

The Subaltern Would Speak: Palimpsestic Identities in Nuruddin Farah's 'Blood in the Sun' Trilogy

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Abstract

Nuruddin Farah's 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy is a socio-political voyage into the Somali life and consciousness. It is a serious attempt to explore the changes that befell the Somali society and converted into a poor, failure and famine struck state in the present though it was a powerful and rich state in the past. The trilogy is a documentation of the history of Somalia from a philosophical standpoint; it delves into clan and ethnic traditions and, at the same time, expounds the adverse consequences of colonisation that have been invoked by the first wave of the 'Rush to Africa' in the nineteenth century. The article is an endeavour to underline the complex status of subalternity of the Somalis whose palimpsestic historical and political situation forced a palimpsestic identity. Farah's 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy enfolds three novels; i.e. *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1993), and *Secrets* (1998) which are reflective of the current failure social and political situation which negatively influences the identity of the natives. The article hopes to be the kernel of further studies handling the complex postcolonial identity of the Somalis from a historical-political perspective.

Keyword: Palimpsest, Identity, History, Subaltern, Autonomy

Somalia is a country whose peculiar situation has made it, in the past, a prey of foreign colonialism while in the present it has become a captive to conflicting national parties whose goal is attaining authority at the expense of the boom and the stability of the country. The complex position of Somalia seems to be the destiny that it should suffer right from the pre-colonial clan-states up to the present; Somalia has ever been trapped into the pitfall of factionalism and constant conflicts. Remarkably, Somalia's distinct position at the horn of Africa made of it a vital commercial centre. Historians assume that it is the fabled Land of Punt (Njoku 2013) with which the ancient Egypt traded and which also developed significant relationships with Greece, the Roman Empire and the Arabs. In the very far past, Somalia though it was divided into various clans, it was powerful, wealthy and famous for its very strong and handsome men, especially the Macrobians who established a powerful tribal kingdom that ruled large parts of the Somalia that we know in the modern era (Wheeler 2010, p. 315). The Macrobians were known as the best warriors and 'the tallest and handsomest of all men' (Wheeler 2010, p. 526). In the era of the Macrobians, the movement of trade flourished as well as the wealth of the state. They also concluded agreements with the Roman Empire when it was in Eden and made an alliance with the Arabs so as to protect their mutual interests (Warmington 1995, p. 229). Somalia was also an important stop in China's Silk Road.

Somalia maintained its glory over the subsequent ages, and could vanquish any foreign forces attempting to disrupt its stability. The pre-colonial clan states put an end to the endless and constant aggressions of the Abyssinians (the Ethiopians as they were known then) during the sixteenth century after a long and exhausting battle. To attain victory at any cost, Abyssinia

secured assistance from the Portuguese military commander Cristóvão da Gama who waged a crusade against the Somali Adal Muslim army (1541-1543). Yet, the Adal army went out of that strenuous war victorious after it could 'capture, torture and execute' the Portuguese Cristóvão da Gama who was described as 'the most chivalrous soldier of a chivalrous age' (Burton 1966, p. 181). It is reiterated that the inglorious defeat and conquest of Abyssinia is the essence of the Ethiopian hostility against Somalia that continues until the present.

The end of the powerful pre-colonial clan states Somalia has begun late in the nineteenth century after the 'Scramble for Africa' that took place after the Berlin Conference in 1884. Despite Somalia could chivalrously fight against the foreign aggressors and could subject them to a series of reprehensible defeats, at the end, it fell a prey to the British, Italian as well as the French colonisation. At the hands of the British and the Italians, Somalia tasted the harsh experience of colonisation. As for the French colonisation, it preferred to cut the quintessential eastern territory for itself so as to control the movement of trade. Notably, after the exigent movements of decolonisation (1960-1969), France encouraged the separation of the vital eastern coastal territory under the name of Djibouti, so as to maintain affiliation to France, even after the main lands of Somalia could decolonise themselves from the British and Italian colonisers. In Djibouti, however, France pushed to the presidency the catalyst figure who 'campaigns for a 'yes' vote in the referendum of 1976' calling for separation (Shraeder 2006, p. 115). After independence, Somalia underwent hardships at the hands of worst colonisers; namely, the military rule who inflicted their natives with atrocities and divisions that ended with making Somalia failure and famine struck state. The despotic regime has obliterated any remaining signs of grace that Somalia has ever enjoyed in the past.

