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## Love in a State of Fear: Reflections on Intimate Relations in Nuruddin Farah's Dictatorship Novels

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### ABSTRACT

Romantic love, shot through with passion and the erotic, has extremely rarely been the focus of the study of African oral traditions or a theme considered in African literature criticism. This situation prevails despite the fact that love is a powerful catalyst in most oratures and literatures in both indigenous and European languages from the period of their origins. This lacuna in scholarship is partially addressed through foregrounding the love which seems to be a ubiquitous but erased presence in African novels through an analysis of the dictatorship novels of Nuruddin Farah. The novels studied are *Sardines* (1981), *Close Sesame* (1983) and *Gifts* (1992). Farah's novels foreground a number of dominant ideas about love but also unique conceptions about intimate relationships in the context of an authoritarian postcolonial state where the dictator himself demands a form of love and love itself holds the threat of becoming a form of dictatorship.

### Embracing Love: Intimate Relations in Cultural Perspective

Studies of relationships between people in the scholarship of African literature has been rare. In very broad terms, the focus of the first major period of African literature in English fell mainly on the dynamics of the encounter between cultural systems, specifically the unequal exchange of colonial and indigenous social structures. The second general trend in analyses of African literature considers the struggles between people as individuals or classes, on the one hand, with the increasingly autocratic power of the post-independence African state. African literature scholarship has also given significant consideration to relationships between persons construed within the context of a gendered agonistics, with various types of feminism challenging transforming patterns of patriarchy, which themselves reflect social shifts caused by the incorporation of African societies into a modern world order. There are very few literary studies of family relationships, those highly constitutive bonds of care between parents and children, siblings, and husbands and wives, whether in nuclear, extended or polygynous families. Similarly there are very few studies of the relationship of friendship and also of romantic love between two people. This obscurity may be the consequence of the shadow cast on scholarship by unofficial African "apartheids", which have tended to render invisible the networks of care which constitute us as subjects, foregrounding instead the more visible and necessary challenges to divisive authoritarian colonial and postcolonial regimes. The proceedings of

the 2014 fortieth anniversary conference of the African Literature Association in Johannesburg, South Africa, which celebrated twenty years of freedom from official Apartheid, seems a highly symbolic forum at which to articulate a hope for repertoires of living *and loving* beyond the shadows of various forms of apartheid, even though the novels studied here seem to remain trapped within the real and conceptual walls of an epistemological totalitarianism.

Widening the scholarly lens, studies of human relationships through the prism of love in other disciplines is also only at an incipient stage of development. There are a fair number of studies of sexuality, marriage and patriarchy in an African context, but very few which consider these relationship in terms of emotion or affect. This trend, however, is beginning to change through the scholarly focus on the AIDS pandemic. Mark Hunter in *Love in the Time of Aids* (2010), a sociological study of the disease among Zulu men and women, contends that AIDS constitutively in its very nature is “reworking” conceptions of intimate relationships. To date, the only dedicated work on romantic love is a volume edited by Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas, aptly titled *Love in Africa* (2009). In this volume, the editors consider love as an analytical problem rather than a universal category, explored in some of the essays in the volume through the cultural forms of film, a televised serial and advice columns in magazines. The volume *Love in Africa*, in part, has been used to construct the background to an exhibition of cross-continental African visual art under the project and book title, *The Progress of Love*. The essays in both these books and the visual art in the latter, unsettle the idea of the cultural purity and exclusivity of European conceptions of romantic love and understand contemporary ideas of love in Africa to be subject to, but also reinterpretive of, local and global cultural networks.

