Violence against Girls: A Feminist Perspective on Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*

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Abstract
In most African societies, there are discernable cultural definitions of power relations which could result to gender-based violence such as gender roles, sexual violence, gender discrimination, stereotypes and cultural prejudices against a particular gender. Indeed, cultural definitions of gender affect the ability of the female gender to integrate socially in society. This creates a feeling of powerlessness which leaves girls and women psychologically depressed or traumatized. Based on this feeling of powerlessness, Nuruddin Farah's From a Crooked Rib is explored to expose various forms of violence that may not be idyllic for girls. Feminist ideologies are employed to interpret experiences and the strategies used by the girl protagonist to revolt against patriarchal subjugation. This paper also adopts some psychoanalytical concepts in interpreting experiences.
Keywords: **Violence, Feminism, Gender Inequality, Gender Roles, Sexual Abuse**

Introduction

The general perception of violence in reality and the negative portraiture in literature have been attributed to extreme force, injustice, violation, rape, pain, suffering or actions which could cause discrimination and destruction. Most societies are characterized by violence which is a "prevalent problem with substantial physical and mental health consequences" (Kilpatrick

1209). Significantly, Randall Collins observes that violence is "about the intertwining of human emotions of fear, anger and excitement, in ways that run right against the conventional morality of normal situations" (24). Rory Miller asserts that "violence is dangerous and it hurts and there is no guaranteed win, but an act of force is the only thing that can stop an act of violence" (7). Gary Slutkin further lends credence to Miller's submission by stating that "violence should be treated as a disease" (www.cureviolence.org).

In most societies, violence could be directed against a particular gender for various reasons. This is referred to as gender-based violence. Colomba Muriungi and Anne Muriiki observe that:

> The term "gender-based violence" is controversial because while some scholars see it as violence against women, recent definitions tend to connect it with all acts of violence rooted in some form of patriarchal ideology, and can thus be committed against both women and men. Gender-based violence is therefore an umbrella term for any harm perpetrated against a person's will and it could be physical, sexual, psychological, economic, or socio-cultural. Violence is thus a means of control. (117)

Furthermore, R.H Walters and R.D Parke suggest that "gender-based violence is culturally determined. As a result, it gives people the privilege to harm others based on their cultural background and beliefs which they do not perceive acts as violence" (231). In this paper, gender-based violence is perceived as any form of violence against the female gender. In fact, these acts of violence are perpetrated against the female gender because she is a girl or woman. All this has led to abusive behaviours that have forceful patterns of male dominance and control over the female victims. In

essence, these patterns of male dominance have "encouraged the marginalization of girls and women" (Kolawole, *Womanism and African* 2).

In most African societies, girls are subjected to violence of different forms as a result of some cultural, social, economic or political issues emanating from the actions of men, women or even the victims. Olawale Albert observes that "violence against girls and women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies. They are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped. Such violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace…and should be given special attention" ("Women and Urban Violence…" 19). In many situations, the incidents of violence against girls are not condemned publicly, except in cases of extreme physical abuse yet, in different societies, girls' lives are shaped by threats of violence often present in cultures characterized by patriarchal traits. Such violent acts manifest in the following forms: gender roles and discrimination (gender stereotype and inequality), forced marriage and rape (sexual abuse).

The above enumerated violent acts are perceived as gender-based violence which categorizes the female gender as the "other of the other or… the inessential who never goes back to being the essential…" (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 173). The above view is in line with Kate Millet's assertion that "patriarchal power is ubiquitous and that sexuality ideological indoctrination as much as economic equality is the site where male power is often exercised" (*Sexual Politics* 33). Based on Millet's submission, this paper explores various forms of gender-based violence discernable in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*.

