PATRIARCHY AND POWER: THE POLITICAL SUSCEPTIBILITY OF ISLAM IN THE WRITING OF NURUDDIN FARAH, WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO THE POSITION OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Farah has stated that he sees women as the symbol of the subjugated self in every one of us, but to claim that Islam, in Somalia, is the fundamental reason for this subjugation is to be greatly mistaken. (1) With an insight rare among Muslim men, he understands women, their reactions, their aspirations and their fears: in the plight of Somalia's women he sees an analogy to the present plight of his country.

Through the novels of Farah, and through his unpublished play, I intend to discuss in this thesis the manner in which the ruling military dictatorship which until recently was in control of Somalia manipulated the Islamic traditions of Somalia not only to subjugate women, but to bring the entire nation under its tyranny. The position of Somali women is but one manifestation of this oppressive regime which curtails all liberty and obliterates all criticism. The General's ability to pervert Islamic truths, elevating himself to a parody of the God he purports to worship, will be compared with the teachings of the Koran in Farah's three novels which form his trilogy, Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship.

The effect of arbitrarily imposed colonial boundaries has had a devastating effect upon post-independent Somalia, creating a quest for national identity and a burning desire for a unity based on cultural and linguistic cohesion. This will be examined in Farah's last novel, Maps.
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I want nothing from my country which forgot the dialect of exiles
but my mother's handkerchief and reasons for a new death...
And the sparrows flew off to a time which will not return...
My homeland is joy in chains, my kiss was sent by mail.

Mahmoud Dalweesh

Nuruddin Farah, one of the younger African Anglophone writers, was born in 1945 in Baidoa, a town within the then Italian colony of Somalia. His origins are Arabic, his name, Nuruddin, meaning the 'Light of Religion'. Farah's formal secondary education was at Shashamanne School and at the Instituto di Magistrale di Magadishu, after which he worked briefly in the Ministry of Education in Somalia before moving, in 1966, to India where for four years he studied philosophy and literature at the Punjab University at Chandigarh. His first published material was a short novella, *Why Dead so Soon?*, which appeared in the *Somali News* in 1965. Shortly before his return to Somalia in 1970 President Shermake had been assassinated and Major-General Muhamed Siyad Barré, in a military coup, had gained control of the government, declaring himself President and setting Somalia on the road to national unity through "Scientific Socialism". For the next four years, Farah says in *Why I Write*, he "watched peoples' features, conscious of their psychological and body behaviour as fear began spreading on their faces, as though it were melting butter". Barré strengthened his regime and (contrary to Koranic
teachings) achieved his personal semi-deification. His acolytes, and soon the entire nation in self-preservation, learned to chant the praise-names of their lord, who was not their God. Any opposition to his regime was ruthlessly stamped out.

Prior to 1972 Somali had been purely an oral language which had been sometimes expressed in written form in Arabic and in Farah's youth there existed an underground Somali script, Cusmaaniyaa, of which the colonial authorities strongly disapproved, but which became a symbol of Somali nationhood among the young.\(^5\) Somali officially became a language with its own orthography in 1972; Farah wrote and published in serial form a few chapters of the first novel ever written in Somali, but Barré's censors considered the material highly seditious and publication was withdrawn. \(\text{It was not until 1984 that Faarax Cawl wrote }\text{Ignorance is the Enemy of Love, a romance, the first novel to be published in Somali}.\(^6\) Farah, however, was not the first Somali writer to publish in a foreign language. William J. F. Syad from Djibuti in the French Protectorate had published a volume of poetry written in French, Khamsine, in 1959.\(^7\) By 1974 Farah realised that the Barré regime, having virtually declared him persona non grata in his own country, would doubtless perpetrate upon him a fate similar to that suffered by so many of the characters subsequently to appear in his books; he became an exile from Somalia, leaving behind his young son, Koschin, to whom he has dedicated A Naked Needle, Sweet and Sour Milk and Sardines, and whose name he has given to the principal character of A Naked Needle, his second novel. His life was undoubtedly saved by a fortuitous telephone call made from Rome airport while en route home from an overseas conference. He was warned "to wait there": this he wisely did, not yet to return.\(^8\)
Farah is descended from a long line of Somali poets on both sides of his family (9), and he utilises the oral traditions of his country in many of his works, although in an interview with Moss he says that his awareness of literature developed more through Arabic poetry, especially One Thousand and One Arabian Nights which has had a great influence on his fiction. He is multi-lingual, being fluent in Somali, Italian, English, French, Arabic and Amharic and is very widely read, some of his sources being as disparate as The Koran, Borges, Garcia Marquez, One Thousand and One Arabian Nights, Joyce, and even the detective story genre. His first novel in English, From a Crooked Rib, was published in 1970, and although once available in Somalia is no longer so. In 1989, when being interviewed by Jaggi, he explained that his books had not been available at home for many years and that since his exile his name had also been banned, not to be mentioned in any form - written or on the radio or elsewhere in public. As he wrote in 1984 "I have not sold a single copy of my novels in Somalia in the past eight years [although] From a Crooked Rib is a prescribed text in Ethiopia as part of the African Literature course at the University of Addis Ababa". (10) Farah became an exile, in the same manner as that high priest of exiles, Joyce, and perhaps like Joyce he feels that he has never really left his country for his works are set entirely in Somalia.

The world is full of exiles; to a certain extent anyone who lives 'abroad' is exiled - from the familiar, known, continuous past - but people in Farah's position often cease to be persons in the eyes of their national establishments, many having been stripped of their nationality; this does not yet apparently apply to Farah. As Bertolt Brecht said, "What do you do when that life came to an abrupt end? You live on
your memory. That, then, is all.\textsuperscript{(11)} But for Farah it has not been all. He has used his exile and his memory to expose to the rest of the world the nightmare that Barré has created in Somalia, revealing a situation of which the West has purported to be blissfully unaware. His chosen medium for writing is English, not merely because his work can thus reach a far wider audience than if he used Somali - which in a man so multi-lingual can hardly be termed his 'native tongue' but rather the tongue of his native country - but also because he finds Somali inadequate for self-expression in coping with life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He told Jaggi that Somali lacks the ability to describe technical complexities and, while it is obviously sufficient for local experiences and for its poetry, no attempt has been made to enrich the language to enable it to transport to the outside world. He has also said that having grown up in Kallafo, a town in the Ogaden which was a peripheral province of the Ethiopian Empire, the schools were forced to adapt English-language textbooks obtained from the British colonies adjoining the Ogaden to the east and south. Ethiopian currency was in such short supply that the outer provinces resorted to British East African money, thus enabling the British to impose their linguistic will upon this region.\textsuperscript{(12)}

His first country of exile became Britain where, whilst continuing to write, he studied for two years at the Universities of London and Essex where he wrote a play, \textit{The Offering}, which he submitted to Essex as part of his M.A. Thesis. Contrary to the claims of several critics, this was not accepted in lieu of a thesis and the qualification was not awarded as he did not complete the course.\textsuperscript{(13)} During this period the British Broadcasting Corporation considered three of his plays, none of which was broadcast,\textsuperscript{(14)} although, on 24 December
1978 the BBC African Service did broadcast Farah's *A Spread of Butter* in their African Theatre programme. From 1976 he has followed the tradition of his nomadic ancestors, moving from country to country, lecturing, writing (he has until recently produced a book every two years) and continuing his assault on the dictatorship which governs Somalia. Farah's attitude to his exile from Somalia has changed with the years. In 1981 (*A View of Home from the Outside*) he said that he did not consider himself an exile, but was on extended leave from Somalia, exploring other avenues: by 1987 (*... Living in a Country of the Mind*) he had realised that although he sometimes dreamed of returning, this would still leave him spiritually exiled in a narrow parochial society that had no understanding of the experiences to which he had been exposed in the past seventeen years, a Somalia where the clan's demands would predominate over those of the nation, where he would "still be in a kind of exile in the cordons of [his] life". His situation can be contrasted with Browning or Brooke who in voluntary exile could write in love and lack of criticism of 'home'; but it bears strong resemblance to Soyinka's borrowing 'seasons of an alien land' during his flight to Germany when escaping imprisonment during the Nigerian Civil War.

Farah frequently returns to Africa, often living on the frontiers of his country; he has said that he feels comfortable in Africa and enjoys living in the Sudan for its proximity to Somalia. This desire for closeness to his home is shared by many exiles: as Brecht says, "We did not leave of our own free will, nor did we leave never to return... we are restless... forgiving nothing and forgetting nothing. The final word is yet unspoken". So, Farah writes from the other side of the fence. But what happens when he is free to return? Could he be faced
with the prospect of having removed from himself any choice of reward because he has not shared in the final struggle but has merely viewed it from the outside? Will the thought that he has missed the wonderful moment of achievement of freedom leave him with a sense of guilt? Those who remained could eventually feel that they had achieved the freedom while those who left may have lost all right to be there. I think not; his novels reveal a country ruled "with a fisted hand of iron and tyranny" (18) and his is the lone voice speaking freely on behalf of all Somalis and, perhaps incidentally, on behalf of all other Africans who endure military dictatorships. The Sam Does, Bokassas and Mobutus, or their successors, still abound.
I was fortunate in being able to live for thirteen years in Islamic countries; three of these years were spent among the Hausas of Northern Nigeria, the remainder in Arabian Gulf sheikhdoms. I learned to respect Islam and particularly the high moral code which it instils in its adherents, but I also came to realise that because Islam is an integral part of the life of its followers it has a much greater political influence than has present-day Christianity and that, in the hands of a manipulative regime, Koranic teachings can be corruptly used to suit the purposes of the current rulers.

The term Islam is derived from the Arabic salam, which means "peace" or "surrender", the full connotation being "the perfect peace that comes when one's life is surrendered to God". Islam's dogma of monotheism is the principal difference between itself and Christianity. To the Muslim, Christ, like Muhammed, is merely a prophet; he is not the son of God and there is no Trinity. This tenet of La ilaha illa Allah, there is no God but Allah, is enshrined throughout the Koran, typical statements being:

They say 'God has begotten a son'. God forbid! Self-sufficient is He. (10:68)

How should He have a son when He had no consort? (6:100)

The Messiah, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle: other apostles passed away before him. (5:75), and

Unbelievers are those that say 'God is one of three'. There is but one God. (5:70)
And, unlike the Christian Bible, whose New Testament relates the teachings of Christ as written by His disciples many years after the Crucifixion, the Koran is the direct word of God spoken to Muhammed for transmission to the people, much as the Commandments were given to Moses.

Arabic history states that prior to Muhammed Mecca had degenerated into an idolatrous state where the Ka'bah was desecrated by graven images and where the spirituality of life was ignored. Muhammed's teachings became accepted by a section of society which appreciated the need for reform: this rapidly developed into a revolutionary movement which threatened the vested interests of the ruling Meccan nobility, and Muhammed's life became endangered. He and his followers were offered permanent sanctuary in Yathrib to which they fled and it is from this year of "flight", the Hijrah, (622 AD) that the Muslim dates his calendar. Yathrib soon changed its name to Medinat un-Nabi, the City of the Prophet, which later became simply Medina. (2) The religious importance of Medina is thus paramount in Islamic culture and this importance is reflected in Farah's novel Sardines where his principal character bears the name of the sacred city.

The earthly cornerstone of Islam is the Koran and as this forbids idolatry, mosques contain no statues or paintings of human beings, their heavy ornamentation depending upon superb calligraphy in praise of God. Even in paintings of Muhammed, his face is always a featureless blank (3) and there are no statues of him, as there are of Christ in churches of most Christian denominations: to the Muslim, Christianity has deified Christ. Islam has no need for a religious intermediary; man speaks directly to God and the Koran, which contains the infallible word of God, the word which has not been
corrupted over the centuries, is the law by which, ideally, Muslims live. Islam sees the Christian Bible as having suffered in its various transmissions to the point where it is now a distortion of its original. Muslims see themselves as the People of the Book:

We have revealed the Koran in the Arabic tongue that you may understand its meaning. It is a transcript of the eternal book in Our keeping, sublime, and full of wisdom. (Koran 43:1)

Islam is not merely a religion; it encompasses a total lifestyle. The Koran is far more than purely a religious treatise; it contains the body of legal and moral laws governing Muslims. It spells out in explicit detail one's duties and responsibilities, the Islamic ethical code and the penalties which will be enacted upon the transgressor in the hereafter. Smith's statement that faith and politics, religion and society are inseparable in Islam cannot be contested. (4) As man is responsible for his own conduct, individuality is very important. Life on earth is merely an anticipation of the afterlife which follows Judgement Day, with earthly deeds dictating man's final destination - heaven or hell.

The fate of each man We have bound about his neck. On the Day of Resurrection We shall confront him with a book spread wide open, saying 'Here is your book; read it. Enough for you this day that your own soul should call you to account'. (Koran 17:10)

Although God is omnipotent, He is an individual and, therefore, man, as His creation, is an individual, answerable only to God for his actions. Given these parameters, one is forced to ponder the Islamic authenticity of men such as Farah's General and their ultimate destination in the hereafter.
Islam functions under five major pillars: The Creed, Prayer, Charity, Ramadan and Pilgrimage. The Creed states the Oneness of God, with Muhammed being His Prophet. Muslims are required to pray at five specific times a day and always facing Mecca, thus creating among themselves a universal cohesion, but also reinforcing their submission to God as the sovereign of all life. Thirdly, under Charity, the Koran decrees that the more affluent section of society shall distribute alms to those less fortunate:

Alms shall be only for the poor and the helpless, for those that are engaged in the management of alms and those whose hearts are sympathetic to the Faith, for the freeing of slaves and debtors for the advancement of God's cause, and for the traveller in need. (9:60)

Although the Koran does not set a specific tithe, Muhammed instituted a levy of one fortieth of the value of the possessions of the wealthy, (5) together with other measures such as feeding beggars, as instanced by Qumman at Soyaan's burial ceremony in Sweet and Sour Milk. Muhammed sought universal justice for all, believing that if a man is hungry and downtrodden he is unable to devote himself to the higher concerns of life such as religious thought, therefore his earthly poverty must be alleviated. Fourthly, Ramadan is the month when the Koran was revealed to Muhammed and its observance as a period of fasting from sun-up to sun-down is obligatory for Muslims: neither food nor drink must be consumed during these hours. Only travellers and the sick are permitted to break fast during Ramadan. Finally, at least once in each Muslim’s life the Haj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca should be undertaken. Farah pinpoints the importance of this journey in Qumman’s reaction to Margaritta in Sweet and Sour Milk and in
Sardines, where Idil can be 'bought off' with a promise of making the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah.

One of the major theses of Islam is its Brotherhood which ideally is a reality to the Muslim. During his final pilgrimage to Mecca shortly before his death, Muhammed told his followers "know ye that every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim, and that ye are now one brotherhood." (6) These qualities of brotherhood are explored by Farah in Yussuf and His Brothers just as the General's puissance in destroying this very plank of his religion is revealed in The Trilogy.

While it is claimed by many Muslims that Islam is the most democratic of religions, to Western eyes this is patently untrue for although women's rights are assured in the Koran these are at a lower level than man's; this may well be connected with the philosophy that woman, unlike man, is not expected to bear the full economic burden of the family. The Surah "Women" details the comparatively equitable treatment which must be meted out to women, including the proportion of inheritance due to them which is only half of what the male may inherit. But even this is a vast improvement over what pertained prior to Muhammed's era when women were regarded absolutely as the chattels of men with no legal rights, being completely at the mercy of fathers and husbands, when daughters were seen as useless and were often buried alive at birth. Throughout the Koran this slaying is condemned, just as marriage is sanctified, being decreed the sole point of the sexual act. This supposedly protects women from the prostitution and rape which may well have been prevalent in the decadent Mecca of the Prophet's lifetime, but in Sardines this sanctity is ignored by both Amina's rapists and the General in his political expediency. Nevertheless, polygyny is Koranically countenanced, but only in so far
as a man maintains equality among his plurality of wives, and this applies not only to material possessions but also to care and affection. He is limited to four wives (4:1) and is given a list of women who are prohibited to him by virtue of consanguinity, however remote (4:24): he is also forbidden to marry a woman against her will, a point which Keynaan conveniently ignores when, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, he forces Beydan to become his second wife. Interestingly, Muhammed was given sole dispensation from this limitation of both number and kinship at a time when his family contained nine wives and numerous slave-girls (33:50).

In the final Koranic analysis, however, man remains the superior being:

> Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient . . . As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. (4:34)

This may give some dubious religious authenticity to Koschin's contention in *A Naked Needle* that Somali women enjoy being beaten and would explain Ebla's note of resignation concerning woman's lot in life in *From a Crooked Rib*. Notwithstanding woman's enshrined inferiority, the Koran devotes its fourth Surah (*Nisāa*) to women, children and family relationships, and here the opening verse of the Abdullah translation from Arabic reads:

> Reverence Allah, through Whom Ye demand your mutual rights, And reverence the wombs That bore you: for Allah Ever watches over you. (7)
In Farah's Somalia it is apparent that most of the male characters pay little heed to this admonition, preferring to invoke the stanza which awards the male superiority.

The basis of the Koran is one of compassion and God's benevolence, each Surah commencing with the benediction "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate", and it is this bedrock which is the foundation of life for the truly devout Deeriye in Close Sesame, making him one of Farah's most impressive characters. However, Koranic teachings do demand complete obedience and submission, rendering Islam an ideal medium for repression of revolutionary or modernising thought. A people accustomed to complete religious obedience is less likely to rebel politically than one where questioning of religious mores has been permitted for several centuries. When Farah's General (and, in fact, Barré) attempted to introduce legislation designed to ensure complete equality of the sexes it was the Mullahs who maraboutically, but un成功的ly, opposed him. It is, as Farah points out, one thing to legislate and another to change centuries of indoctrination and custom.

The very rigidity and unchanging philosophy of Islam is, perhaps, one of its pitfalls. While its laws give a stability to the life of the believer, the parameters within which these are contained do not permit any movement to encompass changing world views. In most respects Islam is a religion still set in a mediaeval mould offering its paradigm to a twentieth century world in much of which a laissez faire mode of life has become the norm. On the other hand, this very rigidity reinforces a cohesiveness among Muslims which is internationally uniting and thus politically very important. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not turn the other cheek to its enemies but decrees
Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed.
(2:178)

A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for a wound.
(5:44)

Since Islam is an infinitely more evangelistic religion than Christianity, it could make inroads into Christian realms: many of the countries which live within the Christian philosophy appear to be suffering near social breakdown, while those which have adhered to Islam remain socially intact within its confines. This should give the Western world food for thought.

Farah writes of the plight of his nation over the past decades, but he hazards no suggestions for a future Somalia when Major-General Muhamed Siyad Barre is finally toppled. Is there a viable opposition that could fill the vacuum left by a defunct tyrant? It would appear not. Farah's novels pose questions, but do not really offer solutions. They are open-ended with the characters poised between appreciating the desperate need to combat tyranny and the realisation that this very despotism combined with Islamic tradition has them enmeshed in a travesty of stability. But it is not only the Somali political situation which Farah addresses; he also considers the relevance and importance of Islam in a society emerging from the nomadic and the manner in which his faith can be subverted to suit the demands of a totalitarian regime, where family tyranny can be utilised to underpin national tyranny, where the patriarchal figure assumes unlimited power and where the country's leader usurps the omnipotence of God in a perversion of Islam.
The events of early 1990 have shown, in Roumania, that the overthrow of repression can leave chaos in its wake if there are no institutions organised to assume authority, and eighteenth century France lived through constant turmoil from the demise of the Ancien Regime until another form of authoritarian rule was imposed by Napoleon. Farah's principal characters, also, plot to overthrow the existing hegemony but offer no ideology with which to replace it. Does Farah fear that the lumpen of Somalia will suffer the fate of the madmen at the conclusion of Weiss's Marat/Sade - the inability to avail themselves of freedom, for they know not what will replace the regime under which they have lived?

Meantime, Farah continues to write of his country and the sorrows that beset it. He considers his writing is "an alternative to the propaganda Siyad Barré's oligarchy releases to the world as the unchallengeable truth"; thus he writes of "Truth versus Untruth" for truth never turns tails like a disinterested cat; it purrs, it winks its feline eyes, it sees, it envisions; truth is the breath in the air, the breath that someone somewhere in the world will inhale, and then speak, in the end. (8)
FROM A CROOKED RIB: EBLA'S STORY

Those that disbelieve in the hereafter call the angels by the names of females.

Koran 53:24.

Farah's first novel written outside Somalia was *From a Crooked Rib* which he wrote in four weeks whilst studying in Chandigarh, although it was not published until two years later in 1970, by which time Barre had successfully carried out the military coup which ousted Shermake. Although *From a Crooked Rib* is not regarded as part of the Dictatorship Trilogy, Ebla upon whom the book is centred, appears throughout the trilogy so that we are able to watch her development until she becomes the wise mature woman, calm in her pragmatic approach to life. While *From a Crooked Rib* bears the hallmarks of an inexperienced writer, I cannot agree with Stratton that stylistically and technically it is "a most unsatisfactory piece of work". While admittedly Ebla is permitted on occasion to slip into very modern idiomatic phraseology, such as "Little whippersnapper","Out with it my boy", and "no reason to get shirty" and sometimes Farah forgets her innate simplicity, as when she soliloquises that her "emotional make-up is cooler" than her brother's, Ebla remains basically the simple girl ignorant of the ways of the world, even when she emerges as the young woman capable of philosophising about her situation and taking her life and decisions into her own hands. At first the novel does appear under-developed but we can rapidly appreciate the subtlety of Farah's writing as he views the world from the perspective of this young
nomadic Somali peasant woman, illiterate, completely unaffected but with a natural sense of how she must conduct her life to its best advantage in an Islamic society. She is one of the vehicles through whom Farah demonstrates his ability, rare in a Muslim male, to appreciate the predicament of woman trapped within the confines of the Islamic tradition, but wishing to live in independence and freedom from subservience in this male dominated society.

Few African Anglophone male writers, be they Muslim or Infidel, share Farah's ability to understand women. Some have written sympathetically about their female characters: although Ngugi's Wanja in *Petals of Blood* is a barmaid and ex-prostitute, he is compassionate in his realisation of the societal pressures that have dictated her life. Soyinka, on the other hand, when he mentions women at all uses them as a supporting cast to his principal characters, the males; the wine-girl is hand-maiden and wife to both Ogun and Sango in *Idanre*; Dehinwa and the nameless student are both used and abused in *The Interpreters*; even Iriyise, who in *Season of Anomy* may be seen as a metaphor for Nigeria, is prostituted by the cocoa cartel as a sex symbol rising through the icing of an artificial cake, reminiscent of 1930s orgies in the United States. Laing's females flit like moths around the candle of his males. Achebe has matured in his view of women; in 1966 when he wrote *A Man of the People* he saw them as figures of satire, but with *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) he has drawn closer to sharing Farah's insight; in the character of Ikem, Editor of the 'National Gazette' before his extermination at the hands of His Excellency, Achebe reveals a sympathy for the thought processes and emotions that make women function, particularly in the love-letter to Beatrice which addresses all women, and in the characters of "BB" herself and
the waif-like Elewa. Farah, however, remains unique among African writers in being fully appreciative of women as thinking positive personalities who are internationally confined and restricted in their social landscapes. As he said in "Mapping the Psyche", "I see women as the symbol of the subjugated self in everyone of us. Wherever you go in the world woman's fate is worse than man's". Although in 1975 the Supreme Military Council of Somalia, in its pursuit of Scientific Socialism, announced that women should have equal rights with men this, as Petersen says, "caused much consternation in a Muslim society where such a decree amounts to heresy". (2) Farah's attitude would certainly have been influenced by his Islamic upbringing. The Koran demands a respect for women and gives them a defined, although limited, place in society with their own decreed rights and responsibilities. This is emphasised by the fact that the fourth Koranic Surah is devoted entirely to women, and their well-being is mentioned in several other Surahs. Most of the other African writers do not have Muslim backgrounds but come from societies, originally 'pagan' and animist in beliefs, upon which Western Christian standards were superimposed by the colonial powers. These 'pagans' appear to have attached little value to the status of women and Christian teachings would have clearly reinforced this masculine power-base. The Bible sees women in the role of either subordinate or temptress, and missionary fervour, being predominantly male, could not have been expected to offer an alternative view. Despite centuries of sonnets eulogising women in the courtly love mode, the western world has made little progress in accepting them as social or political equals. Pauline philosophy has loomed large in Western religious teaching, and while it may be better to marry than to burn, the implications for
women in a society where their importance was already disregarded could only further underline their position. At least in the Muslim world women have an accepted religious basis and under the true law of Allah the Compassionate could be expected to fare better than in a 'pagan' society. It is not so much Islam which is at fault in most Muslim countries, as the convenient political interpretation of the religion. 