Research into love in Africa reveals, however, as the above books also note, that love is a preoccupying and proliferating theme in the oratures, popular literatures and popular cultures of Africa. Okot p'Bitek's 1974 collection of translations of Acoli oral verse titled *The Horn of my Love*, where a significant portion of the translated verse is given over to Acoli romantic love poetry, is a case in point. Also from Eastern Africa, Somali orature is overwhelmingly preoccupied with romantic love, as John William Johnson's overview of particular Somali oral verse genres, *Heelloy: Modern Poetry and Songs of the Somali*, makes clear. The Somali love of love is carried over into new genres like drama, one of the best examples of which is the 1960s play by Hassan Sheikh Mumin, titled *Leopard Among the Women*, about the dangers of predatory gigolos. The attractions of love are the focus also of the first novel in Somali, *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* (published in translation in 1982), by Faraax M.J. Cawl, where the non-literacy of the hero is seen as an obstacle in the relationship with the beloved. In these cases, although the genres and the media are foreign, the sentiments within the worldviews which create them are not. By contrast, Emmanuel Obiechina's inescapable encounter with love in his 1973 study of Nigerian Onitsha market literature finds in this case, however, that the focus on love signals a transition to an individualist ethos at odds with the social foundations of African family life. Love predominates also in the Ghanaian popular novels considered by Stephanie Newell. Scanning through the bibliography of Newell's book, one comes across titles like *The Work of Love*, *Love in a Clinic*, *Falling in Love*, *The Forbidden Love* and *Suffered Because of Love*, to mention only a few. While the theme of love with variations is universal, Newell finds that these novels are not written with a consciousness of a universal readership or appeal. They are confidently didactic, and draw their realism from their didacticism rather

than a transformed epistemological view of the world. Rachel Spronk draws on Karin Barber's discussion of Newell's work where Barber observes that the popular romances are "read as 'true': not in the sense of being mimetic representations of reality, but rather true in the sense of being applicable to reality" (emphasis in the original) (Spronk quoting Barber's "Preliminary notes on audiences in Africa" in *Africa* 67 (3): 406-40, 195). According to Barber thus, the African realism which emerges out of the popular romances of the late twentieth century is a realism which teaches reality through instruction. It is a didactic rather than mimetic realism. There is thus no lack of love in African oratures, vernacular literatures and popular literatures in English, however, these narratives go unobserved by literary criticism and the networks within which such criticism operates.

This is remarkable given the abounding love in African literature, especially poetry. But, in this essay, it is particularly to love in the novel to which I wish to turn. The great importance of love is suggested by the fact that in the earliest African novels in English, love is a conscious element in the narrative. Sol Plaatje's 1930 publication, *Mhudi*, which is regarded as the first South African novel in English by a black writer, is described by its author as: "a love story after the manner of romances; but based on historical facts ... with plenty of love, superstition, and imaginations [sic] worked in between ... wars" (Chennells quoting Willan 254). Stephanie Newell recently discovered a West African novel from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *Marita: Or the Folly of Love*, that could stake a claim to being the first African novel. *Marita* was published in serialized form in the Gold Coast newspaper, *Western Echo*, beginning in 1885. Installments of the novel by the anonymous author who used the pseudonym, A. Native, continued up until 1888 when the novel was drawn to a close. This novel considers the effect on married couples of the passing by the British colonial administration of the Marriage Ordinance of 1884 which the novel suggests would "transform peaceful well-behaved women into shrews and termagants who are bent upon seizing domestic power from their husbands" (Newell 1). Both these early novels thus underscore the centrality of love and transformations in intimate relationships which run parallel with broader colonial transformations.

And love has never been completely lost in the generations of African novels which have followed *Marita* and *Mhudi*, but unlike these early novels, intimate relationships form part of a novelistic background which criticism for the most part has missed. There is a love story element to virtually all of the canonical African novels by established African writers, including the archetypal *Things Fall Apart*. In the foreground of the novel, the late Chinua Achebe presents love systemically in the artfully natural incorporation of Igbo marriage rituals into the story of Okonkwo's downfall. The reader is informed of Igbo customs when Okonkwo visits the house of his friend whose daughter is about to be married. The intimate relationship here is presented as an element of social structure which aligns families, binds the village and provides an opportunity for the patriarch to prove his status and prosperity paradoxically through distributing the wealth he has acquired to all in acts of ritual largesse. The novel also presents the intimate relationship comparatively in the sense that it implicitly contrasts Igbo intimate relations with relationships shaped by colonial modernity, explored in more detail in the case of Obi Okonkwo, Okonkwo's grandson in *No Longer At Ease*. In terms of the infiltrating system of modern intimate relationships, marriage is the voluntary bond of two heterosexual equals whose foundation lies in a conception of love as a form of self-realization. However, in the background of Achebe's narrative in *Things Fall Apart*, where marriage is a

functional part of Igbo social structure, we find hidden like gems, little stories of love as an ideal which the system both makes room for and fosters. The structuralist and functionalist anthropological ideas about marriage, which the novel seems to endorse at a surface level, do not preclude the story of the elderly woman in a polygynous marriage who dies of grief when she sees her husband's corpse. The text suggests that, "[I]t was always said that Ndulue and Ozoemena had one mind" (60). Neither does the interpretation of marriage as communal collective exchange appear to be an obstacle to Okonkwo's second wife Ekwefi's leaving her first husband to elope with Okonkwo, her first and only true love.

