Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences
eajass.eanso.org
Volume 8, Issue 2, 2025
Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285
Title DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285

EAST AFRICAN NATURE & SCIENCE ORGANIZATION

Original Article

The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

Date Published: *29 May 2025*

Keywords: *Autobiography, Journey, Selfhood, Intertextuality.*

ABSTRACT

The study examines the journey motif to understand the identities of Waris Dirie's in *Desert Flower* and *Desert Dawn*. The study relies on autobiography theory as well as African feminism theory. Dirie's two narratives which form the basis of this study: *Desert Flower* and *Desert Dawn*, help to define and place women's contribution to literary and gender issues in the World. Using the autobiography theory, the study uses the tenet of intertextuality to examine how the narratives by Warris Dirie present the factors that problematize the author's identity. The study employs close reading and interpretation of both the primary and secondary data sources on the rendition of identities in the two primary texts under study since it is qualitative. The study establishes that through the analysis of the journey motif, the study traces the transitions that Waris Dirie undergoes to get freed from the restrictions of traditional customs and patriarchy, enabling her to openly express her emotions and ideas.

APA CITATION
Muthama, E. M., Mutie, S. & Macharia, O. (2025). The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, *8*(*2*), 275-288. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

CHICAGO CITATION
Muthama, Eunice Mwikali, Stephen Mutie and Oscar Macharia. 2025. "The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (2), 275-288. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

HARVARD CITATION
Muthama, E. M., Mutie, S. & Macharia, O. (2025) "The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(2), pp. 275-288. doi: 10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

IEEE CITATION
E. M., Muthama, S., Mutie & O., Macharia "The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies". *EAJASS*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 275-288, May. 2025.

MLA CITATION
Muthama, Eunice Mwikali, Stephen Mutie & Oscar Macharia. "The Representation of the Journey Motif in Understanding Selfhood in Waris Dirie's Autobiographies". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, no. 2, May. 2025, pp. 275-288, doi:10.37284/eajass.8.1.3062

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the representation of the journey motif as a way of understanding the hindrances to Waris Dirie's selfhood in her autobiographies. Using the journey motif helps us understand the disjointed selfhood of Dirie through the cross-examination of the hurdles Dirie faces in her life. To achieve this, the paper uses the feminist perspective to read the two autobiographies. The journey motif helps to map the impediments to Dirie's female agency. A motif is a symbolic literary device that the author uses as a key tool to integrate the structure and content of their work, so enhancing the overall significance of the text. The paper utilizes feminism together with the journey motif to read Dirie's physical movements, psychological development, spiritual and emotional maturity as she goes from one stage of life to another in search of a goal or accomplishment in the pursuit of attaining selfhood.

The Journey Motif in Literature

The element of a motif is used in this paper to examine Waris Dirie's journey to seek her self-identity. Treister, Suzanne in, *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, argue that "whatever the journey motif…journey changes both the country visited and the self that travels" (225-238). Consequently, travellers' motivations notwithstanding, their travels shape and alter their personalities.

According to Carl Thompson's book, *Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women's Early Travel Writing* 1763-1862, travel and travel writing began to develop around the end of the 18th century. According to the author, travel writing gained popularity around the end of the twentieth century (131). Travel literature encompasses the depiction of a writer's or protagonist's firsthand encounters while travelling either domestically or internationally. Rosalind contends that regardless of the purpose of the voyage, both the visited nation and the traveller undergo transformation. Travellers undergo a transformation in their personality as a result of their journeys, regardless of their objectives.

Throughout each of the two texts being examined, the protagonist (Dirie) gains insight into the countries she travels to by drawing on her encounters, leading to her self-discovery, exposure to many societies, and real-life experiences. In Postcolonial travel writing and postcolonial theory, Justin Edward contends that travel writing is mostly seen through a male lens. However, there has been a recent emergence of women authors using this genre to address women's problems (19-32). Consequently, female writers who are interested in examining women's issues use the notion of a journey as a metaphor for the constraints faced by women and their efforts to overcome these challenges.

James Vernon argues in his book, *Modern Britain, 1750* to the present that women's travel serves as a spiritual quest, a passionate pursuit, a process of learning, a novelty, a realization of dreams, and a diversion in connection to women's lives (588). Evidently, the travel has a substantial influence on the character development of women. Waris Dirie's personality is greatly influenced by her travels, as she gains new insights about her civilization and encounters unfamiliar personalities, resulting in modifications to her personality. Dirie has a psychological and moral transformation in her life as she grows from infancy to adulthood. This transformation is influenced by her many experiences in different places and her interactions with people, which are reflected in her writings.

In their book "Journeys of Well-Being: Women's Travel Narratives of Transformation and Self-Discovery in Italy," Jennifer Laing and Frost Warwick argue that women can only embark on transformative journeys when cultural and social changes allow them to enter the male-dominated sphere and venture beyond their traditional domestic roles to explore and grow personally (110-119). The trip theme serves as a metaphor for the

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

process of self-discovery and the exploration of new ideas and places. Waris Dirie gains self-awareness via the life situations she has encountered. This study uses the journey motif to show the development of the main character (Dirie) from a youthful, inexperienced, and innocent girl to a mature, cautious, and clever woman who undergoes a gradual process of initiation in a male-dominated society.