Such an exceptional situation which jeopardises the identity as well as the history and the culture of the Somali natives, is better expressed by the metaphor of the palimpsest. Originally, the term refers to a parchment ‘on which several inscriptions had been made after earlier ones had been erased’ (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin 2007, p. 158). Yet, the traces of the inscriptions that have been once written remain, despite the frequent processes of erasures and overwriting. Applying the same metaphor on postcolonial societies, in general, and on Somalia, in particular, a distinctive communal identity is formed by delving into the past, and, in the process, the future is projected. Considering Somalia, the colonial periods, conflicts and factionalism have subjected its history and culture to massive processes of distortion and engineering for the purpose of distancing the relationship of the past to the present. They have also aimed at disrupting the line of inevitability inherent in the meaning of the past. As a consequence, all that is introduced in the present is a foreign past that relativises and undercuts the legitimacy of the present. In other words, such massive erasures of history and culture produce a distorted subaltern identity that is deprived of its distinct individuality because of being constantly *in the flux*.

Nonetheless, the distinctive palimpsestic history and culture of Somalia is also a means to enrich the identity of the natives, as it engenders a multi-layered Somali identity that hoards both the pre-colonial experience along with the postcolonial situation which end product is a characteristic cultural identity.

While the ‘layering’ effect of history has been mediated by each successive period, ‘erasing’ what has gone before, all present experience contains ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present. (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin 2007, p. 158)

‘Layering’ gives depth to any cultural identity suffering from subalternity; it retains the traces of the past that help trigger the present. Thus, the subaltern whose palimpsest identity is destined to be an identity *in the flux* incept a struggle for recognition that finds in the imperfect erasures a source of hope. In other words, the Subaltern's peripheral past is exhumed so as to ‘[reconstitute] or [reinvent] the world from native points of view’ (Rabasa 1993, p. 358). The palimpsestic position of the subalterns gives them the opportunity to develop their identity and, hence, express a unique individuality.

Nuruddin Farah (born 24 November 1945) is a famous international Somali novelist whose works delineate the palimpsest subaltern identity of his natives. He is hailed as one of the greatest contemporary writers in the world, and has been also acclaimed various prestigious international literary prizes. Nuruddin Farah’s zeal is to expound the regressing status of his country Somalia as well as his natives whose subalternity seems to be endless and limitless. Farah’s writings voice the complex situation of his natives’ subalternity whose repercussions metamorphose in the political and social oppression that victimize them. Nuruddin Farah’s identity has been forged due to such a palimpsestic position. He is an expatriate who has been living away from his country for decades. Despite his extreme love for his country, he could not return back there for decades because of the Somali despotic regime that put him in jail for his writings and kidnapped him on his first visit to Somalia in 1996. Though a dweller of the Western world, Farah’s palimpsestic attitude is a vintage point to him; he can freely write about his country to the extent that he is called, ‘the epic chronicler of Somalia’ (Manson 2015). The ‘internationally renowned Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah is known for his politically conscious writing’ (Mojapelo 2020). His ‘output of thirteen novels engages various dimensions of Somali history and politics’ (Shringarpure 2019, p. 4). Farah’s intention is to defy the harsh social-political

conditions that condemn his natives to a death-in-life status by suppressing their voices and obliterating the distinct traces of their identity for good. 'I write about Somalia to keep it alive', confirms Farah (Manson 2015). In his novels the social scene overlaps with the historical as well as the political so as to give voice to his forcefully silenced natives through writings about them.

In his famous 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy, Farah addresses the essence of his natives' subalternity and palimpsestic identity. The trilogy novels; i.e. *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1993), and *Secrets* (1998), tease out the 'vestigial features left over from the past is an important part of understanding the nature of the present' (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin 2007, p. 158). For Farah, the past is vital because it is the basis upon which the unique identity of his people is built; in other words, it gives them a distinct voice. Acclaimed as he is various international prestigious prizes for his novels, Farah is far from being content, 'I was pretending to be happy, but wasn't' (Farah in Jaggi 2012). His novels are a simulacrum of the contemporary situation in Somalia where uncertainty is overwhelming and the ugly reality kills the natives. In 1998, he wrote: 'My novels are about states of exile; about women shivering in the cruel cold in a world ruled by men; about the commoner denied justice; about a torturer tortured by guilt, his own conscience; about a traitor betrayed' (Britannica). Bodacious exile is far less important than the spiritual one; his people under the harsh social and political situation are exiled from engaging with reality as full citizens who have demands and aspirations. They are marred from being active participants in the social-political scene and, instead, they are forcefully hurled to the margins.

