

The Single and Multiple Melodies: A Comparative Reading of Traditional and Contemporary Feminist Writing

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Abstract This article juxtaposes traditional and contemporary East African feminist narratives with reference to Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Nadifa Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls*. Most feminist narratives in East Africa directly confront patriarchal traditions with the least sensitivity to the masculine audience's reaction. The writers adopt the Western strand of feminism that largely upholds gender stereotyping of the masculine gender and presentation of feminine gender as the innocent victims of patriarchy. A new generation of feminist writers however, refrain from the focus on patriarchy and express their subjects through multiple voices that turn their novels into great dialogues. This analytical study was carried out on novels by writers from East Africa to interrogate modes of narration by pioneer and contemporary feminists. Five novels by East African novelists were purposively sampled. In spite of most of the writers expressing feminist subjects, Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Nadifa Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* demonstrated the supposed diversity in the narrative mode. The study adopted the narrative analysis qualitative design. Data from secondary sources enabled the theoretical comprehension and qualitative analysis of primary texts. The study proceeded through close textual reading of the primary and secondary texts while Mikhail Bakhtin's monologism and dialogism formed the theoretical basis of interpretation. It was found that most pioneer feminist writers adopted the

monologic mode to impose feminist ideology while contemporary writers present the feminist voice as one of the many voices in conversation with other voices in the novel.

Keywords Dialogism; Feminist Narratives; Interweaving Melodies; Nadifa Mohamed; Somalia Literature

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Introduction

Literary writers in East Africa grapple with many issues that prompt them to adopt a confrontational style to defend the marginalised groups such as women and prisoners of conscience. Many pioneer literary writers in East Africa such as Nurrudin Farah and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been directly involved in social and political issues of their nations, which turns their literary works into media of expressing certain ideological standpoints. The magnitude of human rights violations and gender disparities calls on writers to take sides in existing conversations. The constant 'otherisation' of women and girls in education, politics and marriage creates a sense of urgency for the intellectuals to speak for the oppressed groups to castigate the so called obsolete traditions. These traditions include wife inheritance, female genital mutilation, gender based violence, early marriage, political and economic corruption.

Although the civil rights movement in East Africa plays an essential role in the fight against these violations, the literary writer has joined the fray to document these experiences for educative purposes. While writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Petals of Blood*); Francis Imbuga (*Betrayal in the City*); Nuruddin Farah (*Close Sesame*); John Ruganda (*Shreds of Tenderness*); Abulrazack Gurnah (*Memory of*

Departure); Wahome Mutahi (*Three Days on the Cross*) and Gael Faye (*Small Country*) mostly focus on political issues, a number of writers seek to address gender disparities. These include Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (*Coming to Birth*); Margaret Ogola (*The River and the Source*); Said Herzi (“Against the Pleasure Principle”); Fatmata Contenth (“Letter to my Sisters”); Ole Kulet (*Blossoms of the Savannah*); David Mulwa (*Inheritance*) and Nurrudin Farah (*From a Crooked Rib*). Most of these writers approach violation of women’s rights through direct denunciation and gender stereotyping of the masculine gender.

This is possibly why Meriem observes that Farah is “interested in those who are denied rights, male or female” (84). According to Meriem, Farah directly contributes to the feminist conversation through creation of female characters that strive for equality with the masculine gender. The Western feminist script that forms the groundwork some of Farah’s works tends to portray male characters as oppressive to female characters. However, contemporary writers on gender issues take an oblique mode that refrains from direct confrontation with the masculine gender. This study juxtaposes traditional and contemporary East African feminist narratives with reference to Nuruddin Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* and Nadifa Mohamed’s *Orchard of Lost Souls*. The major assumption of the study is that there are varying modes of expression among feminist writers in East Africa to combat obsolete traditions in different communities. The study establishes a better mode of expression between monologism and dialogism to enable effective fight for gender equality.

Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* is a story of a girl’s struggle against patriarchy ingrained within Somali culture. Raised as an orphan by her grandfather, Ebla tolerates his cruel treatment until he gives her out in marriage to, Giumaleh, an elderly man of forty-eight. Ebla decides to flee the countryside to her cousin, Gheddi who lives in a small town called Belet Wene. In spite of her hopes to escape patriarchal domination, her life with Gheddi is a repeat of what she had experienced at her grandfather’s home because besides Gheddi’s arrogance towards her, he gives her in marriage to an ailing broker in exchange for money to invest in his business. Ebla flees with a young man called Awill to Mogadicio where she expects him to marry her honourably. Awill however, betrays her by beating and forcibly breaking her virginity on the first night in his room. When he leaves for Italy for further training in his career, Awill starts illicit affairs with other women. Ebla resorts to vengeance by marrying another man (Tiffo) secretly. Although he is married with children of Ebla’s age, Tiffo expects total faithfulness from her. Awill announces his coming and Ebla tells Tiffo that she is married to Awill. In the ensuing row, Ebla

asserts her equality with men owing to her ability to have multiple relationships the way men in her society do.