In "Memory and Trauma in Contemporary Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Literature by Women," Shabani Butoyi notes that women have found empowerment and autonomy via their travels, allowing them to improve themselves and assert their agency. The author contends that the journey helps women in recognizing their "disappearing self," as described by Mortimer in African Journeys, and that "ecriture" is a crucial method for reclaiming their identity (172). Dirie, being an African woman, engages in travel, which enables her to evade prevalent African oppressions, such as patriarchy and traditional African customs. The journey symbol enables us to examine the dual worlds in which the female heroine exists: the "other" world and the repressive one she strives to change in order to attain freedom.

Dirie's Struggle to Self-discovery

As Mortimer Mildred notes in *African Journeys*, some journeys "are forced marches", while others involve a person "in search of a new home" (169). So Dirie undertakes her journey due to both reasons. She faces both "physical and mental hells" in her quest to find a home, and these journeys shape her perception of life, forming her identity. Identity is closely linked to self-discovery; in order to really understand oneself, one must face challenges that contribute to the development and maturation of one's character. Based on the two texts being examined, Dirie has several challenges that significantly influence and transform her sense of self. Despite these obstacles, she manages to overcome them and achieve success as an African woman.

Dirie utilises the analogy of a journey as the central element that she highlights to interconnect her themes, narrative, characters, and social perspective throughout her autobiographies. The main focus is on how women undertake physical journeys in quest of more free spaces in a society that is burdened by patriarchal restrictions and cultural oppressions. The journey motif is thus philosophically interpreted as the transition that maps a person's travels in a state of subjection, repression, and oppression, and concludes with the attainment of discovery, revelation, and liberation. Put simply, the traveller embarks on the expedition injured but ultimately triumphs.

Basirizadeh, Fatemeh Sadat, and Soqandi Mahnaz in "A Comparative Study of the Psychoanalytic Portrayal of the Women's Character by Virginia Woolf and Zoya Pirzad," explore how women are depicted as witches, prostitutes, and marginalised individuals who lack growth (1-8). Dirie's works centre on her relentless battle against the many challenges faced by women. In addition, Kurtz argues that writings driven by hegemonic tendencies are often authored by male authors and uphold the patriarchal structure of society, so confining women to their traditional roles (qtd. in Bassi et al. 38). Multiple literary works authored by males portray the position of women in patriarchal and cultural discourse, as seen through the lens of masculine viewpoints.

The female characters in most of these works are shown as weak and subordinate to their male counterparts, who are privileged by being given the primary roles, and they are frequently referred to as "instruments of societal change" by the author. That's why female authors come up with what Kurtz refers to as "counter-hegemonic works ... challenging borders limiting women to their restricted gender roles" (qtd in Bassi et al. 38). In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf argues that women are denied the right to express themselves since males take up all of the available space, leaving no room for women to express their

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thoughts, feelings, wants, and aspirations through their artistic ability.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie is one of the African Feminism theory tenets employed in this study. She explains this in *The Woman's Condition in Africa: The Six Mountains on Her,* stating that the six 'mountains' or factors are placed on women, preventing them from reaching their full potential in society. Leslie describes these mountains as follows:

The first mountain is oppression from outside (colonialism and neo-colonialism); the second from traditional structures, feudal, slave-based; the third is her backwardness (neo-colonialism); the fourth is man; the fifth is her colour, her race; and the sixth is herself (107).

To understand Dirie's struggle for self-discovery, it is important to examine traditional power structures and how they work in tandem with patriarchal traditions to oppress women. The argument is that these two instruments aid in the representation of how Dirie's selfhood is disjointed. Therefore, Dirie's obstacles can be understood through the feature of a mountain in her life journey, which therefore impedes her achievement of selfhood.

The Feature of a Mountain; Reading the Obstacles that Define Dirie's Identity Struggle

The usage of the image of a "Mountain" is to explore the difficulties Dirie faces in her quest for self-awareness. Dirie's identity struggle is contextualised in the form of "mountains" that hinder her journey in the form of patriarchy and traditional customs in her society. Even after fleeing overseas from her African home, she confronts the same "mountains" but is strong and triumphant after her voyage.

Somali traditional culture combines nomadic pastoral customs and traditions with Islamic teachings, resulting in patriarchy as the dominant social structure. The confluence of Islamic teachings and Somali customs shapes Somali culture. The Koran, interpretations of Islamic traditions and jurisprudence, and the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed (PUB) as affected by social practices and conventions all contribute to the inclusion of women in Islamic societies. Islam liberated women from the oppressive cultural norms of Islamic Arabia through revelation in the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed (PUB) and the Koran. Some of Islam's rights granted to women include the right to life, the ability to own, manage, and inherit property, and the right to education.

Polygamy is acceptable, with four spouses receiving equal treatment as the maximum number. Only males have the right to divorce in a marriage, although women are deemed to have started it. All these ideas are highlighted in Dirie's texts. "One of the techniques for providing more hands to ease the workload was increasing the number of women and children, which means that having multiple wives is a common practice in Africa" (*Flower* 34). Dirie's father is polygamous with three wives and over fifteen children.

