THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN
IN THE NOVELS OF NURUDDIN FARAH

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF THE DOCTOR OF ARTS IN THE HUMANITIES

BY
GLORIA A. MIXON

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JULY 1987
ABSTRACT

HUMANITIES

MIXON, GLORIA ANN  M.A. ATLANTA UNIVERSITY, 1956

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF NURUDDIN FARAH

Advisor: Professor David F. Dorsey, Jr.

Dissertation dated July 1987

The focal point of this study is the social status and the political status of women in Somalia as depicted in the novels of Nuruddin Farah (1945- ). Based on their roles in the novels, the female characters are classified as the traditional Somali woman who symbolizes what is now the status of women in Somalia; the transitional Somali woman who symbolizes what is becoming the status of women in Somalia; the liberated modern Somali woman who symbolizes what should be the status of women in Somalia; and the modern Western woman who, because of her Western values and liaisons with Somali males, serves as a contrast to the Somali woman in every classification.

The study contends that changes in the status of women in Somalia are related to changing forces in Somali religion, politics and economics, while 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 polygamous marriage, oppression of barren women, and "muledom."
NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations and theses deposited in the Atlanta University Center R. W. Woodruff Library must be used only in accordance with the stipulation prescribed by the author in the preceding statement.

The author of this thesis/dissertation is:

Name: ________________ Gloria Ann Mixon

Street Address: __________ 610 Beckwith Street, S.W.

City, State, and Zip _____ Atlanta, Georgia 30314

The director of this thesis/dissertation is:

Professor: _______________ Dr. David F. Dorsey, Jr.

Department: _______________ English

School: ________________ School of Arts and Sciences
        Atlanta University

Office Telephone: ________ (404) 681-0254

Users of this thesis/dissertation not regularly enrolled as students of the Atlanta University Center are required to attest acceptance of the preceding stipulations by signing below. Libraries borrowing this thesis for the use of thesis patrons are required to see that each user records here the information requested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF USER</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TYPE OF USE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I am deeply moved and most appreciative when I consider the loving kindness of my professors, friends, and family toward me as I wrote this dissertation. My committee was unsurpassed in their dedication. Professor David F. Dorsey, Jr., my major advisor, posed probing questions which led me to seek the deeper meaning. Professors Lucy C. Grigsby, Mohammed Hassen, and Elizabeth Higgins provided knowledgeable and painstaking evaluation of my work, for which I am grateful.

Others who contributed immensely to the realization of this work are: the librarians at the AUC Woodruff Library, especially Valarie Bell, Jacquelyn Johnson-Daniel, and Fannie Simmons; Karen Nails, my "waymaker;" Eva Wicker, my "listening ear;" and Carolyn Clark, my "cheerleader" and typist whose careful attention to detail made the difference; and to a number of other colleagues and friends who have supported me in many ways. I extend sincere thanks for their aid and encouragement.

My deepest gratitude goes to my sister Dolores Mixon Henderson and other members of my family for their unwavering devotion.

This dissertation is dedicated to my favorite aunt, Ora Mixon Forbes, who always comes; to my mother and father, Johanna and Theophilus Mixon, who were there from the beginning; and to God who is the beginning.

The United Negro College Fund Faculty Development Fellowship Grant for the 1982-83 academic year and the renewal of that grant for the 1984-85 academic year also facilitated the completion of this dissertation.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. SOMALIA, THE COUNTRY, AND FARAH, THE WRITER:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN OVERVIEW</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. FARAH'S EARLIEST NOVELS:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND REVOLUTION</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. FARAH'S TRILOGY:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF AN AFRICAN DICTATORSHIP</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FARAH'S LATEST NOVEL:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRREDENTISM, WAR AND SACRIFICE</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

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 literature, the picture is almost always distorted. As Naana Banyiwa-Horne asserts,

Women as portrayed by African males (and by some African females) are seldom drawn realistically 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 conceptions, or rather misconceptions, of female sexuality. Men writers tend to overplay the sexuality of their female characters, creating the impression that women have no identity 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 works. Furthermore, male images of African womanhood tend to be idealized and romanticized. There is little or no psychological growth in such portraits which seems to suggest they are largely male fantasies of womanhood. The above does not suggest that every African male writer dabbles in stereotypes of African womanhood. There are brilliant exceptions. But generally, male depictions of African womanhood conform to the above stated observations.

Brilliant exception to this portrayal of African womanhood by African male writers is found in the works of Nuruddin Farah. Here is an African male writer who does not dabble in stereotypes of African womanhood but portrays women as independent individuals. Farah is probably unequalled as an African male writer who frequently raises women from secondary roles and makes them the primary focus of his concern.

This study investigates the social status and the political status of women as they are depicted in the novels of Nuruddin Farah. It shows how Farah relates the changes in the status of women in Somalia to changing forces in Somali religion, politics, and economics.

In analyzing the issues raised by the examination of Farah's portrayal of women in his novels, this dissertation is divided into four chapters, followed by a conclusion. These chapters present his works in chronological order—the earliest novels, the trilogy, and the latest novel. The following aspects of each novel are considered: (1) A synopsis of the plot is given as the message of the book is examined.

Ibid., p. 120.
The roles of the female characters are explored. A general statement is given about the political situation in Somalia, including the novel's special message about women. The examination of the status of women as depicted in the novels employs four classifications of women; namely, the traditional Somali woman, the transitional Somali woman, the liberated modern Somali woman, and the modern Western woman. For purposes of this study the traditional Somali woman is defined as that woman whose life, values, and activities are prescribed by customary and Islamic laws. Not only does she reflect these rules in her own life, but she strives to project them upon the lives of others. As she vigorously attempts to protect the old ways, she shows what is now the status of women in Somali society. The transitional Somali woman does not accept unquestioningly the subservient status imposed upon her by customary and Islamic laws. Her strong desire to achieve self-determination and her Western education make it impossible for her to accept completely the old ways. Yet because she is unaccustomed to making choices in matters that concern herself, she is not able always to achieve a balance in her life. This frequently leads to excesses that negatively affect her new experience. While her movement is toward the modern, she brings with her remnants of the past that sometimes impede her progress. She provides glimpses of what the status of women in Somali society is becoming. The liberated modern Somali woman is that woman who has gained substantial freedom from her traditional culture. Western education and changing political conditions in Somalia have provided her a different world-view and
opportunities which have resulted in this freedom. She moves freely in the workplace, is economically independent, and her male relationships always involve liberated males. It is argued that she reflects what Farah believes the status of Somali women should be. And finally, as defined in this study, the modern Western woman is that woman who comes to Somalia conditioned by her culture and education to seek individual fulfillment rather than the collective good. As she interacts with the Somali male, she reflects the deleterious effect that blind acceptance of Western values and practices has had upon Somali society.

Chapter one presents an overview of background information which is pertinent to an understanding of Farah's novels. A brief description is given of Somalia, the land, its people, its culture, and of Farah, the man, the writer. This overview of background information functions in three ways to prepare the way for the extensive analysis of Farah's works which is the focus of this study. First, the sketch 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. Second, the sketch of Farah the man and the writer enhances understanding of this African male author who, although writing in the tradition of a very select group of writers, has done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing. And third, the sketch of Western and African feminism clarifies Farah's position as a feminist. Those issues which most concern African women themselves are shown to be among the issues which Farah treats in his novels.

Chapter two studies the earliest novels of Farah: From A Crooked
Rib (1970) and A Naked Needle (1976). These two novels discuss the plight of the Somali woman and the plight of the Western woman when she ventures into Somali society. Together, the novels are a study of contrasting cultural values. From A Crooked Rib shows the general odds which weigh against the female in a traditional Islamic cultural environment, while A Naked Needle contrasts the responses to this Islamic culture of the rare Somali woman who has studied in the West and the Western white woman with that of the average Somali woman.

Chapter three analyzes the female characters in Farah's trilogy: Sweet and Sour Milk (1979), Sardines (1981), and Close Sesame (1983). These novels give considerable attention to women while focusing on the repressive and horrifying aspects of the Somali military regime. The African woman is portrayed in various ways: for example, some represent women who have gained sexual equality in what is essentially a male-dominated world; others demonstrate a strong independence necessary for individual achievement while retaining certain traditional values; still others depict the woman who remains a victim of the rigid Muslim culture.

Chapter four, an analysis of Farah's latest novel, presents another aspect of the status of the African woman in Somalia; namely, her changing roles as precipitated by the Ogaden War. An examination of these roles as they are detailed in Maps (1986) shows that the effects of war are pervasive. Whether she resides in the village or in the city, is a citizen or a refugee, is educated or uneducated, is married
or single, the life of every woman is affected by this event. She sacrifices her sons and her husbands as well as herself to her country's cause of reclamation. The Conclusion reviews the various functions of female characters in Farah's six novels to arrive at a synthesis of his perceptions on what the social and political status of women in Somalia is at the present time, what it is becoming, and what it should be.
CHAPTER ONE

SOMALIA, THE COUNTRY, AND FARAH, THE WRITER:

AN OVERVIEW

The six novels which Nuruddin Farah has written in English have their setting in his native country, Somalia, and they deal with various aspects of that culture: the issue of forced marriage in this Muslim culture is focused upon in *From A Crooked Rib*; the adverse effect of foreign domination upon Somali society is captured in *A Naked Needle*; the far-reaching effects of the Somali dictatorship are examined in his trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines,* and *Close Sesame*; and, finally, the consequences of irredentism and the Ogaden War are explored in *Maps.* The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on Somalia and Farah which is pertinent to an understanding of his novels.

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. Arnoldi 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 northeastern region of Somalia, the Biblical 'Land of Punt.' Pre-Islamic Arabs and Persians founded trading entrepots at Zeila on the Gulf of Aden and Mogadishu on the east coast. In the seventh century, Islamicized Arabs strengthened these trading centers 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 centers exported ivory, hides, aromatic gums, slaves, spices and cattle from the hinterlands and imported and redistributed textiles, metal, pepper, tobacco, coffee, sugar, and manufactured goods.

Although less appealing descriptions of the land are given by Cahill, Lewis, and Laitin, whatever the country's appeal or lack of it to the stranger, for the Somalis it is home, the country which they know, which defines their character.

The people of this generally inhospitable land belong to the Cushitic-speaking peoples who are closely related to the Oromo and the


3 The Oromo, generally known by the derogatory term Galla, are the majority population in Ethiopia and they are found also in Northern Kenya.
Afar of Ethiopia. The population was estimated at roughly 5 million persons in 1986. This includes 3.5 million in Somalia proper and 1.5 million outside of the Republic of Somalia. This population is predominantly rural; nomads and semi-nomads make up about three-fifths of the total. Kaplan suggests that all but a few nationals are ethnic Somali who traditionally are divided into Samaal (pastoral nomadic) who comprise about 75 percent of the population, and Saab (sedentary or semisedentary in the south on and between the Juba and Shabelle rivers) who comprise about 20 percent of the population. An additional 5 percent are engaged in trade. 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 the vast majority of the people. It is taught as a subject in government schools and is the medium of instruction in Muslim schools. Somalia is officially an Islamic state; most nationals are Sunni Muslims. This accounts for the widespread use of Arabic in the

4 The Afar call themselves Afar but are called Danakil by their neighbors.


country.

One of the country's most outstanding characteristics is its homogeneity. Although physical features, language and religion may characterize the Somali as a distinct ethnic group, it is their cultural qualities that most distinguish them as a people or a nation set apart. Cahill 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,

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.

---

7 Cahill, Somalia, p. 18.

8 Ibid.

9 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, p. 1.
For as long as anyone can determine a strong individualism has been characteristic of the Somali:

. . . 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 organized 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 Laurence, a Canadian and the wife of a British engineer sent to Somalia in the 1950s to work on a water basin project, was impressed with Somali self-assurance. Anxious to avoid being a neocolonialist herself, she was concerned that her houseboy, Maxamad, was showing too much deference. But she soon realized, 'I need not have worried, for he was not humble in that detestable way, nor was any Somali I ever met.'

David Laitin tells of an experience which he had while teaching at the National Teacher Education Center in 1969 which further supports the description of the Somali as strongly individualistic. While attending the daily meetings of his department staff to talk over issues concerning the curriculum and individual student and teacher problems, he sat stunned while the school's bus driver and the cook discussed educational issues. Eventually, Laitin understood that to the Somalis the meeting was not unlike the shir, where all adult males of the political community (the xeer) are legitimate participants. The participation of the bus driver and the cook in the departmental

meetings demonstrated as well the lack of any class 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.," "Mrs.," or "Sir." Laitin found 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, habash, 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 occupational groups physically resemble the Somalis, but their ethnic origin is uncertain. They are thought by some authorities to derive from the original population of the land. They hunt, do leather work, do metal work, and in the case of the smallest group, the yibir, do magic. The yibir are called upon to make use of their magical skills by making amulets for the newborn, to bless Somali weddings and to act as soothsayers.

Although these occupational groups are generally attached to xeers, they

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Nelson, Somalia, p. 95.

13 Ibid.
did not (until recently) participate in the political life. Other small groups of people who are left out of the egalitarian Somali system are called habash. These groups differ culturally and physically from the Somalis. According to Nelson:

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 found their own communities or were freed in the course of European antislavery activity in the nineteenth century.

They 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 castes. Women, on the other hand, are excluded from full participation in Somali society because they are believed to be naturally inferior to men. This "natural inferiority" has its roots in traditional or customary practice of the Somali rather than in Islam as is commonly thought. Women were held in low esteem in Somali society long before Islam became a way of life. According to Islamic tenets, women are either the equal of men or the property of men, depending upon Koranic interpretation. All of this notwithstanding, women are less valued than men no matter what their caste.

14 Ibid., p. 92.

The Somalis are basically a nation of nomads with a long pastoral tradition which seems to shape their character, making them the proud, independent, resilient people that they are. Not only are they justly called a "nation of nomads," they are also called a "nation of Bards." Those acquainted with the language and culture of the pastoral Somalis can appreciate what Said Samater calls 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 industrialized 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.

---

16 The pastoral tradition is a way of life for from 75 percent to 90 percent of the population of Somalia. The Somalis are extremely proud of their expertise as managers of livestock. Lee V. Cassanelli, The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People 1600-1900 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 11.

17 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, p. 3.

Nevertheless, those scholars who seek to account for the pervasive role of poetic art among the Somalis by looking only at environmental factors and focusing singly on the vicissitudes of everyday life do not see a complete picture. Samater describes this myopic view in the following paragraphs:

... The life of Somali nomads, it is said, is a life of wandering and danger, devoted as it is to eking out a living in a demanding environment. In the great boredom and bleakness of their surroundings, the theory goes, the Somali nomads turn to their poetry, the one thing which does not cost them anything and provides them with drama and entertainment. According to this view, without the twin inspiration of their faith and verse, the Somalis would waste themselves in fury and desperation.

This is a quaint argument, though it may have some merits. Environmental bleakness per se hardly makes for poetry or poetic creativity. To interpret the lyric verse of the Somali pastoralists merely as a survival mechanism, a feeble and self-pitying cry designed to mitigate life's cruelties to man, is to miss the significance of the poetry craft in Somali society.

Poetry, for the Somali, is not a casual affair; it is woven into the very fabric of Somali life. What, then, makes poetry such a pervasive force in Somali society? For one who is knowledgeable about Somali society, this question is not difficult to answer:

... Somali pastoral verse is a living art affecting almost every aspect of life. Its functions are versatile, concerned not only with matters of art and aesthetics 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

---

19 Ibid.
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 vehicle 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. As Kaplan observes:

Children are early trained with riddles and tongue twisters 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:

... 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 other's probable attitude. If it is unfavorable, he may refrain from asking the favor 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 negotiation is carried on in this manner, including marriage proposals. The art of negotiation has developed into a form of etiquette; Europeans, accustomed to speaking more directly, are often considered crude. Negotiating skillfully has to some extent developed into an art form.

From what has been said regarding the land and the Somali people, it readily can be appreciated that administration of a people who traditionally recognize no instituted authority is no easy matter. As Lewis notes:

every adult male has a say in Council, decisions tend always to be made on an ad hoc basis, and the principle that might is 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. Historically, this is true. David Laitin describes the situation in this way:

Since 1506, when the Portuguese ransacked the coastal town of Brava . . . , the Somali desert has been the scene of an unusual amount of foreign contact. The Arabs, the French, the British, the Italians, the Ethiopians, and the Kenyans have all, at one time or another, attempted to rule the Somali people. Numerous treaties were made dividing the Somali lands without any consultation with the Somali people. Yet throughout the

---

22 Ibid.
23 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 29-30.
centuries, the Somali people never submitted to any foreign rulers. They maintained their dignity, their freedom, and their social institutions. While the Somali lands were being sold piece by piece without their knowledge, the political and cultural implications of those sales did not, for the Somalis, necessarily signal the last days of the world.

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. "Somali pride and xenophobia were natural allies in what turned out to be a century of Western colonial resistance." The long effort of Western colonialists notwithstanding, the Somali Republic emerged independent in 1960 with a fervent nationalist spirit:

. . . The five-pointed star of the republic symbolizes the five different regions of the Somali nation. Somalia had been an Italian colony since the early part of the century. It was under British military administration for a decade in the 1940s, returned for a decade of Italian trusteeship in the 1950s, and was granted independence in 1960. British Somaliland was then under British rule, first under the administration of the colony of India, and subsequently as a British protectorate. It received its independence in 1960, a few days before the Italian trust territory, and the two regions merged on 1 July of that year to become the Somali Republic. Central to the aims of the Somali Republic (now called the Somali Democratic Republic) is the eventual incorporation of the other three Somali areas, including the French Territory of Afars and Issas, the Ethiopian and Ogaadeen region, and the Northeastern Province of Kenya. The ardent desire to incorporate these lands felt by most politically aware Somalis has enhanced the fervor of Somali

24 Laitin, Politics, Language, and Thought, p. 43.

25 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
After independence, a major obstacle to the smooth operation of the country was the vestiges of its division into British and Italian spheres. This was reflected most strikingly in the language situation. Somalia was one of the few countries in Africa whose people all spoke a common language. Nevertheless, the mixed colonial tradition and the lack of agreement over how to write the language led to a situation in which civil servants were unable to communicate in writing with each other despite their common tongue. Independence, of course, brought no magical solutions to the problems of the Somali Republic. As was true in the language situation, problems were accentuated:

. . . official corruption and nepotism seemed to be flourishing on a scale hitherto unknown in the Republic, . . . but there was little sign that either the [Prime Minister] or the President were unduly disturbed by their persistence. It may be argued that, in a society based on kinship and one in which kin groups perceive each other as either enemies or allies in competition for benefits, nepotism and corruption might be regarded as normal practices. Nevertheless there were some who were embittered by it and by the ineptitude of the National Assembly. It had been turned into a sordid marketplace where deputies traded their votes for personal rewards with scant regard for the interests of their constituents.

An even more serious indictment against the "parliamentary

26
Ibid., pp. 28-29.

27

28
Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, p. 45.
"democracy" is made by Mohamoud Hassan:

The petty bourgeoisie formally wielding political power was true to its role of being a transmission belt for imperialism. It succeeded in turning their country into a truly banana republic dominated by foreign capital. All the mechanism of colonial exploitation was still in place a decade after independence. For example, the banana monopoly and the federation of banana producers controlled and regulated banana prices and wages—-a product so critical to the Somali economy as to yield over 30% of export earnings. Financial institutions, insurance companies, energy companies, export/import trade, concessionaire agriculture were firmly in foreign hands. Naturally this corrupt and ideologically bankrupt governing class, maintaining its ostentatious lifestyle, deepened and fanned clan divisions. It hypocritically exhorted the ordinary citizens to abandon these retrograde traditional, clan-related loyalties for building the nation but itself indulged in clan politics to the hilt.

Obviously, no single factor or easily identifiable multiple factors can be isolated as causal in the demise of the "parliamentary democracy" that was expected to flourish in Somalia. Flourish it did not. Somalia experienced only nine years of civilian rule before passing on to military rule. This so-called democratic, civilian government bordered on anarchy and was overthrown in the coup of October 21, 1969.

Given the record of the civilian regime, it was not surprising that the military takeover of power in Somalia was enthusiastically received by most citizens. Harold Nelson accounts for their response to the coup in this way:

... Although the ordinary citizens were aware of the corruption and nepotism that had existed in former government circles, many foreign analysts reasoned that the parliamentary system's failure to provide expected resources and opportunities led most Somalis to accept the new military regime without protest.

The coup's leaders, headed by Major General Mohammed Siad Barre, argued successfully that their action had been motivated by the conditions described above. Therefore, the coup leaders met with no resistance when they, having altered the form of government, set about their goals of establishing the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and revolutionizing the society and its economy.

The SRC, under the direction of its newly named president, Siad Barre, soon made it clear that it intended to establish a socialist society. This group wanted to create a new system which would be adapted to the needs and conditions of Somalia; it would be called "scientific socialism." As was promised, this socialism required certain adjustments in order to fit the Somali society:

In trying to introduce scientific socialism the regime was faced with the problem that no class struggle in the Marxist sense had existed in Somalia. There was no proletariat and no class of entrepreneurs. There was a small bourgeoisie composed of government officials, traders, artisans, and a few professionals. The new leaders focused instead on the divisions in the society: the cleavages between clans, between the sedentary and the nomadic, between rich and poor herdsmen,

30 Nelson, Somalia, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

31 After the break from Russia in 1978, the "scientific" was dropped. Ibid.
between strong and weak pastoral lineages, that competed by force for pastures and wells, between patrons and clients in the cultivating regions, and between urban and rural people, and the continuing disdain for certain low-status groups. Members of religious brotherhoods and of political parties had called each other brother. Now all Somali, regardless of hereditary affiliation, were asked to call each other comrade (jalle). Scientific socialism was regarded by the revolutionary leaders as the only means to ensure the economic development of the country without creating new social inequalities.

The new regime knew that sweeping changes such as the reduction of traditional lineage influence, resettling nomadic pastoralists, adopting a standard orthography for writing the Somali language, as well as combining Socialist and Islamic principles would require extensive, active participation of the people.

The campaign to win people over to the new ideology began immediately:

... Government employees, army and police officers, students, doctors, teachers, and other professionals were forced to attend three-month indoctrination courses. Members of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) traveled all over the country to explain the role of a socialist government at hundreds of meetings. ... In 1970 the central Public Relations Office was set up in Mogadishu to provide political education and liaison between the people and the leadership. ...

... Lectures were given not only on the new ideology but also on health and on agricultural techniques. Literacy classes were held at the centers, and actors, poets, and dancers from the capital gave performances that conveyed the new message.

32 Kaplan, Area Handbook for Somalia, pp. 75-76.

33 Ibid.
Between 1971 and 1974 additional significant programs were initiated that not only focused on the nomadic population in specific terms but on the rural population in general:

The Development Program 1971-1973 called for the establishment of hundreds of cooperatives. Most of these were to be in the cultivating areas, but for the first time some were also to be established among nomads for selling animals. . . .

In 1974 about 25,000 secondary-level students went off into the rural areas to take a nationwide census of people and resources, to teach literacy skills, and to spread the ideas of scientific socialism. . . . [The Government also] called for an end to corruption and lethargy and for the use of self-help . . . schemes. As a result guidance centers, roads, schools, health centers, and storage silos for grain were built by free labor with material supplied by the government. . . .

Certainly there was much government-initiated activity, but few real changes resulted. For example, the strong stand taken by Barre against the solidarity of lineage groups served only to strengthen them. The resettlement of 140,000 nomadic pastoralists in farming communities and in towns on the coast far from their traditional grazing lands resulted in real improvement in their living conditions, but, despite government efforts to eliminate it, a desire to return to the nomadic way of life persisted. More successful, however, was the government's achievement of one of its principal objectives; namely, the adoption of a Latin script to be used throughout Somalia. When the military seized

34
Ibid.

35
power in 1969, it laid the foundation for this adoption of the Latin script which took place in January, 1973.

The successful achievement of these objectives notwithstanding, increasing failure to improve the quality of life for the majority Somali population as well as the resounding defeat suffered by the government during the Ogaden War and its attendant refugee problem plagued the new regime.

In 1960 when the Somali Republic emerged independent from British and Italian rule, a five-pointed star was adopted to symbolize the five different regions of the Somali nation: British Somaliland, the Italian Trust Territory, the French Territory of Afars and Issars, the Ethiopian Haud and Ogaden region, and the Northeastern Province of Kenya. Although at the time of its adoption only British Somaliland and the Italian Trust Territory were independent and merged, it was the desire of politically aware Somalis to incorporate these lands. The 1977 war between Somalia and Ethiopia was the result of efforts to achieve the goal of annexing the Ogaden.

Although the immediate precipitants of the 1977 Ogaden War can be traced to the upsurge of competing regional nationalisms unleashed by

36
Ibid.

37
the Ethiopian Revolution and the brutal repression practiced by Colonel Mengistu's regime, according to Lewis:

... its ultimate origins began in the beginning of Ethiopian imperialism in the region--Menelik's conquest of Harar in 1886 and subsequent military expeditions (equipped with arms supplied from France, Italy and Tsarist Russia) against the surrounding Somali, Afar and Oromo tribesmen.

The Italo-Ethiopian peace negotiations of 1897 defined the Italian sphere as an area 180 miles in depth, running from the Juba River north of Bardera to the confines of the British protectorate. The Italian position had been greatly strengthened by a tri-partite Anglo-Italo-French Agreement of 1906 which pledged the three powers "to cooperate in maintaining the political and territorial status quo in Ethiopia as determined by present conditions." There were no less than nine separate agreements, treaties, and conventions, many of them mutually exclusive and contradictory, and including the Anglo-Italian protocols of 1891 and 1894, which had recognized the Ogaden region as a sphere of Italian interest. With a payment to Menelik of three million lire, Italy obtained by the Italo-Ethiopian treaty of 1908 a frontier running from Dolo on the Juba northwards to the Shebelle. By 1920, the Benadir coast and hinterland had been brought under Italian sovereignty, partly by treaty, partly by the distribution of largesse, and partly by

---


39 Ibid., p. 89.
The rise of a Somali nationalist movement in the 1940s in the two colonies of British and Italian Somaliland led to the defeat of the Italians in 1941; the British retained all of Ogaden until 1948 and a part of it until 1955 before handing it back to Haile Selassie. It is the assertion of Halliday and Molyneux that:

... When the British returned the territories there was no substantial political organization in Ogaden nor was there even the kind of controversial consultation practised by the UN in Eritrea: in British eyes these areas were recognized as part of Ethiopia and were accordingly handed back. The cause of Ogaden remained alive, however, and soon after Somali independence in 1960 a Western Somali Liberation Front was established in Mogadishu.

A conflicting account of the establishment of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) is presented by Nelson who agrees with Halliday and Molyneux that Somalia promoted the organization of insurgent movements by Somalis and Oromos in Ethiopia's southern regions in the early 1960s and provided them with material as well as moral support, but he sees a more conciliatory role of the Barre regime. For example, when some members of the SRC urged active Somali intervention in the Ogaden to recover the "lost territories," Siad Barre is said to have counseled...


patience, predicting that Ethiopia would collapse of its own accord.

. . . Following demonstrations of popular solidarity with the Ogaden Somalis early in 1975, the president ordered security forces to arrest and jail militant leaders in the capital.

Siad Barre continued to seek a negotiated settlement with the military regime in Addis Ababa that would allow for self-determination in the Ogaden. Only when his diplomatic initiative appeared to fail did Siad Barre agree to extend formal recognition late in 1975 to the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which had recently been reorganized by new leaders who had been schooled in the old SYL. Operating in the Ogaden the WSLF was committed to the Greater Somalia concept.

Despite these conflicting accounts regarding Somalia's involvement in the struggle in the Ogaden prior to 1977, it is generally agreed that by 1977 Somali troops were actively engaged in a vicious underground war against Ethiopia. From all accounts, even though the battle was a see-saw one for the most part, the WSLF fortified by Somali troops and supplies was well on the way to victory when Moscow shifted its support from Somalia to Ethiopia in September 1977. The delivery of massive quantities of modern equipment, reinforced by Cuban combat units, turned the tide of the battle against the Somalis leading to Somalia's resounding defeat. By the Spring of 1978 the shattered Somali Army had retreated, and the Ethiopians reoccupied the Ogadan, attacking villages and killing livestock in the

42 Nelson, Somalia, p. 60.
process, and forcing ethnic Somali nomads and farmers to flee.

Some effects of this defeat were that Somalia expelled Soviet advisors and diplomats and broke its treaty with the Soviet Union. There also was the initiation of diplomatic relations with the United States and a massive refugee problem which has worsened over the last ten years. All of these events, together with one of the most devastating droughts in Somali history, have led to increased hardship for the Somali people. The military regime which resolved to bring prosperity has not delivered on its promises. Consequently, there has been increasing dissatisfaction with the Barre government which has led to unsuccessful coup attempts and an increase in repressive measures on the part of the regime:

. . . The regime, sensing its back against the wall, began to exhibit all the classical symptoms of desperation. Political elites everywhere generally tend to exhibit self-interest by appropriating economic wealth to support privileged lifestyles. A desperate one, however, is characterized by rampant materialism, get-rich-quick schemes, opportunism and greed. This growing fear and insecurity soon drove the Somali governing elite to smuggling and land speculation, both at home and abroad.

Ordinary citizens, on the other hand, were subjected to unlimited terrorism perpetrated by their own government. Those who protested

---


against this government were not safe either inside or outside their own borders:

. . . For instance, more than a dozen, perhaps as many as 30 people, have recently been reported shot dead and hundreds arrested by the police and armed forces in Northern Somalia for protesting, in peaceful demonstrations, the arrest and detention of forty young professionals and businessmen in Hargeisa, and also the utter neglect with which that region and its inhabitants have been treated by the central government. In Southern Somalia, a whole clan, the Majerteen, has been targeted for extermination by Barre's Soviet-trained security forces. So the Somali people, be they in the North or South, are getting the worse of it. Their government oppresses them in the most brutal manner with the tools and tactics of the KGB and the world denies them material and moral support. . . .

Moreover, government retaliation is suspected even when the reason for it is unclear:

. . . Just last December, one dissident living in exile was murdered in Djibouti and it is widely rumored that the Somalia Government had a hand in the commission of this heinous crime. Dr. Mohammed Aw Osman, trained in Italy in the medical profession, was a prominent member of the sizable Somali community living in exile, but was not, to our knowledge, directly involved in the opposition to Siad Barre's rule—in fact, it is known that there was bad blood between him and the premier opposition group, the Somali Salvation Front. Why he was murdered is not quite clear yet, but there are, as we have already indicated, sufficient reasons to believe that the Somali government had a direct hand in his death.

As the government became more repressive the people became more vocal. Today, the political situation in Somalia is rapidly


46 Ibid.
deteriorating and the economy is in shambles. All resources of this poor country are mobilized not for the welfare of the people nor for their development but, as Hussein asserts, "to sustain the megalomania of Siad Barre through corruption, patronage, and nepotism." David Laitin believes that the Socialist ideology has "run out of steam."

Reports of the formation of opposition groups seem to corroborate this. These groups are to be found both inside and outside the country. Regardless of their location, all groups have as their goal the dismantling of the Barre machine and the return of power to the Somali people.

Without a doubt, having some knowledge of Somalia--its 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 recognize in some of the situations and characters which Farah portrays certain characteristics of the country and its inhabitants. However, it is through knowledge of Islam and its influences in the Somali culture that one's keenest perception is acquired regarding the status of women in

---

47 Abdirazak Hussein et al., "Document--Political Crisis in Somalia and Prospects for Peace in the Horn," Horn of Africa 5, 3 (1982): 42. This opposition group is but one of many operating outside of Somalia.

48 Laitin, Politics, Language and Thought, p. 63.

49 Hussein, "Document," p. 44.
Somalia and in the novels of Farah.

Islam originated in the seventh century with the life and mission of Muhammad, but it was not a totally new creed invented out of the blue. Its conceptual roots are in Judaism and Christianity. Lippman observes that:

Moslems view their religion as a continuation and rectification of Judeo-Christian tradition. The Jewish scriptures and the prophetic mission of Jesus are incorporated by reference in the Koran.

Islam is at once a religion and a total way of life for almost a fifth of the world's people--800 million to one billion in some sixty countries. They are called Muslims, and they embrace this faith which was first preached by the Prophet Muhammad fourteen centuries ago in the Arabian Peninsula.

Officially, the Islamic calendar begins with A.D. 622 when the Prophet Muhammad left Mecca and marched with his followers to Medina; Islam spread first in Arabia, then east and west across Northern Africa

50 Thomas W. Lippman, Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Moslem World (New York: New American Library, 1982), p. 5. The Koran (sometimes spelled Quran) is a text that consists of 114 Suras ("chapters") which vary in length from three verses (three lines of English text) to 286 verses (more than thirty pages of English text). Each Sura has a brief title, and taken altogether, they form the basis for the Muslim faith. They are, together with the Hadith, complete guides to Muslim living. Ibid., pp. 63-64.

and the Middle East under the successors of Muhammad. It was brought to Somalia around the tenth century, or earlier, by merchants and seamen 52 from Southern Arabia. However, before Islam reached Somalia, quarrels over the succession to leadership had led to a split of the Islamic community into Sunnites (traditionalists) and Shiites (from Shiat Ali, or partisans of Ali). The Sunnites accept the legitimacy of the first four caliphs who succeeded Muhammad. The Shiites, on the other hand, believe that only the descendants of Ali, Muhammad's cousin, who married the Prophet's daughter Fatima, are legitimate. Almost all ethnic Somali are Sunnites. Shiites are found mainly among the transient merchants in the ports, usually Indians and Pakistanis who have their own mosques. Irrespective of the division of Islam to which one may belong, for all adherents

Islam means submission to God and a Muslim is one who has submitted. The religion's basic tenet is stated in its creed: 54

there is no god but God (Allah) and Muhammad is His prophet.

While the tenets cited above form the basis of all Islamic belief, there is room for differing viewpoints; thus, there are varied interpretations extant in African society. Trimingham offers an explanation of why this is so:

52 Kaplan, Area Handbook for Somalia, p. 82.


54 Ibid.
Islam in African society was a process of accommodation rather than one of adoption. African Muslims did not so much adopt Islam, a legalistic religion, as to secure the acceptance of certain Islamic customs in such a way that the customary framework of society remained intact.

