

**Reflections of African Dilemma in Nuruddin Farah's Novel, *A Naked Niddle***

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**Abstract**

This article will address the assertion that the African Dilemma is mentioned in the novel *A Naked Needle* by Nuruddin Farah. The study's main emphasis will be on the idea that both men and women's sexual desire is constrained by a need for control and a desire for freedom. The notion that a tribe in Kenya or Somalia exercises authority over its members' desires and directs them into pre-determined shapes will be the focus of this research project. Both men and women in Kenya and Somalia compete for control over the expressions of desire that are sanctioned by their respective tribes. Therefore, desire fills the void between group control & individual freedom.

**Keywords:** A Naked needle, desire, freedom, Kenya, Somalia

**Introduction:**

In 1976, Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah had his work named "A Naked Needle" published for the first time. It was the second novel that Farah had written in the English language. It was written in English and was the 184th book in Heinemann's African Writers Series.

After receiving positive reviews for his first novel, *From A Crooked Rib*, Farah began work on the considerably more ambitious manuscripts for his second book, *A Naked Needle*. This novel is his second book. In 1972, James Currey gave his approval for it to be published in the African Authors Series and the piece was subsequently included in the collection.

It was to be the only book that Farah would ever write in Somalia (Currey, 2003). In 1969, he moved back to the United States after spending four years in India, where he attended Panjab University and studied Philosophy in addition to Literature (Farah 1998). During the same year, in a coup d'état, a socialist militarized government took control, in

addition to Major General Mohammed Siad Barre was installed as President of the country. Barre was at the helm of the administration (Farah, 1989).

At the beginning, Farah was on board with the new government because he thought that his country needed a revolution. But by 1971, he had developed a greater grasp of politics, and he started having uncertainty on the success of the Somali revolution. His response to what he perceived as political corruption and the need for a unified nation was *A Bare Needle*. Richard Lister and Ros de Lanerolle both offered suggestions for improvement on the first draft. Although both of them were generally positive, it was made abundantly plain that the text in its current form could not be published (Schraeder 1988). The work went through a lot of modifications over the course of the following three years, and Lister eventually ran out of patience with the 3rd edition. Previously, Farah had done an essay on James Joyce, thus he said that the book was too challenging for her to grasp. Specifically,

the thesis was on James Joyce. Henry Chakava, the editor for Heinemann in Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and East Africa both reported receiving much higher number of good evaluations (Urrey 2000).

A premiere party was organised at the Africa Centre to celebrate the public publication of *A Naked Needle* in July 1976. Farah had already left Somalia at this time, but she still intended to go back the next year to finish her studies for a degree at the London and Essex universities' theatre departments. In order to board a flight to Mogadishu, he left the UK and travelled to Rome. However, when he phoned his cousin in Somalia to plan for a ride to the airport, he was informed that it was dangerous for him to come back because of the book's storyline.

The period of time that Farah spent in exile came to an end in 1996. Koschin, a professor at a university and ardent revolutionary, tells his story in *A Naked Needle* as he waits for Nancy to come; she is a lady he meets in London & has promised to marry him. The events of the novel take place over the course of a single day in Mogadishu (Currey, 2003). While he has a deep faith in the 1969 revolution, his supervisors at the institution do not share his enthusiasm for it. Instead of reaching a solution, he hands in his resignation, and Nancy starts to question how she will adjust to the culture of Somalia. These ideas are examined via the experiences of Koschin's acquaintances who have previously wed brides from other countries (Schraeder, 1988).

Throughout the course of the book, the protagonist, Koschin, travels throughout Mogadishu, and the author, Farah, is pleased with the novel's ability to paint a vivid picture of the city: "...the real Mogadishu today fades in comparison to

the written - about Mogadishu and so if somebody wants to reconstruct Mogadishu today one may read *A Naked Needle* and see what street was called what, and what it looked like."

### **Nuruddin Farah's *A Naked Needle***

In the book *A Naked Needle*, Koshin Qowdhan, an English instructor from Somaliland, tells the tale of a day when Nancy, a lady who has been waiting for Koshin to marry her, arrives to keep a promise she made to him years ago to wed by the time she was thirty. The problem arises near to the females chosen as wives by some Somalis, who are either rejected because they are white or non-Muslim. The conflict is between indigenous marital notions and those of modern, European-educated Somalis. Among these weddings are those between a Somali male and a non-Somali woman, such as the unions of Barre and Mildred, Mohamed and Barbara, and Koshin and Nancy. For the sake of this study, we will focus on the two first couples and the Somali tribe. (Utami 2013). The story centres on a single day in Koshin's life when Nancy arrives to realise a long-standing vow to be married by the time she turns thirty. The controversy revolves upon the women chosen as brides by some Somalis, who are either rejected because they are white or non-Muslim. Nonetheless, the story's fundamental main concept is centred on the conflict between traditional marriage views and those of contemporary, European-educated Somalis. Some of these weddings include a Somali man and a lady from another country, such as Barre and Mildred's union, Mohamed and Barbara's union, and Koshin and Nancy's union. For the sake of this article, we shall focus on the two early couples as well as the Somali tribe. (Chukwu 1975).

