PATRIARCHY, POWER, ISLAM AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SELECTED WORKS OF NURUDDIN FARAH

BY

MURJANATU RILWAN MUHAMMAD

PH.D/ARTS/7268/2011-2012

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,

AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY,
ZARIA, NIGERIA

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DECLARATION

I declare that this Thesis titled: ***"Patriarchy, Power, Islam and the Position of Women in Selected Works of Nuruddin Farah"***, has been written by me and that it is a record of my research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically and fully acknowledged by means of references.

CERTIFICATION

This Thesis titled: ***"Patriarchy, Power, Islam and the Position of Women in Selected Works of Nuruddin Farah"***, meets the requirements governing the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

_____	_____
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_____	_____
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Member, Supervisory Committee	
_____	_____
Dr. S. Jaji	**Date**
Member, Supervisory Committee	
_____	_____
Prof. T.Y. Surakat	**Date**
Head of Department	
_____	_____
Prof. S.Z. Abubakar	**Date**
Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies	

DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my beloved son – UKASHA who never lived to see the completion of this work. May Al-Jannat Firdaus be your eternal resting place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most compassionate, all praises to Allah for the strengths and His blessing in completing this work.

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ABSTRACT

In general terms, the works of Nuruddin Farah have received insufficient attention in literary circles. This is in spite of the profound insights his novels provide on the Somali society, especially in relation to the struggles of women for emancipation in its patriarchal Islamic context. This research evaluates selected novels of Farah as illustrations of the predicament of women in a patriarchal society in which religion and tradition have been manipulated to subject women to various forms of hardships. The study further focuses on the aspirations and struggles of women in the patriarchal clan structure of Somali society which the previous studies have not adequately explored especially in relation to the efforts of women at self-realisation. Feminist literary criticism is used to show that Farah's novels are circumscribed by reformism, recognising that women can wrest away the historic privilege of males as the sole interpreters of women's lives. The study argues that Farah's novels provide a realistic representation of the position of women in Somalia and submits that religion is not the sole embodiment and conveyor of patriarchal ideology. The study examines Nuruddin Farah's From a Crooked Rib (1970), and his trilogy titled: 'Variations on the theme of African Dictatorship comprising of the novels: Sweet and Sour Milk (1992), Sardines (1981) and Close Sesame (1992).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This study evaluates Nuruddin Farah's vision of empowering women through his artistic recreation of their struggles against domination, patriarchy and inequality both at the domestic and the social levels in an attempt to reconstruct the Somali society. In order to do this, Feminist Criticism is used as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the selected novels mainly because feminist writing is preoccupied with the issues of women as marginalised social group in Third World countries. Nuruddin Farah is one of the feminist writers whose main concern is the unyielding criticism of neo-colonial practices in contemporary Somali politics and the location of the predicament of women in the postcolonial legacies of oppression, subjugation and marginalisation. This study therefore examines Nuruddin Farah's vision of changing society which challenges many of the preconceived values of his society and questions long held beliefs in the subjugation of women. Practices like arranged marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are seen by Farah as deliberate acts of maiming women. The feminist perspectives of Farah's works are therefore depicted together with the social barriers that limit the quest for individuality among modern Somali women.

Literary works reflect real life situations and in this context, the depiction of female characters in literary works invokes their roles in the society. However, the portrayal of female characters, beginning from early times, reflects male bias since the world has been male dominated. Some ancient scholars had negative attitudes towards women's role in the society as expressed in their writings. To cite some examples from Krishnaswamy et al (2001), Aristotle declared that '*the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of quality'*, Aquinas believed that '*woman is an imperfect man and female is a*

mis-begotten male, and also Nitzsche is convinced that '*woman is the source of all folly and unreason, the siren figure that lures the male philosopher out of his appointed truth-seeking path and that woman is God's second mistake'.* These examples show that even some well-known philosophers have a biased outlook towards females. Besides, the society's acceptance of this biased outlook paved the way for women to have a submissive role in society, thereby accepting patriarchy and its consequences.

Convention and traditions set by the patriarchal society unfairly enable men to impose their supremacy in every aspect of women's existence. As is a fact of life in the world as a whole, the case of Africa is no different; it has a long history of predominated patriarchal nature in addition to postcolonial effect. In harmony with this, Reich (1977) describes patriarchy as:

> The power of the fathers: familial, social, ideological, and political system in which, by direct pressure or through tradition, law and language, custom, etiquette, education and division of labour – men determine what parts women shall or shall not play, and the female is everywhere subsumed by the male (Reich, 1977:202).

Bearing this in mind, it is not as such difficult to see the problems women face due to the discriminatory attitude of men both within the family unit and the larger society. The status of African womanhood, though not given much consideration in critical evaluations of African literature until recent years, is one of the subjects which often finds its way into the writings of both male and female authors. While images of African womanhood abound in the literatures written by men, the picture is almost distorted. As Bonyinwa-Horne (1986:82) asserts,

> Women as portrayed by African males (and by some African females) are seldom drawn drastically and are most frequently created as mere appendages to males in a male-dominated world.

She describes the typical male depiction of female characters in this way:

> . . . male depictions of female characters are often from a fiercely male perspective, reflecting male conception, or rather misconceptions, of female sexuality. Men writers tend to overplay the sexuality of their female characters,

> creating the impression that women have no identify outside their sexual roles. Their women are seen primarily in relation to male protagonists and in secondary roles. These characters usually serve to enhance the images of the male protagonists who occupy the central positions in the work. Furthermore, male images of African womanhood tend to be idealised and romanticised. There is little or no psychological growth in such portraitures which seems to suggest they are largely male fantasies of womanhood. There are brilliant exceptions. But generally, male depictions of African womanhood conform to the above stated observation (Boyinwa-Horne, 1986:105).

In spite of the views cited above, Jones (1989) also reveals that not all male writers are biased in the portrayal of female characters in African literature.

> While it is true that most male writers have not been able to communicate to us how women feel on the burning issues of polygamy, motherhood and relations between the sexes and have simply presented the traditional picture of the woman . . . it is not true to say that all male writers have been unsympathetic towards women, or have lacked the ability to present truly complex women, or have merely given us stereotypes (Jones, 1989:97).

Jones cites writers like Wole Soyinka, Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi Wa Thiongo as outstanding in their depiction of women who are resourceful, determined and resilient and who, when necessary, break through the barriers imposed by tradition on their sex, and take their stand by their men. While in detention and writing '*Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi (1981) for instance, highlights in his prison diary the importance he accords to his heroine, Jacinta Wariinga by asserting that:

> Because the women are the most oppressed and exploited section of the entire working class, I will create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the condition of her present being (Ngugi, 1981:57).

Farah belongs to the group of African male writers in whose works the portrayal of African womanhood abounds. Here is an African male writer who does not dabble in stereotypes of African womanhood but portrays women as independent individuals. Farah is an African male writer who frequently raises women from secondary roles and makes them the primary focus of his concern. He generally describes women as self-confident and as prepared to fight for equality and personal liberties. He portrays women's attempts to avoid obstacles where possible, or, if this is not possible, to cope with what they cannot

change. He certainly describes the women in his books as strong and self-determined, and generally shows them in a very positive light.

Nuruddin Farah's first published novel, is *From A Crooked Rib* (1970), followed by *A Naked Needle* (1976). After the publication of *A Naked Needle,* Farah began to compose his novels as trilogies with characters recognisable from earlier books populating later novels. The convention of Trilogy, Farah has explained, structurally provides the breadth to develop key ideas. In this context, his first Trilogy is anchored on, "Variations on the Theme of African Dictatorship" and it includes *Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines,* and *Close Sesame.* The second sequence is titled "Blood in the Sun" trilogy and this is made up of *Maps, Gifts* and *Secrets.* These books have been followed up by two other novels, *Links* and *Knots,* which presumably form part of a third trilogy, as yet to be named.

Feminist literary criticism is used as theoretical framework for the study, together with an analysis on the concept of patriarchy and effects of female genital mutilation (FGM). The study also argue that religion is not the sole embodiment and conveyor of patriarchal ideology in Muslim or any other societies. However, Islamic modes of reasoning and argumentation play a prominent and explicit justification role. This study aims at exploring patriarchy, power and Islam and their subsequent impact on women in the selected works of Nuruddin Farah. In most of his novels, Farah takes up the issues of the oppression of women by men. The female characters that he creates represent a free spirit in search of freedom and exhibit courageous attitude in spite of the social challenges they face. Writers like the Nigerian Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo of Ghana, have dealt with the lives of women, but not with the same emphasis on their victimisation. However, Farah's writings are a portrayal of the victimisation of women under the patriarchal traditional Somali society.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

This study is premised on the view that the novels of Nuruddin Farah derive their strength and focus from their exploration of patriarchy as a system based on gender differentiation. For Farah, women often function as allegorical representations of modern Somalia because in both cases the violence perpetuated on them impedes the realisation of cultural authenticity, individuality or coherent identity. Circumcision, rape, terror, and other forms of physical and psychological abuse are the hallmarks of woman's condition and are at the same time emblematic of the cultural environment in which women exist. To this end, this study elaborates the existential import of Farah's work which is similar with feminist intention – the idea that human beings, and in this context, women, must feel completely free to define their own individuality and existence. Based on the above, the study anchored on the propositions that:

1. There is a relationship between the patriarchal family structure and the oppressive political conditions in Somalia.
2. There is the need for women to be independent and free from all forms of subjugation.
3. Farah's novels exhibit none of the nostalgia for Africa's traditional past, rather he deals primarily with issues in post-independent Somalia.
4. Feminist Literary Criticism is a viable tool for studying women's condition in literature and valuing women's experiences.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

This study appraises the selected works of Nuruddin Farah as illustrations of patriarchy and women's subordination in order to show the position of women in patriarchal Somali society. There are many studies on Farah's works that are mainly focused on the same issues of patriarchy and patriarchal domination of women, while others are on the feminist outlook of his works. However, this research looks at the effects of these patriarchal programming on women especially in the area of female genital

mutilation from a feminist perspective. By deploying feminist literary criticism, this study shows in order to show that Farah's novels are about the quest for women emancipation from oppressive systems and traditions of patriarchy and dictatorship. To this end, the specific objectives of this work are to illustrate that:

1. There is a convergence/complicity between the Somali traditional family structure and the political system in the repression of women in Somalia.
2. Despite the constraints they face, Somali women are depicted in Farah's novels as axioms of self-assertion and the attainment of dignity and individuality.
3. Farah's concern is with women's position in post-independent Somalia.
4. Feminism is a potent source of eliminating the oppression of women in society as well as a viable tool for evaluating the female experience in the novel form.

1.4 Justification of the Study

Sources on Somali literature written or translated into English are quite limited. There is a significant corpus of Arabic sources, but none of these has been translated into English. The earliest source is *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea (60 A.D.)*, and Ibn Batuta's visit to Mogadishu in the first half of the fourteenth century whose record of visits exists in his *Travels*, which has been translated from Arabic. The most well known English source on Somalia is Richard Burton's *First Footsteps in East Africa*, whose stereotypes of Somalia Farah frequently alludes to in *A Naked Needle*. The most early scholarship on Somalia has been anthropological, most notably the work of I.M. Lewis on Somali studies. In recent decades however, scholarship has widened into various other disciplines, including the work of scholars who are themselves Somali. This may be the reason why Stratton (2002) affirms that the work of Nuruddin Farah has not attracted wide critical attention until relatively recently. Written literature in Somalia (and East Africa in general) manifests itself in many genres. However, it is prose that has distinguished itself as the veritable vehicle for literary minds. It is this genre, especially the novel, which has driven to prominence the works of Nuruddin Farah one of the celebrated Somali writers

who use English as his literary language, and one of Africa's most multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-literate writers.

While the dominant perception in existing studies seems to be that of the status of women in society as portrayed in literary works, this study seeks to examine the remarkable influence of patriarchy and Islam on not just the Somali women of Nuruddin Farah, but the African culture and heritage.

1.5 Scope and Delimitation

This study is based on textual analysis of selected novels of Nuruddin Farah dealing primarily with the issue of women and their survival in an entirely patriarchal community. The four novels selected for this study signify Farah's propensity towards the issues of women subjugation in Somalia which is mainly as a result of the influence of Somali culture, religion and power relations in Somali social set-up. The total numbers of texts give a fairly extensive overview of Farah's efforts in portraying the predicament of the Somali women. As such, the study focuses on the following selected novels – *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1992), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1992). Scholarly articles written on Nuruddin Farah as well as interviews conducted with him are so readily available and were utilised for the analysis of this study.

1.6 Methodology

The study adopts textual analysis of the texts of Nuruddin Farah. In this method, the contents, structures and functions of the messages contained in each of the selected texts are described. Sources such as books, journals, and web-based materials, published and unpublished materials and dissertations from wide range of intellectual fields have been incorporated into the research. While the core materials for this study are the novels of Nuruddin Farah, this study has been approached from a flexible and interdisciplinary angle that combines history, sociology, psychology and religion in order to trace how the

Somali woman, via culture and tradition have been subjected to various forms of oppressions.

1.7 Chapter Structure

Chapter one of the study provides a general introduction and explanation of the key terms in the study i.e. patriarchy, power and Islam. Chapter two is the theoretical framework and the literature review while chapter three provides a biography of Nuruddin Farah and a historical survey of Somalia and its people wherein the novels of Farah are set. Attempt is also made to look at secularism in the context of Farah's novels. Chapter four examines *From a crooked Rib* and *Sardines* by focusing on feminism as a challenge to patriarchy. Chapter Five provides the Representation of Gender, Tradition and Religion in *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Close Sesame.* While Chapter Six serves as the conclusion of the study. In this chapter also, attempt is made to look at Islam and the position of Somali women within the context of *Sweet and Sour Milk.*

1.8 Islam, Patriarchy and Power

A very important explanation for the origin of patriarchy was given by Frederick Engels in 1940 in his book, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1940). Engels believed that women's subordination began with the development of private property, when according to him the world historical defeat of the female sex took place. He says both the division of classes and the subordination of women developed historically. At that stage when private property arose in the society, men wanted to retain power and property, and pass it on to their own children. To ensure this inheritance, mother-right was overthrown. In order to establish the right of the father, women had to be domesticated and confined and their sexuality regulated and controlled. According to Engels, it was during this period both patriarchy and monogamy for women were established. Hartmann (1981) looks at the link between patriarchy and capitalism and

argues that patriarchy links all men to each other irrespective of their classes. Hartmann defines patriarchy as a set of relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them, which in turn enable them to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men's control over women's labour power.

According to Mies (1988), male-ness and female-ness are not biological givens, but rather the result of a long historical process. In each historic epoch male-ness and female-ness are differently defined, the definition depending on the principal mode of production in those epochs. This means that the organic differences between women and men are differently interpreted and valued, according to the dominant form of appropriation of natural matter for the satisfaction of human needs. According to Mies, women were the first producers of life, of social production, of the first tools of production, and if they were the first to initiate social relations, why were they unable to prevent the establishment of an hierarchical and exploitative relationship between the sexes? She answers this by saying that male supremacy, far from being a consequence of men's superior economic contribution was a result of the development and control of destructive tools through which they controlled women, nature and other men.

In this patriarchal system men and women behave, think, and aspire differently because they have been taught to think of masculinity and feminity in ways which condition their difference. Patriarchal systems show in or accept that men have, or should have; one set of qualities and characteristics, and women another, such as 'masculine' qualities (strength, bravery, fearlessness, dominance, etc.) and 'feminine' qualities (caring, nurturing, love, timidity, obedience, docility, etc.). The search for the social origins of this relationship is therefore part of the political strategy of women's emancipation. Without

understanding the foundation and the functioning of the asymmetric relationship between men and women it is not possible to overcome it.

Politically, various feminists have seized upon the concept of patriarchy in the search for an explanation of feelings of oppression and subordination, and the desire to transform feelings of rebellion into a political practice and theory. And theoretically the concept of patriarchy has been used to address the question of the real basis of the subordination of women, and to analyse the particular forms which it assumes. Thus, the theory of patriarchy attempts to penetrate beneath the particular experiences and manifestations of women's oppression and to formulate some coherent theory of the basis of subordination which underlies them. The concept of patriarchy which has been developed within feminist writings is not a single or simple concept but has a whole variety of different meanings. At the most general level, patriarchy has been used to refer to male domination and the power relationships by which men dominate women (Millett, 1969). According to Bennett (2006) patriarchy is a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. Allen (2005) believe that society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privileges by being male-dominated, male identified, and male-centred. It is also organised around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women. Patriarchy, Allen further states, is a system including cultural ideas about men and women, the web of relationships that structure social life and the unequal distribution of power, rewards and resources that underlies privilege and oppression.

Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the word patriarchy "to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women and to the symbolic power which fathers have

within these systems, and the consequences of this power for the inferiorised . . . psychology of women (Mitchel, 1974). Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structure and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. She explains patriarchy as a system because this helps us to reject the notion of biological determinism (which says that men and women are naturally different because of their biological make-up or bodies and, are, therefore assigned different roles) or the notion that every individual man is always in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one.

Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that "men hold power in all the important institutions of society" and that "women are deprived of access to such power". However, as Learner (1989) posits, it does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources". Paraphrasing Aristotle, Foucault (1986) explains that, the structure of the ancient Greek family is inherently asymmetric because to govern a wife is to exercise a political autonomy in which relations are permanently unequal. That model of unequal relationships within the ancient family is, for Foucault, an illustration of the wider political context of a Greek polis where all social relationships were seen as the relationship between a superior and a subordinate, an individual who dominates and one who is dominated, one who commands and one who complies, one who vanquishes and one who is vanquished. According to Foucault, the Greeks regarded the family as a site where a free Greek male citizen had to prove his ability to rule in order to participate in governing the Greek State. Thus, in Greek there existed a continuity and homogeneity between the government of a state and that of a household.

The sociologists Jacques Donzelot (1979) follows Foucault in describing the nineteenth century French Patriarchal family as a relay, an obligatory or voluntary support for social imperatives. For Donzelot, the traditional patriarchal family was actually conscripted by the bourgeois system to function as a government through the family. For Farah, similar strategies were used in the rather different social context of twentieth century Somalia, where the fundamental premise of the patriarchal family as the basic unit of Somali society parallels the same premise in European bourgeois society. As in Europe, the Somali society of the twentieth century is based upon a patriarchal hierarchy. And, as in European society, power alliances in Somalia use the traditional family as an instrument for the maintenance of the status quo. Barre powerfully endorsed the traditional patriarchal family which he regarded as a tool for the manipulation of his Somali subjects. Thus, the father turns himself into the household replica and representative of the dictator, and this features in his behaviour in a number of ways. Like the General, Keynaan, the father of Loyaan and Soyaan in *Sweet and Sour Milk* for example, takes refuge in religious obscurantism (only Allah knows, only Allah) and he misuses the Qur'an to deny equality to men and to marginalise women as inferior beings, fit only for sex, childbearing and menial work, and to cow them into submission.

Thus, patriarchy describes the institutionalised system of male dominance. So we can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men and women which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant or masculine roles and women always have the subordinate or feminine ones. This ideology is so powerful that men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress. They do this through institutions such

as the state, religion and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men. The patriarchal system is characterised by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition. So patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

A critical view of political power is a theme which in modern African literature is often combined with a search for roots, an affirmation of the validity of traditional society and its potential as a source for a new beginning. This is a preoccupation of writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. In this respect, Nuruddin Farah falls in the established canon although the problems he highlights are substantially of a Somali nature, because as he states "I wrote to put down on paper, for posterity sake, the true history of a nation" and also "to keep my country alive by writing about it" (Farah, 1998).Farah explores the ways the patriarchal clan structure of the Somali society is reflected in the larger political reality of the dictatorial regime of Mohammed Siyad Barre. In line with this, this study provides an insight into the Somali culture and religion and the position of women in the patriarchal clan structure of Somali society. The Somalia in Farah's novels is a society where the boundaries between the state and the family are blurred: traditional family values are used by the General, in the person of Mohammed Siyad Barre, to oppress and terrorise his people. Farah does not approve of the reliance upon the traditions of the past in order to establish a new, postcolonial cultural identity. Like many other postcolonial writers and intellectuals (like Soyinka and Ngugi) who are known for the appropriation and manipulation of traditional culture and the past, for Farah, the practice of excessive reliance on the traditions of the past amounts to no more than a disingenuous manipulation of the past in the interest of the oppressive present. As Wright (1990) points out, Farah

does not see traditional values as an effective counter to the tyranny and corruption of postcolonial Somalia.

> On the contrary, he sees the traditional forms as being implicated in the new terror. For him, the General represents something authentic. He sees some fundamental need in Somali life. Despotism by a tribal oligarchy is but the family's patriarchal authoritarianism writ large.

Farah compares the power relationship within the traditional family and those established between the state and its subjects. He continuously denounces the Somali patriarchal tradition for its role in the perpetuation of despotism and concludes that the authoritarian structure of the Somali family makes Somali society inherently susceptible to political oppression. In a sense, the family acts as a 'back-up' to other strategies of power by enacting the power hierarchy already existing in the society. Farah finds no virtue in traditional Somali social organisation, indeed his two major concerns are the patriarch in the traditional Somali Muslim family and the concomitant subjection of women to patriarchal domination.

Patriarchy is about the social relations of power between men and women, women and women, and men and men. It is a structural force that influences power relations, and power is seen as a quality of society than of particular people (Hajer, 1989). Power sets the agenda for patriarchy in Somalia, the patriarch or head of an extended family group is a petty tyrant with unlimited power over the members of his family. The Somali social structure provides the context upon which this power operates/occurs, with its patriarchal set-up and the mis-use of Islamic precepts in family relationships and by the State. Power (seen as a system of domination and rule) becomes an inseparable part of the social interaction, it is an integral feature of social life. It is always part of the relations, and its signs may be discerned even at the micro levels of interaction. From the perspectives of Farah's artistic presentation therefore, the patriarch or head of an extended family group is a petty tyrant with unlimited power over the members of his family and in the larger

context of the society he is a cowardly police informer. In the novel *Sweet and Sour Milk* for example, Farah connects these two social levels as the following quotation from Wilhelm Reich shows: "In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power" (Farah, 1992). This juxtaposition of negative aspects in traditional and modern society amounts to a myth in African writing. It is closely connected with Nuruddin Farah's unique sensitivity towards the situation of women in traditional Somali society.

On discussing about the influence of power on women, the most influential theorist of power Michel Foucault, who revolutionised the western perception of power, needs to be mentioned. Foucault posited that a major problem with western perception of power is both the representation of power in a judicial form and its attribution to the sovereign. According to Foucault, a proper analysis of power must extend beyond the limits of the state both "because the state, for all the omnipotence apparatuses, is far from being able to occupy the world field of actual power relation, and further because the state can only operate on the basis of other already existing power relations". (Foucault, 1980).This could be easily linked to the already existing power relation that exist in the patriarchal system in the Somali society. For this, Foucault further maintains that power is everywhere; it is exercised from within the social body rather than from above it, and it is deeply, albeit covertly invasive. Here, it could be understood that power is highly compatible with the view that culture and its religious subsets are a major site of power, because they are highly determinative of individual actions. Foucault's theory of power is particularly conducive to a proper analysis of the power that culture, and religion as an integral part of culture, has in people's lives. In Somali society, the already existing culture and the misinterpretation of some Islamic precepts, provide a stable ground for

men to exercise their power over women and for the General too, to exercise his own power over the citizenry.

Along this patriarchal continuum, sexual power is seen as another extension and manifestation of political power. Somalia is a country where a widow is forced by the government to marry the policeman who has murdered her husband and where a woman is pressed hard to marry one of the political descendants who has raped her. Power is imagined as a captive mistress who is pandered to, courted and finally seized by the General, and village brides are offered up to the sadistic whims of visiting African dictators like Amin:

> Come: take this key, the symbol of power and open the clean and shaven legs of our womanhood. Come: take this sceptre, use it as the whip for the sado-masochistic rite to which you've been honourably invited. The Minister of police, unwrapping a cigar, broke its polythene with the same cruelty as a rapist would deflower a virgin (Farah, 1979:204).

Thus, family and state, patriarchy and power, are Farah's twin concerns. The traditional paterfamilias is the primary model for the head of state whose powers, like his own, rest on tribal consent. At a more abstract level, the father, who is the author and authority over his offspring, is paralleled by the father of the nation who authorises the mode of reality in which his people live, telling them what they shall believe and deem authentic. Throughout Islam recorded history, women have been dehumanised, disposed, diminished, degraded, marginalised, disenfranchised, secluded, subjugated and silenced. The historically ontologically inferior position of women, social roles, and cultural and traditional context must be taken into account. According to Jain (2005:78):

> Formal or de jure equality, which involves simply "adding women" to the existing paradigms is an inadequate response to women's equality. Realising women's substantive or de factor equality involves addressing the institutionalised nature of women's disadvantage and changing the cultural, traditional and religious beliefs that typecast women as inferior to men. It also means recognising that notions of masculinity and feminity are interdependent.

Within Islamic theology, the Holy Qur'an expresses the moral and spiritual equality of men and women by balancing virtues and rewards for both genders in identical terms. The prevailing patriarchal order preceded the birth of Islam. In fact, Arab societies (for which Somalia is a part), Islamised while it tried to preserve the profoundly patriarchal structure dominant in the region for millennia giving priority to those Qur'anic prescriptions that best fit the prevailing social and family model. Now in the modern era, it is institutionalised at multiple level of society (legal, educational, political, economic) and in the framework of some nation states of neo-patriarchal conception, patriarchy extends throughout the social structure in such a way that the power of the father at the heart of the family is translated to society, becoming the power of rulers, and to religion. Thus, patriarchal gender-based societies/regimes have consistently used Islam as a religion, to repudiate Muslim women's rights via historically and culturally religious interpretations.

To this end, feminist Muslim scholars argue that Islam is not inherently oppressive to women by emphasising that factors other than Islam play a large role in the realities of women's lives. To the extent that women are disadvantaged relative to men, the source of women's subjugation is variously identified as, for example, patriarchal social relations that pre-existed Islam and stopped its development and legal spin-offs, or structural factors and general trends in the world's political economy. Therefore, it is patriarchal readings of the Qur'an and fiqh (rules of jurisprudence) as posited Barlas (2002), as well as the structure of religious and sexual power in Muslim societies, rather than 'Islam', that discriminate against women.

Somali traditional culture is predominantly a patriarchal society that blends nomadic pastoral traditions and norms with Islamic teaching. The shape of the culture is affected by the interaction between these two factors. The place of women in an Islamic society is determined by the Qur'an, the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.),

and the interpretation of Islamic law and traditions influenced by social customs and practices. Through the revelations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), Islam liberated women from unacceptable conditions that prevailed in the tribal society of pre-Islamic Arabia. Among the rights granted to women by Islam were the rights to life and education as well as the right to inherit, manage and maintain property. The Islamic shari'a therefore clearly recognizes property rights of women before and after marriage-"To men is allotted what they earn and to women is allotted what they earn" (Qur'an 4:32).

Islam through marriage aims to assure greater financial security for women. They are entitled to receive marital gifts, to keep present and future properties and income for their own security. No married woman is required to spend a penny from her property and income on the household unless she voluntarily wishes to do so. Generally, a Muslim woman is guaranteed support in all stages of her life, as a daughter, wife, mother, or sister. Inheritance in Islam is based on kinship. Thus, the Quran says "Men shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and women shall a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave" (Qur'an 4:7).

Many respectable scholars such as Imam Shafi'i hold the view that it is obligatory that a husband provide a gift even to his divorced wife in accordance with the size of his wealth, this, the Holy Qur'an has clearly stated thus:

> For divorced women provide a suitable gift. This is a duty on the righteous (Qur'an 2:241). Bestow on them (a suitable gift). The wealthy according to his means, and the poor according to his means (Qur'an 2:236).

Woman's property rights in Somali customary laws however, are less progressive than they are in Islam. Somali customary laws (Xeer) often circumvent women's inheritance rights in order to keep property with the patriarchal family. In Islam, the husband is

responsible for the maintenance, protection and overall welfare of the family within the framework of consultation and kindness.

> Men are protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other and because they support them from their means (Qur'an 4:34).

The above verse explains that men are expected to protect and provide for their women from what Allah has given them, thus, men are supposed to stand firm in the affairs and interests of their women. Subject to this, the sexes are on terms of equality in law, and in certain matters women are entitled to special protection. Islam also sought to establish symmetry between the respective rights and obligations of men to women: And women shall have rights similar to the rights against the, according to what is equitable (Qur'an 2:228).

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) instructed respect for women. To demonstrate that respect, the Prophet helped in household chores in spite of his schedule and encouraged men to consult with their spouses and children in family matters. The Prophet (S.A.W.) said, "The best among you is the best to your family (wife). Accordingly, Islam obliged women to accept the authority of the husband within the family. The normative relations of husbands and wives in Somali culture are highly similar to those under Islam. The husband is the head of the family. He is responsible for the security and the relationship of his family to others. The wife is in turn responsible for the day to day management of family affairs.

In Islam, education is not only a right but also a duty of all males and females. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is quoted to have 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. The Prophet (S.A.W.) also explained the reward for treating women fairly, "whoever has a daughter and . . . does not

favour his son over her, Allah will enter him into paradise! The Prophet (S.A.W.) encouraged women to seek knowledge. As an example, the prophet assigned specific days to instruct women, despite his busy schedule. Islam therefore, endorses women's right to have access to all types of education and training, and to pursue it to any level they desire. Both men and women can have the same curricula, examination and qualified teachers.

