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Politics of Memory in Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Raju Kunwar has completed his thesis entitles “Politics of Memory in Waris Diris’ *Desert Flower*” under my supervision. He carried out his thesis from 2074/04/30 B.S. to 2074/07/25 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis is submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Raju Kunwar entitled “Politics of Memory in Waris Dirî’s *Desert Flower*” has been approved by the undersigned members of the thesis Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

This research paper investigates politics of memory in Waris Dirie's autobiography Desert Flower (1998). As an autobiography, by a Somali Muslim nomadic writer and a super model, actress, as well as a human right activist, it recounts private 'self' of the author, experiences and thoughts, struggles and obstacles, physical and mental trauma and tortures being an ignorant Muslim illiterate girl, precisely the daughter of a nomad family. The researcher, here ponders into why Waris Dirie, the author, feels important to explore her 'self' through the script-the autobiographical act, and for that draws theoretical insights of writing autobiography on 'politics of memory' from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative, Anne Whitehead's Memory: The New Critical Idiom, Avishai Margalit's ideas on 'shared memory' from the text, The Ethics of Memory. This research finally concludes that the politics behind writing this autobiography is to empower and inspire women and young girls destined to face traditional but a brutal patriarchal subordinating practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the African Muslim communalities and countries like Somalia, Ethiopia and the likes with the depiction of her successful life story as she is now a super model and a special ambassador of UNO for human rights. Moreover, identity construction as a prime purpose of life writing, she also creates her identity as a rebellious, courageous female and later as a social worker, human right activist, a super model, at the same time, FGM victimized nomad girl, a house maid and worker at McDonald in England.

Key Words: Autobiography, Memory, Shared Memory, Identity, Female Genital Mutilation, Empowerment

This research project examines the politics of memory in Waris Dirie's autobiography *Desert Flower* and also probes into how and why she remembers and encapsulates her past experiences. The present study on Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* dominantly deals with her past Somali childhood memory along with her struggling life after leaving Somalia. Waris Dirie, a Somali supermodel, writer, actress, and human right activist, contemplates her struggling past, the Somali nomadic life and cultural practices with their effects on human life and humane at the same time. Through this text, the narrator recuperates her outreaching success in order to reenergize the marginalized youths and the African girls and women who have to undergo inhuman practice of Circumcision in any forms and the male domination and exploitation since early nomadic life.

Waris Dirie, as a Somali writer, delineates Somali nomadic life and their cultural and religious practices in her autobiographical act *Desert Flower*, but instead it represents most of the African countries' lifestyle, livelihood and prevailing primitive cultures. Waris Dirie, the protagonist and narrator gets birth in Somali desert. She runs away from her oppressive and penetrating life in the African impoverished country Somalia when she was almost thirteen, illiterate and impoverished, with nothing to name but tattered scarf. She travelled alone across the dangerous Somali desert to Mogadishu the capital city of Somalia then to London and to New York. In London she works as a house maid and at McDonalds, and then she moves to nearly every corner of the globe as an internationally renowned fashion model. And ultimately to New York City, where she became a human right activist and a special ambassador for UNO (United Nations Organization) and finally she devotes her whole life serving marginalized African people and to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation, a primitive inhuman ritual practice prevailing over centuries,

spreading human rights and humanitarian values throughout the world.

Desert Flower, an autobiography, recounts Waris Dirie's past life, memories and experiences to reveal those unyielding and unspoken Somali remote deserted story of the girls and women. As she was a Somali nomad girl, her personal story represents dishearten and deserted history of Somali rituals of circumcision. Her existence as a narrator and the protagonist retrospect her own life, especially the story of her own personality. She, through this autobiographical endeavor, expands how she has become she is at a given moment in an ongoing process of reflection this is to simply construct her personal identity of the past formed her present 'self' - a supermodel and the human right activist as she is destined herself to eliminate brutal practice of FGM throughout Africa the continent and the middle East Muslim countries.

Likely, Dirie's personal history reenergizes, inspires and motivates those girls and women who are destined to endure domestic violence, male domination exploitations and subjugation throughout the world in general and the African women in particular. More importantly, her story recounts panic and pathetic story of the circumcised girls and women and their pain bit after bit throughout the life in order to draw due attention towards the inhuman cultural practice of FGM in Muslim and Christian community and families.