Nadifa Mohammed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* is a story of Kawsar, Deqo and Filsan at the genesis of an armed conflict that results in the collapse of the Somalia state. The three women are subdued and dominated by violence that emanates from men that have warped the whole society in aggressive militarisation. Kawsar, a widow, whose husband Farah was frustrated and demoted for opposing the president's aggressive policies, is detained for saving Deqo from assault. She is tortured and spends most of her life on the sickbed. The episodic plot reverts to Filsan, described as "daughter of man" because her father's aggressiveness could not permit her to live with a man. He compels Filsan to avoid every man such that her nature completely transforms into masculine. When Kawsar is detained, Filsan (then a policewoman) beats her with truncheons until she loses consciousness. Dominated by male aggressiveness, Filsan has to act tough; she even shoots and kills innocent elders in the attack in Western Somalia so as to gain fame and stature. Like many other aggressive persons in the police and army, Filsan focuses on the performance of masculinity at the expense of her social life. Her estranged mother confesses that she has taken her father's aggressive nature and would attract neither love nor marriage. Filsan starts realising that her father's domination has drained any traces of humanity from her and resolves to reverse the situation. She falls in love with Roble, his senior and just as her heart starts experiencing love, Roble is killed by rebels when they make a daring attack on their land cruiser on the way back to the camp. During his treatment, Filsan sees the bitter fruit of aggression: students being bled dry in the military hospital, Nurto (the fleeing refugee girl Filsan had arrested in suspicion of working with rebels) lying dead among other thirty corpses. Filsan concludes that her desire to act like a man has only made her "to be nothing more than death's handmaids" (204). She deserts the army and as the soldiers pursue her, she bumps into Deqo, the vagrant who leads her to Kawsar's home (where Deqo puts up). Filsan apologises to Kawsar and as restitution carries her on a wheelbarrow overnight. They come across a lorry and Kawsar pays for their transit to a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

Literature Review

The focus of this literature review is analysis of critical works on the primary texts to locate the gap of this study. Contemporary feminist critics appraise writers in the canon as having successfully demonstrated the flipside of patriarchy for a better society. Okonkwo (1984) has argued that Farah is one of the few authors that have

“done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing” (217) through creation of characters that embody the plight of Somali women. While Okonkwo considers all feminist writers under a single mode of expression, this study postulates a possibility of these writers coming in different shades to address the phenomenal subject—gender disparities.

Furthermore, critics have appraised Western feminist writers for their dealing a final blow to patriarchal propensities in most East African communities. Dowden opines that Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* “is a dazzling spark of light in the dark tunnel of silencing women” (3). Somali culture is this dark tunnel that keeps women in the abyss that endangers their lives for ages. Whereas Dowden’s study delimits feminist writing within the traditional mode of narration, this study incorporates another mode of narrative aesthetic that adopts multiple voices.

Literary critics have also considered feminist writers in East Africa as champions of the rights of girls in the contemporary society. Ifeoma observes “Farah exposes the problems of gender discrimination and inequality that characterize the Somalia cultural milieu. She contends that Farah demonstrates how girls are treated unfairly and are not given equal rights with boys (117). Despite both Ifeoma’s and the present study taking a feminist analysis, the latter juxtaposes modes of narration of pioneer and contemporary East African feminist writers.

Literary scholars have associated Nadifa Mohamed’s *Orchard of Lost Souls* with the feminist canon. Tembo avers that Nadifa Mohamed “employs agency as a discursive technique for negotiating female identities and dismantling oppressive structures” in the novel (2). In Tembo’s perspective, Mohamed’s major aim is to attack patriarchal traditions in the Somali society. The present study contends that besides gender disparities, Mohamed employs multiple voices to address other issues in the Somali society.

Critics have read Mohamed’s *Orchard of Lost Souls* as an example of how patriarchal cultures use war to accentuate gender disparities. Graham-Bertolini contends that most patriarchal societies take advantage of war to allot women peripheral roles to maintain patriarchal dominance (45). The contentious tone against patriarchal voices in Graham-Bertolini’s thesis demonstrates her Western feminist voice, which she associates with *Orchard of Lost Souls*. This study contends that the novel presents multiple conversations to address diverse issues affecting the Somali society.