It is clear that an analysis of love in the African novel must engage the dominant master metanarrative about love. What is the metanarrative in its crude form? In its reductionist form, romantic love is a sentiment discovered in the period of modernity in the West that develops out of the tradition of courtly love. Romantic love is the reason why women are treated better in the modern West than in traditional societies. As the forces of modernization spread to the rest of the world romantic love will begin to reorganize extended family structures and patriarchal gender relations associated with traditional societies. This idea gets exploded from within, sometimes quite graphically. Consider, for example, Margaret Atwood's sardonic rejoinder to the idea of the inherent liberation of individualized intimate relations in the context of the nuclear family. Atwood's well-known poem unexpectedly suggests "you fit into me / like a hook into an eye / a fish hook / an open eye" (1375).

The more analytically sophisticated form of the dominant metanarrative deserves more attention and has been articulated most significantly and most clearly by Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, Niklas Luhmann and Zygmunt Baumann. For Luhmann, the institutionalization of love "as a foundation for marriage is a modern achievement", (27) "which goes hand in hand with increasing societal complexity" (28). Stating the obvious, these sociologists suggest that some conception of romantic love then is universal, but that love as the exclusive rationale for marriage is associated with the modern West. This move is tied up with ideas of autonomy, freedom and individual self-realization through eros. Modern romantic love for Giddens is part of a general democratization which forms the basis of marriage, but also allows partners to the marriage the freedom to exit the marriage when the partnership no longer brings self-fulfillment.

Some paradoxes present themselves almost immediately. At the moment that the ideal of the love marriage establishes itself as the basis of social connection, it also undercuts itself in various ways. The heroines of all Jane Austen's novels, which epitomize the ideal of the companionate marriage, manage to marry not only for love, but also for money and entry into a materially secure middle or aristocratic class. This idea is not dissimilar to the findings of both Mark Hunter and Jennifer Cole that material concerns may be part of the definition of intimate relations in communities in KwaZulu Natal and Tamatave, Madagascar. Mary Evans suggests that what Giddens reads as democratization, where partners to a marriage may walk out when the marriage no longer provides personal satisfaction, simply extends to women a privilege men have generally enjoyed of abandoning their responsibility to home and children (3-4). The novel of adultery, furthermore, is the monstrous twin, so to speak, born a few minutes later than the novel which cements social contract between individuals in marriage. In other words, the novel of the betrayal

of the ideal of the love marriage comes into existence in tandem with the novel which presents companionate marriage as a universal ideal.

Associated with the companionate marriage, furthermore, is the idea of the increasing modern reflexivity identified with love. Love does not lead to an ideal higher than itself. Instead love becomes the ideal; one “falls in love with loving” (Luhmann 57). Falling in love with the idea of loving furthermore for Baumann does not create dominant monogamy since bonds of modern love are “liquid.” Erotic attachments become dominated by the discourse of “relationships” where ties are loose, and connections are made to be disconnected.

These ideas or interesting variations of them occur in most of the novels by Nuruddin Farah. In keeping with the individualizing trend in Farah’s novels, marriage as the key social contract to explain the formation of social bonds is a significant narrative motor in many of the novels. In the first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, escape from an arranged marriage is the narrative catalyst which drives the protagonist, Ebla, to seek self-realization in the free choice of a marriage partner who ironically is a lot like the husband chosen for her by her grandfather. Conscious narrative reflection on the paradoxes of romantic love apparently “freely” chosen, produces a skepticism regarding the possibility at all of romantic love as the sole basis of marriage in the next novel, *A Naked Needle*. Here the main character, Koschin, speculates in the marriage to Nancy Stonegrave, the Englishwoman whom he met in a bar two years earlier, whether he is married at all. He wonders: “My marital status. I mean am I married? The frank honest-to-god answer to this is: I don’t know” (n.pag.). The romantic love which is the rationale for marriage here is just a lukewarm relationship of convenience which is never consummated and, in fact, appears to be the product of pure textuality – love and marriage are the product of Koschin’s euphoric high and he himself is a product of his own creation.

