

Becoming a Man: Construction of the Somali Raganimo in *Maps*

Sehnaz Rofique Saikia
Gauhati University
Assam, India

Abstract

In gender studies, the distinction between biological sex and the social aspect of gender is of pivotal concern, and it needs to be examined not only from a feminist perspective but from masculinity studies as well. Undoubtedly, men have fared better within the patriarchal structure “in terms of the access to and the wielding of power, than have women” (Buchbinder, p. 68), but it is crucial to understand the implications of gender-based expectations on men to possess those privileges. The invisibility concerning masculinity as a gendered category has made it appear natural and coherent. In the context of masculinity as a gendered category, this paper will analyze the configuration of hegemonic masculinity or a *raganimo* in Nuruddin Farah’s (b. 1945) *Maps*. The study will reveal how the dominant masculinity insinuated by culture as natural is, in reality, a make-believe formulated by various discourses. The paper foregrounds that the shaping of masculinity in socially prescribed norms in *Maps* is a discursive practice instrumentalized by patriarchal Somali society to generate, circulate and exert power. The aim of this paper is not to promote the positioning of men as agents of power, but to understand the working of gender and the underpinning of power in masculinity.

Keywords: Nuruddin Farah, gender, *Maps*, masculinity, patriarchy, power, Somalia

Issues concerning men and masculinities have proliferated in the contemporary literary scenario. This increase in interest is revealed in the emergence of research on these issues and in the growing debates on men's subjectivity as a gendered category. The genesis of masculinity studies lies in shifting perspectives of understanding masculinity as a marked gender category which has so far remained an "unmarked (and therefore invisible) gender in political, social, and cultural contexts" (Horlacher, 2011, p. 2). The traditional view of masculinity associated the male figure with an "eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man, a thing, a quality that one either has or doesn't have, and in position of a penis" (Kimmel, 2005, p. 25). The superiority of men is further explained by the biological differences as determining factors in the inequality of the sexes. This notion presented in various social, cultural, and historical contexts as natural and preordained.

This type of essentialist patriarchal ideology has been contradicted by R. W. Connell (2005) in her book *Masculinities*, where she writes that "gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body" (p. 71). She states that masculinity is not a natural process because men are not born masculine, rather their "gender identity must be constructed through behaviours, confirmed by society, and then internalized by the individual" (Connell, 1982, as cited in Philbrick, 2015, p. 4). Connell argues that masculine identities are formed in relation to femininity or other marginalized masculinities like gay masculinity. She states that, through the dominance and subordination of women and other subordinate groups of men, a socially validated masculinity is formed in step with the standards of the patriarchal system. Connell's concept of masculinity is influenced by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Butler (1990) in her seminal book *Gender Trouble* argues that gender is not a stable or fixed category; rather it is a performance enacted by an individual within a particular space, time, and cultural framework. She further clarifies that gender identity is not biologically determined, but is a "performative construct" that is made natural by the repetitive stylization of acts. She states that gender "is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a 'doing' rather than a 'being'" (p. 25). According to Butler, this act is essentialized by society through the medium of language, body, and actions.

Connell's theory of masculinity is influenced by Butler's idea of the performative aspect of gender when she writes that the essentialist patriarchal ideology conditions men to believe that their "masculinity is actually biologically inherent, and not ascribed, and therefore has to be continually maintained and enhanced through the externalization of masculine behaviours" (Connell, 2005, as cited in Mahonge, 2016, p. 38). But the very idea that men are expected to prove or demonstrate their masculinity in a culturally defined way indicates the performative and constructed nature of masculinity. As such, if men have to prove their masculinity in a particular way, then masculine ideals cannot be considered as something fixed, universal, or innate. Thus, masculinity can no longer be perceived as a natural monolithic entity, but a complex subject. It is in this regard that R. W. Connell (2005) in her book *Masculinities* defined the concept of hegemonic masculinity to discern the meaning of the constructed nature of masculinity. She defined hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, p. 77). She believes that a "hegemonic" form of masculine identity sets the male leaders of patriarchal societies apart not only from women but also from men who fail to live up to male ideals (Connell, 2005, p. 77). The concept is, then, that hegemonic masculinity is formed when society validates one kind of masculinity as the dominant form.

Raganimo

In Somali culture, *raganimo*, meaning a “real man”, is considered the dominant kind of masculinity. A Somali man, in order to conform to the Somali normative masculinity of *raganimo*, is expected to embody qualities like “acumen in managing political relationships, alliance-building, negotiation, clan loyalty, fatherhood, defence strategies, conflict, peacemaking, and wisdom, as well as physical strength, mental and physical stamina and courage” (El Bushra and Gardner, 2017, p. 2). Somali society being patriarchal in nature holds men superior to women in all aspects of life. Manhood or *raganimo* in Somali society and the expectations to perform one’s masculinity or *raganimo* play a pivotal role in the life of Somali men. In this regard, *raganimo* can be perceived as hegemonic masculinity because it is constructed and validated by Somali society as the ideal kind of masculinity.