This brief description of the reception of Islam in Africa in general is true of its reception in Somalia in particular. An examination of Islamic practices in Somalia reveals that many current practices are traditional procedures which over time have become "Islamized." In this way, itinerant saints, lineage ancestors, and perhaps traditional gods and folk heroes have become sanctified through their association with Islam. It has been suggested that traditional animal sacrifices, made to founding ancestors by living clansmen, over time have been transformed into religious pilgrimages cloaked in Islamic prayers and rituals. In a similar way, pre-Islamic ceremonies held to ensure good rains and abundant harvests have become Islamic festivals in which the saints are beseeched to intercede with Allah. The changing role of the wadad is yet another example of the Islamization of traditional practices:

The wadad or holy man is a figure belonging to the traditional Somali social order before the advent of Islam; since then his position had changed considerably. From being the repository of Cushitic power and lore he has become the Islamic sheik, and often the incumbent of the office of qadi.


Expert in star-lore, religious officiant in marriage, ritual adviser in tribal politics and war, ritual director of sacrifice and rainmaking, all these functions have been retained and subsumed in his present Islamic capacity. The wadad now acts, to some extent at least, according to Mohammedan principles and in the name of Islam. He had become the student of the Koran and Shariah, often as a member of a jama'a community. Tariqa initiates fulfill the functions of wadad for the surrounding tribesmen although they may not necessarily hold a definite office.

These are but a few examples of what was a common occurrence in the accommodation of Somali society to Islam. The accommodation is not always a smooth one. Generally, Somali belief and practice have differed to some extent from that required by Islam. When such a discrepancy exists, customary practice is followed. This is true of the status of women:

Women cannot take part in the tribal or 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 she belongs by birth or marriage; blood-compensation is much lower for a woman than for a man, while under the patria potestas 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 ceremonial. 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 women are on the move the family property on their 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 outcaste 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 relations involving segmentary groups they do so as clients attached to agnatic units, never directly or sui juris.

The Koran, on the other hand, states that God created all mankind from a male and a 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. Lippman observes that:

The Koranic vision of women is both liberating and confining, uplifting and degrading. In a society in which women were taken and put aside like trinkets, often held in conditions approaching bondage, the Koran imposed rules and prohibitions that curbed the worst of these abuses.

But the Koran also describes woman as man's garden. Additionally, it permits daughters to inherit half of what is inherited by sons.

59 Forde, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, pp. 128-129.

60 Stoddard, Cuthell, and Sullivan, Change and the Muslim World, p. 4.

61 Lippman, Understanding Islam, p. 98.

Because of these contradictory Koranic positions on women and customary laws which discriminate against them, the position of women throughout the Islamic world has always been unequal to that of men. So widespread were the abuse and ignorance of the rights of women stated in the Koran that extensive reforms were initiated in the Middle East in the middle of the nineteenth century. These reforms raised the marriage age to sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys--severely limiting child marriages, restricting Muslim men's abuse of repudiation, expanding the grounds entitling women to a divorce, and improving women's marriage, custody, and maintenance rights.

These reforms did not operate in Somalia prior to the formation of the Revolutionary Government in 1969. 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. For the male, circumcision is regarded in Islamic tradition as a mark of purity and the seal of membership in the faith. The operation is not required of girls by Islam because they are not considered ritually as clean as men. Nevertheless, between the ages of six and eight girls are infibulated. The aim is to prepare a


65 Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, p. 44.
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: (1) Excision of the clitoris and infibulation 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 neighbors, 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 infibulation of the vulva--takes about 20 minutes, and is performed at dawn by a Midgan woman. Infibulation, like circumcision, is a mark of adulthood and eligibility for marriage.

Such practices are extremely painful and lead to a number of initial complications, such as shock, tetanus, infection and excessive loss of blood. Later, the young woman experiences abnormally painful and slow menstruation, pain in urination, as well as urine retention, as an opening only the size of a small pin is left after infibulation. 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, they elect to reduce their caloric intake drastically during pregnancy to ensure babies which are smaller and therefore easier to deliver. The procedure produces smaller 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 morbidity and mortality in Somalia, little has been done to limit the practice. In this country, a woman who is not circumcised is considered unclean and no one will marry her. Therefore, emphasis has been placed on accommodating the practice rather than on eliminating it:

Dr. Fadumna Haji, a gynecologist and obstetrician in Mogadishu, stated that while it is not illegal to perform circumcisions in hospitals, it is policy not to do these operations in the hospital. However, women are routinely reinfibulated after deliveries at the hospital. Although it is not government policy, Fadumna Haji and other doctors in Somalia are encouraging parents to come to their private practices for the infibulation so that the girl can have a safer and less painful operation. In addition, doctors and paramedics are pressuring parents to adopt the sunna form of circumcision and end the practice of infibulation, as this is as far as they believe that they can pressure society about circumcision at

this stage.

Not only do women not have control over their bodies in the matter of circumcision, they have little legal control over their lives. Under Somali customary law and in practice a woman is always under the legal protection of a male—her father or husband, or a kinsmen of theirs in the event of their deaths. In blood compensation her life is valued at half that of a man. In Somali practice daughters do not ordinarily share in the inheritance of valued property (contrary to Islamic law). Few girls are sent to school, and even fewer beyond the elementary level.

As has been noted previously, 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. Such is the case of education for females. Because girls have one function, that of becoming good wives, no need to send them to school is seen. Prior to 1975 when universal primary education was established in principle, most Koranic schools accommodated males only. Even with the establishment of putative universal primary education, girls do not generally attend school, and if they do attend, rarely do they go beyond the fourth

68 Ibid.

year—that is, beyond the age of menstruation.

Traditionally, Somali females marry at an early age and therefore in most cases are precluded from prolonged involvement in education. (In some rare cases husbands permit their wives to attend school after the marriage.) 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 notes, do not legalize 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. *Meher*, 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*. ...

The Somalis practice polygamy within the limits of Islamic Law, which permits a man to possess up to four wives at one time. In general, ... polygyny tends to increase with age and status; older men have generally more wives than young men and usually also more livestock. Greater wealth in livestock not only enables a man to pay new bride-wealth but often also leads him to seek a new bride to cope with the husbandry of a flock which has become too

---

70
Ibid., p. 122.

71

72
large to be managed by one woman and her unmarried daughters.

Each wife is to be treated equally, according to Koranic guidelines. The husband circulates among his wives, each of whom may have her hut and possessions in a different part of the territory of her husband's tribe. 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 camels. Although this is essentially women's work, these flocks are the property of their husbands over which the husbands have primary rights of possession and disposal.

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. Forde describes accepted procedures in such matters:

In divorce, which is frequent, the custody of the children is divided between the parents according to sex. Boys remain with

---

73
Lewis, Marriage and the Family, p. 8. Lewis, who has studied widely in the north, speaks of the practice of polygamy there, but the practice is found in all sections of the country.

74
Forde, Ethnographic Survey of Africa, p. 110.

75
Lewis, A Pastoral Democracy, pp. 57-58.
the father, girls go with the mother. Robecchi-Bricchetti's description is not so simple as this. The mother has the custody of her sons until they are about six years old, her daughters stay with her until they marry. These rights are lost as soon as the divorced woman remarries. Cerulli distinguishes voluntary from compulsory divorce. In the first case, the husband decides to renounce his wife and pronounces the requisite formulae in accordance with Islamic Shafi'ite law. Only the man can voluntarily break the marriage bond, the woman cannot procure a divorce until her husband is willing, and cannot in any case participate directly in juridical procedure. In voluntary divorce, the yarad and gabbati are retained by the wife's family, and the amount of meher agreed to is given to the woman. The husband cannot obtain a separation while his wife is pregnant, and a divorced woman cannot remarry until three months have passed from the time of the divorce, in case she should be pregnant. If the husband has recognized grounds for disposing of an unsatisfactory partner, her family will be held responsible for making good the loss, either by giving another daughter in her place or by repaying the bride-price. Adultery committed by the wife does not always lead to divorce, but if a man can prove his wife's adultery and takes the matter before the qadi or elders, a divorce may be granted and compensation paid to the husband.

In compulsory divorce, the husband is obliged by the qadi to pronounce the divorce formulae. This happens when the man fails to complete the payment of bride-price or when the husband is physically incapable of fulfilling his conjugal duties. Compulsory divorce thus provides a means of effecting a separation against the husband's intentions. Although a woman cannot renounce her husband, she can indirectly bring into action sanctions which force her husband to divorce her.

Thus, according to both Islamic Law and customary law as practiced in Somalia, women have limited legal rights. But their condition has undergone drastic changes since the military coup of 1969 and the assumption of power by Siad Barre. The Revolutionary regime

---

moved quickly to change the legal and political status of women. Women were urged to take an active part in government, in sports, in self-help projects, and in committee and council discussions. Special committees were set up to deal exclusively with women's affairs. On January 12, 1975, President Mohammed Siad Barre announced the decision by the SRC and the Council of the Secretariat of State to give equal rights to women in several respects, including equal inheritance rights. Later in the month, the President announced that the government would introduce a law governing polygamy and divorce. Polygamy would no longer be permitted unless men were able to support several wives, as required by Islam, and they would no longer be able to divorce their wives at will.

The first announcement (January 11) was made on the occasion of the twenty-seventh anniversary of the death of a national heroine, Hawa Othman Tako, who was killed in 1948 during political demonstrations. The new law was not widely accepted by the male population, especially the religious leaders:

. . . Apparently the new law was seen as proof by some Somali that the SRC wanted to undermine the basic structure of Islamic society. In Mogadishu twenty-three religious leaders protested inside their mosques. They were arrested within hours and charged with acting at the instigation of a foreign power and with violating the security of the state. Ten of them were executed on January 23, 1975. Most religious leaders, however, remained silent despite the law's apparent attack on the

77

traditionally subservient role of women under Islam.

Because changes in the status of women came abruptly to Somalia and were enforced over the objections of certain religious leaders, today's Somali woman is a woman in transition. Her rights regarding all aspects of her life, especially inheritance, education, marriage, and divorce, have been announced. However, resistance by Islamic leaders, though subdued, delays the actual practice of some of these rights in some areas—especially in the country or small towns. In urban areas (large towns) many women were visible in public posts in the early 1980s:

... For example, six of 171 members of the People's Assembly were women. Increasing numbers of girls and young women were going to school at the secondary and university levels, although in the latter case they were likely to be less prepared than the young men, a condition that should change in time. Whether in fact daughters inherit as do sons has not been studied, nor are there useful observations concerning the status of women in daily life.

A report by Dr. Dualen Rayqiya further describes the status of women in Somalia as of 1982. Amendments to the family law passed in 1975 gave women certain rights regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance. Now, the struggle is for the full implementation of these amendments:

78
Nelson, Somalia, p. 93.

79
Ibid., p. 99.
Women now at least have certain rights in matters of divorce and marriage. There are specific conditions attached to marriage involving a second, third or fourth wife. Marriage must be based upon mutual consent and respect, with both men and women sharing equally in family responsibilities. The bride-price and the marriage contract were placed under the jurisdiction of civil courts; the bride-price has been substantially reduced. The legal age of marriage became 18 for girls and 20 for men, and the consent of at least one parent or guardian is necessary only for those under 20 years old. Fathers cannot force their daughters into marriage. Divorce can only be obtained by judicial action. The absolute right of the man to divorce his wife as and when he pleases was abolished, both husband and wife have the right to sue for divorce.

Men and women now have equal inheritance rights, which is a very daring measure for a Muslim country to adopt. Somalia today has as modern a family code as any country in the world, but the actual practice of this code lags behind that of most other countries.

Not only has the status of women been changed by amendments to family law, but certain economic conditions have occasioned their own unique responses:

In urban areas, the status of middle class women has been improved and the desire for economic independence has been awakened. The number of new jobs now available to women is a significant indication of the emerging new Somalia, and women's economic horizon has widened considerably. Economic necessity has led women into all types of employment, and paid occupations are today increasingly seen as natural for women. This has secured for women relatively better social positions compared to those who are not employed. Above all, outside employment has brought them relatively greater economic independence with all the social and class consequences this infers, including a change in status.

---

80 Raqiya, Sisters in Affliction, p. 59.
81 Ibid.
While the status of women in Somalia is changing, improvement comes more rapidly in some areas than others. For example, apart from the stereotypical women's jobs (teaching, nursing, secretarial, etc.), a number of women are acquiring higher education and trying to advance their own professional work as doctors, lawyers, university lecturers and administrators. Women are working also in all the small industries, such as textile and food, etc., and the number of women petty traders has increased significantly. Women also have joined the armed forces, the various branches of public administration (at local and central levels) and become active in political and party work. While, on the other hand, although recently, a few women were promoted to become heads of sections, services, and even heads of departments of ministerial services, the number of those at the higher administrative and managerial levels is still minimal. Women encounter much greater difficulties than do men in trying to obtain higher decision-making positions or to advance themselves in their work, due primarily to the still existing prejudice against the value of women's work. Additionally, while labor legislation gives equal rights to both sexes, with "Equal pay for equal work," in some cases women are not given comparable work or positions to those of men and hence are paid less.

This brief description of Somalia, the land, the people and the culture, is meant to provide a background for understanding the novels

---

82 Ibid.
of Nuruddin Farah. In similar manner, a description of Farah the man and the writer, will enhance this understanding.

Published facts surrounding the life of Farah are skimpy, and while it may seem sufficient to say that he was born, studied, and taught school in Somalia, and that he now writes and publishes novels as he travels in exile from his beloved homeland, other details are available regarding him which are pertinent to a discussion of his works. A noted author who was born in 1945, in Baidoa, the Southern region of Somalia, Farah is a novelist, story writer, playwright and teacher. He is the fourth son in a family of ten born to Hassan and Aleeli Farah. His father was a merchant, and his mother was a well-known oral poet whose maiden name was Faduma. He was the recipient, from an early age, of a multilingual and literary education. He attended Shashamanne school in Ethiopia and the Institutio di Magistrate di Mogadishu where he studied Italian and English along with the usual subjects of European schools. In 1966, he moved to India and studied


85. *Contemporary Authors*, p. 173.

philosophy and literature at the Panjab University of Chandigarth for four years. While studying for the Bachelor of Arts degree, he married an Indian woman who bore him a son, Koschin. From 1974 to 1976, Farah resided in Britain studying at the Universities of London and Essex. He was also attached to the Royal Court Theatre in London for eight months. During this time, "The Offering," a play, was accepted by Essex University in lieu of a Master's thesis.

His multilingual education and literary training are reflected in the types of works which he has written. Farah speaks five languages (Somali, Arabic, English, Italian and French) and has written in many genres. In Somali he has written two novels and a novella which were serialized in The Somali News. The serialization of one of the novels, Why Dead So Soon, was halted by government censors. According to Zell, Bundy and Coulson, Farah started writing plays in India where he had a revue broadcast, "Doctor and Physicist," in 1968. A three-hour stage play and two additional plays which were commissioned by the British Broadcast system followed. The short-story genre has also

88 Ibid.
90 Ibid., p. 186.
attracted him, and over twenty of his stories have been published in India, Somalia, the United States and Britain. Further, he has completed a film script which has not yet been put into production due to financial difficulties.

Just as his literary output has been varied, so has his professional career. His first position was as a clerk-typist for the Ministry of Education in Somalia from 1964 to 1966. After completing his studies in India, he returned to teach at the Dhagaxtur and Wardhighley Secondary schools in Mogadiscio and at the National University of Somalia in Mogadiscio from 1969 to 1971. From 1971 to 1974 he lectured in Comparative Literature at Afgoi College of Education. Farah was appointed Associate Professor at the University of Ibadan, Jos Campus, Jos, Nigeria. He has taught briefly at the University of Connecticut, and was visiting scholar at the African Studies Center at UCLA. He also has been guest professor at Bayreuth, West Germany.

Despite his varied experience and rather prolific output, Farah's works are widely acclaimed only in Britain; they are largely unknown in America and almost totally ignored in Africa. Nevertheless, he has


92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., p. 186.
received some prestigious awards and honors. Among these are Fellow of the United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 1974 to 1976, the Literary Award from the English-Speaking Union in 1980 for Sweet and Sour Milk, and a fellowship from the United States Endowment for the Arts and Humanities.

Although Farah has lived outside of his country, Somalia, and for many years has had to content himself with yearly visits of a month's duration to first one part of Africa and then another, he does not consider himself an exile. Nor does he acknowledge that his works are banned in his own country. Responding to the question of his exile from Somalia, Farah asserts that he is not an exile. When asked by interviewer James Lampley, "Would you say that you are effectively in exile?" he replied:

No I am not. I've taken an extended leave from Somalia. I am exploring other avenues, I'm travelling around the world and writing about Somalia. I have written all my major works about Somalia. Do they read, to you, as though they were

---


written by an exile?

The issue of whether or not his books are banned in Somalia remains unresolved. It seems that while there is no official ban against these works, they are restricted nevertheless. Farah says that *Sweet and Sour Milk* and his two earlier novels in English are not officially banned. However, according to Walmsley,

... any work written in English is in practice largely self-censoring in a country whose five million people are almost all Somali-speaking nomads, only recently made literate with the acceptance of Roman orthography as the official written medium.

Further, current conditions in Somalia, even in the absence of an official ban, dictate the careful distribution of the memorandum which has been excerpted from chapter two of *Sweet and Sour Milk*. The passage has been translated into Somali and is widely circulated underground and read communally by Somali speakers. None of Farah's

---

97 Ibid. An additional response on the issue of exile is found in Farah's conversation with a friend in which he reaffirms his previous position and adds another dimension to the debate. He says, "In reality, I am not in exile. It is the government with its obsession with my works that is in exile." A conversation with Dr. Mohammed Hassen, London: August 1986.


99 The memorandum is called "Dionysus' Ear," and it criticizes the eavesdropping of the Barre military regime.

100 Ibid., p. 18.
novels is available in the bookstores of Somalia. That fact notwithstanding, it appears that the messages of his works are being communicated, and that, after all, is the function of his committed literature. In a 1979 interview, he describes his writings in this way:

. . . If a novel is about how a society survives from day to day, season to season, as we do in Africa, and if it deals extensively and intensively, very profoundly, with topics that touch on human interactions and comments on these, then I consider that to be committed literature. I consider Ngugi's and my own writings to be committed. I do not consider committed literature the kind that prettifies only the ideologically accepted, brainwashed system of things.

Farah is described frequently as a feminist because of the emphasis in his novels which he places on the plight of African women. However, the social and historical realities of African women's lives must be considered in any meaningful examination of women in African literature. A workable definition of African feminism, then, is required to provide criteria for examining the works of any African writer who is described as a feminist.

African women have evolved their own brand of feminism based on the social and historical realities of their own lives and because of the failure of white Western feminists to deal with certain issues of deep concern to black women. That the difference exists is not surprising when one realizes that the most celebrated individual writers

and thinkers generally did not include consideration of the plight of
the black woman. A brief look at the origin and nature of feminism
will help to clarify this dichotomous situation.

Richard Evans, a noted advocate of the rights of women, believes
that the ideological origins of feminism can be found first in the
eighteenth century intellectual "Enlightenment" whose thinkers touched
on many subjects. One of them was the nature and role of women—a
subject which had exercised the minds of previous thinkers throughout
the ages.

Although leading French writers of the Enlightenment considered
the question of women only in passing, German writer Theodore Gottlieb
von Hippel was an enthusiastic supporter of equal rights for women. He
was the Mayor of the East Prussian town of Konigsberg and a friend of
the philosopher Immanuel Kant. His book, On the Civil Improvement of

The term "feminism" is defined in this study in its usual
meaning as "the doctrine of equal rights for women, based on the theory
of the equality of the sexes." It first came into English usage in this
sense in the 1890s from the French, replacing the term "womanism."
in Richard Evans, Jr., The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in
Europe, America, and Australia 1840-1920 (New York: Barnes & Noble

Ibid.

Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, On Improving the Status of Women,
translated and edited with an introduction by Timothy F. Sellner
Women (1792), is regarded as the beginning of the literary debate on women's place in German society. Moreover, the book has a more general interest and significance in the history of feminist literature. According to Sellner:

. . . Hippe1's treatment of the legal rights of women, his attempt to describe the history of the subjection of the female sex, his observations concerning the natural superiority of women for certain endeavors, his suggestions for the improvement of women's education and for their admission to citizenship, his exhaustive refutation of the arguments in favor of maintaining the status quo, and his lengthy index of women of the period whose talents had been recognized—all testify to the broad scope of the treatise and its unique position in feminist literature.

Von Hippel was writing in 1792, at a time when the French Revolution already had reached its most radical point, but he was a strong critic of the Revolution because he said it ignored half the nation—the female half. Thus, he was attacked and derided by his contemporaries.

Another ideological source of Western feminism was the social philosophy of liberal Protestantism which was characterized as a

105

Appeared in London in 1792 as an anonymous work, published in Berlin in the same year, whose author was posthumously identified as the German essayist and writer of humorous novels, Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel.

106


107

Evans, The Feminists, p. 15.
religious individualism that, in theory, included women. However, neither Protestant practice nor its practitioners reflected this theory:

. . . the leading figures of the major Protestant churches in the Reformation era believed firmly in the inferiority of women. Martin Luther thought that women should stay at home and keep house. They were not fit for the priesthood: Female government has never done any good. John Calvin agreed with Luther that woman's submission to man was ordained by God. His disciple, John Knox, published a notorious tract against women rulers entitled 'The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.' Nevertheless, their belief in the priesthood of all believers did explicitly include women. All human beings were held by them to be equally capable of direct contact with God, without distinction of sex; and Luther and the Calvinists went to some lengths to demonstrate the falseness of the Catholic belief that women were unclean and agents of the Devil.

Although the Protestant Reformers espoused the theory of human equality more vigorously than they practiced it, women caught a glimpse of how things "might" be for them. Sadly, though, the restriction of female participation in most areas of society was to continue for many years more:

. . . In the early nineteenth century, women did not have the right to vote, to stand for election, to hold public office (except in certain countries the Crown itself), or, in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe, to join political organisations or attend political meetings. . . . Secondly, there were economic restrictions, debarring women from holding property, transferring a woman's inherited wealth to her husband on marriage, and preventing women from engaging in trade,

108 Ibid., p. 17.
running a business, joining the professions, opening a bank account or obtaining credit in their own name. . . . In addition to this, there was a third type of discrimination . . . the denial of basic rights in civil and criminal law. In most countries, women were not 'legal persons,' that is, they could not enter into contracts, and were minors or children in the eyes of the law. Until they married, they were in the power of their father, and required his permission to work, marry, change residence and so on. This was the case even with unmarried women in their thirties or forties. After marriage, these powers passed to the husband, who had complete disposal over his wife's property, income and children. . . . [D]ivorce was relatively easy for a husband, almost impossible for a wife. In cases of sexual deviance (illegitimate birth, prostitution, adultery) the law punished women but allowed men to avoid all responsibility. . . . Finally, women were discriminated against in education, where the new secondary school systems of the early nineteenth century generally catered for the education of boys alone, and where, at a lower level, the inadequacies of primary schooling for girls ensured that illiteracy was far more common among women than among men.

Of course, this is a description of the restriction of white female participation in society. The black female is not even considered because she has no free participation in a society which enslaves her.

Ironically, the United States was the world center for what is now called "the old feminism," except for a brief period prior to the

109


110

All activities of women toward winning equality of females with males prior to 1960. Evans, The Feminists, p. 22.
First World War when the focus shifted to the militant English suffragists. It was here in 1848 that the first organized movement for freedom for women was founded. Exclusively, the focus of this movement was on the status of white women. According to Bell Hooks,

In America, the social status of black and white women has never been the same. In the 19th and early 20th century America, few if any similarities could be found between the life experiences of the two female groups. Although they were both subject to sexist victimization, as victims of racism black women were subjected to oppression no white woman was forced to endure. In fact, white racial imperialism granted all white women, however victimized by sexist oppression they might be, the right to assume the role of oppressor in relationship to black women and black men.

In the eyes of the nineteenth-century white public, the black female was a creature unworthy of the title "woman;" she was mere chattel, a thing, an animal. When Sojourner Truth stood before the second annual convention of the women's rights movement in Akron, Ohio, in 1853, white women who deemed it unfitting that a black woman should speak on their public platform screamed: "Don't let her speak! Don't let her speak!" Sojourner endured their protests and became the first feminist to call their attention to the lot of the black slave woman as

she delivered her now famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman?"

Not only were the concerns of black women ignored, but black women were actively discriminated against:

Discrimination against Afro-American women reformers was the rule rather than the exception within the women's rights movement from the 1830's to 1920. Although white feminists Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and some others encouraged black women to join the struggle against sexism during the nineteenth century, ante-bellum reformers who were involved with women's abolitionist groups as well as women's rights organizations actively discriminated against blacks.

In the late 1960s a new feminist movement burst upon the American scene. According to Carden, "even those who were in time with the newly emerging series of protest movements--civil rights, peace, the New Left, antipoverty--found the revival of feminism a startling event." According to Gloria Wade-Gayles, the Civil Rights Movement which addressed the racial oppression of black people, became the catalyst for the white feminist movement of the sixties, just as the abolitionist movement was a catalyst for the suffrage movement of the nineteenth

112 The speech is considered the first recorded feminist address delivered by a black woman. Quoted in Gloria Wade-Gayles, Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), pp. 3-4.


While white women could risk their lives in the backwoods and small towns of Mississippi in the cause of Civil Rights, black women appeared unwilling to embrace feminism, an issue that always had been dominated by white women. But despite much attention given by the press to the anti-feminist black female position, no satisfactory explanation was given for the failure of black women to participate fully in the contemporary women's movement. Bell Hooks offers this explanation:

Initially, black feminists approached the women's movement which white women had organized eager to join the struggle to end sexist oppression. We were disappointed and disillusioned when we discovered that white women in the movement had little knowledge or concern for the problems of non-white women from all classes. Those of us who were active in women's groups found that white feminists lamented the absence of large numbers of non-white participants but were unwilling to change the movements' focus so that it would better address the needs of women from all classes and races.

Failing to find in the white feminist movement a platform from which to express their concerns, black women began to articulate their own concerns. For the majority of black women, liberation from sexual oppression has always been fused with liberation from other forms of oppression; namely, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, poverty, illiteracy, and disease. Consequently, their feminism has a

\[115\]
Wade-Gayles, No Crystal Stair, p. 36.

\[116\]
Hooks, Ain't I A Woman?, p. 188.
focus that is different from that of white women. The manifold nature of their oppression not only heightens their consciousness about the economic basis of oppression but also indicates its roots: "For the black woman, the enemy is not black men but history." Therefore, the failure of the Western feminist movement to deal with some of the problems which most seriously oppress black women makes it unacceptable to them.

Like black women on other continents, African women have also participated in the struggles against colonialism and in liberation movements against racism. They, too, have experienced exploitation, poverty, and sexism. These multiple forms of oppression put them among the most oppressed peoples of the world. Based on these realities, African women have developed a feminism which focuses on the effects of neocolonialism and the economic, political, and cultural domination of African societies by international forces and institutions. In addition to this, African feminism challenges the traditional social and political dominance of patriarchy and supports women's issues; among

117  

118  
Ibid.

119  
Ibid., p. 28.

120  
These are: genital mutilation, forced polygamous marriage, oppression of barren women, the traditional favoring of sons, and the relegation to "muledom." These issues are raised so that a new relationship, born of mutual respect, can be forged between males and females. Thus, African feminism has a particular focus which, together with its consequent issues, is derived from specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African society.

Both those issues which arise from neo-colonialism and from patriarchy are the concern of Farah and are reflected in varying degrees in his novels; for example, the effects of neocolonialism are evident in all of the novels but are given specific attention in A Naked Needle, Sweet and Sour Milk, and Maps. In A Naked Needle foreign influence is seen in the presence of foreign allies and white women. Throughout the urban scene are found the embassies of other countries, movie houses that show foreign films and inadequately staffed schools built by the Russians, the Americans, and the European Economic Community. There are


122 "Muledom" is defined as the overburdening exploitation of African women in matters which concern work. Ibid., p. 10.
nationalized properties, incomplete projects and soldiers from different countries who provide "technical assistance" and money which supports prostitution. The relationships between young Somali intellectuals and white women take their toll, as the men either remain in the country alienated from their families or leave the country, depriving it of valuable human resources. In Sweet and Sour Milk Russian-like tactics are employed in the enforcement of "scientific socialism" by the military regime. The consequences on the Ogaden War of the withdrawal of Russian support from Somalia and the application of massive Soviet support to Ethiopia are examined in Maps.

The issue of traditional social and political dominance of patriarchy is challenged through the raising of specific issues, such as genital mutilation, forced polygamous marriage, traditional favoring of sons, childlessness, and "muledom."

The practice of genital mutilation or circumcision is examined in From A Crooked Rib as the protagonist, eleven years later, remembers every horrifying detail of the experience. The pain suffered by her at the time of the operation and at the time of her first sexual encounter is so intense as to make her long for death. Even in the city the practice continues. The issue of circumcision is moved from the level of personal experience to one of confrontation and conflict in Sardines. The protagonist, recalling her own ordeal of circumcision and its consequent complications at the time of her deflowering and the birth of her child, declares that her daughter will undergo the operation only over her dead body. Responding to the threat of her mother-in-law to
steal the child away to be circumcised, the protagonist leaves her home and her husband. Furthermore, this traditional practice is decried by an enlightened male in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, when his secretary takes her younger sister to be circumcised.

Reaction to and resistance against the practice of forced marriage are complementary themes of *From A Crooked Rib*. Twice, the protagonist flees to avoid marriages which are arranged for her without her consent. She demands to marry a man of her own choosing. An unexpected deviation in the treatment of the issue of forced marriage occurs when Farah shows that the problem is not unique to women. Men who, for one reason or another, decide against taking a second wife are ostracized both by relatives and the community. Mohammed in *A Naked Needle* experiences a breach in his relationship with his father when he refuses to accept a traditional village wife chosen for him by his father and marries a white woman instead. Samater, a husband in *Sardines*, refuses to take a second wife chosen for him by his mother when his wife separates from him. When Salaado of *Maps* becomes unable to bear children, Hilaal is pressured so by his family to take a second wife that he undergoes a vasectomy; and Deeriye of *Close Sesame* is considered to be either perverted or bewitched because of his refusal to take a second wife after the death of his first. The actions of these men are considered a threat to the status quo and, as such, are unacceptable.

In the presentation of factors that relate to the issue of child-
bearing, Farah speaks against the traditional favoring of sons while presenting childlessness without distinguishing between women who will not have children and those who cannot have them. Five situations are presented in which women either are pregnant or think that they are pregnant. Of this number, only one woman bears a son; three women bear daughters and the fifth surmises that she will probably have a girl because all of the women in her immediate circle of friends are mothers of girls. While the majority of the women portrayed by Farah see pregnancy as a natural function, two of them are shown to control this function through the use of pills. The subject of abortion and the right of women to take such actions without the knowledge or approval of the fathers is examined when Medina of Sardines seeks to have an abortion without having discussed her pregnancy with her husband. The doctor persuades her to give birth to the child. Never does she discuss the issue with Samater. Misra, an unmarried woman who is having sex with several men, becomes pregnant and has an abortion. When one of the men guesses that she is pregnant and attempts to dissuade her from having the abortion, she tells him that he is not the father and has the abortion anyway. In all cases, the women who are childless, for whatever reason, are criticized by the community and their relatives. However, the depiction of these situations does not suggest disapproval on the part of Farah. At best one might conclude that he is saying that while bearing children (girls and boys) is natural, women should have
the right to decide whether or not they wish to do so.

Another issue which is raised in African feminism and treated in the works of Farah is "muledom." African women do not expect to be idle; they accept work as a fact of life, but they reject the relegation to "muledom" that is often their lot. For example, Ebla of *From A Crooked Rib* is overburdened with back-breaking work. Whether she resides in the village or in town, she is expected to engage in almost endless work. Even on Friday, a day of worship for men, her workload remains the same. Qumman and Ladan constantly engage in tasks which ensure the comfort of men, even though they are stricken by the death of Soyaan, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*.

Finally, the need for new relationships between males and females that are based on mutual respect and sexual equality is also an issue that is raised in African feminism and treated in the novels of Farah. Examples of these relationships are: the father/daughter relationship of Barkhadle and Medina and Deeriye and Zeinab, the brother/sister relationship of Soyaan, Loyaan, and Ladan, Nasser and Medina, as well as Mursal and Zeinab, and the husband/wife relationship of Samater and Medina and Hilaal and Salaado.

123 This seems to be Farah's conclusion; whereas, strictly from an African feminist perspective, the issue is not the right of women to choose to or not to bear children, but that barren women should not be oppressed because of their inability to do so. Filomina Steady speaks of the centrality of children in the African culture as one of the many differences between African and Western feminism. Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, p. 32.
In the father/daughter relationship of Barkhadle and Medina and Deeriye and Zeinab, each father has not only the means but the sensitivity toward females to ensure the education of his daughter. The belief of each man in sexual equality is reflected in his own personal relationship with women. In both of their marriages, an untraditional bond of love has been forged between them and their wives; their love for their daughters is merely an extension of this. Therefore, they provide for both their wives and daughters immediate environments which do not thwart their development and destroy their self-esteem.

The brother/sister relationship of Soyaan, Loyaan, and Ladan, Nasser and Medina as well as Mursal and Zeinab offers each brother and sister the opportunity to be more than relatives; they are comrades. The brothers protect the sisters, even from their parents, if necessary, as in the case of the twins and Ladan. The sisters look out for the brothers, sometimes in defiance of their parents, as Medina frequently does for Nasser. The sisters are not seen as inferior beings but are seen as being like the brothers except they are girls; therefore, the brothers share their knowledge and belief in self-worth with them. This gives both brothers and sisters a sense of freedom that pervades whatever they do. This relationship can withstand also the competition which arises between siblings; this is seen in the relationship of Mursal and Zeinab. In all of these brother/sister relationships there exists a mutual love and respect which informs their other relationships.

The husband/wife relationship of Samater and Medina and Hilaal
and Salaado is characterized by flexibility in the performance of tasks. That is, males may cook, clean and attend to children, while wives study, work outside of the home, and take care of all the financial affairs of the family. Tasks are performed, therefore, based upon the skills and interests of the participants rather than upon the sex of the participant. While this kind of relationship is frequently limited to liberated women and liberated men, Farah does present the example of Deeriye, a Patriarch who is so untraditional in his relationship with his wife Nadiifa that sexual equality is achieved between them, although it is not always practiced in public view.