Theoretical Framework

Literary scholars have underscored the need for the novel to be a representation of

multiple voices rather than a single voice that pervades a text. In his critique of the single voice, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) writes:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force. Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the ultimate word. It closes down the represented world, represented person. (292-293)

In other words, all characters in a monologic novel conform to the dominant ideology and those opposed to it are mere targets (object consciousness) of which vices are described to the reader without being given a chance to account for their behaviour. If they are perceived by the authorial voice as villains, they are condemned with finality because the “monologue is finalized and deaf to the other response” in such a novel. Expounding on Bakhtin's perspective, Lodge observes that a polyphonic novel exhibits a “variety of conflicting ideological positions... without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice” (86). The authorial voice and main characters will have different perspectives without the attempt to punish characters who disagree with the author's views. Robinson refers to this authorial control as monologism, where “single thought discourse [...] one transcendental perspective or consciousness integrates the entire field, ideologies, and values and desires that are deemed significant. Anything irrelevant to this perspective is deemed superfluous or irrelevant in general” (2) In monologism, the writer is so much in control of the text and its subjects that characters with diverse viewpoints are stigmatized and punished. However, according to Atwell “[t]here is a true sense in which writing is dialogic: a matter of awakening the counter voices in oneself and embarking upon speech with them” (65). The work of art therefore becomes a conference of divergent voices including the authorial voice. This is probably the model that some contemporary East African writers have adopted contrary to monologic discourse of pioneer writers. This study explores monologic and dialogic modes of narration in Feminist East African writers with reference to Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* and Farah's *From a Crooked*.

Material and Methods

We carried out this analytical study on East African feminist novels by pioneer and contemporary writers to interrogate the modes of expression. A total of five feminist narratives were sampled: Marjorie's *Coming to Birth*, Nurrudin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*, and *Gifts*, Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* and Faye's *Small Country*. In spite of most of the writers and texts expressing the pertinent gender issues, Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Nadifa Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* palpably exhibited the different modes of narration

The study adopted the narrative analysis qualitative design. Data from secondary sources enabled the theoretical comprehension and qualitative analysis of primary texts. In narrative analysis, the research participants interpret their own lives through the narratives and then, the researcher interprets the construction of that narrative (May 10). The two writers in this study have interpreted their experiences through narratives, and the researchers analyse them. We conducted close textual reading of stories and reviewed journals that we selected depending on their pertinent contribution to monologic and dialogic modes.

Inclusion criteria

1. Gender of the writers
2. East African literature (for relevance)
3. Feminist literature
4. Indirect or direct reference to monologism and dialogism
5. Year of publication

Exclusion criteria

1. Non –East African literature
2. Absence of feminist subjects
3. Purely modernist works

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A study of the tenets of monologism and dialogism guided the researchers in analysis of the effect of using single and divergent voices in the two literary texts. The texts, Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* took different trajectories of expression with different effects on the readers. It was apparent that under monologic mode of expression, the Western feminist literary

canon pervaded the characters and themes; in the dialogic mode of expression, different canons and subjects were evident.

Discussion and Results

After data analysis, it was evident that Farah and Mohamed differ in the mode of expression of issues affecting women in the Somali society in particular and Africa in general. The discussion will begin with Farah's homophonic representation and then shift focus to Mahamed's polyphonic model of expression. Farah, like most pioneer feminist writers, adopts a monologic model to represent issues affecting women. As Ondinye observes in the literature review, Farah ignores other voices such as postcolonial feminism to "expose gender discrimination and inequality" (117) in the Somali society through the Western feminist strand. He therefore takes the trajectory of radical voices that describe men as enemies of women, "the exploiter and oppressor" (Frank 14). Indeed the story of Ebla shows the plight of the Somali girl from childhood to adulthood.

