religious institutions or the problem of the lack of social acceptance of dishonoured women.¹³³ Moreover, the literary narratives also ask questions that all the Iraqis should ask themselves. The most important is that about the responsibility of the state and its citizens of different religions for what has happened in the north-west part of their country.

Taking advantage of the privileges of literary fiction, the authors of the four novels try both to document and to commemorate the ISIS attacks in the Sinğār district, by going beyond the limits of the reporting tone, typical of media coverage. On the one hand, they use – as many journalist do – the experimental mode of the rhetoric of collective memory, by showing everyday experiences of ordinary people facing the tragedies, which brings their narratives closer to the above-mentioned “history from below”, for instance to the

¹³³ See: Dulz, *Displacement of the Yezidis*, p. 144; Omarkhali, *Transformations in the Yezidi Tradition*, pp. 152–154.

oral history or the history of marginalized groups. Furthermore, As-Sālim constructs some parts of his narrative as if they were parts of a documental novel, equipped with photos of documents and events as well as Internet entries. On the other hand, the authors of three of the four novels break the chronological order of the depicted events, and one of their many reasons to do it, is to present the memory mechanisms of traumatized individuals, such as Šamdīn, the Yezidi captive girl in Qāsim's novel. Moreover, they employ the monumental mode of the rhetoric of collective memory, by creating an atmosphere of eternal, mythical time in which the rules of the real world are suspended. This, in spite of the intentions and actions of the occupying forces, constitutes not only the literary way to immortalize the guiltless victims, but also to emphasize the durability of the Yezidi cultural heritage. In the conviction of the members of this minority – clearly expressed by the Iraqī authors – their heritage poses a continuation of the experiences of the earlier civilizations which have flourished in Iraq for millennia. Thus, despite the numerous attacks on the Yezidis over the centuries, this heritage cannot be destroyed and will survive. This message stands in close relation to the occurrence of fantastic elements in the narratives, often taken from Yezidi legends and religious beliefs, which points to a strong bond between the Yezidi people and the Singār area that cannot be broken by the ISIS atrocities. Through these and other narrative devices, the literary imagination of the four authors seeks to bring hope in hopeless times.