Gender Roles and Discrimination as Agents of Patriarchal Restriction

The social position of girls and women in most African society is closely related to the roles they play. According to Theresa Abok, "girls and women do not enjoy the power, opportunity, recognition and privilege given to boys and men. They are inhibited by the restrictions imposed on them by tradition and culture" ("The National Gender Policy...." 121). Abok further stresses that:

> Tradition and culture are the contributory factors in the downgrading of the female gender which is perpetrated through myth, superstitions and other artificial barriers. Thus the religious life which is mixed up with their culture has been used to the detriment of girls and women. ("The National Gender Policy...." 121)

The above cultural ideology is subject to understanding the social reality which becomes an instrument of female oppression. This cultural ideology is the ideology of patriarchy which creates gender relations. Tiwo Oloruntoba-Oju observes that " gender relations is power relations, hence the frequent construction of gender in terms of the struggle for dominance between the genders, or in terms of the conscious or unconscious negotiation of psychological, socio-economic and political space by the sexes…" ("Language and Gender…" 213). In Abok's view, "gender is a dynamic concept that refers to socially constructed roles, attributes and responsibilities that are related to being male or female in any society" (105). Hence, the inability of a society to create equality results to limitations, prejudices, stereotypes, discrimination and rigid gender roles. Abok maintains that "gender roles denotes sexual classification of roles on social basis, …which define what is considered appropriate for men and women within a society" (106-7). Gender roles are culturally biased. Hence, they manifest in

different forms and could cause discrimination between individuals in society. Gender discrimination has been defined as "the systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them opportunities, rights and resources. It occurs when individuals are given differential treatment on the basis of gender" (Abok 107).

Nuruddin Farah demonstrates a positive commitment as a novelist who depicts issues from a realistic perspective. Farah's depiction of a society where the oppressive dictatorial law, customs and ritual subjugate the female gender has indeed attracted feminist outrage. In *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah exposes the problems of gender discrimination and inequality that characterize the Somalia cultural milieu. Girls are treated unfairly and are not given equal rights with boys. Farah stresses the acceptability of the male gender in Somalia cultural context. According to the narrator, "as many as twenty or thirty camels are allotted to each son. The girls, however, have to wait until fates give them a new status in life: the status of marriage" (*From a Crooked Rib* 22). The above quotation suggests that the general pattern of inheritance in Somalia is patrilineal.

Hence, the general principle of customary law of inheritance is solely measured using a criterion – being a boy or man. The Somalia native custom of property rights is not flexible. It creates discrimination and inequality between males and females. This discrimination starts right from birth. The omniscient narrator stresses that "a she-camel is given to the son, as people say 'tied to his navel' as soon as he is born" while nothing is given to the girl child (*From a Crooked Rib* 22). Sunday Athanasius Duru thus observes that "the withholding of the right of inheritance from the female is a resultant effect of a patriarchal tailored society – a society that subjugates and subordinates the female and places

her under the male" ("Female Inheritance…" 329). This is what feminists are fighting against to achieve full emancipation of all females from patriarchal oppression and discrimination.

Significantly, Somalia society elevates the male above the female. In essence, males are valued more than females. Farah through his female character, Ebla, contends with this situation where high preference is given to boys. The narrator comments that Ebla, the protagonist of Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* "loathed this discrimination between sexes: the idea that boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family's name alive. Even a moron-male cost twice as much as two women in terms of blood-compensation" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 22). In line with the above, Selden and Widdowson assert that "patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women" (*A Reader's Guide*… 214).

Duru further asserts that "it is unfair for the female to be deprived of her rights to properties just because of reproductive difference" (330). From feminist perspective, feminism advocates for equal treatment of both sexes – male and female for equity and fairness. In essence, feminism as observed by Maggie Humm supports "sexual equality combined with commitment to eradicate sexist domination and transform society" (*Modern Feminisms* 1). Kolawole also supports Humm when she asserts that "all over the continent, there are areas of women's marginalization that call for a re-ordering of the social order, and African women have peculiar needs in this area" (*Womanism and African*… 10). This view is in line with the researcher's view to give equal rights to males and females as regards inheritance and overall treatment.