Ebla exhibits a lot of ignorance because Farah suggests that her society does not associate women with knowledge and intellect. The religion she believes in is just learnt by heart; the narrator says, "[s]he could not read and write her name. She only knew the *suras*, which she uttered when saying her prayers. She learnt by heart hearing them repeated many times by various people" (9). Her ignorance is compounded by her visit to Belet Wene, an urban centre where her cousin Gheddi lives. When people talk about the police, she wonders "who are they? Is it the name of a tribe?" (30) She asks the same question with regards to "government" (30) and struggles to understand the meaning of "office" (31). When Aowrolla, her cousin's wife asks her the date, she is not aware at all. Later after she marries Awill and he informs her that he is going to Italy for three months, Ebla can only understand the concept through the image of milking. In her perspective, Awill will spend in Italy "[o]ne hundred and eighty milking instances" because "a day is two milking instances" (50). The reference to "milking" gives a hint into the kind of graft girls are reserved and therefore interpret their world through that experience. The emphasis on Ebla with regards to ignorance echoes Bakhtin's assertion that monologic works are "[f]inalized and deaf to the other response" (292) because in spite of her brother being ignorant, the narrator just mentions it and reverts to Ebla. For example on her brother's visit to Mogadicio, he ignorantly condemns all city dwellers as wicked unbelievers that ought to be shot and refuses to go to school (54). This is a postcolonial feminist voice that rejects generalisations that all men are knowledgeable and favoured, but the narrator refuses to recognize it and reverts to

the radical feminist voice.

Farah directly endorses the radical feminist claim that the man is the norm and the woman is the other. According to Western feminist voices such as De Beauvoir: “[w]oman is a relative being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her... She is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is absolute—she is the Other” (15-16). The narrator uses Ebla to bring this out when he says, “[s]he loathed 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” (10). A family that has boys is more respected than a family with girls and someone who kills a woman pays less in fines than the one who kills a male. The narrator adds that even prized animals are assigned masculine pronouns. For example Aowralla refers to a cow as “his” and the narrator adds, “[i]n Somalia a cow is spoken of as ‘he’ and not ‘she’ or ‘it’ (17). The woman is indeed “inessential” as De Beauvoir asserts because she is of less value in Ebla’s community. They even believe that girls’ “urine stank more awfully than that of boys”(27).

The othering also manifests through the odd jobs and maltreatment reserved for women and girls; at her cousin’s home, Ebla is forced to milk cows, cook, and assist the cousin, Gheddi carry heavy loads (29). In return, she receives insults instead of compliments. For example when she says she does not know the route home, Gheddi blurts, “[I]f the thing first you fool” (29). This expletive shows that women in this community are viewed by men as fools in spite of the sacrifices they make. Indeed only Ebla succeeds to ferry the contraband goods home, but her cousin blames her for being arrested by police. He says, “[s]he is an ominous person; if she were not with us, we could not have been caught” (33). As De Beauvoir suggests, Ebla and Aowralla become the *other* because Gheddi turns all the anger meant for the police against them. He commands Ebla to get out of his sight and when his wife Aowralla tries to comment on the ordeal, he blurts, “I will hit you if you say another word” (29). This episode is an attempt by the writer to maintain the radical feminist voice that portrays women as victims and men as oppressors (Adjei 49). Farah uses many passages that portray women as victims of male oppressors.

The widow who lives in Gheddi’s neighborhood declares that women are just commodities. She tells Ebla, “[t]hat is what we women are—just like cattle, properties of someone or other, your parents or your husband” (35). The writer therefore suggests that like any other material properties, women and girls are exposed to abuse. This is why Ebla’s cousin gives her to the broker, Dirir in exchange for money (37). The writer underscores this to show the oppression of

women:

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 [...] to a shopkeeper, what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing. (37)

In the character of Ebla, Farah underscores the feminist view that girls are commodified by patriarchal societies. Gheddi does not see Ebla as a human person, but just like his stock at the shop and livestock on his farm. Going by Nnamaeka (2004), Farah becomes one of the radical feminist writers that present African women as “problems to be solved” (57). For Nnaemeka, the description of African women as sex objects, properties and victims of men is an attempt of Western feminists to objectify African women. As a property, Ebla is not permitted to propose or choose a husband. As much she wants to propose to Awill, she realizes that “people don’t think highly of a girl who asks a man to marry her” (37). Ebla therefore has to wait for Awill to propose.

As Namaeka, suggests with regard to Western Feminism, the African woman in Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* “is a problem to be solved” because she has many complaints against society. Ebla raises complaints throughout the novel; that only sons are counted although daughters also take nine months in the mother’s womb (37), the world is a man’s because women are sold and bought like camels (37); men are allowed to smoke, but women who smoke are called harlots (42); even if a woman is beaten by a man, she is not permitted to resist (42); boys can have premarital sex, they can pay for sex from prostitutes (like Awill), but if a girl has premarital sex her “relations either shot her or knifed her to death” (43). For Ebla, marriage is the man’s sphere of influence and so she can short change them to kill each other (53). According to Robson (2011), a novel such as *From a Crooked Rib* is monologic because a “single thought discourse [...] one transcendental perspective or consciousness integrates the entire field, ideologies, and values and desires that are deemed significant. Anything irrelevant to this perspective is deemed superfluous or irrelevant in general” (2). The perspective to be lauded and accepted is radical feminism, in which women must be portrayed as victims and men as oppressors. Therefore any male character who tries to be loving or progressive has to become irrelevant by being recreated into an arrogant, dictatorial, immoral and foolish person.