In a traditional nomadic setting like Somalia, women performed varied roles at different stages. As a wife and as a mother, she is a teacher for all her children, a master trainer for her daughters, and above all a manager of not only her home but including the family livestock. For example, women make all materials for the construction of the nomadic home, as well as all household utensils and instruments. They are also responsible for the logistics of moving the family dwelling in the frequent nomadic movements. Women procure daily supplies of water and firewood. Out of necessity, they took to work outside the home and became key actors in the market place as small traders, shop owners, and Qat sellers but on the following conditions based on religious and cultural grounds: That the job itself should not be something forbidden or should not lead her to something forbidden; she should comply with Islamic guidelines of modesty and virtue; she should not forego an important job (like her housework) for this job.

The social rights of women in Islam and Somali culture are best expressed in marriage traditions and the institution of the family. According to Islam, women have the right to accept or reject marriage proposals. Her consent is a prerequisite for the validity of the marital contract according to the teachings of the Prophet (S.A.W.):

> Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammad (S.A.W.) and reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice . . . (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it)

In another version, the girl said: 'Actually, I accept this marriage, but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right to force a husband on them! (Ibn Majal). Islam

celebrates the special and exclusive function of marriage and procreation, and extends this celebration of marriage to motherhood. The Holy Qur'an advocates reverence for mothers: O mankind, reverence your Guardian Lord and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you (Qur'an 4:1).

Mothers are accorded a special place of honour in the sayings of the Prophet (S.A.W.). A man came to the Prophet (S.A.W.) asking:

> O Messenger of Allah, who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet (S.A.W.) said, your mother. The man said then who is next: the Prophet (S.A.W.) said, your mother, the man further asked, and then who is next? The Prophet (S.A.W.) said, your mother. The man further asked, and then who is next? Only then did the Prophet (S.A.W.), say, your father. (Muslim/Bukhari).

This goes to show the superior position of women over men in Islam as proclaimed by the Prophet (S.A.W.). The Qur'an also states that kindness to parents (especially women) is next to worship of Allah:

> Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life say not to them a word of contempt nor repel them but address them in terms of honour (Qur'an 17:23).
> And we have also enjoined unto humans (to be good) to his/her parents: in travail upon did his/her mother bear him/her and years Twain was his/her waning: (hear the command). "Show gratitude to me and your parents: to Me is (your final) destiny. (Qur'an 31:41).

Violence against women is often based on erroneous notions of men's authority over women. Under no circumstances does the Qur'an encourage, or condone physical abuse or cruelty towards women. The maximum allowed in extreme cases is a gentle tap that does not even leave a mark on the body while saving the marriage from collapsing. In the event of a family dispute with the problem relating to the wife's behaviour, her husband may exhort her and appeal for reason. If the case continues, the husband may express his displeasure in another peaceful manner by sleeping in a separate bed from hers. If that does not solve the problem, the husband may resort to another measure best described as a

gentle tap on the body, but never on the face, making it more of a symbolic measure than a punitive one. The Holy Qur'an has this to say:

> As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds (and last) beat them (slightly); but if they return to obedience seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, great (above you all). (Qur'an 4:34).

As defined above, it is not permissible to strike anyone's face, cause any bodily harm or even be harsh. In addition, early jurists interpreted light beating as a symbolical use of the miswak (a small natural toothbrush). However, the Prophet (S.A.W.) discourages even these measures. Among his sayings: "Is it not a shame that one of you beats his wife like (an unscrupulous person) beats a slave and maybe he sleeps with her at the end of the day". In another Hadith, the Prophet S.A.W. said "How does anyone of you beat his wife as he beats the stallion camel and then he may embrace (sleep) with her? (Bukhari).

The Prophet (S.A.W.) never raised his hand to his wives. The unregenerate male is apt, in the pride of his physical strength, to forget the all-important part which the female plays in his very existence, and in all the social relationships that arise in our collective human lives. The mother that bore us must ever have our reverence. The wife, through whom we enter parentage, must have our reverence. Sex, which governs so much of our physical life, and has so much influence on our emotions, deserves not our fear, or our contempt, or our amused indulgence, but our reverence in the highest sense of the term.

The Shari'a (Islamic Law) has long co-existed with Somali customary law (Xeer), despite apparent contradictions between the two. The Shari'a is more progressive than Somali customary law. It grants women the rights in lots of areas like inheritance, ownership, initiating marriage in which case the Somali customs and practices appraise arranged marriages wherein the consent of the women involved is not sought. Also, the customary law that is practiced often denies women their share of inheritance in order to protect the property of the patriarchal family.

The state of subjugation experienced by women in Islamic societies for which Nuruddin Farah's Somalia is one, has been socially constructed by patriarchal and misogynistic discourses and interpretations, thus making it impossible for women to have an active voice in the society. What is needed for a stable and fair society is that the norms of Islam should be distinguished from the negative aspects of the prevailing social customs and practices. Because these prevailing social customs and practices are part of a culture that constraints, shapes and hones the authority of religion in just such a way that its own viewpoint becomes synonymous with religious authority. It is not religion that determines culture, but culture that first shapes religion into something that it finds palatable and consistent with its values. Religion in traditional Somali was an intrinsic part of the culture which in turn provided social relations and structured orders in which religion operated. In this sense, religion in Somali can be defined as a cultural system reflecting what is spiritually aspired to and inspired by its culture, its beliefs, rituals, and practices which are often shaped and moulded into particular forms of cultural systems and sub-systems whose expectations and orientations are unique to it. Religion is, in this sense, deeply woven into the broad fabric of individual, family and social life, and is an integral part of a people's culture. In this context therefore, religion not only strengthens the core values and meanings of culture, but also functions through such cultural symbols as rite, customs and communal activities. This is what makes it possible for the tribal beliefs and practices of the Somali to be strongly embedded in the religion of Islam, it should however be noted that when pushed to extremes, certain cultural practices can overtake the beneficial aspects of religion as in the case of Somalia where Farah sees a lot of cultural practices meant to subjugate women strongly embedded into the religion of Islam.

1.9 Nuruddin Farah and the Development of the Somali Novel

Written Somali Literature before the advent of colonialism was the exclusive monopoly of the Ulama (Islamic clergy). These Sheikhs wrote their poetry in Arabic script. The intention of writing in such a script was for private consumption, mostly aimed at the immediate family of the Sheikh/poet and other religious figures. These poems were either religious or historical in nature. Three reasons account for the power of poetical persuasion in Somali society. First, poetry is in itself a form of knowledge; secondly, it conserves and passes on to posterity what knowledge there is in society; and lastly, Somali poetry is structured in alliteration which is known for its mnemonic quality. The earliest published prose fiction in Somali literature is said to have its roots in what is referred to as 'the era of the lute'. This era covers roughly 25 years, (1944-69). The socio-political-economic importance of this era is important to Somali literature as Andrzejewski (1985) writes:

> Towards the end of the second world war various social and political changes were set in motion in the Somali speaking territories which led to a gradual departure, for some section of the population, from the traditional Somali way of life.

According to Andrzejewski (1975), Somali group of writers could be classified into three distinct categories, these are the preservers; transmuters; and innovators. The preservers started their work long before the adoption of official Somali script. This first group, true to their name, attempts to preserve the vast verbal art of the Somali for posterity. Their main concern is to collect and conserve 'perishable' oral literature from extinction. Their endeavours derive inspiration from the old maxim that with the death of an elderly person perishes a whole library, which is impossible to retrieve. Motivated by this sense of urgency, these writers go to great length to locate literary figures in ailing health or in old age. Their findings were either published with the help of outside

institutions and persons or remained in the possession of private collectors. Seen as it is, it is the preservers who further develop the techniques of novel writing in Somalia.

The transmuters, as their name attests, attempt to revitalise the present with the past, and vice versa. Writers in this group, 'transmute' what belonged to the oral literature and adapt it to the needs of written literature (Andrzejewski, 1975). Their preoccupation is not only to preserve what is already there, but to create new forms. The creation of new forms demands both talent and knowledge in existing traditions. The aggregate of any tradition consists of two equally important parts: sequences which bear the mark to continuity to tradition, and change over time. The transmuters pioneered that change since they master the linguistic and stylistic necessity to adapt the oral narrative into the novel genre. The result of this experimentation is a breed of writing which incorporates poetry into works of prose.

Another characteristic of this form of writing is that it is laden with expressions from oral narratives. Characterisations in these novels basically conform to that which is found in oral literature. The character is presented to us by the narrator and we rarely come across him or her having an inner debate, as is found in some of the later novels. The character is at the mercy of the narrator who is always structured as a third person omniscient. Characters in the books by the transmuter group reflect a close affinity the individual has with tradition – a reflection which arguably transcends the fictional character and describes the relationship the authors themselves have with their tradition. Themes in the transmuter novels focused on dualities within Somali tradition.

The innovator authors concentrate mainly on the dynamics inherent in society. This group of writers belong to the post-revolutionary era, an era referred to as the aftermath of the 1969 coup d'etat. The adoption of Somali orthography is itself a product of this new era. The writing of the Somali language was high on the agenda of the

Supreme Revolutionary Council and a modified version of Latin script for the writing of the Somali language was adopted. With this, the emergence of literacy encourages creative persons within the society to write in Somali. Most members of this group (innovators) have at least a high school diploma in their name. This educational background is important as it accounts for the introduction of new elements of novel writing into Somali prose fiction. Authors in this group utilise characteristic features of the novel genre in the language of their schooling. Most of them had one European language or another as their medium of instruction in short, they studied European novels in school. It is gathered here that written fiction in Somalia is started by the secular section of the indigenous intelligentsia.

Through individual talent, the innovators usher in a new era of novel writing in Somalia. The ground covered by this group in the short time of written Somali is immense. The reasons for this improvement are many, but three deserve special mention. First is the increase in the literacy rate of the country which came about as a result of the extensive literacy campaigns launched in all corners of the Republic. Secondly, the number of people literate in foreign language was, in comparison to other African countries, small. Competition from other publishing sources was therefore negligible or non-existent. Lastly, college students who wanted to establish their names and reap some material benefits joined the bandwagon of writing in Somali. Besides the relative unimportance of foreign languages in the Somali context, it is the emergence of this new wave of writers which virtually initiates Somali novel writing. The dominant feature of the Somali novel includes the incorporation of poetry and proverbs in the works; the didacticism of the stories and the conformity of narrative structure to the general description made about plot and characterisation. This dominant feature is obvious because of the fact that the Somali novel is a transition from oral to the written since the

Somali literary scene has been characterised by the dominance of poetry. In Somali novels therefore, history and literature merge into a literary unit within which society is represented through event, characters, and scenes taken from real life.

The emergence of the new wave of writers in Somali adversely affects prose fiction written in European languages. It is however, with the proliferation of works by this group that Nuruddin Farah, Somalia's only novelists in a European language, becomes a class unto and by himself. The general trend which is assumed to occur in the African novel in English, for example, does not become a pre-requisite for the novel genre in the Somali language. This account for the absence in Somali prose fiction writing of a trend similar to that found in other African literatures, especially in Yoruba. In the latter, as ably demonstrated by Abiola Irele, one can discern an underlying thread which attests to a linear progression in its development (Irele, 1981). This is to say that one can trace the emergence of the Yoruba novel from Fagunwa's works in Yoruba through Tutuola's ghost stories in broken English to Soyinka's novel. In the Somali case, tradition gives birth to a bifurcated development: the transmuter group of writers and Somalia's best known novelist, Nuruddin Farah. While the transmuter give way to a new wave of writers, the growth and development of novel writing in English starts with Farah. This apparent development of the novel genre in English explains the anomalous situation of Farah in Somali prose fiction writing.

From the above discussion, it is evident that Farah stepped from a culture belonging to the oral tradition to the written one. Farah got a lot of inspirations first from his mother, a poet from the oral traditions. He watches her and listens to her compose poems both for her ten children, and relations. Consequently, Farah found himself involved in composing poems like his mother in Somali, poems praising the Somali, poems propagating the supremacy of the Somali mind and culture over any other. Another

source of inspiration for Farah has to do with his educational background. At that time, all the text-books used in schools in the Somali speaking areas of the Horn of Africa were meant for other people; the Arabic books for the Arabic speaking child; the Amharic book for the Amharic-speaking child in upper Ethiopia; and the English for the British East African colonies. Not only did the Somali feel alienated from the texts they read, but the universe which these portrayed had nothing familiar to offer to a Somali child, like Farah, in a Somali-speaking Ogaden. The cosmos the schools presented Farah with, provided him with the need to build a world in which he was a part, a world he can make his own. Farah needed to see Somali characters in these books so he could be able to say "this is something I know, this is something that is not alien".

Farah says in an interview with Ahmed I. Samatar that:

> My basic sentiment is the very one that I started with ages ago, which is to find Somali in books . . . my great great vision in life became one of keeping Somalia alive by continuing to write about it; by turning it into a debate; by making Somalia intelligible to others, including Somalis. With fellow Somalis, my mission has always been to go beyond the superficial, beyond what everyone knows and into the hidden secrets, into taboos and things that are unsaid because people are afraid to do so. As a novelist, I usually think of myself as somebody who imagines that there are no secrets worth keeping, no taboo areas in human life (Samatar, 2008).

Among the individuals who have had the greatest influence in his development aside from his mother, are two Somalians, Adam Jama Bihi, the first person who read some of the first texts that he had ever written, and Ismail Booba, the first Somali writer from the transmuter group to have had his work published. His was a short story titled "You and I" and was part of his Masters project in creative writing in the United States (Samatar, 2008). For non-Somali whom Farah sees as role models in the writing world, novelists that influence his writing are great historical figures like James Joyce (one of the chapters in Farah's *Secrets* was inspired by one of the chapters in *Illysses*), Samuel Beckett, William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf –this because he finds their works as apolitical. To Farah, rather than wasting time in politics, these writers he says, have a

greater vision of society. Later on Farah confesses, he encountered Nigeria's Chinua Achebe, whom he says, he holds in high esteem because he (Achebe) has been steadfast in his philosophy and Africanness.

With these developments, the first Somali novel written in English rather than in Somali came on board in 1970. Nuruddin Farah wrote the novel, *From a Crooked Rib,* in a language which is his fourth, after Somali, Amharic and Arabic. The novel was published in the Heinemann African Writers Series which automatically incorporated it in the network of literary works aimed at presenting a politically and culturally over determined concepts of "Africa" to a metropolitan audience. An implicit assumption about the novels which entered this global network of exchange was that these were cultural forms which constitutively embodied Africa's step into modernity. The transition from oral to literate worldviews, as outlined earlier, is a key dimension of this assumed evolution.

1.10 Farah and Female Genital Mutilation

Gender oppression is common to both colonial and postcolonial situations, and Farah's novels are expression of the various forms of gender oppression in Somali society. One such oppression in the work of Nuruddin Farah is female subordination in the form of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which for over thirty years has become an iconic example of women's oppression in Somalia. The idea of Female Genital Mutilation started long before the advent of organised religion. Customary dictates justify this process as an indigenous measure improvised to prevent teenage pregnancy and to curtail sexually transmitted diseases which young girls might be subjected to before they are wise enough to make rational decisions about sexual relations. This practice is seen as not just a cultural phenomena but rather the invisible hand of patriarchy. Women do not engage in this practice for their own benefit but rather for the benefit of men. Although this and many other harmful and violent acts committed against women and girls are illegal, they

continue to be socially accepted and maintain legitimacy in the male dominant sphere because the privileging of male that accompanies patriarchal systems make Female Genital Mutilation a requirement for women's survival.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), or female circumcision as it is sometimes erroneously referred to, involves surgical removal of parts or all of the most sensitive female genital organs. It is an age-old practice which is perpetuated in many communities around the world simply because it is customary. FGM forms an important part of the rites of passage ceremony for some communities, marking the coming of age of the female child. It is believed that, by mutilating the female's genital organs, her sexuality will be controlled; but above all it is to ensure a woman's virginity before marriage and chastity thereafter. In fact, FGM imposes on women and the girl child a catalogue of health complications and untold psychological problems.

The origin of FGM has not yet been established, but records show that the practice predates Christianity and Islam in practising communities today. In ancient Rome, metal rings were passed through the labia minora of slaves to prevent procreation; in medieval England, metal chastity belt were worn by women to prevent promiscuity during their husbands' absence; evidence from mummified bodies reveals that, in ancient Egypt, both excision and infibulations were performed, hence Pharaonic circumcision; in tsarist Russia, as well as nineteenth century England, France and America, records indicate the practice of clitoridectomy. In England and America, FGM was performed on women as a "cure" for numerous psychological ailments. The age at which mutilation is carried out varies from area to area. FGM is performed on infants as young as a few days old, on children from 7 to 10 years old, and on adolescents. Adult women also undergo the operation at the time of marriage. Since FGM is performed on infants as well as adults, it can no longer be seen as marking the rites of passage into adulthood, or as ensuring

virginity. Among the types of surgical operation on the female genital organs listed below, there are many variations performed through Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Arabian Peninsula, Australia and Latin America.

Types of Surgical Forms

(a) Circumcision or Sunna ("traditional") circumcision: This involves the removal of the prepuce and the tip of the clitoris. This is the only operation which, medically, can be likened to male circumcision.

(b) Excision or clitoridectomy: This involves the removal of the clitoris, and often also the labia minora. It is the most common operation and is practised in many parts of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula.

(c) Infibulations or Pharaonic circumcision: This is the most severe operation, involving excision plus the removal of the labia majora and the sealing of the two sides, through stitching or natural fusion of scar tissue. What is left is a very smooth surface, and a small opening to permit urination and the passing of menstrual blood. This artificial opening is sometimes no larger than the head of a match. This is the type practiced on Somali girls/women.

According to the World Health Organisation, another form of mutilation which has been reported is introcision, practised specifically by the Pitta-Patta aborigines of Australia. When a girl reaches puberty, the whole tribe – both sexes assembles. The operator, an elderly man, enlarges the vaginal orifice by tearing it downward with three fingers bound with opossum string. In other districts, the perineum is split with a stone knife. This is usually followed by compulsory sexual intercourse with a number of young men.

It is reported that introcision has been practised in eastern Mexico and in Brazil. In Peru, in particular among the Conibos, a division of the Pano Indians in the north-east, an

operation is performed in which, as soon as a girl reaches maturity, she is intoxicated and subjected to mutilation in front of her community. The operation is performed by an elderly woman, using a bamboo knife. She cuts around the hymen from the vaginal entrance and severs the hymen from the labia, at the same time exposing the clitoris. Medicinal herbs are applied, followed by the insertion into the vagina of a slightly moistened penis-shaped object made of clay.

Like all other harmful traditional practices, FGM is performed by women, with a few exceptions (in Egypt, men are known to perform the operation). In most rural settings throughout Africa, the operation is accompanied with celebrations and often takes place away from the community at a special hidden place. The operation is carried out by women (excisors) who have acquired their "skills" from their mothers or other female relatives; they are often also the community's traditional birth attendants. The type of operation to be performed is decided by the girl's mother or grandmother beforehand and payment is made to the excisor before, during and after the operation, to ensure the best service. This payment, partly in kind and partly in cash, is a vital source of livelihood for the excisors.

The conditions under which these operations take place are often unhygienic and the instruments used are crude and unsterilized. A kitchen knife, a razor-blade, a piece of glass or even a sharp fingernail is the tools of the trade. These instruments are used repeatedly on numerous girls, thus increasing the risk of blood-transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The operation takes between 10 and 20 minutes, depending on its nature; in most cases, anaesthetic is not administered. The child is held down by three or four women while the operation is done. The wound is then treated by applying mixtures of local herbs, earth, cow-dung, ash or butter, depending on the skills of the excisor. If infibulations is performed, the child's legs are bound together to impair mobility for up to

40 days. If the child dies from complications, the excisor is not held responsible; rather, the death is attributed to evil spirits or fate.

FGM is known to be practised in at least 25 countries in Africa. Infibulations is practised in Djibouti, Egypt, some parts of Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia and the northern part of the Sudan. Excision and circumcision occur in parts of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, the northern part of Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda and parts of the United Republic of Tanzania. This practice is a custom or tradition synthesised over time from various values, especially religious and cultural values. The reasons for maintaining the practice include religion, custom, decreasing the sexual desire of women, hygiene, aesthetics, facility of sexual relations, fertility, etc. In general, it can be said that those who preserve the practice are largely women who live in traditional societies in rural areas. Most of these women follow tradition passively as they are groomed to follow whatever has been laid down for them by the rules and regulations of the culture regarding women. In the countries where the practice exists, most women believe that, as good Muslims, for example, they have to undergo the operation. In order to be clean and proper, fit for marriage, female circumcision is regarded as a precondition. Among the Bambara in Mali, it is believed that, if the clitoris touches the head of a baby being born, the child will die. The clitoris is seen as the male characteristics of the woman; in order to enhance her feminity, this male part of her has to be removed. Among women in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan, circumcision is performed to reduce sexual desire and also to maintain virginity until marriage.

There are a lot of health and psychological implications of this practice. Haemorrhage, infection and acute pain are the immediate consequences. Keloid formation,

infertility as a result of infection, obstructed labour and psychological complications are identified as later effects. In rural areas where untrained traditional birth attendants perform the operations, complications resulting from deep cuts and infected instruments can cause the death of the child. Most physical complications result from infibulations, although cataclysmic haemorrhage can occur during circumcision with the removal of the clitoris; accidental cuts to other organs can also lead to heavy loss of blood. Acute infections are commonplace when operations are carried out in unhygienic surroundings and with unsterilized instruments. The application of traditional medicine can also lead to infection, resulting in tetanus and general septicaemia. Chronic infection can also lead to infertility and anaemia. Haematocolpos, or the inability to pass menstrual blood (because the remaining opening is often too small) can lead to infection of other organs and also infertility.

Obstetric complications are the most frequent health problem, resulting from vicious scars in the clitoral zone after excision. These scars open during childbirth and cause the anterior perineum to tear, leading to haemorrhaging that is often difficult to stop. Infibulated women have to be opened, or deinfibulated, on delivery of their child and it is common for them to be reinfibulated after each delivery. There has been little research in the area of the psychological implications of FGM, but evidence indicates that most children experience recurring nightmares. This practice will persists in Somalia where its prevalence remains high as at present especially affecting girls between four to 11 years of age in its most severe form infubulation is reported to be practiced in 80% of cases (UNDP, 2007). Nuruddin Farah, who has great passion and sympathy for women, described this act as barbaric, as he states in an interview with Ebony (2015),

> . . . I never hesitate to call it barbaric. [it] describes a situation in which women are continually in danger, nearing close to death, every time a woman gives birth to a child. The first question you always ask if a woman has given birth, "Has she survived?" Now this is something that has less to do with Islamic religion and

> more to do with economics. The economics is that women are valueless if she is not a virgin, and a woman who is not a virgin may not find a husband. Therefore, she will remain a burden on the family.
>
> Women would not like to go through the pain and suffering that they do first when this terrible thing is being done to them. Secondly, when they give birth or even when they're having their menstrual period, they suffer because of that.

Female Genital Mutilation is therefore a patriarchal sanctioned practice, meant to show how some particular customs are cruel, inhuman and contrary to nature. There is nothing called "female genital mutilation" in the Qur'an nor in any other Holy book, eventually culture made it up through free interpretation. There is according to Herbert Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (1998) only a suggestion of the practice in the hadiths. In a famous and widely debated hadith, the prophet allegedly states, 'Reduce but do not destroy; this is enjoyable to the woman and preferable to man". In any case, it is not a teaching that is widely held to be Muhammad's. The most harrowing feature of this practice comes in the way the term 'circumcision' is deconstructed by the graphic and unabashed description of the procedure. The sincerity and vividness of what happens to Ebla in *From a Crooked Rib* when "they had sliced out her clitoris and stitched the lips together" shows what a misnomer in fact circumcision can be. The long term effect of the process is awful to the victims; in fact, it is a carefully orchestrated scheme to curtail female sexuality. Apart from the pain and suffering that the young girls have to undergo from the primitive and unsterilized blades of the perpetrators, they are forever afflicted with frustrated sexual lives. It is really beyond anyone's understanding, how it can be concluded that a woman has no right to sexual pleasure; and to restrain her sexuality, her clitoris should be chopped off. It is safe therefore to conclude that Female Genital Mutilation is a destruction of a woman's most sexually sensitive zone. By mutilating girls, women are made into sexual tools for men. Sexual relations cease to be pleasurable, but become a painful ordeal they cannot avoid. To have children, is the only way to gain

status, they must submit. The main objective of the sexual politics of African men is therefore achieved, that is, to keep women dependent on men.

In Nigeria, as in Somalia, the practice of female genital mutilation is widespread covering practically every state of the Federation in varying magnitude from infancy to adulthood. Some socio-cultural determinants have been identified as supporting this avoidable practice. It has not been possible to determine when or where the tradition originated, it is still deeply entrenched in the Nigerian society, where critical decision makers are grandmothers, mothers, women, opinion leaders, men and age groups. The reasons given to justify female genital mutilation are numerous as in Somalia, they include custom and tradition; purification; family honour; hygiene; aesthetic reasons and protection of virginity and prevention of promiscuity. Others include increased sexual pleasure of husband; enhancing fertility; owing a sense of belonging to a group and increasing matrimonial opportunities. These views also find their roots in the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society where inequality of the sexes manifests so blatantly. Woman's sexual needs and urges, especially in rural communities, are demolished, policed or at best seen as secondary to a man's need. The types, procedure, consequences and complications involved on women who undergo this practice remain the same throughout the world.

In all of these instances, women are inflicting these harms upon their daughters or other young girls in order to ensure their future survival within their respective societies. These gratuitous customs survived for generations because of the woman's own acceptance of her inferiority and unworthiness outside of her sexuality and childbearing capabilities as reinforced by patriarchy. The practice persists because rejecting it would dim their daughter's marital prospects and expose their daughter and themselves to increased economic risks. Such concerns override the women's desire to reject the practice

for their daughters. The women accepted the cultural belief that circumcision enhances male sexual pleasure, thereby decreasing a husband's likelihood of taking another wife. Their apparently backward looking choice of the practice was thus a rational calculation in the face of economic vulnerability. One could regard the suppression of female sexuality as the most important infringement of women's human rights and that patriarchal oppression is not limited to the psychological sphere of the woman, but it steps over to agonising bodily procedures such as female genital mutilation, a phenomenon that is widespread in Somali.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the analytical framework and literature review for the study. Feminist literary criticism is applied as a viable tool for analysing the position of women in patriarchal Somali society. For this reason, various literary views held by feminists on 'feminism' is provided. Attempt is also made to situate Farah as an African feminist whose main concern is with liberating the African woman from traditional and cultural constraints. Accordingly, in the literature review, there are various critical attentions given to the works of Farah by scholars and critics.

2.2 Postcolonial-Feminist Criticism as Analytical Framework

Feminist literary criticism is a branch of literary criticism that closely examines how male dominance and female powerlessness manifest themselves in specific aspects of life. Its main concern is "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (Tyson, 2006:83). Its ultimate goal is to bring about a more equitable society where women acquire equal share of opportunities, on the assumption that women are economically, politically, socially and psychologically oppressed in every domain where patriarchy reigns (Tyson, 2006:92).

However, postcolonial feminist criticism came into existence as a response to the fact that feminism seemed to be focusing exclusively on the experiences and works of white women, without considering issues of racism and colonial imperialism that particularly affect women of colour. Postcolonial feminist criticism became an increasingly important part of a variety of disciplines, such as literary studies and cultural studies, over the last few decades of the twentieth century. During these decades,

postcolonial feminist critics raised a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems with regard to the study of gender representations. Among these problems are "the issue of universal sisterhood and the so called first-world feminists' right to speak for the so-called third world women" (McLeod, 2010:197).

In this regard, postcolonial feminists expressed their displeasure with the patronising approach of first world feminists, who took for granted that they were speaking on behalf of all women, including those in the third world countries. According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "in the contexts of Western women writing/studying women in [the] Third World" the objectification of third world women by these Western women writers needed to be challenged. She quotes Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar, who write: "feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or label us 'traditional' also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western Feminism. They need to be continually challenged" (Mohanty, 2003:23-24). Postcolonial feminist even characterised those first world feminists who try to be assertive about being the only legitimate feminist as imperialists who must be defied exactly as the colonial powers were resisted in the twentieth century (Chrisman and Williams, 1994:217).

Furthermore, it is fundamental to postcolonial feminists to argue that Western society's contemporary history has largely been one of exploiting non-white others, regardless of their gender (Plain and Sellers, 2007:284). Thus, from the postcolonial feminist perspective, first world feminists are not in a position to claim a sisterhood with third world women whom they have colonised and regarded as inferior. According to Mohanty (2003:24) "sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis". Thus, third world feminists refuse to accept the first world feminists as their sisters and believe that the latter

have no idea about their ordeal and thus cannot speak for them. According to Anne McClintock (1995:6):

> As the slaves, agricultural workers, house servants, mothers, prostitutes and concubines of the far-flung colonies of Europe, colonised women had to negotiate not only the imbalances of their relations with their own men but also the baroque and violent array of hierarchical rules and restrictions that structured their new relations with imperial men and women.