Furthermore, in *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah questions the Somalia worldview of perceiving the female as a lesser human being than the male. Through Ebla's thoughts and comments on gender inequality, Farah "bitterly attacks the system that discriminately elevates the importance of boys and encourages the inferiorization of girls" (Kolawole, *Womanism and African*… 154). Farah seems to have depicted Ebla's experiences with the idea presented by Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970). *Sexual Politics* as a classic feminist text clearly depicts the role patriarchy plays as a political institution in sexual relations especially in the "suppression or oppression of the female gender" (Clough, "The Hybrid…" 473). Millet seems to suggest that the oppression and limitation of the girls is evidently linked to the family as a basic structure or unit of the society.

Hence, patriarchy which is instituted in Somalia cultural milieu controls and subjugates the female gender. In essence, Millet explains that sex-based oppression is political and cultural. She therefore advocates for sexual revolution to tackle the problem of girls' oppression instituted in the family. Selden and Widdowson explain that Millett's argument blames "economic inequality as the cause of women's oppression, an argument which opened up second-wave thinking about reproduction, sexuality and representation" (A Reader's Guide… 214). Selden and Widdowson further observe that the title of Millet's book, *Sexual Politics* "announces her view of patriarchy, which she sees as pervasive and which demands a systematic overview as a political institution" (A Reader's Guide… 214).

Furthermore, gender role as a patriarchal tool divides the world of male and female. This is solely hinged on gender differentiation. Ogonnaya and Besong observe that:

> Gender differentiation is the root of gender inequality and discrimination. This gender discrimination sets up the stage for gender identity and role assignment in the family and community. And as much as gender identity is at the base of gender assignment, an individual identified with a superior gender is given superior roles, while an individual identified with inferior gender is assigned inferior roles. ("The Ontological…" 452)

Ebla's oppressive condition exposes the inferior roles given to the females. According to the narrator, "…a woman's duty meant loading and unloading camels and donkeys after destination had been reached, and that life was a routine: goats for girls and camels for boys got on her nerves more than she could stand" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 21). To Ebla, "this allotment of assignments denoted the status of a woman, that she was lower in status than a man, and that she was weak" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 21). This predicament of girls and women has been traced to patriarchy…which is responsible for the inferior status. Ebute Mary Onyiewu in line with the above view asserts that patriarchy is a social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status. This means that patriarchy favours men, and subjugates women" ("Gender Roles…. 326).

Significantly, Farah is mainly concerned with female oppression in Somalia. In *From a Crooked Rib*, Ebla's burdens are centered on the discrimination and inequalities that exist between males and females. This readily captures Ebla's position in her family. In essence, these inequalities and oppressive treatment are the major forces that push Ebla to her inexorable quest for liberation. From the beginning of the novel, Ebla is aware of her inferior status as a girl in Somalia society through her own observation of cultural roles and positions. The traditional roles of

men and women, boys and girls bestow on her a feeling of inferiority that has eaten deep into her psyche. Also her constant observation that boys take care of camels, while girls pasture goats (*From a Crooked Rib*, 13) is a good example of the discriminatory practices against the female gender in Somalia society. The above discriminatory roles and practices are basic factors that motivate Ebla's resistance. All this unconsciously pushes her aggressive and rebellious superego to the extent that the inward traumatic pressures of her past experiences cannot be erased from her memory.

Forced Marriage and Sexuality as Patriarchal Tools of Oppression

Forced marriage violates the rights of the girl-child and limits her growth and development in society as an individual. It is a marriage contracted without the "valid consent of one or more parties usually through physical violence or psychological pressure" (Sharp 6). This is a common practice in some African societies characterized by religion and cultural traditions. In these societies, girls are sold or given in marriage before maturity for cultural reasons, economic and social gains. This grossly affects their emotional development, health and educational opportunities in a negative way.

Forced marriage as a form of patriarchal oppression stems from the belief that girls and women are inferior. This indeed leads to gender bias. According to Onyiewu, "gender bias supports the notion that girls and women are weaklings who can be treated without concern…" (328). Farah's novel fundamentally indicts the patriarchal oppression and subjugation of the girls. This explains why Farah imbues his girl character with radical feminist traits to assert herself irrespective of some cultural norms and old-

fashioned traditions that have denied her access to her human rights.