Writing about the 'self' is remembering the past recollected in subject's memory. Waris Dirie evokes her personal suffering due to bad practices of circumcision and its traumatic and pathetic effects during her puberty, defloration, monthly cycle or menstruation and even at the time of urination in her autobiography *Desert Flower* that she had to undergo until her dis-infibulation in London. Dirie's own experiences and memory of circumcision forced herself writing about it. She

exposes 'herself' in order to aware the African people about the ritual of circumcision as it is a superstition and inhuman tradition prevailing in Muslim and some Christian communities. It is something that the male created discourse in order to subjugate the women. Therefore, with the help of her private experience she wants to abolish/eliminate such an insane ritual of Female Genital Mutilation.

Desert Flower, Dirie's first literary endeavor, contemplates African nomadic lifestyle with some positive aspects of the nomad culture and religious beliefs including their deep rootedness with the soil, and/or nature. However, she critically focuses on the adverse effects of their cultural and religious practices of circumcision in their physical and mental health condition. Female Genital Mutilation is a common traditional ritual in African countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia and others. She, recounting her private experiences and her childhood memory of circumcision, tries to spread an anti-FGM movement throughout the FGM affected countries and areas. That is her prime politics of recounting her past memory in *Desert Flower*.

An internationally recognized supermodel Waris Dirie is a United Nations Organization's special ambassador who travels the world as an articulate and passionate advocate of human rights. She served as United Nations special ambassador for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and promote humanity and humane. As it is given in the cover page of *Desert Flower* 'she has since established the 'Desert Flower Foundation' to advance women's right in Africa.' Dirie presents her extraordinary journey from the Somali desert to New York and as a nomad illiterate girl to a super model and special ambassador. *Desert Flower*, as an autobiography with Cathleen Miller is a collaborative writing, in which she explores the 'self'-the subject I. She highlights the issue of FGM more in this autobiography as human right activist.

Waris Dirie, through this autobiographical act, informs us that many of the most terrible experiences women often face has happened to her; sexual harassment at her tender young age, forced marriage, and child labor. But all these bare realities are simply incomparable with the torture, pain and inhuman practice of circumcision that she had to endure at her young age of 'five'. Later, she reveals her successful life as an ambassador, model and actress. Her account of both tragic and successive moment in life serve as a source of inspiration among readers and the others and also the matter of public conscience regarding the bad effects due to the ritual practice of circumcision in Somalia and the other countries in Africa.

The narrator in the autobiography *Desert Flower* is a true representative of the Somali life in general and Somali female and their social and cultural situation in particular. Dirie's private 'self' – the subject I's experiences, childhood memories and her circumcision are the common shared bearings among African tribal and nomadic communities. They all simply no longer remain apart from ritualistic practice of infibulations. Therefore, re-memorization of the past is transformed from merely personal to public experiences, that is, the revelation of the collective cultural memory.

Memory is subject of an autobiography which involves in meaning making process of the subject 'I'. Autobiography is an account of the subject's past experiences and their present remembrance. In an autobiography, the author recollects the past and explores with help of words with a desiring concern of constructing an identity and a particular discourse in society. Thus, narrated memory of nomad life in Somalia and her struggles as house maid and wanderer in London, in present after her outreaching success in life. That is she articulates her past memory after being a supermodel, actress and special ambassador for United Nations Organization. Thus,

memory hereby, works as a subject to an autobiography.

In this line of arguments, the researcher hereby precisely claims that Waris Dirie writes about 'the self' in order for reenergizing the African women to resist the patriarchal subordinations and penetrating sexual and ritual practices for the better empowerment of the girls and women. More importantly, she contemplates her pathetic experiences of 'circumcision' devour the public concerns and conscience that FGM is inhuman, brutal and superstitious practice, so that, it can be eliminated from the globe. As writing autobiography is identity construction, she involves identifying herself to the public reader. However, her prime concern goes to eliminate and abolish the inhuman practice of FGM from every corner of the world, ultimately saves millions of innocent girls and women from their untimely deaths and psycho-social and physical subordinations. Therefore, the researcher hereby casts light on how and why she explores the 'self', why she gives more emphasis on her childhood nomadic experiences and their cultural and ritualistic practices rather than her later phase of life, and how her past memory serves as a subject of life writing.