*From a Crooked Rib* gives little indication of how the author will develop his ability and style to the point where he can produce the sophisticated complexity of *Maps*, but it does set the framework within which Farah's future writings will appear. The basis of all his works is an analysis of contemporary Somali institutions, be they religious, political, marital or filial. He attacks the authoritarianism of both government and family and while seeking equality in all relationships he deprecates the particular situation that exists between the family patriarch and his children on the one hand, and his wife on the other. In Ebla's story, however, the politics are entirely domestic: it is not until Farah embarks upon the Dictatorship Trilogy that he extends his criticism to the wider national level. This is understandable as in 1968, when *From a Crooked Rib* was written, Somalia was still governed by Shermake and functioned, albeit erratically and inefficiently, under the constitution which the two former colonising powers had promulgated in 1960; thus the young Ebla is living in a period prior to the military coup of Barré. It is an interesting coincidence that the book was written at a time when feminism was emerging as a force in Europe and North America, although whether Farah was conscious of this movement is debatable. For future students of African sociology, it will also be interesting to see if the International Conference held in Nairobi at the
end of the Decade of Woman in 1986 will have had any effect upon the lives of women in Africa or will be reflected in the literature.

It is doubtful if Farah intended Ebla to be the vanguard of his trilogy characters and her story is more likely to have been conceived as a "one-off" novel, but she does reappear briefly in *Naked Needle* (86) as the "owner of the shop" who has a daughter - who will later become Sagal in *Sardines*, where both mother and daughter figure prominently. Farah has said that he prefers writing a sequence of novels as he enjoys watching the development of his characters and events unfold, and thus he weaves into *A Naked Needle* (90) an introduction to Margaritta who is to be the mother of Soyaan's child in *Sweet and Sour Milk*. He also makes reference to Samater and Idil as "the son... whose mother bakes maize-cakes on contract" (95). We will know mother and son intimately in *Sardines*. One feels that Ebla was too interesting a character to fade into oblivion and that having once created her, she became a personality whom Farah saw as having the ability to develop and overcome the position into which the patriarchal system has thrust Islamic women. She can be seen as the antithesis of Beydan, who in *Sweet and Sour Milk* is abused by men and the system to the point of annihilation. Ebla's naturally independent nature, coupled with a strong sense of her own individuality, ensures that she will survive; she must work within the system and take whatever small means are available to her as a woman, but she and Sagal are among the ultimate emergents. This confidence to venture may appear incongruous in an illiterate nomadic peasant, but as Farah reminds us in "A Combining of Gifts", Somali nomadic hamlets are physically separated by great distances, the herders developed a sense of individualism and self-reliance, the children at a very early age being
given responsibility for the animals, the girls, the goats and the boys, the all-important camels. This is one of the many complaints which the young Ebla levels at her society: she sees the allotment of tasks as reflecting the lower status of women, males costing "twice as much as two women in terms of blood-compensation" and she loathes the discrimination between the sexes (FCR 13). Arabs feast in celebration of three occasions - the birth of a son, the arrival of a new camel and the foaling of a fine mare, but not the birth of a daughter. (4) This is regarded as unimportant, yet herein lies a contradiction as, to the nomadic society, a woman is not considered as contributing to the family of her birth but as belonging to the family into which she marries; however, since camels and horses are the bride-price paid by her suitor to the woman's birth-family she does, in fact, contribute largely to its wealth, although this contribution is not acknowledged. (5) Ebla knows that God created Woman from a man's crooked rib, but as she tries to straighten her own life, she comes to realise that it is not woman alone who is bent, but also the world around her. This legend of woman's creation, although Biblical, is not Koranic: the Koran may be interpreted (and is usually accepted) as meaning that woman was created from man's person or soul, not his physical body.

Many critics have seen Ebla as the embodiment of Somalia, the country as repressed by its patriarchal government which rules in a parody of Islam as its symbolic women are repressed by their males whose authoritarianism parodies the Koranic teachings, but given the date of the novel Stratton has suggested that in Ebla is an allegory for Somalia on the eve of independence. (6) Somalia is about to emerge from a state of total subjugation by colonial rule - can she achieve it? Can Ebla achieve her independence? The Horn of Africa has been the
plaything of Westernised powers for many years, to be bought, sold, 
exploited, "used" for the preferment of foreign governments as they saw 
fit. So, too, is Ebla used by men, by the social structure of her family 
and by the contortion of Islamic teaching. As she emerges from her 
chrysalis she can also be seen as symbolic of the emancipation not 
only of Somali women but of all women escaping a male-dominated 
world, a world where Farah sees them as a wasted half of the race 
whose subjugation must be lifted before social and economic change 
can be achieved, particularly in Africa. Farah has said that Somalia 
is seen by its people as the poetic motherland, soft and enfolding, in 
contrast with the Sudan which, like Germany, is distinctly the male 
fatherland. This view could well be a contributing reason to the 
apparent ease with which the people were later to be enthralled by the 
military dictatorship.

This poetic view of the motherland is reflected in the text of From a 
Crooked Rib which, in turn, reflects Ebla's view of the world. The 
sentences are short and uncomplicated, producing a rhythmic effect 
tantamount to the oral poetry which must have been a background to 
Farah's youth. This in no way detracts from the writing, as Stratton 
claims; rather it is enhanced, emphasising Ebla's upbringing and her 
limited view of the world. She has never seen a white man but places 
God's curse on him; she asks if "the Police" is the name of a tribe (FCR 
66). There is an earthiness about Ebla's attitude to life as she 
scratches the dirt from her navel, then scratches her 'treasure', "my only 
treasure, my bank, my money, my existence" (FCR 160). Stratton 
regards Farah's insistence upon such detail as "unsavory", contending 
that it lodges in the reader's imagination "to putrify there". I prefer to 
think that the unsophisticated Ebla, growing up in a landscape where
water was a privilege, not a god-given right, would have accepted a little dirt as a normal part of living. Koschin, the educated 'been-to' of A Naked Needle is a far more unsavory character whose standards of personal hygiene would render him unapproachable, and he has not the excuse of ignorance.

We first meet Ebla at the moment when she is planning to abscond from the Jes, or community, into which she was born. She has been bride-promised to old Giumaleh, a contemporary of her own dead father, and a man she dislikes. Her grandfather has exchanged her for camels. She decides to escape, "to break the ropes society had wrapped around her and to be free and be herself", to "go away from the duty of women" (FCR 12-13), but how and to where? She well understands the constraints within which she can operate. As a single girl she is vulnerable to the whims of any male in her family. Marriage will give her escape and at least partial stability, a form of social security, with room for movement within the confines of enclosure imposed by Islam and patriarchy, but she decides it must be a marriage of her own choosing, one into which she is not sold as a chattel. She secretly leaves the hamlet before dawn and joins a passing caravan as it moves towards the nearest town: this is her first experience of any place larger than her own cluster of huts. She makes her way to the house of a distant cousin whose wife is entering childbirth and she becomes their servant.

Farah is careful to emphasise Ebla's naïvety as she encounters the enigmas of an urban life, and in so doing he presents her as a wholly believable character. To a girl who has always slept on a mat placed on a dirt floor, a spring bed and mattress are things to be approached with caution. A car or a plane are unknown where the only
means of transport is the camel or donkey, and a radio is a thing of mystery to the person who has communicated only orally on a face to face basis. Even her first encounter with an Arab woman wearing purdah fills her with a terror that she has met a ghost. Yet she intelligently rationalises all of these fears and, not wishing to expose her ignorance to others, hopes that "she will learn about them at a later date . . . and do whatever the townspeople did" (FCR 53). She ceases to worry, for she knows that she must make of life whatever she can from wherever she is. Although her pastoral background makes her more comfortable with cattle than with humanity, her native intelligence tells her that she has only herself to rely on, and this becomes her philosophy for the rest of her life. I agree with Wright who considers that through Ebla, Farah gives us "a glimpse of an oral culture in something more akin to a pristine healthy state prior to its perversion by the General". (10) She unwittingly brings into an urban landscape polluted by corruption and duplicity a consciousness of the closeness to nature and simplicity of the pastoral life, as when she measures the length of time her husband will be absent in Italy as "180 milking-instances" (FCR 116).

The cousin, who is involved in smuggling, uses Ebla as a courier, but on this occasion he and his conspirators are caught. The fine, or bribe, must be paid, so he sells one of the family cows; he also sells Ebla to a broker for a sum sufficient to pay the fine of one thousand shillings and leave a little profit to himself. Once more Ebla is a pawn in the hands of men, this time sold to a man sick with tuberculosis. She realises that women are sold like cattle, with as little thought for their welfare. The neighbouring widow reminds her:
But that is what we women are - just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband . . . . What is the difference between a cow and yourself now? (FCR 80)

Again she is confronted with a choice - to marry a man she does not know and to whom she has been sold, or to escape, but for a woman the only escape outside of marriage is prostitution, and that she eschews.

She knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shop-keeper what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing. (FCR 84)

Suddenly she is offered a third choice. Escape can encompass marriage to the widow's nephew, Awill. She knows that love is out of the question and that enslavement is woman's lot in marriage, but at least this will give her the status of a married woman, with the opportunity to beget children of her own blood and stock. She elopes with Awill, thus dishonouring her cousin and incurring for him an economical loss. He has lost her bride-price and she will receive no bride wealth, thus lowering her own status. Awill's major reason for marriage is his wish to have at his disposal a permanent sexual partner rather than putting himself at the dubious mercy of prostitutes who demand payment in advance of an act that may not be consummated. Ebla is physically attractive, available and therefore will suffice. He demands his conjugal rights on their wedding eve. She fears that he may not legalise the union if he invades her virginity before the sheikhly ceremony, but he overcomes these fears by physically beating her into submission. She withstands this violence in lip-biting silence, for has not the Koran said that "Good women are obedient"? (4:34)
The agony of the first sexual experience of a woman who has been circumcised terrifies her, leaving her empty and exhausted and she realises how much she owes to her mother and grandmother who had experienced the same brutality; she no longer feels any guilt at deserting her grandfather, for he too was a male who had inflicted this torture on his wife. She recalls the searing inhumanity of her own infibulation when she was eight years old, and knows that the making and the breaking of the seal will be the two most agonising periods of her life.

While male circumcision dates back to the early Egyptians and Arabs and in many countries has great religious significance, female infibulation appears to be purely a male-instigated custom, ensuring the premarital chastity of the female. Farah has stated several times that he considers female circumcision to be barbaric and he obviously shares the agonies of his women characters as they contemplate it. One of the central themes of Sardines is Medina's anguish in protecting her beloved Ubax from the termagant Idil who threatens forcibly to circumcise the child. Although the Koran enjoins women to be chaste and modest, it does not mention infibulation, neither does it speak of being facially veiled and wearing the aba, merely stating that women should "guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them" and "cover their adornments... draw their veils over their bosoms and not reveal their finery" (Koran 4:34, 24:30). Somali women traditionally do not wear the aba or the full face veil, which would explain Ebla's consternation at meeting the black-garbed Arab woman. Saudi Arabia, as the religious centre of Islam, insists that its women wear both aba and veil when outside the home once puberty is reached, and most women from the Arabian Gulf States follow this
convention, although among the younger generation there is nowadays some resistance. Somalia, like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, is predominantly Sunni Muslim, but has not adopted the veiled tradition. Since the rise of Fundamentalist Islam, however, this tradition appears to have become more widely spread throughout the Muslim world, particularly in those countries such as Iran, where the Shi‘a sect predominates, and Iraq. Originally, the object of the veil and purdah was not to restrict the liberty of women but to protect them from harm and molestation under the conditions then existing in Medina. The garb was regarded as a badge of honour or distinction among the Prophet’s followers, differentiating them from slaves and women of ill fame. (13)

Prophet, enjoin your wives, your daughters, and the wives of true believers to draw their veils close round them. That is more proper, so that they may be recognised and not molested. (Koran 33.57)

Awill is proud of his two-hour masculinity in breaking into Ebla, and while he validates his right to the destruction of her chastity and rejoices at her bleeding for his manhood depends upon it, he is not prepared to destroy his life for a woman, even his wife, when he is offered the opportunity to return to Italy for three months. Moore rightly points out that Awill is typical of his society in that he makes no attempt to explain the reason for his trip or to discuss it with his wife, thus leaving her in a state of some confusion. (14) To Ebla he appears as a bad example of the male sex, intent only on satisfying his animal instincts of procreation, with little thought for her, but, realising his need for her sexuality, the one thing for which he could not pay, she comes to understand her indispensability. "I am a woman. And I am indispensable to man" (FCR 106). As Wright says, she is stating "the
case for the equality, complementarity and mutual dependence of the sexes". (15) Nevertheless, while acknowledging the inequities of her situation in marriage, she is delighted to think of herself as a wife, having thus escaped the stigma of spinsterhood, and "it really did not matter whose wife, because it all came to one thing" (FCR 108).

On accidentally finding a photograph of Awill embracing an Italian girl, Ebla accepts that her husband will be unfaithful, but determines to challenge his right with her own version of polyandry, justifying her second marriage by what she considers to be his lack of fidelity. In this she is abetted by their landlady, Asha, who is little more than a procuress, but who is at the same time an excellent role model of how independence can be achieved through personal financial security. Okonkwo rightly sees Asha as a "confident and stable matron who has fought her way to survival in the modern, urban, dog-eat-dog environment", showing the potential of individual female achievement, a model which Ebla is to emulate in later life. (16) Meanwhile, she remains singularly guileless, seeing the Tiffo episode as a way of creating her own equality in the male world while at the same time abrogating any personal responsibility for her actions. It is God's will that her life should follow this course, for the Koran has stated:

You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You please; You exalt whomever you will and abase whomever you please. In your hand lies all that is good; You have power over all things. (3:26)

Thus it is God's responsibility, not hers. "It is according to His will, and the fate that He has ascribed to me that things should go this way" (FCR 131). This attitude enables her to continue to despise harlots while pragmatically accepting the money which Tiffo unobtrusively
Leaves her on each visit; she has become his second and secret wife through the sheikhly ceremony they have undergone, a fact completely unknown to wife number one. It is during her adventures as Tiffo's 'wife' that her life develops a highly farcical perspective where, despite her protestations to the contrary, she is treated more as a prostitute than a legally married woman, culminating in the denouement of Ardo's arrival with her trio of co-viragos, and Tiffo's reduction to the status of a mouse. Ebla's declaration to Tiffo that she has two husbands, one by day and one by night, is directly inspired by One Thousand and One Arabian Nights where Shahrazad on the one hundred and ninety-seventh night tells Shahryar "The Tale of the Leg of Mutton" and the two men who unknowingly share one wife, Raiya. Unlike Shahrazad, Ebla is not risking her head, but like the Queen she chooses this moment to offer defiance. Ebla claims equality. The response is utterly predictable, - "We are not equal. You are a woman and you are inferior to me. If you have another husband, you are a harlot... You are divorced" (FCR 145), - and Ebla is thus released from a predicament. This instant in the novel also alludes to the Somali poem "The Four Wise Counsellors", transcribed by Laurence, where the acceptance of complete power on the part of the ruler, or patriarch, is inarguable. Although she has defied one man, she realises that she is the ultimate victim:

I am a woman and for a woman there are many limitations. For one thing, Awill could marry another woman and bring her home, and I would not be able to say another word... Our religion is very strict towards women in this respect. The concessions given to men are far too great. (FCR 152, 154)
She is even prepared to defer to her much younger brother, simply because he is male and must therefore be wiser than she, until she suddenly appreciates the leap in sophistication she has achieved by entering town life, but more importantly by achieving the status of marriage. With each moment of self-assertion she is becoming more powerful; like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, she is learning to gain sovereignty.

*From a Crooked Rib* clearly demonstrates Farah's use of literary intertextuality. Like Joyce's Molly Bloom, Ebla lies in bed and allows her life to float before her eyes as she reviews her brief existence. While Molly muses on her love of nature, flowers and fine cattle, primroses and violets, so does Ebla love rain, spring, animals and life itself. While Molly considers her Catholic saints, Ebla invokes her Islamic Almighty God who has fixed the status of human beings. Both women dreamingly review their early lives and their families, and each, within the parameters of her own experience, soliloquises on the manipulative power of her sexuality. While Molly fully understands and is complacent in her power-base, Ebla's philosophising is far more mercurial as she blames herself, Fate, Awill and finally God, on whose slate everyone's fate is written. "We ordain life and death" (Koran 15:19)

Let the people of the Book know that they have no control over the grace of God; that grace is in His hands alone, and that He vouchsafes it to whom He will. God's grace is infinite. (Koran 57:29)

So the skeikhs pour water over the Koranic writing on the slate and Ebla drinks the resulting liquid, in effect consuming her own fate, a fate which she knows is pre-ordained for
On the face of the moon there is a big tree, and each leaf on that tree represents an individual. One dies when one's leaf falls off the tree on the moon. \textit{(FCR 154)}

Here, again, the background is \textit{One thousand and One Arabian Nights}, where Sidi Ahmad, who is "The Man with Three Wives", waits breathlessly for the jinni to grant him the boon of the Chinese Princess, while "a handful of minutes fell like leaves from the tree of Time", and Shahrazad saw the dawn of the seven hundred and seventy-seventh day.

While Ebla accepts the overwhelming part which destiny plays, she is still determined to retain as much control as possible over her life, but she finds that for a woman this is not easy and she is forced to compromise. It is not until she is widowed from her third marriage, when she is left financially secure, that she is able fully to gain control of her own life and activities and to give Sagal the opportunities which she herself has missed. However, since it is unlikely that the young Ebla was originally seen as an ongoing character to be further explored in the Dictatorship Trilogy, we must accept her reunion with Awill at face value. The ending is typical of Farah's ability to leave us guessing: Ebla is pregnant, Awill has come to realise that she is more than just a pastime and is a woman he does not wish to lose, and in his absence she has learned a modicum of self-assurance. While she may be willing to attempt personally to straighten out the crooked rib of her existence, she warns him that "If anyone [else] tries to straighten it, he will have to break it" \textit{(FCR 179)}. \textsuperscript{(17)} They wisely leave their confessions and unburdenings until "tomorrow", and in the present of their sexual mutuality, by tomorrow these will have faded into a past which may never be revealed.
A NAKED NEEDLE

Do not hold onto your marriages with unbelieving women.

(Koran 60:10)

A Naked Needle is Farah's attempt to move from the pastoral life of Ebla, his nomadic peasant girl, to the pseudo-sophistication of urban life as experienced by Koschin, an educated teacher who chooses to live in virtual squalor in a brothel. He has an egotistical view of his own capabilities and is largely disillusioned by the manner in which the Scientific Socialist programme of the General has developed. Like Medina in Sardines, Koschin is not a compliant character, but unlike her he lacks the money and social status which would enable him to be an overt critic of the regime. While acknowledging the need for a change of government from the corrupt and inefficient administration of the 1960s, he is highly critical of the continued influence of the tribal system with its incestuous favours and resulting nepotism and obliquity, echoing sentiments which Farah himself has firmly expressed. (1)

Despite the authorial disclaimer of "No real characters where none is intended, No true incidents where none is mentioned", there is a very real possibility that one could confuse the character of Koschin with that of Farah at this period, for Farah has said that

those days were noisy as violent tides; and the nights were filled with frightened whispers of people listening for the footsteps of the NSS men who were sure to come at dawn to arrest them . . . Mine was a mind in great disorder.(2)
Much of this disorder is revealed in the character of Koschin, who alternately loves his country and despises many of its current characteristics. It could equally be argued that the entire work is purely a vehicle for the expression of Farah's personal political attitudes: in fact, although A Naked Needle was accepted for publication in January 1973, it was not released until 1976 as Farah's publishers feared for his safety while he remained in Somalia. He left for Britain in 1974 and his life was undoubtedly saved by a chance phone call made from Rome airport when en route home in July 1976 he rang a friend asking to be met at Mogadiscio. He was warned not to return as A Naked Needle had received a hostile reception from the Somali regime and his life was in danger. (3) He has never returned. Today he sees his country as "terribly bad theatre being enacted on a stage where curtains do not rise" but where the scenario is terror and nightmare. (4)

A Naked Needle is told entirely in the present tense, as though this period of time in Somalia's history may be an aberration from its nomadic past and its possible ultimate development, a hiatus where continuity and completion are absent. This is reflected both in the fragile state of the relationship which exists between Nancy and Koschin, whom she is determined to marry, and the tenuous grasp which he appears to have on reality. He is a young man who wavers on the brink of a mental breakdown. The novel is obviously that of a youthful writer not yet arrived at his peak and still attempting to find his literary direction. Like Koschin's life, the story lacks cohesion and shows considerable confusion: several of the characters are insubstantial, notably Nancy, which may be why Farah does not permit her to become a force in his subsequent novels. On the other hand,
Ladan from *Sweet and Sour Milk* also does not move through the Trilogy and she possesses a tangible reality. *A Naked Needle* can perhaps best be regarded as the product of a young author making his first overtures into the arena of political writing, a forerunner to his Trilogy of an African Dictator. The novel is primarily a sociological study of Somalia, and particularly of Mogadiscio, in the early 1970s: it appears to be the "odd man out" in Farah's work, perhaps an experiment in writing. I have, therefore, treated the book lightly as it is not essentially germane to the parameters of this thesis.