Significantly, the narrative of Farah on forced marriage is captured in the view articulated by Ebla…. "From experience, she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shops-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shopkeeper, what was the difference between a girl and his good? Nothing, absolutely nothing" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 121). Ebla is totally disappointed and overwhelmed with a strong feeling of insecurity because "docility and complete subsumation of will is demanded from her" (Chukwuma, "Voices and Choices…" 131). "In the home, she is not part of the decision-making as a daughter … even when the decisions directly affect her" (Chukwuma, "Voices and Choices…" 131). In the beginning of the novel, Ebla's grandfather gives her in marriage to an old man (Giumaleh) without her consent. "Giumaleh is an old man of forty-eight: fit to be her father" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 9). Bilal Ahmad Dar commenting on Ebla's plight observes that "the most inhuman and humiliating treatment meted out to girls in Somalia is forced marriage or what we call wife -barter. This is exemplified in a situation whereby a girl is coercively given out in marriage without her due consultations" (2267).

Ebla is relegated to the background. She is a second class citizen who is only good in looking after her grandfather, tending animals and being bartered like animals. Ebla's indifference and disgust towards the attitude of her grandfather is captured in the rhetorical question –"but should I think of someone who does not think of me? It is he who has given my hand to the old man, exchanging me for camels" (*From a Crooked Rib* 15). Farah elucidates feminist tendencies to challenge male dominance when

Ebla runs away from her rural setting "to get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from unpleasantries. To break the ropes society had wrapped around her neck and to be free and be herself" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 19). The narrator comments that "Ebla desired, more than anything, to fly away, like a cock, which has unknotted itself from the string tying its leg to the wall" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 20-21).

Ebla's awareness of her oppressive condition pushes her to escape from the tyrannical oppressive hold of her grandfather. Her escape may be considered right or wrong; but from psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, it is the only decision she has to take to salvage her honour and protect her psyche. Ebla's biological instinct found in the *id*, precisely, *eros* pushes her to engage in life sustaining activity in order to save her dreams. Indeed, the traumatic effects of his grandfather's actions mobilize this escape. Ebla's refusal to marry Giumaleh through her escape translates into her freedom from the string of forced marriage that binds her in chain.

Ebla's escape from the patriarchal web of Somali culture fulfils what Kate Millet observes in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) that escaping from the subjugation of the family as a unit of the society gives the female gender a desired freedom and space. Ebla's escape to the town of Belet Wene increases her awareness about the condition of the female gender in her rural village because she is confronted again with the issue of forced marriage In Belet Wene, Ebla settles in the house of her cousin, Gheddi. She becomes a slave girl, acting as a midwife to Gheddi's wife (Aworalla) who is heavily pregnant; pasturing and milking cows for the family (*From a Crooked Rib 42*). Ebla's new experiences in the town bring her consciousness to the fact that the girl-child "is little less than a chattel as Gheddi turns her into a smuggling

scandal" (Dar, "Nuruddin Farah's Women…" 2270). Gheddi uses Ebla to secure a loan from a broker in order to free himself from the chain of police. To free himself totally, Gheddi secretly plans to marry Ebla off to the broker in exchange for the money he lent him. Gheddi makes this new arrangement without informing Ebla, the bride to be. From the foregoing, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh observes that "the most humiliating act meted to girls in Africa is forced marriage or wife barter. This is exemplified in a situation whereby a girl is forcibly given out in marriage and without due consultations with her…" (74). Dar also comments that twice Ebla "falls prey to the piggish patriarchy that has no qualms and compunction to barter women like cows and camels" (2268). Ebla has also rejected this kind of marriage where girls are bought like ordinary objects. She comments: "I don't like this sort of marriage. But that is what women are – just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband" (116).