In spite of Ebla’s grandfather taking responsibility to raise Ebla, he remains a

villain throughout the novel. Despite his age, Ebla does not have any affection for him because, “[h]e was a man—just like any other man. What was the difference? His wife (her grandmother) must have suffered his brutal manhandling” (44). This is generalisation stemming from grandfather’s decision to give Ebla in marriage to Giumeh. Giving Ebla to Giumeh is a cultural practice that grandfather has seen other men do, which may have nothing to do with his treatment of his wife. Mohanty (1984) urged feminist writers to consider context to gain insight into certain practices (338). Farah ignores context in the portrayal of certain practices in his attempt to castigate patriarchy.

Awill is another character who has to be recreated into a villain to suit the feminist voice in spite of his formal education and contribution to saving Ebla from forced marriage. His first sexual encounter with Ebla portrays him as immoral. He becomes violent by boxing the helpless girl and then proceeding to rape her. The narrator interrupts in a flashback to show how Awill has been paying a brothel visits to buy sex (43). With regards to the first night with Ebla, she says, “Awill was a bad example of the male sex. He acted more like a donkey as far as the satisfaction of his animal desires were concerned. Copulation is a means of getting children [...] but this is not the only thing that a man shares with woman” (45). Awill is therefore portrayed as a sex maniac and pervert. He is obsessed with sex just like a donkey is and this is why he sleeps with an adult female student. When he gets a scholarship to study in Italy, he falls in love with another woman and sends his colleague Jama a half-naked picture of his Italian lover (52). Ebla feels betrayed when she sees the picture and Asha, her landlady, advises her to marry another man, Tiffo.

Ebla ends up with two husbands to embody the dominant radical feminist voice that aims at equality for both men and women. If Awill and Tiffo can have multiple partners then Ebla should do the same. Ebla tells Tiffo, “[m]y other husband’s name is Awill, you have another wife and I have another husband. We are even; you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal” (61). This assertion is a direct recitation of the feminist claim to equality between masculine and feminine gender. Tiffo is throughout the novel portrayed as foolish and ugly. According to Adjei, radical feminist writers represent men as physically grotesque images (49) and this is why Tiffo is described as “short...fat” and a “fool” (54). Asha is not concerned about how Awill will react when he returns to find Tiffo in his house because “marriage is a man’s trouble. They will jump at each other’s throats and nobody will dare touch you” (53). By using Asha, Farah makes a direct affront to patriarchy, which is the main target of radical feminism. Male characters are not given an opportunity to account for their behavior. Tiffo

for instance is in a hostile marriage relationship (55), but rather than giving the audience the root cause of the conflict, Farah simply condemns him as foolish and immoral.

Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost souls* on the other hand presents multiple voices, which give the reader a balanced assessment of issues affecting the society. Pertinent voices that compete for the reader's attention through characterization are hegemonic masculinity, protest masculinity, Western feminism, postcolonialism, postcolonial feminism and Marxism, which turn *Orchard of Lost Souls* into a polyphonic novel. According to Bakhtin, a polyphonic novel is "broken down into disparate philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character. Among these also feature, but far from first place, the philosophical views of the author [sic] himself" (5). Characters such as Filsan, General Haruun, Kawsar, and the female prostitutes represent different voices or philosophical standpoints that interweave into a melody.

To begin with, the novel has a Marxist background as the ruling elite are perceived as bourgeoisie class by the masses. The character, President overthrows the democratic regime behind the mask of a socialist revolution. He establishes a ruling council typical of socialist dictatorships of the 1960s, but after a few years in power, the masses form a movement to overthrow him as a bourgeoisie. The rebels make determined assaults such that as the novel ends, the ruling class is losing its grip on power. Women characters are generally seen as alienated proletariat that suffer the brunt of a brutal bourgeoisie class.