Farah has given Koschin free rein to state a view on two particular matters in *A Naked Needle*. The first of these concerns women in general but more particularly the women involved in racially mixed marriages, and the second is his opinion of political developments within his country. To achieve this Farah has isolated 'Movement 5', so that it concentrates exclusively on the 'guided tour' of modern Mogadiscio on which he escorts Nancy. As he takes her arm to "discover the calamity . . . the eternity of this city that has a divinity of its own kind" (*NN* 90) - doubtless the General - we are shown a city presenting the incongruity of a fine central boulevard flanked by expensive but unaesthetic concrete monoliths, but a boulevard that has manhole covers missing and sidewalks that suddenly disintegrate into acres of nigh impassable sandy rubble; behind the facade, and glimpsed occasionally through noisome interconnecting alleyways, are hovels, slums and open drains. In the name of modernisation the government has moved on the shanty dwellers, making them homeless in the process, moved them "out of sight, out of the curious eyes of tourists who never miss a thing to nibble at", where piped water is available only "in the blessed areas", where prostitution and venereal
disease are at one's doorstep and "little milk-teethed tarts" are sold for a packet of cigarettes (NN 94,97), and where the only street-cleaning is that done by women as the hems of their dresses sweep through the dust. While Koschin displays some admiration for the achievements of the Revolution, even this is guarded and sardonic: he sees all the iniquities and maladministration under which Somalia labours. Although admiring the People's Hall, he deprecates the fact that it is being built not only with Italian aid but with Italian workmen while Somalis remain unemployed and unskilled, and he knows that it would serve the community more usefully if it were offered as accommodation to the National University. The schools lack laboratories and are staffed by poorly trained teachers: there are abundant pharmacies, cafes and cinemas but a dearth of bookshops since books are among the most expensive and heavily taxed commodities, placing them out of reach of a community whose "truth" can thus be forged by authority. Meanwhile, the profits of the many flourishing businesses which belong to the Roman Catholic Mission remain untaxed, even subsidised, "because one must never bite off God's extended fingers - even though that God is Catholic-minded"; and the Italians retain social distinction and superiority (NN 109). Although the natives live on the periphery of starvation and failed monsoons kill their cattle, Koschin remains proud of his Revolutionary Government when it refuses to "prostrate before the Big Bulls, like Britain, and beg" (NN 112). He sees the metaphor of the Brazilian native watching the "ball suspended from the skies" - the bola which entraps the animal's legs just as his own are trapped in poverty by the Gringos - as applying equally to Somalia (NN 98). Nevertheless, he admits that his "Country of Curiosity", still moving at the speed of the donkey-men, is a society that is basically sick because
it views itself as more handsome, more diligent, more intelligent than other people, while others more realistically see the Somali as "the Irish of Africa", proud, fanatical and poor - "Somalis cannot tolerate the pain, but want heaven on earth without toil" (NN 4). He shows Nancy a state of confusion: the Revolution has been betrayed from its original goals of national unity through "Scientific Socialism" which aimed at eradicating the divisive forces of tribalism and which, only three years after the bloodless coup that gave it power, is showing signs of a breakdown of the high ideals which the General rhetorically espoused when he came to power. The people had welcomed the revolution with high expectations of a rapid unification of the various segments of Somalia, but this dream has faded, as has the anticipation that the country would be transformed into a completely modern society. To the educated Koschin the freedom of a nation is "common property"

which a dozen men of whatever persuasion should not do away with at their own discretion. Loyalty to the Revolution is a necessity in order that unification of the different sectors of this society be made a reality. (NN 16)

But Somalia "has lent her stick to somebody from whom she cannot recover it" and, although Koschin pretends to deny it, the country has been taken by the General entirely into the Russian Reserve. The state has become a typical repressive totalitarian regime with a police force infamous for its brutality and a National Security Guard that has been carefully tutored by the KGB. It has learned its lessons well and understands the power of pain and fear as a means of silencing criticism. But no matter how iconoclastically Koschin views the founders of the Revolution, for one thing he reveres them - the introduction of a Somali script:
I worship them for this ... even if they have committed several
crimes that they thought were minor ... 21 October 1972 is the
most important day in the Somali peoples' history. (NN 120)

It is interesting to compare Koschin's account of Mogadiscio with
Deeriye's views of that city in Close Sesame. While the younger man
tends to view only the physical conditions affecting the city, old Deeriye
sees the deeper social and psychological problems which beset it,
seeing it as a "violent city in which only the strong among the young are
able to survive ... no city for the elderly or the very small [who] run the
risk of being mugged or pushed aside like an inconvenient idea" (CS
82).

Farah's method of using a detailed walk through his capital city to
illustrate the conflict and corruption that infects his country has also
been utilised by Kojo Laing whose Search Sweet Country takes us
through the shambles of Accra, that cauldron of tradition and modernity
that has yet to settle, but Farah appears to be less successful in giving
his reader a feeling for the underlying cross-currents that make up a
real city. The town to which Nancy is introduced could have been
taken directly from a travel brochure with the guide offering his
personal opinions en route. This shallowness may well be caused by
Farah's having isolated Mogadiscio into one discrete "Movement"
which contains most, although not all, of the political comment while the
earlier and later parts of the novel deal more closely with social issues
and the position of women, particularly white women juxtaposed with
Somalis. Equally it may be the result of the detachment which
Koschin feels towards life; he is "the needle that stitches the clothes of
people [but] remains naked itself", one of life's disaffected, those who
remain removed and observe.
Koschin's relationship with Nancy borders on the chimerical. After what, at best, could be termed his indeterminate acceptance of her proposal of marriage followed by a two-year separation, a resolute Nancy arrives determined that she will stay and live with Koschin, come what may. This determination may be the result of her having reached thirtyish without achieving marriage, or it may simply be that she has run out of lovers (Farah leaves the decision to us), for on both occasions when she had accidentally met Koschin in London pubs she had been "stood up", and she appears to have an unfortunate predilection for losing her lovers to death. Koschin says that he has come to associate her with death: not only do her lovers die but while he knew her in England two of his lovers became pregnant, one to take her own life and the other to abort the child; at least Koschin financed the abortion, although he seems unsure that it occurred. Nancy constantly dresses in black and to Koschin even her name is symbolic - Stonegrave. Will she see him to his stony grave? During their separation Koschin has not forgotten Nancy but he has imbued her with a Gothic unreality, making her the woman who chants mediaeval hymns and clutches an historic crucifix as he makes love to her, a woman who always sleeps clasping to her bosom a small tin box which is a relic of her dead father. While these recollections are almost certainly too fanciful to be true, they do act as a safety net which could provide him with an excuse for dropping out of her life before he has to make the total commitment. Koschin lives in a world of contradictions where reality is confounded by wildly salacious imaginings which he constructs as a barrier to facing his own inconsistencies. In him there are signs of mental instability which make it no surprise to learn in Sardines that the regime has taken advantage of his complexities and
placed him in an institution. While he is a flawed character who looks at society with a cynical and bitter eye, he has retained certain ideals of human behaviour which he demonstrates in his disgust at his school principal’s seduction of a female student. He shares some of the disillusion of Baako in Armah’s *Fragments* just as he shares certain characteristics with Soyinka’s Sekoni in *The Interpreters* (his favourite novel), both of whom are iconoclasts who disparage the attitudes of the educational hierarchy in their individual academic institutions.

Koschin, however, is a distinctly unsavoury character who lives in the squalor of a brothel and who wears his underwear continuously until it can only be jettisoned in the sea. His personal putrescence can be viewed as a metaphor for the sordidness prevailing in his country where political corruption is equalled by social filth. He describes the lavatory in his rooming house:

> He pushes further the toilet door that is half open and the stench of the collected refuse of many a person who has stayed in the house, the refuse of the rightful tenants as well as the unrightful, hits him in the face... I hit those that don't hit back, squalor seems to say. A very badly ventilated cubicle, roughly cemented with four hangers nailed to the four corners of the walls, not to mention the no-longer usable chewing-sticks all over the floor. Cockroaches appear to be very much at home, they stream in and out of the general pit. Someone has missed the target by a few centimetres and has painted a Picasso-Modernissimo on the edges. Some people can never notice holes. (NN 11-12)

Or is it that he uses his nomadic background as an excuse for his personal dirt? “By birth, I am a nomad, Nancy, didn't you know?” (NN 19). Does his heritage really affect his ability to be clean and to cope with urban life? Rather, I believe, it is his slackening grip on reality which creates his present unwholesome lifestyle.
Farah has said of *A Naked Needle* that it

...is about a man who I think is confused and he finds himself in an ideologically confused country - a man who has no priorities whatsoever apart from the primary essence of day to day survival, a man whose only function is to think. But since he lives in squalor and in an ideologically confused society, he becomes inarticulate. He is also full of hate, not only towards himself but towards women - towards everybody else.\(^5\)

In his indecisiveness, Koschin fails to use the reply-coupon which Nancy has provided with her cable "if [his] answer is only in the negative" (*NN 18*), an opportunity which she offers him if he wishes to withdraw from their loose arrangement, but equally he cannot raise the determination to meet her at the airport and their reunion takes place at the flat of Mohamed and Barbara, one of Somalia's several mixed marriages.

Koschin sees the influence of "imported" wives upon the lives of his own women as being wholly bad. He believes that Somali women should be "serviles in society" and that "they like it that way, being Somalis", but the modern young woman does not conform to his views of her role and he blames much of this on the attitude of the foreign brides who, Okonwo claims, flaunt their sexual and political liberation in a casual manner.\(^6\) Barbara is an example of this complete failure to understand or to recognise Islamic conventions when she turns to Barre for sexual satisfaction within a month of the birth of her daughter and during the brief absence of Mohamed. Koschin commences a diatribe aimed at Barbara:

I think you white women should keep your narcissus-mirror to yourselves, keep it up your sleeves, so that you don't become dead flowers withered before your time. (*NN 68*)
Perhaps fortunately, he is prevented from continuing, but the arrival of Nancy forces him to consider a possible future with her as a permanent fixture in his life. As usual, he is unable to make the necessary decision, just as he is unable to accept that some mixed marriages can be successful. In his determination to see only flaws in the union of Mohamed and Barbara he refuses to acknowledge that they are deeply in love and that they are happy together, although this has been achieved by Mohamed’s shift towards western sophistication rather than by any movement towards Somali traditions which Barbara could have made. She has learned nothing of the language of her husband, despite having been married for some time, and at least one episode of infidelity has been recorded. In Close Sesame Farah introduces Natasha, the American Jewish wife of Mursal; despite being a polyglot, she speaks only halting Somali but she has gone out of her way to help her aged father-in-law. This is a marriage of two highly intelligent educated people, deeply in love, but again it is the husband who has moved further towards Western concepts and culture than the woman has been able to move towards an acceptance of Somali philosophies. Could Koschin make such a genuine transition to Western culture? If the union is to have a hope of success he may well have to do so as it seems unlikely that the devoutly Catholic Nancy will move from the confinement of her particular upbringing. Meantime, he remains ambivalent towards her, using her as a Somali woman would be used, expecting her to fend for herself in city traffic and abandoning her at a strange party, yet at the same time expecting her to finance him. "I'm broke... But, there, take it easy. Western aid to poor Africa in terms of a taxi fare, amen!" (NN 121).
At least, thus far, Koschin's relationship with Nancy has been based on honesty. He has never told her that he loves her, but had said that he "didn't mind marrying her if she insisted" (NN 39), thus leaving it to her to make all the moves in the association. He gave her no illusions as to his wealth or social status and had even followed the Somali prerogative of beating her, "having grown up in an environment where violence between husband and wife was an everyday affair" (NN 66): he knows of her previous love affairs and of her religious propensities. The basis of their liaison has thus more veracity than that of the second racially mixed marriage which Koschin knows intimately.

Barre met his American Mildred, a barmaid in an eatinghouse in Minnesota, and elevated her to the status of his personal deity, but their relationship had been based on lies; on his part that he had wealth and that Somalia would welcome his bride, and on her part virtual blackmail to legitimise a proclaimed seduction. The marriage has proven disastrous with Mildred, in a form of rebellion and self-defence, publicly adopting the role which had been her private life in the States - that of whore. Barre continues to love her and to beat her, and to see no way of correction or extrication from their union. Koschin regards these two marriages askance, understanding neither and preferring "whoring to marrying" (NN 32), and yet among the more affluent of modern Islamic marriages is there so much difference? Xaali, whose conservative banker husband "will not allow the liberated-laureatessa to take up employment since ... women's job is home", enjoys an occasional adulterous sexual encounter. "Wages of jealousy lie in infidelity" she claims (NN 141). Koschin views with repulsion the Russian wife whom Mahad has acquired during his medical training in Moscow and wonders why in the name of heaven "people don't have the slightest
sense of securing themselves good-looking women since they must marry these oddity" [sic] (NN 167) yet, despite his disapproval of mixed marriages, the coarse flesh, thick fingers and peasant inheritance of this woman arouse in him a desire to find Nancy, although he still remains uncertain as to exactly what his attitude towards her shall be. He owes her something as a result of his promise, but cannot bring himself to decide how far his commitment shall go, although several times during the evening he has announced that she is his "intended". His fundamental philosophy has not changed and intellectually he still wonders,

what are we after, the so-called intelligentsia of this country, running like Paris after those foreign women, sluts of a kind, in their own countries, despised here in ours... Why are we unsatisfied with our own? (NN 42)

But Nancy is beginning to fill a vacuum in his life, not that he is accepting her with affection, but rather with a fatalism consistent with Islam, "All is in the hands of God" (Koran 3:153). Although he is non-practising and deprecates the manner with which religion thrives upon fear, he remains fundamentally a Muslim (NN 102).

Only a little younger than the bearded Daud, he has not so far found himself a Somali woman to his lasting taste, whereas Daud, already once widowed, is finding consolation in the arms of Halima, the daughter of Ebla's brief second husband, that Tiffo who was as clandestine in his "marriage" as in selling his country's military secrets to the Ethiopian enemy, and ultimately as unsuccessful. But is the acquisition of a foreign wife of one's choosing worse than the arranged situation in which the liberated Westernised Warsan finds herself tied to Culusso, that "detestable man", or the sins of the "promoter of polygamy" who has married over a hundred women and from whom no
spinster, divorcee or widow is safe from abduction? The difference is that these are functioning within the traditional Islamic system whereas racially mixed marriages involve the introduction of a non-believer whose values and culture make it almost impossible for her to be subsumed by Somalia and Islam. Whether Nancy can cross this gulf remains a matter of conjecture; among other things, she must learn that female dominance is to be suppressed in even the most mundane matters. As Koschin saliently corrects her, it is not Barbara's, but Mohamed's house to which they might return (NN 92). But as Awill grew to understand his need for Ebla, so Koschin has come to realise that Nancy is now a small part of his life, a part which he will miss if it is removed, but a part which will remain a mystery, for just as she could expect little future in Somalia so she has no future at all in Farah's future works. Has she, therefore, any real significance, or is she merely the vehicle around which Koschin is draping his, or Farah's, opinions?

* A Naked Needle* has underlying moral implications which cover the whole gamut of Somali mores. Farah writes not only of the problems of marriages between racially and religiously discrete people but also of the questionable morality of many of his characters. The nepotism that is an integral part of the tribal system and the overwhelming Western influence of the colonial experience have warped the basis of the country's Islamic morality. But perhaps even more intrusive into the stability of the social structure has been the quasi-Marxist ideology of the Revolution with its reliance upon foreign aid and its debilitating effect upon Somalia's real development. The "been-tos" who have, either by influence or (more rarely) by intellectual ability, enjoyed an overseas education can introduce an element of destabilisation upon their return. While youth may be the time for
rebellion, there are those who, having gained little mental expansion from their experience, are willing to settle into the cossetted existence offered to its adherents by the regime and who become too comfortable to wish to upset the status quo, but there are also the more enlightened Somalis who become the rebels, the radicals and iconoclasts, those like Cilmi who find that "Italy and women and white-man's 'wisdom' and life in general" have distanced them from the orthodoxy of their country.

I find it difficult to agree with Ewen that A Naked Needle is a "glitteringly comic novel" (7) - mock-comic it may be - but in the character of Koschin is a man teetering on the edge of not merely a personal breakdown, but of a societal breakdown of the whole Somali people. They have been placed in bondage to the regime as tightly as marriage will bind him to Nancy, a regime which is deviating from the basic truths of Islam just as he must also deviate if his marriage is to have a hope of success. His personal tumult is matched only by that of his nation, and, as subsequent novels are to reveal, neither is easily resolved.
THE DICTATORSHIP TRILOGY

I died as an animal and I was a man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?

Mowlana (1)

While it may well be argued that A Naked Needle is Farah's least successful novel, one which leaves in the reader's mind an impression of the confusion of a writer who has not yet arrived at his full potential, the three succeeding books announce Farah's literary coming of age and ensure his acceptance as one of Africa's most perspicacious political writers. Sweet and Sour Milk (1979), Sardines (1981) and Close Sesame (1983), by overlapping and complementing each other, form one comprehensive picture of the omniscient and totalitarian power of the State in modern Somalia, justifying Farah's collective subtitle of Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship. The General remains in power, his position by now impregnably entrenched with no overt opposition visible or apparently possible: but Farah gradually introduces us to a clandestine group of ten men and one woman intent upon toppling a regime they recognise as corrupt and amoral and it is the fortunes and final decimation of this group which we follow through the series. Farah warns us in Sweet and Sour Milk that their attempts to defy the General's power must be as futile as were those of the ten sheikhs and one woman who in January 1975 dared to denounce the regime's new laws which, contrary to Islamic canon, gave women the same inheritance rights as men and who now lie buried in unmarked graves, their identity as martyrs obliterated, no focal point permitted
them. (2) While the graves of the ten skeikhs form a maraboutic circle, that of the lone woman is not evident, but as Medina is later to note as she stands within her family burying ground:

The girls were discriminated against as usual and weren't buried there; they were buried outside the family cemetery. As a matter of fact most of them didn't have a stone to mark their tombs. (S 141)

Before embarking upon the content of these three major novels, it is relevant to consider the significance of the epigraphs which precede each chapter in the first novel, *Sweet and Sour Milk*. Each of these draws our attention to the danger to small single things, be they children, ants, cats, butterflies or dry weed, and to their impotence in the face of overwhelmingly larger obstacles, opposition or plain indifference. Each epigraphical character confronts a situation over which it has no control: a miniature whirlwind captures a weed and smashes it against a tree; a cat, fighting for the carcass of a dead rat, lies killed by its triumphant rival, killed not in hunger but in the sheer wanton pride of its enemy's ability to conquer; an ant and her already dead companion are trapped in the onrushing waters of a river; an injured butterfly floats into the path of a child who, thoughtless and indifferent to the pain of other life, smashes it to the ground; and children lie abandoned, neglected, their guardians too blind, too old or too selfishly indifferent to their fate to save them from the all-pervasive danger that threatens them. Each of these images is of an individual alone and isolated in its danger just as the members of the underground group are isolated, each one knowing the identity of only the one other member of its particular cell and thus being unable to betray the entirety of the organisation. This monolism is exploited by the General for it enables him posthumously to change Soyaan's
political stance, and therefore his significance, as there will be none who can carry forward the truth of his memory. Individual small cogs in a giant machine which is functioning at a level beyond their control are easily segregated and rendered redundant, just as a people can be suppressed by a regime which permits no individual voice to be raised in criticism, thus no collective opposition to be formed. Each entity lives in a personal world of danger and fear, each faces death if a wrong move is made, and each is incapable of realising that the path he is taking leads inevitably to his destruction. Even where a choice is possible there is no guiding light to the safe route to take. And there is no effective way to fight back. The epigraphs outline the basic thesis of the Dictatorship Trilogy - the powerlessness of the vulnerable who live under a tyrannical rule, and the most vulnerable of these in an Islamic state are the women and children.

The Trilogy opens as Soyaan lies dying, poisoned by a hand whose identity is never revealed, but which almost certainly belongs to a member of the General's Security Service. The dying man's semi-conscious dreams return to an injection administered in a darkened room by "pale ghostly beings jabbing him with needles", but this vision dies with him and his mother is convinced that the diagnosed food-poisoning is no accident but is the deliberate result of his final meal eaten at the house of his father's second wife. This is a convenient verdict for Qumman, a traditionalist who sees only witchcraft and whoredom in the pregnant Beydan. She refuses to acknowledge that the younger woman is as much a victim of circumstances as she is herself: Islam gives no redress to Qumman against the cruelty of her husband Keynaan, and similarly Beydan must submit to a forced marriage with the man she hates and fears, the man who was
instrumental in the death by torture of her first husband. (This marriage contravenes Koranic philosophy which proclaims it unlawful to inherit the women of deceased kinsmen against their will, 4:19). Farah here creates circumstantial analogies with Yussuf who in *Yussuf and His Brothers* marries the widow of a man in whose death he is only suspected of having been involved; but there the similarities end, as Yussuf proves to be a benign and gentle husband whilst Keynaan at no time demonstrates any characteristic that is not vicious and self-caring. For him all women are evil, Qumman grieving beside her dead son "defiles the room" and the weight of Beydan's pregnancy makes her "heavy as guilt": always the onus and burden are woman's, never man's (*SSM* 35,15).

Soyaan ensures that his political involvement becomes the inheritance of his twin brother, Loyaan, a country dentist who has hitherto taken little interest in politics. He secretly gives Loyaan the condemnatory Memorandum on "Clowns and Tribal Upstarts" and other equally seditious writings which he had produced for circulation through underground channels, leaving his brother to unravel his codes and to demystify the country's politics. From these fragments and from the obscure entries in Soyaan's diaries Loyaan pieces together what he believes to be the story of his brother's recent life. He comes to realise how deeply Soyaan was embroiled in subversive anti-government, and therefore anti-Soviet, activities and despite the apparent cooperation of Margaritta, Soyaan's secret mistress and mother of his small son, and of the ubiquitous Ahmed-Wellie, the doctor whose frequent appearances seem almost too coincidental, he rapidly realises that there is no person whom he can completely trust in his search for the truth of his twin's death. He is convinced that Soyaan
was murdered, not by the diagnosed food poisoning but by direct governmental intervention and most probably at the hands of a KGB doctor, but he also realises that there can be no proof. Wherever he turns for help, officialdom closes ranks against him and he finds that he has entrapped in a laoöoon of Orwellian proportions not only himself but others, such as the hapless Mulki, a typist whom he is told has been taken for questioning by the General's dreaded Security Service. The government has neutralised the importance of the dead Soyaan but his brother must also be rendered harmless, so he is officially appointed to an overseas embassy and the novel ends with the apocalyptic knock on the outside door as he is to be escorted to his plane.

Loyaan's request for a post-mortem on his twin is refused by the authoritarian Keynaan, a father who rules his family with an iron fist in the name of Islam, invoking Koranic canonicity to support his stance. He is the archetypal tyrant, an ex-policeman, sacked not for torturing a man, an accepted practice, but for thereby causing his death. Now anxious to ingratiate himself back into the system, he is willing to sacrifice the principles of his dead son for his own personal aggrandisement, at the same time ensuring that his own name is in no way connected with the movement which he suspects Soyaan of fostering. Aware of Soyaan's fierce antagonism to the General and to tribal claims and nepotism, Keynaan perverts his son's dying words of farewell to "Labour is Honour" and "There is no General but our General". This will be his officially recognised epitaph and thus he will die a martyr, "a standard-bearer of the General's revolution", his grave affording no focus for potential dissidents; instead a school and a street will be named in his glorification, signifying his adherence to the regime and thereby neutralising any power he may posthumously have
exercised. Keynaan has sold his son's memory cheaply; Soyaan's soul is now the property of the highest bidder, the General. By proclaiming the dead Soyaan to be a devoted follower of the General, Keynaan makes the state the guardian of his son's posterity and hence his parent in *locum tenens*, transferring and continuing the parental control which has been his traditional right to maintain over his children. By *Close Sesame* we understand that the school and street never are so named and that this remains just one more of the General's broken promises. This initial act of ingratiation, which will be followed by years of acting as an informant against any who attempt to move against the regime, will ensure Keynaan's rehabilitation and his final reestablishment, not as a mere policeman, but as an Inspector of Police (*CS* 156).