In Somali traditions, the agnatic principle determines the person and the similarity of men and women. Clan systems restrict women from pursuing individual and community growth routes since they are physically different from males, despite being energetic and flexible. As a result, clan systems function not only as collective memory but also as personality and communal identity. For example, there is doubt over women's true group identification and adherence since in the Somali clan, once married, women join the husband's family but are not fully integrated into it because tradition requires them to keep their birth lineage links. "A great rivalry exists between the Daarods and Hawiyes, and my father's family always treated my mother badly, assuming she was a lesser mortal by virtue of being from a different tribe than their own" (*Flower* 29). This leads to women being confused in terms of their rights as well as their belonging.

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Patriarchy as a "Mountain"

The most challenging and prominent obstacle for female heroines to overcome is male dominance. Ongundipe contends in "The Woman's Condition in Africa: The Six Mountains on Her" that the concept of the "fourth mountain" is perpetuated by a long-standing patriarchal mentality that has existed for millennia (113). Waris Dirie has had significant challenges from infancy. She triumphs over this formidable obstacle, which is encountered by the majority of African women, via her determination and perseverance. Patriarchy in several traditional and contemporary African communities confers advantages to men in the realm of home decision-making.

Men, in their role as family leaders, exhibit a condescending attitude towards women, leading to power imbalances where women have limited options and must depend on men's judgments. If men fail to fulfil this responsibility, it may lead to family instability and a lack of harmony. Women often face a formidable guy due to the fact that they live in a mostly male-dominated society. Dirie, who was born in a society dominated by men, confronts this formidable challenge. Despite her youth, her father coerces her into marrying an elderly man, with a bride price of five camels to be paid. The decision about the spouse is within the purview of her father.

As a result, Dirie flees her family since it contradicts her childhood ambitions of marrying a guy of her choosing. It is because of her dream's drive that she can flee the intended forced marriage:

I had run away when I was about thirteen years old because my father tried to marry me off to an old man. In Somalia men must pay bride price for a virgin and this balding old man leaned on a walking stick and offered several camels for me. A woman doesn't have much choice in the matter; women have to get married. (*Dawn* 16)

Dirie's elder sister likewise flees her family because of a forced marriage. "I thought my father was afraid that I was going to run away like my sister Aman had. When papa had tried to arrange her marriage, she ran away" (*Flower* 55). The walking away of the two sisters from their house is clear evidence of how man dominates in the African civilisation consequently oppressing the female gender. Home escape becomes the sole alternative for the girls to oppose early forced marriage as men's domineering behaviour toward females.

Dirie has another difficulty on her travels after fleeing her home: an encounter with a lion. A lion is a ferocious wild animal found in the African desert that lives only on meat. During Dirie's journey through the desert, she stumbles upon a lion while helplessly resting behind a tree. She is desperate to die at the hands of the lion since she lacks the stamina to fight, owing to long days of travel and hunger. "By the time the lion sat in front of me, licking his lips in hunger, I had given up. I welcomed his quick kill as a way out of my misery. But the lion looked at the bones jutting out of my skin, my sunken cheeks and bulging eyes, and walked away" (*Flower* 5). Still, in Dirie's escape from home, she encounters shepherds who lash her for breastfeeding their camel. She sucks the camel because she was dying out of hunger after a long journey in the desert without anything to eat:

I began to walk again, and within a few minutes came to a grazing area with camels everywhere. I spotted the animal carrying the freshest milk, and ran to it. I nursed, sucking the milk like a baby. … The herdsman ran at me, yelling, loud and mean. He knew that if he didn't scare me away, by the time he reached me, it would be too late. The milk would all be gone. But I'd had plenty so I started to run. He chased after me, and managed to lash me with the whip a couple of times before I outran him. (*Flower* 6)

Femalism, according to Chioma Opara, puts a strain on the African woman's body. It is related to feminine bodily characteristics. Because of the dominance of patriarchy in African society, males regard the African woman's body as an abuse

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location. The female body is regarded as a location for masculine pleasure. Dirie, the protagonist, is confronted with the same problem. During her youth, a friend of her father tries to rape her despite her not understanding what the man is doing to her genitals, and she tells her family about it later when she is grown enough to realise what occurred. "I asked if they remembered the afternoon Guban went with me to get the lambs. 'When we were far enough away so nobody could hear he grabbed me and tried to get away. When I finally broke loose, I was covered with sticky smelly stuff" (*Dawn* 165).

