

‘Collective Memory’ as an Alternative to History in Manipuri Women’s Narratives



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Abstract

Theorizing in the context of France, Pierre Nora laments the erosion of ‘national memory’ or what he calls “*milieux de memoire*” and the emergence of what have remained of such an erosion as ‘sites of memory’ or “*lieux de memoire*” (7–24). Further he contends that all historic sites or “*lieux d’histoire*” (19) such as “museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries, fraternal orders” (10) and even the “historian” can become *lieux de memoire* provided that in their invocation there is a will to remember (19). In contrast to Nora’s lamentation, in the particular context of Manipur, a state in Northeast part of India, there is a reversal. It is these very ‘sites of memory’ that bring to life the ‘collective memory’ of Manipur, which is often national, against the homogenizing tendencies of the histories of conflicting nationalisms in Manipur, including those of the Indian nation-state. This paper shows how photographs of Manorama Thangjam’s ‘raped’ body, the suicide note of the ‘raped’ Miss Rose, Mary Kom’s autobiography, and ‘Rani’ Gaidinlui’s struggle become sites for ‘collective’ memory that emerge as an alternative to history in Manipur.

Keywords: Manipuri Women Writers, Pierre Nora, Conflict of Nationalisms, Collective Memory, Sites of Memory