The 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy manifests Farah's zeal to chronicle the history of his nation. He intends, 'to make everyone sit up and see the ugliness of what was happening. The entire country was a death camp' (Jaggi 2012). Oppression, despotic regime and bloody conflicts make the Somalis deterritorialised in every aspect to the extent that they have lost their unique

identity. Jean Baudrillard explains in *Simulacra and Simulation* how the real is lost while the reality is crumbling away because of disuse through quoting the fable that Jorge Luis Borges mentions in his work *On Exactitude in Science*. The fable says that a great empire has created a map that is so detailed and as large as the empire itself. The actual map grew and decayed as the empire itself was conquered or lost territory. When the empire crumbles, all that is left is the map. Baudrillard concludes that people live in the map while it is a simulation of the reality. Noting that the reality is crumbling away because it is no longer used, Baudrillard argues:

Today abstraction is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*.(Baudrillard 1981, p. 1)

Nuruddin's 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy is a simulacrum of Somalia; it expounds its social-political situation over centuries. The trilogy depicts the territorial conflicts that have torn Somalia right from the very far past. To add injury to the history of Somalia, the 1977 deconlonisation has not put an end to oppression; as the country has slipped into military dictatorship that has made it, in turn, slip into severe waves of famine and civil war. Furthermore, ardent terrorist groups, like El Shabab, have emerged. Thus, the nation has become ruthlessly divided into three conflicting territories: Somaliland, Putland, and South-Central

Somalia. All these factors have conspired to create of Somalia the classical type of a failure state whose people subalternity is inevitable.

Each novel in the trilogy marks a vital phase in the social-political history of Somalia and, at the same time, produces a simulacrum of the past and projects the current scene. Scrutinising the past and juxtaposing it with the present crystalyses the effective constituents of a palimpsest identity in the flux; i. e. the Somali identity.

It is argued that the claims and counter-claims for colonial or clan bordering between the current clan-based states within the failed clan state of Somalia as well as the discourses for legitimacy and statehood cannot be studied in isolation from the patterns of pre-colonial state structures, clan constraints, and competition for resources.(Ingiriis 2018, p. 57)

The history of Somalia and the collective identity of its natives can never be severed from the past whether pre-colonial or colonial. This totalising situation is a live-metaphor of the palimpsest. It also underlines the unique identity of Somalia that retains its individuality in defiance of the setbacks that it suffers.

The concept of ‘palimpsestic identity’ is accentuated in every aspect. It is obvious in the title of each novel in the ‘Blood in the Sun’ trilogy; each title exhumes a substantial stage in the Somali in history. *Mopsis* is a simulacrum that re-invokes the Somali conflict with its neighbouring Ethiopia over the disputed region of Ogaden. Notably, after the World War II, British colonisation has given Ethiopia the right to control the region of Ogaden. Yet, Somalia has disapproved Ethiopia’s control on basis that the region is inhabited by Somali-speaking people. This intricate situation is simulated by the story of the protagonist, Askar, who has been born of Somali parents but brought up at the hands of a good Ethiopian woman, Misra, who lives in the

disputed over region of Ogaden. Askar recurs to maps to keep himself updated with any change that might take place in the Somali map. He is divided by his love and loyalty to Misra, who has brought him up as if he were her son, and his love and loyalty to Somalia, which is his mother land. Disowning the right of Ethiopia to control Ogaden is compared to betrayal to Misra who was acting as a faithful mother to Askar. To accentuate his perspective, Farah provides his central characters with functional names; Askar means 'military members'. Considering Misra, it is a Somali word which is defined over the web as 'a member of a tall dark (mostly Muslim) people inhabiting Somalia. Synonyms: Somali/Type of: African/A native or inhabitant of Africa.'(google search). The name Misra confirms that all sorts of discrimination between the Africans should not exist; as they are all inhabitants of the same mother continent; namely, Africa. Farah, subtly, asserts that the conflict over the territory of Ogaden is futile because it begets further conflicts and loss of more innocent souls despite the fact that they are all Africans.