One reading Farah's novel sees, glaringly, how Gheddi's house helps to reveal that girls are oppressed through forced marriage. In Gheddi's house, patriarchal kinship traits manifest in Ebla's life in the form of pasturing animals and looking after Gheddi's wife and baby. The forced marriage Ebla has been exposed to pushes her to liken Gheddi and her grandfather to beasts. According to Ebla, "cows are beasts, calves are beasts and so are goats. 'But we are beasts, too,' she thought. Isn't my grandfather a beast? If one shows one's bestiality by what one does then we are only better than these beasts by trying to explain our doings..." (*From a Crooked Rib*, 32). The above quotation likens Ebla's condition to a mere animal that can be treated anyhow. In the above quotation also, we see Ebla's psychic discharge concerning the inferior status of the girl-child in Somalia. This

arouses pity and fear as the readers are drawn to her plight and resistance against oppression.

Farah's psychic conflict is captured in Ebla's consciousness about Oedipal complex which according to Freud is "the beginnings of morality, conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority" (Eagleton, 136). Eagleton further explains that "…in introjecting patriarchal law, the child begins to form what Freud calls 'superego', the awesome, punitive voice of conscience within it. All, then, would now seem in place for gender roles to be reinforced, satisfactions to be postponed, authority to be accepted and the family and society to be reproduced" (Eagleton, 136). I find the above views very interesting and useful in interpreting Ebla's rebellious reaction because, her decisions and behaviour are strongly motivated by instinctual desire of the *id*, arising in infancy, to experience pleasure and avoid pain. This is what Freud refers to as the "pleasure principle" (Eagleton, 131). In fact, Farah forces the readers to identify in their minds his interpretation of Ebla's inner conflict that provides the unconscious dynamic action that moves through conflict, crisis, climax and resolution.

Farah, by depicting Ebla's forced marriages has evidently shown that patriarchy which is enshrined in the family, marriages, society, and religion has great control over the female body. This is very helpful in understanding the relationship that governs men and women in Somalia. Ebla's self-motivated consciousness is strongly linked to Karl and Friedrich Engels' revolutionary political philosophy that aims to capture a dictatorship of the proletariat. This inevitably subjects Ebla's experiences to Marxist-Feminist approach. MacKinnon maintains that:

> Marxism and feminism are theories of power and its distribution: inequality. They provide accounts of how social arrangements of patterned disparity can be internally

> rational yet unjust. But their specificity is not incidental. In Marxism, to be deprived of one's work, in feminism of one's sexuality, defines each one's conception of lack of power per se. They do not mean to exist side by side to insure that two separate spheres of social life are not overlooked, the interests of two groups are not obscured, or the contributions of two sets of variables are not ignored. (516)

In this research, feminist analysis in the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure would help readers to understand Ebla's struggles. Gheddi's attempts to exchange Ebla's hand in marriage links Marxist ideology to feminist objectives in order to present socio-economic formation that has enslaved the girl protagonist in the novel. Farah presents male dominance as a creation of capitalism. In essence, through male dominance, Somali girls and woman are sold, bought, exploited or controlled like mere objects, animals or properties.

In reading *From a Crooked Rib*, the theme of forced marriage and sexuality becomes very important in exploring the family as one of the structures of patriarchy. The story of Ebla, who escapes the family house and Gheddi's home fearing a forced marriage arrangement with Giumaleh and the broker is a very good example. Ebla is simply valued as a property to be sold off by her family members, which consists of her grandfather and her sixteen-year-old brother. Hence, the story centers on various attempts by her family (grandfather, Ebla's brother and Gheddi) to own and sell her body to any man of their choice. Farah seems to suggest that Somali family does not perceive the body of a girl as a free entity; it is rather seen as part of the material wealth or property that can be traded for goods or money. In the novel, Ebla's

grandfather is seen "exchanging Ebla ... for camels" (*From a Crooked* Rib, 9). Thus, Ebla's body becomes a commodity which is exchanged for another. Helmi Ben Meriem explains that:

> The body as such is the site, upon which discursive operations act dis-empower that particular body. Actually, girls and women were objects to a discourse enunciated by men; this discourse emphasized a highly significant division between men and women in terms of the division between mind and body. Men are seen as the site of intellectual powers but also of physical status. Women and girls are seen as lacking the mental capacities and just reduced to their bodies. (87)