Because in his novels Farah sympathetically addresses these major issues which characterize African feminism, he is justly called a feminist writer. However, he is not alone in reflecting some of the same concerns as African women in his works. In this regard, he has an affinity with a very small group of African male writers who also show in their works a concern for the status of women. These include Aboulaye Sadji, Ousmane Sembene, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Sadji (1910-1960), a lesser-known literary figure whose style is greatly imitative of the late nineteenth-century novel, is noted for two major works which highlight the impact of acculturation upon the African woman: Nini: Multatresse de Senegal, 1947 and Maimouna, 1958. Despite minor stylistic limitations in these novels, the heroines in Sadji's works have become classic in African literature. Due to his artful portrayals of African women fraught with cultural ambivalence, he is acknowledged as having made a singular contribution to earlier
francophone African literature and has been acclaimed as an excellent portraitist of the Senegalese woman. Wallace observes that:

As Sadji masterfully draws the reader into the souls of his female characters, they begin to emerge as full-fleshed characters: palpably real beings.

Sadji's works are devoted to the world of the hybrid society of Dakar and the old port city of Saint Louis. His tone is warm, and he seeks to create characters, mostly women, who dominate their societies. He attempts to delve beyond the superficial portraits of the woman as mere erotic accompaniment to the male, in order to reveal her own psychic universe. Through his female characters, he speaks out against the long-range effects of colonization upon the African culture.


125 Ibid.


Sembene Ousmane, another Senegalese writer who has been called a feminist, is identified as one of the first African writers to move his female characters from a secondary role, in which they complement their men, to a primary one in which they express their feelings, sufferings and joys, as they think as well as react emotively to pressing situations. Although female characters are never the main protagonists in his literary works, they often play an important role in the development of the plot and function as persons instead of mere appendages of their husbands and sons. As is true of Ngugi's female characters, Sembene's female characters are active participants in the struggle for liberation from foreign domination. In *God's Bits of Wood* the heroic efforts are detailed of African women in unselfishly devoting their energies to promoting the rights and opportunities of their fathers, husbands and sons in winning the railroad strike to obtain social justice. Like the hard, fibrous substance which forms a tree, their strength of character and will enable them to withstand

129


130


131

devastating conditions.

Sembene also portrays the struggles of women with the problems of polygamy. According to Sonia Lee,

He is neither the first nor the only writer who challenges the validity of Africa's traditional institution of marriage, but he is the only one who does so from a feminine point of view, with much compassion and understanding.

From Kenya, Ngugi wa Thion'go is another African author who challenges the traditional social and political dominance of men and supports women's issues. Like Sembene and Farah, Ngugi sees the woman's struggle for liberation from traditional social and political restrictions as inextricably entwined with the total African struggle for liberation from foreign domination. In a 1982 interview Ngugi describes women as the most exploited and oppressed section of the working class, "exploited as workers and at home" and also by "background, backward elements in the culture, remnants of feudalism." "As a result," he says, "I would create a picture of a strong,


determined woman with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being."

Not only does Ngugi create women who are strong enough to struggle against conditions within the culture which traditionally militate against their liberation, but he also creates women who are active participants in the liberation struggle against foreign domination; Nyakinyua in Petals of Blood and Wariinga in Devil on the Cross are excellent examples.

Although Farah is not unique as a male African writer whose works show a concern for women and present them in a sympathetic manner, he is said to be

. . . the African writer who has done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing, in the number of female characters he projects and the variety of roles accorded them as well as the diversified attitudes toward life represented.

He shares with Sadji and Sembene a concern for the African female who is

---


137 Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Devil on the Cross (London: Heinemann, 1982).

138 Herdeck, African Authors, 1300-1973, p. 137.
constricted by both the African social landscape and the religious landscape of Islam. However, he differs from both in his depiction of the progress which these women have made, their constrictions notwithstanding. Problems there certainly are and some seem insurmountable, but Farah shows that a good many women are succeeding in scaling these hurdles. His is both a realistic and an optimistic portrayal in that he exhibits women together with their achievements and their challenges. So pervasive and consistent is his espousal of the female cause that he has been described as:

. . . . the first feminist writer to come out of Africa in the sense that he describes and analyzes women as victims of male subjugation.

While a more detailed examination of women in the novels of Farah will be given in chapters two through four of this study, it is evident that historical and existing social/political conditions of Somalia profoundly affect the status of women there. In his novels, Farah sensitively captures this scene and, with the eye of an artist, paints a canvas which shows his perception of the finer details of this relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

FARAH'S EARLIEST NOVELS:
SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND REVOLUTION

The sensitive treatment of issues concerning women which has come to characterize 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." They do not "pretify ... 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 demonstrates this faith through his belief in the ability of

2 Ibid.
Somali society to change traditional practices which are undesirable and to unite in the struggle towards a desirable social ideal. For him, this means, among other things, being conscious of the role that women should play in societies:

. . . 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 a very minor role.

Because of his consciousness of what should be the role of women in society and his awareness of what is the role of women in society, Farah challenges the traditional social and political dominance of patriarchy and supports African women's issues. In his earliest novels, *From A Crooked Rib* and *A Naked Needle*, he raises such issues


5 "Earliest novels" is a chronological designation which signifies that these are the first and second novels written in English by Nuruddin Farah. The first novel, *From A Crooked Rib*, was written in 1968 and published in 1970. The second novel, *A Naked Needle*, was written in 1972 and published in 1976. These novels differ significantly from those that follow and warrant treatment together.


as forced polygamous marriage, genital mutilation, and the adverse effects on Somali society of foreign influence. His continuing examination of these and other issues which concern the plight of women in Somali society support his claim as a committed novelist.

*From A Crooked Rib* is the story of Ebla, a young nomadic pastoralist from the Ogaden who seeks self-determination through her struggles to break away from her traditional society which regards women as no better than Adam's "crooked rib" and acts upon her resentment of the role that she must play as a woman in Somali culture, with its subordination, vulnerability, and constant dreary labor.

In *Ebla* Farah depicts the transitional Somali woman. That is, although she questions and even rebels against certain customary and Islamic practices of her culture (male supremacy, female genital mutilation and forced polygamous marriage), she strongly adheres to other customary and Islamic practices, such as her beliefs in God as a controlling force in her life and in the power of special pronouncements to forestall danger and overcome evil.

Ebla is a member of a *Jes* (a unit of several African families living together) with which she has been on the move from the time she was born. Her father and mother died when she was very young, and she was entrusted to the care of her grandfather who is an invalid--although

---

8 "God created Woman from a crooked rib; and any one who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it"

--A Somali traditional proverb (FCR, p. ii).
by Ebla's account, "... not such a bad one as all that" (FCR, pp. 8). Her dwelling in this Jes is like any other dwelling in the neighborhood: "the number of human beings was ten times less than that of the cattle," and "the huts were made of wattle, weaved into a mat-like thing with a cover on top" (FCR, p. 7). It is a portable home, to be put on the hump-back of a camel when the time comes for moving to another pastoral area. In other words, while her dwelling is not in the least different from the others, "it seemed to be unique and, in a way, it was" (FCR, p. 8).

So it is with Ebla who also seems to be unique; in a way, she is. "For a woman, she was very tall, but this was not exceptional here. She stood six feet high" and would have been "very beautiful, had it not been for the disproportion of her body" (FCR, p. 8). Like the other women of her Jes, she cannot read or write her name, but she thinks "of many things a woman of her background would never think of" (FCR, p. 8). For example, "Ebla had been toying with the idea of leaving home for quite some time" (FCR, p. 8). But she loves her grandfather and is unwilling to take such drastic action. However, now that he has given her hand to "an old man of forty-eight, fit to be her father" and "has exchanged her for camels" (FCR, p. 9), Ebla believes that she is no longer bound by her perceived duty to remain and care for him. It is no longer her obligation to see to it "that he dies peacefully and is buried peacefully" (FCR, p. 9). What she desires now is escape! She wants... . . . to get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. . . . To break the ropes society has wrapped around her and
to be free and to be herself" (FCR, p. 12).

Ebla thinks of all this, and of much else. These thoughts strike at the heart of her nomadic existence. She desires, more than anything, to fly away. She wants to fly away from that dependence on the seasons which determines the life or death of the nomads. And she wants to fly away from "squabbles caused by the lack of water, which meant that the season was bad" (FCR, p. 13). She wants to go away from the duty of women; from loading and unloading camels and donkeys after the destination has been reached; from the allotment of assignments which indicates that a woman is of lower status than a man and that she is weak: "goats for girls and camels for boys" (FCR, p. 13). She loathes the discrimination between the sexes: Boys are valued more highly than girls because "boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family's name alive" (FCR, p. 13). And these discriminatory practices are carried still further:

Even a moron-male costs twice as much as two women in terms of blood compensation. As many as twenty to 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 (FCR, p. 13).

At the heart of Ebla's desire to flee her nomadic Somali society is her rejection of customary law, reinforced by Islamic practice, which esteems the male above the female, accords women only limited legal rights, and ignores their opinions in most situations. Uncharacteristic of women of her background, Ebla believes that her opinions have value and should be counted: "to her a refusal did not matter. Neither would a positive answer make her pleased. But acceptance of her opinions
... did make her pleased" (FCR, p. 8). When her opinions are neither sought nor counted in matters which concern her, she considers this a breach in the relationship which releases her from all previous commitments. Therefore, when her grandfather makes the match for her with Giumaleh, she escapes to town (Belet Wene). In Belet Wene, when Gheddi, her cousin, gets into financial difficulty and contracts a marriage for her with Dirir, she elopes with Awill to the city (Mogadishu). When she learns that Awill, then traveling in Italy, has been unfaithful to her, she secretly marries Tiffo. And when she tires of the demeaning marriage to Tiffo she tells him that she has another husband. In all of these instances, she feels that her opinions are being ignored; thus, she is justified in taking revenge: "A nose for a nose and an ear for an ear, that is what the Koran says," she reminds herself (FCR, p. 133).

Because Ebla thinks in a way that other women of her acquaintance would never think, she is unwilling to accept the subservient role which women must play in her society. She rejects the idea of male supremacy and sees herself as a worthwhile individual. These concepts grow out of her own intuition, since she has never received any formal training or other outside influence which would account for them. She does, however, act on them. At no time is this more evident than on the night

---

9 The capital city of Somalia. Variously spelled Mogadishu, Mogadiscio, Mogadixo, Maqaldisho, and Muugdisho (NN, p. 21).
following the day that she learns of her betrothal to Giumaleh. While Ebla remains awake all night trying to sort things out: "What to do about her escape? When would she go? And to whom? And with whom?" (FCR, p. 10), her friend lies next to her, snoring in her sleep. She does not remain awake to commiserate with Ebla in this time of extreme anxiety. Perhaps it is because she does not think so deeply as Ebla about traditional matters that the friend can sleep so soundly. Ebla walks out into the warm night to think over the situation. She cannot bear the thought of waiting to get married to Giumalah. "If she stayed, she thought, she would always be in low spirits . . ." (FCR, p. 10). She decides. "She knew what she should do: escape alone and join the caravan going to Belet Wene" (FCR, p. 14).

When Ebla's departure from her Jes is confirmed by her younger brother, her grandfather is saddened. "He had loved her more than he loved anybody else--when he had the power to love" (FCR, p. 5). Also, he misconstrues the reason for her departure, thinking that she, like other women of her age he has witnessed, has run away from her family into the bosom of a man to get married (FCR, p. 5). He can conceive only with difficulty of the unlikely possibility that she has run away to marry a man whom she prefers, but he cannot at all conceive of her running away with no intention of getting married. His own wife had run off from her family to marry him. Notwithstanding this, he, with his last breath, curses Ebla: "May the Lord disperse your plans, Ebla. May He make you the mother of many a bastard. May He give you hell on this earth as a reward" (FCR, p. 6).
Meanwhile Ebla, having escaped from her Jes, thanks God and reaffirms her position on the matter. "I am certain that God will . . . understand my situation . . . . He won't let me down" (FCR, p. 18). As planned, she travels with the caravan to Belet Wene, the first town she has ever seen. She had heard people describe towns: "Kallafo, Galcaio, Baidoa" and others, but she had never believed what they said about them. Even when her grandfather had tried to tell her about life in the towns, she could not (would not) believe him. Now, seeing this town for herself, she is "inwardly annoyed, perhaps because nobody had noticed her aloofness or perhaps because she could not see anybody whom she knew" (FCR, p. 23). Belet Wene is hideously noisy, too smoky, filled with too many people whose manner of dress she does not immediately approve of. Nevertheless, she queries people about her cousin and his wife in order to seek refuge with them.

Cousin Gheddi accepts Ebla into his home after posing a few questions which identify her as his cousin thrice-removed. His wife is pregnant and unable to care for herself; therefore, Ebla becomes an instant servant. Far from being welcomed as a family member, she is

10

The concept of cousin in Somali society differs from the concept of cousin in some other cultures. Here, it indicates a sense of close kinship no matter how far removed; therefore, when one is identified as a cousin (even ten times removed) homes and other resources are made available. Even in this relationship, the supremacy of males over females pertains. This clarification of the term was given by Dr. Mohammed Hassen, Professor of African History at Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia.
treated indifferently by both her cousin and his wife.

Certainly, Ebla does not intend to be idle in her cousin's house; she is accustomed to working hard for as a nomadic woman she cared for numerous livestock; processed pastoral products such as milk, cream, "ghee" (butter) and wove mats and rugs, in addition to making other handicrafts for their mobile hut. At each location, with the aid of other women, she built and dismantled the hut and made all the household utensils out of local materials. She fetched water and firewood no matter how far she had to go to get them. These were her daily chores. Even Friday was not different for her. For men, Friday was a day when "... they all went to a praying-place or to a mosque. For women, it only meant more work, more washing and more cooking to be done" (FCR, p. 16).

Here in the city, things are different. With the exception of herding the animals, the tasks which Ebla must perform require new knowledge: she has to shop in a store instead of an open market; she must cook spaghetti and meat instead of the customary milk dishes; and she is called on even to deliver a baby. With the exception of the delivery, these are not the tasks performed by women in the country. The unfamiliarity of the chores and the slave-like treatment which she receives from cousin Gheddi and his wife Aowralla lead Ebla to ask God for a sign which will indicate whether or not she should remain in the

11 Rayqiya, Sisters in Affliction, p. 44.
town, although she feels "quite strange and rejected . . ." (FCR, p. 38). She even briefly considers returning home to care for her grandfather (FCR, p. 35) but rejects the idea because of her unsatisfactory position there. To be overworked and undervalued seems the lot of Ebla.

In despair, she turns to the widow next door who is the only person who has responded warmly to her since she arrived in the town. It is the widow who tells Ebla that her cousin has sold her to a consumptive cattle broker because he needs money to pay the fines which he has received for smuggling. Needless to say, this arrangement is not acceptable to Ebla. Had she not run away from the village because of a similar situation? The difference between this time and the last is that now she has someone to help her to chart her course. The widow suggests that she consider going to Hamar (the original name of Mogadishu) where she might find a husband. When Ebla protests that she knows no one in that city, the widow informs her that Awill, her nephew who is now visiting in Belet Wene, comes from that place. The widow further suggests that Ebla might elope with Awill and solve her problem in that way.

Unlike the widow who actively seeks to help Ebla avoid this unwanted marriage, Aowralla seems to submit without question to her husband's decision to marry Ebla off to Dirir, the broker. Aowralla explains that after her obligatory confinement period (40 days) is up there will be little work for Ebla to do (FCR, pp. 80-81). In addition to that fact, she indicates that having Ebla and the baby to provide for
strains their budget (FCR, p. 73). Aowralla refuses to engage in additional conversation concerning the proposed marriage, insisting that Ebla wait to discuss it with Gheddi.

While Aowralla appears to passively accept her husband's plans for Ebla, Ebla does not. In keeping with her tendency to seek unconventional resolutions of traditional conflicts, Ebla decides to propose marriage to Awill. She thinks: "I don't want to be sold like cattle. I won't marry a broker. Unless I choose him" (FCR, pp. 79-80). She is even willing to assume 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" (FCR, p. 85). The possibility of experiencing "love" in the marriage is another example of the kind of unconventional issues which Ebla raises. Again, that problem may be an issue that is rarely raised in this culture, but it is not altogether foreign. Ebla recalls that there was once a couple who had experienced "love:"

... In the history of love in Somaliland the most fascinating love story occurred somewhere near Barbara between Hodan and Elmi Bowderi. He died of love. Was it worth it? What had happened to Hodan? I wish I knew. I wish I could meet her. Maybe she has lots and lots of interesting stories to tell me (FCR, p. 83).

That ancient story has been passed on to her by others but what she personally has observed of marriage between couples is "enslavement ... The woman was a slave" (FCR, pp. 84-85). Unable to resolve these conflicts which are the products of her unconventional probings, she lapses into a stoicism which is engendered by her Muslim
faith: "... . . . she was willing to be what she had been reduced to, she was not raising a finger to stop it" (FCR, p. 84). And if she cannot be assured of a marriage in which love plays a vital role, "Why not marry simply for the sake of living a married life, thus avoiding spinsterhood?" (FCR, p. 84). In addition, since she is doing the choosing, "... why not get married to Awill--or whoever falls into the ditch of matrimony?" (FCR, p. 84).

With this new-found determination, she walks into the widow's house. She finds Awill reading a novel, and when he sees her he shows that he is pleased. Awill states that he has heard about her predicament, and he proposes marriage. After a brief but awkward conversation, the matter is settled; they plan to elope to Mogadishu where they will get married.

After they arrive in Mogadishu, Awill tries to have sexual intercourse with Ebla, but she refuses. A transitional woman, Ebla thinks and acts in unconventional ways most the time, but at other times her thoughts and actions are very traditional. For example, on the one hand she insists that she will marry a man of her own choosing; on the other, she insists that sex with Awill be delayed until after the marriage. Although she valiantly fights to achieve this latter goal, she is physically abused by Awill, who prevails. Ebla acquiesces.

Even in her acquiescence, she is again victimized by practices of her Somali society; she is victimized by the cultural allowance of husbands to beat their wives and by the practice of female circumcision which involves clitorization and infibulation. The physical pain which
women must endure because of the latter custom is anticipated by a fearful 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 (FCR, p. 97).

The bitter memory of her circumcision is ever with her as she rehearses every detail of the brutal operation:

She recalled everything. They had sliced out her clitoris and stitched the lips together, thus blocking the passageway, but also leaving a small inlet for urinating through. They had tied her legs together, and she had lain flat on the ground without any mattress or anything underneath her, for she would bleed on it. They had beaten drums when the girls cried, so that the beating of the drums would drown the crying. If a girl cried too much, they tucked a piece of cloth into her mouth. The wound would not heal, they said, if a boy saw it or a woman who had just committed adultery. So the girls had been confined in a hut for a period of between ten and twelve days (FCR, pp. 149-150).

The experience of this pain has burned itself into Ebla's memory; it is always new. Therefore, when she sees one of the female tenants of Asha's house carrying a small girl whose dress is spotted with blood, she remembers. Asha goes to her room "minding her own business," but "Ebla stood watching." She had "supposed that people in the towns had left that sort of thing" (FCR, p. 149). They have not.

And now, eleven years later, Ebla is fearful of the consequences of that brutal act which was perpetrated against her so long ago. She
is "scared out of her wits" (FCR, p. 97) by her impending intercourse with Awill. And it turns out that her fears are well-founded:

In a couple of hours and after a great deal of sweating he succeeded in breaking the virginity of Ebla. She moaned and groaned and bit the edge of her cloth. She closed her eyes so that the sweat would not go in, and tasted the sour sweat which dripped into her mouth. She bled a great deal (FCR, p. 99).

Afterwards, suffering under the twin burden of ritual beating and the painful sexual intercourse occasioned by the sexual mutilation of circumcision, Ebla wishes that she were either an old woman or a man so that the experience, "the torture," would not have to be repeated (FCR, p. 105). As she lies in bed with even her eyes aching, she is uncertain of her status: "She was certain she was not a virgin, but was she married? There was a promise, but that was all there had been so far" (FCR, p. 103).

Her introspection is interrupted by a knock on the door. It is Asha, Awill's landlady. It was she who had served them dinner the previous evening, and now she comes to ask if she may serve them further. Awill indicates that he needs breakfast for the two of them as well as a sheikh and two witnesses so that he and Ebla can get married. "Aunt Asha" (as Awill calls her), departs and soon returns to bring both breakfast and news--the sheikh is coming soon. She is described by Awill as "a helpful woman" (FCR, p. 104). What Ebla sees is: "... a lady in her late forties who could easily be mistaken for a rich woman ... she was in an expensive dress ... and walked haughtily ..." (FCR, p. 104). This woman, like the widow of Belet Wene, is destined to
become a confidant of Ebla. Apparently she is accustomed to taking care of the many needs of her boarders; thus, as requested, she arranges for the marriage of Awill and Ebla.

The marriage ceremony is a simple affair. Neither Awill nor Ebla has family members present, and there are no friends except Asha. The sheikh is named as agent to speak for Ebla. Moreover, since there is no brideprice, the ceremony takes little time:

What is your name?
Ebla.
And your father's?
Qorrah.
Are you willing to marry Awill . . . ?
Yes.

What about the Yarad
Nothing.
What is your Meherr?
Whatever he is willing to pay.

. . . . The sheikh leaves her; then a few minutes later the whole group comes back. The sheikh tells her that he has made the answers as she has told him and Awill and she are now husband and wife (FCR, pp. 106-107).

Although Ebla seeks independence and self-expression, it is through the very traditional mode of marriage that she strives to accomplish this goal. She is, in fact, "... quite delighted to think

---

Yarad--the price paid to the parents of the bride or her relations by the bridegroom and/or his relations. Meherr--a token amount, either in kind or cash, paid to the wife in case of divorce or death of the husband. Naming of the amount is considered an important factor in the marriage contract. But it is more or less a promise the husband makes to the wife or her relations before they embark on the marriage: this is done in the presence of witnesses (FCR, p. 180). Because of the unorthodox nature of Awill's and Ebla's marriage, no fees are paid.
of herself as a wife. It really did not matter whose wife . . ." (FCR, p. 108). These seem strange thoughts for one who has twice run away to avoid marriages contracted for her by others, but such is the nature of this transitional woman. At this time in her life it seems never to occur to her to avoid marriage altogether. It is for the right to make a personal choice of whom to marry that she fights.

Awill and Ebla celebrate their marriage with the traditional seven-day honeymoon observance, even though they reside in the city. According to Ebla, "the days flew like a beautiful bird that one knows will never return . . ." (FCR, p. 113). She is "quite delighted" with the way things are. Never in her whole life has she spent seven days without doing chores. This is a new experience for her!

During this period, Jama (a friend of Awill) comes to bring news of the final plans made by the government for Awill's departure to Italy in order to study the school system there. A similar structure might be employed in Somalia upon Independence. When Awill informs Ebla of the plans for his trip, he also tells her of the arrangement for her support that he has made with Asha. He has asked her to open the needed account with the local merchant, and he promises to send money through his friend, Jama.

Not fully comprehending all that her husband says, Ebla pretends that she does. She will wait until Asha can explain things to her. She is not at all apprehensive: "To travel is to learn, so we Somalis say . . ." (FCR, p. 116). She accepts the situation with no resentment. When Awill leaves for Italy one day earlier than Ebla expects without
even returning home to say goodbye, it is Asha who becomes quite unhappy about his failure to do so.

Nevertheless, Asha pays Ebla's bill (the shopkeeper refuses to open an account) pending the receipt of a check from Awill; the two women cook and eat together to lessen expenses, and Ebla discovers many good things about Asha. She finds her to be the most interesting person she has met since she left the country. Of the three women, Aowralla, the widow, and Asha, the landlady is the most vigorous, which makes life exciting (FCR, p. 121). Asha's passion for money notwithstanding, Ebla develops a great fondness for her because "she was the first person who had ever considered her her equal: she made Ebla aware of what she was" (FCR, p. 121). Basking in the sunlight of this new status, Ebla enjoys life, learns much about life in the city, and awaits patiently the return of her husband. Her new-found bliss quickly evaporates when she retrieves a photograph which accidentally falls from a letter which Jama has received from Awill. Jama had intended to remove the picture before coming to deliver the money sent to Ebla by Awill. This photograph, which reveals Awill with a white woman dressed in a bathing suit, completely changes Ebla's life. She becomes infuriated that Awill is cheating on her, and with a white woman at that. She seeks the advice of Asha, but is determined not to run away again. While Asha does not suggest that she run away, her solution is even more drastic: she suggests a second marriage to a rich businessman who has shown an interest in Ebla. Ebla agrees to the match and offers to marry Tiffo secretly, if he wishes. She thinks that "... if Awill comes back and
doesn't want to return to me, then I will stay with him" (FCR, p. 125).

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. She believes also that if Awill can be unfaithful to her with impunity, she can be unfaithful to him. However, the fact that she makes a secret marriage may be an indication that she does not believe this to be correct behavior. Tiffo agrees to her terms, and Asha makes all of the arrangements for the marriage. Ebla marries Tiffo without having seen him, and when she does see her very short, brown, fat husband, she does not like the looks of him. "She surmises that he is a fool" (FCR, p. 129). Despite Asha's warning that he would try to do so, Ebla allows Tiffo to trick her out of her waji fur or "opening of the face" fee which is paid to the bride the first time the prospective groom meets her (FCR, pp. 127-128). But he promises to pay her money whenever he comes to visit in the future. This is not an ordinary marriage--Tiffo's visits are infrequent and at odd hours. Asha detests this arrangement and protests to Ebla, "he treats you like a harlot" (FCR, p. 142).

Eventually, Ebla becomes tired of the whole unsatisfactory and demeaning affair and tells Tiffo that she has another husband. He refuses to believe her,

'You are a lie,' he says.
'No. I am not telling you a lie. You have another wife and I have another husband. We are even' (FCR, p. 145).

Ebla declares that they are equal and have a mutual need for each other,
but Tiffo is furious. He spouts the doctrine which Ebla will not accept: "We are not equal. You are a woman and you are inferior to me. And if you have another husband, you are a harlot" (FCR, p. 145). After the angry Tiffo verifies Ebla's story by consulting Asha, he announces, "You are divorced" (FCR, p. 145). This does not disturb Ebla. She has her revenge upon Awill by marrying Tiffo secretly, and upon Tiffo by telling him that she has another husband. She gives them "a nose for a nose and an ear for an ear." That night she has lovely dreams (FCR, p. 145). Tomorrow Awill will come home.

Meanwhile, Ebla becomes physically ill, and she permits Asha to "... take her to consult a savant who announces that somebody sent an evil eye on her. It is very young and she can be cured" (FCR, p. 148). But Ebla's condition does not improve. There are signs of pregnancy: she has a queasy stomach, her breasts have become darker around the nipples, and she craves clay (FCR, p. 165). She knows quite well what these things indicate, but she gives no negative response to the possibility of pregnancy even under these unusual conditions (being the wife of two men at the same time), "for [having a baby] was a woman's role and one has to play one's role" (FCR, p. 168). Only the possibility of Tiffo being the father causes her concern, "... not Tiffo's, oh, my God!" (FCR, p. 164). Still, the prospect of having a baby is alluring to Ebla. When she helped Aowralla deliver her child, she thought, "I don't know why, but I wish I were in her place, giving birth (or is it life?) to a beautiful baby like that ..." (FCR, p. 38). Now she exclaims, "a baby, my own baby" (FCR, p. 168). Ebla does
not fully respond to her pregnancy in the traditional manner. She does not express that preference for sons which is so typical in this culture.

The possibility of a pregnancy does not improve Ebla's situation. She has used sex to attract two men. One has already divorced her, and the other is unaware of her second marriage. She ponders her situation. Will Awill come back to her or "Will he remain with the white woman? Will I or won't I ask him for a divorce? What to do?" (FCR, p. 154). She has committed so many errors. She has committed adultery. Because of these errors, her isolation seems complete: she has lost communication with God; she has lost her family; she has lost her friends; and she has lost her husbands (FCR, p. 156). Nevertheless, she says, "With tomorrow's sun maybe happiness will come to me . . ." (FCR, p. 159).

Tomorrow does come and with it Awill. Arriving while Ebla and Asha are shopping, Awill finds the room unchanged. However, upon closer scrutiny he discovers the photograph which he had sent to Jama:

'How can it be?' he said aloud, as if speaking to someone else. 'Jama, the bastard. He gave me away. I knew he would. It is the region where he comes from. There nobody confides in anybody. Why did he bring her the photo? I did something wrong, but is it such a big crime--and against whom is it a crime? I like Ebla. I did not like her at first when we were married--how could I? I hardly knew her, but I like her more now and I don't want to lose her because of girls who were just a pastime. You go and visit a country. You befriend a girl from that country, and then you talk about it to friends afterwards. But I never intended to marry her or take her seriously. She was just there to help kill the time' (FCR, pp. 175-176).
He turns around and sees Ebla who confirms his fear: "I have been listening," she says (FCR, p. 176). Changing the subject, they compliment each other: "You've grown fatter," he said, "and you've got thinner," she said (FCR, p. 176). And weighty issues can wait. After a long silence, Ebla asks, "Should I tell you everything?" And Awill answers, "Maybe tomorrow when you have thoroughly decided . . ." (FCR, p. 179). As Awill moves toward Ebla with desire, she smells his maleness, touches his forehead which is hot with desire, and concludes that, "... poor fellow, he needs me . . . He is sex-starved" (FCR, p. 179).

In the course of the novel, Ebla, through endless querying, reasoning, and self-exploring, comes to a greater awareness and understanding of what motivates her to do the things that she does. That understanding, according to Cochrane, enables her to "acquire a dispassionate view of life which grants her a degree of composure and serenity." She finally understands that her human value in Somali society is tied to sex. It is toward the preservation of female virginity that clitorization and infibulation are practiced. The bride-price is tendered to say that this girl and her sex are being reserved for this man exclusively. Throughout marriage, while it is acceptable for a man to engage in sex with his other wives, the woman must reserve

---

her sex for her one husband or she is considered a harlot. Outside of the family and marriage, a woman has little legal protection. Should she seek to operate outside these structures, she, then, must "join the marginal group of widows, spinsters, and divorced women whose primary means of survival seems to be prostitution or shades of it." Using the knowledge of the connection between her human value and money, she draws the conclusion made probable by her experiences: "she scratched her sex, then chuckled this is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence" (FCR, p. 160). And as the novel ends she appears to achieve a subtle, sexual dominance over Awill; "Yes. Tomorrow," Ebla murmured and welcomed his hot and warm world into her cool and calm kingdom" (FCR, p. 179).

Although From A Crooked Rib is purely Elba's story, seen predominantly through her eyes, the inclusion of Aowralla, the widow, and Asha serves to expand Farah's message on the status of women in Somalia. For example, Aowralla is a traditional Somali woman, and as such her life, her ethical values and her activities are prescribed by customary and Islamic laws. According to Cochrane, Aowralla epitomizes "the traditional impotence and subjugation of Somali women." Her pregnancy and subsequent childbirth are viewed by Okonkwo as a "painful, agonizing


Concurring with Okonkwo, Cochrane sees in Aowralla's response to childbirth the evidence of female degradation. Aowralla is without power in her husband's house. She is helpless to save the cow which has been offered as a "naval-knot present to her new-born daughter" (FCR, p. 75), and when she reminds her husband that it was Ebla who rescued the only goods remaining from his abortive smuggling attempt, she is silenced with the threat, "I'll hit you if you say another word" (FCR, p. 64).

Unlike Aowralla, the widow and Asha are transitional women. With Ebla, they share an unwillingness to accept unquestioningly the subservient status imposed upon them by customary and Islamic laws. They, like Ebla, have a strong desire to achieve self-determination. However, it seems that the widow and Asha both achieve a degree of independence, authority, and respect at the expense of their reputation and womanhood.

The widow is the only female in the novel who shows an appreciation of Western education. She can read and write, as evidenced by her nightly reading of the Koran and by her letters to Awill when he travelled to Italy (FCR, pp. 140, 177). She is responsible for

---


18 Ibid.
providing Awill the opportunity to attend school and is very proud of his achievements (FCR, p. 139). Perhaps this accounts for her disappointment with Ebla when she decides to send her brother back to the country instead of insisting that he remain in the city and "join the schools" (FCR, p. 139). Additionally, the widow is willing to assist those who come to her for guidance. She helps them to seek independence and self-fulfillment. Moreover, Cochrane asserts that:

The widow's exceptional qualities (her experience, astuteness, maturity) are epitomized in the comparison Farah makes between her and Cleopatra—a comparison which suggests the widow's political and diplomatic acumen as well as her forceful personal and sexual powers.

In refusing to accept without question the subservient status imposed upon her and all Somali women, the widow's independence seems to be achieved at the expense of her good reputation... the townspeople gossip about her being a 'white-shoed' woman. This is a common way of saying that she is easy-going" (FCR, p. 73).

Similarly, Asha stands accused but not for her lack of sexual morality. She stands accused of greed. Although she has an excessive concern for accumulating money, she is a strong, striking personality.

19 This brother/sister relationship reflects the dominance of the male typical in this culture. Although Ebla's brother is younger than she is, his desires take precedence over hers; therefore, when he insists on returning to the country, she agrees to send him back (FCR, p. 139).

20 Ibid., p. 72.
Okonkwo describes Asha as "a confident and psychologically stable matron who has fought her way to survival in the modern, urban, dog-eat-dog environment." Unlike the widow, Asha's means of providing for herself is obvious. She has a six-room house and rents the rooms to different tenants (FCR, p. 121). Apart from renting the rooms to her tenants, she provides many additional services. For example, upon request, she completely arranges the marriage of Awill and Ebla (FCR, p. 104). She also, pending the receipt of funds from Awill, provides food and other necessities for Ebla as Awill travels in Italy (FCR, p. 117). It is she who suggests and arranges the second (secret) marriage of Ebla (FCR, p. 123). Despite her kindness, she has a consuming passion for money. "Her main interest lay in money; it circulated in her blood" (FCR, p. 131). That serious character flaw notwithstanding, Ebla is very fond of Asha because she is the first person to treat her as an equal (FCR, p. 121). According to Okonkwo, in the character of Asha "Farah creates a strong feminine independence in order to portray the potential of individual achievement in a world dominated by men."