This autobiography, hereby, is analyzed from the perspective of autobiographical theory and the theory on 'politics of memory', as the predecessors analyses it from diverse perspectives. A critic Frederique Van de Poel-Knottreus in his article "Waris Dirie and the Ritual Practice of FGM: When Rites Can Be Wrong" states:

In Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* (1998), the narrator recounts her own story: how a little girl from the Somali desert leaves home to become a famous model and find happiness. The reader follows her through her journey, quickly realizing that she is an extra-ordinary human being who will stop at nothing in order to achieve her essential goal: not to be sent back home. Therefore, one

could see her story as an enjoyable modern fairy tale since it ends well, with a successful career and marriage to a man she truly loves and whom she has chosen. (1-2)

Knottnerus gives simply an overview of the text *Desert Flower* with a positive interpretation of the author's journey delineating her as a bold, courageous and strongly determined female who fights against those inhuman rituals upon female. He furthermore, considers this story as 'a modern fairy tale' as it encapsulates grim story followed by successful career opportunities of the 'subject'.

Desert Flower is an extra ordinary journey of an illiterate African nomad girl grown up in a desert who undergoes so many difficult obstacles and hardships. A critic Augustina Kurnia Winderwati in "Effects for a Better Life for Waris Dirie in *Desert Flower: An Individual Psychological Approach*" states:

Waris Dirie shares her story and her impressing and distressing journey from growing up as a nomadic child who was tragically circumcised, to living on her own in London, becoming a well heard model, and finally being appointed as ambassador for the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. She went through truly appalling the frightful experiences, which in turn made it possible for her to help other people and be the strong leader and woman that she is today. (22)

She tries to dismantle the traditional notion of women are inferior and they should roam around men and for the very reason she depicts her own courageous and bold story. She basically harshly criticizes the African male dominated traditions and the discourse that female must circumcised for God's sake or for the religious sake. Ritualized practice of FGM is critically explored in her autobiographical actand traded down in the affected society.

Female Genital Mutilation is a superstitious belief and ritualized practice in the Muslim country in Africa, Middle Eastern Countries and even in some Christian countries. FGM is a cultural practice generated from years back. It ingrained in a diverse variety of cultural customs, is internally recognized as a violation of women and girls' fundamental human rights. Chitra Jha and Neha Anand in their research study "Female Genital Mutilation" state that, "the practice of FGM is deeply rooted in the culture and religious belief of the people of the communities wherein it is practiced which makes it difficult to eliminate the practice" (2). The culture of FGM is deeply rooted in one's mental cognition and guided their lifestyles and the ritual procedures and practices.

According to World Health Organization, female genital mutilation is 'the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.' Female Genital Mutilation, therefore, is an inhuman, insane and false practice miss-lead with due beliefs in superstition and wrong interpretations of the Quran and other holy books. FGM, as it is transmitted from generation to generations, causes deep physical, cultural and psychological impacts in one's life. Chitra Jha and Neha Anand in their research study "Female Genital Mutilation" argue:

Female Genital Mutilation is embedded notion of purity and cleanliness and it has over the countries been particularly evident in contexts where girls and women are seen as property owns and traded by men. FGM is a marker of chastity and sole ownership by a husband. FGM is, therefore, an aspect of tradition, rather than a basic tenant of any particular religion. It is most useful to be understood as a tribal practice relating to family dynasties, identities, wealth, influence and power. (4-5)

As they argue, FGM is as tribal and communal practice and a discourse created by the respected groups and communities for the sake of female virginity, chastity, cleanliness and the womanhood. The circumcised girl is only considered as marriageable. In this way, their ritual practices are also based on FGM practices. This is what *Desert Flower* depicts through Dirie's unendurable experiences of circumcision.

As talking about FGM, the first record of it dates back some thousands of years. It is found in African aboriginal tribe, along with Australian and Middle East Asian countries. Alison T. Slack in "Female Circumcision: A Critical Appraisal" informs that, "female circumcision has been practiced from as early as 2500 years ago and continues in practice today in over forty countries" (489). FGM, from very early nomadic life has been ritualized, customized and inherited generation to generations. Thus it has social, cultural, and psychological effects in the shared community. Waris Dirie, at her early childhood days, was much interested in circumcision. She frequently begs to be circumcised. It has cultural meaning that circumcision brings them purity, chastity, womanhood and eligibility to marriage.

Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* instead of talking solely about the bad ritual customs of circumcision thematizes that how one can reach on top of success. Dirie's penetrated past and outreaching success teaches us that if one has courage, passion, strong determination and feeling of communal hardships she/he can deserves his/her desired destinations. Her enduring and evocating past and struggle for the success inspire and re-energize the readers or the public audiences.