In *Sweet and Sour Milk* Loyaan becomes involved in a nightmare of Kafkaesque proportions where certainties and uncertainties merge and become tenuous and indistinguishable, where tribal loyalties are manipulated to suit the expediencies of the regime, and where the tentacles of the oligarchy extend throughout the nation, strangling opposition but at the same time offering a tributary system of support for its members, no matter how distantly related, within the clan. Both Keynaan and the fanatical Idil in *Sardines* are kinsmen of the General within the tribe and are thus guaranteed state support for their abuse of parental power. Loyaan remembers the lifetime of tyranny suffered at the hands of his father, a man whose ever-ready rage lies just below the surface of his life, an illiterate who believes the world is flat. Once more Loyaan recalls playing on the beach with his twin, tossing a ball illustrated with a map of the world; suddenly the grand patriarch is there, Keynaan, knife in hand, "... heartless, gutless, and the knife tore..."
into the ball. 'A world round as a ball. Whoever heard of that?" (SSM 21). The boys fantasised about killing their father, feeding their hate with dream-talk of his death, but knowing that his patriarchal rights were supreme and encompassed within Islamic tradition (although not Koranic teaching which emphasises fairness and justice to all, 4:1): he can use the force of religion and the image of religiosity to keep control of his family, particularly his children. As Keynaan is to remind his remaining son:

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

His patriarchal power is reinforced by both tradition and the state for his is but a reflection of the much greater authoritarianism exercised by the regime. Soyaan had told the General that his action in executing the ten sheikhs was unconstitutional: the reply had been:

. . . have I ever introduced myself to you, young man? I am the constitution. Now you know who I am, and I want you out of here before I set those dogs of mine on you and you are torn to pieces. (SSM 226-27)

To the General youth presents little opposition; it is the tribal chieftains he fears, men of his own age, men of influence. Soyaan's generation is seen as having no common ideology and few principles, of having been corrupted by its overseas academic training. The very young and very poor can be indoctrinated, these "Flowers of the Revolution" can be gathered into the Revolutionary Youth Centres where, bombarded by panegyrics in praise of the General, they can be moulded into ideal new citizens. (3) In the General's Somalia mosques have been displaced and replaced by Orientation Centres.
Farah repeatedly equates familial and state power: as Keynaan rules "with the iron hand of male-dominated tradition, over his covey of wives and children" (SSM 54), so does the General over the people of Somalia, appropriating to himself God's omnipotence over life and death. As Wright states,

*The twin repressive institutions of family and state invoke each other's authority and sanction each other's violence... familial and national politics [being] interdependent and mutually supportive.* (4)

The General is willing to pay lip-service to the importance of Islam for in a country where religion is essentially an integral part of the social structure, as in Somalia, it can be biased and slanted to reinforce and underpin the regime: equally, the General appreciates that the religious power of the *mullahs* could be channelled to turn his people against him, just as Iranian religious leaders were in large part responsible for the uprisings against the Shah in 1979. (5) Thus Article 12 of Somalia's constitution makes it punishable by death for anyone to use religion to break up the unity of the Somali people or weaken or damage the authority of the Somali state (SSM 53). This stranglehold is reinforced by the General's ability to offer a monthly stipend to all who bow to his power and sing his ninety-nine praise-names in a travesty of the opening Surah of the Koran:

*Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe. . .
You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. . .*

He is therefore able either to buy the public acquiescence that he cannot genuinely command, or to proscribe any opposition, and in this he has the financial aid and political advice of Soviet Russia. As Loyaan appreciates, the General feels that the mast of his flagpost is more secure with the KGB than with the Koran. For Keynaan there is
no need to buy his power; the centuries have ensured that it is
cOMPlete within his family and he may beat Qumman, his wife of many
years, just as mercilessly as he beats the unfortunate Beydan on the
eve of her parturition, knowing that neither has recourse to external
assistance and that authority will not condemn him but will uphold his
patriarchal rights.

Islamic parental power is deeply explored in the Trilogy, with few
characters revealing the ability to afford their children the minimum of
control and the maximum of acceptance as individuals. The foremost
of these accepting parents is Deeriye, the gentle devout old man who is
the protagonist of Close Sesame, a man who has spent many years in
gaols at the behest of both the colonial powers and of the various
governments which followed independence, but who has retained his
deep religious beliefs and his ability to love and understand others. In
Sardines the mature Ebla also is a parent who gives her daughter
latitude to grow and develop in her own way, free from the pressures
and restraints which curtailed Ebla's own youth, so that she and Sagal

... would go together through the entrance of the night's starry
doors like two feathered doves, proud in their plumage - two
vessels of purity... They would keep pace with each other and
together move in the direction of the nodal knot within the circle
which their presence created: an image as fascinating as the
whirlpool of a herdsman's dust. (S 35)

This latitude and love were matched by that of her last husband who
made such a marvellous father to Sagal, just as the Roman Catholic
Barkhadle became a "gem of a father" to Nasser and Medina, in
contrast with their vicious old Muslim grandfather who had driven
Nasser's father to suicide because the "bedridden monstrosity
believed his prattle of senility should be received as law, that no one
not even his sons-in-law should dispute his authority" (S 55). This was the man who attempted to kill his own daughter and his small grandchildren by burning down their wing of the family house.

Farah contrasts the manner in which the older and more traditionally inculcated women are prepared to accept their lowly social status with that of the better educated, widely travelled younger women who rebel against the tyrannical containment of both family and state, but at the same time he poses the question of whether these young rebels are not as closely confined within their own parameters as are the women they tend to despise. One important thing which the traditionalist women have learned is the art of compromise, and this is an art which is anathema to the rebellious young. Qumman, that "souvenir of another age" who falls back upon Koranic quotations and relies upon maledictions and witchcraft, understands the importance of preserving the safety of the family and therefore is willing to accept the posthumous "honour" which the government has offered to Soyaan, hoping that it will carry with it a "lucrative gratuity for the family". She has accepted that "A dead man is not as useful as his pair of shoes are", and that the needs of the living are paramount over the dues to be paid to the memory of the dead. Ladan maintains an irenic silence in the face of her brother's criticism of the state, and both women are prepared to humble and sacrifice themselves for their sons, brothers, family, as they follow the Green Griots' orders to "Move. Sweep. Don't talk" at the Rendezvous of the Brooms. In Sweet and Sour Milk Farah portrays women as the saviours and protectors of their men, the mainstay of their family's unity and safety; for the "dependence of men on women [in Somalia] is of such greatness one is shocked into incomprehension to realise how badly women are treated" (SSM 190).
This desire of women to maintain the cohesion and security of their families is the purest of Islamic virtues, that of compassion, (each Koranic Surah is introduced by the prayer "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful") , but this very virtue lays women open to exploitation, not merely within the family but equally by the state. The General well understands that women will protect their families at almost any personal cost and thus, at least at the public level, he can rely upon their following his edicts. Loyaan knows that by their acquiescence they are pulling the rug out from under the revolutionaries' feet and are using familial pressure to neutralise subversion, but for Qumman and Ladan compromise is a necessity if one is to continue to exist. "Against the ethics of political violence, the weak have no means of survival other than to collaborate, up to a point, with the powerful" (SSM 159). And it is finally Ladan, the submissive sister, whose entire upbringing has been circumscribed by Islamic tradition, who offers Loyaan a moment of sane advice: if he must rebel let him be perspicacious, be worthy, make his action count, let it not be wasted. As she names the new-born son of the dead Beydan, Ladan emerges as the thread that stitches and repairs the tattered remnants of their lives. Whereas Koschin was merely the naked needle making holes in society and consequently is finally destroyed by the regime, she has the Solomic wisdom to compromise and so will live through the current maelstrom which grips her land. Soyaan's name will live on in the motherless child, she will conceal his subversive writings and in her protection she will bend like a reed with the current political flow and so will eventually emerge intact. Yet Farah abandons her and, like Nancy, we hear no more of her.
Medina, on the other hand, will never compromise; she sees herself as fighting for her child rather than for herself, and in this battle she is combatting both the regime and tradition, but Medina has the advantage of being a travelled woman, educated in the Western sense, who is financially secure in her own right and, above all else, this personal wealth renders her almost inviolate. As Stratton states, "Wealth is the prerequisite for freedom, even for today's woman in Westernised society" (6). It is this security of personal wealth which has enabled Ebla to live independently in her widowhood, giving her daughter the freedom of thought and expression which was denied to herself. Money is also the keystone of Margaritta's security; as a "mistione" and a Christian she is subject to the abuse of the inveterate Qumman, who links her in harlotry with Beydan, but when her financial independence is affirmed and she no longer presents a monetary threat to the family she can be peripherally accepted, although not embraced. Women such as these present a threat to the General. They are not dependent upon male maintenance and therefore male domination, and they cannot be manipulated through tribal coercion: like the European wives of Somalis, they are personally just beyond the reaches of the General and, consequently, if they transgress he needs more subtle methods of containing them than he might normally use. Not for them the imprisonment and torture which is meted out to the more vulnerable women and children, but a containment nonetheless. Hence in Sardines Medina will finally be left personally unharmed but in a position of political isolation from which she can do little damage to the regime.

Sardines is Farah's book of his women: whereas From a Crooked Rib tells of one nomadic peasant woman's rebellion against
her personal societal situation, *Sardines* portrays a group of women who are among the upper class of elite educated Somalis, women who perceive their social position as being determined by the politico-religious totalitarianism under which their country labours. However, as Farah emphasises, it is not only the political system against which these women must fight, but also the centuries of acceptance by Muslim women of their lowly role as inferior beings in a world of male superiority and power. Women of Qumman's generation detest young, educated, liberated females, like the Margarittas and the Medinas, seeing them as a threat to the stability of Islamic traditional custom, but it is their education which distinguishes them, not their youth; Beydan is a contemporary of Loyaan but socially and culturally is of a former generation and she remains trapped within the traditional concepts. Since the Koran prescribes in minute detail every action and thought in the life of a Muslim it is inconceivable that there should be change; the laws as handed down by Gabriel to Muhammed on the "Night of Qadr" are to pertain for eternity (Surah 97). This acceptance of immutability enhances the General's ability to control the *status quo* to his own advantage, for acceptance and opposition are antithetical.

Medina is the sole woman in the Group of Ten. A brilliant journalist, she is appointed acting editor of the country's only daily newspaper; within days she elects to edit one of the General's daily harangues to his populace rather than follow the decree of publishing it in its entirety. She is fired and a total ban is placed on the publication of her works inside Somalia. As she has been an outspoken critic of the General one could ask if he has not astutely manoeuvred her into precisely the position where he could legitimately silence her. Medina, "confident as a patriarch in the rightness of all her decisions",
has always refused to compromise and has attacked her antagonist head-on. Or has she subconsciously adopted the shortened version of her Holy name - Mina - as her European friends call her? Has she deliberately placed herself in a position where she can be pilloried and seen not as an upholder of the Islamic true faith which her full name implies, but as an Infidel and unbeliever, a Satanic symbol, whom it is acceptable metaphorically to stone? Her mother, Fatima bint Thabit, at least suspects this and is defensively emphatic in her reinforcement of the Holy connection (S 146). Further to isolate Medina her husband, Samater, is appointed Minister of Constructions, a post he is reluctant to accept but which is forced upon him by tribal pressure. The General has given an ultimatum that if he refuses a large group of his tribesmen will be imprisoned and worse, although they are a subset of the General's own clan. "Convince him to take the ministerial position or I will destroy you one and all" (S 41). It is this, coupled with the formidable strength of purpose of the infamous Idil, that convinces Medina to leave the home she owns and to take her beloved Ubax to safety, removing her from the monstrous Idil's Damoclesian threat of circumcision. Medina recalls the terror of her own infibulation, with its subsequent agonising impact on intercourse and childbirth, and is determined that her daughter shall be protected from this barbarity. She sees the crescent and sword of Islam as equating with the slicing and the rusty knife of female circumcision and knows that the introduction of the General's socialistic state has done nothing to affect Islamic tradition but has merely camouflaged it, while women remain intransigently within the religious mould. Medina recalls the sixteen year old American-born Somali girl who was abducted from her parents during a holiday in Mogadiscio, bound and gagged, then forcibly
circumcised and married to a man within the clan, all with the blessing of the General and the co-operation of tribal women. Farah has frequently spoken of his abhorrence of the practice of female circumcision, invariably depicting women as the victims, but nowhere has he apparently considered women's contribution to its continuation, and one is forced to ponder why women are prepared to perpetuate this barbarity upon their daughters when, having undergone it themselves, they must understand its traumatic physical and psychological impact. Fatima bint Thabit has been exempted from the wound of circumcision by virtue of having spent her life in purdah, encaged in a four-wall prison that made her the exclusive property of a man, but she still enforces the practice upon her daughter (S 136). Conversely, Farah does not reveal whether Ebla inflicts the practice upon her daughter, Sagal. The agony of Ebla's own marriage night is remembered in *From a Crooked Rib*, but there must be an assumption that Sagal remains uncircumcised as she is willing to spend a night of sympathetic casual sex with Wentworth George, the precise occurrence which infibulation is designed to prevent. While men may demand the right to prove their manhood by breaking open the circumcision scar, it must be remembered that it is women who perform this atrocity upon the young of their own sex.

You who have inflicted this obvious injustice on me;
You who saw it,
    but have never admitted it was wrong,
Doesn't the way they butchered me ever trouble your mind?"

... Sometimes an old culture is compelled to change its path.
Let the sun set on it;
Follow a pathfinding pioneer
    who leads in new directions.

"Hufane": *The Voice of the Girls of the Horn of Afrika* (7)
Perhaps the answer can be found in the thought pattern of Idil who having married a gentle man of peace despises that very gentleness for the pain it caused her:

No, not physical pain. He never hit me, never lifted a finger to strike me. No. He just didn't have the guts to shout at anybody, and I used to groan inside, wish that one day he would beat me like all the other men beat their wives, that one day he would out-shout the other men or even out-shout me, his wife... I had bigger [testicles] than your father. (S 78)

Idil sees a need to carry on a tradition in which she has been reared, a tradition with a given coherence and solidity - "I have Allah, his prophets and the Islamic saints as my illustrious guides" (S 77) - yet she, too, has suffered at the hands of tradition and has been a victim of male domination. Her dead husband's brother demanded his dumaal rights, but not until her baking endeavours had established her financial security; Xaddia had been the result of that union. In the "straw-thin days" of her youthful widowhood, when she and Samater had known real poverty, no member of the tribe had chosen to acknowledge them; with increasing affluence they had suddenly acquired tribal obligations. When Samater expresses reluctance to take up the ministerial post he is bombarded with tribal demands that he accept, for if he refuses the General's retribution will descend upon the whole tribe, while if he accepts he will be capable of using his position to obtain privileges and perquisites. He bows to the full blast of tribal obligations.

And it is the obligation of gratitude for life which Idil now thrusts upon her son, using her matriarchal authority to attempt to control his entire life and bend it to her commands. Xaddia has thrown out the interfering Idil, who now moves to dominate Samater, demanding that
he use his ministerial power, as do others, to "get richer while you can, amass the wealth that is yours by right... Look at your colleagues. They've changed house and wife and mistress" (S 65). Despite the fact that she has received a handsome monthly allowance from the combined salaries of her son and Medina, she remains a grasping, avaricious woman.

By vacating her home with Idil in possession, Medina has left an unimpeded opportunity for Idil's interference, but has she done this with careful forethought, believing that Idil will eventually overstep her parameters of parental power and that Samater will rebel? He is a man of few outspoken opinions who seldom disagrees vehemently with anyone and while he is prepared to ignore Idil's harangues that he abstain from non-Muslim food and alcohol, the peace which he has tried to maintain is shattered when she attempts to thrust upon him a new wife of her own choosing and he, in turn, throws out the "bundle of rags and rage". When this final rebellion takes place, it is not in anger and recrimination but in utter calm, and she knows that the umbilical cord has ultimately snapped, she has lost her authority. Her wrath is monumental and she warns him, "You have done something you shouldn't have. And I will make you pay" (S 175). Immediately tribal pressure is brought to bear upon him with the imagery of Islamic duty to one's parents being the foremost argument:
... there is one thing society will not forgive him: for disobeying the authority of an aged mother. Idil represents traditional authority, and it is in the old and not the young that society invests power. (S 23)

While the normal upbringing of any child is authoritarian and Medina considers that she had suffered greatly, she and her brother had nevertheless been saved from the worst excesses of her monstrous grandfather by the enlightened attitude of Barkhadle who, by exercising his patriarchal authority in favour of the children, had in his turn to combat the overweening dictates of his father-in-law. In Samater's life there had been no authority in counterposition to Idil and his youth had been "one long unslept nightmare". Thus, he is well aware of the dangers which Medina's overbearing love presents to their daughter. He remonstrates that the child needs space in which to grow and formulate her own opinions.

You must leave breathing-space in the architecture of your love; you must leave enough room for little Ubax to exercise her growing mind. You mustn't indoctrinate, mustn't brainwash her. Otherwise you become another dictator, trying to shape your child in your own image. (S 14)

He appreciates the child's need to expand her horizons by trial and error as opposed to Medina's contraction of her own imagination into one room of safety, one space which is entirely within the purview of her own control. And the child, in reflection of her mother's forcefulness, makes her own attempt at domination and rebellion:
I want you to promise that you won't ever smoke again . . .
Don't come anywhere near me when you've been
smoking . . . You want me to be just like you . . . I'm only eight
years old. (S 15,12)

But Medina seems to be incapable of realising that
domination and the wish to dominate are as powerful in her
makeup as they are in Idil's. Her mentorship over Sagal is as great
as is Ebla's, but Ebla is that unusually wise mother who
understands the frailties of her daughter's character. She sees that
the girl is as "faceless as a windmill and spins fast", lacking
patience to follow any plan to its conclusion: she could be a
champion swimmer who could represent her country internationally
if she would stay out of politics and banner-waving. It is not that
Sagal has true political convictions, for she sways like a reed, the
focus and direction of her life changed by the latest passing current
she experiences. She is the intellectual product of Medina who
has moulded the young girl's thought patterns and who sees her as
a bridge between her own yesterdays and Ubax's tomorrows.
Medina's influence in her life has been the introduction of a
European culture, the books, records, political philosophies of other
countries and mores, but while these have given the girl limitless
ambition and dreams they have not given her the stability of
personal achievement. She sees herself as a rebel, but whereas
her mother's rebellion had been a personal crusade against her
traditional social chains, Sagal believes that she is rebelling
against the chains that bind her country and her situation will
therefore be far more precarious. She plans to paint the dawn with
graffiti, but while she dreams and prevaricates her thunder is stolen
and anti-establishment slogans appear on the city's walls, ironically
in the Somali orthography which the General was instrumental in
thrusting upon an illiterate nation. Two of her swimming rivals, Cadar and Hindiya, are accused and now languish in gaol, leaving her with only the inglorious option of withdrawing from the championship. Her replacement is Khadija "the ideal, the puritanical, the pervert", who enters the water fully dressed, who sings panegyrics to the General and whose adherence to Islam is entrenched, but who can barely swim.

Sagal, meantime, is faced with the high probability that she is pregnant by a British negro photographer whom she has met once, and for whom she felt sympathy at his loneliness in an alien land. Wentworth George is one of the opportunists who visit African nations in an attempt to trace their 'roots' and who eulogise the rulers, seeing only the panoply, the medals and the exterior success, while ignoring the underlying brutality and exploitation. These are the people whose sycophancy ensures their becoming accepted by the Generals; they are granted the privileges that are afforded only to those within the incestuous ruling circle. They are used by the authorities and they naively accept but do not question. At the female end of this spectrum are the Italian Sandra, whose grandfather had been a colonial governor and who regards herself as an authority on African politics, and the American pseudo-African Atta who is reputed to sleep promiscuously, but only at the highest social level; she makes love "to ribbons of medals because they belonged to an African warrior" (S 189). She sees Africa entirely in terms of hyperbolic italics, her appetite for the superficial as great as her appetite for food; she consumes both indiscriminately and with as little appreciation of excellence. Both of these women compete for the attentions of the General's cousin,
the ideologue, and for the General himself. Atta is a woman who proudly boasts that she never uses contraceptives and in America has a menagerie of children fathered by the stud-stock of the Organisation of African Unity; but she is not socially condemned as she aborts when it suits her convenience. She can be contrasted with Xaddia whose use of contraceptives infuriated Idil and earned her condemnation from her father-in-law, who eventually used his parental authority to force his son to pronounce the divorce formula for the third time (Koran 2:230).

Somalia is a country where rape is more easily condoned than love; rape is symbolic of power whereas love symbolises submission and weakness. Thus the young Amina is pack-raped by three youths as a punishment not of her, but of her father for his conspiratorial acts: "We're doing this not to you but your father. Tell him that." Her father's reaction had been predictable; he must confer with the General, since "This rape is political". The General's instructions are to isolate Amina, so that "the case must be treated as though it were devoid of any political significance" (S 120). She must be bought off with an abortion and an overseas university education, but the rapists must go free. To her father, the rape is an "unfortunate disgrace" which has befallen her and which will soon be forgotten, but as Amina points out, which rape is not political, which is not the imposition of power by the stronger over the weaker? She refuses to comply and delivers twin daughters, keeping the one who was a live birth as a gesture of defiance, so that "every Somali [shall] see the political significance . . . that the powerful rape the weak" (S 122). Her father is given an overseas ambassadorial posting and the rapists are 'rewarded' with pre-paid
tickets to Rome. "The pain is ours, the fat and wealth and power is the men's. I am certain your father will not understand - but your mother will" - the village women understand her plight, just as they understand the powerlessness of the village virgins who are offered to Idi Amin to deflower during his brief stay in Somalia:

Come, take this sceptre, use it as the whip for the sadomasochistic rite to which you've been honourably invited. We host you, we present you with the hand of your choice. (SSM 186)

When the child is delivered, Medina displays yet again her refusal to compromise or to see the point of view of others. Amina is offered the use of her parents' home, their car and a generous allowance; Ebla urges her to accept, seeing the commonsense of the arrangement; Medina attempts to dissuade the girl, taking the polemic approach that in accepting their help she is "abandoning the hope that has sustained you and held us together" (S 123). In fact, she is seen as abandoning "a cause" and "causes" are dear to Medina's heart, with little cognisance of the repercussions they can have on others' lives. When her persuasion is unsuccessful Medina falls back upon childish threats of never speaking to Amina again. Xaddia's accusation that Medina "pawns and pawns until there is nothing or nobody left to put up to auction" is not without justification (S 246). Medina's vindication is that she is fighting for the woman in herself and Xaddia and to do so she must destroy the power of the Idils and the regime, but at what cost? Barkhadle had claimed that "he does not break who does not compromise" (S 243), but how much personal loss must be sacrificed in the political arena? How much pain can the life of the individual bear in this confrontation with overwhelming authoritarianism? While
compromise may lead dangerously to exploitation, it may also, used appropriately, be of benefit to those who are willing to analyse the advantages of making some concessions to their adversaries. Ebla is well aware of this when she urges Amina to accept her parents' offer of a home and financial security, and Medina finally admits that Idil had never really mattered to her, she could "have got rid of her the day she and Samater came home; Idil's concessions were cheap as a nose-rag and Medina could have bought them easily" (S 247), but she sees herself as "serving a greater cause" - the downfall of the General. In refusing to compromise her principles in the face of the monumental power of the General's regime, Medina reflects her father's maxim that to compromise is to admit defeat and she remains unbending, retaining her patriarchal confidence in her own rightness. But ultimately her own suffering is insignificant when compared with the havoc she has created for others. Is her attitude so far removed from that of her grandfather or, indeed, from the General's?

