Cultural Memory, Identity and Trauma in Halima Bashar's Tears of the Desert

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Abstract: This paper aimed to assess the ways in which cultural memory and trauma have been depicted in Halima Bashar's memoir- *Tears of the Desert*. It also attempted to explore how these elements function to form both individual and collective identities. Based on the data collected from the selected memoir, the researcher argued that Halima, as a female survivor of both a cultural practice of circumcision and the civil war in Darfur, has produced a memory of her individual past and the Zaghawa's (the ethnic group she belongs to) worth remembering. A qualitative research design has been employed and both primary and secondary sources were used. Similarly, two theoretical frameworks-Cultural Memory and New historicism- have been employed. The findings revealed that circumcision and war have been sources of both individual and collective trauma which led to the formation of the author's identity. The study implies that trauma can shape the course of identity development by disrupting existing identity commitments. Likewise, it impacts the types of memories authors share through their life writing.

Keywords: Cultural memory; Identity; Remembering; Trauma
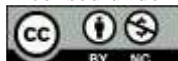
1. Introduction

The surge in memory research has greatly contributed to the way in which we consider a broad range of issues from the most basic biological encoding and retrieval systems to the ways in which political and cultural systems facilitate the remembering or silencing of historical events. As a result, the concept of memory is now studied and taught across a wide range of academic disciplines from the natural and social sciences, the humanities, and the arts (Brown, Gutman, Freeman, Sodaro and Coman, 2009).

Like other fields of inquiry, the field of memory has arisen from the political practicalities of the moment and the high political stakes of memory and the use of the past. Its institutionalized study comes as a response to the very real activities by individuals, groups, institutions and other actors that are immediately and directly concerned with facing the past and its memory and incorporating that past- its victims, perpetrators, and physical remnants- into the past (Brown *et al.*, 2009). Hence, to serve this purpose, memory plays a part in providing content for literature and it is rendered by literature as well.

Of the many genres of literature, life writing serves an important function of solidifying memory. Also, life writing has now become a practice of not only celebrities or professionals but also unprofessional writers. This shift, in fact, resulted from the desire for equality, resistance to dominant culture and cultural narratives and accessible media for self-representation (Grubgeld, 2020). For Grubgeld (2020), life writing has become more than what it has once been considered as an unreliable source of biographical data and has become a source of study for various disciplines.

Despite its recent inception and fast growth, the genre is challenged by a number of criticisms. According to Anderson (2011), the genre has been an important ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including representation, authorship, credibility, etc. One of the critical controversies, authorship, still requires due attention because the majority of literatures, in general, and life writing, in particular, are written until today by men.

Survival stories however come with discrimination. The attempts to narrate the dangerous times are usually attributed to men while women have also always been there beside men. Hence, women have their own stories to tell, and their life writing provides a vehicle for the voicing and preservation of stories and memories that have long been excluded from hegemonic discourses of cultural and collective memory (Leggott, 2004), especially, when the women are both author and narrator who lived through historical events that prove to have a profound impact on the construction of female subjectivity: personal cries and historical trauma (Leggott, 2004).

Generally, with all the positive comments and negative criticisms, life writing has gotten this far. Thus, both sides need to be proven by scientific inquiry, and the findings of such inquiries shall be used to develop the field. Thus, it is in that sense that the researcher embarked up on researching the selected life writing: to examine how the past is narrated by women, for it is important that their past is taken and studied seriously.

Socio-cultural and political background of *Tears of the Desert* by Halima Bashar

Sudan has been torn by civil war that claimed and is still claiming the lives of many men and women. The Arabs who are supported by the system have always been striving to secure superiority and amass resources of the nation until it was divided into two independent nations, namely Sudan and South Sudan. Similarly, the conflict in Darfur is one of the tragic incidents that ever happened to Sudan even though similar kinds of incidents have been witnessed in the country since the 1960's. The root cause of these conflicts has always been a question of power and resource. El-Gack (2016) states that the 2003 conflict has continued and may sometime cause the separation of Darfur from Sudan.

Similarly, the selected memoir recounts the life and experience of Halima Bashar amidst the conflict. Halima was born to the Zaghawa tribe, a black Sudanese tribe and was a successful student who made it to a university to pursue her studies as a medical doctor. In the middle of her studies, yet, this fierce and bloody conflict broke out and her family and tribe fell victim to the Janjaweed militia-

a junta with an Arab descent. Halima has been raped and tortured by the Arabs which contributed to her fleeing the country. Accordingly, the book is influenced by the political, social and cultural context in which it has been written.

Theoretical Framework

Studies of Cultural Memory analyze the discursive form of memories as well as their manifest content. The discourse of memory, whether linguistic, visual or physical, is constructed and choices are made in that process, allowing us identify those choices and make sense of why they were made under particular social, historical and spatial conditions (Keightley, 2008). Similarly, Cultural Memory enables an investigation of the subtle and comprehensive process of identity formation, promotion and transmission, and it is considered as a set of symbolic practices and protocols. Its focus is also on the nature of memory as a storehouse, whatever form of media it is in, and how memory is institutionalized.

However, before approaching the concept of memory of any kind, it is worth identifying remembering and memorizing for a better understanding of readers regarding what is/not remembered, and how it is remembered or forgotten. To begin with, it is essential to know that both concepts have for so long been the concern of storytellers, novelists, psychologists, and psychiatrists and have often been used synonymously to denote the same thing. However, they are very much interrelated though, they differ in some important ways. Accordingly, Linde (2015: 7) describes memory as a description of "an ability or a storehouse", and remembering as an act which occurs when the memory materials are used in an ongoing interaction".