The author's prime desire and intention to explore with words is to dismantle the patriarchal discourse of women inferiority creating a new discourse of power with her irrecoverable past memory. Through this meaning making process with due

interpretation of memory, she proves that the African black nomad women also have courage, power and strength to resist against prevailing dehumanizing cultures and ritual practices. That is to empower the women for their better living in any culture.

Dirie's story of personal hardships not only recounts her private issue as it has been textualized and visualized in a film *The Desert Flower*. It shares the collective sufferings and shared memory of the Somali girls and women. Nitti Rennon, in "Saving Safa: Rescuing a Little Girl from FGM" comments:

Waris Dirie, the Somalia nomad who becomes a supermodel, and an anti-FGM activist, first came to the world's attention with the publication of her autobiography, *Desert Flower*. The book was subsequently made into a film and little Safa Naur, from one of the slums of Djibouti, was chosen to play the young Waris. The book and the film record many extraordinary things from facing down a tiger, to being discovered by a famous photographer in London –but it also tells the grim story of female circumcision, an ordeal that the young Waris had to endure. (8)

Niti describes Dirie's journey from the desert to London the capital of United Kingdom. She also describes how Dirie enters into the field of photography or modeling along with her dangerous but courageous journey through the desert days in and days out with her bare feet. She admires that Dirie's personal story depicts the horrible practice of FGM in the under privileged African community as it eventually plays vital role to publicize its drawbacks by means of book and films.

In the same vein, a critic Dirk Gottsche in "Cross-cultural Self Assertion and Cultural Politics: African Migrant's writing in German since the late 1990" states:

Waris Dirie's bestselling autobiography *Desert Flower* (1998), which contributed substantially to raising international awareness of female genital

mutilation. Dirie highlights the ordeal of female circumcision, subsequent pain and traumatization, and the long road to female self-determination and restorative surgery in Western Diaspora. However, Dirie presents her life as a story of personal liberation through professional success as a star model in a globalized world, devoting little space to issues of cultural identity. (6)

She through her autobiography raises public awareness throughout the world about FGM as a bad and dehumanizing practice and it does not have any religious and scientific reasons rather it is just constructed rituals by the male in order to dominate and subordinate their female.

The author, through this autobiography, historicizes the unheard and unspoken voices of marginalized and suppressed African women. As this autobiography recounts Waris Dirie's private story but also the common history or the collective sufferings with the help of shared memory. This book creates her private identity of the shared groups or clan or tribe and the likes. Therefore, this autobiographical act records the unheard and unrecorded social events and marginalized history in an alternative way.

The memory work *Desert Flower* inculcates how other Somali girls did not heal or survive under the circumciser's blade. One of the most poignant moments is when she looks over after having been sewn up and sees 'pieces of my meat, my sex, lay on top, drying undisturbed in the sun. This grim memory explores tragic and traumatic helpless condition of a girl. Dirie's this memoir more dominantly delineates her childhood memory as her early story of Somalian nomadic life covers almost one third of the total pages. This is her politics to explore the grim story of the nomadic life of African people in the deadly desert. This autobiographical act also raises burning issue of child marriage as she fled away at her early teen of 'almost thirteen'

to be escaped from forced marriage. She was circumcised at the age of 'five' and when she was circumcised at her father attempted to arrange a marriage with a 60 years old stranger in exchange for five camels.

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

Waris Dirie, an African black women writer, human right activist and anti-FGM activist contemplates her past memory in *Desert Flower*. As her autobiographical act, it rememorizes her past days and reinterprets in the present day. She memorizes her pathetic childhood memory as a nomadic girl, roam around the desert with the tails of goats and camels. Moreover, she recollects her memory of undestined journey and recurring struggles to keep herself alive from starvation, hunger, thirst, wild animals and even the brutal and insane human creature to some extent. Her past memory hereby serves as a subject to this autobiography.

Memory simply is an ability of a system to record information about things or events with the facility of recalling them later at will. Memory is a process of recalling and reinterpreting one's past endurances or events recollected in one's mental

cognition. Memory can be personal as well as collective. To some extent, personal memory bounds with the collective memory as one share the collectivity in a particular zone as Anne Whitehead argues, "Memory is a specifically social phenomenon" (123).