Ebla's body, just like the bodies of other Somali girls, is a commodity to be traded. In essence, they can be sold, bought and resold by men. Before, Ebla's forced arranged marriage to Giumaleh, "two of his sons had alternately courted her" (*From a Crooked Rib,* 9). This is an indication that her body is seen a mere commodity to be exploited by the family of Giumaleh. In analyzing Ebla's social setting under Marxist-feminism, Heidi I. Hartmann argues "that a materialist analysis demonstrates that patriarchy is not simply a psychic, but also a social and economic structure" (2). While pointing out "tensions between patriarchal and capitalist interests, Hartmann argues that the accumulation of capital both accommodates itself to patriarchal social structure and helps to perpetuate it. Hartmann therefore suggests in this context that sexist ideology has assumed a peculiarly capitalist form in the present, illustrating one way that patriarchal relations tend to bolster capitalism"(2). Therefore, in *From a Crooked Rib*, bourgeois patriarchal relationships give rise to feminist agitation as

the girl protagonist struggles to control her sexuality. Again, patriarchal capital interest generates class struggle which helps this research to explore how the relation of feminism to class struggle has been. In the novel, Ebla is seen in an open persistent struggle to liberate herself from patriarchal capitalist web. Hence, Marxist feminist theory is employed by Farah as an attempt to achieve social change.

Sexual Abuse as Patriarchal Tool of Subjugation

Rape or sexual abuse is a predominant form of violence against the girls. P. Ebony explains that "rape is an expression of sexual aggression rather than an expression of sexuality. Rape is rooted in non-sexual motivation in the psychology of the offender; it is tied to hostility and anger, and the need to exert power and control" (16). Rape is often carried out through physical force against the wish of the victims and this is capable of causing psychological trauma.

At Mogadiscio, Awill attempts in vain to have sex with Ebla outside of wedlock. Ebla's refusal can be related to her acceptance of the association between honour and her body. After much resistance, Ebla is raped and sexually molested by Awill. According to the narrator, "Awill stood up straight and showered hard blows upon Ebla – in the mouth, at her head, on her belly. He gave her a kick or two on the belly and tried to bite her. Ebla did not cry, she wanted to, but she knew she should not. Awill grasped her by the plaited hair and pulled her down .Now he jumped over her and sat upon her belly, her body heaving underneath his. You are my wife. He unknotted her dress and she raised no objections: she only moaned" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 96-97). One thing is significant, when Ebla's body is beaten and physically tortured by Awill (*From a Crooked Rib*, 96–7), she cannot react because her

body is perceived as a mere property. The above discursive social construction is an act of rape which undermines Ebla's self-worth as an individual. Therefore, it is right to say that rape is a form of violence which attacks the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of a girl or woman. The above view supports the notion that rape as a form of gender-based violence is carried out because the victim is a girl; in other words, rape is not a "crime of sex but rather of power" (Woodhull 170).

Ebla faces sexual abuse after eloping with Awill, the widow's cousin. Ebla elopes with Awill on the advice of the widow because she thinks that education and his experiences in the Italian colonial service have reshaped his cultural mentality about the female gender. Indeed, Awill turns out to be worse than the other men because he molested Ebla at their first night together. It is important to understand that Ebla seeks for companionship and escape because, she is not happy that her cousin, like her grandfather, takes her in and determines to sell her "like a cattle" to a broker as a wife. This explains why she elopes with Awill to the city of Mogadiscio, where, despite seeking equality, she learns that to be a girl in Somalia means little in comparison to being a man. Therefore, in escaping the oppressive presence of masculinity, Ebla finds herself even more controlled by it. The consequence of Awill's action is that Ebla becomes psychologically and emotionally hurt after the rape.