Regarding memory, some scholars pay much attention to individual memory and challenge the notion of collective memory because, for Schneider and Woolf (2011), memory is only a faculty of the individual and social groups cannot of course remember. However, this traditional way of remembrance is limited and problematic for it is more of psychological one. Accordingly, much focus was given to the self rather than the various social contexts that impacted the individual memory and the development of unique individual narratives in the given contexts. In line with this, individual memory is basically identified with the utilization of social narratives and as the sum of individual memories of events by members of a community; that is, there is an embedded collective memory. Still, it should be made clear that a single individual memory does not entirely represent collective memory. As for Rosenberg and Simon (2005: 69), the notion of "the remembrance of one doesn't represent the remembrance of all".

Similarly, the reconstruction of collective memory is troublesome because how individuals remember an event may not be similar. Individuals may approach the same event from different perspectives because of the different emotion the event provokes in/up on each individual, and this makes the sum challenging to be generalized and results in fallacy (Leichter, 2011).

Regarding narratives, such as life writing, Byatt (2008), cited in Steveker (2009), states that it is the act of reading that activates long chains of narrative memories. Memory, thus, becomes not only a matter of stories, but more fundamentally a matter of experience and representation (Walder, 2011). Each time a text is read, Byatt claims that, 'the past becomes present and the burial places of memory give up their dead' (Steveker, 2009: 79). Otherwise, the past remains a past.

On the other hand, this research article makes use of the New Historicist critical theory coined by Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s, which originally developed as a reaction to remonstrate contemporary literary theories such as New Criticism that view the text as an autotelic piece and exclude social and political contexts in an effort to interpret literature. Accordingly, to Myers (1989), this theory emerged as a rigorous means of methodizing the political interpretation of literature. That is, an artwork has to be "put back into history" rather than being treated as an isolated work of art or text (Pechter, 1987: 302).

Besides, a New Historicist interpretation of a text, in general, takes up issues like historical, cultural, social and political contexts to study the historical substance of literature and power relations between

people in a given social band. Similarly, Montrose as quoted in Abrams' (1999: 183), 'A Glossary of Literary Terms' depicts New Historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history."

Thus, the two theories are complementary in such a way that both Cultural Memory and New Historicism pay attention to history, power, identity etc.

Accordingly, the following concepts and extracts are analyzed and interpreted in line with the above theories. Therefore, the arguments about the nature and connection between the past and present, as well as the cause for the consumption of the past with respect to identity will be treated.

2. Research Methods

In this section, the research design, rationale for selecting the text, procedures of data collection and analysis are dealt with. Accordingly, the researcher adopted the qualitative method of enquiry because the data are excerpts from the selected life writing piece and other related texts published in the same historical period. In this article, the researcher was very specific in selecting the text under study i.e. he focused on life writing that is authored by a woman of East African origin and whose setting is East Africa, showing the responses as shaped by local specificities. Accordingly, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the text, *Tears of the Desert* (2008) by Halima Bashar from South Sudan, having in mind selection criteria such as the novel genre, prose form, female gender, Eastern African region, English language, and historical, political and cultural contents of the texts.

This study was mainly intended to uncover ways of reconstructing the past that is recorded by Halima Bashar. Similarly, the main method of data collection was systematic reading of the textual information prevalent in both the primary and secondary sources. Accordingly, the data obtained from both sources were then categorized according to the theory/ies employed in this study. Thus, data gathered from both primary and secondary sources were recorded in the form of written notes, and classified and catalogued accordingly. The data were then analyzed by using cultural memory and new historicism theories as reference. Accordingly, the first analytical step was identifying parts of the selected texts that represented cultural memory. Then, most representative extracts were taken from the four selected texts and made meaningful by supporting them with extracts from other non-literary texts. This endeavor is made with the aim of organizing the elements thematically. Lastly, such representative texts from both the selected narratives and other non-fictional texts published in the same period, were critically discussed and interpreted.

3. Results and Discussion

This section is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the selected text. This attempt is made in accordance with the theoretical framework and literature review sections presented above.

Identity

People always ask themselves a simple, yet critical question of 'who am I or who are we?' Keupp (1996), as cited in Steveker, (2009), claims that identity can be seen as an answer to the aforementioned basic question. Thus, identity is conceived as the way one sees and perceives him/herself. Accordingly, self-identity has two dimensions: how one perceives him/herself and how one differentiates him/herself from others. Even though both of the dimensions are significant, the latter shows that identity is not something that is achieved in the absence of contact with other people. It is created by an interaction with other people who are part of one's society or members of other societies (Marlina, 2017). Habermas (1992) acknowledges the essential influence of personal memories on the individual identity of a person, i.e., an individual forms or claims his/her identity by observing and understanding him/herself in retrospective way. An individual forms his/her self-image or identity by remembering his/her past actions and thoughts.

In line with this, we need to understand that identity formation is fundamentally contextual; individuals awaken different aspects of themselves depending upon different pressures, thereby forming a place for themselves in which they can experience belonging in each different setting.

Various aspects, such as psychological and socio-economic features add up to the picture of an individual who attempts to fit a given identity (Steveker, 2009). Besides, in the process of identity construction, people learn what shall be told and how it is told. This process, therefore, brings change in both memory and identity (Linde, 2015).