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

Avishai Margalit, in the same vein, argues that, "we usually care about our parents, children, spouses, lovers, friends, and by extension about some significant groups to which we belong" (32), as result, memory is, "the cement that holds thick relations together" (Margalit 8). Memory, therefore, is socially and culturally articulated and framed in one's mind which is transformed with the collective artifacts shared by the family, community and or the society. Memory is not an isolated phenomenon rather it is the collective and social issues and subject as one's memorization bounds up with his/her surroundings and circumstances.

Life writing as remembering process the subject's memory is linked with the self's past experiences. Memory, whether public or private, is thus both the subject and the source of an autobiographical act. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue,

"The writer of an autobiography depends on access to memory to tell a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history. Memory, thus is both source and authenticator of autobiographical acts" (16). For Smith and Watson, memory is the subject, source and authenticator of an autobiography.

Dirie while revealing the 'self' involves in a process of remembering and reinterpretation of the past in the present. She with the help of her past experience of the cultural practice of circumcision raises the issue of FGM as a bad practice traditionally followed by almost all of the African groups. Here her past memory is reinterpreted and rememorized. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue:

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

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

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

Autobiography is a meaning making process. The author identifies himself or herself for the sole purpose of bestowing some positive message. Dirie, through the autobiographical endeavor *Desert Flower* tries not only to identify herself as a successful fashion model but as a common Somalian illiterate and nomad girl, victim

of the FGM practice, a house maid, a worker at McDonald, a Muslim girl grown up in the Somali desert, a brave and courageous girl and finally as a UN ambassador, anti-FGM activist and human right activist. The autobiographical theorist Lind Anderson about the purposes of autobiographical writing in her book *Autobiography* states:

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

Dirie, as Anderson argues through *Desert Flower* tries to explore herself as a person with struggling past and as an inspirational figure ever in the world. This autobiography with merely personal experiences creates her 'self' identity as a writer and also involves into the self knowledge and the essence of articulation of her past life.

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

As she reveals the story of her devotion, struggle, passion and pursuits for a

beautiful and successful life and the humanitarian world where no people suffer due to misinterpreted and misguided cultural beliefs, thoughts and primitive ritual practices. Along with her appealing childhood days, undestined journey and more importantly the FGM practice, she shares collective story of the Somalian People. Practice of remembering is a technique of writing life narrative. She, in this autobiography, tries to chronicles the shared community and the cultural locations through her personal account. Neil J. Smelser, views, “as a system, a culture can be defined as a grouping of elements – values, norms, outlooks, beliefs, ideologies, knowledge, and empirical assertions (not always verified), linked with one another to some degree as a meaning-system” (37). It is means to say that culture is a network of meaning-making systems that enhances and perpetuate the success of both individual and collective. Smelser further argues that:

A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative effect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society’s existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. The obvious observation to add at this point...is that if a historical event or situation succeeds in becoming publicly identified as a cultural phenomenon, then this certainly imparts an air of urgency – a demand for those who acknowledge it as such to come to grips with it. (44)

According to Smelser personal memory is a collective response about both individual and collective reactions to widely felt, culturally disruptive events as open system responses. This serves her and the collectivity to recall the past and to create personal as well as collective identity. Thus, a private “remembering also has a politics” (Julia and Smith 18).

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

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

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

As he argues one's memory always closely ties with his/her social cultural backgrounds and transforms from merely personal to the shared collectivity. Memory, in a sense, is a discursive subject as it is formed by the social, cultural and professional engagement of a person.

Memory is meaning making process. Dirie's memory and her remembrance of her past life creates a discourse that even a nomadic girl, victim of FGM, illustrate black girl can change herself, community nation and the globe as a whole if she destined towards with courage, strong determination and power to face every

obstacles and endurances. Waris Dirie lives her playful child ages in the Somali desert with her twelve siblings and with the goats, camels and the sandy soil. She also lives a nomadic life with her family. She lives her happy life until she was five she had to face a brutal practice of FGM. It is a ritual practice in Muslim countries in Africa and in the Middle East. Then, at her tender age of thirteen her father forced her marry a sixty years old man for five camels. To be escaped from the forced marriage she leaves her family, friends, siblings and her birthplace and destined to Mogadishu. She runs throughout the desert days in and days out. She mentions:

This nightmare journey began because I was running away from my father. I was about thirteen at the time, and living with my family, a tribe of nomads in the Somalian desert, when my father announced he had arranged my marriage to an old man. Knowing I had to act fast or suddenly one day my new husband would come to me, I told my mother I wanted to run away. My plan was to find my aunt, my mother's sister, who lived in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. Of course I had never been to Mogadishu- or any other city for that matter. Nor had I ever met my aunt. But with the optimism of a child, I felt somehow things would magically work out. (2)

She memorizes her nightmarish journey to her aunt's house Mogadishu the capital of Somalia in order to escape the forces forced marriage. She runs away and keeps on her journey enduring so many hardships pain and difficulties with the childish optimism. Her sole struggle begins from the journey as she says, "Strolling along in a bored daze, I wandered where my new life would take me. What was going to happen next?" (3).

Life narrative involves remembering and remembering the bygone days and articulates the 'self' through words. As they state "We construct our autobiographies

from fragments of experience that change over time" (Smith and Watson 16). That is we inevitably invest our memory into complex constructions that become the story of our lives. Waris Dirie in her autobiography remembers her most striking events and experiences of the past. She only inculcates her unforgettable memories rather than the every minor details of her through life until production of this autobiography.

Memory, as a subject of an autobiography, is not only merely personal but also memorization of happiness and sadness shared by the self along with collective members. Autobiography as a product of private/personal memory, remembering and accounts of the subject-'I's experiences, it involves the process of identifying the self, and also healing the self. It also publicizes personal feelings, thoughts, experiences and worldly views of one's life. Dirie's *Desert Flower* a cultural product of knowledge represents the shared collectivity and the shared issues and memories.

The author raises the issue of FGM and even the child marriage practiced in Muslim communities in African world with the story of the 'self', it no longer remains merely personal, rather the story of the subjugated and suppressed African girls and women. It postulates the collective memory through the personal depiction as, "we cannot remember on demand. We may of course use helpful, indirect methods of remembering-trying to recall where we last used the keys, where we went afterward, and so on-with the hope that reconstructing what we did will lead us to where we put the lost keys" (Margalit 56).

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

Collective memory is shaped by social frame works, which are created by

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

As Halbwachs argues, *Desert Flower*, shares the common story of the nomadic African people. Dirie depicts their life, sufferings, happiness, rituals, customs and the social values and norms positioning herself within her communal group. Her nomadic life and extraordinary journey create some images in her memory and their influences her explore the self as Augustina K. Winderwati states, "she has overcome so many difficult obstacles and it's because of those obstacles that she was able to help people and become a better human being" (22).

Waris Dirie, postulating 'the self' creates the history of the margin as an autobiography shares the collectivity and the subject's collective experiences. The context or the social circumstances specifies the memory of the subject. "How people remember, what they remember are historically specific" (Smith and Watson 17). As Dirie lives in New York as a supermodel and a special ambassador of United Nations Organization, she goes back to remind her past and the due practice of Female Genital Mutilation that she had embodied. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that, "a particular culture's understanding of memory at a particular moment of its history makes remembering possible for a life narrator. Narrators at a crossroads of competing understandings of memory" (17). As they argue some cultural practices, historical moments, specific zonal place, monuments and the personal embodiment make narrator remembering, understanding and interrogating the past. Dirie reminds

every detail of her circumcision and its torturous moment with the wound that the circumciser 'the Killer Woman' has made. Here embodiment works as a site of memory.

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

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

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

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

Remembering is one of the techniques of depleting the past. Remembering and

memory is the subject of self -narrative. It is not an entirely privatized activity but is a situated in cultural politics and collective activity. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith state “on a daily basis we move in and out of various communities of memory, religions, racial, ethnic, and familial” (20). Dirie, in *Desert Flower* recollects her own familial, ethnic, tribal and the collective memory. The autobiography serves as a collective production of meaning or knowledge which is historically formed and constructed. Thus, this autobiography not only shares personal subject but also the collective matters.