*Sardines* ends on a sombre note. Nasser has been imprisoned as has the singer Dulman, who at one time sang the praises of the General but who came to realise his heinousness; she for having produced tapes decrying the state, he for having sequestered them. Nasser travels on a foreign passport, as did the American Somalis, but that does not prevent the General from relieving him of his documents and classing him as stateless and illegal. Samater is returned to Medina after having been arrested and badly beaten by the Security Guards. Sagal is sure of her pregnancy, but determined that the child shall know nothing of its father, just as he shall remain unaware of its conception. Medina
refuses to concede defeat or to acknowledge that her effect upon the lives of those around her has been devastating: she is finally as disruptive as Idil. She left her home, a small rearrangement in her own life but with a ripple effect which has developed into a tempest of destruction for others, and now, beaten by the regime but adamant in her own righteousness, she retreats into the boundaries of her personal security "to put their house in some order", leaving the holocaust of her creation for others to inherit.

Close Sesame is, without doubt, the most profound book in the Trilogy as it propounds the true nature of Koranic philosophy as opposed to the perversion which exists in modern Somalia. In the character of Deeriye, Farah introduces a saintly old man, who has spent his sixty-nine years true to the gospel of Islam but electing to live by its more kindly aspects. He eschews the rule of *lex talionis*, although the Koran offers: "retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed, a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female" (2:178). For Deeriye every breath is drawn in the belief that the righteous man is he who believes in God and the Last Day, in the angels and the Book and the prophets: who...gives away his wealth to kinsfolk, to orphans and to the helpless, to the traveller in need and to beggars, and for the redemption of captives; who attends to his prayers and renders the alms levy; who is true to his promises and steadfast in trial and adversity and in times of war... such are the God-fearing. (Koran 2:174)

He is a true believer, willing to die for justice and to suffer years of imprisonment for the veracity of his beliefs. His entire thought pattern is moulded by the Holy teachings as he follows the daily regime of ablutions and prayers, offering his thanks (*Alxamdulillaah*) to his God throughout the day and each time he emerges from the ferocious
asthma attacks that leave him exhausted and close to death. His life has revolved totally around the five pillars of Islam, his belief resting on the formula "La ilah illallah" (There is no God but Allah) (8). Farah describes him as "a cairn of clothing wrapped in reverence" (CS 131). He has remained faithful during her life and after her death to the one woman he has loved, Nadiifa, who gave him two children and who bore the brunt of their upbringing during his years in jail - she "who bore the burden of history like a hump on her back" (CS 142). Despite the jibes of his contemporaries, most of whom have followed the Islamic acceptance of multiple marriages, many with women far younger than themselves, Deeriye has maintained his marital faith. "What is Nadiifa but honour, good memory and faith in life, trust in love and friendship!" (CS 26). Quite apart from his love for his wife, his refusal to follow the practice of his friends and remarry after her death is motivated by consideration: his contemporaries have taken young wives, produced a second or third infantile family and exerted their authority to ensure that the older children maintain these youthful menages, frequently to their own financial detriment (CS 89). In Deeriye's view this is shameful and inconsiderate and one of his highest principles is consideration for others. His devotion to Nadiifa enabled him to cross the physical barriers of separation and to communicate with her psychically, giving him an awareness of his family's activities while he was in solitary confinement; this ability to communicate through sheer depth of love has continued after her death so that in waking-dreams she visits him in his old age to offer advice. But, more importantly, as an extension of this ability he has developed the true power of a visionary and now has the occasional gift of foresight. Elmi-Tiir, that kindly man who did so much to maintain
his sister and the two children during Deeriye’s incarceration, believes the old man has passed beyond the point of being entirely of this world: he has developed saintly characteristics and his presence gives one a need to recite the Faatixa, the Exordium with which all Muslims open their daily prayers.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe,
The Compassionate, the Merciful,
Sovereign of the Day of Judgement!
. . . Guide us to the straight path,
The path of those whom You have favoured,
Not of those who have incurred Your wrath,
Nor of those who have gone astray. (Koran I:7) (CS 15)

His family, too, has developed a tendency to view him as “an abstract” rather than a person, so that he is referred to as he, a third person in absentia not a personal present entity. This attitude has undoubtedly been entrenched by his long periods in prison and his absences from all the most important developmental stages of their lives when he became an idea, an image, an absence which was indelible in their youth (CS 14). Here, Farah creates a nexus between Yussuf of Yussuf and His Brothers and Deeriye, both men having virtually transcended their material existence whilst suffering for their political beliefs.

Like the notoriously authoritarian Idil, he has been moved from the home of his daughter to that of his son, but there the similarity ends and the contrast becomes extreme. Whereas Idil deliberately provokes dissension and invokes her parental power with devastating results on the lives of her son and daughter, old Deeriye gracefully accepts whatever decisions are made on his behalf and attempts to blend into his family’s lives as unobtrusively as possible. He would have preferred to continue living in his own home, but Mursal and
Zeinab exercise their power and "for his own good" adopt the role of benevolent authoritarianism, without tyranny, but equally with a degree of protection that overwhelms his own wishes. He "wouldn't deny that he felt pushed around a bit". Mursal has married a wealthy American Jew, Natasha, who treats Deeriye with extreme courtesy and kindness, who goes out of her way to help her aged father-in-law, but who is incapable of crossing the barrier between her own culture and his. Like the racially mixed marriage of Mohamed and Barbara in A Naked Needle, the marital success of Mursal and Natasha relies more upon his Westernisation, than upon her attempts to understand the traditions into which she has married. Although a polyglot, who communicates with her husband and son in English, she has not mastered the intricacies of Somali and she and Deeriye use Italian as their common medium: their relationship is one of mutual respect and courtesy, rather than of deep affection, each fearing inadvertently to hurt the other by a misunderstood innuendo or colloquialism.

At the end of Sardines (240) Farah gives warning that the struggle against the General's regime must continue and that from the original ten only Mursal and Mahad now remain to continue the crusade: but Mahad is imprisoned after his unsuccessful kamikaze attack on the General's life, again diminishing the ten. However, there is a third member whom Medina does not mention - Mukhtaar, concerning whom Zeinab is to warn Mursal that blood is thicker than water and tribal loyalties can overcome ideological ties, for Mukhtaar is the nephew and tribesman of Cigaal, that "unneighbourly neighbour" of Mursal, a man who was a collaborator with the Italian powers, a betrayer of friends, and who is now an informant and adherent of the General. Mukhtaar is also the son of Sheikh Ibrahim whose tribal
connections ensure that he staunchly supports the regime and who therefore violently disagrees with the nationalistic views of his son. Despite living in a house owned by Mukhtaar and therefore being technically a guest, Ibrahim has exerted his parental power and frequently locked the son out of his own home until finally Mukhtaar attacks the father who in a fit of rage was attempting to kill him. By being seen to have publicly humiliated his parent, Mukhtaar has placed himself in a position where Ibrahim will almost certainly take advantage of any opportunity for revenge, and custom will condone the act. Mukhtaar joins the remnants of the ten and discusses destabilising the General's power by invoking *lex talionis*, not upon the "offspring of those who rule, but on the tyrant himself" (CS 43). The blood-revenge exacted for tribal retaliation will, therefore, be circumvented in the national interest and the real instigator of Somalia's murderous regime will be eliminated. For Deeriye the implications of this knowledge are terrifying: he understands from his own bitter experience of combatting, in turn, both the colonial powers and the post-independent regimes the utter futility of such dreams and the intensely dangerous position in which his family will be placed, for the present political situation places a huge burden upon the members of any family engaged in clandestine operations. Mahad's participation in the underground movement could be anticipated. As the son of a man who had, in self-defence, killed an Italian officer and whose action had been the catalyst for the destruction of his own village and that of Deeriye, Mahad's nationalistic fervour was expected, but Deeriye had prayed that his own sufferings for the freedom of his country would not be translated to his son. While he has been prepared to make huge personal sacrifices as
the price of his political convictions, he fears watching Mursal follow in his footsteps:

One knew the dangers, could skirt round these mined territories, could pick one's way through to safety and emerge all the richer with the experience ... But it was definitely different, wasn't it, when one was involved oneself - and not one's son or one's beloved? (CS 13)

Mursal, however, adopts the mantle of his father and questions the Islamic legitimacy of Somalia's present regime. This can be at best minimal since the Koran speaks of a community of brothers and sisters and of helping the oppressed, whereas the General has manipulated tribal loyalties to the point where neighbour is set against neighbour, where fear has replaced trust and friendship, where each man has become isolated in his own cocoon of self-preservation. The General obviously finds the provision of an Islamic legitimacy for his dictatorial Marxist-Leninist regime of extreme importance in securing at least the passivity and at best the full support of his people. (9)

The need for self-preservation is emphasised by the actions of Cigaal, an upstart member of the General's tribe, that "unneighbourly neighbour" whose grandson is a scourge of the district; young Yassin, who feels sufficiently confident in his membership of the General's tribe that he can pelt stones at a beggar woman feeding her child, at the mad Khalilf, and finally at Deerije. In the character of Yassin Farah presents an interesting antithetical role reversal: the Koranic Yassin was the third apostle sent by God to the city of Antioch to carry the word of the Lord to its unbelieving inhabitants. He was rejected and threatened with stoning, only one man accepting his promise of Paradise. Before consigning the remainder to hell, God warned the people
Sons of Adam, did I not charge you never to worship Satan, your acknowledged foe, but to worship me? . . . he has led a multitude of you astray. (36:58)

They have set up other gods besides God, hoping that they may help them. They cannot help them: yet their worshippers stand like warriors ready to defend them. (36:71)

In Close Sesame, the Messenger's namesake is in no danger of being stoned but, secure in the protection of his false god, he feels confident in his personal ability to cast the stones and to remain unpunished. As Deeriye and his children well understand, stoning has a particularly deep significance in Islamic culture; stones may be cast by adults only at those who have committed crimes against Islam, such as adulterous women, or at birds of ill omen and, more particularly, at Satan, the stoning pillar at Mina being the Satanic symbol. It will be remembered that Fatima bint Thabit in Sardines is careful to pronounce the holy distinction when she addresses Medina. Although Yassin is a child, we must appreciate that he is a child nurtured and trained in the State system and his vicious activities are condoned by the adult members of the Cigaal family.

The General demands that his people sing his ninety-nine praise names, in parody of the devout Muslim telling the thirty three beads of his rosary, each representing three of God's names, the hundredth name being known only to God himself (and, in Arabic tradition, also to the camel). As a lifelong nationalist who refuses to bow to the General's usurpation not only of supreme power within the nation, but of God's supremacy over his people, is Deeriye seen by the regime as an outcast who can be publicly dispossessed? He points out to his doctor-daughter that Yassin's action is analogical to the stoning of crows; once worshipped for their cry which sounds like the Somali word for "God", they are now stoned as embodiments of evil (CS 59),
the people forgetting that it was birds who saved man from the Army of
the Elephant by pelting them 'with clay-stones so that they became like
the withered stalks of plants which cattle have devoured" (Koran
105:5). It would seem that the regime has so contorted true Islamic
beliefs that its followers can teach their young to cast stones at
innocents and saints. Moreover, Mahad's attempt on the life of the
General also bears similarities to Yassin's stoning of Deeriye: from the
viewpoint of the true Muslim, Mahad's action can only equate with the
symbolic casting out of Satan at Mina, whereas the regime must see
this as more than an assassination attempt on the head of state, but
rather as a wish to kill a leader who has achieved a godlike
omnipotence. For Farah, Yassin is a Satanic product of the regime, a
child who has been reared under the parental influence of a
collaborator and betrayer, but can Cigaal not also be considered as a
symptom of Somalia's political ills? Since personal survival was of
paramount importance in the country's colonial history and remains
one of the vital imperatives under the General, can Cigaal's attitude be
absolved? Certainly not within the Koranic context, but, as Mursal has
pointed out, the General's regime has little Islamic legitimacy (CS 13).
Cigaal has carried the art of self-survival to a degree where
compromise has been surpassed by sycophancy.

Madness plays a significant role in *Close Sesame*; Farah has
stated that in Islam madness is mystical, the mad being a mirror to the
sane. (11) In the Koran God warns the people that their compatriot
(Muhammed) "is no madman, but one who gives plain warning" (7:183)
and who did indeed see the Angel Gabriel "on the clear horizon"
(81:22). In the character of Khaliif, Farah introduces a madman whose
original madness may well have been drug-induced by the General's
Security Guards but who may now be sheltering behind a facade of insanity in order to reveal to any who will listen the barbarities of the followers of the General. Khalil is a man whose mad utterances speak of "Night plots conspiracies daylight never reveals", who lists names of responsible officials whom he vows to kill, but a man who speaks grammatically, is clean and wholesome; nevertheless, one who cannot bear to be touched, who loathes violence and shuns human contact. Here is one who feels secure - or uncaring - in his madness to the point where he can publicly vilify the house of Cigaal, reminding his listeners that "Nothing is holy in their houses", that they have upturned traditions and created a disharmony wherein only the devil may dwell, that they are people who worship "a mortal and a fool in place of Him" (CS 20); but he is also one who understands the dangerous implications of Mursal's action in thwarting Yassin as he begins to stone a madman. "Now who is mad? Tell me who is mad and I will tell you who is not" (CS 21). To cross swords with a member of the General's clan is to put one's own life in jeopardy and in the General's Somalia it is folly to take such risks in the protection of a fellow human being. As colonial rule brought to bear the full force of its vengeance upon any who harboured or aided its perceived enemies, so does the General exact retribution upon any who slight his devotees.

Madness was also attributed by the British to the Dervish hero, Sayyid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan: to them he was the "Mad Mullah", whereas to the Somali people he was "the most important figure the Somali nation had ever produced", the man whom Deeriye revered and whose poems he loved second only to the Koran (CS 32), the man who led the victorious nationalistic plunge for freedom from the British colonising yoke and who left his legacy to the young Deeriyes and
Roobles of Somalia to continue the battle. But now this briefly achieved freedom has been stolen from the Somalis by a "black nincompoop" who calls himself a General. Using a viciousness which surpasses even that of the British and Italians, the General equally ensures his hold on power by smashing any attempt at rebellion, but always by refusing to acknowledge that any mass dissatisfaction exists. He insists that the attacks made upon him are isolated incidents perpetrated by madmen who have acted on the irresponsible impulse of the moment: always by madmen, for to admit of a concerted effort by an organised group is to admit that the ruling oligarchy is vulnerable. The General is thus able to diminish the revolutionary value of Mahad's nationally and ideologically motivated assassination attempt by publicly denigrating it to appear as a tribally instigated plot, just as he devalued Soyaan's underground activities by adopting him posthumously into State Heroism. The General is reflecting the actions of the Italian colonisers nearly fifty years earlier by isolating small groups within the clans so that he can pick them off one at a time and thus blame their deaths on tribal infighting, keeping himself remote and so avoiding any possibility of there appearing to be a nationalistic movement against him.

Isolate and rule, isolate each community, keep them divided, call the nationalistic tribalist and the tribalist nationalistic and use them. But rule them. (CS 153)

Medina in Sardines is justified in likening the General to her maternal grandfather, the appalling monstrosity Gad Thabit whose creed was to "Keep them guessing" (S 140).

Deeriye understands the tremendous power which the General can derive by superimposing the authority of the nation-state on the
internecine propensities of a clannishly ruled land, supported by old men who exercise their traditional power and the trust of their own tribesman "to support and justify a non-traditional authoritarian head of state" (CS 93). These are the elders who had been servile to the colonial governments and who, for their own salvation, had transferred their allegiance to the dictatorship of the General's regime, the traitorous stipended tribal chieftains, "the walking corpses who are heavier than their unpaid bills" who are willing to stab Deeriye in the back, but only after they have enjoyed his hospitality (CS 91). They are the men who will do the General's bidding, whatever that may entail, and one of their number is Sheikh Ibrahim, whose son Mukhtar is implicated by association, but not by betrayal, in Mahad's abortive attempt on the General's life. The Sheikh is given an ultimatum "the head of his son or his acceptance of the policies of the 'Father of the Nation, the Patriarch of Patriarchs'."

In the figure of the chieftain, the authoritarian state has its representative in every clan or tribe so the elders of the clan become its most important instrument of power. (CS 93-94)

The General can thus refuse to admit that there exists within his own tribe a dissident who is involved in an assassination attempt and can dissociate himself from the lex talionis upon which he insists. Mukhtar is to be killed by his own father, but is he? Mukhtar defends himself and in the ensuing melee clubs down his father; both are alive when Yakuub drives them to hospital, but the Mukhtar who returns later is mad, like the mad Khaliif driven insane "between one sane evening and one mysterious morning". Is his madness induced by the regime, or is it, as Mursal protests, inflicted by his parent?
A father can beat his son to madness in full public view and the son is expected not to raise a hand but to receive the beating in total silence. The son is not allowed to question the wisdom of his parent's statements, must never answer back, never raise his voice or head... What would happen if Mukhtaar were to receive a fatal blow on the head and die? Nothing... after all, it is the prerogative of a parent what to do with the life and property of an offspring. (CS 108-109)

And Mukhtaar's death, following the second and climactic fight with his father, raises the question of whether Sheikh Ibrahim was successful in attempting to kill his child or whether the ominous Dr. Ahmed-Wellie administered the coup de grâce, just as there must be an assumption that the doctor was at least instrumental in the death of Soyaan in Sweet and Sour Milk. For so eminent a man to have attended what was superficially a family fight lends an aura of importance to the situation far exceeding that of an ordinary domestic father/son squabble, albeit between members of the General's clan.

To the humanitarian Deeriye the notion of a father paralleling the Gargantuan authoritarianism of the head of state is anathema. He is repelled by the ideological acceptance of totalitarianism which is embraced by men such as Sheikh Ibrahim. Deeriye had always allowed his children the right to express their own views, although these frequently were opposed to his; he 'invited' them to join him in religious observances, but never insisted that they follow his pure Islamic pattern: while fearing that their political views and activities would endanger their lives, he still preferred to give them the latitude to express their individual ideologies. In contrast, Sheikh Ibrahim had always refused to allow his son to choose his own friends and had tried to force Mukhtaar to accept "a regime of rigid rules" which were imposed according to his own paternal attitudes and his demands for unquestioning subservience in his family. As a corollary of Mukhtaar's
death, and under Koranic law, Sheikh Ibrahim now becomes legal owner of his son's house, the home from which he excluded the young man in life: "if [a man] leave no child and his parents be his heirs, his mother shall have a third . . . A male shall inherit twice as much as a female" (Koran 4:10). Even had Mukhtaar not been killed but had survived the initial beating insane, Ibrahim could still Koranically have claimed the house: "Do not give the feeble-minded the property with which God has entrusted you for their support" (Koran 4:1). Whatever the outcome of the battle, Ibrahim must win if this particular, so convenient, Surah is invoked by authority.

Deeriye -- "the one who offers warmth" (CS 142) and therefore the true Muslim -- has extended his kindness beyond his own children to include his American Jewish daughter-in-law. His friends decry him for his ready acceptance of her within his family, but as he reminds them, "All Jews are not Israelis and even then all Israelis are not Zionists" (CS 89). One of his underlying concerns is what will happen to Natasha and the young Samawade if Mursal continues with his underground activities and falls into the hands of the General's Security Guards; as an old, sick man he will hardly be in a position to help her. Will she be able to return to America? Will she be permitted to do so? The General's manipulative abilities sweep a wide swath across society. Deeriye is close to his grandson and he has instilled in the boy a love of the Koran and an appreciation of the poems of the Sayyid. He has tried to teach tolerance and wise understanding to Samawade, whose name means "conciliator, he that opens the road to peace", but he fears that the spirit of rebellion may have been inculcated by himself and by Mursal and he realises how unbelievable it is that
one could burden a child with the weight of history, garland them with the fruits of this or that past, show how they should take the side of the injured, the humiliated and the oppressed. (CS 172)

He fears that in a future which he cannot foresee Samawade may continue the struggle of his father and grandfather and "kill a tyrant or be killed" (CS 173).

Just as in Sardines the General ensured Samater's compliance by threatening to take in all of his tribe, so he now, in one night's purge, rounds up most of Mahad's younger kinsmen, but not Rooble who represents seniority within the clan. For him is devised a more subtle and devious method of arrest. As he attends the clan meeting to which he has been ordered by the General, he and his contemporaries are arrested for breaking the law "which forbade the assembly of more than five citizens in one house unless in the House of God or to celebrate the great names of the General" (CS 104), and he disappears into the bowels of one of Somalia's security prisons, another victim of the General's duplicity. Fearful for their own safety, the stipended chieftains will now make their mark to dissociate themselves from the activities of Rooble and Mahad, both of whom they excommunicate from the clan, and they will agree fully and completely to accept the General's authority. In two sweeps of his scythe the General has now removed the majority of Mahad's clan, silencing the small remainder, and the assassination attempt can be labelled as "tribal". There need be no admission that one individual has unsuccessfully attempted lex talionis in retaliation for the earlier public execution of his brother who had broken one of those laws decreed by the General's regime (CS 136), nor need there be any hint of national dissatisfaction with the state of Somalia.
Mukhtaar's death is publicly proclaimed as suicide, the post-mortem eventually being carried out by the sinister Dr. Ahmed-Wallie. The General is thus able doubly to diminish Mukhtaar: Sheikh Ibrahim was honourably injured in his attempt to stop his son taking his own life; there will be no ceremonial interment and no Islamic sanctions; the young man will be buried as "unclean" like a dog in an unmarked grave, and forgotten, his attempt to be an individual and to move beyond the rigid social parameters of his clan vetoed, while the father will be lauded for his heroism in attempting to save the son.

The General, in his determination to quash any opposition to his power, demands that a tribal council is convened to "try" Deeriye for his principles, his friendship with Rooble, and above all for his ideological stand against the regime; he is to be isolated from the clan and then exiled from Somalia, but all of this at the behest of the clan elders. The General's hands are, therefore, once more clean and he can publicly and accurately attribute Deeriye's departure to clan-based motives, using a technique similar to that he employed with Rooble. But the General has reckoned without the prestige which Deeriye enjoys within the tribe; he has become a folk-hero for his stand against despotism in all its forms and the regime is not permitted to harm such a man. He withstood the tyranny of the colonial governments and he therefore also has a considerable following among the people, as evidenced by the young man who asked merely for the privilege of walking by his side as he left the Baar Novecento (CS 98). Deeriye likens his situation to that of his hero, Sayyed Mohamed Abdulle Hassan, who eighty years previously had similarly been called to a colloquium. However, as he points out, this is happening not under the rule of a colonial power, but under a national Somali government; sadly, it is a
government which exists by creating disunity among its people: "where there is harmony, the regime brings about death, disorder and disaster" (CS 148:108). It is a government which, while creating madness among its people, has itself become mad.

The novel draws to a close in a welter of upheaval and discord. The group of ten has now completely disintegrated, its known members either killed or imprisoned, with Mursal having disappeared. The penultimate member, who until now has not been revealed, is shot by Security Guards as he attempts to plant a time-bomb close to the General's residence. He is Jibriil, the Messenger, he who delivered to Muhammed the Holy Koran and "who did not descend from heaven save at the bidding of your Lord" for "God chooses His messengers from the angels and from men" (Koran 19:62 : 2:75). The regime's press identifies him as a "good-for-nothing man" once a trusted army major, dismissed for excessive drinking, a man "mad that he was . . . working alone and not in collaboration with any dissident group either inside or outside of the country" (CS 176-77). Again it is a madman, always working alone, isolated from the nation's popular view of the General as God-like. But one could question whether it is the isolate or the General who is mad, or indeed the Somali people, for as Deeriye says:

Somalia has become a stage where the Grandest Actor performs in front of an applauding audience that should be booing him. Anyone who wishes to share the spotlight either goes mad or in the end is imprisoned. Otherwise, everyone is made to join the crowd and applaud with it. (CS 189)

He is amazed at how easily governable Somalis are, but their malleability should be predictable when one appreciates how the patriarchal familial ethos has been translated to the regime. It is
possible that Deeriye's personal gentleness and the latitude he has afforded his children may have clouded his vision of how Somalia could have been expected to develop following the departure of the colonial powers.