McClintock suggests here that colonised women suffered three forms of oppression during colonisation. Firstly, they suffered under the patriarchal tyranny in their own societies; secondly, they were subjected to patriarchal imperial abuse; and thirdly, they suffered at the hands of the colonial women who served as wives of colonial officers or as medical personnel, shopkeepers or farmers and who helped the colonial hegemony in the colonised territories.

In other words, postcolonial feminists desire that problems of racial discrimination, imperialism and prejudice against colonised communities be addressed first. They also prefer to fight patriarchal oppression in their own way under the assumption that first world feminists could never genuinely comprehend their ordeal as triply oppressed women.

However, emphasising issues of racial discrimination and imperialism does not mean that the first world and third world women have nothing in common. The disagreement here rather concerns priorities and grievances that the third world women have against their counterparts in the first world. When it comes to patriarchal oppression and the fight for alleviation of that oppression, they have a common enemy, which is the patriarchal ideology, wherever it is.

According to Tyson (2006), all feminists including postcolonial feminists, share a belief that patriarchal ideology works to keep women and men in traditional gender roles and thereby sustain male dominance in every aspect of life. She mentions several points on

which these feminists agree. First of all, they share a belief that patriarchy oppresses women wherever patriarchy reigns. Secondly, the history of Western civilisation, which shaped the world as we know it today through colonisation, is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideology. Thirdly, the biological differences between men and women do not determine their traditional gender roles, as this is something that culture determines. Finally, the ultimate goal of all feminists, regardless of their ideological background, is to promote women's equality in a world where "gender issues play a part in every aspect of human production". This means that despite the differences in opinion around issues such as class and race, all feminists, including postcolonial feminists, agree on the core issue, which is fighting patriarchy wherever it exists.

According to McLeod (2010), the term 'patriarchy' refers to those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men and marginalise women. In other words, patriarchy is a sexist ideology that considers women to be inferior creatures on the basis of assigned gender roles which basically favour men, endowing them with all positive characteristics, while projecting women as their opposites in terms of quality and characteristics. It is an ideology that believes that women are inferior to men based upon biological differences, assuming that men are physically superior to women and consequently more intelligent, confident and logical – qualities that are indispensable in leadership, for instance, where women are generally denied an equal footing (Tyson, 2006). In this context, de Beauvoir (2011) claimed that biological privilege enabled men from the origins of humanity to affirm themselves exclusively as sovereign subjects while women are condemned to play the role of the Other, and thereby "possess no more than precarious power: slave or idol". This is what feminists want to change, regardless of their ideological affiliations.

Consequently, according to Dahabo Farah (1982), women in many patriarchal societies like that in Somalia are largely denied the rights of acquiring educational and occupational means to enjoy in their societies what their male counterparts enjoy. They are denied these rights because men in power assume that women are inherently irrational and weak, and consequently not eligible to attain leadership and decision-making positions (Tyson, 2006). By denying women the opportunity of educational and occupational empowerment, patriarchy promotes women's failure and then uses it to justify its prejudices about women, ignoring the fact that "the general feeble of women, both in body and mind", in Wollstonecraft's words, arises less from nature than from education. This means that the alleged weakness of women is an issue of patriarchal creation, and this is what feminists seek to challenge, even though they do not deny the biological differences between men and women, but instead celebrate these differences.

Furthermore, feminists argue that in some patriarchal societies, like the one depicted in Farah's novels, women are considered to be men's property rather than equal human beings with their own wills and needs. Fathers own their female children, and thus, without their consent, they can marry them whenever and to whomever they like. In the absence of a father, the nearest male relative controls the girls and, when girls finally marry, they become the husband's property. In this context, de Beauvoir (2011), claims that a woman in a patriarchal society "spends her whole life as a minor; she is under the control of her guardian: either her father, or her husband, or her husband's heir or, by default, the state, represented by public officials" and so on.

Thus, all feminists, irrespective of their ideological association, agree on the fundamental problems in patriarchal ideology. The differences are in priorities. In other words, "the power of sisterhood stops at the point at which hard political decisions need to be made and political priorities decided" (Amos and Parmar, 1984). They agree that

women in patriarchal societies are oppressed economically, socially and politically and are deprived of their human rights and dignities, but many of these women defy such oppression at all cost.

The above mentioned points apply strongly to the texts selected for this research as Farah, through feminist thinking, has significantly drawn attention to the inequality between men and women and to the structures and practices within society which belittle and militate against women. A review of literature on western and African feminist literary criticisms is however provided in an attempt to place Farah in a particular feminist critical thought.

2.3 Western Feminist Theory

Jaggar (1994), equates feminism with the different social movements dedicated to ending the subordination of women; also, Jaggar and Rothernberg (1993), see feminist theories as tools designed for the purpose of understanding women's subordination in order to end it. These differing views highlight the difficulty of reaching a united definition of feminist theory. The focus should therefore be shifted from a fixed stable entity called feminism to a possibility of a multiple feminisms. This suggestion is summed up by Ryan (1988), who maintains that:

> Such a suggestion arises from a number of sources; the difficulty experienced in summarising feminist critical theory; the inability to find a definition which encompasses feminism's diversities and divergences; the reluctance to limit feminism to a single category; an unwillingness to confine it to a totalising theory; and finally a tendency to regard women as having a multiple rather than single identities.

This explains that feminism is not a monolithic ideology but one that is open to interpretation depending on the followers. Three broad theories of feminism can thus be identified: liberal, socialist/Marxist and radical feminist theories (Tyson, 1999).

2.3.1 Liberal Feminist Theory

According to the liberal theories that developed from the 17th century onwards, individuals have a right to own property, sell their labour and go about their lives within a legal framework that protects them from interference by governments or other individuals. Individuals also have a right to choose their own representatives to govern them (Bryson, 1999). Early liberal democratic theorists argued that these rights could not be extended to women as women were biologically incapable of full development of reason. From the early years of liberalism, women argued that they were inherently just as intelligent and rational as men and that, if they appeared inferior, this was a result of their upbringing and lack of education. These ideas were further extended in the 20th century when feminists insisted that women should be entitled to participate in politics and receive paid employment whether or not they chose to get married and have children. This view is dealt with by Friedan (1963), in his book, *The Feminine Mystique.* Whelehan (1995) maintains that feminists with a liberal perspective 'tend not to identify their position as 'political' but rather as a sensible, moderate and reasonable claim for formal sexual equality'.

2.3.2 Socialist/Marxist Feminist Theory

Socialist/Marxist feminists argue that it is impossible to isolate gender equality issues from the class society in which they occur. Socialism covers a wide range of political theories and practices from reformist social democracy to revolutionary Marxist communism. Despite their profound differences, those theories share a general belief that unrestricted capitalism is oppressive for most men and women. They also see collective class interests rather than individual rights as the proper primary focus of political concern. Socialism, like liberalism, promises equal rights and opportunities to all individuals; unlike liberalism, however, it stresses economic and social rights and freedom from exploitation, and prioritises the interests of working class people. Consequently, it is

of more relevance to ‘ordinary people’ than the formal legal rights offered by liberalism. Social feminists believe that it is only in the context of a general movement to economic equality that the needs of all groups of women rather than those of an elite minority can be met.

Socialist thinking also advocates the abolition of reduction of the division of labour. It is argued that, rather than specialising in one limited task, workers should be enabled to express themselves in a whole range of ways, so that work becomes a form of human fulfilment rather than alienation and degradation (Bryson, 1999). In some early socialist thought, the opposition to the division of labour included that between women and men. This general idea ties in with recent feminist analyses, which holds that women should be enabled to do ‘men’s work’, that men should develop their caring and nurturing qualities through participation in family life and childrearing; that sexuality should be liberated from gender stereotypes; and that ascribed and limited gender roles should be ended.

2.3.3 Radical Feminist Theory

Radical feminism argues against liberalism that women’s liberation cannot be achieved by a theory and practice which make provisions for the rights of abstract individuals, irrespective of social class and gender relations. Also, according to radical feminists neither capitalism nor any other economic system is the cause of female oppression, nor do they believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of a purely economic revolution (Ruthven, 1984). Contrary to Marxism, radical feminism regards women’s oppression as the primary and most fundamental form of oppression and gender is seen as a core system of male domination in all social organisations. The term used to signify this universal system of male domination is ‘patriarchy’. While both radical and socialist forms of feminism use the term, in radical feminism, it refers to a

system of domination that has pervaded all aspects of culture throughout history (Ashton & Whitting, 1987). Patriarchy in radical feminist discourse refers to the common oppression of women without regard to history, culture, class or radical differences. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy can be avoided only through the total withdrawal from the world of men-'separatism'. According to Ashton & Whitting (1987), radical feminists strive for women's autonomy in the areas of sexuality and procreation, particularly in what they call 'forced motherhood' and 'sexual slavery'.

Radical feminist critics argue that the stress on women's status as victims feeds into a false and politically dangerous view of women as essentially good and men as essentially bad. It ignores the fact that many women do have a significant amount of political and economic power and that many men are oppressed, and it falsely attributes virtues to women and vices to men despite innumerable examples of aggressive women and caring men (Bryson, 1999). This, according to Bryson, produces a false view of men as 'the enemy' suggesting that they cannot be trusted as fathers, friends, sexual partners of political allies; lesbian separatism therefore becomes the only feasible option for feminists both as a political strategy and as a life-style choice.

As can be seen in the discussions above, the feminist claim that women should have the same rights and freedom as men has been raised mainly in western societies. Although many of the theories discussed here complement each other, they also oppose each other, for example the demands for individual rights and for more collectivist and/or contextualised approaches. Some African women scholars were not happy with these theories which prompted them to come up with alternative theories as discussed below.

2.4 An Overview of African Feminist Discourse

In recent times, there has been vigorous development in feminist and gender discourses and studies not only in Africa but also all over the world. The revaluation of the role of

patriarchy in the oppression of women, debates about advancements in the areas of women empowerment and liberation and the positive reconstruction of women-centered ideologies have never been more pronounced than they are today. Feminism has become a buzzword gathering not only female but also male propagators. Although, contemporary feminism as we know it today developed in the women's movement for equality in the 1960s, it has a longer history and can be dated as far back as the eighteenth century most clearly with Mary Wollstonecraft's "A vindication for the rights of women" (1792). However, the concise beginning of feminism as a practical movement was marked by the struggle for universal women's suffrage, which was started in the United Kingdom and the United States but was first achieved in the United Kingdom in 1928, giving women a right to vote. The 19605 through to the 19805 marked the period of the second wave of feminism, followed by the third wave, also referred to as neo or contemporary feminism that sprang up in the 1980s up to the present. Interestingly, the radical climate of the 1960s gave rise to an explosion of women's movements with diverse ideological stands and strands, with women all over the world beginning to demand vigorously for equal rights in every sphere of human endeavour. Consequently, the feminist thinking soon found its way into the literary scene in the form of feminist theory and criticism.

Bell Hooks (1984:26) aptly and most precisely defines feminism as "the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives". However, there are different adherents to the ideology and each one adopts diverse modes of advocacy. This means that feminism is a constantly evolving concept with multi-lateral interpretations and with as diverse definitions as its followers and branches, because of this, feminism defies being categorised as a monolithic ideology. Feminism is a collection of heterogeneous,

sometimes competing and opposing social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies. Therefore, there is no universal definition to which all feminists ascribe. Nonetheless, all strands of feminism are motivated by the experiences of women, especially concerning their social, political, and economic inequalities. Another encompassing definition of the concept has been adopted to throw light on the heterogeneous nature of the ideology. Evwierhorna (2002:41) provides the definition and indicates that in theory and practice

> the new feminism consists of several linked movements: radical feminism, which sees men's oppression of women as a central historical event; bourgeois feminism. which seeks to eliminate sexual discrimination and sex roles, cultural feminism, which hopes embody a special, enhancing female sensibility, Marxist feminism, which integrates economic and social class and feminist analysis, black feminism which organizes the woman to often act out; lesbian feminism, which finds central bonds between women However, they all share a special balancing of politics and culture.

In spite of the broad scope adopted in the above definition of feminism, it still does not include many variants of the movement, pertinently, developments in African feminism may be elided by this kind of definition, even if there certainly are interfaces between African feminism and the definition such as the advocacy against sexual discrimination and for the holistic female empowerment in social, political, and cultural spheres of human endeavour. Similar to its western counterpart, there is no specific designating philosophy expressing what African feminism is, as it is fraught with pluralities and multiplicities. Instead, African feminism refers to a set of thoughts, actions, and arguments aimed at changing the patriarchal power relations in Africa especially as it relates to the suppression and relegation of women within the social structuring of the African society that is in the collective interest of men. However, African feminist discourse does not ascribe to the tenets of various western feminisms. They believe women have racial, social, cultural, geographical, political, religious, and economic differences, which place a diversity of priorities that further widens the chasm between them as distinctive groups. This

ambivalent attitude towards feminism especially among Black American women necessitated the adoption of the term 'womanism ' with Alice Walker as the proponent.

According to Walker (1983: xi-xii), a womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour:

> who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non- sexually, and is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist [she] loves herself. Regardless; womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

Although tailored specifically for women of African descent, Walker's womanism has been rejected by some feminists who argue that Walker promotes lesbianism as a trait to be applauded by women of colour. These arguments for and against Walker's womanism gave rise to the emergence of' Africana womanism. The exponent of the ideology, Clenora Hudson-Weems, who uses the word Africana to identify women of various ethnicities with an African ancestry, feels that western feminists ignore the specificity of Africana women's problems and speak in the name of all women without being sufficiently informed about the different situations and problems of women other than the white middle-class woman. Hudson- Weems therefore conceives Africana womanism as:

> Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana Womanism is not Black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture. and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women l ... The primary goal of Africana women, then, is to create their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action (Hudson-Weems, 1993:24).

Besides the main characteristic of family centeredness, Hudson-Weems further delineates the eighteen key features of an Africana womanist as one who is a "self-namer and a self-definer, family centred, genuine in sisterhood, strong, in concert with male in struggle, whole, authentic, a flexible role-player, respected, recognized, spiritual, male

compatible, respectful of elders, adaptable, ambitious, mothering and nurturing" (Hudson-Weems, 1993 :24). Hudson- Weems's Africana womanism is more acceptable to a wider number of African American women in the Diaspora who abhor the lesbian tendencies attached to Walker's earlier concept.

Although Walker and Hudson-Weems conceptualised their ideologies with all black women or women of African descent in mind, African feminists decided to figure out for themselves distinctive self-naming concepts suited especially to the African provenance and socio-cultural context. Therefore it was no longer possible to overlook the relevance of an indigenous African feminist consciousness and conscientisation. Speaking about the exigency of inscribing an authentic African feminist ideology onto the global space, Patricia McFadden asserts that:

> we must become scholars and intellectuals in our right. That is the cutting edge. We must bring African traditions of thinking and problem solving to the Global Women's Movement and participate in the formulation of new theories and methodologies. We are bright and intelligent; we must write about ourselves and speak for ourselves. I am sick and tired of being written for and about; let us say it the way we want to say it. Let us know the new theories and contest the production and processing of knowledge. We can no longer be decorations in the Global Women's Movement, the exotica in our beautiful clothes. We must be our own spokespersons and not allow anyone to appropriate our experiences or our voice [...] We have nothing to lose by envisioning and crafting a new future, and we have every reason to want something different for Africa in the 21st century. So whatever we take from the past, let us be very discriminating and take only that which will enable us to shape an agenda, an identity that will reflect new ideals and new traditions (1997:6).

Consequently, with more women that are African venturing into academia and the necessity to create their own voices both at home and in the diaspora, African gender theorists began to search for a name for themselves, their own shades of feminism. This act of indigenising the feminist movement, as Susan Arndt believes, is as "intractable as the dynamism of difference that propels it. Naming feminism is an act (agency) of resistance that sustains its dynamism and expands its horizon [...] Each of these African ways of naming feminism has a fundamental concern, the use of different aspects of

African cultures, historical moments, and current global imperatives to make sense of feminist engagement" (Arndt, 2001: 12).

Despite the need for a continental naming, due to the controversial nature of both western and black (African-American) feminisms, they are considered an anathema to most African men and women. Even notable gender scholars view them with suspicion, rejection, or denigration. Regarding this antagonism towards feminism, Ruthven (1984: 10) observes that for many men "the feminist critique of gender is intellectually disturbing [...] and a source of shame and guilt [...]. Even in its milder forms, feminist discourse strikes men as being accusatory as it is meant to do; and in its most uncompromising manifestations it is unrelentingly intimidatory". However, it is pertinent to note that the opposition against the grounding of the feminist movement in Africa has come from both men and women who view feminism with anxiety. As Arndt succinctly puts it:

> they fear, not without reason, that feminism could challenge and transform existing gender relationships. The men's main concern is that they could lose their privileges. But many women also fear the power that traditional structures guarantee them. Feminism, for example, aims at undermining the power that mothers-in-law wield over their sons' wives. Moreover, many men and women consider it threatening to lose what they have always known and practiced what they have learned to accept as 'normality. Obvious in, feminism like every new political and cultural movement provokes fear in people simply because it is unfamiliar. It is due to these fears that men and women who are uninterested in changing existing gender relationships have developed various lines of argumentation against feminism (Arndt, 2001 :27-28).

These lines of argumentation are manifested mostly in the form of pejorative appellations aimed at gender-sympathetic individuals. For example, while the females are labelled pretentious lesbians, home wreckers, and man-haters, the men are called women-wrappers denoting their lack of masculinity. This derisive attitude towards feminists accounts for the reason why most feminine conscious African men and women writers who clearly pursue feminist ideals through their writings adamantly refuse to be labelled 'feminist', as within the African context the term 'feminism' is misconstrued as western, homosexually-inclined, anti-religious, and anti-men.

Apart from the aforementioned reasons, African feminist scholars partially attribute the repudiation of the universal sisterhood proposed by western feminism to the cultural insularity, myopic stereotyping, and the distorted and presumptuous representation of African women's reality by their western sisters. This separatist phenomenon is what Mohanty terms the "third world difference" (1984:352). Mohanty further elaborates that in these western distortions'

> third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read 'not progressive'), family-oriented (read 'traditional'), legal minors (read 'they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their rights'), illiterate (read 'ignorant'), domestic (read 'backward') and sometimes revolutionary (read 'their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they must-fight! '). This is how the 'third world difference' is produced (1984:352).

African feminists perceive the generalisations imbued in such distorted representations or African women by western feminists as condescending. They argue that African women in their rural traditional settings confront many economic, social, and political challenges which differentiate their status from that of their African or black sisters in the diaspora and further widens the chasm between them and their sisters in the west. For instance, women in many parts of Africa are still grappling with, questioning, and redefining their individual and societal expectations with regard to gender and family roles. This dichotomy is further entrenched by the socio-cultural, economic and political inadequacies that plague the continent. So that while feminists in other parts of the world have already made giant strides towards female empowerment and gender equality in socio-political contexts, a woman in a remote community for instance in Somalia or Nigeria, unlike her sister in the United States, still has to contend with retrogressive patriarchal cultures and traditions, poverty, illiteracy and diseases on a scale of intensity and constraint perhaps not as prevalent there.

For this reason, they are still a long way off from the achievements of their western counterparts and westernised black (African American) sisters in terms of gender

empowerment. As such, the idea of a global sisterhood is elusive and considered inappropriate to all women. Based on all these factors, African scholars both on the continent and in the Diaspora began theorising alternative ideological concepts that reflect knowledge about the intricate condition of African women, thereby formulating nuanced theoretical approaches that shed light on African patriarchal issues, and finding their ways of self-definition, differentiated and informed by lived experiences. This has practically given rise to a variety of African feminist discourses

The concept of African womanism became the first generally accepted strand of feminist ideology among women activists in Africa. In a similar vein with Walker's womanism and Hudson-Weems' African womanism, it advocates complementarity which implies the awareness that neither men nor women can exist in isolation, instead of a confrontational struggle for the equality of the sexes. But unlike Walker's womanism it out rightly shuns any affiliation to lesbianism or sexual bonding between women.

An exponent of this theory, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyerni, accepts that it is an expanded adaptation of western feminism. She defines African womanism as "black centred: unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand" (1988:65) Okonjo Ogunyemi's African womanism is a theoretical approach to fighting the deep-rooted structures of patriarchy in Africa and is all-inclusive as the onus lies not only on men and women but also on children. According to Ogunyemi, an African womanist must incorporate into her philosophy not only her consciousness of sexual issues but also cultural, racial, economic, and political considerations. In addition to Ogunyemi, Kolawole affirms that "any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval of the African woman is an African or Africana womanist" (Kolawole, 1999:34).

Similarly, the Nigerian African womanist, Osita Ezenwanebe suggests that womanism in the African context:

> aims at a general social and cultural transformation. The starting point is not necessarily men. Rather it engages and interrogates culture and sees it as a platform for critical transformation. Womanism opts for an evaluation of men and women that will enthrone complementarity, instead of equality of the sexes. Complementarity implies an awareness that neither men nor women can exist in isolation. While gender peculiarity is accepted (man and woman are not the same), it calls for an urgent redefinition of social roles in the light of the changes in modern society. It is a call for equity and fairness in the relationship of men and women in order to build a society where men and women co- exist in equal dignity, mutual respect and self-actualisation. It is a protest against and the quest for freedom from all forms or social and cultural oppression or African women (2008: 188).

Ezenwanebe's submission summates the entirety of the African womanist ideology as it gives cognisance to the idea of complementarity. Another prominent gender scholar Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie. propounds the concept of 'Stiwanism′ as an individual variant of the African feminist ideology which, she argues, is rooted in the specificity of the African context. Instead of 'feminism' she advocates the word 'Stiwanism ' which is the acronym of "Social Transformation Including Women in Africa' to "deflect energies from constantly having to respond to charges of irritating western feminism and, in this way, conserve those energies, to avoid being distracted from the real issue of the conditions of women in Africa" (1994:229-230). Further expatiating the concept, Ogundipe-Leslie states that "'STIWA' is about the inclusion of African women in the contemporary social and political transformation of Africa" (1994:229-230). Although stiwanisrn negates any connection with western feminism, it ideally speaks about the inclusion of African women into social and political transformative spheres while clearly stating that the intention of African women is not to go to war with men. Ogundipe-Leslie also clarifies the role of men in her theoretical formulation as partners in the quest for social transformation. In summary, her concept is about building a harmonious society and it seeks for the joint responsibility of both men and women to achieve such goals.

In a similar vein of feminist grounding in Africa, Catherine Acholonu proffers her concept of 'motherism' as an 'Afrocentric alternative to feminism', Acholonu posits that motherisrn is the most acceptable term for a feminine conscious African ideology because it integrates the African ideals of womanhood, wifehood, and domesticity. In her conceptualisation of the ideology, Acholouu states that:

> motherism must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages. Whatever Africa's role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from her quintessential position as the Mother Continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African art, African literature (especially women's writing), African culture, African psychology, oral traditions, and empirical philosophy. Motherisrn denotes motherhood, nature, and nurture (1995:3) .

Acholonu rejects western feminist paradigms in their entirety arguing that they encourage African women to reject their traditional roles in the family and concludes that western feminism is "anti-child, anti-nature and anti-culture" (1995: 82). Acholonu ' s concept has not been the favourite of African feminists even if it shares reasonable ligature with the other strands of feminist thinking. The disapproval of motherism has been solely due to her forceful and almost imposing valorisation of motherhood, which most theorists regard as insensitive. Because as much as motherhood and mothering are important to the African way of living, institutionalising motherhood as the fulcrum of a women's movement inadvertently excludes and stigmatises women who for health reasons or by personal choice cannot be mothers.

A more recent variant of feminist theorising on the continent is that propounded by the erudite Professor of Gender Studies, Obioma Nnaemeka. She limns at an indigenously significant African feminism in a concept which she tags Nego- feminism and defines it as follows:

> First, nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation: second, nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of 'give and take/exchange' and 'cope

> with successfully go around' African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with, or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts. For African women, feminism is an act that evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct, a framework. Feminism is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever- shifting local and global exigencies (Nnaemeka, 2003:378).

Like all the previously highlighted African feminist discourses, nego-feminism allows for the praxis of complementarity and inclusion. However, it deviates from the others in its recognition and openness to future mutations and its acceptance of possible dynamism and modulation along with shifting exigencies.

It is important to note that although all the concepts under African feminism bear different names they build on the same principles and hinge on similar nexuses. These commonalities include firstly, the idea of a collaborative synergy of mutual respect, compromise, interdependence gender inclusiveness, and complementarity. Secondly, the positive affirmation of motherhood and the appreciation of family, and thirdly, the conscientious rebuttal of patriarchal structures in various forms of manifestations in African societies, especially those inimical to the advancement of a healthier gender balance. This means that although African feminism is respectful of African culture, in its criticisms of gender relationships it carefully sifts out traditional institutions and practices that are indisputably disadvantageous to women. Some of these retrogressive gender discriminatory cultural practices engaged in across Africa include female genital mutilation, forced brides and underage marriages, exclusion of girls from education and inheritance rights, virginity testing, widowhood practices, breast ironing and sexual ritual cleansing by 'Hyena men(also known as Kusasa fumbi) to mention a few. Finally, all strands of African feminism aim at discussing gender roles in the context of diverse mechanisms of gender oppression such as racism, neo-colonialism, (cultural) imperialism, women's sexual and reproductive rights, socio-economic gender exclusion and

exploitation, political disengagement, religious fundamental ism and extremism, as well as in conflict situations.

Because of these similarities, the term African feminism(s) is used in African literature as an encompassing ideology to represent all the budding strands of feminisms on the African continent, specifically those initiated by women of African origin. These feminisms are practically suited to the needs of African women regardless of class, race, and cultural bias. Boyce Davis formulates the most widely accepted definition of African feminism used in African literary theory and concretises the constellations and ambivalence of the movement when she states that:

> African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to men but it challenges them to be aware of women's subjugation which differs from the subjugation of all African peoples[...] African feminism examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and does not simply import Western women's agendas. Thus, it respects African women's status as mother and wife but questions obligatory motherhood (19868-9).

African feminism therefore aims at destabilising and transforming African gender relations and eventually ameliorating the problems of African women by illuminating and excoriating their causes and highlighting their consequences as being detrimental to the wholeness of humanity. Unlike some strands of the western feminist movement that frown upon marriage and motherhood and measure femininity in terms of bodily aesthetics, in African feminism, marriage and motherhood are considered acceptable so long as they are not imposed on the woman. Similarly, respect and love for both men and women is applauded and implemented as a feminist strategy, because the very principles of African traditional beliefs are built on binary axes. This means that for Africans human existence is fraught with duality which is reflected in nature as in humanity, therefore one gender cannot exist in total isolation from the other, and if they must coexist in harmony there must be complementarity and mutual respect.

Ultimately, African feminists are concerned with identifying new scopes and alternatives through which African women can navigate the inherent patriarchal strictures in such a way as to contribute to overcoming their oppression while maintaining peace and harmony with their gender counterparts. In their modus operandus, most African feminists and womanists deem the radical or militant approach in the opposition of masculine hegemony and patriarchal norms negative' as such an approach would certainly be counterproductive. Rather they posit complementarity as a viable tool for dispelling gender disparity.

The African feminist movement, like all socially based organisations, is prone to evolution and a constant modification of its objectives and goals in accordance to emerging variances in its social context. African feminism is in theory and action characterised by its fluidity. It is a progressively evolving ideological body fully committed in all its shades and forms to the intellectual, social, economic, and political advancement of African women while retaining the nucleuses of family and community centeredness. It believes in the binary fusion of the sexes wherein they are interdependent on and complement each other. African feminism strives towards and encourages a symbiotic and complementary relationship between the genders.

In this context therefore, Farah is considered as an African feminist whose obvious centrality in his work is the suffering of women in his homeland – Somalia, and the intimate connection between the dynamics of power in the family and the state. By deploying insights from feminism, the researcher explicates the salient features of Farah's novels especially with regards to how the feminists' point of view relate to the following:

- The status of women in Somalia.
- The role of both patriarchy and power in the subjugation of women.
- Females' reaction to the patriarchal programming.

- Effect of patriarchal domination on women especially female genital mutilation.

2.5 Literature Review

Farah's many voices have produced many readings and there are as many Farah's as there are readers. As Alden and Tremaine (1998:23) remark, Farah:

> becomes many different kinds of writer, depending on the reader and the context in which he is read. There is Farah the feminist . . ., Farah the innovative prose-poet and stylist, Farah the social scientists, Farah the committed activist, Farah the paradoxical postmodernist and so forth.

Since Farah's novels are situated at the nexus of so wide and varied a range of issues, critical approaches to his works have been legion. One thematic focus is on the representation of women in the novels (Okonkwo, 1992; Alden &Tremain, 2002 and Stratton, 2002). Attention has also been paid to Farah as an explicitly political writer, dissecting colonisation, postcolonial dictatorship and civil war (Gugler, 1998; Mnthali, 2002; Ntalindwa, 1999; Pajahich, 2002; Turfan, 2002 and Wright, 2004). The representation of Somali culture, religion and morality in the novels has also been a focus of attention (Hawley, 2002; Mazrui, 1996; Phillips, 2002; Samatar, 2000 and Sparrow, 1989). A very important thematic concern has been the novelist's critique of nationalism (Cobham, 1992; Garuba, 2008; Ngaboh-Smart, 2002 and Ntalindwa, 1997). The re-imaging of extended and nuclear family structures has also been considered (Bardolph, 1998 & Alidou, 2002). Questions of form, in particular, the use of the techniques of modernism and postmodernism in Farah's works have been addressed by various critics (Gikandi, 2002; Sugnet, 1998 and Wright, 2002). His novels have also been approached from the perspective of genre studies. Adam (1984), for example, considers the affinity of Farah's novels to the detective stories.