Waris Dirie's prime concern behind exploring her 'self' is to empower women and fight against the African patriarchy. She invests her more time on writing about Female Genital Mutilation and its draw backs among the girls and women as it was not her merely personal problems. She writes:

This was not just my problem. Female circumcision, or as it is more aptly referred to today, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), occurs predominantly in twenty-eight countries in Africa. The UN estimates that this practice has been performed on 130 million girls and women. At least 2 million girls are at risk each year of being the next victims- that's 6000 a day. The operations are usually performed in primitive circumstances by a midwife or village woman. They use non anesthetic. They will cut the girl using whatever instruments they can lay their hands on: razor blades, knives, scissors, broken glass, sharp stones-and in some regions-their teeth. The process ranges in severity by geographic location and cultural practices. (218)

This visualizes the pathetic and horrendous condition of the little girls that they forcefully had to be circumcised as per their locality, customs and ritual traditions since years. As they perform it in such a primitive way they even pay no attention

towards their health and sanitation. They use no anesthetics. Tender girls are compelled to face such an inhuman and brutal ritual culturally. Moreover, she chronicles the damages and dangers causes due to circumcisions:

The aftermath of infibulation includes the immediate complications of socks, infections, damages to the urethra or anus, scar formation, tetanus, bladder infections, septicemia, HIV, and Hepatitis-B. Long-term complications include chronic and recurrent urinary and pelvic infections that can lead to sterility, cysts and abscesses around the vulvas, painful neuromas, and increasingly difficult urination, dysmenorrheal, the pooling of menstrual blood in the abdomen, frigidity, depression, and death. (218)

This is how they are suffered, victimized and embraces the death bed. They are traumatized due to the animalistic rituals as they cut out their clitoris and infibulated by the village woman or midwife. This is the common problem and common suffering among almost thirty-forty African and Middle Eastern Muslim countries.

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

I expected a big knife, but instead, out of the bag she pulled a tiny cotton sack . . . and fished out a broken razor blade . . . I saw dried blood on the jagged edge of the blade. She spat on it and wiped it against her dress. While she was scrubbing, my world went dark as my mother tied a scarf around my eyes as

blindfold. The next thing I felt was my flesh, my genitals, being out away. I heard the sound of the dull blade sawing back and forth through my skin. . . . There's no way in the world i can explain what it feels like. It's like somebody is slicing through the meat your thigh, of cutting off your arm, except this is the most sensitive part of your body. . . . and I prayed, *please, God, let it be over quickly.* (42)

FGM, their brutal primitive ritual practice, has been continued since thousands of years ago. Millions of girls lost their lives because of unsecured and unhealthy treatments. They made a discourse that "without it, the daughter will not make it into the marriage market. With their genitals intact, they are considered unfit for marriage, unclean sluts whom no man would consider taking as a wife" (39). Thus the 'gipsy woman' is important person in their society, but the protagonist calls her "the Killer Woman" (39) because Dirie had to see and hear many little girls died at her hand.

Dirie, through her personal agony and pain, urges women to fight against such inhuman rituals created by male oriented society. Broadly her concern is women empowerment and that could be crucial or elimination of deeply rooted ritual practice of FGM. She, after being UN special ambassador, destined her further journey towards human rights and determines:

My goal is to help the women of Africa. I want to see them get stronger, not weaker, and the practice of FGM simply weakens them physically and emotionally. Since women are the backbone of Africa, and they do most of the work, I like to imagine how much they could accomplish if they weren't butchered as a children and left to function maimed for the rest of their lives. (224)

She fights against the deeply rooted ritual of circumcision and encourages herself and

the victimized women raise their voice marching against the dehumanizing superstitious religious and culturally specified practice of FGM. She not only desires to eliminate FGM but also other suppressive activities including child marriage and unmatched marriage. For the very purpose she contemplates her agony and the very extraordinary journey towards success with uncountable obstacles, hardships, struggles, thirst, hunger and starvation. Her story, therefore, reenergizes Somalian and African girls and women and even the youths in the globe to their desired successful life.

She struggles herself for her better future but indeed she always determined to contribute something better for the world. After her career struggle of Fashion model she determines that her life and earning will be devoted and spent for the marginalized people and poverty stricken Somalian people. She mentions, "I've met beautiful people and seen beautiful places and experienced different cultures that have made me want to do something to help the world instead of destroy it. And instead of being another poverty-stricken Somali, I'm in a position to do something about it" (179). This is her love, respect and eventually emotional attachment towards her homeland Somalia.

She always cherishes Somalia and Somalian nomadic lifestyles though she vehemently criticizes some unjust, inhuman and superstitious primitive practices in the name of religion and tradition. She spends most of her fertile age in the West but she always keeps on longing that soil and scent of the African desert. She is nostalgic during her life struggle in the West and even when she underwent writing about herself. Avaishai Margalit claims that nostalgia is an important element of shared memory and argues that, "Shared memory may be an expression of nostalgia. Nostalgia, I hasten to say, is an important element of communal memory" (61-62).