Secondly, General Haruun represents protest masculinities that form the largest proportion of men in Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls*. According to Connell, protest masculinities are victims of low self-esteem whose preoccupation is "fucking and fighting" (167). Mohamed suggests that having been dominated by colonial oppression, Somali men have low self-esteem, which is displaced through constant violence. The reference to colonial oppression is a postcolonial concept that Fanon (1961) refers to. He writes, "[c]olonialism destroys national culture. It disrupts the cultural life of a conquered people, cultural obliteration is enabled by negation of national reality, banishment of natives, their customs and systematically enslaving of men and women. These have powerful psychological effects on people" (168). This is a replica of most male characters in Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls* that adopt violence and sexual promiscuity in an attempt to find a lost manhood. Connell associates protest masculinities with men from subordinated classes (165), because they lack the resources to practise hegemonic masculinity. The latter in this context is a preserve of colonialists who take advantage of their economic strength

to conquer African nations. According to McClintock, “[t]he very act of exploring new land and then subjugating it during colonial times was often imagined in sexual terms” (23), which establishes a nexus between postcolonialism and masculinities.

General Haruun therefore spends his life on violence and sex with female junior army officers without any thought of getting married. As the novel begins, Haruun leads a military parade to celebrate Independence Day in an episode coloured with lewdness and violence. The narrator says:

It is now eighteen years exactly since the President’s rise to power after a military coup, and the celebrations in Mogadishu show the system at its best, everyone working together to create something beautiful. The Military-Governor of the North Western region, General Haruun, will be the President’s avatar in Hargeisa and has arranged the military parade with a flyover to start and finish the day [...] She has lined her eyes discreetly with kohl and pressed colour onto her lips with her fingers. She looks herself but a little better, a touch more feminine; she has resisted playing these games until now, but if the other female soldiers get noticed this way, maybe she can too. (12)

The military coup in this passage symbolizes the “fighting” that Connell points out as symptom of protest masculinity. Haruun is described as a military governor, to imply that the position he has stems from violent take over. Filsan is described as having a sexy appearance to draw the attention of General Haruun because he has always noticed other female soldiers by their sexy appearances. Today he notices Filsan and in spite of the fact that he knows her father, he does not betroth and make arrangements to marry her as Somali culture dictates. He invites her to Oriental Hotel and seems to be more interested in her femininity than anything else. Filsan says that “even in her uniform, the men see nothing other than breasts and a hole” (29). Haruun orders her to take off her hat and seduces her with the promise of anything she wants. The narrator says, “[h]e pushes his hand up her thigh and against her crotch. ‘You’re a virgin, aren’t you? A clean girl,’ he whispers in her ear” (30). Filsan resists his advances saying her father will not like it. Haruun opens the car’s door and growls, “[y]ou cunt, make your way home” (31). His obsession with sex and the violence he exhibits categorizes him as a perpetrator of protest masculinity.

Mohamed suggests that the militarisation of Somalia is violence that stems from low esteem typical of protest masculinities. Unable to perform their masculinity, men from former colonized nations resort to violence and sex. The

soldier motif in the *Orchard of Lost souls* clearly illustrates this performance of masculinity. There are many passages in the novel that underscore the militarisation, violence and obsession with sex among soldiers. During the independence celebrations, the narrator says, “[s]oldiers came first, their legs snicking like scissors, then heavy older policemen and women in their blue uniforms, then civilians in their work clothes [...] the soldiers (all men) are young, powerful, unified” (17-18). In Connell’s perspective, the male soldiers in their poverty find these military drills and shows as an opportunity to reclaim their wounded masculinity. Indeed when they receive an order to restore peace, they handle citizens brutally. It is profoundly shocking how they treat the school children; the soldiers beat them with truncheons and Deqo “is slapped in the mouth while pleading to let the children go” (43). In the cell, the police also express their sexual lust to confirm Connell’s association of protest masculinities with promiscuity (165). To begin with, most of the people in the remand are women and girls. This suggests that they may have rejected the police’s advances. Secondly, the police take advantage of their presence in the cell to harass them sexually, for example Deqo (a female vagrant) observes, “a red beret reaches for her. He is like a figure in a bad dream, silent, cruel and persistent. She squeals in pain as his vice-like hands grasp her ankle, another hand moves to her thigh and he yanks her out (45). The policeman’s attempts to touch Deqo’s thighs demonstrates his lustful intentions. Another policeman with “flies half done up” slaps the back of Deqo’s legs. When the government declares curfew, the police flock the streets of Hergeisa to buy sex from prostitutes (59). According to Shumka et al. men with a wounded self-esteem buy sex as a masculinizing practice (3).