Wright (1994) emphasises the postcolonial aspects of Farah's novels. He draws attention to the multicultural aspects of the work by concentrating on issues of nationality, gender, colonialism, and political and social developments in Somalia. Wright's insightful

essay *Fathers and Sons*, for example, argues that *Sweet and Sour Milk* exposes ways that the traditionally patriarchal structures of family, buttressed by the religious authority of Islam and further strengthened by the boundary-forming structures of clan, are intricately complicit with the larger, more powerful authority of the modern police state. One of the most obvious and most often examined themes in this novel is the relationship of the family and the dictatorship. The domestic and the national become the two most important realms of patriarchy in this novel, the former often justifying and reinforcing the latter. As Keynaan reminds his son:

> I am the father, it is my prerogative to give life and death as I find fit. I've chosen to breathe life into Soyaan. And remember one thing, Loyaan; if I decide this minute to cut you into two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power. I am the Grand patriarch". (Farah, 1992:94).

And, to make the connection between the domestic and the national even more obvious, Farah begins section two of the novel with this epigraph by Wilhelm Reich:

> In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power". (Farah, 1992:95)

Wright (1990), further points out that Farah does not see traditional values as an effective counter to the tyranny and corruption of postcolonial Somalia:

> On the contrary, he sees the traditional forms as being implicated in the new terror. For him the General represents something authentic. He answers some fundamental need in Somali life. Despotism by a tribal oligarchy is but the family's patriarchal authoritarianism writ large (Wright, 1990:).

Clearly then, Farah sees the structures of patriarchy as intimately connected to the forms of power that grant nations their sovereignty. In another body of work on Farah written by Derek Wright (2004), titled *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah*, Wright examines the thematic and stylistic contributions that this venerable writer has made to the world of literature. Another critic Michael Eldridge commenting on Wright's output in *Africa Today* (2005), states that:

> A scholar's scholar, Wright is unapologetically old-fashioned: his study is intended as an introductory overview of Farah's fiction, and for the most part he has sidestepped "more arcane and recondite critical territory" for dense but lucid close readings focusing on theme, symbol, and narrative technique. Wright has always taken care to situate Farah's work within its appropriate cultural and political contexts, however, which contexts he deftly and sensitively adumbrates in an introductory chapter. He is at pains to emphasise that in Farah's often elusive texts – grounded equally in Somali oratory, Arabic classicism, and European modernism, and influenced by such diverse contemporaries as Burges, Grass, and Rushdie – "the ancient and the postmodern join hands". Indeed, Wright nimbly surveys Farah's full stylistic range, from the "Unadorned" prose of his debut, *From a Crooked Rib*, to the highly wrought figures, convoluted narratives, and cryptic themes of his more mature works. Often, he observes, Farah playfully mixes his stylistic palette. *Sweet and Sour Milk* for example, is a "convolution of detective novel, political thriller, and nouveau roman", passed through the filler of a surrealist poetics".

Michael Eldridge looks at how Derek Wright analyses the various components of Farah's novelistic repertoire. This study pushes the critical interest on Farah's novels beyond this shore to illuminate the thematic presentation of women within the Somali cultural and political contexts. Some scholars have also explored Farah's interventions into the larger concerns of African literature and postcolonial theory. For example, when Farah won the 1998 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, *World Literature Today* devoted an entire volume to Farah's work, including Simon Gikandi's essay "Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality", in which Gikandi (1998), points to an important feature of Farah's literature:

> If it has taken long for Farah to be recognised as an important modern writer, this is perhaps because his novels seem to want to perform an impossible task: that of bringing the tradition of nationalist literature into a productive confrontation with the art of postcolonial failure. While the careers of other major African novelists – most notably Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo – have been defined by an explicit movement away from the ideologies of cultural nationalism to a radical critique of the postcolonial state, Farah's works are unique in their contemporaneous representation of both positions. In Farah's early novels in particular, the mapping, endorsement, and critique of nationalism is represented against the background of postcolonial decay and the Utopian possibilities held up both by the Somali poetic tradition and a modern culture. In these works, terms such as modern and tradition, which have been the central paradigms in some of the most powerful commentaries on African literature, are constantly blurred and deauthorised.

This study however attempts at bringing out the clash between the modern and the traditional within the Somali context as depicted in Farah's selected novels, while at the same time bringing out the failure of the postcolonial state.

The feminist aspects of Farah's works are examined by Florence Stratton in "The Novels of Nuruddin Farah" and by Kirsten Holst Petersen in "The personal and the political: The case of Nuruddin Farah" (Petersen, 1981). Stratton (2002), shows the interconnections between the powers of the state and religion to control women's lives. She illustrates how Farah uses the complexities of the traditional family as an image of state control. Stratton concludes her article by focusing on the subversive alternatives provided by Farah and his emphasis on education. Petersen (1981), on the other hand, draws attention to the ways in which Farah is different from other African writers in how he deals with questions of the "personal and the political", a term coined by activist Carol Hamisch, that saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inexplicably linked and that encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives on deeply politicised and reflective of sexist power structures. She claims that he is probably the first feminist writer of Africa as "he describes and analyses women as victims of male subjugation". Farah, in a 1983 interview, underscores the consequence of not treating women as equal partners: "We have to be aware of the opportunities that we lose by not using women to their full, for their contribution to the general welfare of humankind" (Farah, 2012).

Moola (2012), examines Farah's writing within the framework of Somali society and culture, Islamic traditions and political contexts, all of which are central themes in his work. She also addresses Farah's engagement with women's lives – his female characters and identities being at the heart of, rather than peripheral, to his stories – something that has distinguished him from many other male African writers. Accordingly, Larson (2014), opines that what has been so extraordinary about Farah's fiction from the very beginning

is the central place he has given women. According to Larson, Farah is in fact, one of his continent's major feminists. Though the continent has produced few important female writers, the male writers, have explored the masculine world often ignoring female characters in their novels. Many of the early African novels had little to do with male-female relationships, concerned as they were with broader issues of colonialism and liberation. Okonkwo (1984) is another critic who has put Farah's beliefs into proper perspectives: "Farah's championing of the cause of women is part of his crusade against tyranny and victimisation not just of women, but of all who are denied their legitimate rights – social and political, private and public".

The work of Nuruddin Farah is explored by Hema Chari (1998), who states that Farah "perceives and criticise the horrors of oppression and celebrates the libratory goals of African nationalism by decrying the hypocrisy and vacuity of a political freedom that allows the ongoing oppression of women". Farah is dealing with a postcolonial reality fissured by a colonial legacy and oppressive neo-colonial dictators. Farah measures the struggles of Somali culture to come to terms with lost past and difficult presents.

As critics have noted, Nuruddin Farah's trilogy "Variations on the Theme of African Dictatorship" represents the patriarchal structure of the family as reinforcing the power of Somalia's governmental regime under General Siyad Barre. Certainly, traditional gender roles positions the father/husband as the unqualified head of the family and his children/wives as powerless and therefore submissive of a dictatorship, which situates one omniscient and all powerful man above a citizenry at the mercy of his dictates and their often violent enforcement. Powel (2010), claim that Nuruddin Farah also portrays motherhood, both as a familial position and a conceptual framework, as playing a crucial role in the maintenance of the General's regime.

John Masterson, in his book *The Disorder of Things: A Foucauldian Approach to the Work of Nuruddin Farah*, offers a reading of the Somali novelist through the prism of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Masterson (2013), argues that the preoccupation that have remained central throughout Farah's career, including political autocracy, female infibulations, border conflicts, international aid and development, civil war, transnational migration and the horn of Africa's place in a so-called axis of evil; can be mapped onto some key concerns in Foucault's writing notably Foucault's theoretical turn from 'disciplinary' to 'biological' power. Masterson sees Somalia in both the colonial past and the postcolonial present, as typically represented as an incubator of disorder; whether in relation to internecine conflict, international terrorism or contemporary privacy. Throughout his works, Farah strives to present alternative stories to an expanding global readership and *The Disorder of Things* analysis the politics and poetics that underpin this literary project.

Dasenbrock (2007), in "Nuruddin Farah: A Tale of Two Trilogies", sees Farah as a writer of cosmopolitan modernism, a writer who seek to "fly by" the nets of nationalism and ethnic particularism which has done so much damage to his own people. He sees Farah as an artist who retained a primary commitment to depicting a particular culture and place, contending that it is Farah's good luck that he was born in a country like Somalia which has experienced all the travails of the commitment to a vision of the nation as a singular identity, therefore, to read his fiction is to have one's world become a more capacious place. As many critics have pointed out the importance of Farah's perception of the traditional Somali family as one of the fundamental sources of authoritarianism in Somalia, Dasenbrock again sees Farah's intense preoccupation with the Somali family as a necessary and logical extension of his interest in the Somali political structure because "the politics of the nation are the politics of the family, and an authoritarian state depends

upon a nation of authoritarian families". The patriarchal family, with its omnipotent ruler, is the instrument that generates subjects accustomed to subjugation who will unquestionably accept the power of the state.

Individualisation in the Novels of Nuruddin Farah, a Ph.D dissertation by Fatima Fiona Moola (2009), asserts that the subject conceived as "individual" is a sustained focus across the novels of Nuruddin Farah. The thesis locates a reading of individualism in Farah's novels in the context of the historical and philosophical development of modern identity in the societies of the North Atlantic. The novel appears to be the most significant cultural form which mutually constitutes modern subjectivity. This is suggested by the centrality of the *Bildungsroman*, a sub-genre which fundamentally determines the form of the novel. Farah's work spans the historical development of the novel from the proto-realism of his first publication, through modernism and postmodernism, returning to the 'neo-realism of his most recent novel. According to Moola, tension is generated between the social commitment Farah expresses as a writer and the limitations of the form which deny representation to the heteronomous subjectivities that are the objects of Farah's concern.

In Betty Joan Oliver's M.A. thesis titled *Patriarchy and Power: The Political Susceptibility of Islam in the Writing of Nuruddin Farah, with Particular Regard to the Position of Women,* Oliver discussed the manner in which the ruling military dictatorship in control of Somalia manipulated the Islamic tradition of Somalia not only to subjugate women, but to bring the entire nation under its tyranny. The position of Somali women is but one manifestation of this oppressive regime which curtails all liberty and obliterates all criticism. The General's ability to pervert Islamic truths, elevating himself to a parody of the God he purports to worship, is compared with the teachings of the Qur'an in Farah's three novels which form his trilogy, "*Variations on the Theme of African Dictatorship"*.

This study compares the treatment of women at the patriarchal family level with that of the state bringing out the effects of this treatments on women.

While Mixon, Gloria Ann in *The social and political status of women in the novels of Nuruddin Farah*, another Ph.D dissertation contends that changes in the status of women in Somalia are related to changing forces in Somali religion, politics and economics, showing that Farah is justly called a feminist because of his sympathetic treatment of issues raised in African feminism, such as female genital mutilation, forced/arranged marriage etc. This study shows the implications of these changes on women due to the changing forces of religion, and culture.

Writing in *College Literature*, (Summer, 2010) Ines Mzali looks at a stylistic feature that Farah employs in one of his latest works, *Links*, titled, "Wars of Representation: Metonymy and Farah's *Links*". The paper focuses on how the author disavows the West's representation of his war tone motherland in its media. This he does through the use of metonymy where the reality of violence is obstructed from the audience with the view of showing the development of its and the impact it has on the people, something which Farah finds amiss in the media in the West. Mzali (1998), states:

> The title of the novel suggests metonymy as a meta-narrative strategy. More than a theme, the noun "links" becomes a trope almost as pervasive in the novel as violence in Mogadishu. Commenting on Farah's narrative style, Alden and Tremarne notice that he uses "special forms of narrative, which are named in the titles of the three novels: Maps, Gifts, and Secrets. These special narrative modes serve at the same time as metaphors for the equivocal nature of the power of all narratives of self-invention". The title of *Links* similarly enunciates the main trope in the novel. Not only do "links" in the title and in the novel signal a connectedness between different points or links in a chain, but they also imply the delay of meaning and action from one to the other.

The title functions metaphorically as a signal of the movement of violence in the Somali society depicted in the novel and contain both principles of displacement and contiguity. Mzali looks at Farah's strategy of narrating his homeland through metonymic representation. This study has helped this research in the sense that the traditional

patriarch in the form of the father at the family level stands as a representation of the Grand patriarch at the State level in the form of the General.

Furthermore, in the critical write-up titled "the Performance of Madness as Resistance in Nuruddin Farah's *Close Sesame"* which appeared on *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, October, 2015, Colson Roberts analyses how Farah represents the spirit of resistance through the trope of madness. Roberts opines that madness is:

> . . . a performance of resistance against the Somali dictatorship of Mohammed Siyad Barre . . . Farah presents madness as a performance rather than a manifestation of mental illness in order to protect those who speak and act out against tyranny as well as their associates and families. The novel's presentation of these counter-hegemonic performances has implications for the study of narrative representation of dictatorship in Africa as well as for understanding the linkage between the colonial and neo-colonial disciplinary attitudes toward resistance fighters in East Africa.

This work contributes to this research by showing how Farah affirms the argument that anybody who goes against the General, works alone, and anybody who works alone and is isolated from the nation's popular view of the General as God-like is considered a madman. This work by Roberts tells of the theme of resistance to tyranny and is very closely related to this research which looks at resistance by female characters to male hegemony in patriarchal Somali society.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO OF A KIND: SOMALIA THE COUNTRY, AND NURUDDIN FARAH IT'S WRITER

3.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the biographical sketch of Farah. The overview of Somalia, the land, its people and its culture provides a background for understanding the novels of Farah which have their setting in this country, as well as preparing the way for the extensive analysis of Farah's works which is the focus of this study. Being predominantly a Muslim community, the influence of Islam and Somali customary laws on women is provided. Attempt is also made to look at Islam and secularism along with the influence of secularism on the people of Somalia as shown in the work of Farah. This is necessary because of the transition observed in Farah's work which moves from traditional/domestic issues to wider national/political issues found in the novels selected for this study.

3.1 A Biographical Sketch of Nuruddin Farah

Nuruddin Farah was born in Baidoa in 1945, a city in Italian Somaliland, which was under the control of Britain at that time. His family moved to Ethiopia, where he had his primary education. Other than his mother tongue Somali, he spoke Arabic and Amharic, the official Ethiopian language, English, and Italian. Farah worked for the Somalia department of Education, and subsequently left for India. In 1963, three years after Somalia's independence, Farah was forced to flee the Ogaden following serious border conflicts. For several years thereafter, he pursued a degree in philosophy, literature and sociology at Punjab University in Chandigarh, India. After releasing an early short story in his native Somali language, Farah shifted to writing in English while still attending university in India where he wrote his first novel *From A Crooked Rib* (1970). This book later appeared in Heinemann's African Writers' series. In the mid-1970s, Farah

moved to England to study theatre. Upon the publication of *A Naked Needle* in 1976, he was banned in Somalia by Siyad Barre's regime.

He had not gone back to Somalia for twenty two years. In the meantime, he taught in the United States, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Sudan, India and Nigeria. In 1990, he received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service and moved to Berlin. In 1996, he visited Somalia for the first time in more than twenty years. In 1998, Farah moved to Cape Town, South Africa where he lives with his wife and children. His trilogies of novels *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship* (1980-1983) and *Blood in the Sun* (1986-1999) form the core of his work. In the year 2000, he wrote his well-known non-fiction "Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora". One of his latest novels *Links* was published in South Africa in June of 2003 and was released in the USA a year after. He published *Knots* in 2007. Farah's prose has earned him the Premio Cavour in Italy, the Kurt Tucholsky Prize in Sweden, the Lettre Ulysses Award in Berlin, and the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1998. He won the St. Malo Literature Festival's prize in the same year with the French edition of his novel *Gifts*.

3.2 Overview of Somalia

Somalia, situated in the Horn of Africa, stands at the crossroads between Africa and the Near East and lies within a region of great cultural diversity. Arnold (1986:156) observes that:

> Somalis have a rich tradition of verbal and visual arts, which reflect both specific regional and shared forms and ideologies that are spread through the agency of Islam and long standing trade networks. Since antiquity, Somalia has maintained commercial and cultural relationships with North Africa and the Arab Peninsula. From 3100 to 350 B.C. Egypt imported frankincense and myrrh from the north eastern region of Somalia, the biblical 'Land of Print: Pre-Islamic Arabs and Persians founded trading entreports at Zeila on the Gulf of Aden and Mogadishu on the east coast. In the seventh century, Islamised Arabs strengthened these trading centres and introduced Islam to Somalia. Al Yaqubi, an Arab geographer writing in the ninth century, mentions both Zeila and Mogadishu as important commercial cities. These centres exported ivory, hides, aromatic gums, slaves,

> spices and cattle from the hinterlands and imported redistributed textiles, metals, pepper, tobacco, coffee, sugar, and manufactured goods.

The language which is most widely spoken is Somali (for which a script was officially adopted only in January, 1973). English and Italian are used in official documents and some newspapers. Arabic is the second official language and is spoken also by vast majority of the people. It is taught as a subject in government schools and is the medium of instruction in Muslim schools. Somali is officially an Islamic State; most nationals are Sunni Muslims. This accounts for the widespread use of Arabic in the country.

One of the country's most outstanding characteristics is its homogeneity. Although physical features, language and religion may characterise the Somali as a distinct ethnic group, it is their cultural qualities that mostly distinguish them as a people or a nation set apart. Cahill (1980:16) makes this observation regarding the cultural qualities that distinguish the Somali people:

> . . . more than seventy-five percent of the Somali people are pastoral nomads who migrate endlessly with their herds around the horn in search of pasture and water. This unrelenting struggle for survival against overwhelming physical challenges has bred, and is reflected in, an intensely proud and individualistic people. They can offer as desert folk are wont to do – generous and gentle hospitality to the stranger while showing, obviously, the qualities of toughness, shrewdness and fatalism that make survival possible in [such] an environment.

According to I.M. Lewis (1962:62),

> Few writers have failed to notice the formidable pride of the Somali nomad, his extraordinary sense of superiority as an individual, and his firm conviction that he is sole master of his actions and subject to no authority except that of God.

The almost universal sense of Somali nobility is thought to be closely related to the people's unbounded pride in their Somaliness. For as long as anyone can determine a strong individualism has been characteristic of the Somali. In Laitin (1977:102),

> . . . Richard Burton in 1854, while planning an expedition through Somaliland, then considered to be 'the most dangerous (country) in Africa,' was the first westerner to remark on this aspect of Somali character. Burton himself was not without pride, and claimed to be taking the *first footsteps in East Africa*. He was

> nonetheless quick to note Somali pride when he first organised his Somali staff. He remarked on their accepting almost any job without feeling a sense of inferiority, perhaps because they believe that they are superior to everyone else. What was true in Burton's time is true today. Margaret Lawrence, a Canadian and the wife of a British engineer sent to Somali in 1950s to work on a water basin project, was impressed with Somali self assurance. Anxious to avoid being a neo-colonialist herself, she was concerned that her houseboy, Maxamad, was showing too much difference. But she too soon realised 'I need not have worried, for he was not humble in that detestable way, nor was any Somali I ever met'.

There is a lack of any authority roles in traditional Somali society; in no realm are certain people more legitimate spokesmen than others. This is reflected in the Somali language, where there are few honorific titles and no words for 'Mr.' or 'Mrs.' or 'Sir': Laitin (1977) found out that "everyone from the nomadic child to the president of the Republic is called by his first name, often by a childhood nickname".

Nevertheless, while it is said that Somalis consider themselves all equal at a high level of nobility, certain groups such as the midgaans, yibirs, tumaals, labash, and women are left out of this egalitarian system. The midgaans, yibirs and tumaals are excluded from total participation in Somali society because they are considered half-castes and are by Somali myth, unclean. These groups physically resemble the Somalis, but their ethnic origin is uncertain. Other small group of people who are left out of the egalitarian Somali society are called habash. These groups differ culturally and physically from the Somalis. According to Nelson (1982:56):

> Some are descendants of pre-Somali inhabitants of the area who were able to resist absorption by the Somalis. The ancestors of others were slaves who escaped to find their own communities or were freed in the course of European antislavery activity in the nineteenth century.

The habash are clearly distinguishable by their dark skin, flat nose, and 'hard' hair. Somalis and habash do not intermarry nor will a Somali eat a meal prepared by a habash. All of these groups are excluded from full participation in Somali society because of their cast.

Somalis are basically a nation of nomads with a long pastoral tradition which seems to shape their character, making them proud, independent, resilient people. Not only are they justly called a 'nation of nomads', they are also called a 'nation of Bards'. Samater (1982), in appreciating the language and culture of the pastoral Somalis explains the preeminent, sometimes sinister role which poetry plays in Somali life and thought. He contrasts this role with that of poetry in the Western world:

> . . . in the industrialised West, poetry . . . and especially what is regarded as serious poetry . . . seems to be increasingly relegated to a marginal place in society, Somali oral verse is central to Somali life, involved as it is in the intimate workings of people's lives. Indeed, the one feature which unfailingly emerges even from a casual observation of Somali society is the remarkable influence of the poetic in the Somali cultural and political scene. The Somalis are often described as a 'nation of bards' whose poetic heritage is a living force intimately connected with the vicissitudes of everyday life (Samater, 1982:132).

Poetry, for the Somali, is 'not a casual affair; it is woven into the very fabric of Somali life. Samater (1982:138) clarifies on what makes poetry such a pervasive force in Somali society:

> . . . Somali pastoral verse is a living art affecting almost every aspect of life. Its functions are versatile, but also with questions of social significance. It illuminates culture, society and history. In addition to its value as the literary and aesthetic embodiment of the community, Somali poetry is a principal medium of mass communication, playing a role similar to that of the press and television in Western societies. Somali poets thus like Western journalists and newsmen, have a great deal to say about politics and the acquisition of political power. Because it is the language and the vehicles of politics, the verse that Somali poets produce is an important source of Somali history, just as the printed and televised word performs a similar function in the West.

Therefore, a verbal facility is highly valued in this society where until the early 1970s comparatively few people could read and write. Kaplan (1977:48) observes:

> Children are early trained with riddles and tongue twister to attain good diction, and intelligence is judged by alertness and skill in the use of words. A potential father-in-law questioning a suitor will judge his capability by the alertness and appropriateness of his responses to seemingly innocent catch-questions.

Not only does the art of negotiation in interpersonal matters require the careful and effective use of language, but the same traits are demanded of negotiations in diplomatic and political relations. Kaplan again states that:

> . . . because pride is very important in Somali society, a blunt request or a blunt refusal that might lead to a loss of face by either party is avoided. For example, a man wishing for another's cooperation in a project and not desiring to make an issue of it that might cause ill feelings will approach the subject indirectly to discover the others probable attitude. If it is unfavourable, he may refrain from asking the favour in order to avoid a direct rejection. The other, in trying to sound out the first man's object, will attempt to reply in such a way as to give the correct impression. All serious negotiations are carried out in this manner, including marriage proposals. The art of negotiation has developed in a form of etiquette, Europeans, accustomed to speaking more directly, are often considered crude. Negotiating skilfully has to some extent developed into an art form (Kaplan, (1977:120).

From what has been said regarding the land and the Somali people, it readily can be appreciated that the administration of a people who traditionally recognise no instituted authority is no easy task. Lewis (1961:62) notes:

> Every adult male has a say in Council, decisions tend always to be made on an adhoc basis, and the principle that might be right is applied critically even to the administrations in their attempts to maintain law and order and to control clan and lineage group strife.

The response of the Somali people to their environment, their fierce pride and their love of country are traits which have earned them the reputation of being 'ungovernable', that is, indomitable. As is typical of the Somali people, in the face of sustained efforts of colonial powers to 'rule' them they remained true to their cultural heritage. Having knowledge of Somalia – the land, its people, and its history enhances one's understanding and appreciation of the novels of Nuruddin Farah, because it is about this country and this culture that he writes so well. Indeed one is able to recognise in some of the situations and characters which Farah portrays certain characteristics of the country and its inhabitants.

3.3 Influence of Islam and the Somali Customary Laws on Women

An examination of Islamic practices in Somalia reveals that many current practices are traditional procedures which over time have become "Islamised". Generally, Somali

belief and practices differed to some extent from that required by Islam. When such a discrepancy exists, customary practice is followed (Loutan, 1977). This is true of the position of women. In Forde (1953:203)

> Women cannot take part in the tribal and section assembly of the elders; a woman cannot obtain redress in the case of insult or injury except through the intervention of the agnatic group to which the woman belongs by birth or marriage; blood compensation is much lower for a woman than for a man, while under the *patriapotestas* a woman cannot own substantial property or marry without her father's consent. Although according to the Mohammedan shafi'ite law, women do not inherit equally with their brothers, among the Majerteen they are said to share equally in the patrimony. Associated with a woman's subordinate structural position are the following customary practices. Neither the birth of a daughter nor the death of a woman is an occasion for ceremony. A husband has the right to enforce his authority by striking his wife with his horse-whip, and this is an essential gesture before the consummation of marriage. When the *rer* is on the move the woman carry the family property on her backs, while their husbands ride on horses if they have them. Women are permitted to eat those portions of slaughtered animals which noble Somali consider impure (haram) and in this, as in other respects, resemble the outcast *sab*. Woman is a poor thing. She understands nothing.

In a sense women are outside the agnatic lineage structure of Somali society. When they appear in social relation involving segmentary groups they do so as clients attached to agnatic units, never directly or *sui juris.* Somalis value clan connection founded on what scholars call 'total genealogy'. The clan system, though cohesive, suppresses women, allowing men to be solid stakeholders in customary clan laws of *Xeer*, which has, intrinsically, a profound implication on the lives of women. The magnitude of *Xeer* – defined here as the contract between neighbouring clans, in the clan institutions of justice is still in practice in many parts of the rural areas. From a gender point of view, the *Xeer* fails to do justice to women. A case in point is its contradictory facts of the decomposition of women in treating them as property. Bryden and Steiner (1998), citing Enrico Cerulli, an authoritative Italian ethnography of Somalia, observed in the southern Somalia during the early decades of the twentieth century that women do not 'exist as independent legal person; she is always under the jurisdiction of others'. It was traditionally a common practice to observe women being used as gifts. A girl from a family convicted of a crime is

forced to marry a member of the aggrieved clan as compensation. In other cases involving rape, the claimant is obliged to marry the perpetrator to keep her honour and the honour of the family intact.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, states that God created all mankind from a male and female and as all are equal, none is better than another in His sight except through good deeds. Within Islam, women, like men, have moral and religious duties and are viewed as responsible. In the Somali practice of Islam, customary law is given precedence when the two cultures collide. However, when the two are compatible there is no problem. For example, in Somalia, the high value placed on virginity in women at marriage results in the circumcision of girls, which, according to many modern authorities, is contrary to Islamic law. Nevertheless, between the ages of six and eight, girls are infibulated. The aim is to prepare a girl for marriage and to safeguard her virginity until that time:

> Villeneuve in her study "Les Femmes Cousues", divides the sequence of operations which Somali women undergo into three stages: (i) excision of the clitoris and infibulations of the vulva before puberty; (2) the opening made by the husband for intercourse at marriage; and (3) subsequent openings for delivery of the child, after each of which the vulva is again partially closed. The initial operation takes place between the ages of six and eight at a small family ceremony within the hut to which the girl's mother invites female relatives and neighbours, men being rigorously excluded. The ceremony is in no sense a communal rite, and usually only one child is initiated, although sometimes two sisters may be operated on together. The whole operation – excision of the clitoris and infibulations of the vulva – takes about 20 minutes, and is performed at dawn by a midgaan woman. Infibulations, like circumcision, is a mark of adulthood and eligibility for marriage (Loutan, 1977:172).

At the time of marriage and defloration, the woman is thought to be a 'good bride' only if the husband fails to penetrate through sexual intercourse. At this point, husbands have been known to use a knife, a piece of metal or glass to open the infibulated area. Others, after much time has elapsed, have sought privately to have the wife decircumcised. Child-bearing is often difficult for circumcised women. Therefore, Green (1986) explains: they elect to reduce their caloric intake drastically during pregnancy to ensure babies are smaller and thus easier to deliver. The procedure produces babies which are easier to

deliver, but it also produces babies which are less likely to survive than are those of normal weight.

Although circumcision and its consequent health risks are well-known and have been cited as major contributions to maternal mortality in Somalia, little has been done to limit the practice. Here, a woman who is not circumcised is considered unclean and no man will marry her. Not only do women lack control over their bodies in the matter of circumcision, they have little control over their lives. Under Somali customary law and practice a woman is always under the legal protection of a male – her father or husband, or a kinsman of hers in the event of death. In blood compensation, her life is valued as half of the man. In Somali practice, daughters do not ordinarily share in the inheritance of valued property (contrary to Islamic law which details in the Surah "women" the comparatively equitable treatment which must be meted out to women, including the proportion of inheritance due to them which is only half of what the male may inherit).

Traditionally, Somali females marry at an early age and therefore in most cases are precluded from prolonged involvement in education because even with establishment of putative universal primary education, girls do not generally attend school, and if they do, rarely do they go beyond the fourth year . . . that is beyond the age of menstruation (Nelson, 1982). This is because girls are seen to have one function, that of becoming 'good wives', so there is no need of sending them to school. Marriage in the Somali culture is not only a union between a man and a woman, but a union between two clans. These unions are tied to a complex system of marriage payments which, as Lewis (1962) notes, do not legalise the marriage but have other functions.