Similarly, for Habermas (1992), identity and memory are achieved with language which is a means through which individuals in a society come to a common understanding. Thus, the identity of socialized individuals forms itself simultaneously in the medium of coming to an understanding with others in language and in the medium of coming to a life-historical and intra-subjective understanding with oneself.

Memory also creates an opportunity for individuals and groups to possess some qualities that help them identify themselves from other distinct groups. Accordingly, not all incidents are equally important to societies. Some events prove more significant for a society as a whole. Memory, therefore, picks elements from the past in a selective way, keeping in mind the relevance of the past for the present and the future, in an attempt to create identity. Keszei (2017) supports the above ideas that memory, in its effort to reconstruct the past to serve many practical purposes in our everyday lives, is characterized by selection and elusiveness. Nonetheless, irrespective of its different characteristics, it remains eminent source of identity as a collective entity.

Therefore, the interrelated nature of the past and identity is one of the most important phenomena for every past and present society and consequently also for those studying social groups in the present and the past (ibid).

By the same token, the following analysis of Halima's memoir would support the concept of the complex construction of her personal identity and the collective identity of her community. "It has been influenced by the different social, cultural, political and material factors in a way she had made it manifest in the form of a narrative" (Keszei, 2017: 815).

Cultural practices as a means of preserving the Zaghawa identity as reflected in *Tears of the Desert*

Culture and cultural attributes help to remember experiences and promote the different identities of authors. Similarly, a narrative- a carrier of memory- may be an experience or experiences remembered by an individual or groups in a given society from different vantage points (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004). Accordingly, the following analysis of *Tears of the Desert* by Halima Bashar is based on how the past is remembered by the author, and which perspectives and media the different experiences are shared from.

The construction and circulation of knowledge or memory of a common past is only possible with media through oral and written modes. Likewise, the oral mode is common in Africa where there is a large unschooled population. One of the oral media of remembering or passing on memory or story/stories of a family or a clan/tribe is through storytelling, as it has been the culture of the Zaghawa. These stories, which are often transmitted orally are presented in written form in these particular memoirs, and are primarily intended to form identities of the given tribes.

Songs and other oral traditional practices

In *Tears of the Desert* by Halima Bashar, some of the important oral literary practices that were devised to communicate messages with an intention to promoting the identity of the author and her tribe are proverbs and songs. The first brief example of this is a lullaby, sung by her generation and the generations before.

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Come here my love

I have a song for you

</div>

Come here my love,

I have a dream for you… (p.3)

The lullaby, which the author heeds, has two important purposes: to entertain the children, and let them connect to their roots by practicing it as did their parents and grandparents. Halima, as an adult and author of the memoir, of course, recounts the lullaby both to connect with her root and remember her parents and grandparents who used to sing the same song for her. Besides, the contents of the lullaby bear elements that help members of the Zaghawa develop a sense of belongingness in the collective identity of the tribe.

Reminiscent of the nature of the lullaby and other songs sung by the Zaghawa, Halima had to say this: "grandma's stories were always about the family, the clan or the tribe" (Bashar, 2008: 58). Her statement indicates that the vantage point of her grandmother is local and familial, lacking exposure to the world outside her immediate surroundings. On the other hand, her father's stories reflected a view towards her tribe from the perspective of adventure and heroism of the Zaghawa. She recounts that: "my father would tell me about the legends of our tribe, Zaghawa, or about the lineage of our family" (Bashar, 2008: 6). In both cases yet, as Halima puts it, lullaby and other forms of oral cultural practices were the Zaghawa way of sharing knowledge of their society and surrounding with generations that follow them. However, as people become exposed to the outside world, as in the case of her father, their identities become different from the identities of generations before them, and members of their generations who knew little or nothing about the part of the world apart from theirs. Accordingly, memories and identities in the memoir grow from a simple family and village memories and identities to national and transnational ones. Her father had an exposure and knew about what was happening in the rest of the world, and this is evident in the testimony she has given. "My father would try to inform us about the wider world- about the history of Sudan, about foreign cultures and distant countries" (Bashar, 2008: 58), while the knowledge of the older generations such as her grandmother's dictates the absence of exposure to the outside world.

Another of the oral practices incorporated in this piece is a lament. As many of the stories shared in *Tears of the Desert* are sorrowful, a lament is a relevant expression which Halima used to communicate the loss of the many families of her tribe. A brief instance when a lament becomes noticeable as a way of sharing the collective loss of the Zaghawa is when an old woman who had lost her husband and her only child adapted and used lament to show the loss of the village during one of the raids by the Janjaweed.

The raiders took the young men

And cut them down.

The raiders took the old men,

And cut them down.

The raiders took the women,

And cut them down.

The raiders took the children,

And cut them down.

We have no home,

It was cut down.

We have no crops,

They were cut down.

We have no milk,

It was cut down.

Now our children have gone to fight,

They will be cut down. (Bashar, 2008: 294-5)

The widow's grief is an experience and story of many of the black Sudanese tribes who have been victimized by the Janjaweed. Thus, the trying times of the Zaghawa and their identities as victims of the civil war are embedded in this sorrowful and desperate expression.