Like Farah in *From a Crooked Rib*, Mohamed also employs the Western feminist voice in which men are depicted as oppressors and women as victims of the oppression. There are passages that take Adjei’s claims that feminist writers present men as physically grotesque images and cruel. The president is described as a “giant, a god who watches over them, who can dissolve into pieces and hear and see all that they do. The young nomadic boy who knew how to hobble a camel and ease a tick out of a sheep has become a deity” (19). From the Islamic cultural context in which Mohamed hails, being compared to a deity is blasphemous and therefore the worst vice in the society. This passage depicts two voices: Western feminism and hegemonic masculinity. According to Williams, divergent voices in the contemporary polyphonic novel occur on the same page, which deals a blow to monologic criticism of such novels (2). The Western feminist voice is evident when the president oversees highhanded administration that has no respect for women and girls. His governors, such as Haruun take advantage of their positions to harass

female soldiers, but the regime does not take any legal action. The president's soldiers oppress women, for example during the war with rebels, he orders school children (mostly girls) to be bled dry (197) to facilitate treatment of wounded soldiers. Another voice in the passage is hegemonic masculinity, which according to Shefer and Keith is 'predominantly associated with a man's capacity to exercise power and control, within the realm of heterosexuality' (38). McVittie et.al add that any man that aspires to embody hegemonic masculinity should be aggressive, competitive, restrain vulnerable emotions, be tough, strong, successful and most notably, heterosexual (120). The president is admired by many men and women because he rose from a herdsboy to attain the highest status through aggression, toughness and strength. He is heterosexual and maintains a marriage relationship. Unlike Haruun who is single, the president is married to two wives and when Filsan "heroically" kills elders in the west, her colleagues suggest that as a promotion, she should be made the president's third wife (156). His aggression and toughness are evident when the narrator says the president got his position through a coup, imprisonment of the prime minister, abolishment of parliament and constitution (123).

The character Filsan is also used by Mohamed to depict feminism and hegemonic masculinity. On one hand the author uses Filsan to show the feminist insistence on equality between masculine and feminine gender. After Filsan's military incursion and murdering of elders in the West of Somalia, he gives an interview in which he praises her father and the commentator remarks, "[n]ever let it be said that a woman is weaker than a man, we have lionesses in Somalia ready to jump to our defences . This means women can defend the nation just like men" (158). On the other hand, the narrator appeals to masculinities as another voice, in the same episode because it is clear how male domination turns Filsan into a man. Her father is protest masculinity— his violence could not permit him to maintain a heterosexual relationship with the mother. In the same way, he would assault and adjure her not to have relationships with the opposite sex (153). As a result, Filsan is masculine and exhibits the qualities typical of hegemonic masculinity: aggressive, not vulnerable to emotions, tough, strong competitive (McVittie et.al, p. 120). When she discovers that the elders in Salahley, West Somalia do not recognize her as leader, she grabs one by the arm and butts in their conversation, "[i]t is me you need to speak with" (145). Moreover, unlike normal women with capacity to love, Filsan is incapable. For example, she thinks:

She detests what women become when men enter their lives. Love seems to

make fools of women infinitely more than it does men; in university the girls let their boyfriends copy their homework and sat morosely in the canteen deciphering the merest comment or act, cheapening and changing themselves, throwing away their futures to marry men who would become little more than taxi drivers. Filsan suspects that she is too rational to truly love someone; it embarrasses her just to see canoodling couples. (164-165)

As much as it looks like a serious philosophy of life, it demonstrates the “invulnerability to emotions” she has imbibed from her father. For example, when her mother criticises her, she responds in a point-by-point version that a man would. She says, “[y]ou married *Aabbo* out of your own volition; you decided to leave him for another man; you have done nothing with your life but live off one husband after another; you should not be surprised that I take after my father when you are the one who left me to him [...]” (164). Indeed her mother realizes Filsan’s masculinity and comments that “his hostage looks at me exactly the way he did...she doesn’t look like a marrying kind, face like a shoe” (165). In her low moments, Filsan realizes this and blames her father for her failure in her social life. After turning down Haruun’s advances, Filsan is overcome with depressions and says, “[h]er father had locked her away, told her she wouldn’t regret the decisions he made for her ...but instead she lives the celibate, sterile, quiet existence of a nun, growing nothing but grey hairs” (138). This passage confirms that though she is masculine, her inability to have a heterosexual relationship brings her under protest masculinity of which low esteem is exhibited through violence, particularly the murder of innocent elders at Sahaley.