Considering *Gifts*, it gives rise to the concept of 'gifting' and 'gifts' in the Somali tradition; such a habit is called 'potlatch'. According to the Somali tradition, 'potlatch' is a bargaining system in which the clan chief bargains 'everything – food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions and ranks' with other chiefs (Mauss 1990, p.14). 'Potlach' or bargaining has been deemed a sign of power and prestige among clan chiefs and individuals. The more bargains are concluded, the more prestige and voice among other clans are won. Gifts are an instrument for attaining power; they empower the giver the potentiality of creating strong relations with other societies and with his society, as well. Typically, the giver enjoys a unique autonomous identity among his peers. In case the giver is a ruler, his gifts would make his people enjoy that same unique autonomous identity. In Farah's *Gifts*, Duniya, the protagonist, her father has bargained her as a gift, on his deathbed, to his old

blind friend. Therefore, Duniya is forced to wait for very long years until she becomes able to claim her freedom back after the death of her husband. The palimpsestic situation of gifting is hailed in Somalia because it is an instrument with which the Somalis would move smoothly between the present and the past through the medium of customs and traditions. The historical background of the tradition of gifting gives depth to the practice.

As for *Secrets*, it also catches a unique moment in the Somali past-present history. It is a *griot*-like novel that gives rise to plenty of practices that are distinctive to Somalia. Re-excavating the traditions and history of a country or even of a group of people helps cultivate a distinctive identity that would enable such social groups to gain voice. The ability to keep secrets is also relative to the question of identity; a voice is gained when a secret is well kept. In *Secrets*, Kalaman, the protagonist, suffers from a troubled psychological status; he is schizophrenic. His psychological disorder mars him from creating a sane relationship with the society. Believing that there are so many secrets kept hidden from him adds to his schizophrenia. Guiding him, Kalaman's grandfather assures that secrets are the depth of any character and that they are definitive of identity. 'Secrets define us, they mark us, they set us apart from all the others. The secrets which we preserve provide a key to who we are, deep down,' says Nonno, Kalaman's grandfather (Farah, *Secrets*1998, p.144). Kalaman's discovery of various secrets about himself and his household motivates him to perceive that he possesses a distinctive individuality.

The 'Blood in the Sun Trilogy' follows a form that pinpoints the concept of palimpsestic identity in which extreme efforts are exerted to gain distinctiveness and individuality. Nuruddin Farah's patterns the three novels subtly, as the events oscillate from the microcosm of the personal and the family level, to the macrocosm overlooking the national scene as a whole. Notably, the events smoothly glide from the microcosm to the macrocosm, and vice versa. Farah

urges the concept that literature has the capacity to better the socio-political status by deconstructing unjust social aspects that obstacle positive change. Injustice in the Somali culture originates out of dictatorship that grants itself a patriarchal powerful position, despite the fact that it has conspired to make of Somalia a failure state. Farah's trilogy depicts the actual scene in Somalia in hope that what he writes might lead to change. Writers who are capable of creating original round characters are 'cognizant that power is still out of reach unless patriarchy is destroyed. Hence, writing serves to deconstruct the system as a first step toward empowerment' (Kalissa 2009, p.188). Reflecting the same concept Farah asserts, 'I believe in the rightness of what I'm doing, and in the wrongness of being stopped' (Jaggi 2012). He handles vulnerable characters whose fate and feeling are marked with uncertainty; in other words, characters whose lives are overwhelmed with palimpsestic attitudes. Farah's intention is to impact with his novels the Somali society as well as the world, at large. Kwame Anthony Appiah confirms that Farah's 'novels are morally serious without being preachy and that 'he teases you [the readership] by writing of events that seem magical but also always have possible unmagical explanations.' He is 'a man who was deprived by exile of his people and his family has kept his people and his family—and the idea of family and people—alive in the crucible of the imagination' (Appiah 2020). Furthermore, Farah endeavours to delineate round characters so as to provoke the readership to scrutinise their life details and to question what will happen next. His intention is to raise awareness of the past and of the problematic present.