The importance of personal names for the Zaghawa

As are songs important cultural attributes, so are the names of the persons shared in Halima's memoir and the process of naming those persons which contribute greatly to the discussion of identity formation. Naming as a cultural practice in general, and the time of giving a child a name and the kind of name given to a child in particular, are important for members of the Zaghawa tribe. As time is essential in naming a child, the kind of name a child is given is equally meaningful to the Zaghawa. Accordingly, the naming of a child is expected to be carried out within seven days after its birth (Bashar, 2008: 5); especially when the baby is male. Within that time frame, the Zaghawa are expected to name their first-born baby boy Mohammed, after the holy prophet of Islam. Similarly, Halima's younger brother was named Mohammed like all the first-born Zaghawa males (Bashar, 2008). This practice indicates that the Zaghawa are followers of Islam and that they value their religion as a pillar in the construction of individual and collective identities. Likewise, a second born will be given father's surname in which case the second son in Halima's family was named Omer, who grew up to become a tough fighter. This practice, yet, seems not to apply to naming of a female child. Likewise, the author had communicated no such tradition that is to be followed by members of the tribe in giving female children names which help the society form or strengthen its identity. Halima herself was named after a medicine woman who has once treated her father while he fell in a dry riverbed. This can be understood that naming of Halima was personal and had no valuable contribution to the formation of the family's or tribe's identity as the naming of the two boys in the family.

The contribution of rituals and prayers in collective identity formation

People undergo various public rituals and traditional cultural practices with which collective representations and consciousness are reflected. One of these rituals that is performed by the Zaghawas, administered by Fakirs who are potent spell prayers and who prepare *hijabs* (prayers), is "the healing of people when struck by evil eye" (Bashar, 2008: 9). According to Halima, these traditional healers are trusted and respected by the society, and most of them are celebrated for healing people from sicknesses even though they at times use dangerous and dark powers- black magic and devilish arts (Bashar, 2008: 133) and do bad to people. Their prayers have both medicinal and cultural values. Regarding the medicinal value, the prayers heal patients who otherwise might not be cured by modern medicine. On the other hand, the belief in the effectiveness of the prayers shows the trust towards the Zaghawa traditional medicine and members of the tribe who are at the service of patients.

However, traditional medicine is not equally valued by members of the tribe. The older generation believed the miraculous treatment and healing the leaves, roots and prayers do to ill people and their power of preventing people from illnesses. Halima, who had gone to a medical school and studied science, still "believed in the evil eye, the power of *hijabs* and traditional medicine" (Bashar, 2008: 133). She even says:

> I became increasingly fascinated by the traditional medicine used by Halima the Fakir and her Grandma. I had good laboratory facilities at my disposal, and I decided to determine what medicinal value such cures might have. I was particularly interested in the ointment made out of burned pigeon feces, which was used to treat cuts and burns. Then, there were the scores of plants, shrubs bark and roots that Halima and Grandma took from the forest. Each time I went home I gathered a few more samples (Bashar, 2008: 189).

Her attempt shows that she was not just interested in finding cure for illnesses from traditional medicine, but she is also interested in sustaining traditional medicine which she knew about through interaction with members of the tribe; especially the older generation.

Similarly, of the many other traditional beliefs of the Zaghawa, the belief in a white eyelash has been highlighted in the novel. For the Zaghawa, the white eyelash signified good fortune (Bashar, 2008: 10). People who have white eyelashes are believed to succeed in life. Halima, fortunately, was one of the rare Zaghawa people who had it, and allegedly became successful. The importance of the

white eyelash was also revealed through the thrived livestock business of her father the same year she was born (Bashar, 2008: 9). What one finds surprising is that this very tradition has a transcultural aspect. Dr. Hing, who treated Halima's eye, while she was attacked by a stranger in an attempt to pull her eyelash off, states that Chinese people also believed that white eyelash symbolized good luck (Bashar, 2008: 63). This transcultural experience has played an important role in validating the very belief her family and tribe lived by for long.

Games as bearers of identity

Both traditional and western versions of games have been introduced in the memoir to substantiate ideas which the author wanted to emphasize. For instance, the Darfuri version of 'this little piggy went to market' (Bashar, 2008: 6), hopscotch, sock-ball (ibid) and moon-bone (ibid) are some of the games which Halima and her brothers played. The games that are presented in the memoir are literally the children's favorite pastime activities. However, in case of the last type of game, the rule of the game is that one throws a bone and others go on finding it. The keys to win this game are speed and skill of fighting. Another of the games that is most important in defining her tribe's identity is warhorses and fights game. She recounts the game as follows:

> I would make a warhorse for Mohammed, one for Kediga and one for me, and then we'd ride forth to fight the other children. We'd have one row of clay horses with rag doll warriors facing another, and on the order to attack the ranks would advance. 'To War! To War!' we'd shout (Bashar, 2008: 37).

This game supports the claim that the members of the clan are strong and fearless warriors, has reinforced her identity as member of the Zaghawa tribe. Likewise, it manifests and exemplifies the ordeal of facing danger (Bashar, 2008). The depiction of her brothers and their contributions to the resistance against the Janjaweed shows the bravery and determination of her tribe which is carried on by the games. Similarly, women of the tribe shared among themselves and conformed to these manifestations of the collective identity of the tribe. Despite Halima's apparent conformity to the warrior identity of the Zaghawa tribe, her personal feat in the games and fights amounted in fact to the subversion of the norms which dictate that women need not to fight. These allegedly men's qualities are discussed in relation to her strength during the games, and are put to reveal the limits of this dominant cultural ideology and her subversion of it. Besides, the two things show that Halima has been selective in using two different contradicting things to substantiate her pieces of memories.