From the plethora of the discussion above, it is time to turn from Ebla's feelings to the major concern of this study – the theme of sexual abuse. In Mogadiscio, Ebla is faced with the problem of domestic violence and sexual abuse: "Awill stood up straight and showered hand blows upon Ebla – in the mouth at her head on her belly…" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 96). Awill suppresses Ebla and exploits her sexually: "Awill moved towards her slowly, placed his

hands on her breasts and touched them ... he succeeded in breaking the virginity of Ebla. She moaned and groaned … she bled a great deal…" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 99). The definitive image of Awill as an Oedipal figurehead of oppression is evident in the above quotation. This is to say that Awill's act of rape denotes "Oedipus as the symbolic image of patriarchal subjugation; agent of power and paranoia" (Foucault, xi).

The above act of rape motivates Ebla's hateful destructive superego. She is propelled to fight in order to retain her identity in a world where girls are molested, exploited, and sold like a priceless commodity. Reflecting on her life, Ebla sees that she has simply swapped one form of servitude for another and is as powerless and dependent on men as she seems to be in her desert home. Ebla and other girls are merely sex slaves in the eyes of men; they are simply movable property to be "sold like cattle." In Ebla, then, we are face to face with the view that "man cannot escape the consequences of his actions" (Nnolim, *Approaches*… 131). Ebla flees from patriarchal hegemony that subjugates girls, but succumbs to the same form by eloping with Awill who is an epitome of patriarchal oppression.

In exploring *From a Crooked Rib*, the crux of the matter centers on the subtle method by which Farah presents his central theme: 'female abuse and oppression'. At the beginning, he subtly makes the novel read like an escape novel, where the girl-child rejects all forms of patriarchal subjugations. But Farah's subtlety soon deepens in irony as Ebla's elopement with Awill causes a contradiction between her circumstances and expectations. Farah urges us to examine the situation critically, forcing us to wonder about the personality of Awill. According to the narrator 'Awill makes love to Ebla, not with her for seven days in the one-room apartment. Ebla thinks of this period as an imprisonment in the

house' (*From a Crooked Rib,* 114). The above act of violence by Awill is a violation of Ebla's human rights since it is carried out without her consent. "She (Ebla) had bled and he (Awill) rejoiced seeing her blood, as his manhood depended upon breaking this chastity" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 150). The above scene changes Ebla physically and psychologically— 'She was no longer a virgin; she was a woman now, the wife of Awill' (*From a Crooked Rib*, 100). This experience forcefully ushers her into a different phase of life as Awill's wife. In depicting the above act of violence, Nuruddin Farah has exposed and universalized the plight of rape victims in Somalia. Farah in depicting the experiences of Amina in his novel, *Sardines* (1981) clearly shows that culprits of rape like Awill are not punished under the law; instead the victim is forced to marry the perpetrator. The narrator in Farah's *Sardine* explains what Amina's father told his daughter concerning her rape:

> Her father is so much helpless at the cruel dictates of the dictator that he could not protest against the rapists and is instead of it compelled to tell her daughter to forget about it. The rapists have not been punished but are at large for there in a Somalia is no punishment for this crime her father is made to tell her daughter: "In this country rape is not punishable as other crimes of violence. The characteristic compromise arrived at is usually the rapist marries the victim, accepts her hand in marriage in the presence of the elders of his and her clan. (*Sardines*, 256)

Amina Mama in "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence against Women in Africa" goes further to explain that girls who are raped or violated are usually silent because, 'the occurrence of rape is trivialized' (52). According to Chiluwa,

> This suggests that any woman who reports such case may be made a laughing stock. It could be interpreted that the woman harassed the man sexually by being too pretty or by dressing seductively, in which case the 'helpless man' had no choice but oblige her seductive insinuations by forcing her against her will. Thus the woman is to blame for man's quenchable appetite. (114)

Chiluwa goes further to explain that the reasons why the violation of girls and women are not reported is because people usually welcome it with "silence, muteness, inaction, fault-finding, ascription of blame and the scapegoating of females in the manner of Delilah tempting and trapping Samson, as recorded by the Bible" (114). The above view by Chiluwa clearly defines Ebla's condition.