The first novel in Nuruddin Farah's 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy is *Maps* (1986). It runs on two levels, the national and the personal, and each of which runs in the vein of attempting to get out of the circle of palimpsestic identity so as to achieve autonomy. *Maps* takes place during the 1977 Ogaden war in which Somalia is trapped in an epistemological palimpsestic position: one

of the patriot who defends the land, while the other is that of the aggressor who violates the dominance of another country so as to acquiesce a territory that is not his. In either case, subalternity is inevitable. The patriot remains subaltern to the aggressor until he attains his freedom, whereas the aggressor is, in turn, subaltern to his greed until he is defeated at the hands of the original land-owners. The same palimpsestic position is triggered on the microcosmic familial and personal levels. The protagonist of *Maps* is Askar, an orphan who has been brought up by an Ethiopian woman, Misra, who lives in Ogaden, despite the fact that he is a descendant of a pure Somali family. Askar is torn between his love for Misra who has brought him up, and the love for the country to which he belongs. This epistemological palimpsestic situation is aggravated when Askar is defined as a refugee, because he lives in Ogaden, though he is Somali. Farah's *Maps* traces 'the effects of Somalia's historically carved-up borders' (Tepper 1999) and how the current uncertain situation echoes a fervent process of search for identity among all the wiped traces of former inscriptions on the palimpsest of the Somali history.

Compared to Farah, Askar questions the nature of modern African identity. Throughout the novel, he reiterates 'Who am I?' Uncertain as he is, Askar feels that within him there are many 'Askars.' Tormented with this problematic situation, Askar considers that he is shredded into many selves: 'For a long time, your selves argued with one another, each offering counter arguments...' (Farah, *Maps* 1986,p.58). Askar's inner feeling with loss originates within him confusion that is sometimes revealed as a quasi-mental disorder. Talking to himself in a mirror, Askar's extreme inner chaos makes him reiterate:

'And you- who are you?' one of the shadows asked you. You answered, 'I am a foreign body.' 'Now what does that mean?' You paused. Then, 'It means that

I am in a foreign country.’ ‘I was once a young man –but I lost my identity’
(Farah, *Maps*1986, p. 61).

The source of Askar’s confusion is being divided between his nation and his clan; the problem will be solved if he knows whether he is Somali or Ethiopian. In either case, however, he would be betraying a cherished piece of him.

Misra, his foster mother, out of her love and understanding of his sentimental predicament, warns that he would ‘in the end go mad questioning things’ (Farah, *Maps* 1986, p. 44). To attain a full autonomous Somali identity, Askar has to choose whether to abandon his clan or ethnic affiliation. The situation that he has cultivated towards either of them is that of a subaltern who is obliged to reveal utter submission. Voicing his predicament, Askar explodes at Misra:

‘I will kill you.’

She stared at him in silence for a long time. ‘But why?’

‘To live, I will have to kill you.’

‘Just like you say you killed your mother?’

‘Just like I killed my mother -- to live.’ (Farah, *Maps*1986, p. 59)

Askar’s rite of passage into adulthood is effectuated through feeling the pain of his tormented identity. In Kaffaloo, he leads a quiet life until he begins doubting everything. One time he thinks that uncle Quorrax raped his mother and, this is how he was brought to life. Later, he knows that his mother was raped by a group of people; as for his father, he was killed while fighting to defend his country, Somalia. These painful incidents produce a tormented identity of a young man who experiences the rite of passage so as to help him get rid of being subaltern to

his ethnicity, or, in other words, clan life. The same painful attitude is reflected into the rite of circumcision; in Somalia, it emphasises that a boy is passing to adulthood.

I don't know what curses I shouted or uttered. All I can tell you is that I woke up my body wet with sweat, my throat aching from crying and saying again and again and again, 'Who am I? Where am I? Where am I? Who am I?' (Farah, *Maps*1986, p. 97).

In the search of autonomous identity, Askar moves to Mogadishu to stay in the house of his educated uncle Hilaal and his wife. It is his uncle who provides him with the answer for the question that troubles him; i. e. 'Who am I?' Hilaal gives Askar not only the chance to develop full autonomous identity, but also grants him *thatfull identity*, as well. He tells Askar all about his family and his country, and expounds for him matters of identity. Crowning these efforts, his uncle Hilaal, who is a symbol of Somalia, begins the legal procedures of issuing for Askar identity papers, so that Askar will be registered as a family member. Few days later, uncle Hilaal gives Askar a Somali identity card. He also makes for Askar a credit card. Still yearning for his clan life, Askar asks his uncle whether it is possible to make for Misra a credit card the same way he has done for him. Yet, he becomes shocked by the fact that Misra cannot enjoy the same privilege because she is not a family member. This situation parodies the status of the neighbouring Ethiopia that is no longer a friend to Somalia.