Generally, the different elements of identity are carried on to generations of the tribe through traditional practices such as games.

Scarring

The cuts on the face of a Zaghawa are unique and serve different purposes. The first purpose, according to Halima, is health-related. Members of the society get the marks to prevent infections. On the other hand, the second purpose, which is the most significant, is related to identity. That is, the scarring on the face of a Zaghawa has a unique pattern which is used to identify him/her from members of other tribes. Similarly, her father, who had a Zaghawa descent "had two vertical scars at his temple" (Bashar, 2008: 11), which makes it easy for members of his tribe and other tribes identify him or other men with the same scarring. The third purpose, pertinent to scarring of women, is that it is accepted by members of the tribe as a mark of beauty (Bashar, 2008). That is, women who have scarring are perceived by the society to be more beautiful than those members who do not have it. Thus, scarring is important for both sexes in the society and it plays an immense role in the formation of the collective identity of the Zaghawa.

Matrimony and wedding ceremonies

Marriage is an essential cultural element for the Zaghawa. Nonetheless, while marriage is a good thing in principle, it had different harmful facets in the life of the Zaghawa. According to Halima, "village girls would normally be married off long even before they could ever think about university"

(Bashar, 2008: 154). This denotes the way people think about the role of women in matrimonial unions. The society is focused on marrying its girls off at a young age without caring more about the rights of women that marriage deprives of. This shows that women and men as well as older and new generations identify themselves differently in terms of marriages.

While this is the case, there are two unique and important aspects of marriage in the Zaghawa culture: interfamilial marriage and polygamy. Accordingly, incest is briefly discussed in the book and approached as a practice that is permissible. A member of the tribe can propose to marry any of his close relatives. As was the case in her tribe, Halima got proposal from a cousin to get married to him (Bashar, 2008) even though the proposal was later declined. This tradition, of course, has a religious touch. Members get married to family members as it is prescribed by Islamic scriptures. Likewise, the proposal shows that incest is a collective practice. For this reason, members tend to practice interfamilial marriages. Still, this collective practice could be at times challenged by individual needs and identity.

Similarly, regarding polygamy, Halima states that a man is allowed to marry more than one woman, and it is an accepted way of marital life of her tribe, i.e., "in Zaghawa culture, it is normal for men to take more than one wife" (Bashar, 2008: 19). Accordingly, women had to live with the different wives whom their husbands would get married to. Good examples of it are that Grandma Sumah's father was wedded to nine wives, and Sumah's husband had also been wedded more than once. For many men and women, polygamy has been perceived as part of their identity or way of life. Polygamy is not, however, presented as a totally righteous marital practice. Not all Zaghawa men and women had embraced/ would embrace with this tradition. Some women even defied their husbands' marriage to a second wife. A good example of this is Halima's grandmother, Sumah, who was not convinced and eloped, leaving her husband, for he had taken up a second wife.

In addition to the desire from women's side to be the one and only wives of their respective husbands, polygamy entails some economic issues. Even though Halima shares with her readers the abundance of resources in the area, and the simple and easy life of the tribe and that almost all the basics were freely available, and men worried less about the cost of living and spent money on drinking (Bashar, 2008), men with many wives would not have an easy life. What is more, the economic burden intensifies as Zaghawa men are duty bound to marry wives of their late brothers. Thus, managing a household of many wives becomes an economic burden to a husband. In those households, women lead a tough marital life and are responsible for all household chores and making ends meet.

Once marriages are arranged, they will be made public through weddings, which are highly celebrated traditional practices for the Zaghawa. Apart from the many similarities with the traditional wedding ceremonies in many cultures, what is typical of a Zaghawa wedding is that, according to Halima, it should involve fighting. She reminisces that as: "in our culture, if a wedding goes ahead without any fighting people don't really enjoy it. We always remember the weddings with the biggest fights and the most heartfelt making-ups" (Bashar, 2008: 141). This statement adds to the argument that the Zaghawa is a warrior tribe and even women share this identity with their counterparts. Besides, a wedding is considered lively when it involves songs (Bashar, 2008), which often communicate the message that the Zaghawa are proud people. As she explains it further, "as each new person entered the wedding house, which he/she is invited to, an entertainer beats out a deep, pounding rhythm, calling out participants' names and their lineage, and their family's most famous exploits" (Bashar, 2008: 142). This experience shows that weddings serve as a platform where people's individual and family identities are communicated. Thus, weddings play an essential role in remembering who the participants are as a person and a Zaghawa.

All in all, the above cultural attributes of identity communicate the collective identity of the Zaghawa tribe than they do promote individual identities.

The importance of material culture for identity formation
Tangible objects and spaces dictate the interaction between men and the objects and spaces themselves and the interaction among men in relation to objects and spaces. Similarly, some possessions that are an unaffordable by the majority of a tribe define identities of individuals or a certain group of people. As Halima states, possessions of her father such as his land rover and radio (Bashar, 2008) and Mo and Omer's bicycles (Bashar, 2008) were assumed to be status symbols. The tribe considered its members rich when they possess such objects. The objects, which belonged to her family are equally significant in preserving the family's memory as they define the economic class of her family. According to her, for example, the old land rover her father owned meant a lot to her father and to her as well, for "many memories bound up in it" (Bashar, 2008: 10). For instance, it was the same land rover her father drove to take Halima to University. Again, the same car was used to transport villagers to places for free. Thus, the car alone gives the reader of the memoir an idea about the importance of objects in identity formation.