All of the female characters in From A Crooked Rib project Farah's concern for some aspect of women's status in his Somali society. Whether a traditional woman, such as Aowralla, or transitional women,
such as Ebla, the widow, and Asha, they carry the message that women are a significant part of any society; therefore, they must receive equitable treatment.

The many facets of life in Somalia of the mid-1970s are exposed as Farah continues to depict the day-to-day, season-to-season survival of this country in his second novel, *A Naked Needle*. During the years between the writing of *From A Crooked Rib* and *A Naked Needle*, significant changes have taken place in Somalia, for not only has an assassination of the head of state and a revolution taken place but Somalia has been invaded by foreign powers which vie for Somali support by investment and aid-inducements, and an internal conflict between the traditional forces of tribalism and the new revolutionary government threatens the stability of the country.

*A Naked Needle* depicts a crucial day in the life of Koschin Qowdhan, a young Western-trained intellectual who teaches school in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, during the period immediately following the Revolution. It examines the ideological confusion which results in his adoption of a critical-and-yet-wait-and-see attitude toward the Revolution. His personal dissatisfaction with many changes which are occurring in the culture as the result of foreign influence, as seen both in the relationships between African males and foreign women and in the changing values of Somali women who are exposed to foreign education, is examined also. The arrival of Nancy, his English girlfriend, exacerbates his confused state. Koschin, the "naked
needle," deplores the discrepancy between theory and practice relative to an ideology which was meant to convert his country into a truly independent socialist state: tribalism is rampant, poverty and corruption pervasive, and neocolonialism is consolidating its grip through foreign aid from Western and Eastern powers which, rather than genuinely attempting to improve the internal condition of Somalia, are competitive and self-serving.

Unlike *From A Crooked Rib* which is concerned primarily with the influence of Islamic and customary laws upon the traditional and the transitional Somali woman, *A Naked Needle* examines the impact of foreign influence and urban living upon Somali society and the transitional Somali woman. In *A Naked Needle* Farah suggests that the greatest single influence which negatively affects the Somali culture is foreign education. This influence is seen in the changing values of Somali males and females who are exposed to foreign education. Farah describes them as:

The so-called intellectuals of Somalia. The brightest sons and daughters of Puntland, the best that have made home with a degree in their hands... ([NN, p. 135](#)).

---

23 "The needle that stitches the clothes of other people remains naked itself." An Arabic Proverb ([NN, p. i](#)).


25 Puntland is the ancient historical name for Somalia.
In addition to their degrees, they bring adopted Western and Eastern values that adversely affect their Somali culture. The preference of these Somali men for foreign women as mates, especially for white women, and the desire for individual freedom perpetuated by Western culture and copied by Somali women who study in Western countries, are two examples. The effects of Western influence are great, also, upon women who reside in the urban areas and have not travelled abroad. The negative effects of Western influence are seen most clearly in Farah's portrayal of the modern Western woman and the transitional Somali woman.

As it scrutinizes the effects on Somali society of liaisons between Somali men and foreign women, A Naked Needle presents Nancy, Mildred, and Barbara, three Western white women who have such liaisons.

Nancy is the English girlfriend of Koschin, a proud, fanatical, and poor urbanized young Somali teacher. He is a "been-to" who has studied in England, where he met Nancy. She writes to announce her imminent arrival, acting on Koschin's offer of marriage if neither of them has found a partner within two years of his departure from England. This throws him into a welter of confused emotions every time he hears a plane arriving. He is deeply uncertain about their relationship.

26 One who has left one's country to study in foreign colleges and universities and has returned home with adopted values which frequently conflict with those of the indigenous culture.

27 Moore, "Nomads and Feminists," p. 5.
because he is aware of the stresses placed on foreign wives, and because he worries about the possibility of his own alienation from family, social and cultural ties:

. . . . They make you cut off your ties with your brothers and sisters, they insinuate the idea from the moment they set their feet here that you must live your own life with them, without anyone ever coming to stay with you, without anyone ever freely dropping in to lunch or to tea any time any day as is our case (NN, p. 28).

Consider the case of Mildred and Barre. They met while Barre was in the United States as a participant in an AID course at the University of Minnesota (NN, p. 27). She was a barmaid in a very small, insignificant eating-house for students on the outskirts of the town (NN, p. 33). Mildred is described as "the American dream of a woman, a wife with two breasts each as big as a camel-bell" (NN, p. 27). Over the objections of their friends, they marry and come to Somalia to live. Barre dreams "of happiness, . . . of rearing children, healthy members of the world society . . . " (NN, p. 37). But these dreams do not come true. Instead, marriage to Mildred proves to be expensive as well as disappointing:

. . . . If I were to pay the repatriation fee only . . . you know what it amounts to? It would take me years and years to pay off, what with the debt I am already smiling into: I had to buy her a second-hand car, a fridge, and rent a decent flat in a decent area, and my salary doesn't and can't stretch like rubber (NN, p. 28).

She is unable to live in Barre's village with his family for she cannot communicate with them. Their customs are strange and their language is unintelligible to her. For those reasons, Barre is forced to leave his family and provide a separate house for Mildred and
himself. The expenses which he incurs in setting up a "Western style" house leave no money for his family. Mildred is a constant embarrassment to him. She dresses in a revealing manner, chain-smokes, and runs around with other men (NN, p. 29). Barre's tribesmen "protest to him that his wife is a bit loose in the head, maybe," and they warn that "he must let her go" because she is a "whore" and "you can't keep a woman, a white woman, who is also a whore" (NN, p. 30). The fact that they cannot have children is a factor also to be considered. Despite these protestations, Barre is unwilling to let his wife go. He tries first to love her into compliance and then to beat her into compliance, but nothing works. She runs away from their home and is seen by Barre in the bathroom of a missionary (NN, p. 30). Still, Barre wants his wife (NN, p. 37).

Although Koschin is highly critical of Mildred's behavior and the deleterious effects it has on Barre as well as on traditional family and tribal relations, he does not see Barre as blameless: Barre is guilty of lying to Mildred. Koschin charges that he trapped Mildred into this disastrous marriage by giving her an inaccurate account of Somalia and what life would be like for her there:

'Why did you not-- the poor woman . . . why did you not tell her that the poverty-stricken people in Somalia would offer her, Mildred again, their hate in abundance?'

Disbelievingly, Barre sits and sluggishly says, his hands on his knees:
'I don't understand a thing you say.'
Koschin, calm and collected, lights a cigarette, while Barre is almost torn to pieces with worry. Koschin turns on him.
-'WHY DID YOU TRAP THE POOR THING?' (NN, p. 34).

The effects of this interracial marriage lead Koschin to
conclude: "I prefer whoring to marrying . . ." (NN, p. 32). This, despite the fact that Nancy is coming, this day, from England to marry him.

Barbara is another modern Western white woman who has a relationship with a Somali man. She is an American citizen who comes to Africa to cover the whole East African area for Reuters [Press]. Although she is married to Baldwin, a fellow American, she has an affair with an East African Indian in Nairobi (NN, p. 58). Their affair becomes so blatant that Baldwin, thoroughly humiliated, leaves the marriage (NN, p. 58). Later, in an effort to reunite with Baldwin, Barbara follows him to Somalia. They agree to make up and they celebrate. While in a drunken condition, and seeking to visit a friend of Baldwin, they accidentally walk into Mohammed's cubicle (NN, p. 58). Mohammed, like Barre, is a "been-to." While studying abroad, he has dated many white girls. That experience has altered his attitude toward certain traditional practices; therefore, when his influential father offers to "buy him a girl unlike the ones whom he had dated in the whiteman's land" (NN, p. 71), Mohammed refuses. He calls the arrangement, among other things, "a day-light robbery of my freedom as a man of value" (NN, p. 71).

The accidental, drunken encounter of Mohammed and Barbara leads, in spite of everything, to marriage: "Mohammed took the title of being the first Somali male ever to marry a foreigner in Mogadiscio, and he was the talk of towns for months." The marriage is the social event of
the season. And although Mohammed and his father are not on speaking terms, the father assumes a considerable share of the marriage expenses. Over three hundred people are invited to the wedding reception. In spite of all of these public successes, the marriage, in its early stages, is a private failure. The differences in their behaviors essentially owing to their cultural backgrounds, seem insurmountable: Mohammed is interested in "reading very high-floating things and listening to the BBC's Book-case till late into the night" (NN, p. 64). On the other hand, Barbara is interested in herself. True to the expectations born of her Western culture, she waits "for him to come, and warm me, and pamper me, and kiss me, and hold me and love me and make love to me" (NN, p. 65). During their "dark days," immediately following the birth of their daughter, Barbara seeks revenge for the neglect she feels. She has sex with Barre who is also a friend of Mohammed (NN, p. 63). But those days pass, and Barbara learns the "basic Somali words for communication," and they are happy (NN, p. 62). "I know him now. I come to him, and I listen to the newscast with him, he gets fed up easily and we go and sleep" (NN, p. 65).

As Mohammed and Barbara pursue their happiness through a typically Western mode, Mohammed is cut off from his family. As Barbara confirms: "... But it is only him that I must get used to, not a . . . whole tribe" (NN, p. 64). Mohammed's alienation from his culture is further evidenced by the insular, nuclear world in which they reside. Their "walled" flat (NN, p. 55), with its "bull's eye window" (NN, p. 56), is filled with Western furniture: high armchair
with foam upholstery (NN, p. 56), dining room table and chairs, silver utensils, china bowls and plates (NN, p. 79), and bookshelves, crammed with books on a wide variety of subjects (NN, p. 56). They are served by an obedient, well-trained houseboy (NN, p. 60) and protected by a loyal housedog (NN, p. 56). They have a baby daughter whom Barbara, against all Somali custom, refuses to breast-feed (NN, p. 67). Her name, Susan, is very, atypically, Western (NN, p. 72). Further, Barbara's challenge to the very foundation of Somali society is completed by her refusal to support the traditional status of Somali women. She observes that:

'A Somali wife takes orders from her husband, doesn't expect a good-night kiss from him, or I-am-sorry-darling or any do-you-minds. The average Somali woman isn't even bothered about these. Women stay in the houses, men go out to return whenever they please, and that is the norm. I know a woman . . . .

-I know one or two educated ones, educated in universities in Europe. Their marriages don't work. And as for some party-girls I have spoken to, they said they know where they stand. The men say, party-girls are for parties and sleeping with, not marriage' (NN, p. 68).

Regarding such a stoic acceptance by Somali women of their status, Barbara judges them "demented" (NN, p. 68). Not only is she critical of Somali customs which concern women, she is also "staunch enemy of Somalia" (NN, p. 59). Mohammed is openly critical of the Revolution (NN, p. 149) which is not a safe opinion to voice. Because of this opposition, Koschin concludes that Mohammed and Barbara, as many other interracial couples do, will find "themselves homes elsewhere, perhaps . . . the States or Canada" (NN, p. 150). That process Koschin calls "mucus drainage" (not brain-drainage) because in his opinion,
"anyone leaving his motherland when it needs him most has no right whatsoever to be called the brain of the country" (NN, p. 150).

The dilemma of whether to leave Somalia does not appear to be a likely one for Koschin and Nancy at this stage of their relationship. Koschin affirms his position: "There is my country, there are my people, my values. There is the Revolution to which I am loyal. There is ME, what I represent in the eyes of my country" (NN, p. ii). And Nancy vows, "I have come to stay come what may" (NN, p. 177). Nevertheless, while there is little probability that Koschin will seek a home elsewhere because of his affirmation of loyalty and Nancy's vow of steadfastness, he indicts himself on the same charge as others of his countrymen who marry foreign women:

What are we after, the so-called intelligentsia of this country, running like Paris after these foreign women, sluts of a kind, in their own countries, despised here in ours? Is it what Fanon says we are after? Or something below that? Or is everything taking place by chance, by co-incidence? Why are we unsatisfied with our own? (NN, pp. 73-74).

There exists a case against him, a case he must refute, as he says, "every minute of my life, mere association with you [Nancy]" (NN, p. 10). In a cruel confession, Koschin admits to Nancy that he does not understand his attraction to her when he is "obsessed" with the beauty of Somali women, and he adds, "I feel like a fool escorting you!" (NN, p. 104). When they encounter during their tour of the city some laughing women, Nancy asks: "Whom are these women laughing at?" Koschin replies, "Laughing at you, Nancy, a human deformity, the white person, these women think . . ." (NN, p. 113). Liaisons between Somali
males and foreign females are not acceptable to the average citizen, especially the Somali female. Therefore, Nancy is admonished to be discreet in all that she says and does (NN, p. 10). Indiscretions such as those committed by Mildred and Barbara are intolerable in this traditional society.

Perhaps Nancy understands the nature of the strain which her presence causes Koschin. Perhaps she believes him when he denies an affinity with his countrymen: "I don't consider women as a superfluous dimension in this push-button era. All I ask is wait... I'll get used to your being with me..." (NN, p. 86). In any case, her quiet, loving calmness wears him down. And in the course of their journey through her first day in Somalia, he begins to understand, a little, his attraction to her:

... I feel... [like] a Fanon in his youth in his masks and skins, his betrayals of his own self, and soul, the contractual marriage between the image he hated and the woman he cared for, and I think I am beginning to like... er... be attached, not like... I think I'm getting used to her being with me, and I think I need her so that I may crush out of existence an image of the dominator... I won't be a Jain... neither will I be a Hercules... I shall be... (NN, p. 134).

At evening's end, Nancy goes with Koschin to his one-room "hovel of a home" (NN, p. 179) where she asks him, "Do you want me to stay?" and he responds, "Do you want to?..." He kisses her... "Sleep well, Nancy," he says (NN, p. 181). Although this is a "weak yes," it does set the stage for the marriage of Koschin and Nancy. Considering the failed marriage of Barre and Mildred, and the saved marriage of Mohammed and Barbara, the marriage of Koschin and Nancy can go either
Such relationships of Somali men with foreign white women appear to have political implications in that they seem to symbolize Somalia's external relationships with foreign powers. Barre's relationship with his "American" wife is fraught with problems and viewed with disdain by Koschin. Similarly, Mohammed and his "British" wife (an American expatriate), although enjoying a successful relationship, disgust Koschin with their reactionary statements concerning the revolution. It is only British Nancy with her half-Spanish background, perhaps of the lower class and of socialist sympathies (her former fiance and father were both revolutionaries), who Koschin thinks will understand the true principles of the Somali revolution. Shunning the overbearing reactionary nature of the United States and Britain, Farah, through the character of Nancy, seems to give tentative approval to the following of an independent path of socialist development by his country.

Not only is Somali culture negatively affected by the liaisons between modern Western white women and Somali men, but urbanization and Western education so alter the values of some transitional Somali women that Somali culture is affected adversely. In order to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, Farah presents a group of transitional Somali women whose life-styles represent an almost complete break with Somali traditions. That break with the old values and the turn to newer and less familiar ones tends to lead to imbalance in their lives. Instead of being free to express their individual selves, they are
exploited by their urban environment as they are set adrift without the familiar landmarks of family, marriage, and childbearing by which to get their bearings. Therefore, for the so-called intellectual single woman, life seems to be a never-ending series of parties and boyfriends, such as is depicted in the lifestyles of Mary (Museum-piece) and Ambera.

"Museum-piece," an "unofficial love-goddess," is the lowest ranked of about sixteen girls whom "the pseudo-sophisticated Mogadiscio youth refer to as party-girls," and "they go from hand to hand" (NN, p. 52). She spells her name in three different ways (Mary, Merriam, Maria), and when she is greeted, she responds to the name that fits her mood at the time (NN, p. 52). True to her chameleon-like nature, she takes on the interests and the personality she thinks suitable for the man in whose company she finds herself. When she discovers that Koschin has done his thesis on Joyce, she immediately claims a special attachment to *Finnegans Wake* (NN, p. 52). She enjoys her life as a "three-bottler, and a chain-smoker, with supplies of all sorts swimming in from fans," and she refuses her father's demand that she marry the man whom he has selected for her (NN, p. 52). Another frequenter of parties (but not an unofficial love-goddess) is Ambera. She is a "highly strung," non-bra-wearing teacher (NN, p. 136) who is said to be very intelligent but refuses to teach the children to whom she has been assigned. "They are too noisy, speak in jibberish Bravanese and think they are Portuguese descendants" (NN, p. 136). She is too vain to wear her desperately needed glasses to parties, and cannot locate her expensive contacts which, she says, one of her boyfriends bought for her
Faduma, another transitional Somali woman, is a single woman who resides in the city, but she is not a so-called intellectual and does not qualify to travel the party circuit. Her story reflects another aspect of the influence of urbanization; namely, its effect on the uneducated single female. Faduma was engaged to be married to a clerk at the Port of Mogadiscio, but he was convicted of misappropriation of government money and sent to the gallows (NN, p. 8). Although Faduma was eventually cleared of any involvement in the crime, "the misuse of government funds by her would-be husband has made her the hecatomb of a down-graded woman" (NN, p. 8). Nevertheless, she consoles herself by "accepting that every dog has its day, that, in any case, she has had hers" (NN, p. 8). She has had everything a middle-class Mogadiscio woman would sell her body and soul to get; now she has been reduced to eking out an existence by cooking a single meal per day for "Koschin and Co. Unlimited . . . four men who live within fifty metres of each other, who pool in and share a meal" (NN, p. 8). She is bitter, sarcastic, unmindful of her appearance and foul-mouthed in her conversation (NN, p. 20), but she continues to believe in the traditional power of the tribe. Therefore, when Koschin will not pay the blood-compensation tribute demanded by his tribe, she unsuccessfully implores him to do so lest he incur "the tribe's curse" (NN, p. 15).

Not all transitional women who are single suffer the fate of the so-called intellectuals who are caught up in what seems to be an aimless
life, going from party to party, man to man. Nor do they suffer the fate of Faduma, who has no profession and has missed her chance to make a marriage which would lift her from the squalor in which she lives. The lives of three transitional women present a more optimistic picture of single life. Maryan has had a somewhat lengthy association with Koschin; they have been lovers off and on for ten years. They have fought, loved, and lied to each other... gossiped about other people's profanities, about the Revolution... at any rate, we have lived off and on, which is something very few people can be proud of... (NN, p. 18).

But he has never mentioned Nancy, his English girlfriend, to her; therefore, when Nancy sends a telegram saying that she is coming to Somalia to marry him, as was promised two years ago, he writes Maryan a letter telling her of the situation and asking forgiveness for not having told her about Nancy before this time (NN, pp. 18-19).

Although Maryan will not marry Koschin, one gets the impression that she is a stable person and will survive the blow. She is described as one "who, on previous occasions, when I was at the point of heading into a political mess, offered me a hand" (NN, p. ii). She is "beautiful, kind, a Somali, very understanding, very loving, and lovable" (NN, p. ii), and she is not shown to be a member of the party group. Although she is "on the wrong side of thirty," she does work and can look after herself.

Meyram, on the other hand, has had to flee Mogadiscio, "the city of the destitute!" She is about twenty-eight, with a son, and "has survived affairs with many men in Mogadiscio" (NN, p. 47). Fleeing from
the shattered pieces of her life, she settles in Kismayo where she "works in the Port as a clerk/typist, and keeps her little son and her humble home in absolute cleanliness" (NN, pp. 47-48). Hers is a quieter life now; she goes out to the office only. When Koschin comes to her with a letter of introduction from a man in Mogadiscio, "... she readily welcomed him into her heart, said a few nasty things about the man from whom Koschin took the letter... but said she would be nice to Koschin" (NN, p. 48). In order to avoid pregnancy she takes Western-made birth control pills.

Margaritta, a mulatto, a platonic friend of Koschin, has grown up "under the care of the Catholic mission... and is among the few mulatte who managed to go to high school" (NN, p. 90). Margaritta is the most positively drawn of the female characters presented in A Naked Needle. She is a transitional woman with an apartment of her own who visits her mother. She has "a boyfriend" whom she visits also. She plays tennis and seems to take the game seriously. Koschin states that he will take Nancy to Margaritta's house; he does not expect to see (and he does not see) her at the party. Apparently she avoids the frantic pleasure-seeking pace which characterizes the lives of many single women in the city. This transitional Somali woman is not given to excessive behavior.

On the other hand, the lives of married women do not appear to be much more fulfilling than those of the majority of the single women presented above, although their education and family ties should provide greater stability. Xaali is the wife of a banker and the mother of
five children, including "the youngest two who are identical twins" (NN, pp. 141-142). She and her husband graduated from the same Italian institution, she with a low average to become a wife, and he, to become a banker who is:

so primitive mentally . . . that he will not allow the liberated-laureate to take up employment since . . . woman's job is home, he believes . . . and to that she whispers her response in friends' ears, saying: Wages of jealousy lie in infidelity (NN, p. 141).

Because she is not permitted to work, Xaali counts "money for the sake of killing time." She is a "chatter box . . . whose hobby is gossip . . ." (NN, p. 142). In addition to this, she pampers herself with specially designed dresses and is not very unfaithful ("only once in two years, the right man at the right place, to promote business, etcetera") (NN, p. 142). Her sole role is to support her husband.

Berni is another woman who supports her husband in his career. As ambassador, he has served in "three European capitals, Washington, D.C., and New York, and he has been recently re-appointed ambassador after a long interval of joblessness" (NN, p. 130). Berni, in her heavily-accented English, enjoys making unfavorable comparison between Somalia and the other places in which they have lived. This transitional woman has in her home the trappings of Western civilization mixed with souvenirs of African culture: there is a corridor . . . "decorated with masks from all over the continent" (NN, p. 127). In one room "there's a fireplace that has never burnt a coal, for Magadiscio is never bitterly cold indoors" (NN, p. 128). All over the four walls are imitation
items; with an elephant tusk in one corner. There is also the head of a
deer (NN, p. 128). There are Liz Taylor's and Richard Burton's
snapshots nailed up next to Barni's and Dulmar's wedding photo. "They
are our friends." Barni volunteers with pride in her voice . . . "New
York friends. We taken that at a New York studio. Dick and Liz came to
congratulate uss and they evan autograved theirs for me . . ." (NN, p.
128).

Not only does Barni claim a level of familiarity with the famous
couple that is probably greatly exaggerated, she has many paperback
books which she does not read. Her possessions like her relationships
exist for the sake of appearances. She is a woman of excesses; she eats
and drinks too much and wears too much jewelry (NN, pp. 127, 131). For
all of her physical bulk, she seems a woman of little substance.

The lifestyles of the transitional Somali women presented in this
discussion show the adverse affects of urbanization and Western
education upon Somali society. The single woman and the party-goer are
products of the urban environment. They are unknown in the traditional
village. Prostitution is another urban phenomenon. According to
Rayqiyai:

Prostitution has become increasingly visible in the urban
areas since the Second World War. Society at large views this
as a negative trend. Religious men especially, periodically
wage campaigns against sexual adventures and the Government
occasionally issues orders to abolish prostitution. So far, one
big research project has been undertaken in this field and there
were plans for the rehabilitation of prostitutes.

Although religious men see prostitution as moral depravity,
you also regard it as a form of rebellion on the part of the
woman. Interestingly enough, it is those women who are
basically unwilling to fulfil the traditional submissive roles of wives and mothers, who usually engage in prostitution in order to survive.

In *A Naked Needle* there is evidence of prostitution in the cities. Koschin lives on the outskirts of Mogadiscio in a room that is a part of a dilapidated building with an aluminum roof, patched walls and only one toilet that serves at least ten people. The room opposite Koschin's is occupied by the landlady, a woman of ill repute who hires four additional prostitutes. These women stay up all night talking and entertaining clients and sleep late in the morning. They live in squalor and openly ply their trade (NN, pp. 2-3). Koschin admits that "Prostitution in Somalia is at the door step" (NN, p. 97). According to him, it is caused by such factors as "divorce, insecurity in city-life, poverty, and withitness, ..." (NN, p. 97). A woman who owns a house in Kismayo advances the theory that prostitution in Kismayo is almost as widespread as it is in Mogadiscio. Her assertion is that it is caused by the Americans and the Germans:

Naturally, if the Americans and the Germans had stayed on in Kismayo, money would circulate a little more freely and poverty would be less--but all that prostitution that their monies have enticed women into . . . (NN, p. 44).

Urbanization, Western education, and Western-style education are primary factors in the changing values of Somali men and women which have a negative effect on Somalia as a whole. The changing values of

---

Somali men who study abroad frequently lead them to reject as mates Somali women, preferring alliances with foreign women, especially white women. These alliances lead to the adoption of a Western lifestyle which is the antithesis of the Somali lifestyle; many Somali men married to white women choose to live outside of Somalia, resulting in a "brain drain" from the country. In a similar manner, Somali women who are exposed to Western education, either in countries outside of Somalia or through training based on the Western model inside of Somalia, tend to abandon traditional practices which restrict them and to adopt new practices which are more compatible with urban lifestyles. This practice, carried to the extreme, modifies family relationships, male-female relationships, marriage patterns, and childbearing patterns to a degree that Somali culture is seriously threatened. Although this is a rather dark and dismal forecast, one can discern a pinpoint of hope for Somalia in the subdued optimism inherent in Farah's portrayal of Koschin and Nancy, Maryan, Meyram, and Margaritta. Through these characters he demonstrates his faith in the ability of members of Somali society to struggle towards and to achieve, finally, a desirable social ideal which is conscious of the role that women must play in such a society.

Farah's earliest novels, From a Crooked Rib and A Naked Needle were written during a period of much social and political activity in Somalia (1968-1972). The former novel was written one year prior to the Revolution and the latter just three years after the Revolution. This event brought a change from a democratic form of government to a socialist form of government. It also brought about changes in the
status of Somali women. Although at that time legislation was passed which mandated sweeping changes in marriage laws, divorce, and inheritance, most still await full implementation. Subtle and not so subtle male opposition to changes in the status of women account for the delay. For the most part, women continue to be left out of matters of importance and are still chained to domestic chores. That is true whether they reside in the city or in the country.

In his earliest novels, then, Farah shows his concern for the way women are treated in this Muslim country. Deploiring the difference between what is the condition of women and what should be the condition of women, he explores such issues as forced polygamous marriages, genital mutilation and the adverse effects on Somali society of foreign influence. He does not "prettify" undesirable traditional practices in this society. He calls for a change. Also, he warns against the blind acceptance of foreign values which adversely affect the culture. Thus, Farah's commitment to accurate portrayal of Somali society as well as to the treatment of women's issues has its beginning in his earliest novels and is continued and expanded in his subsequent novels.
CHAPTER III

FARAH'S TRILOGY:

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF AN AFRICAN DICTATORSHIP

The variations on the theme of an African dictatorship presented by Farah in his trilogy reflect the increasing tyranny of the military regime which had its origin in the Somali Revolution which took the form of a bloodless coup in 1969. The coup was the result of growing despair over the increasingly obvious failure of the parliamentary model which Somalia had inherited from Italy and England when it gained formal independence in 1960. Because of the failure of the parliamentary government and the excesses which it bred, the coup marked the ending of the post-colonial experiment with democracy and the beginning of an experiment with socialism. Although many of his colleagues were trained in the Soviet Union, Siad Barre, the leader of the coup, came up through the military ranks, beginning with his service during the colonial period. Together, they developed their own brand of "scientific socialism." In doing so, they had the cooperation of a small group of intellectuals who helped them to initiate many changes. There was an idealistic promise of a new beginning. There was a spectacularly successful literacy campaign, following the long-overdue agreement on a
script for the Somali language in 1973. The Supreme Military Council's concern for the rights of women led to the January, 1975 decree that women should have equal inheritance rights with men. In addition to this, the special committees established to deal specifically with affairs concerning women made recommendations which resulted in the President's announcement later in the year that a new law governing polygamy and divorce would be introduced permitting only those men who were able to support several wives equally, as required by Islam, to enter into polygamous marriages. Further, men would no longer be able to divorce their wives at will. These sweeping changes were not welcomed by the male population, especially religious leaders. However, open opposition was silenced by the immediate execution of ten religious leaders. But underground activities against the new laws have thwarted attempts to implement them.

Although the effects of the decrees regarding the rights of women have not been fully realized, the new inheritance and marriage laws are testimonies to the idealism of the new military regime. Unfortunately, with time the regime also developed a repressive aspect, exhibiting the only too well-known features of sudden arrests, torture, disappearances, censorship, and, in 1980, the power to detain without trial for ninety days. Corruption and a clan-based nepotism flourished. That combination of positive and negative aspects of the Somali Revolution has created a complex situation.

The particulars of this complex situation are examined in the novels of Nuruddin Farah. In his novels one finds a careful weighing
of all factors before conclusions regarding the effects of the Revolution are reached. *A Naked Needle*, the first of Farah's novels to discuss the Revolution, reflects a degree of uncertainty which is characterized by a critical-and-yet-wait-and-see attitude. However, this uncertainty crystallizes into open opposition to the regime in his trilogy, to which the author gives the overall title: "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship." *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979) is the first novel of the trilogy, and it "tells the tale of those who do not compromise." *Sardines* (1981), the second in the trilogy, "is about those who do compromise." And *Close Sesame* (1983), the third, calls for drastic action. In his trilogy Farah both intensifies his scrutiny of the military regime and its adverse effects on Somalia in general and continues and extends his probings into the plight of women in the

---


3 Nuruddin Farah, *Sardines* (London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1981). All quotations are taken from this edition and are cited as (S, with page numbers).


5 Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame* (London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1983). All quotations are taken from this edition and are cited as (CS, with page numbers).
Somali society as it suffers the throes of revolution.

_Sweet and Sour Milk_ is the story of a pair of identical twins, Soyaan and Loyaan. Soyaan, a 29-year old Economic Advisor to the President, is also a political activist who sees through the regime and tries to subvert it by writing illegal pamphlets. Soyaan dies mysteriously. Loyaan, a District Medical Officer in the small town of Baidoa, without any real interest in political matters, is driven by a personal wish to vindicate his brother. He gains insights into the machinations of the regime which eventually force him to accept the validity of his brother's vision and to try to incorporate that vision into his own. As Loyaan investigates the recent life and subversive activities of Soyaan as well as his death, he must also struggle (vainly) against the desires of his mother and father to collaborate with the government in its calculated appropriation of the dead Soyaan. The father, Keynaan, falsely asserts that Soyaan's last words were "LABOR IS HONOUR AND THERE IS NO GENERAL BUT THE GENERAL" (SSM, p. 99). The pronouncement makes Soyaan a standard bearer for the regime which he opposed. The mother, Qumman, favors accepting the General's offer of posthumous honor, which doubtless includes a lucrative gratuity for the family (SSM, p. 80). Powerless, Loyaan watches as buildings and streets are renamed for Soyaan, the "Hero of the Revolution" (SSM, p. 99). Finally, Loyaan himself feels the heavy hand of governmental oppression: he is given the choice between "deportation" and imprisonment because of his relentless search for the truth surrounding Soyaan's death (SSM, p. 203).
In *Sweet and Sour Milk* no one escapes the oppressive and repressive tactics of the tyrannical General and his sycophants. Men and women suspected of being enemies of the revolution are often removed at dawn to be interrogated, tortured, incarcerated or murdered. The General appropriates the oral tradition of the culture and requires citizens to spy on each other, to eavesdrop and to report suspicious remarks as well as deviant behaviors of neighbors, friends, distant relatives and immediate family members. So efficient is this information-gathering system that it is dubbed "Dionysus' Ear."

In other words, *Sweet and Sour Milk* is a story of oppression. Among other kinds of oppression portrayed, it is the story of the direct and the indirect oppression of women. First, the traditional Somali woman is oppressed by customary and Islamic laws. Second, the transitional Somali woman is oppressed by customary and Islamic laws and by the tyrannical government. Third, the liberated modern Somali woman is oppressed by the tyrannical government. Finally, all Somali women, regardless of classification, are indirectly oppressed by the government as they suffer the repercussions of the atrocities perpetuated against their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and daughters.

---

6 A secretly circulated memorandum written by Soyaan in which he describes how the General's ear-service uses illiterates to report what they hear as they hear it. This procedure is likened to the one used by Dionysus the Syracusan tyrant who had a cave built in the shape of a human ear which echoed to him whatever the prisoners there whispered secretly (SSM, pp. 135-136).
Qumman and Beydan are traditional Somali women whose world-views are defined by the customary and Islamic laws of their culture. Therefore, they are governed by such practices as enforced polygamous marriage and female subserviency, with all its concomitant ills, such as illiteracy, superstition and powerlessness.

As the first and second wives of Keynaan, Qumman and Beydan 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 and find them beneath their concern. For them, "women are simply a generally generalised-about human species more mysterious than Martians" (SSM, p. 86). "Does one notice the small insects which die a suffering death under the eyeless heels of one's feet?" (SSM, p. 86). Further, "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" (SSM, p. 84). They are certainly not for discussing things with. A man who discusses things with a woman is a disappointment (SSM, p. 86). Therefore, when Keynaan 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 (SSM, p. 14).

Keynaan represents the patriarch or head of an extended family group in Muslim society who has unlimited power over his family and will brook no challenge to his authority, however hesitant it may be.

7 Petersen, "The Personal and the Political," p. 98.
For example, having grown up with the idea that the universe is flat, Keynaan's ideas are "exclusive, . . . flat . . . uninteresting as the universe his insularity ties him to" (SSM, p. 85). When Soyaan and Loyaan, as small children, fight over a globe of the world (a round ball which helps to shape their perspective and world view), Keynaan senses that the ball stands for a concept of the world that differs from his and destroys it (SSM, p. 36). He can destroy the globe, but he cannot destroy the ideas which the twins possess; they will forever disagree with his.

One consequence of Keynaan's view of the universe is that he despises and frequently beats his wives and children.

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 that he was, the Grand Patriarch whose authority drenched his powerless victims with the blood of his lashes (SSM, p. 86).

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" (SSM, p. 86). 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. She could not have avoided these pregnancies because "there were no pills a woman could take in

those days" (SSM, p. 86). 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. "I waited for your return...I thought you would earn enough money to give us independence so that we wouldn't need Keynaan any more..." (SSM, pp. 55-56). 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 (SSM, p. 88). Soyaan becomes an economist, and he purchases the house in which she lives and bequeaths it to her (SSM, p. 14). However, by the time they are in position to provide this protection Keynaan has left Qumman for another woman (SSM, p. 95).