Askar's innermost identity conflict is compared to experiencing a civil war within the self. The traces of writing on his identity palimpsest creates so 'many selves' within him. To Farah, an inner conflict is compared to a 'civil war' experience. Focusing upon the psychological damage produced by such an experience, Farah in an interview with Kwame Anthony Appiah adds, 'The civil war, and how people live through a civil war; how they express

themselves, gather their broken selves with a view to mending their damaged memories and cure their illnesses,' (Farah 2004). Civil war psychological damage should be followed by a healing process that necessitates gathering the chaos of the self to find an effective cure. Similarly, Askar could 'gather his broken self' at last, and it is his uncle Hilaal who was the last one to write upon the palimpsest of his identity. Attaining his psychological freedom after the horrifying death of Misra who is violently killed after being stamped as traitor, Askar severs affiliations with his clan life. He begins thinking of his future, but the processes of writing, erasure and overwriting upon the palimpsest of his identity are still on and would never come to an end. He is still psychologically divided; as he is still not sure whether to choose to join the university in order to lead a peaceful life or to join the army like his deceased father so as to defend his country, Somalia. Political instability blurs the vision of the youth as well as hurls the future generations into paths of uncertainty. The inability to settle such a predicament would inevitably lead the whole country to further deterioration. *Maps* is a faithful parody of the Somali situation to whoever

trying to make sense of a stateless anarchy called Somalia, [. . .] (thus) the fiction of Nuruddin Farah [sic] very helpful. It is very reassuring that (Farah) waves the flag of redemption and new possibilities in many of his novels (Ajibade 2018).

Farah expounds the situation of his country as a warning for all the future generations. His intention is to help them make sense of their tormented identity that is exposed to a harmful damage because of the political situation. Genuine autonomy is guaranteed when subalternity to ethnic affiliations and dictator regimes comes to an end.

Unlike his preceding novels, Farah's *Gifts* (1993) has been published in Africa with the intention to convey his message to his Somali natives; he mainly writes for them. *Gifts* is a soft documentation of the history of Somalia at the nineties of the twentieth century so as to highlight the deteriorating status of the Somalis that is an outcome of the dictatorial regime which has turned the Somalis not only into submissive subjects but also has converted them into slaves of the national and international abusive donors who deceptively define their abuses as 'gifts'. Keen to widen the scope of his novel so as to reach wider African audience, Farah educates his natives to speak for their rights the same way he does on their behalf through his documentary novels. *Gifts* advocates rejecting all forms of subalternity, at the top of which is the habit of accepting gifts. Unlike any other author, Farah does not tell a story about people who suffer from the adverse consequences of a socio-political predicament; his focus is the category of people who are capable of achieving positive change. Moreover, Farah does not approve any sort of gifts, as he deems that they are corruptive to both the natives and the society, at large.

In *Gifts*, Duniya, the protagonist, is a woman who diligently works for achieving a comprehensive autonomy. Undoubtedly, financial independence is the highway for making true her goal. Duniya is a mother of three children as well as a working woman; she is a senior nurse at a Mogadishu maternity hospital. Early in her age, she learns that she should be fully empowered to gain control over her course of life; especially that she, all of a sudden, finds herself socially stranded; while still young she becomes a widow then a divorced mother who is responsible for supporting her children *unaided*. Nonetheless, Duniya and her family are able to enjoy a middle class lifestyle thanks to the dollar remittances of Duniya's brother, Abshir. She struggles to attain a distinctive autonomous identity that springs out of her palimpsestic one which is that of a female who leads unstable social and marital status. Notably, she was forced

early in her age to embrace such a status. At the backdrop of Duniya's story is the political scene that runs at the ending phase of Said Barre's dictatorship that has destroyed Somalia. That period is marked with rampant crimes and shortage of supplies that were conducive to widespread famines. Furthermore, under the sham façade of helping Somalia, Western countries commit heinous moral crimes against Somalia; the food aids were contaminated with radiation and the Western aids pushed into the society social malaises, drug abuse and the inhuman practice of foundling children. Furthermore, they made the worst use of the Somali resources; for instance, many Western countries while pretending to provide Somalia with the financial aids that would alleviate the suffering of its population, they used to take the cash crops with low prices. Farah voices the hoax of the Western aids through his spokesman Tariq, Duniya's ex-husband, who says: 'why devalue the significance of the act by mentioning it in public?' (Farah, *Gifts* 1993, p. 124). Farah confirms that if the West had sincere intentions to assist the Somalis, they would not widely promulgate for their deeds as if implicitly demanding the Somalis to show gratitude by turning into submissive subalterns.