The protagonist of the novel "A Naked Needle," Koshin Qowdhan, is an English teacher from Somaliland, and the story is based on his life. The plot revolves on one day in Koshin's life when a woman named Nancy arrives to fulfil an old promise of marriage before the age of thirty. This day is the focal point of the book. At the time when the events of the story take place, Koshin is thirty years old. The source of the dispute is the fact that some Somali males choose non-Muslim or non-white women to be their spouses, only to have their choices rejected for one of two reasons: either because they are white or because they are not Muslim. In spite of this, the plot revolves on the conflict that arises between the traditional Somali viewpoints of marriage and the viewpoints of modern Somalis who have been educated in European countries on the subject of marriage. Some of these partnerships include a Somali man and a woman who is not Somali such as the unions of Barre and Mildred, Mohamed and Barbara, and Koshin and Nancy; nevertheless, for the sake of this study, we will concentrate on the two first couples and the Somali tribe. Relationships such as the one between Barre and Mildred are an example of this sort of connection. (Farah's, 2019).

On the one hand, Barbara, an American, marries Mohamed, a Somali man; since he married a person who was not of Somali descent, "Mohamed acquired the status of being the first in Mogadiscio, no Somali has ever married a foreigner" (Farah 1976:72). The act of marrying a foreigner is considered a source of gossip as well as "talk of town for months" by the Somali clans in Mogadishu (Farah 1976:72); Mohamed's marriage to Barbara is such a huge shock to the Somali clan that it causes Mohamed to be at the centre of

conversation for a significant amount of time as a result of the marriage. This shock represents two distinct but linked issues: Mohamed represents a new image of the Somali man - one who is willing to fulfil his personal feeling of want in contradiction to the dogma of the collective position—and his marriage is originally perceived as a transgression and transcendence of Somalia's recognised traditions. These two problems are related to one another. During her conversation with Koshin, Barbara elaborates on the concept of desire in relation to the tribe, saying, "And then we married against everything." Furthermore, I dreamed for him, and he also dreamed for me, for the nation, and for the chances to contribute to the making of something that can be grasped in one's hands. dreams, both those that have come true and those that haven't yet. After that, we were confronted head-on with reality, and for the next few months, we argued nonstop around the clock. (Farah 1976:63)

The crux of Barbara's argument is a conflict with the other members of the tribe, as well as the struggle to hold on to one's aspirations while living in an oppressive setting. The foundation of Barbara's marriage is not anything that can be seen or touched; rather, it is an intangible emotion known only as love. Marriage and families, on the other hand, are legitimate institutions that can neither be dismissed nor disregarded. She, an American woman, views her marriage to Mohamed as a public display of love. (Wolfers, 2009). Barbara feels that by memorialising her love in a tribally recognised institution, she would be able to avert the tribe's wrath. She even says, "I must become acclimated, not to the entire tribe" (Farah 1976: 64), referring exclusively to Mohammed, her husband

and the other half of a forbidden love. In spite of this, it was all for nothing since the marriage absorbed the conflict that was occurring outside, and the fight became one that was fought between the married pair than between the tribe and the wedded couple. Barbara clarifies the situation by quoting a Somali proverb: "Laba isu dhow wey dirirta; carab iyo dana koley tahay" (Farah 1976:63), which may be interpreted as "of two close together they fight; tongue and jaw are most likely" (Andrzejewski 1974:225). To put it another way, the jaw and tongue are supposed to be part of the same system and work in tandem (Sheikh Mohamed & of Nairobi, 2016).