Keynaan moves to Afgoi and takes a second wife. She is Beydan, the widow of a man who has died in the torture-chamber under interrogation by Keynaan, who is a Security Officer. The General orders Keynaan to marry the dead man's wife in an effort to silence whispers that he has been murdered (SSM, p. 153). Beydan suffers much at the hands of this patrilineal society and this tyrannical government. Upon the death of her husband, as customary law requires, her two daughters become the property of his family and are taken to live with them. Forced to marry the man who has murdered her husband, she is beaten and maltreated by him (SSM, p. 152), and despised by his first wife, who later accuses her of poisoning her son Soyaan (SSM, p. 26).

Neither Qumman nor Beydan has been formally educated and both are illiterate. As traditional women, their world-view is also flat, and they struggle to perpetuate customary and Islamic practices. Neither
believes in modern medicine. Therefore, during the hours which precede Soyaan's death, Qumman refuses to give him medicines prescribed for him, but favors traditional remedies. Soyaan insists that his mother provide him the prescribed medicines, "... but his mother shook her head determinedly. No, she wouldn't get them for him ..." (SSM, p. 9) He knows that Qumman has little faith in the miracles of modern medicines because: "She would argue with sustained passion that she favored traditional medicines; [if] they didn't work, then Allah's providential cures ..." (SSM, p. 9). Soyaan capitulates and agrees to allow the sheiks to practice their healing techniques, but to no avail. Soyaan dies despite the sheiks' efforts (SSM, p. 21).

Similarly, Beydan clings to the old ways, having no faith in the new. She refuses to go to the hospital to deliver the baby which she is now expecting. "They stitch you badly." She believes as most traditional women believe that the mid-wives who are government paid are more concerned with quantity than with quality. Whereas old women, preferably one's own relations, stitch with love and care. Therefore, some weeks before Beydan's delivery, an old relative comes to care for her (SSM, p. 154).

In keeping with the practice of Islam in Somalia wherein there exists, for some, simultaneous acceptance of Islam's uncompromising monotheism and pre-Islamic beliefs in mortal spirits, Qumman and Beydan are both highly religious and very superstitious. Although they accept the doctrines of Islam, they lay greater stress on spirits of their own
pre-Islamic traditions. For example, Qumman is convinced that Soyaan's final meal which he ate in Beydan's house was responsible for his death. Therefore, upon receiving from the mourners money to assist with the burial of Soyaan, she quietly goes to Afgoi and pays a large sum of it to a master-witch to cast a spell to avenge her son's death. When Beydan learns of Qumman's actions, she secrets the three thousand shillings which Soyaan provided for her support and pays the master-witch to "... suggest what protective mixtures she should take to fight back and come out triumphantly" (SSM, p. 155). She does not triumph. True to her dream, she bears a son whom she names Soyaan and immediately dies (SSM, p. 236).

The lives of these traditional Somali women reflect the patrilineal Islamic culture into which they are born. As girls, they are not highly valued, and they receive training which restricts their world-view. Loyaan makes an observation regarding Beydan's status in Somali society which is applicable to Qumman 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 claypots 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 (SSM, p. 150).

In a society such as this, neither Beydan nor Qumman is given opportunity for those explorations which lead to self-definition; instead, they rely on tradition for a definition of themselves. Thus,

their worlds are flat and their vision limited. Traditional Somali women, they are in these modern times, "souvenir[s] from another age" (SSM, p. 32).

Unlike Qumman and Beydan, the child Ladan was given an illustrated ball. Her mind and her aspirations have been lifted above the bog of traditional society by her twin brothers who oppose their father by educating her. They tell her stories from China, India (Tagore), Iceland (sagas), and Arabia (The Nights). "She was like them--except she was a girl" (SSM, p. 110). Believing this to be true, they cultivate in her a world view which encourages exploration and refuses total submission to traditional values. She is told, "The world is an egg and it awaits your breaking it" (SSM, p. 110). Conversely, she receives from her mother the more traditional world-view which she also partially absorbs. The result of this dichotomous education is that Ladan believes: "Soyaan is the braille of my unguided vision; and Loyaan is the one who enables me to sow my noons and days with nightly stars" (SSM, p. 54). But at the same time she "... take[s] a stand much more akin to that of her mother's" (SSM, pp. 54-55). Ladan, then, is a transitional Somali woman who because of the Western-style education which she receives from her brothers, cannot accept totally the old traditional practices based on male dominance. Nevertheless, because of her mother's influence, she reflects certain traditional practices, such as are demonstrated in her acceptance of "women's work."

Although she receives from her mother and father the indifference towards girls so typical of Somali culture, from her brothers she
receives protection. "How the two had loved her. How the twins had protected her from those murderous looks of Keynaan and the . . . indifferent attitudes of Qumman . . . ." (SSM, pp. 109-110). They open up a world for her that women in their society normally find closed to them. They embue her with a feeling of equality which she will not easily relinquish. In a very untraditional procedure, she is allowed to attend school and to become a teacher. Even at the age of twenty-three she has not been forced to marry. Although she is considered a spinster by traditional standards, she is free to choose her marital status in the new order of society. Apparently she has chosen Koschin as her soul-mate. It is to Koschin that she dedicates a sonnet of love (SSM, p. 17). His incarceration together with the death of Soyaan plunges Ladan into an apathetic depression that is difficult to overcome. She vows that she shall "will not to see, reason or feel." She will not go "to teach any more" because "nothing made sense any more" (SSM, p. 82).

Not only does Ladan choose for herself the man whom she will love, she refuses to acquiesce readily to her father. This is shown in her response to his bringing unexpected guests to the festivities following Soyaan's burial. Upon seeing her father and his guests, she

10 The protagonist of A Naked Needle who is said by Soyaan to be in serious trouble because of his unexplained arrest (SSM, p. 20). In his novels, Farah makes use of a device which is evident in the novels of Honore de Balzac; namely, that of presenting overlapping characters. Similarly, many of Farah's characters make repeated appearances in his works. This device is called by G. H. Moore, "A Balzacian device" and is said to give continuity to Farah's novels. G. H. Moore, "Nomads and Feminists," p. 9.
in very untraditional language says to Loyaan, "That bastard! ... I could kill him..." (SSM, p. 231), and when her father orders her to go into the house she does not move until "Loyaan motion[s] her to obey;" at which time she goes, not into her own house, but next door where Beydan is about to give birth to a child (SSM, p. 231). It seems that Ladan's hostility toward her father has its origin in his unacceptable expectations of her: "... he ... wants us to prostrate ourselves before him, kiss the floor that he and the General walk on" (SSM, p. 231).

On the other hand, Ladan can be quietly acquiescent to her mother's demands and lose herself in "women's work." For example, Soyaan's death causes a profound disturbance in her. "She was no longer full of youthful vitality, bursting with energy and creativeness ..." (SSM, p. 32). Her eyes are blood-shot and her throat is sore from continuous "wailing and keening." Yet, even in her grief, without protest, she accepts responsibility for those chores normally relegated to women. She puts a room in order so that the men can have a place to which to retire (SSM, p. 33); she assists in gathering and inspecting the clothes of her dead brother which are designated for the poor (SSM, p. 52); she offers tea to guests and purchases cigarettes for Loyaan (SSM, p. 67); she prepares food and serves Loyaan in his room (SSM, p. 109). Although Ladan is obedient and helpful to her mother, she does act on her own opinions. When Qumman wrongly accuses Beydan of poisoning Soyaan, she is very hostile toward her; she does not approve even of Beydan's visiting her home to pay condolences to the family.
But Ladan joins Loyaan in welcoming Beydan. Also, despite a "burning look" from Qumman, she offers her room as a place where Beydan can rest (SSM, p. 60). Again, when her mother snubs Margaritta (the secret lover of Soyaan) who comes after the death to introduce his son to the family, Ladan is very cordial. She serves tea and offers to hold the baby (SSM, p. 67). Regarding Margaritta and the child, Loyaan knows that "his parents would certainly disassociate themselves from any position he took," but he wonders, "What about Ladan? Would she share his views, would she like this woman and accept her?" (SSM, p. 69). Ladan does share his views rather than those of their parents. She is a transitional Somali woman, and while she can be acquiescent in certain small traditional matters, in matters of significance she is more likely to reflect the views of her brothers who contributed, during her formative years, much time and information to her training.

On the other hand, Margaritta is one of a "new breed of young Somali women who do not conform to the traditional image." She is a liberated modern Somali woman who is "educated, has independent means of livelihood, and pursues her own interests--intellectual, social,

11 Continuing his application of the Balzacian technique of using overlapping characters, Farah shows the development of Margaritta from a transitional Somali woman in *A Naked Needle* to a liberated Somali woman in *Sweet and Sour Milk*.

romantic and political." She first appears in *A Naked Needle* as the platonic friend of Koschin. She is described as being "among the few mulatte who has managed to go to high school" (NN, p. 90). Her characterization is the most positive of the females in that novel. Her life is more stable than theirs, and she apparently avoids the frantic going from party to party and man to man which is so typical of most transitional Somali women in *A Naked Needle*. Although during the years intervening between *A Naked Needle* and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Margaritta has acquired, among other things, an Italian education, an Italian husband, Italian citizenship and a large sum of inherited money, she is still spoken of in derogatory terms in Mogadiscio. She is called *Mistione*, which is an abusive term used "only in reference to the half-Italian, half-Somali community in Somalia" (SSM, p. 71).

Her non-Muslim status affords her greater freedom than most women in this traditional society. She is registered as an external student at the University of Rome where she is studying for a degree in law; she has already begun to research for her thesis entitled, "The Burgeoning of the National Security Service as an Institution of Power in Africa and Latin America" (SSM, p. 70). Although she is the ex-mistress of the Minister to the President and the secret lover of Soyaan, she is not given to excesses in her behavior. The secrecy of her affair with Soyaan seems an attempt on their part to avoid confrontation with her ex-lover. Of her relationship with Soyaan, Margaritta says, "I bore

13

Ibid.
Soyaan, my love . . ." (SSM, p. 120). After the death of Soyaan, she introduces their child to his family: "I bore Soyaan this child of love. I have brought this love-child so as to share with you the love Soyaan left behind . . .." (SSM, p. 70). She is a good mother (SSM, p. 68) who has a well-paying job (SSM, p. 70), and she seeks nothing from the family. Loyaan, upon hearing her story and seeing the child, is "proud of her, he was joyous . . ." (SSM, p. 70). He obviously approves of Soyaan's choice of this strong, intelligent, and independent woman as his mate and the mother of his child.

However, Margaritta's financial and intellectual independence cannot protect her from the tyranny of the General. After Soyaan dies, security officers with a properly signed warrant are dispatched to her home to conduct a pre-dawn search for anti-government documents belonging to Soyaan (SSM, p. 113). When the documents are not found in Margaritta's house, someone secretly breaks into her bank locker and removes the sensitive documents which are stored there (SSM, p. 163). There is one anti-government memorandum which the General's men are not able to destroy. That is the memorandum which was written by Soyaan and found in the folds of his pillowcase by his mother after his death. In it he indicts the top civil service officers for their complicity with the General in oppressing the people of Somalia. He describes them as "men and women with no sense of dignity, nor integrity; men and women who have succumbed and accepted to be humiliated" (SSM, p. 38). The process, for some, is almost imperceptible, as "one by one, top government officials capitulate continuously and finally become clowns."
Cowards. And (tribal) upstarts . . . " (SSM, p. 38).

The terror which the regime perpetuates is pervasive. No one escapes it. "Listen to the knock on your neighbor's door at dawn. Harken: the army-boots . . . leading away from your house . . . when will your turn come?" (SSM, p. 38). And the women suffer in many different ways. At the "Rendezvous of the 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 true because the women leave their husbands and brothers inside ostensibly to take a siesta (SSM, p. 190). 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 children who were financially dependent on them (SSM, p. 192).

Women are sacrificed to the lust of visiting dignitaries, also:

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 . . . (SSM, p. 186).

The women suffer for the ones who are taken in the pre-dawn raids. They alone are left to spread the news. "Yesterday was your colleague's turn. You saw his wife wrapped in tears, you saw her averted eyes" (SSM, p. 38). They take another. "The wife doesn't switch the electric lights off . . . . The sun will have sent her on her fearsome errand. She gives the morning terror to the brother of the
detainee . . ." (SSM, p. 38). The women vainly strive to hold things together. Farah describes them as "... saviors, ... protectors ... the backbone of the family's unity and safety" (SSM, p. 191).

*Sweet and Sour Milk*, then, is a most virulent attack upon the tribalistic and authoritarian practices of the Barre regime and its links with the Soviet Union, the traditional patriarchs of Somali society and the elite group who sell themselves to the government. The tone of this book is sinister, and arrests, imprisonments, tortures, informers and generally an atmosphere of fear prevails. Everyone is affected: members of the security compromise themselves and permit themselves to become sycophants who sing the praises of the General and terrorize the citizens. Families are divided. Women of all classifications are directly and indirectly oppressed by the government.

Nevertheless, as in most committed novels, *Sweet and Sour Milk* ends with hope. According to Moore:

> . . . The book does close on a hesitant note of renewal, something a little more definite than a question mark. . . . In the moments preceding the arrival of his [Loyaan's] escort to the airfield, his stepmother gives birth to a boy who is duly named Soyaan. Father and son even discover a possibility of communicating with each other. All three of these developments converge with the knock on the door which ends the book.

As in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, the foreground of *Sardines* is dominated by the ominous power of a tyrannical general who runs the government: "The secret police are everywhere, security thugs trail the

---

innocent [and] people disappear at random." Additionally, both novels focus on the intellectuals in Somali society. However, whereas *Sweet* and *Sour Milk* tells the story from the perspective of the intellectual male, *Sardines* tells the story from the perspective of the intellectual female. This second novel in Farah's anti-government trilogy explores the role of Somali women in opposing the current regime. The story revolves around Medina, an avowed feminist and intellectual who challenges both the political and the social structure of Somalia in her personal quest for a room of her own and a country in which she need not feel like a guest. That search brings her into head-on confrontations, first with the government when she refuses to assume an editorial policy favorable to its objectives and later with tradition when she refuses to allow her daughter to be circumcised. Ultimately Medina discovers that her room must be shared with her husband and daughter, and that together they resolve to fight to gain control of the country for the people.

In summary, then, *Sardines* is a novel largely about women, particularly women who play influential roles within the government, yet find themselves locked within a masculine power structure and confronted with the age-old questions of sexual liberation. As Farah examines that timeless question in a new, revolutionary setting, he presents

---


16 Ibid., p. 59.
women who are affected in various ways. First, there is the traditional Somali woman who fiercely struggles to protect the old ways and to project them upon the lives of others. Second, there is the transitional Somali woman who because of her strong desire to achieve self-determination, her exposure to Western education and other urban influences, finds it impossible to accept completely the old ways but who because of her religion, is unable to absorb totally the new ways. Third, there is the liberated modern Somali woman who because of education and changing political conditions has gained freedom from her traditional culture. With her Western education, public employment and economic self-sufficiency, she engages in public and political activities. Finally, there is the modern Western woman who because of her Western values serves as a contrast to both traditional and transitional Somali women. Her interaction with the Somali male has a negative influence upon the society.

The traditional Somali woman in Sardines is portrayed through the characters of Idil and Fatima bint Thabit. They are 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.

Challenges to customary and religious practices are those against which Idil and Fatima struggle most vigorously. However, each responds to these challenges in ways which reflect the different background from which she comes. "The two [mothers-in-law] are dissimilar as the palm and the back of the hand" (S, p. 6). Fatima is a woman of the purdah (a veiling system of secluding women) who never comes out of her house unless it is absolutely necessary, unless she has to answer an urgent call of some kind (S, pp. 6-7). She believes, as she has been taught, that "a woman should be veiled from the top of her head to the top of her toes" (S, p. 53). Idil, on the other hand, comes from a nomadic background which is less rigid than the Arabic tradition of institutionalized mannerisms. She is not veiled nor does she remain inside her home. In fact, she has a profession. When her children were growing up, she supported them by selling maize-cakes on commission (S, p. 7). Fatima lives in a house which her Arabic family with its slave-owning tradition has owned for nearly a century. She is permanent in her fixed abode (S, p. 7), while Idil, because of the nomadic tradition from which she comes, and because neither her son nor her daughter owns any property, "moves like the lightness of a tree without roots" (S, p. 7). Fatima believes that she is superior to Idil: "She hasn't class or style, has she? . . . Idil hasn't the same as I, eh?" (S, p. 138). Contrary to popular opinion, Fatima accepts seclusion and the wearing of the veil as practices which produce a "semi-aristocratic," "civil woman," while the nomadic tradition of Idil produces an "overpowering," "barbarous and uncivilized" woman (S, p. 138). In
Fatima's opinion, Idil, because she is not of the purdah, is as a "street dog, ... let loose on the world" (S, p. 139).

Both women have been married twice and have two children, a boy and a girl. In the traditional fashion, Fatima's first husband's father asks for and receives her hand before she even sees the prospective groom (S, p. 133). He is the father of her son, Nasser (S, p. 136) and is said to have committed suicide because of the overbearing and demeaning treatment which he received from Fatima's father, the Grand Patriarch who believed that "no one not even his sons-in-law should dispute his authority" (S, p. 55). Fatima's second husband, Medina's father, Barkhadle, is chosen by her because she loves him (S, p. 133), but he is never approved of by her father: "He used to say that Fatima bint Thabit his daughter ... had picked the fruit the Catholic Church discarded" (S, p. 55). This is said because Barkhadle, as an infant, is reputed to have been found on the doorstep of the Church and brought up and schooled in the Christian tradition although he resides in a wholly Muslim country (S, p. 55). Idil, like Fatima, loses her first husband due to an untimely death: not because of suicide but because of war. He is killed fighting for the Italians and leaves her in dire straits: "She was twenty, poor, with a sick child" (S, p. 77). No relatives come forward to aid them, not until they are slightly better off. When Idil has earned enough money from her baking to place her and her son, Samater in a better position, "The dead husband's brother
demand[s] the right of dumaal" (S, p. 77). Xaddia is the only child born to the marriage, and Idil, years later, obtains a divorce from him.

These differences in the backgrounds of Idil and Fatima notwithstanding, both in their relationships with their children strive to maintain the status quo and are disturbed by challenges to it. For them, the traditional customs which are most challenged by Western education and urbanization are the veneration of parents, marriage, child-rearing, and dietary practices.

Although in the Islamic culture in which Idil and Fatima live the Grand Patriarch is the dominant figure, females are accorded a special status in their relationships with their children. The failure of adult offspring to honor their mothers brings the censure of the community. In her relationship with her children, Idil is domineering and overbearing. She constantly blackmails Samater and Xaddia by reminding them of how much she has suffered on their behalf. As a single parent she raised her two children, receiving no help from either her dead husband's family or from her own. She meddles in their lives, insisting that her wishes be obeyed. Her interference in their affairs notwithstanding, it is never acceptable behavior for children to evict their mothers from their homes. Both Xaddia and Samater break with this tradition. Idil becomes outraged when she is informed by Xaddia that the reason there are no children (grandchildren) in the home is that

The Islamic custom which gives the brother of a deceased husband the right to marry his surviving wife or wives.
she takes pills to prevent it. It is Idil (not Xaddia's husband) who complains so loudly and persistently against the practice that finally the husband's father steps in and forces him to end the marriage. Enraged by the whole incident, Xaddia throws her mother out of her home (S, p. 5). Samater takes his mother into his and Medina's home after exacting from her a promise not to interfere in their personal lives. Idil promises, but she does not adhere to that promise. And when she completely takes over the home in Medina's absence, Samater expels her from the house. Because the relationship between a mother and her adult son requires the son to protect the mother and to provide for her until her death, Samater's expulsion of Idil is not acceptable. Such an act is virtually unheard of in Somali society; therefore, the news spreads quickly and the reaction of the community is predictable. Samater fears that the General will unseat him from his position as Minister; 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, come to call at his home (S, p. 175). All of this activity because Samater commits an unthinkable act in violation of tradition: "The Somali is never patricidal. Never in the history of power-struggles has anybody seen a Somali kill his father or mother . . ." (S, p. 179). Not all females, however, are so protected by the society. Wives are not: "If he beat his wife till she spat blood, no one would stop or condemn him . . . he could kill her in combat and nobody would say a thing" (S, p. 179). But his action toward his mother is utterly inappropriate.
Fatima's position as mother is equally as strong as Idil's, but her complaints against her children are different. Hers grow out of the Arabic tradition from which she comes. This tradition requires children to bend their bodies, incline their heads, and kiss the mother's hand when they come into her presence. Neither of Fatima's children will do this. Nasser lives in Saudi Arabia, but when he comes to Magadiscio, he spends little time with his mother. He even refuses to celebrate the Neyrus with her. ("Was it the hand-kissing ritual he couldn't stand? He said something to that effect once.") (S, p. 104). Nasser "loathe[s] himself" for kissing his mother's hand, so he simply stays away from his mother's home. For Medina, this is not the solution. She lives in Mogadiscio and, although infrequently, she visits her mother. She manages, however, "to keep her distance, ... to remain formal with her mother, no bowing of head, no touching, no kissing" (S, p. 104). Medina's behavior does not escape the notice of Fatima, who chooses to ignore it, accepting an uneasy peace; but when Medina refuses, also, to bow at the tombs of her ancestors, her mother is forced to comment: "You refuse to incline your head and bow even before the dead. You make me wonder. You make me think of things wicked as your soul. . . ." (S, p. 141).

---

19 The traditional celebration of the New Year which includes the building of large fires symbolizing the birth of a new year and the extinguishing of the old. On a global level, the fires are said to burn away the "sins of mankind" and with the new year comes new hope (S, pp. 131-132).
Not only is the failure of their children to honor the status accorded mothers by tradition a concern of Idil and Fatima, but the husband/wife relationship reflected in their marriages concerns them as well.

From the beginning, Idil and Fatima respond differently to the marriage of Samater and Medina. Idil disapproves of the wedding while Medina's parents do not, although "it was Idil and not they whose mouth was monthly buttered with the ghee from the couple's combined earnings" (S, p. 65). That fact notwithstanding, Idil does not accept what she assesses to be their "untraditional . . . un-Islamic and imperfect" marriage (S, p. 65). Samater and Medina reject the traditional marriage model within which wives are chained to domestic chores and husbands are the decision-makers. They accept, instead, a marriage which fosters sexual equality--one in which tasks are performed according to interest and skill, not according to the sex of the participants. Therefore, Medina takes care of all financial matters (S, p. 65), while Samater prepares meals for the family when the maid is absent and serves as the official dishwasher at these times (S, p. 69). Idil deplores this reversal of roles and insists that Samater is unmanly, as was his father who "didn't have the guts to shout at anybody." She wanted his father, as she wants Samater, to assert himself: "I used to groan inside, wish that one day he would beat me like all the other men beat their wives . . . ." But, alas, he never did, and Idil concludes that Samater will never be a real man because "Medina has larger testicles than you. Just
as I had bigger ones than your father" (S, p. 78).

On the other hand, Fatima approves of Samater as a son-in-law; it is Medina's behavior as a wife which she questions. In fact, Fatima is quite fond of Samater, who gives her the traditional reverence that her children will not. About the difference between her son-in-law and her children, Fatima says to Medina:

Neither you nor Nasser is willing to incline head, back and body to kiss your mother's hand. You keep your distance, and Nasser hardly visits me. But Samater is an incliner of head, a bender of body, Samater is. He doesn't in the least feel inhibited, he does it so naturally. He kisses my hand (S, p. 140).

Fatima is fond of Samater because of his confidence in their relationship, also. In this relationship he treats her as one whose opinions are worthy of respect. Such a response from males to females is not typical in this Somali society. Even during the period of Medina's separation from him, Samater maintains his relationship with Fatima. He buys her a lovely gift when he travels to Algiers, and he tells her the truth (as he believes it to be) surrounding Medina's departure from their home. He opens his heart to her, speaking ill of his own mother's behavior in the matter; he declares that there "[isn't] a grain of truth" to the story that he will marry a maid from Mudug chosen for him by his mother. "It [is] gossip" (S, p. 143). Unlike Medina and Nasser who never tell her anything of importance, Samater entrusts her with secrets (S, p. 137). Fatima's concern is that in "Medina's separation from Samater, she has taken her untraditional principles too far, that Samater will lose his job as Minister, and that
Medina will take him back into her embrace a different man, a man broken, prideless, needy . . ." (S, p. 143). And while Fatima does not condone Medina's action, she believes that even in this she should be guided by tradition. When a marriage breaks up, Fatima is trained to expect the wife to return to her parents' home. Therefore, she tells Medina, "If you are not with Samater, a wife of a caring husband, then come back here and be the grown child of your own mother" (S, p. 137). This Medina will not do.

On the issue of child-rearing, the mothers-in-law agree that the modern liberal course followed by Samater and Medina is unacceptable because it challenges traditional practices. Again, the specific procedures to which each woman objects reflect her own background. For example, Idil deplores the fact that Ubax is not allowed to play as other children her age, that she dresses inappropriately by wearing jeans, and that her toys are too expensive. She is also disrespectful of Idil. So untraditional is the upbringing of Ubax that Idil rightly speculates that Medina will choose not to have her circumcised. Consequently, Idil threatens to have the operation performed herself (S, p. 66).

It is to Medina's practice of treating her child (as well as the children of others) as equal to herself that Fatima objects. Not only does Medina refuse to bow her head and body and kiss her mother's hand, she refuses to demand this action of Ubax, her daughter. Medina insists that "... my child is my love and you can only love your equal" (S, p. 140); she will not treat her otherwise. Fatima disagrees, "... A
child is an inferior being when it comes to that . . ." (S, p. 140). A mother, according to Fatima, must always present her hand, not her cheek, to a child (S, p. 139). Failure to do this threatens the status quo and is unacceptable. Thus when, in keeping with her views, Medina offers a small child her cheek, Fatima firmly insists, "Your hand and not your cheeks . . . . Don't spoil things . . . . Give her your hand like any other parent would" (S, p. 139).

Finally, not only on the issues of parent veneration, marriage, and child-rearing do Idil and Fatima object to the refusal of their children to follow traditional procedures, but on the issue of adherence to traditional dietary laws as well. Again, in this as in other such matters, Idil is more aggressive and overpowering than Fatima. She constantly complains about the fact that Medina smokes and that both she and Samater consume pork and drink alcohol. All of these acts are strictly forbidden by Islam. Idil not only complains, but when Medina departs the house, she takes action. She hides the liquor and refuses to give it to Samater, insisting that "No one will drink any liquor in this house as long as I am here." She adds, "It is my duty as your mother and as a Muslim to remind you of your religious responsibilities" (S, p. 75). On the other hand, Fatima avoids constant confrontation on this issue, for she and Medina have an understanding "that so long as these forbidden foods [are] consumed in her absence, the matter [does] not concern her" (S, p. 99).

Thus, these traditional women strive to maintain the status quo,
disdaining the attempts of their children to pursue a different course. Idil accuses them of "abandoning the old ways and striving to live without sure guides such as Allah, his prophets and the Islamic Saints (S, pp. 77-78). Fatima's overall assessment is that they "are prisoner[s] of [their] principles and secret dreams" as she is no less "a prisoner of a tradition." Concluding her evaluation, she asserts, "One is always a prisoner of one thing or another; . . ." (S, p. 144).

Dulman, Ebla, and Xaddia are transitional Somali women who, unlike Idil and Fatima, do not accept unquestioningly the subservient status imposed upon women in their Somali society. These transitional women are similar yet different. Each in her own way is transitional not only because of the influence of Western education and urbanization, not only in the degree to which she clings to remnants of the traditional culture which affect her behavior, but also because in some way she fails to meet Farah's standard of the ideal modern woman.

Of the three transitional women, Dulman is farthest from meeting Farah's standard of the ideal modern woman. She comes from a nomadic Islamic background and is illiterate; therefore, when she arrives in Hargeisa she has no profession and lives most precariously. As an unmarried, illiterate woman, her first years are difficult and one night when things are at their worst she is "discovered by one of the most talented poet-playwrights, Ali Sugulle, with whom she sleeps twice" (S, p. 164). She goes from one man to another, from one hand to another:
From Sugulle, through Hassan Mumin's thick, hairy fingers, through Mustafa Hagi Nur and finally through the then director of Radio Hargeisa: she became a member of a troupe called Walaalo Hargeisa (S, p. 164).

She becomes famous and important: everyone recognizes her face, her voice and her name. This new status frees her from the vicious cycle of going from man to man which her poverty has necessitated, but she is not entirely free. She continues to be plagued by her practice of Islam, the traditional religion in Somalia. Dulman receives a prediction from a fortune-teller which reveals that she is destined to bear the Mahdi, a leader, a messenger who will be sent by God before the final day to call people to the right path (S, p. 157). The fulfillment of the prediction becomes an obsession: she marries four times and sleeps with any man who she thinks fits the fortune-teller's description of the one who will father her child, but "... nothing [comes] of the thousand times she believed her womb would hold, fertilize and bring forth a prediction" (S, p. 157). She seeks the aid of holy men who tell her that she is the victim of a dark curse on her femininity which prevents her from having a child. She is led to believe that "The knot of this curse can only be untied after the sheiks pray for her" (S, p. 156). And although she receives the prayers of the sheiks, for whom she provides "a series of feasts month after month after month, she remains as barren as before" (S, p. 156). As these expensive prayers drain her finances, she takes more and more loans to meet the sheiks' demands. Meanwhile, she is offered no parts in the plays being produced, and she becomes bankrupt. Because she is a famous actress who is without money, she is a likely
target for the General who uses her as he uses others. "... he needed our rallying for him... because some of us were more famous than he when he came to power" (S, p. 165). She accepts the General's offer to go on a tour of the Middle East which is organized by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance. In addition to money, she is promised an opportunity to seek the medical services of Europe's most well-known physicians in order to solve her problem of infertility (S, p. 156). The tour is a disaster because Somalis living in exile in Saudi Arabia object to her singing the sycophantic praise songs of the General. As a result, Dulman's popularity touches rock-bottom (S, p. 157). After the tour is completed, as the General has promised, at the expense of the government Dulman travels throughout Europe consulting physicians who have reputations for overcoming infertility. Ultimately, neither religion nor science provides the answers to her prayers. At forty she is a desperate, barren woman who is named "the Lady of the Revolution" (S, p. 155). She lives in a splendid villa which is rumored to be the provision of the second Vice-President of the Republic (S, p. 158). So closely is she watched that one might say that she is under virtual house arrest. She is "made irrelevant like last year's joke" (S, p. 164). Nevertheless, she participates in anti-government activities by sending taped versions of all underground songs to Nasser, her friend and lover. He distributes them in the exiled Somali community in Saudi Arabia (S, pp. 156-157). It is because of these activities that Dulman and Nasser are arrested and their fate is uncertain:
There was the National Security Law of 10 September 1970 (Article 18) which would sentence both Nasser and Dulman to death for having 'spread, disseminated, or distributed reading, spoken or broadcast matter or information aimed at damaging the sovereignty of the revolution of the Somali nation' (S, p. 249).

Unlike Dulman who is victimized by both traditional and modern attitudes toward women in Somali society, Ebla is a transitional Somali who is more propelled by her strong desire for self-determination than she is hindered by certain aspects of her traditional culture which she retains. When she is first introduced as the protagonist of From A Crooked Rib she challenges certain traditional practices such as forced polygamous marriage and male dominance. She refuses to honor two marriage contracts that are entered into without her permission. She marries twice, but she insists that she will marry a man only of her own choosing. She rejects the traditional view of male dominance and female subservience in male/female relationships. For her it is not acceptable that her opinions are not counted even in matters which concern her directly; she demands a voice. Also, she demands relationships with males that are based on sexual equality. As she informs Tiffo, her secret, second husband, "You have another wife and I have another husband . . . you are a man and I am a woman, . . . you need me and I need you. We are equal" (FCR, p. 145). Later, after her divorce from Awill, her first husband, she seeks and wins custody of their daughter, Sagal. Traditionally, the child of a failed marriage is the property of the father and his family, but the tribal courts, for reasons not explained, award full custody to her. In order "to give Sagal a firmer
bedstead and a secure homestead, Ebla herself contract[s] another marriage" (S, p. 33). That marriage lasts for only two years, but the man is a "wonderful father for Sagal" and a "generous soul, too" (S, p. 33). He dies and in his will provides for Sagal to own his five-room house and for Ebla to own his shop. Three of the rooms are rented out to a large family and Sagal and Ebla occupy the other two; Ebla attends the shop (S, p. 34). These arrangements make them financially independent. Ebla's financial independence and independent ideas permit her not only to practice her views of female equality but to embue her daughter with a similar spirit. At the age of forty, Ebla can make the decision not to remarry but to have a steady relationship with a man of her choice even though her daughter disapproves (S, p. 43).

Through the years, Ebla continues to seek self-determination, but she retains also the traditional disdain of formal education for females and the devotion to religion that she has had always. Although she lives in Mogadiscio for nineteen years and meets many educated women, Ebla remains as she was when she first entered the city, skeptical of "the white man's [education] which is no knowledge" (FCR, p. 178). Then, she saw Western education as inadequate to meet the real challenges of life; now, she is suspicious of the influence of books and especially that of the books given to her daughter by Medina and Barbara--two women, one African, the other a white American expatriate living in Europe--who are recipients of Western education. Perhaps it is because Ebla has received no formal education that she does not trust its influence upon her daughter. When discussing the situation with
Medina, Sagal observes, "Ebla thinks evil of you and Barbara when she sees me so engrossed in a book" (S, p. 52). Having this attitude toward "book learning," Ebla relies on her common sense and observations for getting along in the world. It is religion, not education, upon which she relies most as her sure guide. Her involvement in the Islamic religion is total. It is reflected in the decoration of her personal quarters and in her personal philosophy. In her room are constant reminders of her faith: "Ebla had Koranic writings on her walls and a prayer-rug hung there which, . . . had the prophet's tomb outlined delicately under Arab inscriptions" (S, p. 33). In her day-to-day activities, Ebla adheres to rules of modesty but does not wear the veil. "She believed that woman's body is her pudore: she must wear it with modesty" (S, p. 32). The exhibitionism of European women is not acceptable to her. Because of her faith, Ebla believes "in miracles and in traditions," and "the continuation of logical arguments" (S, p. 34).