On the microcosmic level of *Gifts* runs the story of Duniya who shuns the 'potlach' obligations as reciprocity forces a system of 'take and give', such a habit has distorted her youthful life-experience when she became a 'potlach'. Jacques Derrida's notions on gifts voices Duniya's. To him, it is an entrapment that forces a vicious circle from which there is no escape. Derrida asserts:

If there is gift, the *given* of the gift [...] must not come back to the giving [...]. It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure [...]. (Derrida 1992, p.7)

A gift, accordingly, would cease to be an entrapment if it is not mentioned and nothing is expected in return; as is the case with the financial assistance that Duniya's brother Abshir gives to her while expecting nothing in return.

In her early personal life, Duniya has been cruelly taught the lesson of refusing gifts when she has been converted into a 'property'; a gift. On his deathbed, her father gifts her to his blind elderly friend. Though there are no witnesses to the gifting action except her mother, it is the mother who insists upon consummating the marriage. Duniya's mother hoards the traditional primitive notion of a gift as both a sign of honour and shortcut to effective social bonds. In *Gifts*, Farah uses gifts as a means for exploring how human beings define their duty and responsibility to others in daily life. By the death of her elderly husband, Duniya escapes a marriage bond that she has been forced to embrace. The 'potlach' marriage makes her lose her humanity and degrades her into a property that would be owned and reciprocated; a palimpsestic attitude that obliterates her humanity and individuality. Two weeks after her husband's death, Duniya begins exercising her freedom as she finally feels 'self-possessed' (Farah, *Gifts* 1993, p. 12). From that point on, Duniya begins a journey of 'possessive individualism' (MacPherson 1962, p. 20) in which she gets rid of her previous imposed subalternity.

The journey begins with her flight from the country to the urban city of Mogadishu. The financial support she receives from her brother Abshir is her first step to get rid of subalternity because she knows that he demands nothing in return. Attaining her freedom, she cultivates vigilant awareness against any gifts that might threaten her newly-acquired autonomy. She also purposefully transmits the same vigilance to her children when she warns them against accepting any gifts from 'well-intended' uncles and aunts, dubbing such gifts 'corpse food' (Farah, *Gifts* 1993, p. 120).

Duniya's palimpsestic situation is aggravated by her inability to attain stable love and family lives. Her first marriage relegates her to a mere property that would be reciprocated and gifted while her second one makes her suffer at the hands of an alcohol-addict husband. When courted by Basaao, Duniya fears being involved into a love story that would entice her to sacrifice her autonomy; she repulses the idea of sacrificing anything else in return for a sham gift. Gifting and reciprocation processes make her feel insecure. Trusting Basaao's sincere love, Duniya, finally, gets rid of the last traces of her subalternity; she breaks the bonds of dependence and admits her romantic attachment to Basaao without any fear of being re-ensnared into the vicious cycle of gifting again. Celebrating her full autonomous identity, Duniya accepts to go out in a date with Basaao and, furthermore, agrees to make her daughter dress her. For the first time, she reveals full independence in triumph over any tradition that would accentuate her subalternity. She even abandons her headscarf and shows her ears as a sign of being proud of herself, her achievements and her identity as an autonomous woman: '[A]ll stories are one story, whose principal theme is love' (Farah, *Gifts* 1993, p. 242). In the realm of Farah's *Gifts*, the theme of love is the gateway to the desire of getting rid of subalternity so as to attain autonomy.

Secrets (1998), the closing novel in 'Blood in the Sun Trilogy', is a family drama. The backdrop of the whole action is the collapse of Somalia in the early 90s. The setting is the modern urban Mogadishu where the protagonist, Kalamani, is an over thirty computer programmer.

Clearly, Farah shows us in his novels, most often set in Mogadishu, that, although Somalia is still chaotic but the tragic turns can be overcome if people get themselves organised around great ideas that will save that country (Ajibade 2018).