Dirie comes across a road and notices a vehicle during her departure from home due to forced marriage. Since she is tired of walking, she stops the lorry and requests a lift to Mogadishu. While in transit, the co-driver joins her in the truck's rear where she is being carried with construction blocks and tries to rape her. Dirie cleverly prepares it such that she knocks the man with a stone until he falls unconscious and flees the vehicle to the surrounding jungle. "He was also fat, as I learned when he took his pants down. His erect penis bobbed at me as he grabbed my legs and tried to force them apart" (*Flower* 8). Dirie's sister also encounters a stranger who rapes her while tending to their animals in the desert:

My oldest sister, Aman, was out one day taking care of her animals, when a man approached her. This guy kept pestering her, and she kept repeating, "Leave me alone. I'm not interested in you." Finally, when his charm didn't work, he grabbed Aman and tried to force himself on her. (*Flower* 52)

One of Dirie's male relatives tries to sexually harass her while working as a maid in London. He began by doing Dirie favours, such as assisting her with housework when his mother was away. This male relative was eventually able to enter her bedroom at night under the influence of alcohol and began stroking her, whereupon in reaction, Dirie assaulted her. This occurrence was kept under cover by the family obviously because the female body is a venue for abuse by males according to the African traditions:

… In a repeat performance of the previous night, Haji came in around three in the morning. … I lay there with one eye open, watching him. He crept to my pillow and started tapping me on the arm. His breath stank of scotch so bad…Haji groped around until he found the bottom hem of the covers, and pushed his hand underneath and across the mattress to my leg. Sliding his palm up my thigh, he was going all the way to my knickers, my underwear…. My hand around the rolling–pin handle and brought the wood across his face with all my might. (*Flower 111-112*)

Dirie's act of hitting the cousin was her defence mechanism from patriarchy, which has dominated her life since childhood. The various rape attempts indicate patriarchy, exemplified as the man mountain in Somalia. Domestic violence is experienced in the texts under study because males regard the female body as an abuse location owing to masculine domination. Dirie's mother is challenged by her husband when she does anything against his desire. She is also beaten up as she tries to resist and prevent her children from being caned by their enraged father.

Dirie's father strikes his wife mercilessly, causing blood to flow from her body. This behaviour is horrible and that's why African women struggle for gender equality. "In one split second, he hit my mother so hard it knocked her across the corral. She crumpled in a heap on the ground and blood ran out of her nose and mouth" (*Dawn* 76). Besides, when Dirie visits a hotel with her brother, she is denied admission to the hotel room because only males may go in, while ladies have their room adjacent to the washroom. The state of the ladies' room is dirty and disgusting. This indicates that in African society, the female gender is seen as having less value than males. "Although Somali women won't eat in restaurants with men, it was news that women weren't allowed to eat with men when they wanted

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to. He repeated, 'This restaurant is for men only, no women allowed in here" (*Dawn* 209).

In her physical journey, Waris Dirie becomes an immigrant. She achieves this position after receiving her first passport to travel to London. As an immigrant, she encounters several problems. Once in London, she takes low-wage employment. First, she becomes a maid to her uncle, where cleaning and other domestic responsibilities are given. When Dirie's uncle's contract as an ambassador in London expires, his family returns to Somalia, where Dirie hides her passport to avoid returning to her native country and eventually becomes an emigrant. Instead, she seeks another employment to make ends meet in exile. She gets to work in a restaurant as a cleaner and gathers enough to pay for her English classes and rent. Dirie gets low-paying employment since she lacks professional skills and is still unable to communicate fluently in English:

My career as a kitchen help at McDonald's put to use the skills I'd learned as a maid: I washed dishes, wiped counters, scrubbed grills, and mopped floors, in a constant effort to erase the traces of burger grease. When I went home at night, I was coated with grease and stank like grease. (*Flower*122)

While working as a maid in London, Dirie is interested in studying English. Dirie's relative drives her to the English school, where she enrols. When her uncle learns this, he instantly stops her, arguing that she has to focus on what drew her to London: working as a house assistant in his home. "I learned the alphabet, and was beginning on the fundamentals of English, when my uncle discovered I was sneaking out at night. He was furious that I'd disobeyed him and ended my attending school after only a couple of weeks" (*Flower 100*). Later, while no longer a maid to her uncle, she returns to school to study English to better her communication abilities. Dirie's attendance at school is a resistance against male supremacy in society.

Still, as an emigrant, Dirie has passport issues. She is denied the right to a passport since she is not a British citizen, forcing her to marry an American resident to escape deportation. She is also duped out of money under the pretence of receiving a passport, only to receive a temporary one of poor quality in the end. These passport issues cause Dirie to falsify her African identity and lay low to impress a white man for her survival. "Wheeler explained how I would marry an Irish national, and he just happened to have such an individual in mind. The two thousand pounds would go to the Irishman in return for his services" (*Flower* 162). Following this occurrence, Dirie meets another guy, still a British citizen, with whom she fakes marriage to survive overseas. This time Dirie is a model and has to go worldwide. It comes to a point where she needs to go back to Africa for a documentary, and this man wants to join her. When Dirie refuses his company, he conceals her passport, making it harder for her to travel. "When I came back to London, Nigel came to my hotel and started it again on his campaign to come to Africa. When I refused, he stole my passport. Of course, he knew that in a few days, we were supposed to leave the country" (*Flower* 199).

Dirie also happens to be in an emergency where she needs to travel for modelling events, hence her passport has expired. Therefore, she hides her friend's passport and slips with it for the concert unobserved, pretending to be summoned by the name on the ticket. She tells her buddy about it once she returns from the show. "…trying to forget my passport troubles… "Marilyn", I panted ", I need your passport." …we'll go to the post office and I'll apply for a passport in your name; I'll forge my signature, and put my picture on it" (*Flower* 142-143).

