

Autobiographical Self or Social Self?

Esther G. Wanjau, Maasai Mara University; Email: wanjau_e@yahoo.com; mobile: 0722658412

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on how two Somali women, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Waris Dirie try to define themselves through recreating their selves in their autobiographical works; *Infidel: My life and Desert Flower* respectively. The present shapes the past in autobiographies and in this regard the current status and experiences have prompted the women to take an inward journey through memory to ascertain who they are and how they have ended up being the people that they are at present. The paper is a critical analysis of the two texts and it seeks to ascertain that the two focus only on those occurrences in their past that are in line with their intended aim of writing their autobiographies and also the image they want to create of themselves. The two have relied on memory to recreate the self and since memory is selective they only include in their works those experiences that conform to their current ideologies. Their relocation to the West has influenced the way the two view themselves and consequently it affects their recreation of the autobiographical self. Outside influences such as their interaction with the civil society plays a key role in the reconstruction of the self. The image of the self that emerges in the autobiographical works is therefore a social construct that is in conformity with western perceptions of African women.

Key words: identity, self, memory, autobiography.