Xaddia, more than Dulman or Ebla, has many traits of Farah's ideal modern woman, the modern liberated Somali woman. She seeks to balance both marriage and a career while paying proper respect to her mother. The fact that she is a wife and a career woman leads her to make decisions which will permit her to continue in both capacities; therefore, she takes a pill to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. It is not her husband who objects to this, but her mother. Idil complains so loudly and openly about Xaddia's use of the pill and her refusal to give her a grandchild that Xaddia's husband's father steps in and forces his
son to dissolve the marriage (S, p.5), whereupon Xaddia, very angry with her mother, puts her out of the house (S, p. 5). Such an action is unacceptable in a society which requires adult children to care for their mothers. Nevertheless, Xaddia forces Idil to leave, and goes on with her life. She does not seek another male alliance; she continues in her job as hostess for Somali Airlines and persists in delivering mail from her friends to their exiled family members who reside in cities outside the country. Although Xaddia has many traits of the liberated Somali woman—for example, she is educated, she works outside of the home, she is financially independent, and she takes an active part in the political life of her community—she remains a transitional woman because of her inability to make the leap from giving consideration to traditional concerns to seeing the larger issues in the battle of Medina against the General and Idil. That battle strikes at the heart of the country's survival and the survival of the women who live there. Yet Xaddia asks questions which address individual, personal losses: "What was the point of the charade in which Samater lost face and his job, my mother, her son and dignity, Nasser and Dulman their freedom?" (S, p. 246). She cannot make the leap in understanding which allows her to see, as Medina sees, that there is nothing "so exceptional about Samater losing his job or face; or your mother a dignity which she didn't have in the first place . . .;" The issue is larger than this. It is larger, even, than the freedom of Nasser and Dulman. "Others have lost their lives in this struggle against this fascist regime . . . ." (S, p. 246). Because Xaddia cannot see the larger picture, cannot
identify the larger issue in these recent events, she, like Ebla and Dulman, epitomizes the transitional Somali woman who is the reflection of what Somali society is becoming. Each, in her own way, is a bridge between the old and the new--the traditional and the modern in Somali society.

The characterization of the liberated modern Somali woman is enlarged in Farah's presentation of Medina, the protagonist of Sardines. Not only is she young, beautiful, educated and financially independent, she is also actively engaged in the struggle against established authority, the power which inhibits social and political growth. She takes an active part in the life of her society through the sacrifices which she makes: she sacrifices her editorship, her marriage, and her time to the cause of eliminating tyranny and achieving freedom. Further, in the portrayal of Medina, Farah spells out in greater detail the elements required to produce a modern liberated Somali woman. First, there must be concerned enlightened males who are willing to cede some of their authority and power to the female. For Medina, these enlightened males are her father, her brother, and her husband. Second, there must be money and space in which the woman can be herself, in which she can create. In other words, she must have what Woolf calls "a room of one's own." Third, there must be ideals for which the woman

A concept advanced by Virginia Woolf in a paper read to the Arts Society at Newnham and the Odtaa at Girton in October 1928 and developed in the altered and expanded version, Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929).
will fight, rejecting compromise with traditional forces as a viable option. Finally, there must be a commitment to training persons who will perpetuate and extend the concept of sexual equality and participate in the formation of a just society.

During her formative years, Medina, together with her brother Nasser, joins her father in Europe (S, p. 58). This event brings about immediate changes in her life and provides the basis for future development. Her father, Barkhadle, rescues her from the traditional female role which is being shaped for her by her mother and grandfather. Already, she is not allowed to play with her own brother or to attend school (S, p. 15). In the care of Barkhadle, Medina is treated in the fashion of a privileged Western woman, but curiously without the Catholic indoctrination in which he has been reared (S, p. 55). Under the watchful eye of Ambassador Barkhadle, she grows: "At thirteen, she prostrates [herself] before the powers of femininity . . . washing away the first trickles of her monthly pains" (S, p. 179). "At fourteen, New York women's magazines welcome her as the daughter of the most well-known African Ambassador at the United Nations. At fifteen, Paris pampers her with token presents . . ." (S, p. 179). "At twenty-three, she earns a degree in literature" (S, p. 58). She is accustomed to

The type of father/daughter relationship which produces positive effects is first introduced in Sweet and Sour Milk. The father is an Italian and as such does not reflect a changing role of the father in Somali society. Similarly, Barkhadle, though of African descent, is raised as Catholic and as such does not fit into the role of Grand Patriarch.
receiving the best. In Europe, "whether in Stockholm or London or Rome or Paris, she is the beautiful Black goddess." In Africa, "whether in Mogadiscio or Ouagadougou or Dakar, she is envied for her cosmopolitan ease, her African pride and her openmindedness" (S, p. 58). A consequence of these experiences is that she emerges as a "young, beautiful intellectual who is considered learned by any standard anywhere in the world" (S, p. 3). "She [speaks] four European languages quite well and [writes] in two; her Arabic [is] as good as her spoken Somali" (S, p. 58). Such is the contribution of Barkhadle to Medina's development as a liberated modern Somali woman.

Her brother Nasser is another contributor. Medina deeply loves Nasser, who always protects and provides for her while allowing her the opportunity to make decisions for herself. They are more than brother and sister; they are comrades. Theirs represents the type of male/female relationship which proponents of African feminism extol; namely, a relationship which is based on love and mutual respect. This relationship begins in childhood when Nasser is punished frequently by Uncle Saleh because he insists on tending stray, wounded animals which are considered impure. He is denied food and forced to chant the Koran hour after hour, late into the night. Medina steals into his room with food, "Medina, who because she was a girl, was never asked to read a verse of the Koran and . . . was allowed to go into the kitchen without being reprimanded" (S, p. 106). Nasser is treated harshly not only by his uncle but also by his grandfather. This leads Nasser and Medina to plot, unsuccessfully, his death. The old Patriarch lives to be a
hundred and ten years old, and when he dies, they go to join Barkhadle in Europe. There they develop an open friendship. Nasser is allowed to engage in activities which his mother and grandfather deem too frivolous for a male, while Medina is allowed to read the Koran, if it pleases her to do so. There is no strict male/female separation in Barkhadle's home (S, p. 106). At the University of Milan, Nasser and Medina are inseparable. Even when each one becomes interested in a member of the opposite sex, they do not separate; his girlfriend Sandra and her boyfriend Samater are simply taken into the relationship to form a foursome (S, p. 87).

When, after graduation, Medina begins to freelance as a journalist throughout Europe, she always depends on the three significant males in her life to respond to her needs. Money is provided by Nasser and Barkhadle and services are provided by Samater (S, p. 58). Even after her marriage to Samater, this supportive relationship with her brother and father continues. It is they who accompany her to the hospital for the birth of her child; Samater is detained by an airline strike (S, p. 13). Similarly, when Nasser learns of Medina's separation from Samater, he comes to visit. With him he brings not only the items which she has requested but a sympathetic and caring heart (S, p. 89). He comes fully prepared to look after her: he prepares her favorite meals, serves them to her in bed, bathes Ubax and listens patiently as Medina carefully unfolds her tale (S, pp. 98-99). Although Nasser is somewhat doubtful that Medina has weighed all of the
odds before making her move away from Samater, he supports her (S, p. 99). Their mutual respect and unconditional love are elements in their relationship which contribute significantly to Medina's development.

Samater, Medina's husband, is loving and supportive of her goals and contributes to her development, also. The relationship between Medina and Samater is symbiotic--one in which each partner contributes to the well-being of the other. She patiently guides him through new experiences which enrich his life, while he consistently allows her to pursue activities based on her interests and talents rather than on her sex. "She makes him read the world's classics, introduces him to music, jazz and to cinema . . . she helps him with his English, with his French." She takes him by the hand and leads him through life's unread guides (S, p. 178). The results are astounding; for example, before he goes abroad he has never set foot in a kitchen; he has never cooked anything or made a cup of tea. Later, thanks to Medina, he knows how to make a kettle sing any tune and is an expert at the art of dishwashing. He also cooks meals for Medina and Ubax when the maid is off duty (S, p. 69). He allows her the full range of her talents and does not cast himself in the role of superior male. Their bank account is in her name because she is the better financial administrator (S, p. 96). She manages the affairs of the household: she negotiates with servants and hires them, the occasional handyman, the gardener. All of this she does because Samater, admittedly, is not in the least interested in performing any of these activities; he is disorderly and is not good at keeping accounts (S, p. 65). In addition to this, the house in which
they live belongs to Medina. While neither of them seems adversely affected by these anomalies in their lifestyle compared to the norms of their culture, his mother is humiliated by them. "What kind of son have I ended up with? A man dependent upon a woman?" (S, p. 65). Samater's silent response to his mother's criticism of their marriage is, "mother [is] monstrously unthoughtful to say that . . . [our] marriage [is] as untraditional as it [is] un-Islamic and imperfect. [Is] she mad?" (S, p. 65). Aloud, "he [is] never able to answer back as he should; good breeding told him to hold back" (S, p. 66).

In addition to the exceptional relationships which Medina enjoys with her father, her brother, and her husband, she has an exceptional relationship with males who are not related to her in that way. Among the original members of the underground organization formed to oppose the General's regime, she is the only woman (S, p. 83). Dulman and Xaddia are not formal members, but they are women who have been recruited by members of the organization to participate in underground activities. Dulman is persuaded by Nasser to record, for a price, the underground songs (S, p. 157) and Xaddia, at the request of Medina, agrees to deliver the tapes and other underground materials to Nasser and other members of the Somali exile community in Saudi Arabia (S, p. 249). Therefore, Medina is almost always a woman among men, sharing things with them, conversing over drinks, reading the same books as they, borrowing or lending them ideas. Her position in the organization demands of her sacrifice and commitment. She fights not only for
herself as a woman but symbolically for the survival of all women (S, p. 246).

Medina is committed to the struggle against established authority. That requires, among other things, the demolition of "families" like Idil's (the repressive traditional structure) and regimes like the General's (fascism) (S, p. 246). Medina does not recommend compromise with traditional forces, she appropriates Barkhadle's favorite maxim: "He does not break who does not compromise" (S, p. 243). That is the reason why Medina separates from Samater. He must free himself from the bondage of both Idil and the General. That will not be easy because "a confrontation with Idil mean[s] a direct challenge to tradition, to the General's generation," (S, p. 99) and the General will brook no challenges. Nevertheless, these issues must be settled. Leaving Samater alone with Idil is risky. Medina sacrifices her marriage so that the issues may be settled: "For years . . . she had been the guest who forbade them to speak their minds, who made them postpone their confrontation . . . ." (S, p. 98). Therefore, Medina leaves so they may "talk about her and . . . come to a head-on clash" (S, p. 98). She hopes, also, that they will come finally to an agreement or to a disagreement that will settle their differences once and for all (S, p. 98). Additionally, she hopes that Samater will become independent, outgrowing his dependency upon both his mother and herself. He should "breathe with his own lungs," have an affair with another woman, do something unexpected (S, p. 16). He does.
Now he would undo all he had done. No Medina, no mother, no house, only an account in his name, a room in a hotel, a woman to date: he would resign. He was determined to do that. To hell with the rest (S, p. 173).

Samater believes that the new year will bring a new and better life (S, p. 172). But for him, the new year brings imprisonment and torture. Ultimately, Samater is released a beaten and broken man. He comes home to find Medina and Ubax there. His rehabilitation and convalescence will take time and patience, but the three of them have all that they need. They have each other, and they have a room of their own as well as a country in which they are no longer guests (S, pp. 249-250).

Medina's relationship with Sagal and Amina reflects her commitment to guiding the development of persons who will perpetuate and extend the concept of sexual equality and participate in the formation of a just society. Properly guided, Sagal and Amina are becoming two such persons. They are "the bridge to an unbuilt future" (S, p. 45). As their mentor, Medina helps them to formulate their ideas; she lends them books to read; she refreshes their young brains with new seeds, new ideas (S, p. 62). It is she who carefully and methodically helps to guide them towards maturity. Ironically, it is an act of maturity on the part of each girl which threatens her relationship with her mentor.

Amina is the first to make an independent decision that, for a time, causes a rift in her relationship with Medina. Amina is raped by three men who declare that through the act they are avenging the many men who have suffered at the hands of her father who is a Major and a
Minister in the military regime (S, pp. 119-120). Amina knows the men, and she appeals to them not to commit the act. They refuse, saying, "We're doing this not to you but your father . . . ." But it is she who feels the pain: "what pain, what pain! . . . she had been a virgin, she had been circumcised . . . what pain!" (S, p. 119). And they leave her bleeding and hurting. Hours later, she is found by a young shepherdess who summons help but upon learning whose daughter she is, the men of the village refuse to help her. They depart, but several women, disobeying the men's instructions, take her to their village and care for her before putting her on a bus back to Mogadiscio (S, p. 119). Although the men who raped her are known to Amina, only one of them is arrested, and he for only a short time. The General insists that "the case . . . must be isolated; it must be treated as though it were devoid of any political signification" (S, p. 120). They offer to send Amina to any university anywhere in the world, but the case will not be heard. Amina refuses, saying that she will stay as a reminder to others of what can happen even to the innocent in this military environment. In vain, her father tries to dissuade her from taking such a stand. The matter is settled when a month later Amina discovers that she is pregnant. Ebla counsels her to make her own decision regarding whether to have an abortion and offers her support if she decides to keep the child. Amina refuses to have an abortion. Ebla, Sagal and Medina support her throughout the pregnancy and the birth of her twin daughters (one is stillborn, but the other is healthy). Medina supplies money and books,
while Ebla and Sagal supply her a home and both motherly and sisterly friendship. However, when Amina decides to accept a car, a house and a bank account offered her by her parents (perhaps from the General), Medina severs their relationship.

Less drastic in its consequences is Medina's reaction to the developing maturity of Sagal. As the daughter of Ebla, Sagal is the recipient of untraditional ideas and rearing practices from the very beginning of her life. The intellectual guidance of Medina further strengthens her. Like her mother before her, Sagal has many unconventional ideas: she will not become a mother; she intends to defect from Somalia when she goes to Europe to represent the country (S, p. 27); if she does not go to Europe, she will remain in Somalia and "paint the morning leaves with slogans and go to prison" (S, p. 31). These threats, however, are not taken seriously by her mother (S, p. 25), her best friend Amina (S, p. 26), or her friend and intellectual mentor, Medina (S, p. 25) because Sagal seldom finishes anything she begins: " . . . she is an exceptionally gifted girl, but she requires outside motivation to achieve a goal. If challenged by her mother or her friends, she could show her worth" (S, p. 24). However, when Sagal suspects that she is pregnant, she begins to think more deeply. First, she ponders the wisdom of having offered her body to a stranger and a foreigner with the hopes that he would join her and her friends in their opposition to the General's regime (S, pp. 48-49). Second, should she share her suspicions with her mother? With Amina? With Medina? or even with the prospective father, Wentworth George? (S, p. 47) Through
the contemplation of her own situation, she becomes more sensitive to Medina and her separation from Samater (S, p. 61). Medina is "struck . . . [by] how confident Sagal sounded, how certain she was of her convictions" (S, p. 62).

Medina's pupils are growing up. One is already a mother and the other is probably a mother-to-be. Medina realizes that this is what she has wanted for them all along—to be able to make their own decisions and to accept the consequences of their actions. Concerning Sagal's new maturity, "Medina didn't know whether to laugh or sigh; she certainly could think of nothing to say" (S, p. 62). After a period of separation, she reconsiders her decision never to see Amina again, and she sends her an invitation to come to her house so that she may apologize (S, p. 45).

In her relationship with her daughter Ubax, Medina seizes the opportunity to develop the kind of female of whom she approves: the kind of female who is equipped for the future. Therefore, Medina refuses to subject her to traditional practices which will thwart her development and restrict her in any way. "Of course, I want you to be like me. But I want you to grow up healthy and independent. I want you to do what you please" (S, p. 12). Medina does not send Ubax to school like the other children, "because schools teach . . . nothing but songs of sycophancy and the praise names of the General" (S, p. 12). She can teach Ubax better than they. She can teach her things that will be of use to her in later life (S, p. 13). Nor is Ubax allowed to play with
the neighborhood children (S, p. 12). Medina wishes to be the primary influence in Ubax's life, and she is given a greater opportunity to achieve this goal when in addition to being dismissed as editor of the country's only newspaper, she is banned from publishing any of her writings inside the Somali Democratic Republic. Medina's dismissal and the subsequent banning order result from her open refusal to adopt an editorial policy which the General approves of (S, p. 3). When Medina is offered the position of editor, she consults the surviving members of the movement and is told that "she must take the job, do what she could to effect any changes within the paper; . . ." (S, p. 212). Immediately, she sets about making changes: on the first day, the layout of the paper is different; on the second day, the photograph of the General and the space reserved for his daily wisdom to the nation are removed; on the third day, the General's speech is edited and shortened; on the fourth day the paper fails to come out, and Medina is taken for a long interrogation (S, pp. 212-213). According to Okonkwo, "[Medina's] genuine revolutionary tendency propels her to challenge the editorial policy of daily singing the General's praises." Whatever are her reasons, such direct confrontation with the General results in her dismissal and the banning order which provides her more time to spend guiding the experience of Ubax. She decides to translate twenty world classics from six foreign languages into Somali, and she reads

---

them to her daughter, giving them "to her hot like maize-cakes from the oven" (S, p. 3).

In this way, Medina protects Ubax from the subservient demeaning role that traditional Somali society carves out for females in the limited education which it allows them. She desires, also, to protect Ubax 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:

She bled a lot, she had second and fourth labors . . . . 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 cut open and re-stitched. Life for a circumcised woman is a series of deflowering pains, delivery pains, and re-stitching pains . . . (S, p. 59).

Medina wishes to spare Ubax these and other pains; therefore, she declares, "She will not be circumcised. Over my dead body" (S, p. 59).

Medina is conscious that sacrifice is indispensable in any concerted struggle against established authority, and she is willing to make whatever sacrifices are required to alter the course of her Somali society. She brings knowledge closer to the people whom she instructs by sharing her time, her ideas and her books. She offers counsel and protection to young students who participate in protests against the tyranny of the government (S, p. 249). In addition to her own participation in a secret organization which actively opposes the General's military regime, she is concerned with such issues as forced marriage, oppression of barren women, and genital mutilation through
circumcision and infibulation. Because of her education and her financial independence, she achieves freedom from the direct adverse effects of custom and religion, but she is directly affected by the government due to her political posture.

In addition to expanding the characterization of the liberated modern Somali woman through the presentation of Medina, Farah shows the influence of the modern Western woman generally to be more subversive in this second novel of his trilogy. This is true because in Sardines the relationship between the Western woman and the Somali male involves men whose functions in government are at the highest level. The influence of these Western women differs from that of From A Crooked Rib, where Western female presence was introduced through a photograph of Awill and a scantily-clad white woman. The threat posed by this presence was muted because of distance and impact: the liaison implied by the picture took place in Italy, and it affected only the marriage relationship of a single couple. In A Naked Needle the influence of the Western woman was more pervasive. The women live in the country and are married to the intellectuals of the country. These relationships have their greatest impact upon the social aspects of the culture. They alter the traditional family structure through the employment of a Western mode of living; the nuclear family and the insular environment fostered in Western women's relationships with Somali men adversely affect the culture. Certainly the social influences of these relationships are insidious and have long-range effects. But the relationships of Western women and Somali men presented in Sardines are
political in nature, and they have an immediate effect not only upon the several local persons whose experiences are detailed in the story, but upon national and international policy as well.

Sandra and Atta are the two characters who represent the Western woman. Sandra is a close friend of Medina and Samater and an ex-lover of Nasser. During their university days they are so close and spend so much time together that they are "enviously referred to as the incestuous foursome" (S, p. 87). Medina's and Sandra's friendship cools after a heated argument over Italian politics. Medina makes an observation which Sandra challenges, saying "You have no right to discuss internal Italian politics, since you don't understand it" (S, p. 88). Nevertheless, years later while Sandra is recovering from an unsuccessful suicide attempt, she visits a Hindu temple where she has her palms read and receives the prediction that she will leave Milan before the end of the year and that she will travel to Africa where her grandfather served as an officer of the Italian government. There she will meet many, many men:

The most powerful men of that country will prostrate themselves before you. You will be wined and dined and dated by the most powerful in that country (S, p. 198).

Consequently, after more than three years' separation and non-communication, she cables Medina. "Could she give her hospitality for a week, a month, maximum two? She would be ever so grateful" (S, p. 205). Medina says yes. They talk in confidence a number of times, and Medina through friends arranges a meeting between the Somali Ambassador
in Rome and Sandra. The Ambassador is so impressed that he telephones his cousin the Generalissimo about a brilliant journalist whom he would do well to interview. He also mentions the young freelance journalist's "Colonial connections: her grandfather had been a Vice-Governor-General of Italian Somaliland. The General is impressed, too" (S, p. 205).

Sandra does travel to Somalia, but not as the guest of Medina. She is made "an honorary guest at the October celebrations of the Revolution, with ticket and a hotel paid for as long as she pleased to stay in Somalia." Not only this, but she is offered "an exclusive interview on the eve of the celebrations" (S, p. 205). Sandra, upon arrival in Somalia, is given the VIP treatment. "She [is] met at the airport by the then Minister of Culture (now the Ideologue), and [is] whisked off to the hotel and dined and wined and entertained" (S, p. 205). . . . "She is provided a chauffeur-driven car, a house with a garden, a maid, an orderly, plus a key to open any door of the Republic." (S, p. 205).

Sandra travels in the top circles of society and within a week after her arrival, she has become the host and the government officials have become the guests, proving as Medina says, "in this century, the African is a guest whether in Africa or elsewhere" (S, p. 206). After four weeks, Sandra still has not called on Medina. She is too busy becoming indispensable to the regime. Six or seven magazines publish her articles on "Progressive Somalia" and her interviews straight from the "mule's mouth." She travels with the General on state visits: "She accompanied the General on a trip across Africa, when he served as
Chairman of the OAU. . . ." Also, when in Francophone Africa, "she serves as interpreter, and when the General can make himself understood speaking his fractured English . . . she becomes Press Attaché" (S, p. 211). Through her active participation in all of his affairs, Sandra gains an enviable position with the General. Her suggestions are acted upon: her parents and a few friends, tickets pre-paid by the government, are invited to visit and tour the country. A delegation of fifty-one officials of the Italian Communist Party is invited for a visit (S, p. 211). Not only are foreign visitors treated like dignitaries at her suggestion, but native Somalis benefit from her influence. Medina is made editor of Xiddigta Oktoober (October Star, the only daily paper in Somalia), and Samater is made Minister of Constructions (S, p. 212). Both appointments have disastrous results. Medina changes the organization of the paper and edits the General's speeches, knowing that these acts probably will not be tolerated. But she must make her statement of opposition. On the other hand, Samater is blackmailed into taking the job. Ultimately, he resigns the position but is discredited by the government. Even in the face of obvious danger to herself and Samater, Medina vows to fight on (S, p. 249). Unlike Sandra who deliberately misinforms the world about what is happening in Somalia (S, p. 20), Medina stands firm on the truth.

Atta, another Western woman, has been "brought [to Somalia] as a mistress by one . . . tribal upstart" (S, p. 87). She is an Afro-American who says that she has returned to her African culture (S, p.
171

180). Her escapades with high-level officials are well-known: "Mogadiscio had gossiped about her brief flirtation with one of the vice-presidents of the republic and the General himself" (S, p. 182). That may be speculation, but Samater is sure that Atta and the Ideologue have had something going. That is why she and Sandra spoke ill of each other (S, p. 182). However, it is more than the fact that Sandra is sleeping with the same man as she that galls Atta. It is the influence that she and all other white women who sleep with Black leaders have: "I've always known this: Black men in power blindly trust the white chicks they sleep with and let them run the country's affairs for them" (S, p. 188). Consequently, according to Atta, Sandra has the unfair advantage that power bestows: "... she has the Ministry of Information telex at her finger tips." And "there is a total news black-out until she has filed her item and sold it the world over." She has no competition, she has an "absolute monopoly. The white bitch" (S, p. 188). "She has government cars at her disposal" and "she's invited at the government's expense a large delegation of her friends" (S, p. 188).

Atta as an Afro-American represents the Americans who come to one's country with their shallow perceptions and easy answers to problems that they cannot understand even as well as the displaced African who has lost touch with the country and as a consequence has developed naive theories regarding it. Like those of many Americans, her manners are crass, her appetites voracious. She fills her mouth with huge amounts of food every time she helps herself (S, p. 185), and
she chews loudly (S, p. 188), as she devours everything in sight (S, p. 183). She eats and drinks her way through a meal without any regard for her participating partners, taking much more than her share (S, p. 187). She mistakenly assumes that the essence of Africa is skin color and language. Her affinity to the Africans she meets is her skin and the language which she has learned. Inevitably, Samater and Medina shock her by their lack of skill and interest in Swahili. They are enthusiastic neither about learning the language nor about teaching their little daughter to speak it (S, p. 184). She sees race as a unifying force, and she is promiscuous in her behavior, saying: "Let Africa multiply" (S, p. 188). Her personal contributions to African multiplication are her four children "back at home." She explains that their fathers are "Afrika: one is Igbo; one is Mandingo; one Hausa-speaking; one Swahili-speaking." And now? "I am hunting for the undelivered Hamite in me" (S, p. 187).

Her naivete also leads her to an uninformed adulation of African leaders. "Atta praises Kenyatta, Haile Selassie, Senghor and Kaunda; in the same breath she says that the General is the greatest African leader she has ever had the pleasure to shake hands with" (S, p. 184). She has no concrete knowledge, no informed opinions regarding "sisters and brothers in the struggle" either at home or abroad in Africa. Medina concludes that, "If she didn't know Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Don Lee, . . . if she didn't know or read any of these, she wouldn't know Soyinka either. . . " (S, p. 185). Atta is as generous with her
criticism of the Western white woman's influence as she is with her praise of African leaders. According to her, some Somali leaders, sadly, are "bewitched by Sandra, and her talk about ideology as a force that binds them together." Atta insists that while the terminology used by Sandra to describe her relationship with the Africans differs from that employed by her colonialist grandfather, the intent is the same; namely, to secure the power of the whites:

. . . a hundred years ago the African was a savage in need of the white man's civilizing mission; now the African needs technology [and] the white man's ideology . . . the sacred word of Marx and Lenin. . . . All [of] this [including the] white-woman thing are one and the same: to hold onto the reins of power (S, pp. 188-189).

That, according to Atta, is why Sandra has come to Somalia. What, then, are Atta's reasons for coming to Somalia? Opinions vary: "she had come to Somalia to set aflame the cabinet's thighs, said the malicious tongues of Mogadiscio." For others she represents "the power of women over men whether white, black or African" and "CIA, many said" (S, p. 189). Atta is a mystery. Her presence in Somalia is a mystery:

. . . how come an American, supposedly the enemy of a socialist revolution, was not the first suspect but got everything she asked for? Samater thinks, Did anybody really know who this woman was? (S, p. 190).

In addition to the mystery which surrounds Atta there is absurdity. "What makes the whole thing absurd is that the regime is very security-conscious and paranoid, and doesn't tolerate Somalis coming into unauthorized contact with foreigners." That is especially true of "those from Western Europe or the USA." Nevertheless, "members of the tribal oligarchy can introduce anyone they please." They can introduce Atta.
They can introduce Sandra (S, p. 87). The presence of Atta in Somalia remains enigmatic despite the rumor that she is being used by the government in a plot to discredit Samater. In this way, his voluntary resignation will appear as if it were forced because of his involvement in scandalous activities with Atta (S, p. 239). Her expulsion from the country is shrouded in even greater mystery. She is observed by an air hostess as she is put on a plane to Nairobi by two security men. Meanwhile, Sandra and the Ideologue are seen sitting in the VIP lounge (S, p. 244). Rumors abound. Atta is said to be "An American Agent serving the interests of imperialism" (S, p. 239); it is said that "she was with child . . ." (S, p. 248); it is said also that "behind this sudden expulsion was the Ideologue's (and not Sandra's) conspiratorial hand" (S, p. 247).

Atta and Sandra are mutual enemies. Atta hates Sandra because she is a white woman who is accorded extraordinary privileges by the Somali government, while Sandra hates Atta because she is a black woman and is able, therefore, to appeal to a common African heritage shared by the Somalis and herself. Sandra becomes enraged by what she calls, Atta's attempts to "... exclude me, write me out. To her, they are her brothers and sisters . . . I am whitey, the enemy. . . ." (S, p. 215). Sandra is already sensitive that she is seen as being the same as her grandfather who served as a colonial officer in Somalia. She informs Medina that it is a mistake "to look for her in the mirrored history of her grandfather's colonialist and paternalistic attitude to the African"
(S, p. 88). Disavowing any ideological similarities between her grandfather and herself, she asserts, "I am a Marxist and as such have the right to share my acquired experience with a government which calls itself Marxist-Leninist" (S, p. 88).

The assumption that she "has the right" to share her ideas appears characteristic of Sandra. It is this very characteristic to which both Atta and Medina, Sandra's long-time friend, object. Not only does she appropriate the "right to share ideas" for herself, but she denies it to others. For example, in Milan, when they were students, Sandra refused to support Medina's "right" to express her views on the Italian government: "you don't understand Italy, so let's keep it out of our discussions" (S, p. 204). Nevertheless, after spending just one week in Africa, she accepts a commission to write a series of articles on Somalia: "... to just say how things are..." (S, p. 208). This leads Medina to ask:

If [I] whose intellectual makeup was structured on a European philosophical foundation, if [I] who lived in Europe for the greater part of [my] formative years, couldn't understand Italy. . . . [how could] Sandra, who had never set foot in Africa before . . . understand Africa in a week . . . well enough to write about it . . . [?] (S, p. 208).

If Sandra is always "at home" wherever she is, then Medina is always a guest: first in Europe and now on her own continent of Africa. Therefore, Medina feels "a resentment and jealousy not so much addressed to Sandra but at the Africanness in herself, at her guesthood; . . ." (S, p. 207).

In the battle to exert the greater influence on Somali political
leaders, Sandra triumphs over Atta. As Atta is expelled from Somalia amid rumors that she is an American agent, and that she is carrying the Ideologue's child, Sandra sits with the Ideologue in the VIP lounge.

In *Sardines*, then, Farah continues his examination of the oppressive military regime which now governs Somalia. As the powers of the General expand, due process is abrogated; thus, human rights are denied and men and women disappear at random. This second part of the trilogy differs from the first, primarily in its focus. Not only is the story told from the perspective of the intellectual female, but it also explores the role of Somali women in actively opposing the regime. In the fulfillment of this role the traditional Somali woman is not expected to participate at all; the transitional woman in only a limited way while the liberated modern Somali woman is expected to assume primary responsibility. Because of this, the characterization of the liberated modern Somali woman is expanded to reflect specific elements which are necessary in the development of what Farah considers to be the ideal modern woman to fill this role. In addition to this, the influence of the modern Western woman is shown to be more subversive because of her involvement with Somali men who occupy top positions in the government. Further, the activity of the underground organization which opposes the tyrannical government of the General is greatly diminished by the arrest of two of its members, the compromising of another and the silencing of still another by the imposition of a banning order.

Finally, the novel shows that essentially the struggle of the
Somali people is against established authority. That struggle requires, among other things, the demolition of families which represent the repressive traditional structure and regimes like the General's which are said by Farah to be fascist in their nature.

23 Close Sesame is the final book in Farah's anti-government trilogy. The novel presents the most politically engaged and anti-government statement of all Farah's novels. Rather than discussing muted protests, distribution of secret memoranda generated by a clandestine organization, or no-compromise confrontation tactics as he does in A Naked Needle, Sweet and Sour Milk, and Sardines, respectively, Farah in this novel calls for Barre's assassination and seeks to rationalize such a call.

Once again, the events taking place in Somalia are the primary impetus of Farah's increased opposition to the military regime. Opposition groups describe the period between 1981 and 1983 (the period in which Close Sesame was written) as one in which "mass discontent with the regime intensified to such an extent that it has become a national

23 Nuruddin Farah, Close Sesame (London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1983). All quotations are taken from this edition and are cited as (CS, with page numbers).

Moreover, increased anti-government demonstrations, ambushes of military convoys, and bomb explosions in Mogadishu are cited as "good examples of the nation-wide manifestation of discontent with the regime." The theme of expanding opposition to the Barre regime is captured also by Farah through his choice of protagonist. Deeriye is "an outspoken opponent of current tyranny, a national hero . . . a devout Muslim," but most of all, he is the Grand Patriarch. The fact that the central figure is not a young been-to, but a patriarch and a patriot is at once a great distinction between Close Sesame and Farah's previous novels as well as a substantiation that opposition to the Barre regime is widespread. It extends from the young to the old, from the educated to the uneducated, and from the zealot to the patriot.

Not only does Farah focus on the opposition of the people to the military regime, but he continues to address the issue of sexual equality found in his previous novels. Additionally, he focuses on the need for mutual respect and love to transform the relationships between men and women. If sexual equality is to be achieved, mutual respect and love must characterize all male/female relationships: A traditional

26 Ibid.
Somali woman, Nadiifa, has a relationship with her husband which overcomes the barriers of time and space; Zeinab, a liberated modern Somali woman, is a widow and a medical doctor who has a very special relationship with her father and her brother; and the relationship between Natasha, a Western Jewish woman, and her Somali husband is one which complements the family structure. All of these women are affected as their husbands, fathers and brothers play out their roles for or against the repressive, militarized environment that is Somalia.

Close Sesame, then, is the story of Deeriye, a nationalist, Muslim, pan-Somalist and Pan-Africanist. A strong, well-respected man within his Somali community, Deeriye pays a considerable price for his convictions. He spends eight years in colonial prisons and four in post-independence jails. In the 1980s, he is confronted with another dilemma when he learns that his son Mursal, with three accomplices, is plotting the assassination of the General. In addition to being well-respected for his determination to abide by his political convictions, Deeriye occupies the position of Grand Patriarch, but is well-known for his untraditional attitude toward women. All of his relationships with women are characterized by mutual respect and love. Never does he feel diminished by the respect he shows to women. In this as in other matters, he refrains from following traditional paths and takes his own wise counsel.

It is also according to his own counsel that he regards matters of violence. Originally, he states that he will never make use of violent means to overthrow a tyrannical regime. But his political
opinions change as the tyrannical government seeks for self-serving tribalistic purposes to isolate him from his clan and discredit his public image. Believing that his son has been killed by the government, Deeriye is finally driven to violence. He unsuccessfully attempts to assassinate the General.