### Totalitarian Regimes of Loving

The focus of this essay, however, is the fate of love under political authoritarianism. Attention thus falls squarely on the “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship” trilogy, but also the two novels set towards the end of the period of dictatorship, namely, *Gifts* and, to a lesser extent, *Secrets*. The title of this essay, “Love in a State of Fear”, is one which alludes to two novels, namely, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Love in the Time of Cholera* and Menán du Plessis’s *A State of Fear*. Marquez, of course, is a writer for whom irrational and debilitating love is the lens through which postcolonial politics often is viewed, as is the case for the novels of many other Latin American writers. Menán du Plessis’s *A State of Fear* foregrounds the control which the Apartheid authoritarian state exerts over a range of intimate relationships, most notably a daughter’s relationship with a poet father whose insistent apparently apolitical and irrelevant love poems and adulterous relationship seem a betrayal of the protagonist’s range of fidelities and commitments. This is an idea explored further in the context of poetry by Peter Anderson, editor of the anthology, *In the Country of the Heart: Love Poems from South Africa* (2004). The title plays upon the ways in which love, ironically, is both repressed and impressed, or shaped, by politics and history highlighted through its allusions to both J.M. Coetzee’s Apartheid inflected master-servant farm novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, and Antjie Krog’s deeply personal take on the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in *Country of my Skull*,

both works which highlight the personal traumas and costs of Apartheid politics on both sides of the racialized political divide. Anderson in the introduction to the anthology notes that “Love that makes us all awkward at the outset, is greatly awkward in South Africa” (5) since it seems a betrayal of matters of far more pressing urgency. Anderson notes that not only do politics and history in Apartheid South Africa efface the importance of love, but most of the major poets, black and white, have tended to self-censor the love poetry which is an inescapable and inevitable part of their oeuvres.

Approaching the question of love from a gendered perspective, the impact of Apartheid on women writers suggests a double effacement. This is a concern addressed in the 2005 collection by Lisa Combrinck, titled *An Infinite Longing for Love*, which demands the right not only to write about love in the context of imperative political problems, but also demands the right for the *woman* poet to write about love since erotic poetry, unlike the romance novel, seems to be a genre dominated by male poets in most cultures. In the poem, “Concerning the subject matter of this poetry”, Combrinck declares quite unequivocally: “It so happens I want to be a woman undeniably / who writes erotic love poetry.” (5). In this collection, romantic love is presented not as an escape from political activism and struggle, but as forms of passion and desire intimately interwoven as the second stanza of “To the reader” makes clear: “But these cold stones, these slogans of struggle, / these wounds, these spears cannot be free / until they come to terms with femininity / and feel the freedom of love” (6).

Paradoxically, however, in a greater continental African context, South Africa, seems to have produced more art that specifically foregrounds eros than other regions. Perhaps this occurs precisely because of the attempted control of the Apartheid state of all facets of life, especially interracial love by the Immorality Act of 1957. Again, Peter Anderson, in the anthology referred to above, suggests how, in the context where love itself is forbidden in the twentieth-century social interpretation of the nineteenth-century science of race, the romantic love of two racially divided individuals is an attempt to forge an erotic unity which transcends brutal material, social and political realities:

But for all the social nightmare frustrates love and divides its lovers, yet it can also prompt new loves and confirm old ones, shaping the intensity of the lovers’ moment and matching the intensity of their feelings with the spectacle of extraordinary history. Against the backdrop of cataclysm the lovers stand for a hope that is more than political: what they cradle in their arms is the hope of all human love that it – love – might arrest history and dispel the end of time – death – in an endless joy, a new world. (5)

Athol Fugard’s *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* is a case in point of a drama that reinforces the examples of poetry anthologized by Anderson. For the black and white lovers in this play *jouissance* exceeds the physical to embrace an imagined pleasure in a shared social freedom. In the South African context thus love to a large extent is produced as an act of rebellion and resistance (with transcendence as outcome), underlining the transgressive nature of love in general which disregards boundaries of race, class, religion and ethnicity. In this case love is a revolt against legal and social constraints. Control of all facets of living and loving under the Apartheid state has thus produced a paradoxical liberation through intimacy in resistance to the totalitarian state.

While Apartheid South Africa endorses the stereotype of the “unloving” nature of authoritarian control, East German socialist dictatorship has been described by Josie



McLellan as a “dictatorship of love” (quoting Stefan Wolle 83). Contrary to common assumptions of the grey, cold rigidities of life under communism, McLellan has found that love in all forms, both conventional and unconventional flourished in East Germany.