Dirie becomes a model in accordance with the self-texts examined in this study. Despite facing several challenges as she strives to grow in her modelling career, she becomes recognised through her modelling job. She is highly worried during her first modelling photo session since she breaks an African

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taboo by displaying her nude body to the world. "The first job I get and they want me to take my clothes off!" (*Flower*133). As a model, Dirie is recruited to advertise items, developing and extending the product market. She joins an advertisement, which causes her leg damage due to the photo's posture. "The shot would appear on a liquor bottle label. I would be sitting on top of the bull. Naked … I sprained my ankle, which began to swell and throb immediately" (*Flower* 188). Dirie poses naked in another photo shoot:

In Morocco, my movie career consisted of a couple of scenes where I was supposed to do what the script called "a beautiful girl lying around the pool." Then I was in another scene where we were sitting inside this fantastic house in Casablanca, having tea, yet for some reason all the women are naked. (*Flower* 144)

Dirie progresses from being a model to being the United Nations special ambassador. Her job requires her to advocate for women's rights. After openly discussing her experience with female genital mutilation and its consequences, it becomes a problem for her. Truth, a pillar of autobiography theory, is revealed here when Dirie receives messages condemning her after reading her essay. These assailants oppose Dirie's plan to publicise the covert practice of female genital mutilation. "I received only two negative responses criticising me, and not surprisingly, they came from Somalia" (Flower 229). These texts are evidence of women being subjugated, whereby the mountain of man comes in here.

Most females in African civilisation are oppressed by male supremacy. Almost all available opportunities for progress, such as education, are prioritised for men. This causes the feminine gender to be afraid of the unknown, and they just obey what their male counterparts dictate without questioning. The pattern persists from generation to generation, necessitating action. Waris Dirie, as a separate character, battles this mountain and triumphs by serving as the United Nations special ambassador. Rules have been developed in most African countries to combat male domination, where the girl child is safeguarded and allowed to express herself.

In conclusion, it is factual that travel to cities helps female characters to determine their identity as they get exposure by "allowing them to be free from patriarchal tradition, in particular, if they can undertake an educational path or be employed" (qtd. in Bassi et al. 44)

Achievement of Selfhood as a Mark of the Journey's End

Journeyer's challenge encounters make them strong enough to a point of getting to their journey's climax. At the termination of a journey, the journeyer is completely different from how he or she began it. Meera Babu and K. Devi in *Journey as a Motif of Self Discovery in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe* assert that "protagonists wind up learning numerous things regarding humanity, world's nature and also about themselves as individuals" (483). As a result, travel as a motif is a process that aids in identity creation by enhancing self-awareness, understanding of human suffering, and respect for the environment in which one lives. The completion of a voyage provides the journeyer with exposure, independence, discoveries, and enlightenment, resulting in a changed viewpoint, as it does for Waris Dirie once she leaves Somalia.

Despite Dirie's tragic recollections of her past, in which she is circumcised, raped, and forced to marry an elderly man, Dirie's trip home to make the BBC documentary is a celebration of a major triumph in her life: coming home. Mortimer in *African Journeys* argues that the female protagonist's "circular journey…ends where it began, at home" (173). Dirie returns home to an ecstatic reunion with the fragrance of the dirt, the animals, the harsh environment, and everything else that reminds her of her original home. Dirie's mother's reaction to seeing Dirie back at home reflects her emotional reunion with her home:

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I could tell she recognised my voice, she kind of stopped breathing for a moment. Then she grabbed me and held me next to her like a baby snatched at the last second from falling into the fire. Waris?' Is this really my daughter Waris?' she said and started to laugh and cry at the same time. (*Dawn* 101)

Dirie's family's suggestion to host a feast in honour of Dirie's homecoming, where she is comfortable with the atmosphere and at ease in her ancestral house, is a real aspect of home arrival. When she leaves her ancestral home, she is not completely at peace because of the conventional traditions practised there, but after travelling to the West, she returns home as a great figure with a changed perspective, ready to transform their people's perceptions of women. She talks with her family about how to modify customs and appreciate women, as she is an example, after suffering through all of life's trials. Completing the voyage allows her to complete the mission she set out on at the start of the journey; she is now free to say, think, do, and live as she sees fit, rather than being at the beck and call of others. Her treasure is the peace of mind from a life free of patriarchy, colonialism, and conventional ideals.

Travels have great advantages compared to the final destination. Dirie's treasure is not a "material thing" but "inner serenity", culminating in the transformation of personality on finishing the voyage. Despite worrying about how her people would respond to her public speech on female genital mutilation, she is overjoyed to find her mother and some siblings alive despite the violence in Somalia. She reconnects with the tangible items in her environment after returning home, giving her a sense of belonging.