Mursal is killed in another abortive assassination attempt. His death is not publicised, the broadcast of the funeral ode 'Samadiidow' being the only official indication that someone has been shot by the Security Guards. The truth is proclaimed by the mad Khaliif who curses the General and those within the group of ten who are betrayers, while calling God's blessing upon "the martyrs [and those who] suffered on behalf of the suffering humanity" (CS 194). Deeriye struggles with the depth of his Islamic belief and finally accepts that he must take *lex talionis* into his own hands. For the first time in his long life he is willing to kill, not only to avenge Mursal but to vindicate justice, and perhaps to offer his own life in, at least partial, recompense for the far younger lives which have been sacrificed in this struggle against oppression. Or is he finally admitting that he is a tired old man whose only real wish is to join his beloved Nadiifa but that first he must make this gesture which could very well be his last act? Success will make him a hero, failure will cost his life, but either way he will not have died in vain and he will be more than merely the myth which shaped the thinking of Mursal and the others, the inspiration which gave power to their determination to overthrow the General. He will have been a participant. As he realises the seriousness of Satan's suggestion that he should kill the General, he seeks refuge in the name of his Creator but, singularly, finds no help in overcoming the conviction that this final act he must perform.
Ultimately it is his Islamic God who prevails. As he pulls the revolver from his pocket it becomes entangled with his rosary and he is gunned down as he attempts to unravel it. Surely his God could not have forsaken him at that final moment and could not have permitted this saintly old man to commit the most cardinal of all sins - that of murder? He dies as he lived, an unblemished Muslim and a continuing inspiration to his people.

*From a Crooked Rib* begins with a very old man, sitting cursing as he counts on his rosary the ninety-nine names of God: he is cursing his grand-daughter, Ebla, because he had loved her above all, but more importantly because she was gone and he now had nobody else to look after him. He can narrate in the minutest detail the history of the legendary Sayyed Muhamed Abdulle Hassan, the rebel warrior who was also a poet and who killed Corfield. The old man dies quietly and is left lying on the ground "and nobody went near him" (*FCR* 6). More than a decade later, the trilogy of the dictatorship ends with another very old man, not bitter, not cursing, but one who has loved and been loved through a long and faithful life. He, too, is intimate with the poetry of the Sayyed and he, too, dies with his rosary in his hands - not quietly, but cut down by machine-gun fire. His body also is left where it fell, "soulless, shrouded in blood [until] the General's entourage left the scene" (*CS* 207). We have witnessed the progress and the tragedy of Somalia.

In all of his novels, but particularly in the Trilogy, Farah is not only making a political statement but is also taking his readers into the depths and subtleties of Islam: in this his writing may be considered didactic. While he admits the propensities of the religion to encourage tyranny (it should be noted that no Muslim country in the world
functions under democracy, all are either dictatorships or autocracies), he is, nevertheless, stressing the underlying compassion of the Koran which can be translated into life with as much ease as its more vengeful aspects are currently being exploited in Somalia. Unlike Christian tradition, Islamic traditional law, in theory, is all-embracing. It contains all the commands, prohibitions, and recommendations given by God to Muhammed concerning human conduct. It includes, equally, rules for prayer and rules for contract, matters punishable by death and those punishable by inner contrition. Its sanctions are as much otherworldly as of this world and it even specifies the proportion of otherworldly reward given for meritorious acts. (13) Like all religions, however, Islam is as much open to wide interpretation and exploitation as the individual, or regime, wishes, although the Koran warns of the dire consequences ultimately awaiting those who agree to obey God only in some matters while obeying Satan in others (47:12). It is not a religion accepting of half-measures.

Although not a practising Muslim, Farah obviously believes devoutly in the validity of his faith and knows that, in its purest form, it must finally prevail over its exploiters. While accepting that the politics of the nation are the politics of the family in Somalia and that each is contorting Islam to its own convenience, he offers the reader both sides of almost every preferred coin. Ebla, the moderate, may be compared with Medina, the confrontationist; Keynaan and Sheikh Ibrahim, adherents of the General's 'modified' Islam, may be compared with the true Muslim, the gentle non-authoritarian Deeriye, and, as Wright points out, it is men such as Deeriye who could ultimately topple the regime since it depends upon parental power to validate its authority at the intimate familial level. (14) Deeriye is the near-perfect Muslim,
one who is willing to conform to Islamic law even in the face of doubt and the dark nights of the soul, a man to whom imprisonment was of less importance than his gaoler's refusal to give him access to the Holy Koran. For the Prophet had said

God the most blessed and most high says, 'Nothing brings men near to Me like the performance of what I have made obligatory for them; and through works of supererogation My servant becomes ever nearer to Me until I love him, and when I have bestowed my love on him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his tongue with which he speaks, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks'. (15)

In faithfully conforming to the Islamic law the believer becomes, both literally and metaphorically, an instrument of God, so that Elmir-Tiir is not without justification when he describes Deeriye as a saint. Similarly Khaliif truly understands the house of Cigaal which he sees as "Satan's offspring", for popular Islamic thought believes that every person has, alongside his guardian angel, an attendant personal satan, thereby becoming a microcosmic battlefield of good and evil. (16) And on the depth of one's adherence to the Holy Word depends the eventual outcome of the internal battle and thus one's entrance into "the Paradise which the righteous have been promised" (Koran 47:15).

Farah is also comparing the old unadulterated Islamic faith, as espoused not only by Deeriye but equally by characters as unlike him as Idil, Qumman and Fatima bint Thabit, with the modern rejection of Islam as instanced by Medina. By her denial of the rites of Islam and her disregard for its more cohesive aspects -- those of brotherhood, compassion, mercy and helping one's neighbour -- Medina is attempting to destroy the very roots of the culture into which she was born. She offers nothing with which to replace Islam, just as her group of ten offer nothing with which to replace the General. As members of
the upper stratum of society, an elite whose education has been almost entirely European-based, they cannot be considered as representative of the lumpen of Somalia. Their circle remains incestuous and they have little contact with the nomadic peasant majority, therefore they can have little knowledge of the needs and aspirations of this larger society. Idil correctly berates her son:

I am the product of a tradition with a given coherence and solidity; you, of confusion and indecision. I have Allah, his prophets and the Islamic saints as my illustrious guides... your generation hasn't produced the genius who could work out and develop an alternative cultural philosophy acceptable to all the members of your rank and file; no genius to propose something with which you could replace what you've rejected. (S 77-78)

A religious vacuum is as dangerous as a political vacuum.

Like all religions, Islam can be lived by selectively, although the Koran claims in its opening Surah The Cow that "This is the very truth of that which is certain" (17) and Islam demands closer adherence than most other creeds. But in his Trilogy Farah debates the questions of whether one can reject or pervert a religion in its entirety, and whether a parent or the state has a right to manipulate a religion to suit its own particular dictatorial convenience. I believe his final decision is that, no matter what religious perversities humanity pursues, eventually God will prevail. However, by the end of Close Sesame there is no indication that this heavenly intervention is imminent and the General remains as firmly in control as he was when Soyaan lay dying.

Farah appears to have little optimism for the immediate future of his country, which is possibly why he has elected in his next novel, Maps, to present Somalia from a different perspective, that of a country attempting to redefine the boundaries left to it as a legacy of
colonialism and trying to regain its identity as a single Somali-speaking nation.
MAPS: MISRA’S STORY

The problem with maps is they take imagination. Our need for contours invents the curve, our demand for straight lines will have measurement laid out in bones. To let go now is to become air-borne, a kite, map, journey . . . (1)

Farah’s most recent novel, Maps published in 1986, is an almost complete departure from his previous preoccupation with the internal politics of Somalia and the uncompromising regime under which his compatriots live: he now tackles the problems of frontiers; not only those dividing countries, and thus confining them within their own boundaries, but equally those which confront all human beings as they strive to establish their personal identities within the socially imposed mores under which they were reared. In this context, in the character of Misra, Farah continues to explore the lot of women in a Muslim society and particularly in a society where the principles of Islam have been corrupted to satisfy the patriarchal basis of a community completely dominated by males. Although most critics of Maps concentrate on the development of the child Askar, I consider Misra’s story to have a greater hold upon the imagination and to be one which is worthy of far more extensive exploration than it has hitherto been given. As Kelly says, “Misra’s story in Maps is really more compelling”. (2)

The novel is set against the backdrop of the Ogaden conflict, with Farah drawing heavily upon his own childhood in Kallafo “which boasted a Somali-speaking civilian population, a large Arab community engaged in business, as well as Amharic-speaking soldiers . . . who were said to have been recruited from all the ethnic groupings of which the Ethiopian Empire comprised”. (3) This
heterogeneity contrasts sharply with the monolithic nature of Somalia proper which prides itself on its linguistic and cultural cohesion: given the country's clan-based political history and its consequent internecine fighting, this cultural background is probably its only claim to any form of real cohesion. Misra is cast largely in a supporting role to the child Askar, to whom she devotes eight years of her life for remarkably little ultimate acknowledgement. Like Kelly, I find Askar to be a character with whom it is difficult to empathise, a spoiled child who becomes an egocentric youth, one who considers himself to have an inherited epic destiny waiting to be fulfilled but who lacks the moral fortitude to take decisive steps to achieve that destiny. He shows a marked reluctance to accept the responsibility implied by his name (which means "a bearer of arms") as he prevaricates upon his adult fealties, and much of his "epicness" is firmly refuted by Uncle Hilaal who assures him that despite his aspirations to join the ranks of Africa's other mythological 'miracle' children, his conception and birth were completely normal. It is difficult for Farah's non-African audience to sympathise with Askar's attitudes, but the writer's portrayal of Misra awakens an immediate sympathetic response.

While one must agree with Bardolph that Misra shares certain characteristics, such as charm and simplicity, with Ebla, she is, however, simultaneously as much a victim of her society as is the unfortunate Beydan and her death can equally be seen as a result of the male power-base under which all Somali women have for centuries existed. Unlike Ebla, Misra's origins were comparatively luxurious and her removal from her family was by force, not of her own volition: she was unable to extricate herself from her initial marriage and was never in a position to exercise any entrepreneurial skills she may have had.
Her situation in Somalia seems to be inevitably that of a servant and one upon whom her employer may make sexual demands at any time. She is the archetypal female victim, a woman doing her best to survive in a puritanical society which is basically hostile to all women and particularly to women who can be seen as scapegoats, so that in times of war, if their allegiances can be questioned, they are automatically condemned as traitors; and Misra's mixed Oromo-Amharic blood makes her a target for accusations of treachery in the eyes of the ethnocentric Somalis. The adult Askar, being male, may be weak, vacillating, hypochondriacal and utterly cossetted, but society never questions his credentials; his future is guaranteed. Similarly, society does not doubt the loyalty of Aw-Adan or Qorrax, although there are indications that Qorrax is at least a collaborator and very possibly a traitor while Aw-Adan shares Misra's problem of being a non-Somali; he does not, however, share the 'guilt' of her femininity. Also it seems seldom to have occurred to Askar to ask what would have been his future had he been born a female child, although he does admit that he would sooner be sick than be a woman (M 107). But this is spoken rather in disgust at the state of womanhood than in realisation that he would probably have been left to perish with his dead mother, or have been relegated to servanthood and concubinage, in a fate not dissimilar to that of Misra. Neither Misra nor Askar was Koranically blessed at birth, she being the unwanted daughter of a princely damoz, he the son of a rebel killed whilst imprisoned by the Italian colonial authorities; thus neither can claim an identity through the bureaucratic system. For Askar this presents merely a minor difficulty; for Misra it remains insurmountable. While Askar's citizenship papers declare him to be a member of Hilaal's family, and thus Somali, it can equally be interpreted that he is
as much a refugee as is Misra, both having escaped from the embattled Ogaden.

The question of identity is paramount throughout the novel; who is a Somali? For Askar the answer is provided by the intercession of Hilaal and Salaado, but for Misra the question remains, a Damoclesian sword. Tom from her own country as a child of seven, she is thrust into an alien situation for most of her adult life, learning a foreign tongue, but never sufficiently fluently that she is not recognisably 'different' from native Somalis. In a country where children learn by heart their genealogies and where these define the basic political and legal status of the individual and assign him a specific place in the social structure, (6) Misra can never hope to lay claim to Somali nationality, whereas Askar is automatically accepted as being pure Somali, although his birth occurred not in the Somali homeland but in the disputed Ogaden. Misra embraces the infant Askar and through him attempts to find a 'Somaliness', in the process giving her whole being, her cosmos, to the child who becomes pre-eminent in her life even to the neglect of her Islamic prayers as she tends his morning needs. She is accused by her current lover, Aw-Adan, of permitting the boy to displace God in her life - "Allah is the space and time of all Muslims, but not to you, Misra, Askar is." (M 11). While it is suggested that she sees Askar as a replacement for her 'fatherless child' who lived a bare eighteen months, it can equally be argued that he is also a substitute for the real lovers she has never had, one who comes demanding not sexual favours, but only love; it is with him that she feels sufficiently relaxed that she may speak not in the language of her adoption, but that of her birth, Amharic. Or is she vicariously attempting, through Askar, to relive her own shattered childhood when she was (if one is to
accept her sometimes embellished memories) the pampered princess surrounded by love and attention? Against this fantasy of privilege, it must be remembered that her mother was rejected by her princely lover for failing to produce the anticipated male heir. Similarly, over the years Misra's memories of her personal circumstances at the time of Askar's birth become suspect: she claims to have been "elegant-looking" when she found the "ugly mess" of the new-born, although it must be noted that she is a servant and at the time had been escaping the amorous predatoriness of Aw-Adan.

As Askar becomes part of Misra's being, so her self-esteem rises through his growing abilities and prowess, but this, in turn, induces in him a view of his uniqueness and increases his already high opinion of his own person. His adult view that his infantile man-child's gaze was capable of making Misra feel inadequate, while strongly refuted by Hilaal, may be in part his wish to reinforce his masculine superiority or it may be a prelude to his later willingness to participate in her condemnation. Why else should he focus "on her guilt - her self!" (M 6)? In this attitude he reveals himself to be not so very far removed from the loathsome Keynaan who saw all women as bearing a burden of guilt by the sheer fact of their being women. Throughout the novel Askar is unable to prescript his true relationship with Misra; as a child he knows he can manipulate her and is inconsolable when she is not present, but as he grows he resents the all-embracing love with which she surrounds him, histrionically telling her that "To live, I will have to kill you" (M 57), believing that he must exorcise her from his soul in order to achieve an individuality. As the Ogaden war is unleashed he falls under the Somali chauvinistic spell and sees her as a person whose non-Somali origins will make her suspect and hence,
by association, endanger his own position, thus reinforcing his self-centered need to free himself from her. The influence of his boyhood guerrilla friends makes him see Misra as a possible traitor, yet at the same time his childhood ties run deep as he longs to share the secret of his training with her. Later, as a young man, he comes to appreciate the invidious position of women in general where man is the "taker" and woman the victim, where "if she isn't your mother, your sister or your wife, a woman is a whore" (M 52), and for defenceless women such as Misra this situation is exacerbated. Yet while he is able to accept Misra's vulnerability, he remains willing to believe her capable of betrayal of the Somali garrison purely on the slanderous unsubstantiated claims of her enemies. It is not until her mutilated body has been blessed by the Koranic janaaza and he is recovering from his final Misra-associated sickness, that he comes to terms with the enormity of her persecution. Appreciating the significance of the Surah "Luqman", that which "conveys assurance of success to the Muslims at a time of persecution" (7), he suggests the forgiving verses that should have formed her eulogy:

We enjoined man to show kindness to his parents, for with much pain his mother bears him, and he is not weaned before he is two years of age. We said: 'Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me shall all things return. But if they press you to serve besides Me deities you know nothing of, do not obey them. Be kind to them in this world, and follow the path of those who tum to Me. To Me you shall all return, and I will declare to you all that you have done.

My son, God will bring all things to light, be they as small as a grain of mustard seed, be they hidden inside a rock or in heaven or earth. Gracious is God and all-knowing. (Koran 31:14, 15, 16)

Misra's one opportunity to achieve 'Somaliness' is through marriage to the priest Aw-Adan who, although not Somali-born, is
accepted by the community for his theocratic activities; he pursues her and although she believes him to love her she eschews his offer, refusing to admit that the child she has conceived is his. Later we learn that Aw-Adan's love is as ephemeral as is Somalia's hold upon the Ogaden: it is he who eventually accuses Misra of betrayal. This accusation could possibly be induced by jealousy at her having refused him and having taken an Ethiopian lover, but given the lapse of years and the parlous state to which Somalia's fortunes had fallen in the Ogaden, it is far more likely to be an accusation made in an attempt to ensure his own safety by denouncing another 'foreigner' of treachery. For Misra, Askar is her life, the child for whom she will sacrifice all else. "I am his - in body and spirit too. And no one else's. I can be yours or somebody else's only in sin". (M 12) Also, as she implies to Aw-Adan, the child she carries may well not be his: Qorrax, Askar's hated uncle, has exercised his seigneurial rights to bed Misra at his will. The foetus is aborted and Askar remains pre-eminent in Misra's life. Uncle Qorrax is the typical patriarch, brutal to his own family, 'using' Misra sexually on threat of taking her away from the child, but at the same time treating Askar with a kindness he does not offer his own children. In this, he follows the Koranic catechization to deal justly with orphans (2:220), his religiosity being mixed with a certain fear and awe of the wizardry within the child's "stare". In the characters which Farah portrays in the Kallafo scenes of Maps he offers a sharp contrast with those later to be encountered in Mogadiscio; obviously the degree of sophistication to be found outside the capital is miniscule compared with that of the city-dwellers. There the older beliefs and foibles remain and the inherent traditional credences are but lightly overlaid with
twentieth century influences, whereas Mogadiscio offers greater freedom and emancipation, even for women.

From early in his childhood Askar claims to have realised his power over Misra - "I would smile to myself triumphantly, knowing that I had her whole life in the power of my mouth and I could do what I wanted with it" (M 40). Equally, Misra understands that, being a foreigner, she will be publicly blamed for Askar's problems, whereas his achievements will be credited to his Somali inheritance, not to her nurturing:

"You know I am a foreigner here and that if you fall ill, your people will say it is because I haven't taken good care of your food. You also know that, when you do well, the credit is not mine but your people's, that is your [Somali] nation whose identity I do not share". (M 40-41)

As an Ethiopian Misra is unable to define her own cultural borders. No longer overtly communicating in the language of her origin, she is nevertheless neither accepted by the local people nor can she wholly identify with them. Realising her separateness, she knows that ultimately Askar must choose his own people, thus leaving her isolated. With prescience she sees that one means by which he can achieve his individual identity is to kill her; she even suggests this to the boy. Although she has a primitive's belief in her own ability to foretell the future in the blood and entrails of animals, perhaps this is one moment of genuine foresight when she can divine her own fate. Years later, when Misra has taken refuge in Mogadiscio, Askar is to use her simple faith in her own powers as a weapon against her, seeing it as a sign of witchcraft.

Farah appears to see his fellow Somalis as being isolationist in their refusal to accept non-Somalis and even to be suspicious of ethnic
Somalis who, as victims of colonial partition, now live beyond the nation's frontiers in the Ogaden or Kenya. As Koschin says in *The Naked Needle*, Somalis are the Irish of Africa.

The novel neatly juxtaposes the character of Karin with that of Misra. Although Askar sees Karin as being as much a victim of her femininity as is Misra, it is apparent that she is a far more fortunate woman. While she has devoted much of her life to caring for her semi-paralysed husband, she has obviously loved him; when the Archangel of Death calls and the old man's "leaf fell gently from the tree on the moon" (*M* 71) she lies beside him through the night, he dead and she alive, sharing the silence of his death. As a leader of a Somali Youth League cadre and a victim of Haile Selassie's gaols, her Armadio has lived as an unsung hero, and she is certain of her own position in Somali society, not merely as a reflection of her husband's patriotism but rather in her own inheritance of Somali culture. She bears considerable similarities to Fatima bint Thabit and Qumman whose centuries of tradition have given them also a stability and rock-firm foundation which cannot be undermined. For Askar, Karin represents a grandmother figure, one who is always comforting and willing to provide love and protection at the times when Misra is beyond his reach. She is "a dream of a woman", a person in whom he can place his implicit trust, whose word he will later accept as "the truth of all that she had told him" concerning Misra's surrender of her body to her Ethiopian lover and, in reversion to her innate Ethiopian loyalties, her betrayal of the Somali garrison. Hilaal warns him that the woman who was once his entire world should not be condemned without the opportunity to account for her life, but Hilaal is essentially humane and
so understands that Misra is the scapegoat whom men use for their self-inflicted misfortunes.

"Women as whores, women as witches, women as traitors of their blood, women as lovers of men from the enemy camp - throughout history men have blamed women for the ill luck they themselves have brought on their heads. Women are blamed for every misfortune which has befallen man from the first day of creation, including his fall from heaven. Woman is said to have betrayed man at the first opportunity, throughout history, Askar. . . . You've no proof and you've asked for no proof. Men have always done that. They've condemned unjustly and asked for no evidence". (M 178)

Notwithstanding the older man's pleas for understanding and without having any verification of the truth of Karin's accusations, Askar privately invokes God's curse upon Misra if she has betrayed his countrymen, and rapidly the if becomes less acceptable to him than because. Exactly why Karin chooses to make these accusations of treachery against Misra is uncertain; they had been close friends and confidantes. While the xenophobia of Somalis is the obvious reason - several hundred Somali troops had been massacred and someone, preferably a foreigner, must carry the burden of blame - there may be a more subtle reason. Karin, a woman of some small social position, is now widowed and past child-bearing, while Misra, the servant, is still sufficiently young and attractive to acquire a lover, and an officer to boot. Feminine jealousy could well have played a part in the charade of patriotism.

Misra's incestuous relationship with her half-brother outrages Askar even more than her purported treachery and he is convinced that she condoned the love affair in the full knowledge of their blood ties. He is repulsed to think that as a child he, too, had shared her body, once regarding himself as an extension of it, "a third breast . . . a third
leg" as he explored her body's mountains and valleys. For him she had been the very "foundation of the earth", as her name signifies. Here Farah strongly suggests Freudian connotations of incest and of Askar being plagued by a subconscious guilt of his physical attachment to the woman he called 'Mother' until the war separated them. Hilaal and Salaado both appreciate the predicament of a woman in Misra's situation. While Askar questions his own identity, for Misra the problem of identity is compounded; torn from her family in early childhood, she would have had no further knowledge of them, hence this young and handsome Ethiopian lieutenant would have been to her a complete stranger. In fact, in her search for personal identity Misra is hardly a person in her own right, existing solely through the lives of other people, her princely father, her murdered husband, her own dead child, Askar and finally her Ethiopian lover; as a woman, her life is completely controlled by others. Level-headed Hilaal understands how male paranoia has historically blamed women, but such a man is unusual in the Muslim context. Finding that his beloved Salaado is incapable of bearing children, he does not upbraid her or take another wife, but undergoes a vasectomy so that he, too, can share the burden of sterility; he has the gentleness and understanding of humanity which Farah has already portrayed in the character of Deeriye, although as a more unconventional man he lacks the religious depths of the older man's soul, preferring to question the conventions of life rather than philosophically to accept them. Askar, however, fears that so much of Misra's influence lurks within him that theirs is a dual identity from which he must extricate his own personality, albeit on pain of causing her death. As Bardolph says, the novel underlines the role of the mother present in each man. If Askar is
to carry the burden of his biological inheritance by defending his country from the people of his nurturing mother, he must first rid himself of her presence within him (9). Thus, in bringing about her death there is not only a patriotic justification for sacrificing a purported traitor but a religious obligation to satisfy Koranic incestuous prohibitions - her guilt in having taken her brother as lover, and his subconscious guilt of his early relationship with her. "Forbidden to you are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters . . . " (4:24). The fact remains, however, that he is not willing to shoulder these inherited responsibilities and by the end of the novel he hovers in an agony of irresolution, having neither entered the army nor enrolled at university.