On the other hand, while taking an AID course at the University of Minnesota, Barre meets an American lady named Mildred; they "decided that each would love the other, decided on their making it to their maximum ability" (Farah 1976:27); this portrayal of the pair, who would endure everything for the sake of their love, is sentimental and evocative of a fairy tale. Barre, however, has constructed this fairy-tale-like love story on a series of falsehoods; he romanticises and idealises his Somali clan as the "kin and kith [that] would welcome her [Mildred] into their midst as the daughter, the white daughter of the tribe, immediately as she comes to the country"; however, Barre's portrayal of his people as "kin and kith" is based on a series (Farah 1976:36). Mildred has the impression from Barre that her people are welcoming and do not object to the fact that she is white and a Christian, both of which are indicators of her double foreignness. In fact, in the fourth novel written by Farah, titled *Sardines*, a Somali tribe does accept an Arab woman named Fatima Bint Thabet will marry a Somali guy. This is due to the fact that Fatima Bint Thabet

shares the same religion as Somalis, this indicates that she is alien to Somalis exclusively on the level of her ethnicity. Religion, not Somaliness, is the crucial marker of distinctiveness that the tribe cannot ignore or disregard. (Hons, 1996).

To put it another way, the Somali tribe is represented as adaptable to the demands of its members; yet, Mildred was "offered... their loathing in plenty" (Farah 1976:34), which contrasts sharply with Barre's image of the community. In point of fact, some of Barre's tribe have raised objections [...] They claim that she is a whitewhore, and they argue that it is impossible to maintain a white lady who is also a whore. According to what they have heard, there are two fundamental sins that a person cannot bear to commit in the eyes of God on that day of judgement (Farah 1976:30)

The absence of links between Somaliness and Islam and morals enables the linkage between Mildred's whiteness and Christianity on one side and the famed image of the whore on the other. Islam is used to justify the tribe's rejection of Mildred and denial of her status as a tribe-approved wife of a Somali man. On the basis of her identification, Mildred is disapproved by the religious community as the corrupt and potentially corrupting lady. On the basis of her identification, Mildred is disapproved by the religious community as the corrupt and potentially corrupting lady. The following Quranic verse is brought up during a talk between Koshin and an old tribal member: "And We divided you into tribes and nations in order that you might understand one another better" (Farah 1976:13).

Despite the tribe's attempts to portray itself as an adherent of Islam in daily encounters, it doesn't seem to be aware of

or bothered by this passage, which advocates forming connections with diverse human groups. Mildred isn't rejected because she isn't a Muslim Somali; rather, it's because she simply symbolises the other, who the tribe's I don't understand. Mildred is not rejected because she is not a Somali Muslim, validating the argument that the clan employs Islam as a ruse rather than a true dedication to the faith. (Clapham2012).

Finally, the book *A Naked Needle* shows two instances in which a person's desires are suppressed by their tribe, which forbids them from engaging in any form of desire that is not sanctioned by the tribe; the person, being a member of a Somali tribe, is forced to engage in pre-made and pre-selected channels of desire. In both scenarios, the individual's desires are thwarted in a manner that is detrimental to the tribe. In this regard, it is appropriate to draw reference to the statement made by Michel Foucault, "Sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden" (Foucault 1978: 83). The foundation of the Somali tribe, one of the most important parts of Somali civilisation, is an unwritten agreement wherein everything is guided by the wishes of the collective tradition rather than the desires of an individual. (Meriem, 2016). Sexuality is consequently imprinted with the tribal notion, which views sex and sexual desire as tools for maintaining the status quo rather than changing it. The tribe contends that while sexual activity is a private act, it is an extension of the social and public realm. The individual seeks to reject both the physical traditions of the past and their ethereal representations in the present via the same acts. They then attempt to create a new status quo that will

serve as the foundation for a new future. The traditions of the past are brought to the forefront by the tribe through sex and individual desire, and the present is marked with the values of the past (Moolla, 2016).

### Conclusion

In his book *A Naked Needle*, Nuruddin Farah discusses the dialectics of desire in the context of Somali and Kenyan tribes. These dialectics are entwined in two conflicting approaches: the tribal system of controlling everything, including members' desires, and the individual goal of carving out a private space for his or her demands. The conflict between the tribal emphasis on making personal desires visible and the fight on the part of the individual to keep their desires private is brought out in these two texts. The crux of this debate is whether or not desire should be or will remain largely under the authority of the tribe, that is, created within the confines of the tribal area. Three important issues are revealed by the texts under study: first, both men and women are subject to tribal control of desire; second, there is a growing trend to resist this tribal control through relationships with people of different nationalities and religions or by refusing the need to have a tribal conceived; Third, despite the individual fight for self-definition of want, the tribe continues to see itself as the source of (il)legitimization of want. As a result, the question of want and the tribe involves both having an inner and exterior comprehension of the member's desire as well as whether desire is a private matter or a contentious problem between the individual and the group to which they belong, often a tribe.

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