Self-Assertion as a Strategy for Female Liberation in *From a Crooked Rib*

Different forms of violence are catalysts that help to construct the consciousness, choices and responses of the female gender in any society. This leads to the adoption of survival strategies by girls and women to resist different territorialities of power that inhibit their freedom and overall well-being. Escape is a major strategy Ebla adopts for emancipation from male subjugation. Ebla escapes from her family's rural setting as well as Gheddi's house to avoid forced marriage. Ebla's resistance and determination is indeed foreign to nomad culture because she is mandated to submit to the dictates of Somali culture. The narrator gives us a clue to Ebla's psychological disposition:

> Inside her, she knew why she wanted to escape. Actually it was more than a want: It was a desire, a desire stronger than anything, a thing to long for. Her escape meant her

> freedom. Her escape meant her life. Her escape meant the divine emancipation of the body and soul of a human being. (*From a Crooked Rib*, 20)

Ebla's escape signals the rejection of patriarchal modes of subjugation as manifested in forced marriage. This is why she is more determined and assertive in her struggle of liberation. In fact, Ebla's feminist consciousness is evident in her statement: "I don't like this sort of marriage…. I don't want to be sold like cattle...we are human beings…" (*From a Crooked Rib*, 79-80).

Ebla's second marriage to Tiffo is another strategy for resisting oppressive male jingoism after being sexually molested and betrayed by Awill (Her first husband). Ebla's new marriage is also a revolutionary strategy to obstruct patriarchal structural mode of living which does not allow a girl to marry more than one husband. Indeed, Ebla's act of marrying two men at the same time projects Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* as a feminist novel. By depicting Ebla's revolutionary stance, Farah recognizes the claims of the female gender for equal rights with men – "sexual, legal, political, economic, social, marital, et cetera" (Nnolim, *Issues*… 135). Farah adopts both radical and womanist feminist ideologies that have communal tenets which are hinged on the African philosophy of thoughts. Ebla's radicalism is seen in her journey of escape from patriarchal oppression, while her reunion with Awill depicts Farah's womanist stance. Farah's feminist ideology is black centered and accommodationist as a result of Somalia's Islamic religious background. Though Farah believes in the freedom and independence of the female gender, he also supports meaningful union between African men and women for peaceful coexistence. This explains why Ebla divorces her second husband (Tiffo) to reconcile with Awill.

Significantly, Farah rejects female subjugation and maltreatment by advocating for change in males' sexist stance against girls and women. This is why his feminist plot ends with a move for negotiation and unity of male and female – indeed, Ebla reconciles with her husband (Awill) at the end of the novel. One thing is clear – Farah's womanist stance is forced; it is achieved through Islamic religious background which stresses the need for female submission to patriarchal authority. Hence, Ebla reconciles with Awill to avoid cultural stereotype and further discrimination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the spurious patriarchal consciousness about marriage raised by Ebla's grandfather, Gheddi and Awill who represent the culture and tradition of Somali people is challenged by Farah through his girl protagonist. Farah depicts Ebla's struggles against different forms of patriarchy to create awareness on female oppression through forced marriage. Farah has adopted a feminist point of view which enables him to explore the experiences of his female protagonist. This is clearly evident in the development of her female character and the consciousness he imbues in her at the expense of the male characters (Grandfather, Gheddi, Awill and Tiffo). The male characters are castigated, denigrated and presented as scoundrels in the novel. The point of view Farah adopts in depicting female experiences creates a clear picture which reveals that Farah empathizes more with his girl protagonist.

Significantly, Farah presents gender inequality, forced marriage and sexual abuse as major agents of patriarchy which are against Ebla. By focusing on reconciliation and accommodation, Farah seems to suggest the kind of feminism that would be suitable

in Islamic regions. It seems certain, then, that Farah's novel depicts the portrait of a girl caught in the web of violence and individual freedom. Paradoxically, the novel is termed a feminist novel because Farah makes social commentary on the experiences of girls and women in Somalia. In this study, Ebla's plight and journey for escape is symbolic and metaphorical – it represents the futile journey of all girls and women in their quest to revolt against patriarchy which is instituted in the religion and culture of Somalia. In essence, the nature of Somalia as an Islamic nation does not allow total freedom for the female gender.

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