Upon completing Close Sesame, Farah is questioned about the special roles which he carves for women in this novel and the amount of time he expects it will take before one can observe such changes in the status of Somali women in real life. In response to these questions, Farah observes that in both social and political terms, women have not figured greatly in the consciousness of nations: "They have occupied places of insignificance in the minds of politicians, writers and so on." He is convinced, however, that it would be easier to effect a change in the level of sexual oppression in Africa than in more highly developed countries:

At least in Africa, everything is already in turmoil. There, it is inevitable that there will be major change in the next 50 years or so. It is far easier to educate people about sexual equality at that stage.

Meanwhile, Farah portrays men and women who have untraditional relationships in which mutual respect and love promote sexual equality.


29 Ibid.
In Close Sesame he depicts Nadiifa, the traditional Somali woman, Zeinab, the liberated modern Somali woman, and Natasha, the modern Western woman who are women that experience untraditional relationships in which that mutual respect and love are evident.

Nadiifa is a traditional woman who marries Deeriye in a manner prescribed by her Islamic, Somali culture, and from the earliest days of their marriage she is a docile, obedient wife. "She is beautiful, with plaited hair, painted palms and soles. . . a body like silk" (CS, p. 41). Although she is a young wife, she understands how tradition dictates that she respond to her husband. As all good traditional wives are, Nadiifa is a "patient, loving person, who is both generous and conscientious." Moreover, she knows that it is never proper for a wife to criticize her husband in public, but characteristically "she never said one wicked word about his politics in public or private" (CS, p. 142). In all matters Nadiifa defers to her husband and unhesitatingly follows his lead. For example, she never learns to read and write and has been trained to believe that it is improper for women to do so. Nevertheless, when Deeriye learns to read and write in prison, and writes her long letters, she has her son Mursal read them to her and answer them for her; they carry on a lively correspondence (SC, p. 142). In addition to the letters which mean so much to him because they bring him news of his family and community, she becomes a silent presence which gives comfort to her troubled husband.

During the early days of their marriage, Deeriye, as a recently elevated Sultan, meets his first challenge when the Sultan of the clan
adjacent to his, in defiance of an ordinance issued by the Italian Residente of the region, refuses to comply with instructions to appoint stipended chieftains who would be answerable to the head of the regional administration. The Sultan refuses to receive a junior officer whom the Residente in the nearest town had delegated. The Italian and the Somalis in his retinue, when told that they will not be fed or received with hospitality, try to force their way into one of the houses. The young man in whose hamlet this house is located wrestles with the Italian for possession of the gun which he holds. The Italian dies from a bullet in his chest. The retinue run to save their lives, and on reaching the next town they report the incident. A day later a senior officer, with twice as many soldiers and retainers, arrives in the village. Speaking through an interpreter, he announces an ultimatum, demanding the name of the man who killed the white man. The Sultan refuses, and he, along with twelve elders of the village, is imprisoned. Deeriye's village gives asylum to the young man who has killed in self-defense. When this fact is slyly extracted from an unsuspecting eight-year old boy, the senior officers and soldiers come. Nadiifa informs the interpreter that the Sultan is performing his prayers and will come out when he has completed them. When Deeriye refuses to turn over the young man for beheading by the Italians, he is given one day in which to reconsider, else the Italians will create a "famine worse than any famine God or man has ever heard of" (CS, p. 36). Deeriye and the elders will not comply because it is their policy that "whoever comes
and seeks asylum is offered precisely that. There is no turning back" (CS, p. 36). True to their word, the soldiers return, slaughter all of the camels and cattle, and loot the village.

As a consequence, Deeriye risks the condemnation of his villagers who believe the punishment too harsh to be borne by themselves. The young man is not even of their village (CS, p. 37). There follows the first experience in which Deeriye "crosses from the known tactile world into one in which he can have visions, can hear prophecies .. and receive the guiding voices of other visionaries" (CS, p. 37). There follows also the beginning of the unique relationship between him and his wife Nadiffa. She comes to him and holds him. Later, he is unable to sleep or engage in conversation; his temperature is very high. "Nadiifa sat by him, a fan in hand, active and yet silent, near and yet distant, speechless and yet communicative. How much he began to respect her .. ." (CS, p. 38). Love comes later, during his detention, when she visits him in his visionary dreams; love comes much later when both pass the test of endurance (CS, p. 32). She is first "a woman who was also a friend" and ultimately, a woman beloved (CS, p. 32).

Others know of Deeriye's deep attachment to Nadiifa, and they tease him about "this weakness of his." What they do not know is that during his initial detention she visits him at night and keeps him company, tells him stories, brings him news about Mursal and Zeinab, about Rooble and Mahad, about Elmi-Tiir and his children (CS, p. 24). He has proof of his communication with her:
Once when released from detention, he was brought home and upon entering the house seemed to know what each had been doing and he had talked about intimate things nobody knew other than insiders like Mursal, Zeinab and their mother Nadiifa, the three having discussed that topic only the evening before, just before going to sleep-- . . . With Mursal and Zeinab seated to one side and Nadiifa the other, he recounted to them what they had said about him. He had seen them in his vision: Nadiifa, perfumed and loving, had told him all that. He could describe the guntiino she wore, could tell her that it was a gift from Elmi-Tiir (CS, p. 24).

The relationship between Deeriye and Nadiifa was baffling to most of his acquaintances who said "he was either a pervert or that the woman must have bewitched him" (CS, p. 25). They cannot understand why, although he has the means, the money and the opportunity to marry as many women as he wishes and to maintain two mistresses on the side, he would think of no other woman but Nadiifa. Ninety-nine per cent of his peers remarry when their wives die or age, as at their menopause. Some marry again with their wives still alive, reasoning: "But what can I do with a woman who won't give me any more children?" (CS, p. 26). For them women are to be slept with, to bear and raise children, and to do household chores. Beyond this, they have no value. "Rooble, his best friend, had remarried too and now had a son a few months old. So had Elmi-Tiir." (CS, p. 26). But Deeriye who never thought of taking a second wife during Nadiifa's lifetime will not consider remarrying even after her death:

And some . . . spoke of how they wish he would stop his hankering after that poor woman who, . . . had spent nearly twenty years of her life alone and longing for a man--when he was in prison, fighting for a national or personal principle (CS, p. 26).
he had spent a little more than a dozen years in various political detention centres: eight of these in colonial prisons, four in post-independence jails.

The first: he was twenty-two and the year was 1934. The last only a couple of years ago: he had been released just in time to bid farewell to his dying Nadiifa (CS, p. 31).

In the relationship between Nadiifa and Deeriye, Farah shows the power of love to transcend space and time. In times of stress Nadiifa always comes with words of comfort and wisdom. Alive, she is the bridge between his prison and the real world. Dead, she bridges the distance between earth and paradise. In his words, "she is the pill of [my] construction, the bridge between [me] and the world" (CS, p. 24). Even two years after her death, Nadiifa, in this environment rife with rumor, provides Deeriye the information that he needs to distinguish between fact and fiction. Nothing else is certain. "In Somalia," asserts Farah, "where the politics of distrust operates, the basis of all information is rumour."

Nadiifa is the sharer of his secrets, also. When their son Mursal is killed because of his complicity in a failed attempt to assassinate the General, it is she and she alone who knows what uncharacteristic action Deeriye plans:

. . . I know you've hidden a revolver somewhere; I know you've activated the line of communication between yourself and the Inspector, the General's uncle on his mother's side, who's accepted to take up your request for an audience with the General today and I know, naive that you are, that you will go to meet the General armed with the standard revolver which once belonged to a Jibriil Mohamed-Somali! (CS, p. 198).

Deeriye keeps his appointment, but he fails in his attempt to kill the General and is killed himself. There is another appointment, however, that he does keep, that made with his beloved Nadiifa: "... come and join me, ... I am here, awaiting your arrival, I am the houri assigned to you--on earth as well as in paradise" (CS, p. 198).

Not unlike the relationship between Deeriye and Nadiifa which is based upon mutual respect and love are the relationships between Zeinab and her father and brother. Zeinab, the daughter of Deeriye and Nadiifa, is a liberated modern Somali woman whose Western education provides her the world-view and economic independence which free her from the restrictions of customary and Islamic practices. She is a feminist, full of extraordinary enthusiasm for women's causes (CS, p. 183). When she is in the company of men, she becomes a member of the male community by virtue of her background and "is never excluded from taking part in any activity because she is a woman" (CS, p. 106). This acceptance informs her responses to all of her relationships with men. She proceeds on the assumption of sexual equality.

Zeinab is a strongly independent character who, unlike previously presented liberated modern Somali women, is not dependent upon either her father or her brother for support. Therefore, she is able to operate from a position of strength. Theirs represent relationships of true sexual equality which permit the male in certain matters to be dependent upon the female who is in a position of authority, while providing the kind of male image necessary to bring about the new order.
Together, this liberated woman and the liberated males in her life form a family structure that is conducive to the fullest development of each of its participating members.

Zeinab, the adult, retains the strong, competitive nature which she evinced as a child; therefore, to understand Zeinab the adult, one must look to the upbringing and relationships provided her by her parents. Zeinab receives a rather unconventional training in a rather conventional setting. Her mother Nadiifa is a traditional wife who has an untraditional relationship with her husband Deeriye the nationalist. Deeriye has grown up in the traditional setting of the village. His life is the same as that of every other male with two exceptions: first, he is the son of the Sultan; and second, his views and principles are a bit unorthodox. As the son of the Sultan, he is expected to be twice as good at sports and other male activities as other boys, and he is (CS, p. 15). As a man and recently appointed Sultan, he is expected to adhere to the customs of the culture. Outwardly he conforms but inwardly his world-view is different. He believes that women have a value beyond those of servant and mother ascribed to them in the Islamic culture. He respects his wife and learns to love her. Uncharacteristically, he is not diminished (in his own eyes) by the tenderness which he shows his wife. However, she is uncomfortable and often worries lest he be found out and disgraced by the supposedly unnatural acts which he performs, such as washing her feet and sitting in prayer all night next to her bed (CS, pp. 184-185). For her part, it is Nadiifa who introduces to Mursal and Zeinab their father's life and
politics. She is the first to speak about the betrayals and hopes (CS, p. 142). Although Deeriye is absent from the home at crucial times in the lives of his children, his spirit is kept alive by his loving wife and his sympathetic friends. Additionally, their uncle, Elmi-Tiir, their mother's brother and their father's friend, provides for their welfare. He brings them up as if they are his own (CS, p. 39). In this environment Zeinab matures. She challenges her brother and competes with him constantly. For example, once when Mursal announces, "I'm going to become a lawyer," Zeinab, feeling challenged, retorts, "And I'm going to be a doctor . . ." (CS, p. 14). Although Mursal decides against becoming a trial lawyer and opts to become a University professor of law instead, Zeinab goes on to become a doctor.

The relationship between Zeinab and Mursal is one such as only equals can have; namely, a relationship in which either partner can be the dominant one, depending on the situation. Unlike Margaritta and Medina, who inherit fortunes from their fathers and enjoy the constant protection and provision of their brothers, Zeinab is the one who provides the greater support during the final days preceding Mursal's death. When Zeinab guesses that Mursal is involved in a plot to kill the General, she demands to know the extent of his involvement. Mursal refuses to discuss the matter, despite Zeinab's lengthy probing (CS, p. 111). Although Zeinab understands that such activities require secrecy, she wishes to know what his chances for success are. She knows that should Mursal be killed it will be her responsibility to settle the affairs of his foreign wife, Natasha, and their son Samawade.
In things other than these, they agree on shared responsibility. Both sister and brother are dedicated to the care of their father who now resides with Mursal and his family because Zeinab's house is being renovated to add an extension wing for him (CS, p. 135). He was moved to Mursal's house because the dust aggravates his asthma. Regardless of whose home he resides in, Zeinab and Mursal and members of their families take loving care of Deeriye. Similarly, when Mursal fears that the actions to be taken by the organization will adversely affect Deeriye because he is directly involved, he and Zeinab develop a plan to ensure their father's safety. Each has a part to play. Zeinab will accompany the father to Hargeisa and remain with him until it is safe for them to return. Mursal will take Zeinab's children into his home where he and Natasha will care for them. Should the plot in which Mursal is to participate fail, contingency plans are made to take Deeriye out of the country (CS, pp. 129-130). To all of these plans, Deeriye replies, "No. I will not go. I have other things to do here; I, too, have responsibilities. And duties to perform" (CS, pp. 130-131).

When Mursal disappears from his home and it is learned that another unsuccessful attempt has been made on the General's life, everyone in the house is frantic. They fear that Mursal is involved in this abortive attempt, but they are unable to verify it. Zeinab's responsibility is to restore order and to calm the family. When they receive word that Mursal is dead, Zeinab is the strong one. Again, even when Deeriye is killed while attempting to assassinate the General,
Zeinab remains strong. Neither the death of Mursal nor that of Deeriye occasions her tears. Zeinab receives this news as she received, years ago, that of her husband who was killed while fighting in the Nationalist's cause in Ethiopia: "She sheds not a single tear" (CS, p. 207). She, Zeinab the daughter, the sister, and the wife of men who have died in the struggle for their country's freedom, consoles herself, "At least neither died an anonymous death--and that was heroic" (CS, p. 207).

In Close Sesame, mutual respect and love transform the relationship of the Western woman and the Somali man from one which has the potential to destroy the family to one which strengthens it. Natasha is the first Western white woman married to a Somali man to receive what appears to be Farah's strong approval. Although she is an American and a Jew, she possesses a crucial quality that previously presented Western female characters lack: she understands the importance of family and the nature of sacrifice.

She is a Jew from New York, born and bred in the fashionable, well-to-do parts of Manhattan. Mursal meets, falls in love with, and marries Natasha while studying in the United States (CS, p. 46). Theirs is a marriage which unites rather than separates families. When Samawade is born in New York, Deeriye travels for the first and only time to North America, to see his grandson, to be reunited with his son.

Farah seems to give a weak yes to the relationship of Koschin and Nancy in A Naked Needle.
and to meet Natasha and her family. The humidity of the New York summer aggravates his asthmatic condition and so weakens him that he can do nothing. Her parents respond as if they are long-time, well-known family members: they defray his expense to see their doctor, purchase the medicine prescribed for him and, when he does not improve, even accompany him to California. A friend of Natasha lends them a cottage and her parents pay all costs. As the warm weather works its magic on Deeriye's health, the parents get to know each other. They overcome both language and ideological barriers as well, never agitating each other. "What a journey! What a long journey to Natasha's home, her people's world-view and their notions about Africa, et cetera" (CS, pp. 48-49).

Natasha. "Tall and elegant, beautifully dressed, simply and yet exquisitely, . . . light make-up, decorous, blue eyes . . ." Oddly, puts Deeriye in mind of his own wife, Nadiifa (CS, p. 46). As Mursal's wife, she makes a consistent effort to render Deeriye happy; she:

. . . drove him everywhere he wanted to go, came to his room the moment she returned home from work to ask him if anything was amiss and never let him sleep without a glass of boiled milk by his bedside and a glass of cold water. He had clean linen every few days; shirts, sarongs and all other vestures a man of his age and background was fond of arraying himself in were taken away to be washed and returned warm and ironed. He was grateful to Natasha for all she had done for him (CS, p. 10).

Every effort is made to keep the whole family happy: the friends of her father-in-law as well as the friends of her husband are always welcome. Zeinab is adored and all of the children, though noisy, are welcome (CS, p. 9). But Natasha herself feels isolated and excluded
because no one tells her anything of significance (CS, p. 169). She is often shut out of their conversations altogether when they lapse into Somali, a language that she cannot speak. She herself has learned many languages and both her father and mother are polyglots also. She comes from a family which speaks some twenty languages all told, but she does not attempt to speak Somali. Why not? Her answer is simple: Somalis are neither sympathetic with nor helpful to foreigners who have difficulty trying to speak their language (CS, p. 47). Therefore, she does not attempt to learn to speak it.

The isolation which she experiences because of her inability to speak and understand the language is heightened beyond her ability to endure by Mursal's leaving home without a word of explanation. She remembers his attempt to warn her of his involvement in potentially dangerous activities. But his explanation is inadequate. Therefore, on the night which ends in his disappearance, when she hears him moving around, typing and talking to a guest whose voice she does not recognize, she longs to go to him, and say,

Here I am, a part of you, an integral part of the painful history of your family and the country's; but for the sake of our love, for the sake of Samawade, please do not do anything stupid without consulting me (CS, p. 162).

But she understands the nature of sacrifice. She has heard from her father how the action of only one young man saved hundreds of lives when this young man blew himself up along with his German jailers. (He died on the spot but enabled the others to escape.) Therefore, she restrains herself (CS, p. 162).
Nevertheless, the disappearance of Mursal causes her great pain. "He ... is . . . the only link . . . the most significant link I have with . . . this land . . ." (CS, p. 163). But this is not true. She has more links with the land than that. "She [has] Samawade, a loving father-in-law, a loving sister-in-law" (CS, p. 163).

Samawade himself is a bridge that connects Natasha to the land and the family. He connects Deeriye and Zeinab to Natasha. He connects the past to the future. And these are bonds that cannot be broken no matter how far she goes. And Natasha begins to understand. She apologizes for what she has said to Deeriye:

Mursal is not my only link with this country and its people and all the links will not be severed completely if something were to happen to him. It won't be the same. But there is a link. There is you. There is Samawade. There is Zeinab (CS, p. 171).

The news of Mursal's death is reported by Khaliif, the madman who is wearing Mursal's clothes; he calls him and his group members "martyrs." Khaliif prophesies,

. . . they suffered on behalf of the suffering humanity. . . . contact will be made again; from the void will come . . . his voice: a pious Muslim dies twice: a martyr thrice. Yes: listen to his voice from the void (CS, p. 194).

However, the movement appears to be ended; the organization decimated: Soyaan, Mukhtaar, Jibriil, and Mursal are dead; Loyaan is exiled; Sama- ter, Siciliano and Mahad are being held in detention; Koschin is half-paralyzed; Medina, rumor has it, is affected with insomnia; and Ahmed- Wellie is a traitor (CS, p. 179). Nevertheless, there is hope. There is Samawade, the son of Mursal, grandson of Deeriye. He has a sense of
history, and at the age of eleven, only hours after his father mysteriously disappears, he can say to his grandfather:

... Just like you. Some of us have to go to prison or die for a principle or a cause so that others, whether they are aware of it or not, whether they are grateful for it or not, can live a decent life... (CS, p. 172).

Close Sesame, then, culminates Farah's variations on the theme of an African dictatorship. The work expands the theme in several significant ways: first, it addresses the issue of sexual equality and focuses on the need for mutual respect and love to transform relationships between women and their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Second, the negative influence of the military regime is great upon all women in Somali society: traditional, liberated and Western. Third, because all other approaches appear to be ineffectual, more drastic action is required. The assassination of the General (Barre) is called for.

The action of Farah's trilogy intensifies as conditions in Somalia worsen. In Sweet and Sour Milk, secret pre-dawn arrests and unexplained disappearances are common occurrences. Members of a clandestine organization which is dedicated to the overthrow of the military regime are at work, and for the first time a member dies mysteriously; later, one is forced into exile. In this environment women suffer. Traditional women cry out to Allah and rely upon witchcraft for comfort. The transitional woman is caught between tradition and the new order, and the liberated modern Somali woman because of her active involvement in politics suffers more directly at the hands of government.
In *Sardines* the roles of women in actively opposing the tyrannical government are told from the point of view of an intellectual female. The traditional woman continues to strive to maintain the inherited social order by whatever means possible. The transitional woman achieves personal economic independence but fails to make the leap beyond the personal which is necessary for comprehensive liberation for self or for society. The liberated modern woman, on the other hand, makes the leap beyond the personal. She makes the sacrifices required to achieve a new order in Somali society. Meanwhile, the impact of the Western woman upon Somali society shifts from the social to the political. Her negative influence is more immediate and pervasive because she moves in the upper circles of government.

In *Close Sesame* the call is clear: Death to the tyrant. More repressive measures are employed by the military regime, and they result in the decimation of the clandestine organization. Relationships between men and women require a commitment of mutual respect and love for the realization of sexual equality. Traditional, liberated and Western women benefit from relationships in which men themselves are liberated from traditional roles. The Western woman whose love unites rather than divides families and who understands the need for sacrifice may be an asset to the Somali man whom she marries.

In all of the novels, there is an element of hope. The hopes of

32

In *Close Sesame*, the transitional woman is not presented.
the movement as well as the hopes of the country rest in the children. In *Sweet and Sour Milk*, hope is reborn by the birth of Beydan's child, who is given the name Soyaan. In *Sardines* Ubax and Amina's daughter, Sagal, represent the youngest generation female who receives instruction from the liberated modern Somali woman. There is also Sagal's unborn child. In *Close Sesame* there is Samawade. He is the link between the recent past and the future. The children, then properly taught, are the hope for a better Somali society.
CHAPTER IV

FARAH'S LATEST NOVEL:

IRREDENTISM, WAR AND SACRIFICE

The Ogaden War which Farah so poignantly portrays in his latest novel, *Maps*, represented an attempt by the Somali government to achieve the unification of all Somali-speaking territories, an idea which was first advanced in the 1940s by Ernest Bevin, then British Foreign Secretary, who proposed before the British House of Commons that all Somali-speaking territories be unified in order to maximize the resources of the country, and was written into the Somali Constitution upon its Independence in 1960. When the Somali Republic was formed in 1960 a five-pointed star was adopted to symbolize the five different regions of the Somali nation which included, in addition to the newly independent and merged sections (British Somaliland and the Italian Trust Territory), the French Territory of Afars and Issas, the Ethiopian Haud and Ogaden region, and the Northeastern Province of Kenya. Subsequent efforts to reunite these territories were reflected

---

1 Nuruddin Farah, *Maps* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986). All quotations are taken from this edition and are cited as (M, with page numbers).

197
in the stated Pan-Africa, Pan-Somali policy of the new Republic but were firmly rejected by Ethiopia and Kenya, the countries in which the disputed lands lie. Somalia and Ethiopia fought a war in 1964 in which Somalia was defeated. From 1964 until 1966 Somalia supported and supplied guerilla activities in the Ogaden and the North Frontier District of Kenya. However, from 1967 until 1969 the irredentist clamor was subdued.

With the overthrow of the post-Colonial government came a resurgence of irredentism. From the beginning the regime frequently acknowledged its abiding commitment to the "liberation" of those parts of the Somali nation which still languished under foreign rule, during the first phase of General Siyad Barre's military rule no significant actions were taken. Instead, there was a concentration on internal problems of local development and the consolidation of the regime's authority. It was not until 1975, following the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974, that those in power in Somalia shifted to a more sympathetic response to aspirations to unite the Ogaden to Somalia. Underground activities became more overt, while government involvement became more direct. It is against this backdrop that Maps is set.

In Maps, then, Farah shifts his focus from the oppression of the Barre regime, which he treats in A Naked Needle and expands upon in his trilogy, Sweet and Sour Milk, Sardines, and Close Sesame, to the irredentist policy of that regime which leads to the Ogaden War. He also expands the theme of sacrifice from a subsidiary one, as it is in the trilogy, to a dominant one. Everywhere there is sacrifice and its
enduring symbol, blood. At all levels, relationships are changing. War precipitates change and demands sacrifice.

Maps is the story of Askar, a serious, bitter, and strangely wise child who is orphaned by the Ogaden War. He is placed by members of his father's family in the care of Misra, the non-Somali woman who discovers him and his mother who has died in childbirth. Askar spends the first seven years of his life under the powerful influence of Misra, before he is forced by worsening war conditions to flee to his maternal uncle and his wife in Mogadiscio. After ten years, Askar and Misra are reunited but under very different circumstances: he is the fervent nationalist, a patriot clamoring for the unification of Somalia and the Ogaden, and she is accused of betraying that cause.

The novel, set against the bloody background of the Ogaden War, "explores the consequences of both emotional and political affiliations, of personal and partisan betrayal," while examining the status of the traditional Somali woman, the transitional Somali woman, the liberated modern Somali woman and the foreign African woman.

Shahrawello is one of the wives of Qorrax, the Grand Patriarch. He has many wives and children. There is frequent turnover among his wives; he frequently divorces his current wives and marries new ones.

---

199

2 Quoted from the back cover of the paperback edition of Maps.

3 So nicknamed, because like Scherezade of the One Thousand and One Nights, she arrived on the scene and stayed (M, p. 12).
The sole authority in the family, Qorrax is known throughout the compound for beating his wives and his children (M, p. 12). His reputation for divorcing and beating his wives, notwithstanding, Shahrawello, as her nickname implies, finds a way to ensure her tenure and restrain Qorrax at the same time. She makes herself indispensable by the skillful application of a traditional medical procedure. Like her namesake, Shahrawello circumvents the awesome authority of the Patriarch over his wives by keeping him occupied through daily blood-letting. She prescribes the treatment regardless of the specific complaint. He receives it if he is not "happy with his performance in bed . . ., contented with his respiratory system, or if . . . suffering from bronchitis" (M, p. 102). Hours later, when the treatment is completed, she brings a cupful of darkened blood as evidence with which Uncle Qorrax agrees, saying: "You see, I told you. I am not well" (M, p. 102). However, it is the opinion of others that Qorrax is healthy until Shahrawello decides it is time for his pride to be punctured, at which time she humiliates him by making him lie on a mat on the floor, helpless and submissive:

. . . flames, tumblers, used razor blades--she gave him the works. Lethargic, and drained of blood, he would remain on his back, at the same spot for hours. From then on, he beat his wives less often. From then on, he bullied his children less frequently (M, p. 102).

And the amazing thing is that Qorrax not only acknowledges his unlimited gratitude to Shahrawello who, he says, keeps him fit and in good form, but he recommends her curative skills to others (M, p. 102).
Qorrax is a selfish, overbearing man who, as Askar says when he is only eight years old, "... has made everyone ... suffer when he himself does not know what the word suffer means. It is a tragedy." And so it is. But he and Shahrawello continue in their uneasy relationship until selfish disregard for others takes him beyond her ability to endure. When the tide of the Ogaden War is turned toward Ethiopia by the massive aid from Russia, Qorrax becomes "very chummy with the newly appointed Ethiopian governor." He is called "traitor" (M, p. 174). And because of either the humiliation she feels because of Qorrax's treachery or the fact that her three sons are killed in the massacre, no one knows for sure, Shahrawello commits suicide: "She cut her throat. Leaving behind her a pool of blood, no more" (M, p. 175).

That Qorrax beats his wives and children does not damage his reputation because beating wives and children is quite acceptable in this culture. Further, he has a "public" persona that insists on being generous at times. He is kind to his children and wives when outsiders are present. Only when alone with them is he an abuser. Consequently, Qorrax is a well-known, well-respected merchant (M, p. 16) whose wives and children are well-respected also. But when Qorrax becomes openly friendly with the newly appointed governor, there is no doubt that he is and always has been a traitor (M, p. 174). Inevitably, he loses the respect of the community, and his family loses its status as well. Therefore, when suffering both the humiliation of Qorrax's betrayal and the devastation of the death of her sons, Shahrawello has limited choices. With the death of her sons goes her hope for protection and
support in her old age. She cannot accept Qorrax's treachery; therefore, she kills herself (M, p. 175). Such an act is almost unheard of in her Islamic culture, but, as Hilaal says, "Wars disorient one. Wars make one do the unpardonable" (M, p. 172). That fact in a way, may explain why Shahrawello, a traditional woman, commits an act that is rarely performed in her Somali society.

Wars not only disorient one, causing one to do unpardonable acts, they also demand sacrifice. Generally, in Maps there are two types of sacrifices: those which are made of one's own volition and those which are forced upon one. Qorrax sacrifices everyone on the altar of his greed. By his traitorous act, Farah shows that for the man who abuses his wives and children, betraying daily their rights as human beings, betrayal of larger causes is possible. It may be the betrayal of a dead son to the oppressive government which killed him as in the case of Keynaan or the betrayal of one's country as in the case of Qorrax. The consequences of such an act are far-reaching. As in the case of Qorrax, it is more than likely that he is the betrayer of secrets that lead to the massacre of the six hundred and three warriors. Second, three of these men are his sons by Shahrawello. In their deaths they sacrifice their young lives and the future of their mother as well. It appears that they have escaped identification when they survive the initial roundup and slaughter of six hundred fellow Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) warriors. Nevertheless, they are later

4 As shown in Sweet and Sour Milk.
arrested and murdered (M, p. 176). Finally, because the present is unbearable and because she has no future, Shahrawello takes her own life.

Not only from the traditional female is sacrifice required but from the transitional Somali woman as well. Karin's relationship with Armadio is an example of this. Just before Karin turns fifteen, she is married to a man old enough to be her father (M, p. 71). But this is not unusual in a culture which marries off its girls at an early age to the man who makes the most satisfactory offer. The transaction is presented as a business deal; Farah even uses business language to describe the events: "He comes one morning and makes a down payment for her" (M, p. 71). Confident that the property has been secured for him, he goes away giving little explanation, saying only that he has a job to do. Later he returns as mysteriously as he leaves. He comes to collect his property "in a manner porters lift any weight." He is not a man for formalities, weddings and parental blessings. Neither is he a man of many words: "He spoke little, said little, the night he deflowered her. . . . I have a job to do, he said, and she carried his child" (M, p. 71).

Over the years, Armadio gives Karin "children, lots of space and silence and love, when he is home." However, he disappears every now and then, saying only, "I have a job to perform" (M, pp. 71-72). On the surface this seems a traditional marriage, that is, one in which the wife is secured by transaction between the prospective groom and the father of the bride-to-be, where the bride has few rights and the
husband, being the dominant figure, has no obligation to consult her on matters of business. But it is not a traditional marriage. For example, after he repeatedly disappears without explanation over the years, Karin becomes jealous and confronts Armadio. She accuses him of being with other women; she throws tantrums, and maliciously taunts him as "the man with a job to do" (M, p. 72). These are not the actions of a traditional wife. Theirs is a culture in which a wife can express her dissatisfaction with her husband only through subterfuge. For example, she may express it in "a dozen . . . acts: an unkept house, noise when the husband is entertaining, insufficient food for guests, unruly children, and so forth," all of which cast an uncomplimentary light on the husband and his supposed control over her. "Part of his honor is defined by the degree of his control, and a woman by subtle means can undermine it," but never by such overt means as Karin applies in her response to Armadio. Neither is the response of Armadio to this unconventional behavior of his wife that of a traditional husband. As the Patriarch of the family, Armadio can marry three additional wives without the approval of Karin. Further, she is not expected to react negatively to the decision. However, Armadio, although he does not "explain himself," does not "scold her," either (M, p. 72). Therefore, when he announces that he might be away for a long period as he prepares

5

6
Ibid.
for another of his mysterious missions, it does not surprise him when Karin questions him in a thoroughly untraditional manner. This transitional Somali woman demands to know "What job is taking you away from us?" When he suggests that "Death might," she continues undeterred:

Now what do I say to people who ask me where you are? You are my husband, the father of my children, the man I've lived with and loved all these years. What am I to say? (M, p. 72).

He is "most tender," and he gives her instructions and money which he is sure she and the children will need, suggesting that if he is not back before the rains come she is to sell the house and buy a smaller one. He promises, also, to return to her saying, "Don't worry. I'll not allow death to take me away . . . I'll come back, sooner or later" (M, p. 72). He does not come back before the rains or after them either. She receives news of him over the wireless. Armadio apparently is the chairman of the cell of the Somali Youth League (SYL) which is agitating for the reunification of all Somali-speaking territories. He ends up in one of Haile Selassie's prisons. She does as she was instructed--she buys a smaller house and does her job, which is:

. . . taking care of the children, sending them to school, and making sure they all left for Mogadiscio, where they would join cells . . . launch spearheads . . . open the way for a united Somalia (M, p. 72).

She stays--and waits, certain that he will come home. One day, he does. At once, without speaking of his ordeals and his prison years, he simply hangs a portrait of Ernest Bevin, who he says is "the one British friend Somalis have," because he "has advocated the
reunification of all the Somali-speaking territories" (M, p. 73). Armadio falls ill, suffering from a spinal condition which makes him unable to move. He lies flat on his back unable to care for himself. Karin washes him twice a day and feeds him, just as one would a child. After a long period, he dies. His last request is that there should be no mourning.

Although Armadio dies a peaceful, gentle death, inexplicably a stain of blood appears and remains on his mouth (M, p. 94). It is the blood which symbolizes the sacrifices, both personal and political, that he has made. These are the sacrifices which wars demand. As Salaado observes, "... wars ... bring into being other forms of trust and interdependence ..." (M, p. 53). And the "war" between Somalia and Ethiopia casts Karin into a transitional role which makes her slightly different from other transitional women presented by Farah. In other cases, society allows a woman in unusual circumstances to move a little away from tradition. In this case, husband and society are directing, instructing, her to assume new responsibilities. Thus, in the portrayal of Karin, Farah presents a woman whose role is transitional. And the "war" imposes this transition. Because he is a nationalist who is engaged in underground activities, Armadio has to trust Karin to perform many tasks which traditionally are performed by males in this culture: she has to sell and buy property, and she is the sole authority in the rearing of their children. On the other hand, Karin must trust in the faithfulness of Armadio because he gives her no details regarding his underground activities; nevertheless, she follows, to the letter, his
directions and waits patiently for his return. Armadio's dedication to his secret missions and the aims of the Organization to unify all Somali-speaking territories are as a third person with whom each must learn to live. This requires much sacrifice which does bring into being other forms of trust and interdependence.