Her childhood memory haunts her badly and goes back to Somalia when she visit many places during her modeling career she enjoys and celebrates the nature imagining she is back to her home in Somalia, as she remembers:

I felt so wonderful to be free in nature, back in the sun again. . . . and just listen to the birds singing. Ahhh. I would close my eyes, smell the sweetness of the flowers, feel the sun on my face, listen to the birds, and pretend I was back in Africa. I would try to recapture that feeling of peace and tranquility I remember from Somalia, and pretend I was back home again. (179)

Here, she not only longs her homeland but rather she valorizes her childhood days and her childhood memory and sees the West; her career-land something different than Africa and African communal lifestyle. She hereby, subtly shows her departure from the totally westernized lifestyles even though she is a fashion model in New York and London. She slightly criticizes the crowded life and hectic life styles in the Western world as she repeatedly memorizes and pretends to be with peaceful nature in Somalia. Furthermore, her very private feeling lets the reader to their homeland and urges to love respect and contribute even a little for some betterment.

Desert Flower also raises the issue of civil war, homelessness, and refugee.

When she returns back from New York as a UN ambassador she has to meet her family and her mother in neighboring country Ethiopia at the refugee camp. Even the nomadic people are affected by the civil war in Somalia. She even there has to hear tragic news of her father's death. She sees her little brother Ali in Ethiopia shot death. She writes, "When I saw my mother in Ethiopia, she told me she was still carrying a bullet in her chest after being caught in crossfire" (224). This pictorises the deadly, horrible scenes and torturous lives in Somalia, Ethiopia and some other African countries. As she pictorizes deadly scene of civil war, she also urges people not to

fight with their own brothers and sisters. This is politics to raise voice against anti-human activities and to promote the humanity and humane among people throughout the world. She in her aggression insists that, "these tribal wars, like the practice of circumcision, are brought about by the ego, selfishness, and aggression of men" (224). In this, she tries to spread humanitarian values throughout the world.

Waris Dirie, speaking about her personal journey from an illiterate nomadic girl in Somalia to a supermodel and special UN ambassador and the human right activist become a process through which she-the narrator finds words to voice what was previously unspeakable, unheard and unspoken. Thus, writing about her personal enduring story, gives some solace and big sighs. It makes herself publicized as one's autobiography is a public matter.

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

Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* as a memory work postulates the collective issues of illiteracy, lack of health facilities, war victims, refugees, and more importantly the traditional practice of circumcision and its drawbacks on physical and mental state of a young girl and even the youths and old woman. It is a cultural practice especially

followed by the Muslims in African world and even in some Middle East of Asian countries. She also talks about the inhuman practice of child marriage as her father makes an agreement of her marriage with an old man at her late twelve for five camels. These all issues are tactically presented in this autobiography in order to make people aware about these unjust, inhuman, and irrational practices. She memorizes her past events and experiences and incorporates her personal feelings and understandings about those issues and practices.

Through this memory work postulating her personal courageous even also struggling and painful life story, Dirie reenergizes the girls and woman to raise their voice against the cultural, religious, and traditional practices designed and described by the male authority. Her autobiography helps to empower the underprivileged woman through the world in general and the Somali and African woman in particular. Dirie, an illiterate nomad girl grown up around the tail of goats and camels, later a house maid and a worker at McDonald becomes a famous Super Model and celebrity throughout the world and an especial ambassador of United Nations Organization for the human rights, life and liberty. She later destined herself to serve the needy people in the African world and more importantly fights against FGM practice and encourages the woman and even the male.

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

Waris Dirie contemplating the 'self' reenergizes the woman to resist the prevailing patriarchal subordinations and inhuman and unjust religious and cultural practices traditionally designed for woman in order to keep them in hand by the male authorities. She, through this autobiography, tries to empower the woman particularly in African world who are compelled to be circumcised even in the postmodern technocratic life. Her memory work is helpful enough for raising a public conscience that FGM is inhuman, brutal, and superstitious practice and is against the human right, thus it must be eliminated and abolished from the affected areas with joint efforts of all male and female, which eventually saves millions of innocent girls and women from their untimely deaths and psychological and physical subordinations.

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