  Again, the family was one of a kind in the village to get a TV set because most members of the society could not afford to have a TV. This material culture has entertained the family and showed the economic status the family had. However, the TV has a major symbolic role in explaining the influence of objects in shaping identities. Hence, TV has affected their lives and culture greatly because watching TV has changed the family's ways of "spending time, talking and eating and telling stories as a family" (Bashar, 2008: 120-121). At its worst, it has ripped off traditional communal life of sharing experiences, history and memory that helped members of the tribe in forming their indigenous identities. For that matter, it has greatly affected the nature of their lives. Halima remembers that even grandma, who was a proponent and practitioner of storytelling, used to watch TV, and the kids were very much influenced by the contents of the TV broadcast. Halima's favorites were English children's programs (Bashar, 2008), specially 'Tom and Jerry' (Bashar, 2008). Thus, compared to the time Halima's family used to spend together, the family time they had after the introduction of radio and TV in the house has declined noticeably. This implies that the tribe has made a shift from a strong intrafamilial and interfamilial relationships to relationships between people and objects.

Trauma
In classical medical usage, according to Erikson (1995), trauma referred to the blow that inflicted an injury or the event that provoked the injury. Moreover, trauma is commonly used to refer to the stress that resulted from a blow. Accordingly, the stress can be expressed by nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations. As Freud (1920), cited in Robson (2004), suggests that with a compulsion to repeat, survivors are forced to relive memories (blows) even if they consciously attempt to block those memories. For Erikson (1995), these kinds of events and their memories return against survivor's will as long as the survivors do not come to terms with them. As a way out, survivors usually share the urge to tell their stories, as Laub (1995), unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. Laub adds that this urge is caused by the need to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.

  Similarly, trauma is a constellation of life experiences and discrete happening (Erikson, 1995). Some of these experiences might be terrible, deplorable or abnormal happenings which make life unpredictable. When such abnormalities occur, initial responses, according to Neal (1998), are shock or disbelief, followed by chaos and uncertainty. Besides, such incidents leave individuals with wounds. Accordingly, those traumatic wounds inflicted on the individuals can combine to create a group mood that is different from the sum of the private wounds that make it up.

  For some survivors, the sense of difference-difference from people who have not been through a stressful blow- can become a kind of calling, a status, where survivors are drawn to others similarly marked. In Erikson's (1995: 186) words, this "estrangement becomes the basis of communality" for the survivors. As to Neal (1998), this kind of trauma is shared collectively and frequently and has a

cohesive effect as individuals gather in small and intimate groups to reflect on the tragic experience and its consequence on present realities.

The function and significance of the community/-ies created by survivors provide/s a cushion for pain and offer/s a context for intimacy and serves as the repository for binding traditions (Erikson, 1995). For Erikson, it is not the nature of the incidents that brings people together, but rather the shared experience that becomes a common culture, a source of kinship. Thus, communal trauma can take two forms: damage to the tissues that hold human groups intact and the creation of social climates, communal moods that come to dominate a group's spirit (ibid).

One of the crucial tasks of culture is to help the survivors camouflage the actual risks of the world around them by helping them edit reality in such a way that it seems manageable for them (ibid).

Representation of individual and collective trauma in *Tears of the Desert*

Traumatic incidents that are caused by cultural, economic and political changes affect both the consciousness and identity of survivors once and for all by disrupting the routines in their lives and their families. Accordingly, the life of Halima is overshadowed by violent memories in her past. Halima has documented her major individual traumatic experiences resulting from her circumcision and the war in Darfur.

Circumcision is a deeply rooted socio-cultural facet of the Zaghawa tribe. As Halima puts: "all girls in the tribe were circumcised, and most of them experienced it while they were ten or eleven years old" (Bashar, 2008: 65). The Zaghawa considered and celebrated circumcision as a mark of the passage from girlhood to womanhood. However, as Halima tells her readers, it has never been a pleasant experience for the women who went through it. At times, the women suffered from infection or cut of vein or died of the infection (Bashar, 2008). Similarly, a personal trauma inflicted on her by circumcision is presented as follows. Halima remembers and expresses that her circumcision was as painful as a circumcised woman would imagine:

> With the first slash of the razor blade, a bolt of agony shot through me like nothing I had ever experienced. I let out a bloodcurdling scream, and as I did so I started kicking and fighting to get free. But all that happened was the huge woman bore down on me, clamping my legs in her vice-like grip (Bashar, 2008).

This was a single instance which showed the first major physical pain she had encountered. This experience has; hence, influenced her private and social life greatly.

The first influence was that she had to make a choice in terms of what she was about to study at university. Accordingly, she made up her mind to study gynecology because she had lived her young life seeing mothers and babies in her village dying and getting ill in cases related to childbirth. In addition, she, as a circumcised woman, had a fear that she might have trouble giving birth to a child. This change in her decision marks the change in her identity- from a victim to a problem solver. Halima did not just remain a victim of circumcision and other harmful practices performed to her. She fought it when she had the chance, i.e., of all the four subjects of a medical degree at her university, Halima decided to specialize in gynecology- the care for women during pregnancy and childbirth, as the need was high in her village (Bashar, 2008) resulting from lack of healthcare facilities and the great number of circumcised women.