In Somalia, the period of dictatorship begins in 1969 when General Mohammed Siyaad Barre takes control of the Somali government, which, with 69 political parties, could be described as government by democratic anarchy. Through manipulation of the rhetoric of indigeneity, socialism and religion, Barre quickly gathered up complete power which he managed to hold onto through manipulating US and Soviet Cold War animosities (Samatar) until his flight from Mogadishu in 1991. In this period, oral poetry, continued to be composed as well as literature in the vernacular for the local market. Unfortunately, very little has been translated and there is no scholarship which overviews the cultural production of this period. There have been a few autobiographies published in English of life experiences under the authoritarian regime of Siyaad Barre, for example, Jama Mohamed Ghalib’s *The Cost of Dictatorship: The Somali Experience*, but apart from this genre of literature, there has not been much other writing in English that presents this period. Thus it is largely only through the fiction of Nuruddin Farah, who writes exclusively in English and who is translated into many world languages except Somali, that the English literary establishment has one window onto the world of Somali dictatorship.

### **(Non)Variations on the Theme of Love in an African Dictatorship**

The politics of the dictatorship of Siyaad Barre is what Farah analyzes most directly in the “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship” trilogy. The first novel of the trilogy, *Sweet and Sour Milk*, explores love not as eros but as the substitution of love in the parental relationship with brute authority. The contention of this novel is that modern dictatorship represents the traditional authority of patriarchs or fathers writ large. The next two novels, *Sardines* and *Close Sesame*, however, foreground intimate relationships between men and women.

*Sardines* tells the story of the Mogadishu “priviligentsia’s” attempt to challenge the Dictator, Siyaad Barre, at the height of his power using different forms of resistance. Medina, the central character, is more complex since her resistance is leveled not only against the Dictator, but also against perceived social, religious, patriarchal and cultural forms of authoritarianism. Although *Sardines* is most obviously a novel about the relationship between the protagonist, Medina, and her husband, Samater, in some ways the husband-wife relationship is simply a pretext for the central character’s ambition to “freely” encourage the “free” self-development of others (Moolla 79-95). Samater recalls the love talk between the couple in happier days where Medina says to him: “A flower serves as the humus for the soil of my love for you. Yes, you are the fertilizer” (177). In the very next sentence, Medina refers to her daughter Ubax, whose education in her mother’s image is a major preoccupation in the novel. Samater as “fertilizer” is quite literally meant here since copulation with the man is necessary in order for Medina to fall pregnant with the child whom she will train to be a free individual.

The more significant relationship, which is intimate in its passionate intensity, is the relationship with the Dictator who is referred to simply by the appellation “He.” “He” is also the title given by Medina to the Igbo folktale of the tortoise and the birds refracted through Achebe’s Igbo and postcolonial reading of it in *Things Fall Apart*. Through



Medina's version of the folktale, the Dictator is allegorized as greedy, wily and manipulative. This story is one of a range of stories told by Medina to her daughter which allows her to see herself as a latter day Scheherezade, keeping the death of herself and other women at bay through the tales which keep Shahryar/the Dictator charmed and consumed with desire for the next story. Ironically in *Sardines*, far from intriguing and tantalizing the dictator, Medina's orchestrated and consciously inflammatory newspaper articles, her "stories", produce the censorship and house arrest she desires.

What is also different between *Sardines* and *The Thousand and One Nights* is the fact that while Scheherezade in the Baghdadi frame narrative inhabits the harem for cultural reasons, Medina creates a harem of her own making through literally isolating herself from collective politics, her husband and the cultures and religion of her mother and mother-in-law. While in most versions of the *Arabian Nights* the stories stop when Shahryar, the dictator, falls in love with Scheherezade, in *Sardines* Medina's stories proliferate upon the dynamo of her negative passion for the Dictator. But, an irony already noted above, Medina's stories, because of her banning, are heard/read by the audience of one represented by her daughter, Uba. In this Dictatorship novel, thus, love is not a release from authoritarianism, neither is it an act of resistance to the Dictator, as the South African love stories mentioned above are.