Notably, the notion of saving the country is stipulated with saving the identity of promising youths, out of whom Kalaman is one. The palimpsestic identity of Kalaman harbingers his destruction on every aspect. Similar to Askar, he is full of questions that trouble his psychological status and afflict him with some sort of mental disorder. Unfortunately, all such questions are with no answer. Moslem as he is, he wonders why he is deprived of having a Moslem name like 'Mohamed' or 'Mahmoud' as is the case with his peers. His is a typical ethnic name that does not grant him the distinctive name identity of the Somali Moslems. The return of his childhood crush Sholoongo from her exile in the US impedes his identity from slipping *in the flux*. Her sudden visit is not out of her love for Kalaman; she only needs him to fulfill his childhood promise of making her pregnant. She assures that she would not make him raise the child by repeating, 'a mother is everything, a father is nothing' (Farah, *Secrets* 1998, p. 40). Annuling Kalaman's role in parenthood, Sholoongo forces another 'erasure' in Kalaman's palimpsestic identity and adds to his aggravating mental disorder.

Sholoongo's arrival, however, stimulates all the old family secrets, which torment Kalaman, to come to the surface. He starts questioning his parents and grandfather about his personal history. Kalaman discovers that his lot is uncertainty towards all the matters troubling him and emphasising that his identity is still in the flux. Kalaman's grandfather Nonno who assumes the role of a traditional *griot*, informs him that his paternity is uncertain. His mother, Damac, is a victim of a brutal gang rape that made her pregnant. Therefore, they gave him a name that does not underline his Moslem identity. In addition, his bloodline to his mother is similarly uncertain. During infancy, Kalaman used to drink the menstrual blood of his crush Sholoongo from a thimble. Symbolically, drinking his friend's blood makes him a descendant of her bloodline not of his mother's. Thus, she would be rather considered another mother to him.

In contradiction to Kalaman's expectations, the predicament of having various mothers and fathers might act as a privilege, according to the Somali culture, because it would give him the opportunity to choose for himself the father and the mother whom he likes. Therefore, his palimpsestic identity would be the way to full bloodline autonomy. He is now the master of his individuality.

Written against a background of clan and ethnic Somali culture, Kalaman develops fascination with biological origins. However, this might be an identity destructive force, as the authoritarian clan rhetoric mars any sane identity development. Holding Sholoongo as his blood mother, making her pregnant would be a predicament because he would be both the father and the brother of his child. This situation adds to his mental disorder that continues until he attempts to disentangle himself from such clan rhetoric: 'I am a person, a clan is a mob. [...] I am reasonable. Clans are not' (Farah, *Secrets* 1998, p. 297), confirms Kalaman. His troubled psychological experience prods him realise that it is better to choose freedom because identity is not granted by blood descent. Identity is an accumulation of experiences that are forged through the relationships one develops. Clan identity is not as constructively meaningful as the relationships one 'freely chooses' (Farah, *Secrets* 1998, p. 297). Hence, any individual may build his identity the way he aspires, as the development of identity is infinite and should never stop at one incident.

'Blood in the Sun' trilogy is Nuruddin Farah's simulacrum of his beloved Somalia that is torn with political conflicts, famine, social predicaments, crime, drug abuse and clan rhetoric. Despite the deteriorating and conflicting socio-political and ethnic situations are major setbacks, because they appear as the forces that mar the cultivation of uniform identity, they might be also considered the creative power for constructing a promising future; stipulating that

the Somalis should make of them the cornerstone of developing a rationale that would turn the set backs into a privilege. Farah endeavours with his novels to expose to his Somali natives, as well as to all the Africans, the factors that contribute to promoting such a palimpsestic identity that is deemed the stamp of subalternity and, also, the dead-end to any attempt for achieving autonomy. Thus, he makes of the trilogy a 'dialectical tussle' that runs between his personal notions and experience, from one hand, and the Somali culture, from the other hand. 'Farah, in narrating and attempting to come to terms with the disintegration of the Somali state, is putting that history in dialogue with the longer durée of Somali culture' (Dasenbrock 2020). The dialogic simulacrum of Somalia in the trilogy confirms that harsh socio-political situation could be a force of creativity. Knowing that identity is the product of experiences and backgrounds whether good or bad, these same experiences are accounted the layers that enrich the Somali identity and, consequently, urge the Somalis escape imposed subalternity. Askar, Duniya and Kalaman fearlessly express their aspirations and dreams when they firmly hold the belief that their palimpsestic attitude is characteristic and would help them attain distinct voice. Nuruddin Farah's 'Blood in the Sun' trilogy proves that the subaltern can speak.

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