Furthermore, through the character of Filsan and Farah (Kawsar’s husband), Mohamed also incorporates postcolonial feminism by inverting generalisations typical of radical feminism. According to Mohanty and Nnaemeka, generalisations such as men are oppressors and women are victims of oppression become unreasonable without consideration of context. Except in her childhood, Filsan is not a victim of male oppression—she is an oppressor of fellow women, and men. When Kawsar, one of the heroines, is arrested for protecting Deqo from the police, Filsan tortures Kawsar for saying “her sons went to heaven” (35). Kawsar remembers Filsan’s torture:

The blows come one after the other. The first to her ear as loud as a wave hitting a rock, then to her temple, cheek, neck. For a moment they stop as Kawsar clutches Officer Adan Ali’s hands in hers but after a few heartbeats

they resume. A swirl of sound and sight engulfs her until a punch to the chest knocks her from the chair onto the cement floor. Landing on her hip, Kawsar hears a crack beneath her and then feels a river of pain swelling up from her stomach to her throat, obstructing her breath. Resting her weight on one hand, she lifts an open palm to the soldier. "Please stop!" she cries. (35)

Filsan has no pity for an old widow, such as Kawsar whose only daughter, Hodan committed suicide after leaving school. In this episode, Mohamed confirms Mohanty's contention that radical feminists should consider context before making generalisations that women are victims of oppression. In a culture in which aggression is admired as the pinnacle of success, even women can imbibe it and behave worse than men. On the contrary, Farah, Kawsar's late husband was a very caring and loving man such that Kawsar still misses him. When the president overthrows the democratic government and replaces parliament with a supreme council, "Farah had been one of the few to voice his opposition; he called the new leaders 'cuckoos' and cut off contact with friends who said they preferred military rule to the chaos of democracy" (123). Farah was demoted and frustrated in his career because of his love for the Somali society. When the military junta incorporates women such as Filsan to start oppressing women and men (after Farah's death), Kawsar confesses that her loving husband was right (123). As she battles with the pain of a broken hip, Kawsar remains with fond memories of her husband. She sees his ghost in a dream just before Filsan appears to carry her on a wheelbarrow to safety as restitution for her past wrongs.

Finally, it was evident that the monologic aspects of expression in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* underscore gender stereotyping of male characters while dialogic mode eradicates these stereotypes in Mohamed's *Orchard of Lost Souls*. From the above analyses, there is hardly an exemplary male character in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*: Ebla's grandfather is a greedy old man who intends to sell her to a forty-eight-year-old villager, Ghedi is an arrogant, greedy and suspicious cousin who plans to sell Ebla; Awill is a sexually immoral husband while Tiffo is an idiot. In *Orchard of Lost Souls* Mohamed gives a balanced presentation of male characters: there is Farah, Kawsar's husband whose loving and caring nature leaves Kawsar with wonderful memories years after his departure. In as much as Roble is hostile to the rebels, he treats Filsan well and for the first time she aspires to get married before death deals her a blow when Roble dies. Mohamed then presents violent and oppressive male characters such as Filsan's father who assaults and locks her up to destroy her interest in the opposite sex. Haruun is another callous

man with sexist attitudes towards women, and can perceive nothing in them other than “breasts” and private parts (29). Besides gender issues, Mohamed expresses other voices such as Marxism, and masculinities through the president, the soldiers and rebels in the society.

Conclusion

This article set out to investigate monologism and dialogism in pioneer and contemporary feminist writers in East African prose fiction. The study proceeded by comparison of Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* and Mohamed’s *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. The foregoing discussion leads us to the conclusion that most pioneer feminist writers adopt monologic aesthetic mode because they refuse to recognise other voices and compel characters to submit to a single ideology. Western feminism permeates Farah’s work and characters with divergent voices are either punished or eradicated. The direct attack on patriarchy may not go down well with some male readers. The character Ebla remains a victim of male oppressors and directly attacks the so called “obsolete” traditions that cause untold suffering to women and girls. All male characters such as Awill, Tiffo, the grandfather and Gheddi have to be callous and immoral to adhere to the Western feminist script. Contemporary feminist writers on the other hand adopt multiple philosophical standpoints through different characters, which creates arguments or interweaving of melodies. This approach is quite oblique and patriarchy stands out as just one of the issues that affect women. The portrayal of some male characters as caring and some female characters as oppressive gives a realistic interpretation of life. The characters such as Filsan, Farah, Kawsar, Haruun and the president therefore represent different voices including masculinities, postcolonial feminism and Western feminism (sometimes on the same page) to give the work broader assessment of issues.

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