> . . . *Yarad* is the real bride-price, which is paid to the fiancee's father or the head of her family . . . additional gift, *meher,* made by the groom to the girl's guardian, . . . acts as a deterrent to divorce at the husband's instigation, for it will be forfeited unless he has grounds . . . a present, tusbah among the majerteen, from her spouse as the price of defibulation . . .(Lewis, 1962:109).

The Somalis practice polygamy within the limits of Islamic law, which permits a man to possess up to four wives. Each wife is expected to be treated according to Qur'anic guidelines. When the group is on the move, the loading and unloading of the camels, and the erection and dismantling of the nomadic hut are women's work. In like manner, the management of the sheep and goats which a husband allots to each wife for her own and her children's sustenance is largely in her hands. Here, a married woman is assisted by unmarried daughters and sons too young to be out with the grazing of camels. Although this is essentially women's work, these flocks are the property of their husbands over which the husband have primary rights of possession and disposal (Lewis, 1961). In matters of divorce as in marriage, the initiative and the rights, according to both Islamic and Somali customary laws, belong to men not to women. Thus, according to both Islamic and customary laws as practiced in Somalia, women have limited legal rights. These provide an ideal medium for revolutionary or modernising though. Although it is often found difficult to change centuries of indoctrination and custom, Somali women of Farah are seen to reject the total submission and obedience to the religious and traditional laws imposed on them. This is clearly evidenced in Ebla's emancipation from patriarchy in *From a Crooked Rib* and Medina's rebellion in *Sardines.*

3.4 Religion and Secularism

Secularism is the principle of the separation of government institutions and persons mandated to represent the state from religious institutions and religious dignitaries. One manifestation of secularism is asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from imposition by government of religious practices upon its people. Lewis (2007), opines that another manifestation of secularism is the view that public activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be uninfluenced by religious beliefs and/or practices.

Secularism draws its intellectual roots from Greek and Roman philosophers such as Epicurus and Marcus Aurelius; from enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke, Denis Diderot, Voltaire, Baruch Spinoza, James Machison, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine; Robert Ingersoll and Bertrand Russell. But the term "secularism" was first used by the British writer George Jacob Holyoake in 1851. Holyoake invented the term to describe his views of promoting a social order separate from religions, without actively dismissing or criticising religious beliefs. He defines secularism as:

> . . . a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on considerations purely human, and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable. Its essential principles are three: (1) the improvement of this life by material means, (2) that science is the available providence of man, (3) that it is good to do good. Whether there are other good or not, the good of the present life is good, and it is good to seek that good (retrieved 15, February, 2016. "Secularism, free encyclopaedia)

Holyoake further argued that:

> Secularism is not an argument against Christianity, it is one independent of it. It does not question the pretensions of Christianity; it advances others. Secularism does not say there is no light or guidance elsewhere, but maintains that there is light and guidance in secular truth, whose conditions and sanctions exist independently, and act forever. Secular knowledge is manifestly that kind of knowledge which is founded in life, which related to the conduct of this life, conduces to the welfare of this life, and is capable of being tested by the experience of this life.

In political terms, secularism is a movement towards the separation of religion and government (often termed the separation of church and state). This can refer to reducing ties between government and a state religion, replacing laws based on scripture (such as sharia law) with civil laws, and eliminating discrimination on the basis of religion. Due in part to the belief in the separation of church and state, secularists tend to prefer that politicians make decisions for secular rather than religious reasons. The aspirations of a secular society could be characterised as one which:

1. Refuses to commit itself as a whole to any one view of the nature of the universe and the role of man in it

2. Is not homogeneous, but is pluralistic.

3. Is tolerant. It widens the sphere of private decision-making.

4. While every society must have some common aims, which implies there must be agreement on methods of problem-solving, and a common framework of law, in a secular society these are as limited as possible.

5. Problem-solving is approached rationally, through examination of the facts, while the secular society does not set any overall aim, it helps its members realise their aims.

6. It is a society without any official images. Nor is there a common ideal type of behaviour with universal application.

The positive ideals behind the secular society are that:

1. Deep respect for individuals and small groups of which they are a part.

2. Equality of all people.

3. Each person should be helped to realise their particular excellence.

4. Breaking down of the barriers of class and caste (Munby, 1963).

Since the research is based on a society that is predominantly Muslim, the need to look at the relationship between Islam and secularism from the Muslim perspective is relevant. The concept of secularism was imported along with many of the ideas of post-enlightenment modernity from Europe into the Muslim world, namely Middle East and North Africa. Among Muslim intellectuals, the early debate on secularism centred mainly on the relationship between religion and state, and how this relationship was related to European successes in science, technology and governance. In Islam, the idea of secularism has been claimed to have religious sanctions. The Sahih of Imam Muslim, the second most authentic book on Hadith dating from the 2nd century Hijrah, contains a chapter headed thus: "Whatever the Prophet (S.A.W.) has said in matters of religion must be followed, but this does not apply to worldly affairs": The Hadith is as follows:

> Once Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) came across some people doing artificial pollination on palm trees. Due to some reasons he disliked the idea and commented that it would be better not to do any pollination at all. However, for the following year the harvest was poor. When he came to know about this

> Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) admitted his limitation of knowledge regarding secular affairs and said: "if a question relates to your worldly matters you would know better about it, but if it relates to your religion then to me it belongs".

Commenting on this Hadith, a prominent Indian Muslim scholar Wahiduddin Khan explains in Islam: Creator of the modern age, retrieved 3 March 2016.

> Islam separated religious knowledge from physical knowledge. The source of religious knowledge which came into general acceptance was divine revelation (the authentic version of which is preserved in the form of the Qur'an), while full freedom was given to enquiry into physical phenomena, so that individuals could arrive at their own conclusions independently.

He further says: "According to this Hadith, Islam separates religious matters from scientific research. In religious affairs, there has to be strict adherence to divine guidance. But in scientific research, the work must proceed according to human experience".*("Islam and Secularism – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia")*. This shows that the religion of Islam is not against anything that will foster the growth and development of society, rather, it shows that human dignity also appears to be at the heart of Islamic teaching. It also help to confirm that Islam is a dynamic progressive religion capable of change and compatible with the pillars of modernity (reason, science, and technology). It could be deduced that this ideas laid the foundation of Farah's secular ideas as presented in his writings.

While secularisation is seen to reflect a move away from religion as a dominant source of social mores, Islamists believe that Islam fuses religion and politics, with normative political values determined by the divine texts (Bonney, 2004). It is argued that this has historically been the case and the secularist/modernist efforts at secularising politics are little more than ignorance, infidelity, apostasy and atheism. According to Najjar (1996), those who participated in secular politics were raising the flag of revolt against Allah and his messenger. This is why Saudi scholars denounce secularism as strictly prohibited in Islamic tradition. The Saudi Arabian Directorate of Iftar: preaching and guidance, issued a directive decreeing that whoever believes that there is a guidance more perfect than that of the Prophet, or that someone else's rule is better than His is a

Kafir (Abu-Rabi, 2008). It lists a number of specific tenets which would be regarded as a serious departure from the precepts of Islam, punishable according to Islamic law. For example:

1. The belief that human made laws and constitutions are superior to the Shari'a.
2. The opinion that Islam is limited to one's relation with God, and has nothing to do with the daily affairs of life.
3. To disprove of the application of the *hudud* (legal punishments decreed by God) that they are incompatible in the modern age.
4. And whoever allows what God has prohibited is a *kafir* (Mabruk, 1990).

Thus, having a solid foundation on Islam and secularism, it is pertinent to see the role of colonialism in the development of secularism especially in the Muslim world. When colonial rule was established, the process of secularisation began to expand into Muslim lands. Secularism thus came as the European colonialists dominated the region and supplants rule with their own processes and procedures. According to Esposito (2005),

> Modernisation was seen as a legacy of European colonialism perpetuated by western-oriented elites who imposed and fostered the twin processes of westernisation and secularisation (Esposito, 2005).

Colonial powers in many cases replaced indigenous political, social, economic, legal, and educational institutions. For instance, in many former colonised Middle East countries, *the Kuttub* or the Madrassas (The Qur'anic schools) were moved to the western format. The French colonial government in the protectorates of the Maghreb changed the education system into a secular model closely modelled on their own. The colonialists firmly believed that their secular system was more modern, efficient, and progressive than the incumbent practices. Naturally, these changes had far-reaching social consequences and led the foundation of Arab secularism by separating Islam from government affairs, education and justice.

In consequence, perception of the public, political and social domain through the prism of religion became marginal, and was replaced by a new perception, a perception that was modern, temporal, ideological, ethical, evolutionary and political. This provided a challenge to some governments, which had no choice but to change in the face of overwhelming force. It is from this experience that secularism gained also its perceived foreign identity. These western perceptions which Farah's characters were exposed to provided them with secular orientations that came into constant class with their incumbent practices.

3.5 Secularism and the Works of Nuruddin Farah

As Wright (1994) has noted, one of the central ideas in Farah is the universally accepted 'Islamic ethic of brotherhood or neighbourliness that cuts across tribal divisions'. Farah proposes social equality, monogamy, self-responsibility, democracy and individual freedom as the only model that can lead to a fair society. While values such as these may not today be readily identified as Islamic, for Farah they are not exclusively western as he seeks to show in *Close Sesame*. What he seeks to show especially in *Close Sesame* is, go back to the original ideas of the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), such as consultation (shura), consensus (ijma) and general welfare (maslaha). Indeed the existence of these concepts in the hadith suggests that Muhammads original vision of society was basically democratic. And Farah's writings are regarded as democratic, as having a room, a space for everybody. Attempt is made at providing secular ideas presented in some of Farah's works selected for this study.

From a Crooked Rib (1970) tells a story of women and girls who run away from forced marriages, often to be forced back into these exploitative relationships. In fact, the story was so popular in Somalia because 'everybody knew someone similar to Ebla' (Alden and Tremaine, 2002). It shows Farah's empathy for these young women and his

concern about a system in which, 'Muslim women are chattel'. The story is focalised through a young woman who escapes from two arranged marriages. Ebla, although an illiterate rural woman, sees with clarity her inferior position in these marriages:

> From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers . . . . What makes women so inferior to men? . . . For sure this world is a man's – it is his dominion. It is his and is going to be his as long as women . . . are sold and bought like camels . . . (Farah, 1970:84).

Farah makes it clear that it is a radical and risky act for a woman to challenge social arrangement in Islam. This is because such arrangements are based on religion, and 'women were identified with the "irreligious" realm of sexual passion, as repositories of all "lower" aspects of human nature, the very "anti-study" of "illuminated" sphere of male (religious) knowledge, which is the sole source of religious authority' (Duderija, 2011). Ebla uses her own empirical experience and reasoning to draw her own conclusions that go entirely against the Qur'an, which stipulates that 'men have authority over women' (4:34), sometimes also translated as 'men are the maintainers of women'. This institution of patriarchy, where marriage is not based on equality but rather complementarity, was according to the Qur'an entirely justified, since men maintained women financially. Ebla questions this age old arrangement and demands gender equality and companionship at marriage, which is regarded as an essentially modern idea:

> There is no friendship between a husband and a wife; the husband is a man and the wife is a woman, and naturally they are not equal in status. Friends should be equal before they can become friends. If you despise or look down upon somebody, he cannot be your friend, neither can you be his friend (Farah, 1970:156).

Ebla is presented by Farah as an antithesis to the ideal, pious Muslim woman. Instead of accepting her fate without questioning and obeying the men in her life, Ebla protests and acts according to her own intuitive idea of right and wrong: 'She thought about things and people in her own way. . . . She thought of many things a woman of her background would

never think of. Due to her illiteracy, Ebla has a very limited notion of the teachings of the Qur'an and articulates her own moral path derived entirely from her own reasoning. In this sense, Ebla invalidates the patriarchal notion that women lack the quality of being rational, her 'irrationality' is what set the pace towards her emancipation from patriarchy by fulfilling the positive ideals of secularism such as breaking down the barriers of caste and class and the realisation of individual worth in society.

In *Sardines*, set after the military takeover of the country by the 'Generalissimo' (Siad Barre), Farah shows that a highly repressive and violent Islam is not only a religion of the poor and the semi-literate, but is also attributed to the Somali urban middle-classes. It is embodied by Idil, who sees the equal partnership and secular lifestyle of her son Samater and his wife Medina (such as drinking alcohol or reading European literature) as threatening traditional Somali values. Idil is portrayed as vile, egotistic and devious; at the same time, she is a devout Muslim who considers her faith the backbone of a moral life, as she explains to her son:

> I am the product of a tradition with a given coherence and solidity; you, of confusion and indecision. I have Allah, his prophets and the Islamic saints as my illustrious guides. For you, nothing is sacred, nothing is taboo. You are as inconsistent as your beliefs and principles are incoherent (Farah, 1981:).

Clearly, Idil seeks to command morality and uses intimidation, repression and physical violence to do this. For example, she insists that her eight-year-old granddaughter Ubax be 'purified' with circumcision. Medina's moral orientation, on the other hand, is decisively liberal, secular and feminist. She is against female genital cutting, which symbolises in the novel the Islamic/traditional belief in women's submission to men. In addition, Medina translates works of anti-traditional European literature; she cultivates equal partnership with her husband and her daughter; she is financially independent and not (visibly) religious. Most importantly, she believes in individual responsibility and personal ethics. Medina is thus very different from the ideal Muslim woman characterised in the Qur'an by

modesty, purity, self-denial, piety and dependence (Sura 4, esp. 4:34). In a society where Islam is invoked to lock women into domestic imprisonment, dependence and sexual slavery, the only way for a woman to be free as perceived in Medina's character is to be secular.

Farah does not, however, simply equate Islam with oppression and Western culture with freedom. Just as Islam can be violent, so can modern Western ideologies such as Marxism. The authoritarian power of Siad Barre was based on both the Qur'an and Marxism, a hybrid fusion supposedly possible because of Islam's emphasis on communality and sharing and Barre manipulates both ideologies for his own profit. However, since the novel does not engage with the ideas of Islam nor Marxism, it does not show how to be a believing Muslim in the modern world nor how an Islamic state can promote democracy and social equality.

Set in the time of Barre's police state, Derriye's household in *Close Sesame* is the anti-thesis of state politics based on power, hierarchy, surveillance and terror. The relations in the family are egalitarian and based on love and respect. Deeriye is a widower who insisted on monogamy and equal partnership in marriage. His faithfulness to his late wife Nadiifa is seen by his acquaintances negatively, as foolishness, and his refusal to re-marry after she dies as a perversion. Deeriye refuses to see a wife merely as a reproductive body. His view of women as free, rational and autonomous beings is reflected also in his relationship with his daughter Zainab. Although she is a widow for whom the traditional course would be for her to marry again, Deeriye accepts her decision not to remarry and her independent lifestyle as a physician. In addition, Deeriye believes, against the traditional view that women should participate in politics and be invited to important meetings of the elders, since 'they might make some of these stupid idiots talk less, since

mixed company would most probably have made them feel ashamed of themselves' (Farah, 1992)

At the same time, Deeriye is a traditional Somali Muslim who prays five times a day and spends most of his time listening to Qur'anic litanies and Somali oral poetry on tape. Islam, for Deeriye, appears to be the source of his inner peace: 'Each Qur'anic word creates crests of waves of its own, curiously rich with the wealth of the interpretation the hearer heaped on them: Deeriye's heart danced with delight' (Farah, 1992). For Deeriye, one of the key concepts of Islamic ethics is neighbourliness – taking care of his family, relatives, neighbours and those in need: 'A neighbour, according to Islamic thought, is one's closest and therefore first protector. God is our neighbour. A wife is a man's neighbour. The husband, the wife's (Farah, 1983).

The other Islamic idea central to the novel is justice. In *Close Sesame* the totalitarianism of the General is discussed by Deeriye and his son Mursal as something anti-Islamic and illegitimate. Mursal, whose Ph.D was on 'the political relevance of the Qur'an in an Islamic State', refers to the Prophet's practices and authenticated statements during his rule over the early Islamic *Ummah* (community of believers) in Mecca, which was not autocratic, but based on democratic principles. As Amin Malak (2005) succinctly explains,

> a tyranny that usurps power, terrorises the citizenry, and violates human rights can in no way be called Islamic because it violates social Islam's twin concepts of '*Adl* (justice) and *Rahma*(compassion), with the latter taking precedence when the situation merits . . . open criticism of the ruler is not only tolerated but encouraged . . . Not only is the ruler enjoined in the Qur'an to conduct regular *Shura* (consultation) with the people in matters of collective concern, but the ruler is also obliged to act humanely and transparently.

While Islam appears to be central to Deeriye's identity and subjectivity, represented as a metaphor for justice, tolerance, love, friendship, charity and responsibility, towards the end of the novel, Deeriye admits that he is in religious doubt: 'It is the prerogative of God alone to be sure of anything . . . I am only human. And

therefore I am in doubt' (Farah, 1983). For a devout, traditional Muslim, this could be seen as a serious crisis of faith. As Moola (2014), points out:

> What Deeriye expresses is not the occasional uncertainty to which one is from time to time prone, but rather *doubt as ethical source.* This is, however, a philosophy which cannot easily be construed as Islamic as the Prophetic tradition, more than known to a character like Deeriye, emphasises: 'Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt' (An-Nawawi 52).

As the last sentence reveals, doubt arises in every religion and it is precisely for this reason that doubting is forbidden, as it changes the individual and collective religious identities. The ideal believer does not doubt: for the devout Muslim, the Qur'an is the absolute truth, embodied in the Prophetic example. Deeriye, in contrast, is tortured by doubt.

The novel shows Deeriye as an actively questioning individual, drawing his moral orientation, like Farah's other protagonists, from within himself rather than from Allah. Fiona Moola reaches the same conclusion: 'While in private Deeriye listens to and reads the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet, the ethical code thereby constituted does not, however, inform his moral orientation which draws its source from elsewhere'. Rather than being a traditional Muslim who looks for the answers in the Qur'an, he is an enlightened individual, constantly searching for answers within his own mind.

After the death of his beloved wife Nadiifa, Deeriye engages in conversations not with Allah, but with his dead wife, who appears to him in his dreams as an angel. He realises this might be seen as blasphemous: 'No mortal, not even Nadiifa, should be offered that privilege: only God. But she kept me company, she helped me stay sane, she talked to me when I needed someone to converse with (Farah, 1983). Clearly, for Deeriye, the human presence, rather than God's presence, is the source of comfort, morality and the truth.

The novel introduces religious doubt as an aspect of faith. Since doubt is the first step towards secularisation, Farah seems to be reconceptualising Muslim identity,

attempting to reconcile religious and liberal-humanist worldviews. However, since we never follow Deeriye on his religious meditations, it remains unclear how he reconciles the Qur'anic essentialist view of the world (where the 'truth' is not to be disputed) with his love of freedom and his liberal humanism, or which Qur'anic verses are his moral source. As a result, Deeriye is more of a symbolic figure, embodying Farah's ideal Muslim, rather than a real individual. *Close Sesame,* the novel where Farah comes closest to engaging with Islam, demonstrates a desire for a revised Islam that would reconcile religious devotion with questioning and self-responsibility that defines the modern humanist self, but it does not meditate further on what this might mean for the Muslim religious and cultural identity. Its desire for an idealistic fusion between Muslim ideas of the self based on absolute faith in Allah with the Western humanist self based on reason is not convincingly portrayed, since it never explicitly engages with Islam as a set of ideas. As a result, it offers no answers to the question of whether or how the meaning of Islam must be revised to suit contemporary needs. According to Masterson (2013), morality in Farah is presented as a maze, challenging the reader to navigate through its labyrinthine passages – but it rather seems that his passion for indeterminacy is self-contradictory and self-defeating, creating, as Wright (1994) suggests, a 'massive aporia' in his writing.

Furthermore, by using a foreign language (Farah never wrote or translated any of his works into the Somali language), he has isolated himself from his own culture. In the same manner, the protagonists of the first Trilogy – *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship (Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines, Close Sesame)* are all young, oriented towards European culture and languages, and generally European educated: they speak Italian as well as Somali and converse in Italian as a kind of secret language their children don't understand and as an intellectual lingua franca in which certain concepts are more easily expressed. There is an overlap between their Italian/European frame of reference

and the English language in which the novels are written which identifies Farah with these protagonists as cosmopolitan, multilingual Somalis necessarily at some remove from the *mentalite* of the average Somali. These characters are aware that the languages in which they have been educated give them access to aspects of international culture which would otherwise not have been open to them. Though they identify intensely with Somalis, what these idealistic young Somalis have gained access to separates them from the culture which surrounds them. By becoming revolutionaries, they have become dangerously secular. To assert his point properly, Farah portray characters, especially female characters, who are the worse victimised, as agents of his secular ideas. Because they have lived in many different cosmopolitan cities, they must behave in cosmopolitan ways which are regarded as non-traditional, non-Islamic. Farah, the self-described secular, says that "it would be contradictory for you to live in a cosmopolitan place and not behave in a cosmopolitan manner"

Farah's secular ideals grew out of the need to search for the betterment of women's status in life. What is paramount in his vision is the need for equality and independence from the bondage provided by the tradition and religion which the Somali woman is subjected to. This freedom no doubt succeeds, as the 'modern' Somali woman is now a completely changed person from what used to obtain. In this case, religion is primarily an individual and personal affair, as Farah himself says "God created people differently for different purposes". So each is at liberty to live his own life differently. This is why Farah consciously rebels against or challenges Somali culture and tradition which he sees as the source of inequality and female subjugation. In Farah's novels therefore, the most virulent characters are conservative Muslims who legitimate their actions by invoking the Qur'an, while most of his positive protagonists are western-educated, secularised, cosmopolitan,

intellectuals (just like Farah himself). His characters' behaviours and actions are a welcome progress toward secularisation in Somali society.

3.6 Women and Siyad Barre's Military Rule

Upon the military's ascendancy to power and its subsequent official ideology of 'Scientific Socialism', some social and political changes occurred in Somalia. From the outset, Siad Barre gave women some space to organise themselves for the benefit of his regime compared to other dictatorial contexts in Africa. It is because of this that some Somali feminists described the dictator as the saviour of women. During his reign, a considerable number of women occupied senior public positions and became members of a handpicked pseudo-parliament. However, most women who came to hold positions of power and influence during the period of military rule were mainly related to top ranking military officers either by way of marriage, clan affiliation or clan allegiance, as Alim (2008), recalls.

Opportunities for secondary and higher education were increased for women (Abdinoor, 2007). The military regime offered them academic and military scholarships in overseas countries that came to be an important development, contributing to the women's participation in diverse professions until the collapse of the regime in 1991. Women also played a remarkable role in the army and became officers, although they were not promoted to senior or mid-level positions on par with their male counterparts. Women also served in the National Security Service (NSS), the Somali equivalent of Gestapo, as well as in the secret police. In doing so, they assisted a totalitarian regime bent on oppressing the very society that yearned for regime change.

From the beginning, Siad Barre saw women as an attractive source of legitimising his authority and of consolidating his power. His intention can be summarised as threefold: First, he wanted to enhance his global reputation under the banner of gender

equity; second, his aim was to use women as instruments to mobilise the public for ground support and long-term legitimacy of his regime (Lewis, 2000), third, he intended 'to accelerate the replacement of customary and religious law(s) with secular legal practices' (Bryden and Steiner, 1998). The latter objective was to pave the way for a society based on what he termed 'Scientific Socialism' which the public would later reinterpret as Siadist Socialism (Ingiriis, 2012).

To consolidate power within societal setting and, seemingly, to legitimise a regime that came to power through a non-democratic avenue, the regime 'created and used' the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO) for its own interests. According to one former influential member, members of the SWDO, who had monopoly over women's affairs, were primarily appointed on the basis of clan loyalty to the regime and their organisational politics was heavily shaped by clan sectarianism. It was in fact 'flawed by being part of the controlling apparatus of Mohammed Siad Barre's corrupt and highly-repressive regime' (Gardner and El Bushra, 2004), with the office of the dictator taking direct control (Bryden and Steiner, 1998). Nurta Haji Hassan, who worked for the regime, recalled that women beating drums in praise of the ruling military men led many critics to brand those women as the 'devil's forces'. The point is that supporting the dictatorship further frustrated women's long struggle for finding a political space for themselves. Nurta's observation is mirrored by that of the former regime's Vice Minister who also recounted thus:

> Inept administration, nepotism and political repression became rampant. Many people were summarily arrested and imprisoned indefinitely. But when, in 1982, some loyal and prominent members of the government were arrested and treated in the same manner, without substantiated proof of guilt, people completely lost their faith in the regime. Somali women had filled the orientation centres day and night; and they had crowed the streets of the capital, towns and villages, under rain, dust and burning sun-either to hail some measure adopted by the regime; or to welcome members of the government and visiting foreign dignitaries, by clapping, singing, beating drums and shouting Jaalleyaalow! Soo Dhowaada [Welcome comrades!]. Yet even they gradually stopped coming out (Alim, 2008).

True to Farah, this is clearly observed in the second book of his trilogy, *Sardines.* Probably to reward women for their unwavering support, the regime made matters unwittingly worse by promulgating a controversial decree of the Family Law of 1975, legalising equality of men and women (Baadiyow, 2010). The law contradicted both the Islamic and the customary laws of the Somali society. Surprisingly, the *Xeer*– though disempowering women – was not seen as so controversial as the Family Law. As the law stipulated equality between men and women in some contentious social aspects – i.e. inheritance, marriage, divorce – the unilateral decision by the regime infuriated local Islamic sheikhs, who vehemently opposed it and appealed to the public to object to it. The military regime responded by sentencing to death a group of ten religious intellectuals in January 1975. An incident Farah referred to in his first novel of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk*

> . . . the sheikhs conversed in loud voices across which echoed their unspoken protuberance. Recently ten colleagues of theirs had face a firing-squad (Farah, 1992).

The execution of the ten clergymen by firing squad sent warning signals to the society in general and women in particular that the military regime's attempt was motivated by political aims rather than social transformation and gender justice. It appeared that the military regime intended to test its totalitarian power within societal reflection by attempting to forcefully apply a controversial law as they did in 1970, when they announced that Somalia has become a socialist state whereby state and society were to follow by the principles anchored on Siadist Socialism. Again, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah makes reference thus:

> Turned into Soviet inspired Marxist-Leninist state, a country with a 100 percent Muslim population. In one hand, the Blue Book of the General and Lenin's writings in improvised translations; in the other, the Holy Qur'an (Farah, 1992).

Similarly, the military regime's rhetoric was not matched by the realism of a majority of Somali women (Baadiyow, 2010; Bryden and Steiner, 1998). It was prudent for many women to distance themselves from this law after the demise of the regime in 1991.

In 1978 when an unsuccessful *coup d'etat* endangered the military regime (e.g. Faarax 1990; Ghalib, 1995), it was women, along with his military police, who stood up in defence of the regime, mobilising the public through using the only radio station in the capital – Radio Mogadishu – to mobilise support for the regime. Several women urged the public to back up the military regime, accusing rivals of impairing 'Somali unity', while others physically took up arms and attempted to defend the regime from being toppled. Siad Barre soon promised to reward women for their unequalled loyalty. Understandably, it was during this critical period that he appointed Faduma Alim as Vice Minister, one of the first female cabinet ministers in Siad Barre's military regime. Faduma Alim was affiliated with the military regime by way of marriage and by maternal links; her husband, Ahmed Mohamud Farrah, was vice president under the military regime, while her mother Hawa Jibril was a distant cousin of Siad Barre. This testifies to a fact of Barre's regime. That members of his cabinet are only those belonging to one of the three: his clan, his wife's or his in-laws. This also Farah informed his readers in *Sweet and Sour Milk.* However, even she was never appointed to a full ministerial position. Prior to her nomination, Faduma Omar Hashi, the chair of the SWDO, was the only female figure in the regime. Dissatisfied with the disequilibrium between women's loyalty, with support to the regime, with their marginal representation in the upper decision-making circles of the authority and with the military rulers whom women had considered as 'liberators', Hawa Jibril recorded the moment in a poem she raised such a concern:

> Is it fair to have only two women in our higher political offices? Did women neglect or fail to understand their duties? Are they not yet mature enough to comprehend them? Do they not deserve higher positions and rewards? Or are you

> too hasty, and having second thoughts? Are you not tormented by the injustices they suffer? (Alim, 2008).

Said Barre's rhetoric, not to mention his 'interventionist' attitude to women's movements, did not reflect the reality that Somalia was going through. The country had already been on its way into a profound, all-encompassing crisis due to the legacy of dictatorial practices by his regime wherein chronic corruption and external support from western powers was the life machine that prolonged the rule (Brons, 2001; Ingiriis, 2012). There existed an impression that some of the women groups applauded the military rule because of fear of either having their close kinsman lose a post or categorising the concerned females as reactionaries – a term that could have severe consequences for anyone to whom it was attributed.