Although Misra cannot clearly identify "her people", feeling herself attached to those of her adoption rather than of her birth, she well realises that it is easier for a community to suspect one not born of them than it is to accept that one's own kinsmen would commit the heinous crime of betrayal. Therefore, she expects little more from her accusers than they are willing to proffer when she is pack-raped. The rape is as political as is that of Amina in Sardines but for Misra there is no support: the community willingly accepts the rapists' account that they had saved her from an attack by baboons and, in fact, uses the episode to reinforce its attitude towards her. If the animals could smell her treachery, like her menstrual blood, then beyond all dispute she is guilty. Despite Askar's demands that she prove her innocence, he is well aware that to do so is an impossibility in the best of circumstances and in the face of public and personal hostility the accused must inevitably be branded as traitor and murderer. Although Misra says of Karin that "The worst enemy in the world is one who has been your dearest and most intimate friend half your life" (M 195), she could
equally be including Askar within this assertion. Farah has already placed the mark of Cain on Misra by giving her the reputation of having murdered her father/husband "in an orgy of copulation", but this does not ring true with her other characteristics and one is left wondering if his death is not the result of an old man's sexual over-enthusiasm and thus of natural causes, the accusation being levelled because she is seen as 'separate' from the greater community. Kelly makes the valid point that while it is hard to imagine Misra as a murderer, it is not so difficult to interpret Askar as a character capable of distorting facts to suit his own poor opinion of the altruism of women.(10) One of Askar's few moments of redemption is his articulating Misra's unspoken wish to see the ocean, and here there is a classic reversal of roles between the two major characters. Following his circumcision, it is Misra who remembers that Askar has always wanted a map: when she is faced with the possibility that her cancerous growth will kill her, it is Askar who recalls that Misra has always wanted to see the ocean, although this 'memory' is acquired in dream-form. It is worth noting that although Askar decries Misra's prophetic attempts as witchcraft, he appears to accept as certain the gift of foresight offered by his own dreamings. The dream-Misra who feeds the fishes with her menstrual flow (the only occasion when he realises how utterly he loves her), the bloody heart, the skull engraved with "M", the knife "stained with caked blood" lying on the seashore, the enthroned Misra whose gaze is as "distant as the nether heavens", are all projections eventually fulfilled as is his dreamscape of holding submerged the drowning woman who cries for his help.

The manner in which Farah handles Misra's 'disappearance' from hospital raises questions in the reader's mind. Is he unaware that no
woman who has recently undergone a carcinoma mastectomy is "ready
to go for a quick dip in the sea" (M 129)? This is improbable as
Salaado, understanding the seriousness of the operation, is later to
point out that Misra was in no position either to take a walk or go for a
rendezvous with someone. The author is using the episode to
underline the indifference of Somalis to foreigners: Hilaal had
registered Misra in the hospital records as coming from Kallafo, thus
hoping to gain her refugee status, but also unintentionally leaving her
vulnerable to those who would question her national identity. The
nurse's almost callous acceptance of Misra's departure is symptomatic
of Somalia's xenophobia. However, it could conceivably be argued
that Misra's paranoia has at last been realised and that fatalistically she
has come to accept that her death can bring the ultimate freedom which
has always been denied her - "the end of all suffering [from which she]
can only expect things to improve" (M 237). Whatever the reader's
interpretation, the fact remains that Misra's murder is not only vindictive,
it is symbolically ritualistic and a deliberate Somali demonstration of the
fate that awaits purported, albeit unproven, traitors.

Askar's part in Misra's murder is debatable, but the implications of
his involvement cannot be overlooked; why otherwise would Salaado
fear the "pointing of suspicious fingers at Askar" (M 231)? And why,
as he eventually tells the story to himself, should he finally feel himself
to be the defendant? Farah's methods of switching the narrative from
the accusatory to the affirmative voice carries the changes of personae
as Askar reviews his entire relationship with his surrogate mother and
his dilemma in coming to terms with his own identity, a dilemma which
Farah leaves for the reader to unravel.
The novel ends on a note of pessimism. At the personal level, *Maps* continues Farah's polemic on the pressing need to improve the lot of women not only within his own country, but within most Islamic regimes. At the political level Misra has been sacrificed just as the Somali people were sacrificed by the departing colonial powers who, in their haste to abandon their responsibilities in the Horn of Africa, 'carved up' the country to placate the neighbouring states. The newly independent Kenya was given the North Western Frontier territory with its hitherto nomadic Somali peasant population, while the Ogaden, that "focal point of Somali national aspirations",(11) was presented to Haile Selassie as a placebo for the damage wrought upon Ethiopia by the Italian invaders. (12) The book is an affirmation of Farah's belief that

"... it befogs the imagination to think that we can accept such a thing to exist in Africa today. We shouldn't have these borders. We should eliminate them. We should redraw the maps according to our economic and psychological and social needs, and not accept the nonsensical frontiers carved out of our regions." (13)

But it also raises the question of Somalia's isolationist attitude in the present global picture. Somalis appear to seek a return to a 'golden age' of geographic unity in which their culture and language bound them into a unique cohesive whole. This may be an ethnocentric 'truth', but as Hilaal asks, "... does truth change?" (M 216). In reading *Maps*, one is forced to question if the sacrifice of Somalia's youth at Ethiopia's expansionist altar is worth the return of an arid stretch of what Farah calls that "territory of pain",(14) whose population is, in any event, 50% Amharic. Whether or not Misra betrayed 603 Somali warriors is ultimately a moot point but it is incontestable that the power of the Ethiopian Empire, supported by the might of the Soviet Union,
emphasises the impossibility of returning to that distant Utopia. The colonial experience of all African countries cannot be overturned and the 'Golden Age', if it ever in *truth* existed, is incontrovertibly lost.
CONCLUSION

In reading the works of Farah one rapidly becomes aware of the deep understanding the writer has of the human psyche, of the depths to which it can sink and the heights to which it can occasionally rise. While his works address the universal confrontation between those who brandish power and those who suffer beneath that puissance, they have a particular applicability to the African continent with its many nations but recently emergent from colonialism. However, the specificity of his work's reference to his native Somalia enables him to demonstrate the distinction which exists between his country and many of the other ex-colonial African states. While Somalia enjoys a unique cohesion of language and culture, it is also rare in that it has remained almost entirely Islamic, the people tracing their origin to two brothers, Samaal and Saab, said to be members of the tribe to which Muhammed belonged. (1) This heritage enabled the Somalis to withstand the colonial Christian influence which, therefore, made few inroads into its cosmos. In this it is unlike most of the other African countries which underwent Western colonisation and consequent religious indoctrination superimposed upon (but usually not eliminating) their own traditional beliefs. However, this entrenched Islamic tradition, while giving Somalia a rock-firm base on which to survive foreign religious influences, has at the same time made it vulnerable to those who saw an opportunity to fill the power vacuum left by the departing British and Italian authorities. Somalia's brief flirtation with democracy proved ineffectual to the point where a
dictatorial power-grab by Barré was not only comparatively easy but was welcomed by the disaffected Somalis, a consequence which could have been foreseen by more far-sighted colonisers. Few dictators prove altruistic and the sheer rigidity of Islamic philosophy lends itself to abuse by totalitarian regimes, particularly when these regimes are supported by the world's super-powers in a demonstration of competitive international domination: there is then little the indigenous people can do to combat the abuses imposed upon them. And these are the matters which Farah confronts in his oeuvres.

It could be argued that there is a certain inconsistency between Farah's personal philosophy and his writing. On the one hand he has stated that he is a believing Muslim, on the other he espouses the elevation of women's global position; these two attitudes appear difficult to reconcile. Islam is not a religion of sexual equality; nevertheless, while the Koran (4:34) distinctly makes man superior to woman, giving as justification the need for the man to support the woman and their children, it does not give a completely subjugated role to woman: rather, her rights are defined as clearly as are her responsibilities. Thus, one must agree with Farah when he claims that one is mistaken in blaming Islam as a fundamental reason for the subjugation of women, not only in their domestic relationship with men, but equally in their position within the political sphere. It is the corruption of Islamic teachings which has engendered a belief that by religious decree women are entirely disenfranchised. This is, of course, a convenient ideology which is fully exploited by many of Farah's male characters. In contrast, he also offers the reader the occasional male whose humanity and understanding would be exemplary in any society and are outstanding in an Islamic country:
paramount among these is the truly devout Deeriye who assumes saint-like proportions when compared with his contemporaries in Close Sesame. He is joined by Barkhadle, the nameless third husband of Ebla and Idil's equally anonymous husband, who is so unappreciated and shrewishly reviled.

Farah has said that there is a great need in many Third World countries for the division of power between the temporal and spiritual. "We need to separate these powers".(3) While this may be desirable, it must also be appreciated that Islam is not only a religion; it is a complete code for living and contains the laws to which Muslims must adhere. Following the Exordium, the Koran's first Surah, "The Cow", commences:

This Book is not to be doubted. It is a guide for the righteous, who have faith in the unseen and are steadfast in prayer . . . These are rightly guided by their Lord; these shall surely triumph.

As for the unbelievers . . . their sight is dimmed and grievous punishment awaits them.

Although the Koran is the dominant source of Islamic thought and conduct, to it must be added the Hadith, which are the words reputed to have been spoken by Muhammed, although written down after his death, as the guides to interpretation of the teachings of Islam. Even more important is the Shari'a, meaning 'path to a waterhole', which is the body of Islamic law derived from the Koran and which, in theory, governs all aspects of Islamic life. It is acceptance of the Shari'a which gives Islam its international unity and common identity. (4) This immutability covering the ethics and laws of all who subscribe to the principles of Islam ensures the rigidity of the religion, leaving no room to accommodate development of the social structure of the nations which adhere rigidly to its orthodoxy. In some countries this has given
enormous powers to the *mullahs*, as in Iran where they were instrumental in bringing down the corrupt Pahlavi regime only to replace it with a viciously puritanical theocracy; in others, such as Farah's country, this power has been usurped by a militarily backed dictatorship in the name of Islam. Whatever the means, the end result for the populace has been political subjugation by the ruling power which has exercised its might beneath a camouflage of religion.

As Moss states, Farah writes of the *real* world as he sees it, not the fairly narrow world of many European writers. Like so many African writers (one could name Armah, Laing, Ngugi) his work reflects the social conditions of his country, offering his readers a "multi-faceted view" of his society. His penetration has a Dickensian depth as he takes his readers into the nightmare of a country which has been largely ignored by Western commentators and hence is barely a name on a map to many non-Africans. In "Islam and Farah" I questioned whether there was a viable opposition in Somalia; although one does not appear to have emerged, the *lumpen* has finally rebelled, regardless of who will take Barre's place. The unknown must appear to be preferable to life as it existed under the dictator and the plunge into chaos has been taken. However, the eventual and bloody ousting of Barre in January 1991 was completely overshadowed by the international enormity of the Gulf War. The Western world, in its justifiable horror of the post-war plight of the Iraqi Kurds, has been left unaware of details of the insurrection which overthrew Barre. Only very occasional mention by the media has been made, as in:

"thousands of refugees fled the rebellion, taking refuge in the Ogaden which now appears to be internationally accepted as part of Ethiopia and which is apparently suffering a fate similar to that of El Tigre. Despite the overthrow of the hated Barre, the affairs of Somalia do not appear to have improved".
Thus the Misras and the Askars of Somalia are again refugees and the tragedy of *Maps* is being replayed, but in reverse.

While it is true that Farah is exiled from his homeland, this banishment has given him the freedom to write as he chooses and, like Soyinka, he has accepted

the obligation for the writer to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves, who are not liberated [although] sometimes one is overwhelmed by the sense of futility ... what will it really do? (8)

Whether Farah will ever feel himself capable of returning permanently to his country is doubtful; he considers it to be parochial and after almost twenty years of exile his horizons have obviously developed beyond the narrow confines of Somali interests. However, given the events of January 1991 and the subsequent upheaval within the country, if he does not eventually return he will have difficulty in persuading his readers that he is presenting the truth of what is currently happening to his people.

Kelly makes the point that Farah's characters are those whose lives have been seriously affected by "flaws in Somali society" at the levels of both domestic and national politics.(9) While this is indisputable, it reinforces the fact that he is writing from his personal perspective of the "real world" and, as a man whose own life has been severely disrupted by the actions of the Barre government, his empathy and understanding obviously lie with others who have equally suffered. This, however, does not preclude him from laying under the public microscope those, like Keynaan and Cigaal, who have prospered under a corrupt and vicious regime.
Given that English is but one of the many tongues the polyglot Farah speaks, his usage of the language frequently reveals the influence of his family poetic background. His writing is at times truly lyrical, as when he describes the death of Karin's 'Armadio' in *Maps*.

Before midnight, the old man's leaf fell gently from the tree on the moon. It was a most gentle death. Hush. And the soft falling of the withered leaf didn't even tease the well of Karin's emotions, nor did it puncture the lachrymatory pockets. She didn't cry, didn't announce the departure of the old man's soul to anyone until the following morning. She stayed by him, keeping his death all to herself. She lay by him in reverent silence, he dead, she alive - but you couldn't have told the difference, so quiet was she beside him. (M 71)

Farah draws his inspiration from many sources and particularly, in this lyricism, from *One Thousand and One Nights* which he says has had a great influence upon his fiction: "Anecdotes tied together by the one who narrates is one of the things that appealed to me" (10), a method well exemplified by his use of Askar as narrator in *Maps*. However, if one could level an accusation against the writer it would be that he occasionally shows an eclat of his eclecticism, as when he permits Uncle Hilaal to dig "for psychoanalytical evidence" among a hotchpotch of prominent psychiatrists, anthropologists, political philosophers and poets - all within one paragraph (M 222). At the other end of his spectrum Farah is prepared to break many of the taboos of his society in his discussions of menstruation, a time in Somali society when women are reputed to be kept apart from the household and particularly from food and men, (11) although Farah's depiction of Misra refutes this assertion. Similarly, his discussion of both male and female circumcision and combined homosexuality and bestiality, in the character of the Adenese in *Maps*, is also atypical of the Muslim norm. He also makes some interesting analogies, as when he names Askar's
tutor Cusmaan: although Somalia lacked an orthography of its own until 1972 - one of Barre's few positive achievements was its introduction - the underground Somali script, Cusmaaniyaa, became a symbol of Somali nationhood among the young during Farah's youth, despite colonial disapproval. (12) Cusmaan similarly becomes a symbol for liberation as he exerts his influence upon the youthful Askar to join the army which will fight to ensure that the province of Ogaden does not remain "colonially subjected to foreign rule" (M 167).

Farah's discussion of women's position in Somali society makes trenchant statements on their behalf. In the character of Medina he portrays the dilemma of a woman who is educated and sophisticated and hence should be considered as liberated, but who must operate within the tightly controlled Somali Islamic situation, wherein she is not permitted to function adequately. Her position within her own country must be compared with the time she spent in Italy when she experienced freedom from both political and religious restraints and could utilise her education unhampered. While her background and personal wealth protect her from much of the savagery of the Somali dictatorship, these do not completely exempt her from the controls imposed by her citizenship and the religious restrictions placed upon her female compatriots. Her education has given her the power consciously to analyse what is being inflicted upon her country and thus to become an overt critic of the General: without the luxury of her inherited position she would undoubtedly have disappeared permanently into one of his dungeons. On the other hand, she may have been forced to compromise her convictions, as was Ladan. Farah clearly demonstrates that personal survival, both physical and psychological, is a question of either maintaining the low
profile of apparent acquiescence or the complete acceptance of tribal allegiances and responsibilities. Idil is a woman who can follow this path of acceptance by justifying its rightness in the name of Islam.

While Farah's women are pre-eminent throughout his writings, he does not condone all womanly aspects, but appreciates that self-seeking and coercion can be as much a part of the female psyche as of its male counterpart. Idil displays characteristics which are close to those of Keynaan and Ibrahim; like them she attempts to use her religion to impose her authority and will upon her family although, lacking the power of Islamic masculinity, she does not achieve their ultimate success. In the characters of his three leading female protagonists, Ebla, Medina and Misra, Farah presents three women whose background and philosophy are completely diverse, each of whom is attempting, with varying degrees of success, to create her own personal barriers against the restraints placed upon her by Islamic custom and the General's political edicts. But none can fully succeed and each is ultimately the victim of her geographical and religious circumstances. Of the three, Ebla is the most successful and this is because, like Ladan, she has learned to levitate within the system, compromising where necessary, remaining silent where discretion demands and pragmatically accepting the limited space within which she can manoeuvre. If we consider these three women as being symptomatic of Farah's paradigm of Somali women's future, we can see that he is, in fact, depicting a gradual downward slide for the fate of women in Somalia. Ebla prospers by some good fortune but more especially by using her innate intelligence to manipulate and rationalise life: Medina, who has enjoyed the greatest privileges and whom one could expect to be in the vanguard of liberation, remains
trapped in the recalcitrance of her own refusal either to conform or compromise: and finally there is Misra, the woman who has endured a lifetime of suffering simply because she is a woman, the one who at no time has had control over her own life. Misra is the most pathetic, the most haunting of his characters, and it is she who is ritualistically murdered. Apparently, in Farah's eyes the future does not bode well for Muslim women in Somalia.

The scission within Farah's men is perhaps more easily defined. They tend to fall sharply into two categories: there are those who protest against the iniquities of the General's rule, the twins Soyaan and Loyaan, Murhad and the remnants of the Group of Ten, who give their lives for their altruism. And there are those who embrace the opportunity to flourish under a regime which patronises obsequiousness and sycophancy, those who will selectively use Islam to justify their lust for power and their oppression of all who confront them. But distinct from both these groups is Deeriye, the old man who has achieved near sanctity by his spirituality and his embrace of the most humane aspects of Islam. Of all Farah's male characters, I find Deeriye the most endearing, the one with whom the writer has the most sympathy and with whom the reader can most easily empathise. Close behind him is Rooble, also a fighter against repression and intolerance, who by the end of the Trilogy is imprisoned, still alive - but for how long?

Maps is the first book of Farah's second trilogy, to be followed by Gifts and, finally, by Motives. In 1986 Farah said that Gifts had been submitted to his agent and that already several chapters were completed of the third novel "...to be called Motives". So far (1991) neither book has appeared. This five year silence on the part of
a writer previously so prolific is alarming and it can only be hoped that
this is a mere hiatus in his creativity.

Farah has taken an essentially pessimistic view of his country's
future and until recently one could hardly disagree with his
forebodings, but his gloomy view that the prospects for Somalia can
only be minacious has been challenged. The people have overturned
their tyrannical General, an event which Farah considers not to have
been possible. Admittedly, the resulting turmoil and internecine
fighting reflects, once again, the tribal allegiances and alliances which
have traditionally prevailed, but from this upheaval must emerge a new
order. Perhaps it will be little better than the Draconian
authoritarianism of the General, but at least it will be different and
Somalia may ultimately gain some breathing space in which to develop
a regime based on the more compassionate aspects of Islam.
Whatever the outcome, one can hope that Farah will continue to use
his fiction to document his country's progress.

Perhaps the General's (and Barre's) epitaph should be

If only we listened and understood, we should not now be
among the heirs of Hell.

(Koran 67:4)
APPENDIX

YUSSUF AND HIS BROTHERS

"Satan set at variance me and my brethren"

(Koran 12:100)

Farah's play, *Yussuf and His Brothers*, has been produced once, in July 1982 at the University of Jos in Nigeria, and Moore who attended this premier described it as "an absorbing, yet elusive and mystifying experience". It has not yet been published and perhaps this is understandable as it is not an easy play, being full of allusions and innuendo which a non-African, and specifically a non-Somali, may find problematic; but more importantly a play relies almost entirely upon the spoken word and there are times when Farah does not appear to be completely comfortable with unsupported conversation. Koschin in *The Naked Needle* is a more fluent character in his internalised introspection than in his conversations with Nancy, just as in the play both Yussuf and Aynaba appear to converse in a stilted artificial manner, unlikely between man and wife. Nevertheless, Farah produces the impression that within each of them lies a furnace of emotion and doubt. Aynaba's jealousy of the known love which Yussuf holds for her son, Raageh, and the suspected desire he has for Siraad is coupled with her doubt as to the exact part he played in the death of her first husband and the extent of his complicity in Hussen's arrest. After four years of marriage she asks herself "Who is Yussuf and, equally, who are his brothers?" The play, like most of Farah's work, asks the questions, but provides no answers. While Yussuf is solely
the centre of interest and action, his background, indeed his philosophy, remain an unravelled mystery. Is he the overt nationalist who is apparent, or is he the covert traitor who condemns his brother to death only to claim the widow for himself? Or is he even a mortal being? Aynaba asks him "Who are you really? Are you not like us?" Perhaps he does not fully understand himself, for his reply is uncertain; "I wish I knew". (4)

Although the play is set in no particular country and no particular enemy is defined, there are obvious analogies with the political situation in Somalia: an amorphous threat hangs like a veil over the people and it is apparent that death awaits any who question the rightness of the status quo and of whatever undefined authority is currently empowered. However, reference to the apparent permanency of the colonial masters and their Zulkifl collaborators (12) suggests a nationalistic uprising rather than a rebellion against an internally imposed regime, but this is not explicit and complaints about colonialism could be used to obscure the true target at which the play is aimed, as the situation in Somalia and in many other parts of Africa would preclude an overt declaration against authority. The Narrator states that geographically we are in a peninsula (euphemism for Horn?) of Africa where one region is rebelling against the central power of the Empire. The indigenous people are repressed, living in temporary shelters and nomadic huts while the rulers and their sycophants, the Zulkifls, control government and business, entrenching their power and permanence. This could relate to many parts of post-European colonial Africa, but reference to "nomadic huts" and the "central power of the Empire" strongly suggests Somalia with its large
population of nomads and its attenuated war against the Ethiopian empire for control of the Ogaden.

The role of the Narrator who guides us through Yussuf has similarities to the Greek chorus, but he offers very little explanation and his implications and suggestions in no way provide answers to the reader's questions. He is himself a questioner, reminding his audience of Islamic values and truths, promising not to intrude unduly but to let the rhythm and fluidity of the tale determine its own pace. (12)

Bardolph, whose article "Yussuf and His Brothers" is the only critical material written about the play, explains that the theatre in Somalia continues to flourish in the oral tradition of the culture and that a play always contains a message, "relayed explicitly by the chorus which extracts meanings and lessons". (2) In the case of Yussuf these are somewhat obscure and one is left to supply details from one's own knowledge and imagination, particularly as much of the background to the general theme takes place off stage and the reader is reliant upon the Narrator for this concomitant information. In this respect Yussuf is probably, of all Farah's work, the closest to the oral message of traditional Somali poetry, relying heavily upon the personal images which the reader can empirically conjure.