Waris Dirie's ideas on bringing peace to the community are easily apparent in her surroundings. Some of her decisions include: educating her people about the negative effects of female genital mutilation, providing equal access to education and rights for both genders, transporting her father to the hospital for eye surgery and transporting her paralysed uncle to the hospital for medication, both of which they believe in traditional cures. These decisions were some of her contributions to her childhood runaways. Dirie's homecoming is welcomed not just by her people, but also by God, which is why it rains fiercely the night she arrives:

Suddenly, I heard drumming and pounding on the tin roof. I jumped and said, 'what is that?' for a second; I didn't know what it could be. It was so hard and so loud, and it didn't start slowly; it all came at once. My mother and sister-in –law both laughed and said at the same time, 'oh, it's raining, Waris. Rain at last. (*Dawn* 103-104)

The most obvious freedom is evident in Dirie's roles, which are completely flipped. She is this insignificant young lady who has been "pressed down" by patriarchy and cultural ideals before going on her trip. Dirie emerges from the physical voyage as the pinnacle of the social changes that occur, and she plays an important role in the new social and economic guidelines that she develops in her community. She goes from being a rebel, "a reputation I earned in a series of actions that to me seemed logical and justified, but to my elders, particularly my father- seemed outrageous" (*Flower* 21) to a cherished, charismatic leader, a "United Nations spokeswoman" (*Dawn* 11). She progresses from a basic cleaner in the service of the powerful and the poor to the overall United Nations special envoy with complete power to advocate for women's rights. Dirie embarks on the journey to find tranquillity and rediscover herself, who she truly is, and the power she possesses to change the world.

The female protagonist's specified status and high positions are not only recreated through conventional frameworks but also through patriarchy. Both patriarchy and traditional beliefs cross to distort the identities of the female characters in African works, as with Dirie in *Desert Flower* and *Desert Dawn*.

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Traditional Social Historical Structures as "Mountains".

According to Dilthey, historical consciousness or historicity is a vital factor in autobiographical criticism, implying that; autobiography is a key to understanding the history curve, shapes, and cultural manifestation and the importance of human culture itself (qtd. in Marcus 137). The "ails" that society perpetuates are called traditions. In the traditional African framework, certain beliefs are adhered to, and anybody who does not is either seen as an outcast or faces physical punishment. As a result, many individuals in contemporary African society find it very difficult to adhere to traditional norms, like Dirie does.

Dirie identifies as a Black Muslim woman. This stems from the ideas and practices she witnesses. She must adhere to Islamic values because she was born into a Somali nomadic household. Dirie qualifies and connects with other Somali Muslim women after seeing all this in her country. However, this identity faces a number of issues beneath the mountain of tradition. Dirie confronts several challenges due to her identity, with customs as a hindrance. Poverty, female circumcision, and early marriages are among the problems. Dirie argues that poverty is one of her greatest challenges as a Black Muslim African girl. "I looked around for something to grab, something to take, but there was nothing, no bottle of water, no jar of milk, no basket of food. So, barefoot and wearing only a scarf draped around me, I ran off into the black desert night" (*Flower 3*). She lacks certain fundamentals because she was born into a poor family. Dirie's first name implies that she overcame many obstacles as a newborn, becoming a survivor. "The thing that comes to my mind about my name is that I am a survivor, like the desert flower" (*Dawn* 17).

Additionally, Dirie laments about her country Somalia, which is claimed to be crippled by poverty and is hence regarded as one of the world's poorest countries. "I still find it hard to believe that Somalia is one of the five poorest countries on the planet" (*Dawn* 115). "There was not enough water, no electricity, no doctors, no medical dispensary and the nearest hospital was over a hundred miles away" (*Dawn* 181). Technologically, Somalia is backwards, as Dirie claims in her autobiography. "No one in my family could read or write, so even if there was a postal service, I couldn't send a letter, an e-mail, or a fax. My poor little country has not kept up with technology, it has gone backwards" (*Dawn* 28).

There are various indications that Dirie's background is poor. This is demonstrated by the failure to provide the fundamental necessities of food, clothes, housing, medication, and education. Dirie is not proud of her physical appearance because she suffers from rickets due to starvation. "I looked at my body and felt ashamed of my legs. They are bowed due to childhood malnutrition…." (*Dawn 16*). Besides, she recounts stabbing her brother in the leg with a knife while scooping her final spoonful of rice. "Having food is not something we took for granted; … suddenly Ali stuck his spoon in my dish and scooped out my last bite, taking every last grain of rice. Without thinking, I retaliated by grabbing a knife beside me and burying the blade in Ali's thigh (Flower 21). This is a clear indication that food is a necessity, which was scarce for the family.

Clothing is another essential requirement that Dirie's family falls short of. According to reports, the family members only wash one pair of clothing when the rains begin. This is due to a scarcity of water in Somalia's deserts. Dirie wore a single frock and a scarf, which she wrapped around her head as an Islamic woman. "I looked around for something to grab, something to take, but there was nothing, no bottle of water, no jar of milk, no basket of food. So, barefoot, and wearing only a scarf draped around me, I ran off into the black desert night" (*Flower 3*).