It did not take long for women to change sides. For those who resisted the regime's oppression after 1977, when the regime was defeated in its war with Ethiopia, many were women. After being silenced, many women fled from the country and began to compose poems in exile. Few were those who remained and attempted to offer resistance. One of the most notable female singers, Saado Ali Warsame, was among those detained without trial for singing *kacaandiid* (anti-revolutionary) songs: Some of her colleagues such as Halima Khalif Magool, Faduma Abdullahi Maandeeq and Khadra Daher Ige, out of fear of reprisal from the regime, resorted to exile. By the same token, women who associated themselves with the opposition groups turned their most powerful weapon – the *buranbur* – against the very regime for which they had acted earlier as guardians. Maryam Haji Hassan, a poetess and an opponent of the regime, recited a poem in which she explains how women suffered under the military dictatorship upon the aborted coup:

> The committee [Barre's politburo] has let us down. They eliminated the strong and the intelligent. They detain the young as they reach puberty. The process of avenging these wrongs must begin. We must support those preparing to fight (Jama, 1994).

Buraanbur, such as Mayan's, constituted a last resort of resistance for women. However, where colonial and post-colonial governments tolerated the critical voices of women, the Siad Barre regime reacted to arrest as many women as it could. In order to show how his work is a true reflection of events in his motherland, Somalia, Farah also referred to this incident in *Sardines*. We saw how Dulman, who sang praise songs in the name of the General was later imprisoned when she came to realise his heinousness and produced tapes decrying the state. The freedom of associations once enjoyed by women became a thing of the past. If they had a right to raise their voice to express their grievance, women had now to join the armed resistance groups to make their presence felt.

Despite the fact that major changes occurred in the status of women during the era of the dictatorial military regime of Siad Barre, the social status and position of Somali women, lies in between struggle and survival. Indeed, Somali women have struggled and survived in precarious and uncertain circumstances. They seemed as though they became forward-thinking when compared with many other women in post-colonial settings. They nonetheless shared certain characteristics with others, such as the perpetuation of marginalisation in politics. The initial support they provided the Siad Barre regime made their status worsen instead of developing into that for which they had struggled- a testimony in Farah's work of patriarchy at the state level.

Present development however shows gradual changes in the position of women as the Ministry of National Planning and Development (MoNPD) has developed, for the first time, a five year National Development Plan (2012-2016), which includes the need to:-

- Eliminate gender inequalities/disparities in employment and Gender Based Violence (GBV).
- Mainstream women's empowerment in all sectors of development; and promote women's equal access to participation and decision making in social, economic and political life of the nation.

- Increase proportion of seats held by women and marginalized groups (Youth, Disabled, etc) in National Parliament.
- Increase women's participation in the justice sector through reform promoting women's legal education, entry into the legal profession, and women's equal access to justice.
- Implement the draft National Gender Plan (NGP) and Gender Budgeting Guidelines.
- Joint Programme on Local Governance, United Nations Development Programme (2012, p. 11-12).

On legal matters, the Constitution (2001) recognises international human rights instruments, including the Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs and CEDAW.

Article 36 of the Constitution States:

- The rights, freedoms and duties laid down in the Constitution are to be enjoyed equally by the men and women save for matters which are specifically ordained in Islamic Sharia.
- The Government shall encourage, and shall legislate for the right of women to be free of practices which are contrary to Sharia and which are injurious to their person and dignity.
- Women have the right to own, manage, oversee, trade in, or pass on property in accordance with the law.
- In order to raise the level of education and income of women, and also the welfare of the family, women shall have the right to have extended to them education in home economics and to have opened for them vocational, special skills and adult education schools.

Women's rights are also protected under a number of other articles:

Equality of Citizens: Article 8.

- All citizens of Somali land shall enjoy equal rights and obligations before the law, and shall not be accorded precedence on grounds of colour, clan, birth, language, gender, property, status, opinion etc.

Equality in Work and Social Security: Article 20.

- All able citizens have a right and a duty to work. The state shall, therefore, be responsible for the creation of work and the facilitating of the skills training of employees.
- The conditions of work of the young and women, night working and working establishments shall be regulated by the Labour Law.

Equality in Political, Social and Electoral Rights: Article 22.

- Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the political, economic, social and cultural affairs in accordance with the laws and the Constitution.
- Every citizen who fulfils the requirements of the law shall have the right to be elected (to a public office) and to vote.

Equality to form and join Social Organizations: Article 23.

- All citizens shall have the right to form, in accordance with the law, political, educational, cultural, social and occupational or employees' associations.

Equality in Property Rights: Article 31.

- * Every person shall have the right to own private property, provided that it is acquired lawfully. -

Equality in Access to Education: Article 15.

- The state shall pay particular attention to the advancement, extension and dissemination of knowledge and education as it recognises that education is the most appropriate investment that can play a major role in political, economic and social development.

This chapter provided an overview of Somalia, its people, culture and tradition. Being a predominantly Muslim country, the influence of Islam and the Somali customary laws on women was discussed. It is evident that the idea of women subjugation and oppression in Somalia is a societal phenomena and not a religious one. Secularism came at a time when Somali women are looking for a way out from the bondage of

tradition/cultures with its dehumanising practices that sets them aside as inferior. Though Farah clearly indicate the need for individual responsibility, (moral, social, political), he tends to emphasise Islam's positive ideals such as compassion, justice, neighbourliness, charity and consultation.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEMINISM AS A CHALLENGE TO PATRIARCHY IN FARAH'S *FROM A CROOKED RIB* AND *SARDINES*

4.1 *FROM A CROOKED RIB*

The sensitive treatment of issues concerning women which has come to characterise Farah's novels grows out of his commitment to present an accurate picture of his Somali society. By his own account, his novels depict ". . . how a society survives from day to day, season to season", and they ". . . deal very profoundly with topics that touch on human interactions and comments on these" (Farah, 1986:1827). They do not "prettify . . . the ideologically accepted, brainwashed system of things", because of this focus, Farah classifies his novels as "committed". But the committed novel is also one 'which necessarily looks into the future because of implied faith in the ability of a people to change their history (Farah, 1988:1591). Farah demonstrates this faith through his belief in the ability of Somali people to change traditional practices which are undesirable and to struggle for a desirable social order. For him, this means among other things, being conscious of the role that women should play in society:

> . . . they form about half of any society and if that half is not put to good use, then there is something wrong with it. At the moment there is often total exclusion of women from anything important. Whether it is in the most technologically advanced societies or the least informed societies, you will find that women are given very minor role (Farah, 1986:1827-28).

Because of his consciousness of what the role of women in society should be, Farah challenges the social and political dominance of patriarchy and supports African women's issues. Farah remains unique among African writers in being fully appreciative of women as thinking positive personalities who are internationally confined and restricted in the social landscape. As he said in 'Mapping the Psyche', "I see women as the symbol of the subjugated self in every one of us. Wherever you go in the world women's fate is

worse than men's". And particularly the Somali woman who suffers double oppression throughout the course of history, for this he says in 'Why I write', "I wrote to put down on paper, for posterity's sake, the true history of a nation" and ". . . I write because a theme has chosen me: the theme of Africa's upheaval and societal disorganisation . . .". Although in 1975 the Supreme Military Council of Somalia, in its pursuit of scientific socialism, announced that women should have equal rights with men this, as Petersen (1986:93) says, 'caused much consternation in a Muslim society where such a decree amounts to heresy". In the Muslim world, women have an accepted religious basis and under the true law of the Shariah, could be expected to fare better. Farah's Islamic upbringing which is characterised in his writings, affirms that it is not so much Islam which is at fault in most Muslim countries as far as the oppression of women is concerned, as the convenient political interpretation of the religion.

From a Crooked Rib set the framework within which Farah's future writings will appear. The basis of all his works is an analysis of contemporary Somali institutions, be they religious, political, marital or filial. He attacks the authoritarianism of both government and family and while seeking equality in all relationships he deprecates the particular situation that exists between the family patriarch and his children on the one hand, and his wife on the other. In Ebla's story, however, the politics are entirely domestic. It is not until Farah embarks on the Trilogy that he extends his criticism to the wider national level.

> Escape! To get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from unpleasantries. To break the ropes society had wrapped around her and to be free and be herself. Ebla though of all this, and much else (Farah, 1970:12).

This passage is from Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, published first in 1970 and regarded as one of his most important novels, and the text that gave him international credibility (Moola, 2014). These are words that assert the feminist nature of his novel and

summarise the issue of patriarchy in Somalia where women, generally, are kept under control by their men as an old Somali proverb which says "your woman should be in the house or in the grave" (Hadjiyanni, 2007:95) indicates, a situation that Ebla, the protagonist of *From a Crooked Rib* tries to challenge throughout the story. It is worth mentioning here that the situation that Ebla challenges in the novel is still almost the same in Somalia, even though a long time has passed since the novel was authored. Through Ebla, Farah questions the cultural practices that rob women of their equal rights in respect to the privileges, status and rights that men retain in Somali society. He invites us to criticise the patriarchal ideology that allows practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and polygamous marriage, practices which destroy women's lives and damage their dignity. According to Fatima Moola, a specialist in African literature and orature, *From a Crooked Rib* is considered the first African novel by a male author to highlight the experience of women from a woman's perspective (Moola, 2014), at a time when, according to Maya Jaggi, African fiction was more focused on colonial hegemony and the emerging nationhood in the continent (*The Guardian*).

The main setting of the novel is Somalia in the 1960s, when the absolute majority of the people lived in rural areas as nomads and in sedentary agricultural localities (Farah, 1982). The story revolves around a teenage girl, Ebla, who challenges the prevailing customs in Somali society. She escapes from an arranged marriage in the countryside to the city of Beled Weyne and, from there, for the same reason, to Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. During her journey, she becomes acquainted with a woman called Aowralla, who epitomises, according to Cochrane as quoted by Moola, (2014:58) "the traditional impotence and subjugation of Somali women". She also encounters a nameless widow and a woman called Asha, both of whom are more enlightened than Aowralla,

sharing with Ebla the "unwillingness to accept unquestioningly the subservient status imposed upon them by customary and Islamic laws" (Mixon, 1987:60).

However, the customs that Ebla challenges regard girls as a curse and boys as a blessing. Accordingly, boys and girls are treated differently in the society. Dahabo Farah argues that when a boy is born to a nomadic Somali couple, they display their pleasure and pride in the newborn baby, while the opposite is true when it comes to the birth of a girl. The reason, she claims, is that a girl could dishonour the family at any moment if she, for instance, performs a sexual act before marriage, a judgment that is not applicable to boys (Farah, 1982). This means that women in Somali society are unfavourably treated from their very first day in the world. As girls, they are confined to the home sphere throughout their childhood to be programmed in the patriarchal ideology by their own mothers. They learn from them how to behave well and how to become good wives for their future husbands; and, as adults, they become an unpaid workforce who own nothing but are owned by their families before marriage and by their husbands after marriage (Farah, 1982).

It is also worth mentioning that some of the practices that deprive Somali women of equal rights are believed to be religiously motivated, and this is the reason why Farah derives his novel's title from a Somali proverb that is believed to be inspired from a hadith, an Islamic tradition which claims that the prophet Muhammad said: "Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely" (Bukhari, 2007). Thus Farah reveals in the title of the novel the bias the Somali culture has against women. More importantly, he takes inspiration for the title from religious scriptures and, by doing so, suggests that

religious beliefs which are fundamental to the norms and values of the Somali society are actually biased against women.

Ebla's defiance, or journey for emancipation from patriarchy, starts when she realises that her hand has been given to a 48 year old man called Giumaleh in exchange for camels. Terrified about being in bed with such an old man, she makes up her mind to flee this dreadful destiny. She realises that she is no longer bound by her perceived obligation to remain and take care of her grandfather and abandons her original idea of leaving the countryside. She comes to a conclusion after much deliberation with herself. "But should I think of someone who does not think of me? It is he who has given my hand to the old man, exchanging me for camels" (Farah, 1970:). She reflects on her situation in a very rational way, contrary to the traditional gender roles which cast women as emotional, irrational and submissive (Tyson, 2006). Despite her strong feelings and gratitude towards her grandfather, who brought her up in the absence of parents, she sets aside these emotions and convinces herself that she has "to get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from unpleasantries" (Farah, 1970:2). After all, in her own words, "One came out of one's mother's womb alone. One tried to solve one's problem alone" (Farah, 1970:9). She realises that there is no one else to solve her problems, her grandfather, betrays her. Ebla invalidates here the patriarchal notion that women lack the quality of being rational. In a long soliloquy, Ebla speaks critically to herself, questioning patriarchal values:

> Why is a woman, a woman? . . . Surely a woman is indispensable to man, but do men realise it? A man needs a woman. A woman needs a man. Not to the same degree? A man needs a woman to cheat, to tell lies to, to sleep with. In this way a baby is born, weak and forlorn. He decides to belittle his mother as soon as he is old enough to walk (Farah, 1970:106-126).

Here, Ebla is clearly aware of how patriarchy works and how men try to subdue their female counterparts since childhood. Ebla's awareness of gender inequality is very well

expressed when Farah reveals her loathing of “discrimination between the sexes; the idea that boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family’s name alive. Even a moron-male cost twice as much as two women in terms of blood-compensation” (Farah, 1970:84). Furthermore, Ebla adds; “as many as twenty or thirty camels are allotted to each son. The women, however, have to wait until their fates give them a new status in life: the status of marriage” (Farah, 1970:38). Ebla indicates that, in contrast to men, women in traditional Somali society are deprived of economic empowerment. They are never permitted to own property or anything else. On the contrary, they are owned by their male counterparts and the only hope for them to gain some respect is to marry a man and to become “his other ‘half’” and integrate into “his world” (de Beauvoir, 2011). Something that Ebla resists by running away from an arranged marriage.

Ebla's defiance of patriarchal values takes her to Beled Weyne, where she finds herself in a similar situation to that from which she fled. Her uncle, Gheddi, gives her hand to a very sick broker in exchange for money to pay the fines that he received for smuggling and for illegal activities. This means that there is no escape from patriarchy, whether it be in countryside or in the town. There, in the countryside, her grandfather gave her hand to a man without her consent and here, in the town, the same thing happens to her again. The difference, however, is that the first attempt to marry her off was probably due to custom, with some economic interest, while the economic benefit is the main motivation now when her uncle attempts to marry her off. Uncle Gheddi is indebted to the colonial authority and therefore is compelled to marry off Ebla to get some money to pay off his debts; he sells a cow for the same reason. This means that colonialism exacerbates Ebla's situation. It is in fact the colonial authority that forces Uncle Gheddi to sell Ebla by making him indebted to the authority for smuggling goods. As Patrick Colm Hogan writes, "At least in this way, colonialism doe, not improve but worsen[s] the situation of

women" (Farah, 2000:205). Gheddi would probably not be in a hurry to marry off Ebla had he not been indebted to the authorities, and this would have given Ebla a breathing space to recollect herself and plan carefully for her next step.

However, in response to the rumour about Gheddi giving Ebla s hand to a broker, Ebla refuses to be sold like cattle. She declares that she is a human being and does not deserve to be treated in such a way:

> But that is what we women are-just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband. We are human beings. But our people don't realize it. What is the difference between a cow and yourself now? Your hand has been sold to a broker, just like Baffo [a cow]. He has sold it too [...] I won't marry a broker. Unless I choose him, I cannot think of anything else to do (Farah, 1970:13)

These are her arguments in response to the news about her arranged marriage. What is very important here is that Ebla, once again, invalidates the idea that third world women are too immature to recognize 'the element of patriarchal oppression in patriarchal societies when she says "that is what we women are-just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband" (Farah, 1970:). On the contrary, she proves that she is fully aware that women in such societies are considered property, like cattle, and that a patriarchal man does not comprehend that a woman is a human being exactly like him. In addition, she challenges patriarchy by once again refusing an arranged marriage and confirming that she will never accept a man as a husband unless she chooses him.

Nevertheless, after the second attempt at being married off. Ebla adopts a new strategy. She decides to be proactive rather than reactionary and to handle issues more pragmatically. She therefore acts rapidly and decisively to approach a man called Awill to elope with him. This initiative-taking contradicts Moore's claim that she is "remarkably lucky to have been taken up by the personable young man Awill" (Moore, 1984:70), as if she does not have any active role in the whole issue. According to Mixon, Ebla even

assumes "an active role in making Awill a suitable husband. She will 'try to reform him, to teach him, to break his pride, to turn him into a human being'" (1987). Unfortunately, he, too, turns out to be part of the very patriarchy she is challenging, where the woman's body is considered the property of whichever man claims her. After all, as she says, "he is a man like any other" (Farah, 1970:97).

Sadly, Awill takes advantage of Ebla's dependence on him and forces her to sleep with him before marrying her. By doing so, he not only violates her dignity and pride, but he also exposes her to physical strain and agony due to the circumcision that she was subjected to in her childhood, which usually causes such women to face unbearable pain. The pain in this case frightens Ebla:

> Ebla was very frightened, not of Awill, but because she was a virgin. She had heard lots of women talking about the pain one undergoes when one has one's first sexual intercourse. She had been circumcised when she was eight: the clitoris had been cut and stitched. She wished more than anything else that she was not a woman. She remembered Aowralla's painful child- delivery when she was in Belet Wene. That was a recent occurrence, but she recalled many other incidents, both similar and dissimilar, and all this scared her out of her wits (Farah, 1970)

This quotation clearly indicates how female genital mutilation in the Somali society is meant effectively to control women's sexual desires. Firstly, it is painful for a woman to have sex for the first time when she is circumcised, which usually frightens the individual away from having sex at all. Secondly, many believe that circumcised women do not enjoy the same sexual pleasure as uncircumcised women would enjoy when having sex, which discourages a circumcised woman from having sex if it is not for the purpose of reproduction. It has at least a stifling effect, as many of the societies that exercise this customary procedure acknowledge (World Health Organization, 1998). Thirdly, according to the World Health Organization, "All types of female genital mutilation involve removal or damage to the normal functioning of the external female genitalia an. can give rise to a range of well documented physical complications", such as complications during childbirth that can sometimes cause "moderate-to-severe damage for the mother and the

child' (WHO). Fear of such complications could also be an effective deterrent against women seeking sexual pleasure, something that also makes Ebla hesitant about sexual intercourse with Awill.

In addition to circumcision, patriarchy employs another mechanism to further control women's sexual desire in the form of punishment for sexual intercourse out of wedlock and adultery. It is not only a dishonourable act for a woman to become sexually involved with a man outside marriage, but such involvement is severely punished when it is discovered. According to Farah (1970) "If a woman slept with a man, her relations either shot her or knifed her to death. It had happened quite a number of times in the dwellings where she grew up". In other words, patriarchy uses the concept of honour and shame in combination with fear of severe punishment to control women's sexual desire, which Ebla has to think about before surrendering to Awill's animal desire. She thus contemplates the issue before concluding that no one in Mogadishu would discover her if she yielded to Awill's demands. Ebla thinks that no one "would be able to know where one slept and whether a woman slept with a man" (Farah, 1987:131). Consequently, Ebla lets him do what he wants without resistance.

Paradoxically, however, this premarital sexual intercourse that she is forced to engage in with Awill opens a new door for her to challenge patriarchy. She learns that no one will discover if she acquires multiple sexual partners or extra- marital sexual relationships. More importantly, the religious obstacle that would dissuade her from having sex outside marriage is removed with this premarital sexual intercourse. Accordingly, she conquers areas that were mainly preserved for men in patriarchal societies, becoming exactly what some men are in her society- polygamous and adulterous at the same time.

Shortly after their sexual encounter, Awill employs a Sheikh, an Islamic wedding officiant, and, after due procedures, he pronounces them husband and wife. Now Ebla is "delighted to think of herself as a wife". It really does not matter whose wife, because, as the narrator explains, it all comes to one thing: that she has married (Farah, 1970:126). However, this time, the husband, Awill, is the man of her choice. Unfortunately, however, this delight is cut short by an emissary from the Ministry of Education who comes to tell Awill that he will soon leave the country for an overseas assignment. Awill and the emissary exchange some words in Italian, wherein Awill learns that he will go to Italy on a study to visit some schools and get an idea about how to run them, as he is bound to be appointed as a head of schools in the Ministry of Education when he comes back from Italy one month before independence. Awill accepts the proposal without consulting his new wife. According to Farah, "he knew what to do about Ebla with regard to this departure. He had decided even before he arrived in Mogadishu". She also affects ignorance and never discusses his departure for Italy with him. It is part of a man's life to travel for the benefit of the family, she imagines (Farah, 1970). She knows that she has to behave as a submissive woman who never interferes with her husband's manly affairs if she is to succeed with her family life. This is, after all, part of the new strategy that she adopted since her second escape from an arranged marriage.

Consequently, Awill travels to Italy, leaving Ebla with Asha, an urban woman whom Ebla "found was the most interesting character she had met since she left the country". This woman has a great impact on Ebla due to the position she comes to occupy in her heart, as she is the first person who considers Ebla to be her equal. Nonetheless, the turning point comes when Awill's friend Jama mistakenly hands Ebla a photo where Awill's hands rest on the breasts of a white woman wearing a swimsuit. Ebla becomes furious and disappointed, but she still thinks that if someone had told her that this is the

way things are "in the white man's land she would not have believed it". Nevertheless, when Ebla asks Asha for advice, Ebla's rebelliousness against patriarchy becomes more pronounced. Instead of calming her down, Asha advises Ebla to take revenge on Awill by doing exactly what he does-that is to say, be unfaithful to him. Asha even assures her that she will help her to find out the best way to cheat on him without being detected or noticed by anyone:

> What should 1 do? Ebla asked and her voice was so serious that anyone could see that she needed help. I know what you should do, said Asha. Tell me, then. '1 will make us some tea. After that I will tell you what to do .... You see I have a suggestion to make,' Asha began. She gulped. 'I want to hear. Ebla sipped the insipid tea. But you will listen? Asha gulped again. Yes, 1 want to listen .... Say it. She took another mouthful of tea ... I swear upon Allah. And my God kill my brother if I don't do it (Farah, 1970:153).

Here, before giving her advice on such an important issue, Asha makes sure that Ebla will listen to her attentively. She makes them some tea first in order to create a relaxed atmosphere where they can deliberate together comfortably. In the meantime, while drinking the tea, she examines whether Ebla is only emotional and does not mean what she says. However, what is more important here is that Asha and Ebla use drinking tea as a random check in Ebla's commitment to challenging patriarchy, because drinking tea in Somali tradition is associated with masculinity, according to a famous Somali proverb that says, 'Rag 'Vaa Shaah, Dumarna Waa Sheeko' (men drink tea, while women gossip). Ladan Affi in Kusow (2004:101), discusses this proverb, writing:

> One of the principal narratives that organize gender relations, and therefore, the ultimate subordination of womenfolk is derived from the popular Somali proverb men drink tea while women gossip. The way in which this narrative subordinates women is based on the distinction between drinking tea and gossiping. Drinking tea, according to the 21 narrative, is understood as a masculine activity and denotes hardiness, rationality, and pragmatic thinking. Gossiping, on the other hand, is culturally interpreted as softness, emotionality, and lack of pragmatic thinking.

Thus, because drinking tea is associated with masculinity, Asha and Ebla here try to challenge patriarchal ideology. By drinking tea and thinking carefully before being

advised, Ebla demonstrates that, exactly like tea-drinking, men do not have a monopoly on rationality and pragmatic thinking. She shows Asha how committed she is not only to listen to her, but also to challenge patriarchal ideology by drinking tea with her, and she thereby gains Asha's confidence.

Accordingly, Asha continues her relaxed discourse with Ebla, telling her that she knows a rich man who is very interested in her and is ready to accept whatever she suggests. Subsequently, Ebla expresses her readiness to marry him and even insinuates that she is already married to two men-to the man to whom her grandfather gave her hand and to Awill. This provides more assurances to Asha with regard to her defiance of patriarchal values. "Tell him that I am willing to marry him secretly," Ebla says. "I love life, and 1 love to be a wife. I don't care whose," she adds. Asha assures her by saying, "Yes, 1 will" before finishing their tea (Farah, 1970:125). This shows that Ebla's determination to challenge patriarchy started when her hand was given to Giumaleh, something that indicates that seeing her husband's photo constitutes only a pretext to justify her deeds in front of Asha before discovering that they are of the same opinion with regard to patriarchy. Thus, Asha happily arranges Ebla's marriage with Tiffo, the rich man about whom she told Ebla. Ebla feels that the consummation of the new marriage will destroy the sway of patriarchy over women, the act of polyandry being the final stage of her challenge to the system (Wright, 2002). She sees the Tiffo episode as a way of creating her own equality in the male world while at the same time abrogating any personal responsibility for her actions.

To Ebla, 'life' means "freedom, freedom of every sort", as the narrator later explains, writing, "One should do whatever one wants to-that is life. That is what I love.' Freedom: that was what she worshipped." This includes the freedom that sexuality in marriage ironically affords her. "Marriage was a sound refuge," writes Farah, though the

key word is secretly': "I am willing to marry him secretly," as Ebla said. Being able to marry secretly allows Ebla the opportunity to marry Tiffo and two other men at the same time: by doing so, she becomes polygamous and thus undermine. patriarchal values by engaging in a practice that is restricted to men.

Remarkably enough, though, Ebla benefits from a practice that is actually meant to benefit men in the patriarchal Somali society. Marrying secretly in Somalia is in fact intended to provide men with multiple wives without being detected by their official wives. But here, in the absence of her official partner, Ebla benefits from that practice, turning the whole idea of secret marriage upside down. As a consequence, Ebla becomes polygamous, believing "that if Awill can be unfaithful to her with impunity, she can be unfaithful to him". She thus takes Tiffo as a second husband of choice while she is still married to Awill and probably to Giumaleh. According to Mixon, "Ebla's decision to take a second husband while yet married to the first is a direct challenge to the polygamous marriages which men traditionally are allowed" (1987:108). Hence she undermines patriarchy by breaking the rules in terms of sexual partnerships.

Unfortunately, Ebla's secret marriage is a disappointment because Tiffo ends up treating her like a harlot, and she decides to put an end to the marriage "which had nothing behind it except sharing a bed and earning some money from him" (Farah, 1970:132). She decides to terminate the relationship with this man in a way that demonstrates her strong personality and her eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for- a-tooth approach of returning any humiliation or repressive behaviour against her. The following passage explains that approach:

> 'I am also married.' She thought, 'How does that hit you? 'To me. You are married to me. Ah! Ah!' he said, [...]. No. To another one, You see, you two take turns. [...] My other husband's name is Awill,' Ebla replied. 'You are telling me a lie.' No. I am not telling you a lie. Why- should I? You have another wife and I have another husband. We are equal, you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal' (Farah, 1970:145).

Ebla tells Tiffo the reality about her relationships in a way that gets "his lips and hands quivering" from anger and disbelief, which was actually her intention here even though she could have managed a gentle way to get rid of him (Farah, 1970). She chooses this brutal way for two reasons. Firstly, she wants to torment him, to take revenge on him for treating her like a harlot. Secondly, she wants to remove him decisively from her life as quickly as possible as her ordinary husband, Awill, is expected back home very soon.

The way Ebla speaks to Tiffo here demonstrates how self-confident she is and how she asserts her equality with him, which hurts his pride as a man in a patriarchal society and challenges his perception of women. He responds by saying, "Look, I am not going to be questioned by my wife, so don t speak to me like that", expressing his frustration with the challenge she is posing not only to him, but to patriarchal values as a whole (Farah, 1970). Women, for him, are supposed to be submissive and obedient, accepting "without argument the truths and laws that other men gave them" (de Beauvoir, 2011). Ebla not only defies his perceptions, but also demolishes the whole idea of secret marriage by proving that she, a woman, was polygamous-something that patriarchal men would never accept. Additionally, she makes Tiffo taste the sense of bitterness that a woman experiences when her husband takes another woman while he is still married to her. Soon after this encounter, Awill comes back from Italy, and again Ebla's feelings of equality to men are manifested. Instead of feeling regretful and trying to hide what she has done in Awill's absence, she asks him "if she would tell him everything she had done during his absence .... We will tell each other everything, tomorrow. You'll tell me everything, and I shall tell you everything", he says moving towards her to quell his desire for sex, as "he is sex-starved," in Ebla's words. She seems to be confident in herself to the point that she asks him if he is interested in hearing what she has to say about what has happened in his absence. She knows that he himself is not innocent and that he has to explain himself

about the white woman she saw him within the photograph and what else he may have done with other women overseas.

Somali marriage, in Farah's polemical vision, is commercial, mercenary, and exploitative. And yet, however unsatisfactory it may be, it remains the given condition through which everything in the woman's existence – even her strivings after individuality and independence – has to be expressed, and those who remain outside it, such as the widow and Asha, suffer the various punitive stigmas of spinsterhood (one in accused of loose morals, the other of greed). Ebla reflects: "she had run from the country to a town and from there to Mogadiscio. Now if she ran from Mogadiscio, she would run into the ocean [. . .] She had escaped before: it was no longer an enigma – the only problem was where to go (pp. 83, 123). The Somali woman has no place to go, nowhere to run except into another marriage: 'I love life, and life lies in marriage' (p. 126). Farah has said that at the time of writing he was interested in people who are deprived of what they cannot exist without, in the personal struggle for survival (Vincent (ed) 1981:48), and in Somalia of *From a Crooked Rib*, marriage is the principal and, in some cases, the only means of survival. The combined constraints of tribal patriarchy, Islamic law and the hardships of nomadic pastoralism ensure that only in marriage is there financial security and space (albeit limited) for self definition. Thus, Ebla who "loves to be a wife" tests her individualistic aspirations within the framework of the institution, challenging her polygamous husbands with polyandrous experiments of her own. The latter, however, are short-lived and provide little relief from her plight, for simply to be a wife in Somali society is to call into play reactionary conventions that degrade and enslave woman and is this to reinforce one's subjugated status.