The setting has a timelessness which could fit most periods of history but certain properties bring it firmly into modernity. Although Yussuf's symbols are those of Islam, the rosary and the prayer mat, the young Kulmie introduces materialism with the watch which Zulkifl has given him and which so obsesses him that he neglects to attend the mosque to pray publicly. His sister, Aynabo, avers that Kulmie has turned traitor for rings, wrist watches and dreams of worldly comforts (16), but as the play unfolds we are forced to doubt his betrayal; the
precious watch is lent to Hussen so that he may know the exact time he is to meet his wife and Yussuf during the staged escape plan, and this inadvertently costs Kulmie his life. In some respects he is a farcical character, a "tamer and feeder of lions" (12) who forgets to lock the gate of their cage as he belatedly prepares their food: the outcome is inevitable. He is apolitical, having no interest in the local polemics, living for present pleasures, but showing an unexpected courage as he helps Hussen to escape from the mob following the debacle of his execution. Is he reacting instinctively to the emotional pressures of the mob; was his fortuitous presence a pure coincidence, or had he planned a part in the rescue? He had made enormous efforts to ascertain advance details of the execution, thrashing Raageh and attempting to bribe Gheddie and his wife, but for what - betrayal of the rebels or betrayal of authority? Kulmie remains one of the question marks of the play and the fact that he is eaten by his own ravenous lions does nothing to mollify the reader. Farah uses Kulmie to express one symptom of the obfuscatory malaise which presently exists in Somalia: Aynabo seeks the return of Kulmie's body but is told by the Zulkifli that nothing remains to bury; the lions have eaten him. This is paralleled in *Sweet and Sour Milk* where the regime refuses to provide a death certificate for the murdered Soyaan, despite his twin's attempts to obtain this vital written document. Thus for posterity there will be no evidence that Soyaan had ever existed, he will soon be an illusion remembered only in the minds of those he loved.

In contrast, Raageh is an open character, a lad of thirteen who adores his stepfather and emulates his every action, sharing his prayers, his clothes, his love, his political hopes; he becomes Yussuf's second self, the future hope not only for the man but for the country;
the bridge, the double that exists in all of us, Yussuf's "other head" (76), his country's "Future-Man" (21). As Yussuf says, Raageh's future is tied to that of the nation (8). The boy has courage and withstands Kulmie's beating without revealing any vital information; and he is honest, refusing to accept the much-proferred watch as a bribe since he can offer nothing in return: at the same time he is a typical boy who proudly fights the Zulkifl louts to defend the honour of Hussen. For Raageh, if Hussen is to die it must be in defence of the rebellion with the full honours of a martyr, the world knowing that it was he alone who blew up the bridge.

Yussuf's wife, Aynabo, suffers a deep jealousy of the bonds and affection which Yussuf shares with Raageh: she feels herself to be exiled within her own home, shut out from their mutuality, and her jealousy extends to Siraad, Hussen's wife. Aynabo recalls how four years ago her husband, Yussuf's cousin and also one of his band of brothers, similarly should have faced a firing squad and how Yussuf had plotted to rescue him also, first taking her and Raageh into his home for protection; but the scheme had misfired when the husband (who remains unnamed) took his own life, either not knowing of the scheme for his rescue or preferring his personal solution to the ignominy of that rescue, thus robbing the rebels of a martyr-figure. Aynabo remained with Yussuf, now as his wife, but she has harboured secret doubts that Yussuf may have connived at her husband's death in order to acquire her for himself, just as she now fears that he may be manoeuvring Siraad into a similar position. She claims that it was only after she became Yussuf's wife that she learned he had sent his first wife away. Yussuf is later to admit to Gheddi that he had sent his family away to safety as he was unsure of his own fate.
Aynabo's fears that she is about to be replaced are proven unfounded: Hussen faces his executioners convinced that he will die, unbelieving that they have saved him by deliberately firing into the air on all three commands to shoot. In the ensuing melee, as the spectators erupt into a tumult, he escapes with Kulmie's aid, but Gheddi and his twelve-man firing squad are trapped; unable to make their way through the mob, they are arrested. From the point of view of the rebel cause this is irrelevant, the plan had been not merely to save one life, but to make of that life a cause celebre on which to focus public support and to demonstrate the strength of the rebel underground. Hussen, however, is faced with the dilemma of living on with the knowledge that although he may be free, thirteen men will have been sacrificed for his one life and the martyrdom which he was seeking will still be denied him. Gheddi meantime has accepted his own predicament: he is damned whatever he does. He has sworn on the Koran to be a servant of the regime, but he also is a true believer in the rebellion. If he permits his soldiers to execute Hussen he is damned in the eyes of his own people; if he abets an escape plot the regime will exact retribution, but more importantly his Islamic vow will be violated. He makes the pragmatic secular decision and plans to escape immediately after the aborted execution.

Hussen's confrontation with death has changed his perspective. He realises that he cannot live as a hero-figure; his honour, his whole identity has been lost in those terrifying moments when he believed he was dead. His only recourse is to surrender, thus achieving his freedom and restoring his honour through the reality of death. He also suspects that Yussuf has manipulated not only his escape but also his
initial arrest. While Hussen has consistently denied his own guilt of blowing up the bridge, he knows that an equal declaimer of his innocence has been Yussuf, but Yussuf has never been willing to produce evidence to substantiate this innocence. The saboteur was identified by his raincoat - Hussen's raincoat - but we know that Yussuf owns an identical garment; Aynabo accosts him with this fact, and with his having been seen near the bridge on the night of the bombing. The emphasis given to the raincoats may appear rather contrived, but Farah frequently adopts the detective mode and drops clues for his readers which may be recalled later. Thus in one story we may get brief mention of characters and incidents to which we may be introduced in depth in subsequent works.

Exactly who planted the bomb remains one of the imponderables of the play. For Yussuf it is an unimportant detail; it is not an individual who "plants a bomb which blows up a bridge, he does so not as a person but as though he were the nation: and he is the nation . . . we're all one person" (72). Yussuf sees Hussen not as a man but as a symbol of struggle, one who has no right to make restitution of himself (60), but who must take the place of Aynabo's husband, he who lacked the courage to be martyred for his people. Hussen also sees himself as a symbol, but for him that symbolism is not of one who has been dragged back from the abyss of death, but of the man who planted the explosive which blew up the bridge. He will be the eternal light of the unknown warrior, the one who gave his life that others might live. If he is to die, let it be as a martyr; he will then be credited with the explosion, whether or not he is innocent. He decides to greet death willingly, restoring his own identity and simultaneously eluding Yussuf's puppetry.
Yussuf's power and leadership abilities seem to evaporate with Hussen's decision and, as Bardolph says, he appears to be caught in a double-bind, unable to give decisive answers to questions, diminished by Hussen's transformation. (3) Hussen's re-birth has undermined his own. In the final scene we learn of Yussuf's having arisen from the dead; Banana, the African condottiere who has flown in with his personal army of mercenaries to restore order for the regime, had years previously rescued Yussuf, drowned and apparently dead. To Yussuf, Banana is the man who gave him this gift of life, the biological father-figure that the adolescent child meets again after many years, having glimpsed him briefly only once or twice before; to Banana this return to life is "a gift of the divine" (69); "Our help came down to them, delivering whom We pleased" (Koran 12:110). Banana is to remain an enigma until the final moments of the play. Has he come to uphold the regime, or has he assumed the legendary mantle of Shaka who will lead the oppressed and oust the oppressors? He is a figure larger than life, who can command men and women - big, handsome, a man of appetites, who gives hints of his political affiliations, but leaves us guessing. It is not until the Epilogue that Farah offers hope: Raageh reads that they live, but in exile - as does Farah - waiting to return. Meantime, there are bridges, which join not themselves but other objects, just as a man serves not only himself, but others as well (30). Raageh is the future, the as yet uncommitted, but the one who will share the treasure left behind. He must grow and be cared for, as Yussuf cared for his garden, for the Koran states that kindness must be shown to widows and orphans, they must be dealt with justly: "remember they [orphans] are your brothers" (Koran 2.219). The hope, however, may be challenged by doubt, for the responsibility for
this care will fall now upon the shoulders of a boy barely entering his teens.

The play is entirely oral, the only evidence of written material being Yussuf's letter to Raageh which comprises the Epilogue; this at least will remain as proof that Yussuf existed, just as, in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, Soyaan's Memorandum and his piece on Clowns, Cowards and Upstarts proclaims his existence, unlike Kulmie who leaves no memorial and will inevitably become a non-person. Is Farah analogising Somalia's transition from a purely oral culture to one which has belatedly been given its own script, or does Yussuf now feel free to put into writing what none had previously dared to commit to paper? As Soyaan understood the dangers of his written Memorandum so would Yussuf have realised that oral reporting can be denied as rumour, but paper and the written word are irrefutably damning. All governments are adept at utilising rumour; in more advanced societies where the written word is the accepted mode of communication, politicians well appreciate that journalists can be fed a rumour of an impending action which is likely to be publicly detrimental; this then becomes a governmental possibility which is allowed to 'float' through the media to enable the people's reaction to be assessed. At this juncture it is only rumour, but it rapidly becomes fact if reaction is either indifferently favourable or non-existent. But Yussuf must rely upon the spread of information by oral means only, and this is in part why Aynabo's husband was uncertain whether or not he would be rescued; the brothers had been unable to gain access to speak to him directly. It is not until Yussuf has physically left the country that he dares to communicate with Raageh in written form, and this makes his letter all the more symbolically important in the life of the boy.
Is Yussuf the metaphor for Farah, the one who has left his people, but persists in their consciousness as a bridge to the outside world, an exile in body but not in spirit? The bridge symbol is significant throughout the play. In the first scene Aynabo watches the man and boy as they walk towards the bridge, the boy's eyes raised admiringly to his stepfather "like a drawbridge"; they part, the child to cross the bridge and the man to turn back and take a different road (2-3):

Raageh is Yussuf's bridge to the nation: the Zulkiflis live on the other side of the bridge in an area removed from the country's proletariat, and the sabotage of the bridge is the pivot around which all action rotates. Farah, in writing of his early childhood in Kallafo, has stressed the importance of the town bridge which it was necessary to cross in order to reach the schools which lay on the other side, the side of Government Hill, the seat of authority. This was a bridge guarded by Ethiopian soldiers who enjoyed inflicting upon their subject people intimidation, humiliation, interrogation, and even rumoured rape. At the same time he was aware of the cultural bridge which his generation had crossed in its educational aborption of a worldview alien to that of his parents, a view in which his people's history and ancestry were notably absent "from the rollcall of world history". Bardolph questions whether Yussuf is a symbol for the elite, the "artist or visionary, the man who has been singled out because he could read the present and forecast the future" and who consequently arouses the suspicions of his brothers; but is the exiled writer regarded with suspicion by his peers or only by authority; is resentment against the exile only present when it is whipped up and inculcated by authority? Few British resented W.H. Auden's 1939 departure from a Britain embarking upon the horrors of war until considerable adverse publicity suggested that
his exile was a matter of self-preservation and a betrayal of those who remained.\(^6\) I feel it is more likely that Farah sees Yussuf as an analogy for himself, a seeker after truth. In his interview with Jaggi he said:

"Truth in all its contexts is what finally leads you to comprehend the first and most important questions that all human beings ask themselves, 'Who am I?' 'Why am I who I am?' 'What is my place in this world?' and it is in answer to these questions that I have been writing, coming to the same questions from different angles, using different characters".\(^7\)

Yussuf is presumed to have died twice, first by drowning and later in a cholera epidemic, of which he was the sole survivor. Banana recounts dragging him dead from the water, watching life flutter softly back into the inert body and feeling convinced that a miracle has happened. As one who has tasted of the Lethe and has experienced what lies on the other side of life, is Yussuf now no longer mortal, but a symbol, a spirit of the true soul of his people? As he looks into his hand mirror, his major leitmotif, could it be that he is seeking a reflection which no longer exists? Is he now truly a man or he has transcended mortality? Borges reminds us that "killing or engendering are divine or magical acts which notably transcend the human condition" \(^8\) and Yussuf is a man who is prepared to kill for his cause. Aynabo accuses him of sitting huddled in a corner clutching his mirror, "seeing I know not what" \(^20\). Folklore has it that ghosts have no reflections: as he says, he knows death and his funeral rites have been conducted \(^5\). His first act on returning to life in Banana's grasp is to ask for a mirror. Does he need reassurance that what has returned from that brief encounter with Eternity is indeed Yussuf? He is obsessively interested in Hussen's reaction to facing death while waiting in the prison cell, with time like a crucifix bearing heavily upon his shoulders. Yussuf wishes to experience vicariously the anticipation of death, his drowning
having given him no time for the ceremony and ritual of its approach. Banana hints that he may have undergone a Biblical resurrection.

The Narrator tells us that Yussuf has been likened to the "mirror's splintered and wounded soul". If he is only a reflection of the others outside himself (14) he has undergone a transubstantiation where his own mutable soul can migrate to Raageh so that he is the boy in the same way that the boy is the nation (39), thus establishing his duality with Raageh and through Raageh with the country. Yussuf is accused variously of being simultaneously the man he once was and the one he has become, one the sum of whose fragments exceeds the total, a miracle of a man whose disappearances have become legendary, yet who has the saintly strength of one who believes in the Eternal. He remains unmoved and says he is prepared to make do with his faulty soul. In his final message to Raageh, Yussuf says that the mask is no longer necessary "nor do I need any other prop". Now that he has established his oneness with Raageh, the "Futureman", he can physically disappear; no need remains for the mirror, as none remains for his presence in the physical body. He is the instigator, the invisible one who cannot be identified as the perpetrator, about whom the others, the Brothers who are also believers, orbit (Koran 49.10). It is he who, like the Biblical Joseph, monitors the situation from a distance of objectivity.

There are strong Biblical analogies in *Yussuf and His Brothers*, Farah drawing upon both the 12th Surah of the Koran and upon Genesis in the Bible upon which to base the character of his protagonist. Like his namesake, Yussuf is a man who sees a dreamful future; this earns him the animosity of his brothers, just as Joseph was
envied by the sons of Bil'hah and Zilpah (Gen: 37.2) who saw him as the favourite child of their father Jacob. The Koran remains silent on the naming of the brothers, although Farah permits Raageh to name four "uncles" who may or may not be brothers in the rebellion. But one brother is named, Hussen, just as the Bible (although not the Koran) names Reuben, and both are uniquely men of compassion: Reuben is he who returns to the well attempting to save the young Joseph (Gen: 37.29); Hussen intends to surrender knowing that he cannot live with the death of thirteen innocent men on his conscience, that he must make restitution of himself. Yussuf's shirt is one of his major stage properties, a Biblical symbol which figures prominently in his association with Raageh. The boy angers his mother by insisting upon wearing his stepfather's "dirty shirt that smelt of [his] filth and sweat" (7) in his desire to become part of the man he respects and loves; so too does the shirt, or coat, feature frequently in Joseph's life. His beloved father, Jacob, "had made for him a coat of many colours" (Gen: 37.3); and it was this coat which the brothers returned bloodstained to the old man as proof that the boy had been eaten by the wolf:

'The wolf devoured him. But you will not believe us, though we speak the truth.' And they showed him their brother's shirt, stained with false blood. (Koran 12:18)

As a parallel, a mud-stained raincoat is identified as proof of guilt: but of whose guilt - Hussen's or Yussuf's? In the Koran the shirt, torn from behind, proves Joseph's innocence from seduction of the Egyptian's wife, and lastly it miraculously cures Jacob's blindness:

And when the bearer of good news arrived, he threw Joseph's shirt over the old man's face, and he regained his sight: 'Did I not tell you, God has made known to me what you know not'. (Koran 12:96)
Abandoned by his brothers, Joseph is presumed to have died; so too does Yussuf apparently die and, like his Biblical brother, he returns after many years from the dead, and each man knows he is not free from sin and that his soul is prone to evil, but that the Lord is forgiving and merciful, all-knowing and wise (Koran 12:52, 12:100) and that he is placed here on earth to fulfil the wishes of that Lord. Raageh, like Jacob, is "brought out of the desert [into manhood] . . . after Satan had stirred up strife between [Yussuf] and his brothers" (Koran 12:100). For Raageh the shirt stained from his stepfather's body has absorbed the very essence of the man, and as the boy feels the cloth touching his flesh he becomes less the thirteen year old boy and more the man in whom the future of the nation may be entrusted, until in the final scene he is asked to assume the mantle of that man, "his future . . . tied to that of the nation". His duality with his stepfather on the one hand and his country on the other is affirmed.

Duality plays an important part in Yussuf and His Brothers, the Castor and Pollux syndrome (9) of twinnings, groupings and the mirror-technique being frequently used; Farah also touches upon Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist explorations of the 1950s - his theory of the other. Farah's concept of his own divided personality is emphasised in his childhood memories, a time when he was constantly aware of learning in languages other than his own, of utilising paradigms other than his people's, of receiving other nations' wisdoms, and of being aware that in the Ogaden the Somali child was "the unnamed other . . . the child of contradictory inadequacies". (10) Hussen wonders if Yussuf is listening or if his mind is elsewhere. "The posture he strikes invariably suggests to me as though he were a twin-brother in Manichean communication
with the other who had died young" (13), a spiritual twin with whom he is exploring a dualistic theology. Yussuf's monozygotism is reflected in many of the characters, none of whom is unambiguous. Farah frequently uses twinning as a metaphor: in his novel Sweet and Sour Milk there are the twin brothers Soyaan and Loyaan who suffer violence at the hands of Somalia's hostile regime: Sardines pairs the protagonist women into ages, social strata, religious convictions: A Naked Needle joins the women who are voyeurs in their various associations with Somali men. But Yussuf and His Brothers appear to be more than twinned; they are the multi-faceted perspective of one entity, each containing all. Yussuf is a hologram of the entire band of brothers which is the people of the nation, divided yet indivisible, perhaps anarchic, but determined to wrest power from those who have abused it. In his symbiotic relationship with the brothers he has become less an individual and more a codetta in a fugue, even his periodic disappearances underlining this transformation.

I keep telling them that we're all one person: that if one of the brothers plants a bomb which blows up a bridge, he does so not as a person but as though he were the nation: and he is the nation. (72)

Yussuf is portrayed generally as the "manifold manifestations of the many-facedness of a mirror" (14), but specifically he enjoys a duality with his stepson, Raageh, whom he has endowed with his revolutionary soul and who will be the bridge to the future for his country: Banana dreams of a Yussuf with two heads, one his own and one that of Raageh. At the same time Farah twins Yussuf and Hussen, whose raincoats are identical and appear to be one. Banana asks if there was any period "when they looked so much alike it was possible for one to be taken for the other" (68), and Hussen, in turn, is paired
with Aynabo's former husband, each refusing rescue and preferring death, albeit in a manner of their individual choosing. Both Yussuf and Hussen have faced certain death and have drawn aside the veil to return to life, or have been restored by God for a time ordained (Koran 39:42), but during this experience Hussen has found within himself a twin, the other, the subjugated self, and his dilemma is to choose which of the two shall survive - the one who has indulged in the secret sacrilegious thoughts, or the one whom the gods have blessed, the good Hussen, one who has descended in a direct line from the Prophet's daughter, Fatima (49). He appears to have chosen the former as he later flouts his infidelity before his wife, Siraad. His schismatic experience contrasts with that of Yussuf who fears himself to be not merely bifurcated but fragmented. Banana also has reflections and doubles. It is only the Epilogue that reveals which Banana has spoken to Yussuf, the Self or the double who is Banana's stand-in for many situations: and he has a reflection in the ill-fated Kulmie. Both are creatures of doubtful alliances. Do they align themselves with authority or with rebellion? Can they be trusted or are they among those basest creatures, the faithless, who violate their treaties and have no fear of God? (Koran 8:57). Aynabo believes that she shares a destiny with Siraad, a destiny which is being determined by Yussuf. Each woman's husband has been condemned to execution before a firing squad; Yussuf insists that each is innocent but refuses to offer evidence in the defence of either. Each woman understands that Yussuf will fulfil his Islamic obligations to widows and orphans by taking her into his home, yet each ponders the possibility that he has been the agent provocateur in the arrest of her husband.
Although Farah has experimented with dyadism in his other novels, it is most pronounced in *Yussuf and His Brothers* where the counterpoint of light and darkness, life and death, the sacred and the profane are complementary to one another and are delicately balanced. As Yussuf's final letter tells Raageh,

"... nothing exists unless its double exists too, life has no meaning unless death exists to complement it ... I am a man and ... at the same time a woman and child ... there is God in man and the devil in a saint." (77)

The play questions how we face death; is it with the conviction that to die for a cause is worthwhile, hoping that we leave a better world for our children? Should we follow Hussen and confront death head on, convinced that by so doing we remain morally intact, an individual whole and integral, not shattered to disintegration as Yussuf has become, a man divided within his soul? Should we leave the conflict, hoping to live to fight another day, as Farah himself has done, believing that we can influence our country's destiny from beyond its borders? *Yussuf and His Brothers* presents questions which extend far beyond the traditional Somali mores, moving the reader into universal metaphysics. The poetic serenity of Yussuf's final letter accepting, as it does, the multiplicity of roles and choices which permeate man's life, leaves us with what is perhaps Farah's personal philosophy:

There is a universe of doubt and man drowns in it unless he finds a cause for which he must die. (77)
END NOTES

NOTE Unless otherwise stated, all Koranic quotations are taken from the Dawood translation

ABSTRACT


A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH


5. "Childhood of My Schizophrenia" an article written by Farah in Amsterdam (9 August 1990), which he permitted scholars to use prior to its publication. This was kindly provided by Professor Jacqueline Bardolph of Nice University. The article subsequently appeared in the Times Literary Supplement of 23-29 November 1990. 1264.


ISLAM AND FARAH.


2. ibid. 225.

3. The Topkapi Museum in Istanbul displays paintings of some of the more important points in Muhammed's life in which this "blank" is evident. Personal knowledge.


5. ibid. 240.


FROM A CROOKED RIB


12. Personal knowledge.


15. Wright, Derek. "Post-Colonial Literatures". A background paper prepared for students at the Northern Territory University. 3.


The creation of woman from man's rib is folk-lore. The Koran (4.1) states that woman was created from man's soul.
A NAKED NEEDLE


4. Farah, Nuruddin. "Fear is a Goat." The Guardian. (Lagos) June 1, 1990. This article was also generously sent to me by Professor Jacqueline Bardolph of Nice University, France. No page number was printed.


THE DICTATORSHIP TRILOGY


10. Personal knowledge.


17. *ibid*. 367. This is translated in the Dawood translation of the Koran as "This Book is not to be doubted".
MAPS


12. Lewis, A modern History of Somalia: A Nation and State in the Horn of Africa. op. cit. 130.


CONCLUSION


3. ibid. 1828.


8. Soyinka, Wole. ABC Radio National 7.30 pm May 12, 1991. Soyinka was speaking regarding his earlier writing on behalf of Nelson Mandela, then imprisoned.


APPENDIX

YUSSUF AND HIS BROTHERS

The play remains unpublished (1991). Page references are to the typescript which was kindly sent to me by Professor Jacqueline Bardolph.


3. ibid. 61.


5. Bardolph, "Yussuf and His Brothers by Nuruddin Farah." op. cit. 64.

6. Personal knowledge.


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"Interview with Nuruddin Farah about His Play The Offering". With Julian Marshall. BBC Arts and Africa, 109. 1976. 4-5.

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OTHER WORKS