Love is conceived instead through the heroine Medina as a macabre ritual of courtship where the supreme leader is Medina's subject of fascination. The motif of the dance runs throughout the novel as captured in Medina's observation that: "The General's power and I are like two lizards engaged in a varanian dance of death; we are two duelists dancing a tarantella in which they challenge their own destiny. He is as aggressive towards me as I am towards him. He uses violent language and so do I. He calls me 'a dilettante bourgeois', 'a reactionary'; I call him 'fascist' and 'dictator'" (45). Medina uses the "tarantella" as a symbol which captures the relationship between Medina and the Dictator. This dance is a signature Italian dance which is supposed to be able to grab one from the embrace of death caused by the bite of the tarantula. When the tarantella is danced by a man and a woman, it is known to be patently sexual. Frances Malpezzi and William Clements refer to Richard Gambino's description of a tarantella where the man and woman "acted out a range of attitudes — seduction, aggression, bravado, coquettishness, taunting, teasing, jealousy, feigned indifference, flirting, cruelty, surrender, and tenderness — all to the shouts of approval or disapproval of their audience" (219). Similarly, Julie Taylor has drawn the analogy between the passion, poetry and violence of the tango with the magnetism and ruthlessness of control of the Argentinian military junta. Paradoxically, in Farah's meditation on intimate relations in *Sardines*, the Dictator emerges as the most enthralling demon lover and in some ways Medina is a dictator, as her relationships with her husband and child suggest, through her determination not to be one.

Farah has said that it is the expansiveness of the trilogy form which allows the full exploration of the ideas in his novels. *Close Sesame* quite aptly concludes the Dictatorship trilogy in a way which takes the ideas of the earlier books and alternatively construes them. Here the hero, Deeriye, is foregrounded as father, alternately refracting the figure of the monster father in *Sweet and Sour Milk*, but also as husband, presenting a character of strength which contrasts with the weak husband, Samater, in *Sardines*. As a benevolent patriarch and husband, Deeriye is also a kind of dictator who, in one respect, is like the Dictator of Somalia. Deeriye is most symbolically powerful as a resistance leader when he

is an absent presence, much like the figure of Siyaad Barre in Farah's novels. Many critics have noted that apart from a few brief references in *A Naked Needle*, Mohammed Siyad Barre, is never referred to directly in any of Farah's novels, although the state of dictatorship is a constant preoccupation. Deeriye also is most potent as an idea of resistance when he is incarcerated for twelve years in Italian colonial jails, where, like Barre, he is an absent presence.

In the context of an analysis of intimate relationships, however, it is Deeriye as husband and the bond with the wife which is more significant. The centrality of love to this novel is made clear by the quote from W.B. Yeats which acts as epigraph: "One should say before sleeping, I have / lived many lives. I have been a slave / and a prince. Many a beloved has sat / upon my knees and I have sat upon the / knees of many a beloved." The marriage between Deeriye and Nadiifa epitomizes non-modern intimate relations grounded in group social contract where politics and economics determine matches and love develops subsequently out of companionship and commitment to an ideal outside of individual fulfillment. Interestingly, this is not the case for Deeriye. Because of the circumstances of his life and imprisonment in his early married years, he learns to love his wife when later he is separated from his wife. The narrative suggests: "He had just married a woman whom he respected (love came later when in detention, when she visited him in his visionary dreams; love came much later when both passed the test of endurance) ..." (31-32). Deeriye is released from jail just in time to say farewell to his wife, who passes away. His life hereafter is driven by his desire to see his wife in his dreams.

The agonistics of the varanian dance of death, the tarantella, danced by Medina and the Dictator, is replaced by a different kind of state where the hero desires to succumb to the liminal state of sleep in order to dream in order to consummate the glowing love for his wife. The Dictator on this interpretation is the wife who in death is an absent presence and with whom the hero may achieve unity only in his own absence in prison, in the death of sleep and in real death. In a number of ways, Deeriye's death at the end of the novel is indeterminate. We do not know whether he dies in a botched assassination attempt on the Dictator or whether he attempts to commit suicide. Neither is it clear whether the Dictator is alive or dead. Deeriye, in the death of himself and potentially the Dictator, consummates his relationship with the man who, like his wife has held him captive. Siyad Barre, the brutal dictator, who it is rumored threw his enemies into the shark-infested waters of the Indian Ocean, in the earlier novel, is presented by the pronoun "He." By analogy, the wife as benevolent dictator in this novel is "She." Deeriye attests:

During one of my irreligious fever-ridden bouts – may God forgive us and all Muslims all sins, amen! – I am supposed to have described Nadiifa as an angel; I am supposed to have said she could come to me at will, any time, any hour she pleased and I would keep myself free for her. Now that, I believe, was an exaggeration on my part and an irreligious thing to utter. No mortal, not even Nadiifa, should be offered that privilege: only God. But she kept me company, she helped me stay sane, she talked to me when I needed someone to converse with. She? Or my own invention. I would say, she. She was too great to be invented. (230-31)

For Deeriye thus, love is most acutely experienced in the absence of the beloved.