4.2 *SARDINES*

Sardines, the second book of Farah's trilogy are regarded as 'Farah's book of women'. The novel portrays a group of women who are among the upper class of educated Somalis, women who perceive their social position as being determined by the politico-religious totalitarianism under which their country labours. However, as Farah emphasises, it is not only the political system against which these women must fight, but also the centuries of acceptance by Muslim women of their lowly role as 'inferior' beings in a world of male superiority and power.

A singular picture of the claustrophobic atmosphere that characterises relationships in the Somali family and the strategies the Barre regime uses to replicate this atmosphere within the Somali society is further provided in this second book of Farah's trilogy. The novel *Sardines* focuses on Medina and her husband Samater, European educated intellectual trying to adjust to the Somali context. Medina is a journalist who challenges the regime and therefore loses her job. Being a woman and thus not very relevant, she is spared harsher punishment. However, she refuses to accept the subservient position of women in the Somali society and gathers a group of female friends whom she wants to help escape the feminine predicament of submission. One of their secret projects is opposition to the regime, which they see as the purveyor of traditional social relations based on the oppression of women. The narrator explains medina's position:

> One of the reasons why she opposed the present dictatorship was that it reminded her of her unhappy childhood, that the General reminded her of her grandfather who was a monstrosity and an unchallengeable patriarch who decreed what was to be done, when and by whom (Farah, 1981:19).

Medina's grandfather was a difficult tyrant who constantly abused his power. However, his power and tyranny were not confined to his family. He was also one of the slave-owners with whom the Italian government had the most difficulty in persuading to free his slaves. Farah here again draws a parallel between the General's rule and the

patriarchy he emulates. Just as the 'monstrosity' of a grandfather owned and freely disposed of the lives of his family and slaves, the General freely disposes of his subjects that he 'owns'. Medina's grandfather, Gad Thabit, lives a hundred and ten years playing his authoritative part, even to the point of mis-quoting the Koran:

> . . . he was unkind to Medina and to the women in the household; he was the cruellest man these women had ever known. He was the typical authoritarian patriarch. A woman needs a man to intercede for her and present her to Allah; a woman's God is her husband. He would go as far as mis-quoting the Koran (Farah, 1981:57).

These are what Medina, avowed feminist and intellectual challenges–both the political and the social structure of Somalia, in her quest for a room of her own and a country in which she need not feel like a guest. That search bring her into head-on confrontations, first with the government when she refuses to assume an editorial policy favourable to its objectives and later with tradition when she refuses to allow her daughter to be circumcised. In summary then, *Sardines* is a novel largely about women, who are locked within a masculine power structure and confronted with the age-old question of sexual liberation (Larson, 1983).

As Patricia Alden (1991), observes of Medina, her first priority is the battle for the survival of women against tyrannical domestic and political regimes like Idil's (her step-mother) and the General's, which causes her to put the feminist cause before family loyalty. On a similar positive note, Rosemary Colmer (1991) argues that Medina uses her manipulative powers in a constructive way: namely, to engineer a situation in which Samater (her husband) is forced to take cognisance of and confront his mother's intolerable meddling, from which she hitherto screened and cushioned him. Metaphorically, the title of the book 'Sardines' refers to the sealed sardines tin of Somali society which denies women a public outlet, forcing them into a suffocating intimacy in all relationships be they personal, political or religious. They are packed inescapably together,

forcibly alike to the extent that they are all in the same tin. In this novel, a composite portrait of Somali womanhood is portrayed and the helplessness of the Somali woman's position in society. Farah often times says that he has "used women as a symbol of Somalia because, when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia" (Wright, 1994:73) and elsewhere he has said that: "I see women as the symbol of the subjected self in every one of us" (Farah, 1986). Nevertheless, the general enslavement of Somali women can be seen as instrumental in, and therefore analogous to, the political repression of the whole Somali people insofar as, at an immediate practical level, the immensely powerful influence of women on the young is capable of damaging the national psyche and adversely affecting the nation's destiny if it is exercised by a class of people who are themselves continually violated and degraded. This brings us to a portrait of the traditional Somali women who fiercely struggle to protect the old ways ever to their own disadvantage, and try to project those patriarchal/matriarchal tendencies upon the lives of others, especially their children.

Idil and Fatima bint Thabit are examples of the suppressed, second class citizens of traditional Muslim culture who struggle vainly to protect that culture and their families from what they consider an assault by western and foreign influences. They strive against all odds, to ensure the perpetuation of the social status quo by stifling any type of deviation from the pattern they know and accept (Okonkwo, 1984).. Challenges to customary and religious practices are those against which Idil and Fatima struggle most vigorously, although each responds to these challenges in ways which reflect the different background from which she comes. No matter their backgrounds, these women are seen as matriarchs in their own rights, and "in an authoritarian state, the head of the family (Matriarch or patriarch) plays a necessary and strong role; he or she represents the authority of the state". Idil and Fatima bint Thabit represent the lot of Somali women:

> In Somali, fifteen percent of them wouldn't live to celebrate their first birthday. Was that the tragedy of which Nietzsche spoke? And what if they survived? At eight, they are circumcised; at eighteen or before they are fifteen, they are sold into slavery – (in the form of marriage). Then another barbarously painful re-infibulations awaits them. if they are good Muslims they go to heaven, where Allah will assign them their usual job – that of serving men! They will become the houris whose business it is to entertain the men in heaven (Farah, 1981:127).

No matter how women are subordinated and maltreated, these traditional women stand to uphold the culture of oppression. Idil, for example, was compelled to exchange her body for a bread concession to keep herself and her two children from starvation. If she rejected the restaurant owner's offer of infidelity, she will starve with her children. Knowing the consequences, she therefore gave access to herself in order to secure an income and help her dependents thereby considering herself as a commodity. Fatima Bint Thabit is another character who is very comfortable with patriarchal ideology and traditional conservative Muslim values. They are both advocates of patriarchy and supporters of submission. Fatima Bint Thabit gives a hint on her strong belief to continue the patriarch oppression she is living in. It reads:

> I remember something my grandfather used to say: A woman, like any other inferior being, must be kept guessing, she mustn't be given reason to believe she is certain of anything. . . . That's right, children must be kept guessing (Farah, 1981:134).

This implies that in the patriarchal construct, a woman, no matter how old, is ever regarded as a child, and must be treated as such. Though Fatima Bint Thabit is considered as inferior by the patriarchal society for being a woman, she has never complained about her inequality but rather lives comfortably in the situation of traditional conservative society. In the traditional fashion, Fatima's first husband's father asks for and receives her hand in marriage long before she even sees the prospective husband. She confessed to Medina that: "Nasser's father asked for my hand and was given it long before I saw what he looked like". This same husband is said to have committed suicide because of the overbearing and demeaning treatment which he received from Fatima's father (Gad

Thabit), the Grand Patriarch who believed that "no one not even his sons-in-law should dispute his authority". Fatima's second husband Barkhadle, is chosen by her out of love, but never approved by her father, this, because as an infant, he was reported to have been found on the doorstep of the church and was brought up and schooled in the Christian tradition though he resides in a wholly Muslim country. Fatima is one whose family history could be traced to a known patriarchy. Idil, like Fatima, loses her first husband due to an untimely death: not because of suicide but because of war. He was killed fighting for the Italians and leaves her in dire straits. "She was twenty, poor, with a sick child". No relatives came forward to aid them, not until Idil has earned enough money from her baking to place her and her son, Samater in a better position, the dead husband's brother demands the right for *dumaal* (the Islamic custom which gives the brother of a deceased husband the right to marry his surviving wife or wives). Apart from the fact that Idil has suffered at the hands of tradition and has been a victim of male domination, yet she sees a need to carry on a tradition in which she has been reared, a tradition with a given coherence and solidity. She says:

> One shouldn't search for my past in the manifold cultural contradiction of your present and your future. I've collected and eaten the fruit of the tree my parents planted . . . . I am the product of a tradition with a given coherence and solidity . . . I have Allah, his prophets and the Islamic saints as my illustrious guides (Farah, 1981:82-83).

In traditional conservative society such as Idil's, it is considered an abomination for a man to depend on his wife for economic assistance on whatever ground. This is because even if economic independence serves as a factor in ensuring gender equality, societal norms has its own strong influence on who is making decisions. She could not tolerate the fact that her own son, Samater, should continue to stay in a house owned and financed by his wife. She says to Samater when he ejects her out of the house for interfering too much on his domestic life that:

> First, get yourself a house out of which you can throw anyone. "I buy these drinks with my own money". Why not save it towards a down-payment on a house while you can, eh? This is Medina's house. Don't forget that. You cannot throw me out (Farah, 1981:86).

This is an indication that Idil is sick and tired of being dependent on her daughter-in-law. It does not give comfort to a woman like her to see her son live under his wife's roof because it is against the tradition based on patriarchal construct. She is aggressive to her son's plan with his wife because it does not give her a chance to interfere in his marriage, since this plan renders her son powerless, especially when it comes to making decisions. Idil now confronts her son to behave like "men" and to uphold socially approved manners. She wants him to have an account and a house of his own. So he will be in the decision making position in the house regardless of his comfortable living position. Samater is in conflict with his mother, a traditionalist, for preferring his wife's decision making role in the financial system. She again expresses her disgust to her son for his weakness as a man:

> What kind of a son have I ended up with? A man dependent upon a woman? And what are you a minister for? . . . Look at your colleagues. They've changed house and wife and mistress". . . . "Do you know any man in this country who trusts his wife with a delicate matter such as administering his financial affairs? What if you die today? You have no bank account in your name, there is nothing which belongs to you legally, your name will not enrich me a cent. Turn this over in your head and think of me and your sister and your clan (Farah, 1981:75).

From Idil's point of view, it is a curse to end up with a son who trust his wife with delicate issues like finance especially since a woman is expected to be dependent on a man. Domineering and overbearing Idil bank on the community support to meddle in the lives of her children – Samater and Xaddia, so much such that her wishes must be obeyed. In Somalia power is seen as a system, power as a function, and Idil is part and parcel of that power. Both Samater and Xaddia though, breaks with this tradition by evicting their mother from their houses. This is something that cannot be condoned, "the sky would fall in on anyone who upset a pillar of society – in this case, Idil" (p. 52) This shows that

power system which is built into the Somali social fabric, and of which the General is merely a manifestation, is as evident in the passive powers of the matriarch – the right to be listened to and obeyed, the right to profit from her son's prosperity and not to be ejected from his house – as it is in the active ones of the patriarch, and political pressure will be brought to bear upon any member of the family who breaks with tradition. As Samater bundled her into the taxi, Idil said:

> . . . I am rags in whom dwell life's rages. But I will make you regret. I will make you regret . . . Children outgrow their parents; men outgrow their women: women outgrow fashions; and the year, the season. Unlike the seasons, the years, the men, the women and the children, unlike all these, tradition stays and wins at the end. You have done something you shouldn't have. And I will make you pay (Farah, 1981:95).

And immediately tribal pressure is brought to bear upon him with the imagery of Islamic duty to one's parents being the foremost argument:

> . . . there is one thing society will not forgive him for disobeying the authority of an aged mother. Idil represents traditional authority, and it is in the old and not the young that society invests power (Farah, 1981:98).

Samater's expulsion of Idil is not acceptable, such an act is virtually unheard of in Somali society, therefore, the news spread quickly and the reaction of the community is predictable. Samater (a minister of constructions) fears that the General will unseat him from his position; the clan unites against him and individual members place call after call to make their objections known; a stream of tribesmen, led by a chieftain, came to call at his home. All of these are because Samater commits an unthinkable act in violation of tradition.

In Farah's *Sardines,* as the traditional women strive to maintain the status quo, disdaining the attempts of their children to pursue a different course, the 'modern' women refuse to accept unquestionably the subservient status imposed upon women in their Somali society. Women such as these present a threat to the General. They are not dependent upon male maintenance and therefore male domination, and they cannot be

manipulated through tribal coercion. In spite of society's disapproval of women assuming male roles, this novel is characterised by economically independent and strong women, active participants in political issues and determined to change the patriarchal construct.

Medina, the only female member of an underground movement working to overthrow the oppressive government and the tradition of conservative Islam, is the protagonist of the novel who is actively engaged in the struggle against established authority, the power which inhibits social and political growth. As an example of the liberated modern Somali woman, she takes an active part in the life of her society through the sacrifices she makes: she sacrifices her editorship, her marriage, and her time to the cause of eliminating tyranny and achieving freedom. Nasser, her brother considered her as someone capable of dealing with economic, social and political issues regardless of her sex.

> Whatever had become of her personally, the strength of her weaknesses, the undeniable fact that she was almost always a woman among men, sharing things with them, drinks, reading the same books as they, borrowing or lending them ideas? Was she not the only woman member of the underground organisation which so far had sacrificed Soyaan and Koschin?(Farah, 1981:94).

This explains Medina as a strong character able to fight dictatorship, patriarchy and traditional conservative beliefs. This is possible because she has the chance of being educated since her father is known to be educated too and a non-patriarch. Medina has known about patriarchy and its consequences from her grandfather, Gad Thabit. Even as a child, she suffered enough from the old patriarch (her grandfather, Gad Thabit), even to the point of religious teachings, she was discriminated upon, and she never forgets:

> Medina who, because she was a girl was never asked to read a verse of the Koran: Medina who, because she was a girl, was allowed to go into the kitchen without being reprimanded (Farah, 1981:111).

Medina's rebellion could be seen as a personal crusade against her traditional social chains. In this way, she protects Ubax (her daughter) from the subservient demeaning role that traditional Somali society curves out for females in the education

which it allows them. She desires also, to protect her from the sexual mutilation which society imposes upon little girls through circumcision. Medina, even now, most vividly recalls the pain which she suffered during the birth of her child because of infibulatory complications:

> I fear the descending knives which re-trace the scarred wound, and it hurts every instant I think about it. She experienced the dolorous mixture of pleasure and pain at the age of twenty-four when she brought forth a flower of beauty – Ubax. What pain! What pleasure! There were infibulatory complications, she bled a lot, she had second, third and fourth labours. . . If they mutilate you at eight or nine, they open you up with a rusty knife the night they marry you off; then you are opened and re-stitched. Life for a circumcised woman is a series of de-flowering pains, delivery pains and re-stitching pains . . . (Farah, 1981:63-64).

She never forgets the trauma she went through, because of this, her daughter was born through caesarean operation, and she says:

> I suffer this humiliation, this inhumane subjugation of circumcision; you can never know how painful it is unless you've undergone the operation yourself. But must every woman in the world suffer this act of barbarism in order to know the suffering it entails . . .? A great majority of Africa's female population suffers complications arising from infibulations . . . suffering is human (Farah, 1981:196).

This is because the tradition of patriarchy does not make any provision for the intellectual growth of girls/women but rather are simply trained to be housewives and cooks. Medina wishes to spare her daughter these and other pains, therefore, 'she will not be circumcised. Over my dead body". She sees the crescent and sword of Islam as equating with the slicing and the rusty knife of female circumcision and knows that the introduction of the General's socialistic state has done nothing to effect Islamic tradition but has merely camouflaged it, while women remain intransigently within the religious mould. Medina recalls the sixteen year old American-born Somali girl who was abducted from her parents during a holiday in Mogadishu, bound and gagged, then forcibly circumcised and married to a man within the clan, all with the blessing of the General and the co-operation of tribal women.

> The women hired by the newly-stipended chieftain plotted. One night, while the parents were asleep in their room, they dragged the girl out of her bed, tied her to

> the bed-post, gagged her mouth with a cloth and circumcised her. Poor thing. (Farah, 1981:97)

Her parents, now securely tied to society's aggressive tradition, committed suicide. "The two of them. They committed suicide when the tribal chief who had interceded on their behalf said why the girl had been circumcised: to marry her to a man of the clan (Farah, 1981:203). The chieftain who was in the General's payroll was actually her uncle and the one who introduced her to the man he had chosen for her. Though all these "was done in cohorts with the Generalissimo".

Farah has frequently spoken of his abhorrence of the practice of female circumcision, invariably depicting women as the victims, but nowhere has he apparently considered women's contribution to its continuation, and one wonders why women are prepared to perpetuate this barbarity upon their daughters when, having undergone it themselves, they must have understood its traumatic physical and psychological impact. While men may demand the right to prove their manhood by breaking open the circumcisional scar, it must be remembered that it is women who perform this atrocity upon the young of their own sex. Thus, Medina and her group are seen to criticise this practice by bringing to people's consciousness all its negative implications on women.

Somalia is a country where rape is more easily condoned than love; rape is symbolic to power whereas love symbolises submission and weakness. The young Amina is pack-raped by three youths as a punishment not of her, but of her father for his conspirational acts: "We are doing this not to you but your father. Tell him that." Her father's reaction has been predictable; he must confer with the General, since "This rape is political". The General's instructions are to isolate Amina, so that "the case must be treated as though it were devoid of any political significance; it must be dealt with as having no political implication whatsoever" (Farah, 1981:230). Her father, a major and a government minister, had no choice but to obey the General's order. With loyalty to the

Revolution, "He would do it for the good name of the Revolution". As this is done to show the subservient, relegated position of women, one sympathises with Amina as she explains the pain the individual bears in confrontation with the overwhelming authoritarianism through the act of rape. She says:

> It is the element of surprise that is so shocking about rape, it is being caught unprepared, unaroused, dry, the stick being pushed in a door which, given time and necessary caress, might have opened on its own . . . It is the head-on collision of two vehicles involved in an accident that kills: it is the shock, the unpreparedness . . . (Farah, 1981:125).

Amina is thus sacrificed for the survival of a regime. She must be bought off with an abortion and an overseas university education, but the rapists must go free. As her father affirms:

> In this country rape is not punishable as other crimes of violence. The characteristic compromise arrived is usually that the rapists marries the victim, accepts her hand in marriage in the presence of the elders of his clan and her clan. I am sure you wouldn't want to marry all three, I am sure you wouldn't want to marry even the one who is in prison. That's why we suggest that you leave the country and leave behind you the unfortunate disgrace (Farah, 1981:128).

To her father, the rape is an "unfortunate disgrace" which has befallen her and which will soon be forgotten. But Amina wouldn't forget the wound inflicted upon her:

> The cut, the knives, the blood on her thighs . . . The pain, what pain, what pain! She had been a virgin, she had been circumcised . . . what pain, what pain! (Farah, 1981:119).

To her, all rapes are political, the imposition of power by the stronger over the weaker. She refuses to comply with the General's request by insisting on bearing the child of the rape as a gesture of defiance, so that 'every Somali (shall) see the political significance . . . that the powerful rape the weak". Amina's story testifies to a woman's ability to assume control, even over the violent rape which caused her to be pregnant, and defy her rapist, her father, and the General, by insisting of bearing her child and raising it in a community of patriarchs. In Farah's work as seen through Amina, women are not just mid-wives to

history but actors in their own drama, narrators of their own lives, and interpreters of their own dreams by struggling to avert patriarchy and traditional conservative beliefs.

Hence, we find in *Sardines* a swift movement from microcosm to macrocosm in the two powerful anecdotes of Amina's unpunished rape and the brutal circumcision of the visiting American-Somali girl together are made to sum up both the plight of Somali womanhood and, move tenaciously, the condition of the Somali people, drawn up along broad politico-sexual lines: "The pain is ours, the fat and wealth and power is the men's", coments one of the old women who took Amina in after the assault (p. 119). To her father's comment that this particular rape is political, Amina replies: "But which rape isn't?" The choice of rape as a political weapon against the General by the three young rebels is significant partly because it indicates that they share his sexual politics, but principally in that Farah depicts rape as a re-enactment of the origin of circumcisional violation of womanhood which is an instrument of tribal patriarchal power over women. Hence, the two are associated in the thoughts of Amina, which run the pain of the earlier violation into that of the later – "she had been a virgin, she had been circumcised [. . .] what pain, what pain!" (p. 119) – and earlier in Medina's comment: 'Life for a circumcised woman is a series of de-flowering pains, delivery pains and re-stitching pains' (p. 59). Thus, in Medina's vision, her two reasons for leaving her home – the protection of her daughter, Ubax and Samater's forced acceptance of a place in the government – are really the same reason, since societies that terrorise women with circumcision also produce patriarchal monsters like the General. Hence, her equation: 'Idil in the General; the personal in the political' (p. 245). In this novel, we have male characters who have feminist inclinations, being a non-patriarch, Nasser, Medina's elder brother, was educated and lived abroad. Nasser engages himself in domestic chores which are attributed to women in the patriarchal ideology:

> I don’t guarantee you’ll eat well, he said. His eyes were clear as the vegetable soup he had made; his gaze was as vague on the pale circle of a young moon (Farah, 1981:111).

Even though looking after the household (cooking, cleaning, raising children, etc) is considered as the exclusive preserve of women, Nasser, opposing the submissive role of patriarchy is found putting himself in the areas restricted for women only in a male dominated society.

The chapter demonstrated the importance of Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* in terms of highlighting the ordeal of Somali women and the multiple problems that they face because of the patriarchal system that reigned in their society in the 1960s. This is made possible thanks to the postcolonial feminist approach that has been adopted to analyse the text from a feminist point of view. The main point that has been made throughout the text is that Farah asserts through Ebla that patriarchy is a problem in Somalia, where women are regarded as inferior creatures. He shows that women in Somalia are not only deprived of the economic empowerment that men have but are also treated like property, owned either by their husbands or by their male relatives. Farah shows that the patriarchal oppression of women in Somalia even involves physical torture to control women's sexuality. Because of this, Ebla-who could be considered a prototype of Somali women-is sold like cattle and offered to a man in marriage in exchange for camels. She is also subjected to female genital mutilation, which is intended to hamper a woman's sexual drive and is, consequently another form of exerting .control over women’s liberties. The beauty of the novel lies in its ability to capture the troubles a Somali woman had to go in a world created and dominated by men. This is in line with theoretical criticism that assumes that all women in patriarchal societies are oppressed and deprived of their own rights to be treated equally and to be offered the same opportunities that are offered to men. On the other hand, Farah, through Ebla again, indicates that third world

women have the same intellectual capability as women in first world countries in terms of understanding patriarchy and how it works. He shows how these women are capable of speaking for themselves and dealing with their patriarchal problems.

In *Sardines,* it could be inferred that apart from the deep rooted patriarchal impositions which manifest themselves in the novel especially in the portrayal of characters like Idil and Fatima Bint Thabit, who stood in support of tradition and traditional practices, the novel has anti-patriarchal stand. The presence of Medina and Amina defines this. These women define themselves as feminist who understand that the liberation of women from patriarchy is a necessary part of the social transformation required to bring about a more equitable order. Their intellectual commitment to feminism is sustained in part by their western education and in part by dramatic experiences as children within patriarchal societies. Farah's canvas allows him to present a wide range of women's experiences and so to register contradictory ways in which their oppression mirrors and sustains dictatorship and sometimes leads them to challenge it. By condemning the deeply-rooted patriarchal ideology and traditional practices that aims at subjugating women, the novel fulfils an important need of feminist perspective which is eradicating women's oppression

CHAPTER FIVE

REPRESENTATION OF GENDER, TRADITION AND RELIGION IN FARAH'S *SWEET AND SOUR MILK* AND *CLOSE SESAME*

5.1 *SWEET AND SOUR MILK*

Sweet and Sour Milk is the first novel in the first series of Farah's trilogy "variations on the theme of African dictatorship". In an epigraph to part two of the novel, Farah deliberately underlines the parallel between the patriarchs of sate and family with a quotation from Wilhelm Reich "in the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power" (Farah, 1992). Farah suggests a direct relationship between the traditional patriarchal Somali family and the authoritarian regime in Somalia under the rule of Mohammed Siad Barre. Because Farah sees that close connection between the family and the state as crucial to the adverse social conditions in Barre's Somalia, he is "unrelenting in his pinpointing of patriarchal bigotry and brutality as the source of current political authoritarians and police-state terrorism (Wright, 1989). Therefore, the cruelty of family life is one of the major motifs of the trilogy for which *Sweet and Sour Milk* is one. The patriarchal Somali family is merciless in imposing its rule on its members, to whom it denies a separate individual identity. As Keynaan is to remind his remaining son:

> I am the father. It is my prerogative to give life and death as I find fit . . . And remember one thing Loyaan: if I decide this minute to cut you in two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power. I am the grand patriarch (Farah, 1992:95).

His patriarchal power is reinforced by both tradition and the state for his is but a reflection of much greater authoritarianism exercised by the regime. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Farah repeatedly equates familial and state powers: as Keynaan rules "with the iron hand of male-dominated tradition, over his covey of wives and children", so does the

General over the people of Somalia, appropriating to himself God's Omnipotence over life and death. As Wright states:

> The twin repressive institutions of family and state invoke each other's authority and sanctions each other's violence . . . familial and national politics (being) interdependent and mutually supportive (Wright, 1990:75).

In *Sweet and Sour* Milk (1990), no one escaped the oppressive and repressive tactics of the tyrannical General and his sycophants. The novel shows the direct and indirect oppression of women both by the customary and Islamic laws and by the tyrannical government as they suffer the repercussions of the atrocities perpetuated against their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and daughters. In the powers of the General, women are weak and meek and helplessly powerless: but due to his respect for women, Farah also portrays women as the saviours and protectors of their men, the mainstay of their family's unity and safety; because according to him, the "dependence of men on women [in Somalia] is of such greatness one is shocked into incomprehension to realise how badly women are treated" (Farah, 1992:190). The desire of women to maintain the cohesion and security of their families is the purest of Islamic virtues, that of compassion, but ironically, this very virtue lays women open to exploitation, not merely within the family but equally by the state.

Qumman and Beydaan are Somali women whose worldview are defined by the customary and Islamic laws of their culture. Therefore, they are governed by such practices as female subserviency, with all its concomitant ills the greatest of which is "powerlessness". As the first and second wives of Keynaan, these women find that the primary source of their oppression is located in the home and originates from their husband. Keynaan is representative of men of his generation who hold women in low esteem. "Keynaan and his generation have never known women", to them, women are simply of generally generalised – about human species more mysterious than Martians"

(Farah, 1992:42). And to him women are insignificant "Does one notice the small insects which die a suffering death under the eyeless heels of one's feet?"(Farah, 1992:42). Furthermore, "Women", Keynaan teaches his twins, "are for sleeping with, for giving birth to and bringing up children; they are not good for any other thing, . . . they can serve the purposes Allah created them for originally, and no more" (Farah, 1992:88). This shows how patriarchal ideology wants to give a religious touch to the submissive role imposed on women. This same ideology goes further to believe that a man who discusses things with a woman is a disappointment', because 'they are not to be trusted with secrets'. For this reason when he prepares to make a third marriage with a girl younger than his daughter, Ladan, he does not discuss the matter with either of his wives. Keynaan represents the patriarch or head of an extended family group in a Muslim society who has unlimited power over his family (Petersen, 1981) and will not tolerate any challenge to his authority. Keynaan despises and frequently beats his wives and children, especially:

> Whenever some superior officer humiliated him, he came and was aggressive to the twins and his wife. He would flog them, he would beat them . . . big and powerful the man he was, the Grand patriarch whose authority drenched his powerless victims with the blood of his lashes (Farah, 1992:30).

Qumman, for more years than Beydan, has taken his abuse. When the twins were young, she had thought of being rescued by them. "She would wait until the twins grew up . . . She would wait, patience, patience". She realises that all these she must endure because "society, on top of it, required women to be tolerant, to be receptive, to be receiving – and forgiving" (Farah, 1992). Qumman couldn't escape her husband's brutality even on the day of her son's death. Such a beautiful woman in her prime, but now:

> . . . it was as if different parts of her body had been dismantled at puberty and reassembled at old age. Also, today, she had bruises. Her forehead had bled and dried. There was a scar a night old on her arm as well (Farah, 1992:26).

Although Qumman longs to leave Keynaan, two additional pregnancies force her to remain for a longer time: first Ladan their daughter is born, and later she nearly dies in childbirth with their fourth child, who is still-born. Therefore, she must await the maturity of her sons before she can separate from Keynaan, for six years while they study in Italy, she waits. Eventually, her sons are able to offer her protection and independence. Loyaan becomes a dentist and will not allow his father to beat his mother in his presence. Even at this point, her ever-ready submission to her husband's cruelty made her to caution her son:

> Be sincere with yourself, my son. That is the first and most important thing of all. Hold no grudge against your own father. He is your father, don't you forget that (Farah, 1992:27).

Qumman is a victim of male dominated society and the above extract shows how patriarchy deeply influenced her thinking. Soyaan becomes an economist, and he purchases the house in which she lives and bequeaths it to her. However, by the time they are in position to provide this protection Keynaan has left Qumman for another woman. Farah shows the manner in which women especially the older and more traditionally inculcated are prepared to accept their lowly social status. One important thing which the traditionalist women have learnt is the art of compromise. Qumman, that "souvenir of another age" falls back upon Koranic quotations and relies upon maledictions and witchcraft, she understands the importance of preserving the safety of the family and therefore is prepared to humble and sacrifice herself for her sons and the entire family.

As Keynaan moves to Afgoi, he took a second wife, Beydan, the widow of a man who has died in the torture-chamber under interrogation by him as a security officer:

> Her former husband had died in the torture-chamber. He had been Keynaan's case. The General compensated: he ordered Keynaan to marry her in place of the murdered husband (Farah, 1992:167).