Salaado is a liberated modern Somali woman who, of all the characters in *Maps*, seems least affected by the war. While there are some sacrifices required of her as a direct result of the war, the major sacrifices in her life occur prior to the beginning of open hostilities between Somalia and Ethiopia and are not war-related. They appear to be related more to her liberated status than to any other problem. Salaado has all of the requisites of a liberated modern Somali woman; that is, she is educated, has a profession which gives her economic independence and is married to a liberated man. Further, she understands what it takes for a person to achieve self-knowledge: one needs an awareness of boundaries, a sense of time and an undistorted image. Therefore, to Askar she is the giver of maps so that he can "identify where he was born . . ." and "see himself in that context" . . . . The provider of calendars so that he can "follow the progress of the war in the Ogaden." The dispenser of mirrors so that he can "register his bodily changes, see how much taller . . . or fatter . . . whether . . . losing weight by the day" (M, p. 145). It is through these possessions that he is expected to get a complete sense of himself and become a complete person.
Salaado is a complete person who shares an unusual relationship with her mate, Hilaal. She is free to be herself, while he is free to pursue his interests. Jones, in his review of Maps, describes this relationship between Salaado and Hilaal as a "unisex relationship in which Hilaal is a feminist" who prefers to do the cooking while conducting research at home. Salaado, on the other hand, is a terrible cook and avoids the task (M, p. 145). They are quite comfortable with their arrangement, but it is strange and unacceptable to others. For example, they have decided against continued efforts to have children of their own and are quite happy in possessing only each other. But other people talk because childlessness is frowned upon in this culture: "They say terrible things about a woman who can't have children" (M, p. 143), despite the fact that there are reasons for their childless condition. Every time Salaado becomes pregnant she carries the infant for seven months and then "emits a dead child" (M, p. 152). After suffering that painful ordeal several times, she has to undergo a very serious and painful operation in Europe which results in the removal of her ovaries. After the operation Salaado is unable to bear children, but the fact poses no problem for Hilaal. His relatives, on the other hand, are greatly concerned, and they insist that he take another wife. He refuses and in order to end the discussion, he undergoes a vasectomy. Now they are equal: "She cannot have children, nor can I . . ." (M, p. 145).

---

Through their beliefs and actions, they achieve sexual equality in their relationship. However, their lifestyle is not approved of by most people:

... It's not all that simple, to be truthful. Society doesn't approve of a man who loves a woman who doesn't bear him children, a woman who doesn't cook his food, mind his home, wash his underthings. A woman who sits behind the wheel of a car driving when the man is a passenger—to our society, this is unpardonable. It is sex, sooner or later. And there are the hierarchies which escort the notion of sex... (M, p. 144).

Therefore, they have only a few friends and his relatives refuse to visit. Mostly, their visitors are either good friends of Salaado or her relatives. But Askar, the son of Hilaal's sister, is sent to live with them because of the worsening conditions precipitated by the Ogaden War. His arrival reestablishes contact between Hilaal and a member of his family and offers the childless couple an opportunity to become parents. Nevertheless, at first the reversal of male/female roles which he observes in their relationship disturbs Askar a little. He has to get used to seeing Hilaal cook the meals, wash and dry the dishes and put them away as well as to seeing him press his own shirts and trousers (M, p. 145). And although with the assistance of Hilaal he is taught to care for himself and his clothes, he remains self-conscious about those tasks. Understandably, then, in his letters to Misra (which he never mails) he avoids mentioning that Hilaal performs them (M, p. 18). Consequently, Misra is unprepared for the things she observes when she visits him in their home. Not only does she observe Hilaal doing the cooking and cleaning the kitchen while Salaado drives the car and
does the shopping, she is told by Askar that the bank account is in Salaado's name and that she takes care of all of the family business (M, p. 18). Misra is never able to completely understand the lifestyle of Salaado and Hilaal, but Askar is a sensitive young man, wise beyond his years, and while Hilaal and Salaado are unlike other couples he knows, he senses that "they were heads above most men and most women" (M, p. 145).

Salaado and Hilaal sacrifice much for their beliefs and for their freedom. Their belief in the need for sexual equality as the basis of a lasting relationship is reflected not only in their personal interaction with each other, but also in their relationship with Askar. They provide him both opportunity and space for growth. Under their tutelage he learns many valuable lessons. Perhaps the most significant is how to take "a back seat, allowing others to take life's seats of prominence." He discovers that "... he is not ... the only one who exist[s] ... the only one around whom the sun, the moon, the stars, in short, the world, revolved" (M, p. 146). He also teaches many valuable lessons. It is he who shows Uncle Hilaal that he is moving in the wrong direction in his research into the psychological disturbances which the war has caused in the lives of children and women. Although Hilaal never appears directly to question Askar regarding his experiences, he does take note of what he says. Without being pressured to speak, Askar tells him the dreams which have left impressions on him as well as the experiences he has had. These expressions enable Uncle Hilaal to put together his findings into the appropriate research categories;
ultimately, because of Askar, he burns his research notes, a whole years' work because "talking with [Askar] made him unmistakably aware that he had been moving in the wrong direction all along" (M, p. 152).

Similarly, it is the free exchange of ideas, largely with Salaado, who is Askar's primary teacher, that leads Askar to the brink of a decision which will affect his whole life. Their discussions of Africa, especially of Somalia and its irredentist policy, extend Askar's understanding of the Ogaden War and fan the flame of his nationalism (M, pp. 148-149). Therefore, when he learns of the resounding defeat suffered by the Somali forces at the hands of the Ethiopian army, he becomes impatient to join the battle. He is severely agitated because he must choose, it seems, between furthering his education and serving his country. Salaado shares with Hilaal her concern that Askar is leaning toward the latter alternative. In a long letter to Askar, Hilaal cautions him to think things over very carefully; he ends the letter by saying:

And please do not do anything rash. We will miss you greatly if you go—but we understand. Rest assured that we'll not stand in your way if you wish to return to your beginnings.

   Much, much love,
   Yours ever
   Uncle Hilaal (M, p. 22).

They are uncertain whether Askar will choose to attend school or will decide to join the WSLF. Whatever his choice, he must be free to make

---

8 She is the only teacher from whom Askar is willing to learn when he first arrives in Mogadiscio. He observes that "Salaado made you work harder at being yourself" (M, p. 145).
it because not only in war is sacrifice required, but it is vital to the achievement of freedom in every area of life. Therefore, Hilaal and Salaado offer Askar the opportunity to make his own decisions, while assuring him always of their love.

Although Salaado is a liberated modern Somali woman who is not so much affected by the war in the Ogaden as by the lifestyle which she and her husband pursue, Shahrawello, a traditional Somali woman and Karin, a transitional Somali woman, are dramatically affected by the war. But even more dramatically affected by the war is Misra, whose dominant characteristic is her "foreign-ness." However, she does not fit the description of other foreign women presented by Farah in previous novels. First, she is not of Western origin; she is African and not Somali. Second, she is a Muslim who was not born into the faith, but was reared according to the customs of Islam. Third, she is not English-speaking--Amharic is the language she knows best. Therefore, one can see that Misra does not possess those characteristics of other foreign women which are shown in Farah's previous novels to impact negatively upon Somali culture. Nevertheless, she is considered to be a foreigner by members of the Somali community in which she has lived for many years, and as such she is greatly influenced by the "War" which takes place there.

Despite her marriage to a wealthy Somali man, Misra remains outside the Somali community for three reasons: she was born in the north (thus she is considered to be Ethiopian), speaks Amharic, and is
still considered a serving woman. She is the child of a *damoz* union between an Oromo woman and an Amhara nobleman, but because she is a girl the father loses interest and leaves the mother and child to fend for themselves (M, p. 70). She is Oromo, although she is considered by the Somalis to be Ethiopian. When she is barely seven years old she is kidnapped by a raiding warrior who ultimately takes her to Jigjiga where he becomes ill and dies (M, p. 69). She is left with a wealthy man who mistakes her to be the daughter of the warrior and brings her up as one of his own children, making her embrace the Islamic faith and forcing her to undergo the infibulatory rites, just like every other girl in the community. "But he raised her with an eye to taking her as his wife when she grew up" (M, p. 69). And when she becomes seventeen he does take her as his wife. Misra is unable to adjust to this sudden change in their relationship—from daughter to wife. "During an excessive orgy of copulation," she murders him. Desperate to escape persecution, she joins a caravan going south to Kallafo. It is during her stay with this man that she learns to speak Amharic and becomes a Muslim (M, p. 69). Upon arriving in Kallafo without means of support, she enters the home of another wealthy man as servant and moving rapidly from servant to servant

9 A relationship in which a "salaried" concubine is contracted by an Amhara nobleman to live with him to give him a son and heir (M, p. 70).

10 Described to Askar by Hilaal as "a peripheral people . . . that . . . form over sixty percent of Ethiopia's population, despite their occupying only a marginal position. And as such, the Oromo have either to assume Somali or Amhara identity" (M, p. 163).
mistress, eventually becomes his wife. A few years and two miscarriages later, he divorces her, but she remains in the area to become the mother of a "fatherless" child who dies at the age of eighteen months (M, p. 70). Thus, in a few short years she has moved from the status of princess to pauper to privileged child to confused wife to murderess to maid to mistress to wife to divorcée to unwed mother. Like the geographic boundaries of the Ogaden, her cultural lines overflow several cultures, denying her the boundaries by which to obtain her bearings. And although she has lived many years in Kallafo prior to her discovery of Askar and his dead mother, she has no place in the community. She is still a foreigner who speaks the language poorly. To many members of the community, she is "that maidservant who came from somewhere else, up north" (M, p. 10). And they treat her with contempt, looking down upon her and calling her all sorts of names (M, p. 18). It is Askar's father's relatives who decide that Misra, the woman who once was a servant, would "mother" Askar. Perhaps, in reality, "Askar ... chooses Misra and the community of relations ... approve of his choice," because the child will not allow any other person either to feed or to hold him (M, p. 5). However, not all of his relatives approve of the choice. Not until a year later does Uncle Qorrax, who bitterly opposes placing Askar in the care of Misra, make a public effort to accept this choice. "To reduce the tension ... uncle decided to earmark a fenced mud hut with its separate entrance for [their] own use." He is too well-respected to allow a child of his brother to live in need; therefore, he takes an interest in the child's
welfare. However, it is one matter to make a public statement by being kind to Misra and the child; it is another to give something for nothing. "He didn't confound issues--he would hire another woman . . . and dispense with her services unless she offered herself to him" (M, p. 28). She does.

Misra willingly sacrifices herself for Askar. She detests Qorrax, yet she sleeps with him under the cover of night to avoid losing Askar. Also, she refuses Aw-Adan's proposal of marriage because it does not include Askar. Aw-Adan is jealous of the child (M, p. 12). She has no public life of her own, and suffers the indignities of night-time liaisons, all for the sake of Askar whom she loves dearly. When Somali war efforts are increased and Ethiopians fearing defeat begin to send their wives and children away from the Ogaden to the safety of their country, Misra will not go. Innocently, Askar says, "I'll go with you." But Misra knows that this is not possible; her people would kill the small Somali boy (M, p. 95). Through the character of Misra, Farah explores the sacrifices required in the mothering process. Misra is completely tied to Askar and he to her. But in these early years, the sacrifice is all hers. She gives up her independent life, allows her body to be used, refuses marriage, aborts a pregnancy, and risks her life for love of Askar. She is completely his: "I am his--in body and spirit too. And no one else's . . ." (M, p. 12). Misra, indeed, is a "foundation" (M, p. 177). Although Misra is never completely accepted in her Ogaden community because she is considered to be Ethiopian, she
is tolerated because of Askar who is both the relative of powerful men in the compound (M, p. 39) and the son of a father who gave his life fighting for the cause of Somali-unification (M, p. 7). Her stay here represents, at best, an uneasy truce which is broken by Askar's departure to Mogadiscio and the reverses encountered by Somali troops in the Ogaden War. When the Ethiopians receive massive aid from Russia and in a matter of days are able to win the war despite the year-long period of victory which the Somali had enjoyed, Misra and other Ethiopians who remain in Kallafo are viewed with suspicion (M, p. 185). In addition to this, Misra is further alienated from the community because of her affair with a young Ethiopian officer. He is ruthless in his pursuit of underground Somali nationalists (M, p. 228), and when he makes a discovery which results in the death of six hundred and three Somali warriors, Misra is accused of betraying them (M, p. 228). Although she denies any wrong-doing in the matter, she is not believed. More painful still, Misra discovers that the lover is her half-brother--the son of the same Amhara nobleman who fathered her (M, p. 228). She is totally disoriented. Because she is considered to be Ethiopian, she cannot remain in the Ogaden with its large hostile Somali population. She cannot return to her birthplace because she no longer speaks the language. She cannot remain with the officer because of his unrestrained brutality and because he is her half-brother. She cannot join refugee centers because they may contain refugees from Kallafo who believing her to be a traitor, have vowed to kill her. She has no map to tell her where she is and no legal boundaries to say what her rights
are. She has no language in which to say who she is. She has only her love for Askar.

Therefore, ten years after she bids Askar farewell, she journeys to Mogadiscio to see him. An unwell, sought after woman, Misra disguises herself and crosses the border using false identification papers (M, p. 184). She spreads the word, "Misra is in town and she is looking for her son, Askar" (M, p. 181). Ten years have elapsed, and their positions have changed dramatically: she is smaller, and he is larger (M, p. 181); he is an avowed nationalist and she an accused traitor. Askar does not look forward eagerly to being reunited with Misra. When he considers the possibility of seeing her again, he asks himself, "... does that mean that I will have to touch her, kiss her, hug her? ... how loathsome...." (M, p. 55). More than time and distance, war has altered their relationship. Askar feels betrayed by Misra when he receives Karin's report of her betrayal of the WSLF warriors. He believes Karin because he does not understand that "Wars kill friendships" (M, p. 53) in ways that only a few circumstances can.

The war is responsible for the demise of Misra's friendship with both Karin and Aw-Adan. Karin is a long-time friend of Misra. She is a kind, generous woman who cares for Askar as a grandchild during his early years. When Misra is experiencing her menses she suffers greatly from pain caused by circumcision. She is nervous and easily upset. During these times, Askar is entrusted into the care of Karin (M, p. 29). The two women are the best of friends, comrades who also share
responsibilities: "Karin baby-minded for her. Likewise, when she was indisposed, Misra looked after the old man" (M, p. 16). Karin is given complete charge of Askar during these times. With her children all grown up and living in Mogadiscio and her husband ill, lying flat on his back all the time, she has little social outlet and thoroughly enjoys the company of Askar. "Karin carried or took Askar wherever she went, as though he were running the same errands as herself" (M, p. 49). She takes delight in talking to him about things she had not dared talk about with her own children. She is the first to explain menstruation to him: "My husband and my sons do not suffer the monthly pains of menstruation. My daughter, yes. I, yes--when I was younger" (M, p. 50). On one occasion, Misra does not have the monthly excruciating pain. There is a great deal of movement, with Karin and another woman coming and going. This ends with Misra being fed concoctions which have "abortifacient powers" and "... one of the women insert[ing] a metallic rod into her inside..." (M, p. 51) What a kind woman Karin is! She ploughs the space between a husband who lies on his back and Misra whose wounds are fresh. Uncomplaining, she performs her tasks--even playfully. She rides Askar on her back as she goes back and forth (M, p. 52). It seems that their friendship can never be broken. But it is broken by the war.

Karin tells the tale of Misra's betrayal, believing it to be a fact (M, p. 53). It seems that soon after Askar's departure to Mogadiscio Misra meets "A dashing, handsome young man, the Prince Charming type, whom she's been wanting to meet all her life" (M, p.
The Ethiopian officer is in charge of security and from the same village as Misra (M, p. 176). For a time they live together. When six hundred and three WSFL warriors are massacred, Misra is accused of betraying their identity to her lover. The whole community turns against Misra, including her friend Karin:

Karin was such a dedicated soul and [Askar] trusted the truth of all that she had told him about Misra, trusted the truth of Misra's surrendering her body in order to save her soul... (M, p. 53).

The friendship with Aw-Adan, which the war also kills, is different from that of Misra with Karin. Aw-Adan is Misra's teacher and her lover. When she becomes a mother to Askar, she no longer sees as much of Aw-Adan, the priest, as she used to. He "used to teach her, on a daily basis, a few suras of the Koran..." But her interest in him "petered out the way light fades when there is no more parafin in the lamp" (M, p. 8). Askar becomes her consuming passion, and although Aw-Adan objects he keeps coming back. They continue to share intimate moments, but Askar is included (M, p. 10). Whenever Aw-Adan complains that Misra is too exclusive in her attentions to Askar, she defends the child and herself. Aw-Adan persists: "Allah is the space and time of all Muslims, but not to you, Misra, Askar is" (M, p. 11). When he asks, "What am I to do then? Suggest something." Misra replies, "Be as accommodating to me as I am to him" (M, p. 11). But Aw-Adan cannot be that. He is jealous of the child. Instead, he proposes that they get married and make a baby of their own. She can return Askar to his relatives. "Come to me alone--both of body and of spirit--and let our
bodies join, without Askar's odour or cries" (M, p. 12). Since she will not, under any conditions, abandon Askar, theirs is an unhappy union. Yet Aw-Adan persists. Always, "he came back. He was in love with her--or so she believed" (M, p. 11). It is known that Aw-Adan has a penchant for jealousy where Misra is concerned, but no one expects him to accuse her of betrayal. That is an act which so pains the soul of Misra that she can scarcely bear to speak of it. When Askar asks, "Who is it that accused you of being a traitor?" she cannot bear to call the name. "I had trusted him, how I trusted him," she says. "His name?" Finally she says, "Aw-Adan" (M, p. 210).

More bewildering than Karin's defection, more painful than Aw-Adan's accusation, is the doubt of Askar. He implores her, "Be truthful, ... Be truthful and tell me what I must know if I must take vengeance. Did you or did you not do it? ..." (M, p. 109). That is the question she has hoped never to hear from the lips of Askar. It is more than she can bear that her own Askar is asking her whether or not she has committed so heinous a crime. "To think that you could suspect me of betraying". ... And then she burst into tears, shaking ... (M, p. 209). Little does Misra know how Askar has agonized over this situation. Nevertheless, when he hears Karin's report he believes that Misra is guilty. After all, Karin is Misra's best friend. Would she lie? Uncle Hilaal and Salaado think that Karin could be mistaken in believing that Misra is guilty of betraying the warriors to her lover. Consequently, they are disturbed by Askar's easy acceptance of Misra's
guilt. How can his memory be so short and his faith so small toward one who has meant so much to him? (M, p. 178). True to his male sex, Askar blames Misra, concluding that she is no longer worthy of his trust, his love. Betrayal begets betrayal: "For the first time ever, Askar consented to talk at length about Misra's divining in blood, raw meat and water" (M, p. 178). Impatient with Askar's lack of faith in Misra, Hilaal warns him that he is like all other men--quick to blame women for every misfortune without asking for proof. He further suggests that Askar try to be more understanding, delaying judgment until there is proof to support the accusation. "Wars disorient one," says Hilaal. "Wars make one do the unpardonable." And in any case "We don't know if she was the one who betrayed . . . . We have no evidence" (M, p. 172).

Now, seeing Misra and hearing her deny any complicity with her Ethiopian lover who spearheaded the ambush of the WSLF warriors by the Ethiopian Security forces, Askar at first is not convinced of her innocence. Therefore, he spends less time in his house. Now that Misra had been invited by Hilaal and Salaado to live with them during her stay in Mogadiscio, he spends more time in the home of Riyo, a neighbor his age in whom he has more than a passing interest. Salaado likes to tease Askar about Riyo: "You appear to me like a young man who has found a new love--Riyo what's-her-name--who I hear, you're intending to take with you to the war front . . . ." (M, p. 195). But for Askar Riyo is no laughing matter: "She was the kind of girl you could trust, the kind that you could have as a companion and as a wife if you went on a
sabotage mission or had a job to do" (M, p. 211). In addition to being trustworthy in her actions toward Askar, Riyo is genuinely sympathetic toward Misra and her plight (M, p. 212).

Warmed by Riyo's feelings for Misra as well as by the renewal of his memory of past experiences during which Misra loved and cared for him for so many years, Askar knows that he still loves her and that she is incapable of committing such a crime. Therefore, their last days before her hospitalization, mastectomy and eventual abduction from the hospital and death are happy ones. They visit the ocean because she has always wanted to see one, and they renew old memories (M, p. 189). After she enters the hospital, she confides to him her fears of death. She tells him of three men from Kallafo who have come to her ward and have threatened to kill her. Also, she reaffirms her innocence, saying to Askar, "I have not betrayed. I am innocent of the crime. You are the one person I care about . . . I want you to know the honest truth. . . ." (M, p. 215). Askar believes her, and they are reconciled. On the morning prior to receiving word that Misra has been abducted from the hospital, Askar has the taste of blood in his mouth. The taste is strong, yet his saliva is clear (M, p. 215). He is overcome by a sense of foreboding that makes him seriously ill. When Misra's body is found and during her funeral and burial Askar is confined to the hospital, unaware of these events (M, p. 238). Hilaal and Salaado decide against informing him because, as Salaado says,

We were worried, let's face it . . . The slightest tremors shake you. You're like moist earth at the centre--soft. We were
worried what you might do if you saw her mutilated body and what that might do to you for the rest of your life (M, p. 239).

Askar is the sensitive barometer that registers the pain and suffering of those whom he loves. He takes his body's pained measurements, his body's space as the guide in his dealings with other people (M, pp. 209-210). Therefore, their pain becomes his pain. Through the taste of blood in his mouth, he knows that Misra is dead. That is not unusual, for he has always been a person "burdened beyond his years, burdened by the violent and passionate world . . . ." in which he is the "dispenser of wisdom and foresight that only adults should possess."

It is true that in times of war relationships change and sacrifice is required by all. But such, says Farah, is the nature of life. In Maps Farah shows that not only in times of war is sacrifice a necessity, but that sacrifice is a necessary part of life itself. In a fairly lengthy paragraph, he lists his major participants and indicates the sacrifices they have made. This paragraph, then, is a summary of the physical, political, and emotional sacrifices presented in the novel:

. . . Sacrifice! For Misra--a mastectomy; Hilaal--a vasectomy; Salaado--removal of the ovaries; Qorrax--exaction of blood, so many ounces a-bleeding; Karin--a life of sacrifices; Arla and

11
It is suspected that the three men who forced Misra to leave the hospital performed a ritual murder on her body--removing the heart before throwing the body into the ocean (M, p. 239).

12
Quoted from the back cover of Maps.
Cali-Xamari--his parents--their lives; the Somali people--their sons, their daughters and the country's economy. In short, life as sacrifice. In short, life is blood and the shedding of one's blood for a cause and for one's country; in short, life is the drinking of enemy blood and vengeance. Life is love too. Salaado and Hilaal are love. Arla--the earth; Qorrax--the sun in its masculine manifestations; Hilaal--the moon; Salaado--solemnity, prayers, etc.; Misrat--foundation of the earth; Karin--a hill in the east, humps on backs; Cali-Xamari--a return to a beginning; . . . (M, p. 244).

Thus, the story of Maps shows that everyone must make sacrifices, everyone suffers. Relationships are destroyed. Men and women die. But there is hope. There are Askar "... and Riyo--dreams dreaming dreams!" (M, p. 244).
CONCLUSION

The social status and the political status of women in Somali society as depicted in the novels of Nuruddin Farah are evidenced by the examination of the writer's female characters. These characters, based on their roles in the novels, may be classified as the traditional Somali woman, the transitional Somali woman, the liberated modern Somali woman and the modern Western woman.

The traditional Somali woman is the suppressed, second-class citizen of traditional Muslim culture. Because she is a female born into a patriarchal Islamic culture she is not as valued as a male. She has a restricted world-view and a negative self-image which is self-perpetuating. She receives little or no formal education and is usually illiterate and superstitious. She has limited power in either her father's or her husband's house and is, therefore, unable to avoid their abuse. She must unquestioningly endure such indignities as genital mutilation, forced polygamous marriages and frequent beatings. She is held in low esteem and is beneath the sympathetic concern of most men. She is said by one character to be as a small insect which dies a suffering death under the eyeless heels of one's feet. When all is said regarding the traditional Somali woman as depicted in the novels of
Farah, she is for sleeping with, for giving birth to and bringing up children; she is not good for any other purpose.

The primary source of the traditional woman's oppression is found in the home in the person of the Grand Patriarch, either the father or the husband. The Grand Patriarch is the head of an extended family group in Muslim society who has unlimited power over his family, and as a rule he will brook no challenge to his authority—not from his wives, not from his children. He will not tolerate a world-view that differs from his own. Although there are exceptions, Farah portrays most Patriarchs as men who frequently beat their wives and children and abuse them in numerous other ways because of their limitless power over them. For the traditional woman who is so abused, there is little escape. Divorce is not possible unless initiated by the husband or by her male agnates. Few women can initiate a divorce for themselves. Generally, it is only with proof that the husband has failed to properly feed and clothe a woman or that his physical condition prohibits him from carrying out his sexual obligations that male agnates may initiate divorce proceedings on her behalf. Therefore, frequently the only hope a traditional woman has for getting out from under cruel, abusive treatment by her husband lies in her grown sons. She may expect resolute protection from them because her society frowns upon adult sons who do not protect their mother.

Ironically, the traditional Somali woman struggles vainly to protect the traditional Muslim culture and her family from what she considers an assault by Western and other foreign influences. That is
true because the traditional woman relies on tradition for a definition of herself. As a child she is provided no experiences which would give her a different world-view. Farah says of such a woman that as a girl she is never given a globe to illustrate nor a world to dream. She is offered broken clay pots to play with and bones to dress as dolls. She is bound leg and foot to a choice not her own. Her hand is exchanged for cash delivered. She is always somebody's property. In these modern times, she is a souvenir from another age. But hers is the only lifestyle with which she is familiar. Any lifestyle which deviates from the familiar pattern threatens her. Therefore, she strives against all odds to ensure the perpetuation of the social status quo by stifling any type of deviation from the patterns of behavior she knows and accepts. Challenges to customary and religious practices are those against which she struggles most vigorously. As a female she is ipso facto prohibited from participating in political matters. In her vigilant efforts to maintain the status quo, she will very actively oppose sons who defer to their wives in matters which traditionally are male prerogatives, for example, handling money, conducting business and buying and selling property. She will very actively oppose daughters who pursue a Western mode in their lives, such as in remaining single, choosing their own mates, using birth control pills, aborting pregnancies, divorcing husbands, eating and drinking forbidden items, and deviating from traditional child-rearing practices, especially as relates to parent-veneration, education, and circumcision. And she will stealthily oppose
wives who are accorded by their husbands equal status in their relationships. Should all else fail, she will blackmail them (especially the sons), threatening to reveal their unseemly behavior to the tribal council. Although traditional practices of Somali society militate against her, she wages a never-ending battle against the adoption of practices which would change her status because of her familiarity with the old ways and her distrust of anything new and different. The traditional Somali woman, then, represents what is now the status of most women in Somali society.

On the other hand, the transitional Somali woman reflects what is becoming the status of women in Somali society. She is the most difficult type of Somali woman to define because, as Farah portrays her, she is the embodiment of both the past and the present. She questions and even rebels against certain customary and Islamic practices in her culture, such as male supremacy, female genital mutilation and forced polygamous marriage, while she strongly adheres to other customary and Islamic practices which affect her behavior. She brings such remnants of the traditional culture as a disdain of book learning, lack of trust in modern medicine, a belief in God as a controlling force, superstitions which support the belief that special pronouncements forestall danger and overcome evil, or the avoidance of modern technology, to name a few. She has a strong desire for self-determination and has experienced some exposure to Western education either through study in the West or through study in her own country where the Western model is used. When she does travel abroad to attend
Western and Eastern colleges and universities, like her male counterpart, she returns home bringing, in addition to her degree, adopted foreign values that adversely affect her Somali culture.

The strong desire for "individual freedom" so characteristic of Western culture is copied by Somali women with deleterious results. In describing this transitional Somali woman, Farah presents several women whose lifestyles represent an almost complete break with Somali traditions. That break with the old values and the turn to newer, less familiar ones tend to lead to imbalance in the lives of these women. Instead of achieving the freedom to express their individual selves, they are exploited by their urban environment as they are set adrift without the familiar landmarks of family, marriage, and children by which to establish their bearings. Life for these so-called intellectual, single women seems to be a never-ending series of parties and boyfriends. The pseudo-sophisticated Mogadiscio youth refer to them as "party-girls." They are women with whom it is all right to party and to go to bed but not to marry. The lives of many married intellectual women do not appear to be more fulfilling than those of their single counterparts. Too often they are relegated to the position of supporting their husbands' careers, while not being allowed to pursue careers of their own despite their higher level of Western education. They are sacrificed on the altars of their husbands' pride which says that their wives cannot work. Such a course is followed at great personal cost to both the women and the country which so desperately
needs their skills. Non-intellectual, un-schooled single women also are affected adversely by urbanization. Lacking an education and a profession, some accept a subsistence existence, living in squalor in the city. Others turn to prostitution, a strictly urban phenomenon. Sadly, though, the adverse effects of urbanization and Western-style education are far-reaching in that already the lives of a second generation of young women are being shaped by these factors. Some prefer partying to studying, and others are sexually promiscuous.

That is not to say that all transitional women, intellectual or non-intellectual, suffer the same fate as those described above. Though fewer in number than those transitional women who are adversely affected by Western education and urbanization, transitional women who lead a more stable, fulfilling life are presented by Farah. They have family and other personal relationships that reinforce positive values. They are employed, often financially independent, and some continue their formal education. They reject forced polygamous marriages and demand to make their own personal choice of a mate, saying, "I don't want to be sold like cattle." They do not, however, reject marriage altogether. They insist that their marriages will be different, even believing in the possibility of "love" in marriage. Although a Western concept of romantic "love" is not generally observed in marriages in this culture, these transitional women know that the concept is not altogether foreign. Somali history reports the fascinating love story of Hodan and Elmi Bowderi. Furthermore, girls have been known to run away from their homes to marry men they loved. These transitional women do not support
idleness or laziness which leads to prostitution, but they do reject the never-ending, back-breaking labor that women are expected traditionally to perform. They will not accept "muledom." They strictly adhere to moral standards, rejecting the veil and seclusion but shunning equally the exhibitionism of European and American women.

Clearly, Farah's transitional Somali woman represents both aspects, the negative and the positive, of the changing urban Somali society. She symbolizes what is becoming the status of women in this society.

If the traditional Somali woman represents what is now the status of women in Somali society and the transitional Somali woman represents what is becoming the status of women in Somali society, then the liberated modern Somali woman, as portrayed by Farah, represents what should be the status of women in Somali society. The liberated modern Somali woman is one of a new breed of Somali women. She is educated, has an independent means of livelihood, and pursues her own interests—intellectual, social, romantic and political. Although she is independent and active, she is not given to excesses in any areas of her life. She seeks to achieve a balance in her relationships. She will not automatically abandon her family nor will she worship at the altar of their traditions. Neither does she avoid committed relationships with men. Farah's liberated woman enjoys sexual equality with liberated men. This new relationship replaces the old traditional male/female relationships which are based on the maintenance of sex roles with a
"natural," symbiotic relationship based on the skills and interests of the individual. The liberated woman enjoys meaningful relationships with other women as well as with men who are not her husband or relative. Farah never presents her as sexually promiscuous.

She challenges the social structure which supports male dominance, forced polygamous marriages and genital mutilation. She shares equally with her mate and is treated with respect by her father and brother. She is the only wife her husband has, and she refuses, under any circumstances, to allow her daughters to be circumcised. She challenges the political structure through her active participation in political organizations, and she is committed to the training of persons who will perpetuate and extend the concept of sexual equality while participating in the formation of a just Somali society. She does not support compromise in dealing with either the traditional society or the oppressive military regime. Therefore, she is willing to make whatever sacrifices she must in order to destroy the established authority which inhibits social and political growth.

Finally, Farah presents a fourth type of woman who, although not a Somali, has a significant impact on the social and political development of Somali society. She is the modern Western woman who comes to Somalia conditioned by her culture and education to seek individual fulfillment rather than the collective good. As she interacts with the Somali male, she reflects what Farah sees as the deleterious effect upon Somali society of the blind acceptance of Western values and practices.
Like their female counterparts, so-called intellectual Somali males who have travelled abroad to study in Western and Eastern colleges and universities bring, in addition to their degrees, adopted Western and Eastern values that adversely affect their Somali culture. One of these is a preference for foreign women, especially white women, as mates. These liaisons between Somali men and white women have serious social implications because they alter the traditional extended family structure through the employment of a Western mode of living; they foster a nuclear family and an insular environment which adversely affect the culture. Many of these relationships deprive the country of badly needed human resources when the couple chooses to leave the country altogether. Although the social influence of relationships between Somali men and white women is insidious and has a long-range effect, the relationships of Western women with Somali political leaders have an immediate effect at the local, the national, and the international levels. Farah indicts these men, who are among the most powerful in the country, for prostrating themselves before foreign women, especially white women. They wine, dine and date them, and allow them to actively participate in government, usually in capacities that far exceed their abilities.

Only relationships with that rare Western woman who understands the importance of family and the nature of sacrifice are acceptable to Farah. These relationships are those which instead of destroying the family, strengthen it by building strong, sturdy bridges between the
participants and their cultures.

Many rapid changes have been taking place in Somalia since its Independence in 1960 and following the Revolution in 1969. Both of these events brought about significant changes in the status of Somali men, but only the Revolution sought to bring about changes in the status of Somali women. Although legislation has been passed which mandates sweeping changes in marriage, divorce and inheritance laws, most still await full implementation. Subtle and not so subtle male opposition to changes in the status of women account for this delay. For the most part, women continue to be left out of matters of importance, even those which concern them. That is true whether they reside in the city or in the country. Farah calls for the implementation of those and other laws which are designed to change Somali practices which militate against women. He calls for change, but he does not call for the total destruction of vital, cohesive elements of the culture, such as family relations and marriage. He sounds an alarm against the blind acceptance of foreign values acquired through foreign education, urbanization and marriage which adversely affect the culture. Therefore, in his novels one hears a call for change as well as a cry for caution.

Both his call for change and his cry for caution reflect his belief in the ability of Somali society to change traditional practices which are undesirable and to unite in the struggle towards a desirable social ideal, which means being conscious of the role that women must play in such a society.
Further, there is the belief that it will be easier to effect a change in the level of sexual oppression in Africa than in more highly developed countries because, as Farah observes, at least in Africa everything is already in turmoil. He maintains that in Africa it is inevitable that there will be major change in the next fifty years or so and that it is far easier to educate people about sexual equality when other major changes are occurring already. Believing these things to be true, Farah ends all of his novels on a hopeful note: in some it is a hesitant note of renewal through new birth and improved communications; in others it is the ability of the children, properly taught, to effect change. In still others it is the conviction that sacrifice is not only required but that it is redemptive.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


**Periodicals and Informal Reports**