Farah's novels which present the Somali dictatorship then, unlike the other authoritarian states considered earlier, seem unable to conceive of romantic love between a man and a woman as a present reality outside of the frame of paradox. In *Sardines*, the most intense passion is the love-hate relationship with the demon lover embodied in the

Dictator. In *Close Sesame*, love is present only in absence and love is real only in dreams. In the period of Somali dictatorship then erotic love is controlled by authoritarianism. Romantic love may only be squarely treated when the Dictator begins to lose his hold on power, encountered in the novel, *Gifts*, the middle novel of the next trilogy.

“[A]ll stories are one story, whose principal theme is love” (Farah, *Gifts* 242); thus concludes Abshir, the brother of Duniya, the heroine of *Gifts*, when at the end of the novel his arrival, almost as a *deus ex machina*, makes her marriage to Bosaaso possible. *Gifts* is the first international African novel written in the latter half of the twentieth century which is described as a love story in reviews and criticism of the novel. Derek Wright, whose position as leading Farah scholar remains unshaken, affirms that “the novel is, first and foremost, a love story” (130). This is a situation which more recently has changed, most notably with the publication of Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story*, which has been analyzed in a number of journal articles, and Ben Okri’s *Dangerous Love*, among other more recent novels. When Abshir says that all stories are one story, whose principal theme is love, he may be alluding to the fact that, in terms of the philosophical individualism out of which the subject is conceived, it becomes all the more pressing to explain the concept of society through the primary contract of marriage. Marriage furthermore should not be the product of obligation but of desire in which the lover finds self-realization in union with the other. Duniya’s love story is proleptically written in the stars. On the morning that she meets her love she dreams of a butterfly which materializes in the brightly colored taxi driven by Bosaaso, whose ruse allows him to meet her and also give her the gift of comfort and security on the hazardous streets of a Mogadishu, run down and disorganized as a consequence of the Dictator’s waning power. The faces of Duniya and Bosaaso are reflected in the single frame of the taxi’s rear view mirror, playing self-reflexively on the cliché of love at first sight. Duniya literally feels the earth move under her feet for the rest of that day, finding herself absent-minded and clumsy at work, dropping things to the irritation of her colleagues. The burgeoning love affair allows Duniya to discover her true self reflected in changes to her style of dress and the fact that she ventures to do things she had previously considered off limits, like, for example, learning to drive.

The narrative obstacle in love’s path is the fact that Duniya is highly suspicious of the power that Bosaaso’s gifts of love can exert through creating bonds of obligation. The dilemmas around love-gifts are extended to gifts in general and the micronarrative is linked allegorically to the macronarrative of third world donor aid. Ironically, Duniya can only give herself to Bosaaso and lose her independence when her brother arrives to give her complete financial autonomy in his gifts of accommodation and education for her children from previous marriages. Duniya feels free to bind herself in love only when she is in a position for the bond to be freely broken. In other words, she is only willing to submit to the dictates of love when she is in a position, mainly in this case financially, to withdraw from love’s totalitarian regime, given her independence (which in reality is illusory since it depends on the benevolence of her brother). One comes back here to the “liquid love” described by Baumann where individuals can connect only once unbound. In this respect, Duniya’s literary love is at variance with the intimate relations studied by Hunter in KwaZulu Natal and Cole in Tamatave, Madagascar, where material questions are not regarded as sully love but are, in part, a condition for love.

The significance of creating connections in the individualized world of Farah's novels is emphasized also by the repeated reference to the use of pronouns in this and in other novels. The description of the erotic relationship through a consideration of pronouns in Farah captures Baumann's description of modern relationships as the "incarnations of ambivalence" (viii). The witty concision of Baumann's edited version of the introduction to *Liquid Love* highlights the contradictions of modern conceptions of relationships, of which Duniya's dilemmas are an early stage, and warrants attention here:

Welcome to the age of semi-detached couples. In modern "liquid" society, relationships are, like high-tech toys, upgradable. We want the ties that bind us to be just as easy to cut. The hero of Austrian writer Robert Musil's great novel was, as the title of the novel announced, the man without qualities. Having no qualities of his own, whether inherited or acquired, he had to compose them himself, using his wits and acumen; but none of them were guaranteed to last in a world full of confusing signals, constant change and unpredictability. The hero of my book is the man with no bonds - no fixed, unbreakable bonds, and he is the denizen of our liquid, modern society. More importantly, whatever bonds he does make need to be only loosely tied, so that they can be untied again, with little delay, when the settings change - as in liquid modernity they surely will. The uncanny frailty of human bonds, the feeling of insecurity that frailty inspires, and the conflicting desires to tighten bonds yet keep them loose is what I seek to unravel and grasp. The subject is human relationships, and the central characters are men and women - our contemporaries - despairing at being abandoned to their own wits, feeling easily disposable, yearning for the security of togetherness and for a helping hand to count on in a moment of trouble, and so desperate to relate. Yet they are wary of the state of being related, and particularly of being related for good, since they fear that such a state may bring burdens they feel neither able nor willing to bear. In our world of rampant "individualization", relationships are mixed blessings. They vacillate between a sweet dream and a nightmare, and there is no telling when one turns into the other. Most of the time, the two cohabit - though at different levels of consciousness. In a liquid modern setting of life, relationships are perhaps the most common, acute incarnations of ambivalence. This is, we may argue, why they are firmly placed at the top of people's life agendas. (n.pag. edited online introduction to *Liquid Love*.)

The contemporary twenty-first century modern relationships described by Baumann are foreshadowed in the postcolonial relationship of the late 1980s described in *Gifts*. Duniya does not fail to observe when Bosaaso takes her for her first driving lesson that Bosaaso thinks of him- and herself as a couple:

Duniya took note of the flourish of pronouns, some inclusive, some exclusive; pronouns dividing the world into separable segments, which they labeled as such. Apparently the two of them were we, the rest of the world they. Together, when alone with each other, they in turn fragmented themselves into their respective I's. That is to say, they were like two images reflecting a oneness of souls, more like twin ideas united in their pursuit to be separable and linked at the same time. Is this the definition of love? (148)

The striking feature of this passage is the knife-edge balance of the contraries of autonomy and unity that the intimate relation on this conception must provide. Duniya and Bosaaso must be "like twin ideas united in their pursuit to be separable and linked at the same time." The novel suggests thus that love is based on contradiction, ambivalence and paradox. It must allow unity in individuality and individuality in unity. The highest love in this reading is the love for freedom. Freedom is the higher order against which love orients itself. Thus, paradox generating paradox, in this novel freedom as an absolute value is the Dictator of love.

## Conclusion

It is clear therefore that for Farah intimate relations and the possibility for self-fulfillment through the mutual links they provide can be conceived only with great difficulty in a state of authoritarian control represented by the Somali dictatorship. Loving relationships are precluded in *Sardines* since the Dictator, in effect, seduces the woman so that He becomes the heart of what matters to Medina rather than her husband, Samater. In *Close Sesame*, love may only be realized when the beloved is an absent presence, herself representing the absent presence of the Dictator. *Gifts* is the novel where love takes centre stage. This is the novel where Somalia begins to move out of dictatorship, but has not yet slipped into civil war. But here again love is not simple since love must negotiate the dictates of freedom as an absolute virtue. The novel which describes the collapse of dictatorship is *Secrets*, the final novel of the “Blood in the Sun” trilogy. In this novel, the focus shifts from love, where the erotic is always interwoven with greater concerns of self-realization through mutuality, to sexuality. The heterosexual romantic love which culminates in marriage is a rather nondescript backdrop to the theatrics of sexuality. Kalamán, the central character is engaged to be married when his childhood mentor, the shape-shifting, performer, Sho-loongo, arrives from the United States. She had initiated Kalamán into manhood through sensational childhood games and gets impregnated by his grandfather in a “reverse rape.” The attention to sexuality in this novel encompasses heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, bestiality, onanism and incest. In the earlier novels, however, which explore intimate relations in the period of dictatorship, love does not abound as it does in the East German dictatorship. Neither is love the heartbeat of resistance to authoritarian control of personal lives as it is in Apartheid South African literature, where union with the beloved also seems to allow a transgression that transcends social and political constraints. Love in Farah’s dictatorship novels seems to be caught in a stranglehold of ambivalence, paradox and contradiction which the subsequent novels also do not resolve.

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