Beydaan suffers much at the hands of this patriarchal society and this tyrannical government that forced her to marry the man who has murdered her husband, wherein she

is beaten and maltreated. She suffers the same fate as her co-wife Qumman. Like her, she resigns to fate by accepting her position as 'inferior'. She says: "We are women, we are weak. When we are widowed, we cry softly lest the General hears, lest you return to take away those you haven't already imprisoned". Both women struggle to perpetuate customary and "Islamic" practices.

The lives of these women reflect the patriarchal culture into which they were born. Even as girls they are not valued, and the kind of training they receive is meant to restrict their worldview. Loyaan makes an observation regarding Beydan's status in Somali society which is applicable to Qumman and by generalisation to all women as well:

> . . . for one thing, Beydan as a child, as a girl, was never given a globe to illustrate nor a world to dream. She was offered broken claypot to play with and bones to dress as dolls. She was bound leg and foot to a choice not her own. Her hand was exchanged for cash delivered. She was somebody's property. She was nobody (Farah, 1992:164-165).

In a society such as this, women are not given the opportunity for those exploration which may lead to self-definition, instead, they rely on tradition for a definition of themselves. As for men, they are:

> . . . the vintage class of superior beings. Men could drop their anchor's weight anywhere they please. Their sail could flutter in the wind of their freedom. (Farah, 1992:164).

The terror which the regime perpetuates is pervasive. And women suffer in many different ways. At the "Rendezvous of Brooms" when all able-bodied men and women are required to come and sweep all roads leading off and on to the routes which the visiting dignitaries will take, there is only a sprinkling of men present. This is so because women leave their husbands and brothers inside ostensibly to take a siesta. For the small number of males present, women must assume responsibility:

> Women had the difficult task of making sure these men wouldn't lose their temper, nor their heads, and speak their minds and in that way endanger their own lives and the lives of the women and the children who were financially dependent on them (Farah, 1992:209).

To further entrench the patriarchal domination in this society, women are sacrificed to the lust of these visiting dignitaries, since one of their functions is to quench the sexual thirst of men, so:

> Mr. Visiting President, come: take this key, the symbol of power, and open the cleaned and shaven legs of our womanhood . . . We host you, we present you with a hand of your choice. We've given one Belet-weine girl to Idi, we give you another, Mr. Visiting Dignitary. Please accept this exchange – not so much of opinion. Our people don't have opinions. We are all after our general. We pray to him (Farah, 1992:204-205).

Along this patriarchal continuum, sexual power is seen as another extension and manifestation of political power. As seen earlier in the case of Beydan, Somalia is a country where a widow is forced by the government to marry the policeman who has murdered her husband, here again, power is imaged as a captive mistress who is pandered to, courted and finally seized by the General, we have village brides offered up to the sadistic whims of visiting African dictators like Idi Amin. Another image is of the minister of police, unwrapping a cigar, broke its polythene with the same cruelty as a rapist would deflower a virgin". Patriarchal rights guarantees any monstrous act against women. Farah makes it clear that men are the source of the chains of oppressions which the regime passes on to women. He describes women as "saviours . . . protectors . . . the backbone of the family's unity and safety", this is why Qumman notes that "fathers are secondary" in the lives of their children because all the love and affection needed for a stable family relationship are absent, only pain and constant fear prevails both within familial and societal relationships.

Sweet and Sour Milk, then, is an attack upon the tribalistic and authoritarian practices of the Barre regime, the traditional patriarchs of Somali society and the elite group who sell themselves to the government. Although everyone is affected by the General's regime, women are at the receiving end. They are directly and indirectly oppressed both within the family unit and the state.

Characters like Keynaan are typical patriarchal figures whose power are granted by the tradition and culture of women submission and dependency. It is this same notion of submission and dependency that ultimately grants the general the power to rule the citizenry with the same 'iron hands' as does the patriarch at the family level. The inability of women to resist any form of oppression at the family level make them liable to further oppression at the state level where the power of the general transform them into sacrificial lambs offered to visiting dignitaries to be 'used' and humiliated. The problem with this novel is its inability to fill the gap in deconstructing the patriarchal constructed masculine behaviour of characters such as Keynaan. The novel most comprehensively, incorporates the view that patriarchy is a key "variation" of African dictatorship and indeed the fundamental ground upon which it flourishes.

5.1.1 Islam and the Position of Women in *Sweet and Sour Milk*

In a Somalia ruled by patriarchal despotism, religion is exploited by husbands, the clan, and the political regime, who do not hesitate to distort it in order to attain their own interests and reinforce their authority:

> The cynical politicians, the self-enslaved fanatics, and the devout. There are those characters who use the trappings of religion for political ends, [. . .] those who use their religion to absolve themselves from involvement in the world around them, or who use their interpretation of its precepts to discipline the more creative and the more daring among their family members.

Keynaan, an ex-politician, treats his two wives contemptuously and violently. To justify his misogyny, he, every now and then, refers to religion, misinterpreting Islam to suit his ideas and behaviours. He never deters himself from beating Qumman and Beydan if they ever think of disobeying his wishes and orders. His ruthlessness has left serious damage on their bodies and souls. Knowing that his mother is frequently beaten by Keynaan, Loyaan says, "also today, she had bruises. Her forehead had bled and dried. There was a scar a night old on her arm as well". Before Soyaan's funeral, authoritarian Keynaan

cannot tolerate the idea that Qumman is in the room with the deceased. In what clearly contradicts Islam, which he pretends to adopt, he tells Loyaan to bring her out of the room, or he will drag her out himself, because he believed that "her presence defiles the room". At another point in the novel and in a clear example of misinterpreting religion, he blames Loyaan for listening to women, saying:

> Women are for sleeping with, for giving birth to and bringing up children; they are not good for any other thing. They are not to be trusted with secrets. They can serve the purposes Allah created them for originally, and no more (pp. 89-90).

Loyaan feels sick of how Keynaan never spares an opportunity to refer to Islam and holy Koran to support his unbending points of view. He recalls:

> Women are inferior beings, [Keynaan] unhesitatingly would declare. 'talk to whom? Listen to whom? Beydan or Qumman?You must be out of your head, son. The Koran said . . .!' Yes, I know, I know what the Koran said, when and why. 'Please spare me that'(p. 164).

Keynaan also resorts to religion to hide his ignorance. Loyaan sarcastically says, 'when you confront him with a question of a universal character, his answer is tailor-made, he will say 'only Allah knows, only Allah'". However, when it comes to his authority, this needs no proof. At a moment of rage, in defence of himself and the regime, he screams at Loyaan "I am the father. It is my prerogative to give life and death as I find fit. If I decide to cut you into two, I can. The law of this land invests in men of my age the power". However, this tough patriarchal figure, who takes neither his illiterate wives nor his educated sons seriously, suddenly presents himself as a devout Muslim, thus asking Loyaan to read from the Koran after they know of Beydan's death while giving birth. He says:

> Read on. Bless us. Bless your mother who has sinned. Bless your brother who died an innocent death. Bless us all. Bless us so that Allah may deliver us from our sins and the sins we harbour inside ourselves. [. . .] Bless Beydan. Bless the newly arrived, welcome him (p. 264).

Ironically, Keynaan is dating a girl younger than his daughter, Ladan, and he is planning to take her as a third wife. This, nevertheless, is not among his sins; as a Muslim male, he uses his right to four wives, but he neglects the restrictive condition that he has to be fair and treat them equally. He, for example, hasn't slept with Qumman for more than two decades, sexually preferring younger Beydan to her.

In addition, religion is used by many clergymen and politicians to ensure themselves certain privileges and power. On the seventh day of Soyaan's death, and before saying their prayers, the sheikhs are the first to eat and are served the best meat, together with other important guests, mostly politicians and tribal chiefs. Other men follow them, and later, women, who work hard to prepare the feast, eat "the intestines, the plain and the honeycomb tripe [. . .]. What the women wouldn't eat went to the beggars", something merely traditional and not religious at all.

In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the dictator is the grand patriarch, who claims a new type of rule supposedly based on Islam and Marxism, but actually using the tribe and its values to dominate every single aspect of life in post-colonial Somalia. The regime arrests opponents, including women, throws them in jail, and executes them in the name of Islam, which seems sarcastic knowing that "orientation centres" have been built and "it was to them that people went, not to mosques anymore". In "Nuruddin Farah: A Combining of Gifts" (1989), an interview with Maya Jaggi, Farah says "For a Muslim believer, it is God who decides the destiny of all people; for a mortal to have a whip in his hand and to judge and determine the fate of someone in the name of the Lord is profoundly unIslamic thus, referring to the General and his rule. Although Islam is incompatible with the socialist rule the General claims to adopt, in "opposing dictatorship" (2002) Barbar Turfan writes:

> [He] has been able to distort his subjects' interpretation of Islam, bribing or coercing the sheikhs to support his rule and to lead their followers in singing his

> praises and comparing him, grotesquely, with the Prophet or even with Allah [. . .] The provision of an Islamic legitimacy for a dictatorial, Marxist-Leninist regime is something the General obviously finds of extreme importance in securing at least the passivity and at best the full support of the populace (p. 270).

One more example of the abuse of religion by authorities is their carelessness about the dire poverty which, pervades the country. The streets of Mogadishu overflow with fatherless children and beggars and all the regime does is collecting them and putting them in jail whenever a foreign diplomat visits the country. Farah sheds light on the fact that while a lot of people can barely find something to eat, the general and his ministers live in outrageous luxury. Farah's narrator makes it clear that the general cares the least about Islam and justice; what he really cares about is power. He writes:

> That is what the Koran promised men of equal birth. But the General himself, disbelieving in the teachings of the Koran, denied men equal to himself the right to have their sales beat untampered with in the openness of God's air. Think of the general as another infidel, quoting and misquoting linen in order to remain in power [. . .] To rule, the General hoists the mast of his flag post which he feels is secure more with the KGB than with the Koran (p. 165).

Soyaan has been courageous enough to confront the general with all these cruelties, thus telling him, "it is unconstitutional to pass laws, sign decrees, run a martial-law government and then sentence these sheikhs to death. It is against the teaching of the Koran on which they base their arguments". At this point, the General gets furious and screams, "I am the constitution, now you know who I am, and I want you out of here before I set those dogs of mine on you and you are turn to pieces. It is worth mentioning that Farah does not introduce Soyaan, who pays his life as a result of being true, as a devout Muslim. On the contrary, he drinks alcohol and has a child out of wedlock, while many other supposedly pious individuals not only keep silent towards all the cruelties and brutalities but also participate in praising the General, despite all the verses in the Koran and the Prophet's Hadith that urged believers to speak truth to power.

5.2 CLOSE SESAME

Close Sesame is Farah's last book of the trilogy: *Variations on the Theme of African dictatorship*. The novel presents a positive image of a family presided over with gentleness and dignity by the aging, "devoutly" Muslim Deeriye. In this novel, Farah attempts to examine alternative potentially positive aspects of patriarchy by portraying a traditional patriarchal family that is not based on oppression and domination. Mutual respect for each other is the foundation of the relationships among the members of this family. As "pious Muslim" Deeriye cannot reject his family. Firm obligations are placed on the Muslim to care for and show respect to both nuclear and extended family. In Islam, the hierarchical order of love proceeds from God to the prophet to one's mother and then the father and other relations. Deeriye, the patriarch of the family, is an old and respected anti-colonial fighter who enjoys his old age living with his son, Mursal and Mursal's family. Like the notoriously authoritarian Idil in *Sardines*, Deeriye has been moved from the home of his daughter to that of his son. Whereas Idil deliberately provokes dissension and invokes her parental power with devastating results on the lives of her son and daughter, old Deeriye gracefully accepts whatever decisions are made on his behalf and attempts to blend into his family's lives, as unobtrusively as possible.

To the humanitarian Deeriye, the notion of a father paralleling the gargantuan authoritarianism of the head of state is anathema. He had always allowed his children the right to express their own views even when these were opposed to his. He invited them to join him in religious observances, but never insisted that they follow his pure Islamic pattern and even while fearing that their political views and activities would endanger their lives, he still preferred to give them the latitude to express their individual ideologies. An example is Deeriye's acceptance of his daughter's independent life-style that radically differs from the conventional norm for a Somali woman. Zeinab is a medical doctor with a

successful professional career. Even though she is a widow whose husband died fighting for the Somali cause during the 1977-1978 Ethiopian-Somali war, Deeriye does not insist that she remarry – the standard course for a Somali widow.

Mursal's marriage to an American Jew is regarded as unorthodox in the Islamic society of Somali, but this is something that is warmly accepted within the Deeriye family circle. Mursal has married a wealthy American Jew, Natasha, who treats Deeriye with extreme courtesy and kindness, who goes out of her way to help her aged father-in-law, although she is incapable of crossing the barrier between her own culture and his. As a polyglot, Natasha communicates with her husband and son in English. Because she has not mastered the intricacies of Somali language, she and Deeriye use Italian as their common medium. Their relationship is one of mutual respect and courtesy, rather than of deep affection, each fearing inadvertently to hurt the other by a mis-understood innuendo or colloquialism. Deeriye 'the one who offers warmth' and therefore the true Muslim – has extended his kindness beyond his own children to include his American Jewish daughter-in-law. His friends decry him for his ready acceptance of her within his family, but as he reminds them, "All Jews are not Israelis and even then all Israelis are not Zionists" (Farah, 1992). Revolution must start inside the home and the family, and this is Farah's message: Deeriye, the messenger, an ethical exemplum, has made it possible. Deeriye's revolutionary message lies in the way he has created a new modern and hybrid form of home and of father-son and man-woman relationships.

The presentation of characters like Zeinab and Natasha shows Farah's ideal society of equal gender status. Zeinab is presented as a well educated character and a doctor by profession, who earns a good living from her career, while Natasha, a foreigner, is a university professor with a stable and comfortable economic status. This is against the patriarchal construct which does not give women a chance to support themselves; women

are expected to be economically dependent as this is the only means that they can be effectively controlled. Tyson (1999) explains that the prevalence of economic difference is inevitable in a patriarchal world because women are denied the educational and occupational means of acquiring those powers. Farah has given these women the power to be economically independent from male subservience in this patriarchal society.

One might argue that both tradition and religion have already achieved representation in the earlier novel, *Sardines,* through the characters of the Somali traditional Idil, and the Yemeni religious Fatima bint Thabit. The challenge in *Close Sesame* is to represent tradition and religion in and through the character of Deeriye. The irony of the representation in this novel is that, the vehicle through which tradition and religion achieve representation is through an ailing, frail, very elderly man. One implication is that consequent upon his age, Deeriye must live a radically circumscribed life. In the novel we are informed that the aged father is moved from a room in his daughter's house which is being renovated, to the home of his son where he has "a room of [his] own". Deeriye's door is kept ajar to allow the family's benevolent vigilance over the old man. Deeriye, of course, also has a room of his own in his twelve years of incarceration in colonial jails and four years in independence jails. Without exception, the "action" of the novel occurs in one room in his son's home, "and is very static," as Bardolph (2002) suggests. But the room is one with a view. Through this window, Deeriye may gaze upon but not participate in the activities of the street, which frequently involve the mad revelations of the mysterious character, Khaliif. The sense that Deeriye is radically cut off from the society around himself is exaggerated by the fact also that when in his room, he listens with headphones to "isolated Koranic litanies" (Farah, 1992) and to recordings of the Sayyid's poetry. So often, when other people enter his room, he is not

even aware of their presence. The poetry, of course, is also supposed to entrench the conviction that Deeriye embodies tradition.

The novel discusses the importance of poetry to Somali tradition. Although it is understood that Somali oral poetry is highly "individual" in composition, but it is also highly social in performance. But Deeriye's enfeebled physical condition makes the fact of his possible performance, or his participation in a living tradition impossible. The text also reproduces eleven lines of "The Death of Corfield", Deeriye's favourite poem composed by Sayyid, in untranslated Somali. Farah's refusal to translate these lines from the poem may be because he does not want the poem to be assimilated into the dominant language of discourse. The poem "The Death of Richard Corfield" was composed by the Sayyid after the leader of the camel constabulary was killed in a battle with the Dervishes (Andrzejewski & Lewis (1964). The poem is particularly fierce in tone, perhaps since the Sayyid saw in Corfield the image of his own crazy recklessness. The poem is addressed to Corfield in the next world and is very strategically composed to exalt and encourage Dervish unity and bravery, and confirm that the Dervishes have justice on their side. The poem is a call to action which would expose the fundamentally opposed invocation of the novel to potentially endless interpretation such as being a historical documentation of Somali Nationalism.

Close Sesame, despite the title which suggests finality and despite the expectation that it might share in the relative certainties of tradition and religion which it is supposed to represent, is one of Farah's most radically indeterminate novels. Wright (1994) suggests the ambiguous and paradoxical, the unexplained and indeterminate, occupy so much space in [the] narrative that it is uncertain whether the final effect is a polyvalence of meaning or a massive aporia at the core of the book. Even Deeriye's death at the end of the novel is shrouded in uncertainty. His action may have been suicide or a failed assassination

attempt. If an assassination attempt, it fails since his revolver gets caught in his prayer beads. This may suggest the inadequacy of religion in the face of political oppression or the triumph of religion which resists becoming the mirror image of evil. In the position of Islamic law and history, the family of a murder victim has a right of retaliation against a murderer. This provision provides the relative rational for Deeriye's attempted assassination of the Dictator. Since Deeriye's son, Mursal has been murdered by the regime, in terms of the novels' version of Islamic law, Deeriye has the right of retaliation against the person of the Dictator. The Sayyid only retrospectively comes to be constituted as the father of Somali nationalism. The Sayyid's primary orientation was religious, a religious understanding which did not outright reject kinship structures. The effect of the Sayyid's religiously inspired anti-colonial activities was to a certain extent to disembed the subject from narrowly defined clan associations and re-embed the subject in a wider religious identity. This did not prevent him, however, from on occasion opportunistically manipulating clan identities (Samatar, A.I. 32-33). Deeriye, by contrast, regards his time in prison as the closed space which opens up his eyes to the fictionality of clan (Farah, 1994). Clan exists only as "trivial [. . .] politicking" (Farah, 1994). Deeriye's reality is constituted around the "autonomy" of his subjectivity whose precondition is "a losing-control of the clan ideology or the narrow-minded 'family first' ideology" (Farah, 1994).

The novel shows a virtually complete parallel between the Sayyid, father of Somali nationalism and his replica in the novel, Deeriye. While Sayyid reflects an identity oriented against the Somali social code in significant ways structured around kinship relations, Deeriye, reflecting the sensibility of all Farah's positively represented characters, completely rejects the idea of clan. While kinship relations to a certain extent may be a construct, often disastrously manipulated as posited by Besteman (1998) and Kapteijns (2006), they also are a significant aspect of Somali identity, so fundamental that

they are noticed only by default, when there are tensions in the system. For example, the economy of the Somaliland Republic is virtually completely a remittance economy which depends precisely on kinship obligations. In other words, in this case, kinship obligations, "clan", is not only what keeps the Somaliland economy moving, but traditional conflict resolution techniques are precisely what allowed the fragile and regionally threatened stability of the Somaliland Republic to emerge (Bradbury, 2008).

In the time frame depicted in the novel, Deeriye ventures out of his room on only three occasions; the first when he is struck by a stone thrown through the window and is taken to the hospital, the second when he is dropped off by his daughter-in-law at a neighbourhood tea shop and the third when he attends the meeting of clan elders organized by the Dictator. Curiously, on each of these occasions, when Deeriye does venture out into the world, he is not fully in the world. He is taken to the hospital unconscious. His visit to the Baar Novecento and his subsequent walk to the house of his friend is marked by confused bewilderment. And Deeriye's participation in the clan assembly is punctuated by unavoidable catnaps. Although Farah try to present Deeriye in a struggle to represent community due to his old age as tradition expects but he cannot be fully integrated into the social fabric due to debilities of old age and ill-health.

Deeriye is taken in criticism of the novel to represent the very pious Muslim. And indeed superficially, that is what he is. He is extremely conscientious about the five daily prayers, reads the Qur'an in the colonial prison, has the professions of faith constantly on his lips and has a profoundly spiritual consciousness. But, what once again is curious about him is that he is physically unable to participate in the collective dimension of the expression of the Islamic faith. In the course of the entire novel, Deeriye is only on one occasion able to perform prayers in a mosque, even though Islam highly encourages congregational prayers five times a day every day. Deeriye visits the mosque as an

incidental detour on his walk from the Baar Novecento to the house of his friend, Rooble. What is interesting is that the mosque, as forum for prayer, education and socialisation, in a sense constitute the religious equivalent of the eighteenth century coffee shops of the bourgeois public sphere, this is because despite its potential, the mosque does not come into the focus of the novel in any specific way. Deeriye as "the pious Muslim" thus masks a contradiction. Through the superficial elements of clothing, ritual and other worldly spirituality, criticism interprets Deeriye as representative of Islamic consciousness. But this reading is flawed since Deeriye in essential ways is seen to be completely alienated from social forms of religious activities.

For the pious Muslim, the Qur'an is the word of God and the Prophet is the Perfect Man. The fundamentals of the faith thus established prescribed a wholly social practice. While various grades of obligation exist from mandatory to recommended, what are termed the "five pillars", are the *sine qua non* of faith. Each of these fundamentals is constitutively social: The *shahada*, or statement of belief, namely, that there is only one God and that Muhammad is His final messenger, is not an interior belief but a declaration, a "performative"; the call to the five daily prayers is a call (ideally) to congregational worship; the injunction to give *zakah* or almsgiving, is a call to social responsibility, the requirement that one perform the *hadj*, or pilgrimage at least one in one's lifetime is an invocation to participation in a social ritual and the injunction to fast in Ramadaan is necessarily a public call since the lunar month of Ramadaan begins and ends with collective sighting of the moon. *Close Sesame* represents religious devotion through the hero, Deeriye, as the private pastime of the private individual. In Deeriye, there is virtually complete absence of these dimensions of Muslim practice. Like the protagonists in Farah's other novels, Deeriye draws his moral sources from within himself.

There are also powerful allusions to the sufi tradition in Somali Islam expressed through the portrayal of the character of Deeriye. Until recently, since Somalia has come under the partial influence of what is termed "wahhabi" or "Salafi" interpretations of Islam, regarded as part of a broader response to modernity, virtually all Somalis were associated with one of the sufi orders, which trace their origins to the Qadiry brotherhood, founded by Abdul-Qader Jilani. The Sayyid was the founder of the Northern splinter group called the Saalihiy order, while the Uwaysiyya order dominated in the South. What is common to all sufi movements, however, are the concepts of interiority and development. These come together in the sufi concept of "*tariqa*" or path. Like the self-development traced in the 18th century European *Bildungsroman*, the path negotiates various stages of development or, in the discourse of Islam, "stations" or "*maqamat*" (Schimmel, 1987). A fundamental difference between the two models of self-development, however, is that Islamic development is always a spiritual development as opposed to a secular development which witnesses the isolated individual inwardly at odds with society, finally reaching some associational compromise. The spiritual journey is in some ways similarly a lonely, individual journey, but also, paradoxically, a journey of confraternity in which the initiate is induced into a brotherhood and where the most significant social bond is the allegiance to "*Sheikh"* or spiritual guide.

The marked divergence of novelistic representation of Somali Muslim piety from its historical expression in the brotherhoods is suggested by a cursory glance at Ahmed Samatar's analysis of the "basic characteristics" of the Somali sufi orders. These include belief 'in the living spirit of the great Prophet", "the degree of control and power given to the leader of the order", "a collective and organised spirit", frequent " 'congregational' activities" called Dhikris", vertical and horizontal integration of "inchoate groups", the

revival of the broadly social concepts of *hegira* (emigration) and *jihad* to resist British colonial penetration (Samater, 1988).

This chapter has shown the representation of gender, religion and tradition in Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk* and *Close Sesame.* In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, we understand that, blind religious faith never provides a solution for people suffering from different kinds of oppression and cruelty. Religious practices do not give Qumman, Beydan, and other poor Somalis the means to get rid of domestic, social, or political dictatorship. Religious faith is definitely a source of relief on the short term, but if it is not accompanied by education, open-mindedness, and will power to act, it will be another means of repression and persecution and a symbol of speechlessness and powerlessness. Hope though, seems to lie in the new generation represented by strong-willed, educated, and independent people like Ladan who, unlike Qumman, and Beydan, refuses to surrender to prevailing beliefs and values. Such individuals can be both religious and knowledgeable, rejecting superstitions and embracing the essence of religion, which stimulates believers to work, had for righteousness, equality, goodness and justice.

Close Sesame has shown the representation of gender through Farah's attempt at examining the alternative potentially positive aspects of patriarchy by portraying a family set-up not based on oppression or gender discrimination. The representation of Somali history and tradition received attention especially in relation to kinship ties and Somali clan affiliation. *Close Sesame* novel however, did not portray a vibrant, living religious tradition. Despite the representation of Deeriye as a man of tradition and faith, he remain disengaged in religious practices thereby confirming Farah's ideology on religion as basically an entirely individual affair.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This study examines the position of women under the patriarchal traditional Somali society using feminist literary criticism as its theoretical framework. The study is built on the assumption that patriarchy is the underlying source of women subjugation within the Somali traditional Muslim society as portrayed in the selected works of Nuruddin Farah. As various feminists have theoretically used the concept of patriarchy to address the question of the real basis of the subordination of women, and to analyse the particular forms which it assumes, this study affirms Millett's (1977) interpretation of patriarchy as the system of male domination and the power relationships by which men dominate women. This study explains that culture and religion is a major site for power because they are determinative of individual actions. In Somalia, the already existing culture and the misinterpretation of some Islamic precepts, provide a suitable ground for men to exercise their power over women and for the General too to exercise his own power over the citizenry. According to Foucault, there is no relation of power without resistance, therefore, this study establishes that the resistance of Farah's protagonists from all forms of male chauvinism shows the presence of power within the Somali society.

The study shows that Farah's novels are acts of reformism, recognizing that women can wrest away the historic privilege of males as the sole interpreters of Islamic teaching. Ebla, in *From a Crooked Rib* for example, demonstrates over and over again through the narrative that Islam is interpretive and performative. This study therefore argues that religion, in this case Islam, is not the sole embodiment and conveyor of patriarchal ideology in Muslim societies. However, Islamic forms of reasoning and argumentation play a prominent and justifiable role. Since Farah has established himself as a postcolonial writer whose major concern is the plight of women, especially the Somali

women of his country who suffer double oppression due to the complicity between the Somali traditional family structure and the political system in the repression of women in Somali, his women are seen to be self-assertive in preserving their dignity as individuals who are ready to challenge the existing status quo as regards women's position in Somali society.

Through the analysis of the texts selected for this research, the study argues that Nuruddin Farah's novels are realistic representation of the position of women in Somalia. A clear understanding of Farah's novels reveals that he sees no virtue in the Somali culture which he portrays as tyrannical. This is why he used his imaginative engagement with the plight of women in an Islamised, pastoralist society and challenges all aspects of patriarchy and its consequences on women especially on the area of Female Genital Mutilation, a phenomenon that is widespread in Somalia. As established in this study, this practice is considered as a patriarchal sanctioned practice, meant to show that some particular cultures are contrary to nature and that this practice does not have any bearing with religion, but that eventually culture made it up through free interpretation. This is why in all of Farah's books selected for this study, patriarchy in all its forms is challenged in one way or the other. Sub-summed under the status quo are all forms of authority whether in form of personal, that is, in form of male household head, and the public, that is, head of state power. And his female characters are those whose lives have been affected by 'flaws in Somali society' at the levels of both domestic and national politics. Farah's primary commitment as an artist who depicts a particular culture and place are defined in his novels whose central focus are an attempt at bringing about a revolutionary transformation of the existing social structures. This study also affirms that unlike most of the other African countries which underwent western colonization and consequent religious indoctrination superimposed upon their own traditional beliefs, Somalia enjoys a

unique cohesion of language and culture, it is also rare in that it has remained almost entirely Islamic although most Islamic doctrines are abused by the totalitarian regime and by traditional patriarchs in form of household heads.

The study concludes that Farah's secular ideals grew out of the need to search for the betterment of women's status in life. What is paramount in his vision is the need for equality and independence from the bondage provided by tradition. The misinterpretation of some Qur'anic verses to suit the selfish interest of men thereby subjecting women to various forms of hardship is also of concern to Farah who having come from a solid Islamic background must have known the real interpretation of most Qur'anic verses and the position of women as stipulated in both the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the teachings/sayings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW). This provides the justification for him to question and challenge the ill-treatment of women in his society which is supposed to be built on Islamic precepts. But since he has not grown to be a devout practicing Muslim himself, it is observed that from the perspectives of Farah's work, religion is primarily an individual and personal affair. Farah believes that women should be allowed to assert their dignity as equal human beings with men both within the family and in the wider society. Thus, he consciously challenges the Somali culture and tradition through his protagonist at the same time disabusing certain readers of the idea that Islam necessarily impairs self-determination in women. To assert his point properly, Farah portrays women characters who are the worse victimized as agents of his secular ideas. Since these women lived in many cosmopolitan cities, they behave in cosmopolitan ways that are regarded as non-Islamic, non-traditional, since what they have gained access to separates them from the culture which surrounds them. According to Farah's works therefore, education is the main source of women empowerment. The novels selected for this study illustrate the fact that Farah is an intellectual who has used his creative talent to

comment on life and society. This has enabled him to maintain his position as the first and best author who writes in English language to emerge from Somalia.

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