Similarly, Halima was victimized by war and experienced the next major blow in addition to the one she went through during her circumcision and post circumcision days. Halima involved in the war directly after she left university. She was placed as an intern in a hospital and continued to support her society until she fled her country. While working at the hospital, following her interview about the war and its cause, Halima was taken into custody and put in a secret detention center (Bashar, 2008). The purpose of her arrest by the secret police was to instruct her to keep her mouth shut and decline any other interview about the war. This warning was also followed by a transfer to a clinic in a very remote land called Mazkhabad (Bashar, 2008). Her placement in the village clinic had revealed to her another bare truth or experience that many black African tribes living in such remote villages do not have access to proper medical treatment and were prone to attacks.

Halima was getting involved in the war by way of treating rebel fighters and giving them medication in the clinic (Bashar, 2008). She says, "I reckoned twenty Zaghawa fighters had been through the clinic and I had cleaned and bandaged their wounds and sent them back to the bush with consignments of medical supplies" (Bashar, 2008: 247). The police have always been after her, and requested her to submit a list of her Zaghawa patients (Bashar, 2008) with the intention to identify who those members were. While the request was worrying her, another serious offense by the Janjaweed on school girls was committed and the incident ended up complicating her case. The school was raided by the Janjaweed (Bashar, 2008) involving inhumane acts of beating of and raping little children.

As I gazed in horror at her [Aisha, one of the victims of the raid] limp from a keening, empty wail kept coming from somewhere deep within her throat- over and over and over again. It was a sound such as I had never heard before- a hollow cry of brutalized innocence, of innocence forever lost. It is a sound that I shall never forget no matter how long I live (Bashar, 2008: 249).

All she could do against the perpetrators was to share what happened to the rest of the world through an interview. As Schaffer and Smith (2004) put it, personal experiences and memories are some of the most powerful tools for human rights organizations to illustrate their assertions. Accordingly, UN officials had approached and interviewed her about what happened to the girls. This interview was unlike the interviews she had with the BBC, Sunday Telegraphy, Independent News, Channel 4 News, Al Arabia TV after she fled Sudan. The interview with the UN officials was not even a good decision for she has been warned to refrain from doing interviews. She was once more taken in by men in uniform. As she recollects the moment:

> They took me to the far side of the village, to a military camp. We stopped at three huts, with a wire fence running around the outside. The soldiers dragged me out and marched me into the nearest one. It had a hard-concrete floor and bare brick walls. The windows were barred, and closed with metal shutters. A single little bulb revealed dark, blotchy stains on the floor. I did not want to imagine what they might be. I stepped into the room, and without warning the beating began (Bashar, 2008: 263).

This time round, she was stabbed and cut in the thigh and breast and gang raped by the same men (Bashar, 2008: 267). Surviving this ordeal, she made it to her parents and stayed there. Nonetheless, deserting the place where she has been tortured has not at all made her heal. As she confesses: "I was hiding away from my family, from my friends and from life in its entirety" (Bashar, 2008: 274). However, at least two things have helped Halima to cope up with her trauma temporarily. One was family support; especially from her father, and the second being her betrothal to her cousin Sharif which has given her the will to go on.

Before she relatively completely healed, five months later, the Janjaweed came to her village accompanied by a fleet of helicopters, making dehumanizing statement: "Kill the black slaves, dogs, monkeys...etc." (Bashar, 2008: 283). In that attack, unfortunately, many men including her father were killed. What is more, the Janjaweed ended up burning village elders alive in their huts and flinging babies into the fire (Bashar, 2008: 287). The brutalities of the Janjaweed were beyond the most possible human imagination, which forced some of her family members, Mo and Omer, to join the rebels (Sudan Liberation Army (SLA)) and fight against the Arabs (Bashar, 2008) while for her, the only option was to flee her village because the family was separated and she was once again left helpless. Further, it was while planning to escape to Tchad that she discovered that her mother and little sister were alive and had fled their home as a result of threats by soldiers (Bashar, 2008).

What happened to her family has eroded the structure of her family and her community at large. "The civil wars between the North and the South of the Sudan (1955–1972, 1983–2005) have had their vicious ramifications in terms of the killing and large-scale displacement of millions of Sudanese" (Madibbo, 2012: 303). Similarly, Halima was soon convinced and left for the Nuba Mountains in the south, and was to trade the family's valuables for a travel across the Sudanese border (Bashar, 2008). Likewise, making it to her final destination, England was another traumatic personal experience. Even though her worries of getting caught and tortured or killed came to fade away as she boarded a flight to England (Bashar, 2008), going through the process of asylum seeking

was also troublesome. As she tells us, her case of asylum has been rejected several times, and Britain had not been safe haven for her and her husband Sharif for there was a serious threat called deportation that had befallen before them. However, the biggest challenge was still the war, memories of the war and not getting caught by it. First of all, the war itself had caused her too much physical and psychological suffering, as discussed above. Secondly, memories about the war have been relentlessly haunting her regardless of the place and the time of occurrence; she was supposed to live with those memories and traumas every day for the rest of her life because those memories will make their way as long as there are certain triggers that reawaken the latent traumatic memory (Viebach, 2019). Accordingly, the following two brief excerpts from Halima's memoir substantiate the role of triggers in initiating her memory. She recalls one of the triggers as such:

> One day as I was working on the writing, a police helicopter started to circle overhead again and again and again. It was obviously tracking a joy-rider, or something similar. With the repeated thud-thud-thud of the rotor blades, I started to become increasingly fraught (Bashar, 2008: 357).