Furthermore, Dirie's father owns only two shirts and one dirty jacket. The family has few supplies for survival as they roam throughout the desert due to their nomadic existence. The entire family shares a

Article DOI : https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.2.3062

single pair of inexpensive slippers that they only use while visiting the village's restroom, although they generally go barefoot:

Everybody was constantly fighting over one pair of flip-flops. They only had one good pair in the whole house and I kept hearing, 'Where are the shoes? I need to go to the bathroom. It's almost time to pray, I have to wash.' Mama would have them on to get something outside and Burhaan would have to wait until she came back and gave him the shoes so he could go to the bathroom. 'Who is wearing the shoes?' I heard all day, especially just before it was time to pray and everybody had to go and wash. Four people were fighting for one pair of rubber flip-flops. They were the cheap kind that fall apart two days after you buy them. The front piece that goes between your toes comes out and they won't stay on your feet anymore. My mother was wearing two different colours when I met her and half of the bottom of one was missing. (*Dawn* 145)

As an Islamic Somali woman whose agency is impeded by the mountain of tradition, Dirie has yet another hurdle. Dirie's family is a pastoralist family, thus, they don't have a fixed house and move about depending on pasture availability for their animals. Their home is constructed of grass and was built by Dirie's mother. The home is used to store camel milk and for toddlers to sleep. The remainder of the family slept outside under their father's protection, with nothing to keep them warm. It becomes worse when it rains since the family gets thoroughly soaked outside:

Our home was a hut woven from grass; being portable, it served the same purpose as a tent. …The hut provided shelter for the babies, shade from the midday sun, and storage space for fresh milk. At night, the rest of us slept outside under the stars, with the children cuddled together on a mat. After the sun went down, the desert was cold; we didn't have enough blankets for each child to have his own, and since we had very little clothing, we used the heat from our bodies to keep us warm. My father slept off to one side, as our guardian, the protector of the family. (*Flower* 13-14)

In the Somali desert, there are no hospitals or skilled doctors. Dirie loses some of her siblings due to sickness and viruses. Dirie's family had twelve children, but only six lived due to illnesses. Other relatives also died as a result of the lack of expert medical treatment. "Part of that hardness formed watching my brothers and sisters die. There were twelve children in my family, but now only six of us are left. My mother had a set of twins who died right after they were born" (*Flower* 20). The only accessible medical workers rely on standard medications but are not doctors.

Dirie's uncle has eye surgery in the jungle, which causes him to become paraplegic due to the ongoing illnesses. After being carried to the sole hospital at the end of the desert, the only trained doctor reveals that tuberculosis is the most prevalent disease in that country. "What is the major medical problem you have encountered so far? 'TB', he said and turned back to his Bunsen burner."(*Dawn* 128)

Another challenge that affects Dirie's selfhood is the lack of access to education. Dirie has never attended school, but she has obtained a place to take English classes in London. Education is not only a right but also a responsibility for all men and women. Prophet Muhammad said:

Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim. A husband cannot prevent his wife from seeking education. Parents are duty-bound to educate their girls as they educate their sons. Prophet Muhammad said:" Whosoever has a daughter and…. does not favour his son over her, Allah will enter him into Paradise. [*Ahmad*]

The Prophet urges women to seek knowledge. Despite his rigorous diaries, the Prophet, for example, sets out special days to instruct women. Islam supports women's rights to all sorts of education and training, and to pursue it to any degree they wish. Although both genders can have

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the same tests, skilled professors, and curricula, traditional Islamic groups prefer to have separate learning facilities for each gender. According to the literature being studied, education is a right of a boy, which is prohibited by Islamic law. “I never had the opportunity to sit in a classroom and listen to a teacher. Everything I know I taught myself” (*Dawn 186*). Somalia’s single school is deplorable, with instructors going months without a salary, implying that education is not emphasised. Men in Somalia coerce young girls into early marriages for selfish reasons due to the country’s poverty.

Dirie flees away from her desert home because she was forced to marry when she was young. Dirie’s father had arranged for her marriage to an elderly man, which Dirie discovered and fled from home. According to Lidwien Kapteijns in *I.M.Lewis and Somali Clanships: A Critique*, marriage in Somali society has commercial and individual aspects. She adds that it is the girl’s family's responsibility to help her marry.

Parents and other agnates, therefore, exercise considerable influence in the choice of a bride. Brides are chosen or rejected in the interest of the families and concerned kinship groups (qtd in Lewis. 66). For this reason, Dirie’s father settles on the kind of man to marry his daughter Dirie. “I had run away when I was about thirteen years old because my father tried to marry me off to an old man” (*Dawn 16*). Local customs and social conventions, based mostly on affinity ties among agnatic groups and families, culminate in marriage agreements between the two people, according to Somali culture. Nonetheless, marriage is performed in line with specific schools of thought (“shaafici”) and Islamic doctrines; hence, there is no usual agreement for matrimony processes amongst distinct kinships.

Because marriage is a right of every young couple, young people can pick their marriage partners regardless of clan interests. Besides, Lewis argues that, under the Somali tradition, young females and males can meet while herding livestock, either during the daytime, or at night inside the nomadic hamlet, where they can dance or talk together. Older people, especially the religious, often disapprove of these meetings, particularly the songs and dances (34). Social encounters provide opportunities for young people to interact with one another and, in some cases, lead to marriage, as it is with Dirie, who meets the man of her dreams through social interactions.

Under its pervasiveness, customary law weakens the application of Islamic law. A man, for example, is worth 100 camels, whereas a woman is worth 50 camels. As a result, women are vulnerable to transitioning from customary to “sharia” law. Elders regularly violate women’s legal rights by pressuring them to settle disputes outside of court through traditional procedures. In the instance of blood reparation, the female gender compensation is half that of the male gender, resulting in a significant disparity between the sexes. Dirie expresses this theme in her self-texts because she is an Islamic lady born in Somalia. “Of course, if you knocked out a woman’s eye, that would be worth a lot less than a man’s eye.” (*Dawn 150*)

Many young couples elope because their own families protest their marital choice. However, most young couples marry after clan elders confer and agree on a dowry. This is seen as an investment since the concerned families develop a deep relationship and gain wealth in the bride price. Further, in *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture*, Maxamed Ibraahin Warsame, famously known as Hadraawi claims that this kind of arrangement is pride source and honor for the girls (23).

Additionally, Muse Cali Faruur and Cumar Nuur Cusmaa in the same book *Women’s Rights in Islam and Somali Culture* argue that “the power of the father and other senior family male members or agnates over the girl’s right to choose her spouse was counter-balanced by the power the girl exercised over the family in choosing to elope if they objected to her relationship” (23). They saw an

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extra structure that made it uncommon for a girl beyond the standard marriage age to present herself to a nomadic hamlet for marriage to a guy. Mr. Muse continues in pointing out that "sometimes the woman used to select a particular man, the house of whom she took refuge in" (23). This is a symbolic plea for her hand in marriage. Dirie resolves to defy this convention by fleeing her household, and she later picks a husband for herself according to her childhood dreams.

Always, when any man was interested in me, I ran. I would disappear. Now here I was, chasing this man I barely knew. The night I met Dana, I was wearing a green sweater and had my hair in a wild Afro. I explained that if I wanted something, I went after it, and for some reason, for the first time in my life, I very much wanted a man." (*Flower 214*)

Female circumcision is another obstacle under the mountain of customary structures. Female circumcision is also known as female genital mutilation, according to the World Health Organization. It includes any treatments that involve partial or whole removal of the external female genitalia or harm to the female sexual organs for cultural or other non-medical reasons. Many women and girls suffer lasting and irreversible damage to their health and well-being, with two million girls around the globe being subjected to it yearly. Somalia is one of the African countries most afflicted by this practice.

Girls are increasingly circumcised between the ages of five and eight, frequently in the privacy of their own homes, as Dirie is. "When I was only as tall as a goat, my mother held me while an old woman cut off my clitoris and the inner parts of my vagina and sewed the wound closed. She left only a tiny matchstick-sized opening for urine and menstrual blood" (*Dawn 11-12*).

All females in Somalia are required by Islam to be circumcised to follow tradition. Female circumcision is a sort of initiation that all girls go through before marriage. The Muslims in Somalia believe that female circumcision is designed to purify the girls and is an instruction in the Koran. ''My mother believed, like all my people, that infibulation was ordered in the Koran'' (*Dawn* 13). Any uncircumcised female would not marry because she is seen to be unclean. Dirie gets circumcised at five, despite being unaware of the advantages of circumcision. "When I was about five years old, I went to my mother and nagged, 'Mama, just find me this woman" (*Flower* 43). The circumciser undertakes this initiation procedure in an unhealthy way.

All applicants share the blade used for the cutting procedure without being sterilised, and no anaesthetic is supplied to the candidates. Dirie is a victim who contracts a significant genital infection, causing the wound to heal slowly. "As the days dragged on and I lay in my hut, my genitals became infected and I ran a high fever. I faded in and out of consciousness" (*Flower* 47).

Dirie's elder sister bled profusely after being circumcised, got an infection, and died as a result. "My beautiful sister Halimo died from it" (*Dawn* 12). Generally, female circumcision is unhealthy, depending on how it is done on girls. Besides, its side effects are very dangerous to the candidates. "Girls in Somalia suffer the most severe form of female genital mutilation called Pharonic circumcision or infibulation. The clitoris and the inner lips of the vagina are cut off and the wound is sewn shut leaving only a small opening for blood and urine" (*Dawn 13*). Infibulation is exercised to make sure girls preserve their virginity, besides it being a cultural practice. Dirie later sees a doctor, where a surgery is done to open up her genitals. She decides to get this procedure since she feels uncomfortable with her circumcision. Dirie also experienced extreme cramps during her menstruation, to the point of fainting. "Dr. Macrae added that he couldn't do the operation right away; I'd need to make an appointment. …immediately after my family returned to Somalia, I called and made an appointment" (*Flower 155*). Dirie felt ill,

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oppressed, and bored with her conventional rules of circumcision, thus, she had to go against their tradition by opening her stitched genitals.

CONCLUSION

By embarking on the journey, Dirie is freed from the restrictions of traditional customs and patriarchy, enabling her to openly express her emotions and ideas. It enables her to battle for an open space free from the encroachment of patriarchal norms, where she may freely express herself. Dirie gains growth on this journey in all spheres of her life physical, emotional, and psychological. After the journey, she has undergone a significant transformation. Whereas she was formerly reckless, she is now careful and has treated both the wealthy and the underprivileged with decency and respect. Thus, the journey motif aids her in overcoming the challenges that impede her ability to achieve self-actualization, self-fulfilment, and self-determination. By accepting her "shadow," "anima," and "persona," it aids her in achieving Carl Jung's "individuation," changing her into a freedwoman at peace with both the outside world and herself. Through the journey, she discovers her former identity and acquires her selfhood.

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