Here, we see that a simple sound of hovering of helicopter rekindles a traumatic experience in the far past. Similarly, the second brief moment took place when she was in the WWII Holocaust Centre, where she spoke about her experience in Darfur to a group of doctors. In the venue, she had seen "photos of unspeakable horror and mass murder from the time of WWII", which took her back to the hell that was in Darfur without the limits of time and space.

On the other hand, collective trauma has a lot to do with the communal nature of the life of the Zaghawa. Its members have stayed on their land and fought to defend it in unison- men and women together. However, some of the cultural, historical and political aspects in Darfur seemed to have affected the communal life of the Zaghawa.

The collective trauma which is depicted by Halima is caused by the oppression of the black Sudanese tribes, the Zaghawa in particular by the Arab descendants in Sudan. Of course, the collective experience of the civil war by the Zaghawa is not the starting point of the collective identity, yet the incident has given rise to the strengthening of the Zaghawa as one of the black Sudanese tribes victimized by the Arabs in Sudan. Accordingly, this memoir complements the different memories of men and women alike about the civil war in Sudan. One of the facets of the war was that it directly victimized black men and women. The Arabs did not fight black men themselves throughout the war. They rather deployed black men to fight their own race. Easy victims: orphans, uneducated and unemployed young Zaghawa and other black men and women were recruited to fight and kill their own tribes (Bashar, 2008). They have to either fight or fall victim to the government. For instance, students at a university in Khartoum who had gone on to the streets to protest have ended up beaten and driven into a river and left to drown (Bashar, 2008). This could be taken as an example of the brutal retaliatory measure against disobeying the call by the Arabs to participate in the war.

In addition to the forced deployment of the male Darfuris and other black tribes, Darfuri students were dismayed by fear and horror that their home villages would be attacked by the Arabs. Halima recalls and states: "each of the dozen Darfuri students at the university were afraid and prayed that our own villages had remained untouched by the killing" (Bashar, 2008: 196).

There is no parent or sibling or loved one or member of a society who wouldn't undergo the pain that every single victim experiences. Besides, each experience adds up to the fear that the rest of the society would encounter potential threat. Thus, Halima and her fellow students were very much worried about their families living in a distant land. Accordingly, the torture, rape and killing in Sudan, in Darfur in particular; have touched the lives and hearts of many. This is so because even if people are not directly victimized, they would have to live with fear of the imminent.

In the same sense, for war naturally creates horror in the minds of all age groups of societies, experiences of women and children were involved in the memoir. As were the students dismayed by the war, other members of the society were also affected by it as stated in the following quotation. "Old women were talking about when the Zaghawa had fought the Arab tribes in ancient times…and little children seemed to be preparing themselves for war" (Bashar, 2008: 205).

"Talk of the war and the horrors it was bringing was on everyone's lips" (Bashar, 2008: 261). From this very statement, one understands that the effect of the war was and still is collective because the families of many had lost their lives and many more had fled their homes. Thus, it is not just Halima who mourns the loss in Sudan. Every Sudanese directly or indirectly affected by the conflict is traumatized and shares the story of Halima as if it were his/her own.

5. Conclusion

Halima Bashar should not be taken for granted as an individual. Rather she mirrors not only an individual identity, but also identities of her society. Furthermore, she can be taken as a representative of the social, cultural and identity concepts or stories of her society across the boundaries of time and space.

When one imagines of East Africa, what comes to one's mind is a region where there are war, displacement, poverty, hunger and other natural and man-made disasters and practices. Incorporating the story of women survivors of these different social, cultural and historical incidents helps create a complete image of a given account and promote mutual understanding between men and women, perpetrator and victim, higher class and lower class people, etc. Halima's memoir builds up on both racial and political identities at both individual and collective level. By the same token, the selected life writing seems to strengthen the fact that society has been influenced by the ongoing cultural, social and political changes which result in displacement, torture and death by sharing different incidents. In line with this, susceptibility to violence and danger was central in building both the individual and collective experiences of women.

From these incidents and experiences presented in the life writing, it is possible to understand that the experiences have been horrible and such horrible memories recur as long as people and places or objects of memory exist. Similarly, the individuals in the texts happen to learn their identities through these crises. Accordingly, reconnecting to a culture through literature might have helped the author of this memoir to grieve her past, which is full of horror and adventure and create new narratives contributing to her healing and view of herself as the member of her community and country at large. Even if total healing is impossible, embracing the traumatized past or coming to terms with it is essential in preventing retaliation or potential genocide. Similarly, Halima sustained all the atrocities with the promise she made to her father and strength as a Zaghawa and as a doctor.

In order to share memories of her life, the author has generally used different cultural elements such as songs, games, rituals etc., which are pivotal for highly illiterate societies whereby the elements contribute to the formation of collective memory and identity.

Halima's *Tears of the Desert* valued the strong and detachable familial connections of different generations in each family. The presentation of such a connection was devised to depict the confrontation between an old generation that sticks to all indigenous cultural practices of its respective time and struggles to sustain those practices even if they are harmful and a young generation that opts to appropriate the practices for current use or abandon them at all. The thought of giving up some practices is actually not because the young generation has become civilized but because the practices inflicted greater harm.

Generally, the attempt by the author sends a message to all of us that a woman should be able to write her life herself and share her stories, feelings and emotions and preserve them from being overshadowed by a man's. This way, women's stories complement stories of men regarding a given incident.

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