Thus, in the light of the above context, this paper will analyse how in Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps* different kinds of hegemonic tools like the male body, nationalism, female archetypes, and exercise of violence over female characters, etc. are employed to construct socially normative masculinity. This paper examines the particular notion of masculinity that is embedded in a heteronormative and patriarchal framework. Following R. W. Connell, Judith Butler, and Todd W. Reeser’s line of thought, this paper analyses the role of *raganimo* in perpetuating the authority of the Somali patriarchal system.

Maps

Published in 1986, *Maps* is the first novel of the cycle of novels in the Blood in the Sun Trilogy. At a micro level, it tells the story of a Somali boy Askar’s quest for an integrated identity amidst the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia, and at the macro level, it maps Somalia’s quest for a homogenized identity. It showcases the repercussions of the Somali territories’ colonial divisions and their devastating effect on personal identity through Askar’s story, as he struggles to come to terms with issues of Somali identity and Somali cultural nationalism. His father having fallen victim to the Ethiopian Civil War (1974-1991) and his mother dying on the day of his birth, Askar’s story is centred on his childhood, spent with his foster mother Misra in the town of Kallafo (Qalaafe), a village in the Gode Zone of Ethiopia’s Somali Region. It follows him on his departure to the home of his maternal uncle and aunt Hilaal and Salaado in the Somali capital Mogadiscio at the breaking of the Ogaden War (1977-1978), all the way to his reunion with Misra in Mogadiscio after ten years in a situation where Misra is condemned as a traitor by the Somali Liberation War Front.

Consequently, it depicts Askar’s dilemma of being caught between the bond he shared with his Ethiopian foster mother Misra and his expected allegiance to his ethnic Somali identity. *Maps* is Farah’s most critically acclaimed novel, one that has attracted much critical attention concerning its treatment of a varied range of issues like nation, body, self, dreams, narrative technique, gender, etc., all intertwined with the core theme of identity. However, critical scholarship pertaining to the question of Somali identity in relation to gender has not been paid much attention in the shaping of the protagonist Askar’s masculine identity.

A relevant critical work on *Maps* such as Rhonda Cobham’s (1991) *Boundaries of the Nation, Boundaries of the Self: African Nationalist Fiction and Nuruddin Farah’s Maps*, touches upon the issue of identity, but it limits itself to the narrative mode of the novel with a passing reference to Askar’s unstable gender identity. Similarly, Charles Sugnet (1998) in his essay “Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps*: Deterritorialization and the ‘Postmodern’,” argues that the novel

destabilizes the narrative to manifest the instability in gender and national identities. Sugnet has referred to the instability in Askar's masculine identity, but he does not engage with the nuances of masculinity like the process of Askar's socialization in traditional Somali masculinity and its implication in the gender paradigm. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect that fulfilment of traditional masculine gender norms has on men's psyche, and how it determines the question of gender identity in the novel.

Body and Image

Various discourses, including biomedical, cultural, family and fashion, ensure that the body performs according to the identity ascribed to it. Not only the female body but the male body is constructed in this manner. The male body becomes the defining element of masculinity. Society constructs men as masculine by shaping their bodies in a set of cultural codes to prove their masculinity (normative). In the novel *Maps*, there is enough evidence to prove the influence of culture in constructing a belief system in Askar's mind, one that corresponds to the masculine ideals ascribed by the Somali society of Kallafo. The Somali society of Kallafo and his paternal lineage constantly remind Askar that he needs to mould himself in a "worldly image" and get rid of his dependence on Misra's body. Askar's paternal uncle, who represents the Somali pastoral society, states that if Askar remains in the company of the women folk throughout the day, he will have "bad influences".

In line with this, Qorrax instructs him to develop rational thoughts, which can be attained only if he acts like a man, when admitting Askar to a Koranic school. He says to Aw-Adan, "I bring him to you nevertheless. For there is no man in the compound in which he lives and one must take boys away from the bad influence of women" (p. 85). Qorrax even permitted Aw-Adan to "discolour his body with bruises or injure it slightly" (p. 89), to train his spirit. This incident depicts how societal construction of masculinity guides correct masculine and feminine behaviour at an early age, while influencing their mind with gender differences. Another instance is when Askar first learns the Arabic gutturals and writes them in his body to memorize them. Askar's writing of the Arabic alphabets in his body implies the shaping of the body in a discourse that is culturally normative because religious scriptures serve as a source of hegemonic discourses that are considered as preordained. Foucault (1980) in *History of Sexuality* notes how the body is used as a space to exercise and produce power when he states that

deployments of power are directly connected to the body—to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures...the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another...but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion. (pp. 151-2)

Foucault's argument on the connotation of body as a space to demonstrate power resembles Askar's act of writing the alphabets in the body, not only as an impression of how the body is shaped but also how power governs the body.

Furthermore, society initiates certain rituals to enforce manhood. In Islamic culture, one such ritual that has become the marker of a boy's transition into manhood is circumcision. The ritual of circumcision facilitates culture in the swift transformation of the male body "into a kind of body that it may consider masculine (or not masculine, as the case may be)" (Reeser, 2010, p. 95). Todd Reeser (2010) in his book *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* notes how the ritual of circumcising the male body results in such ritualistic practices:

With circumcision, for instance, culture quickly transforms the male body into a kind of body that it may consider masculine (or not masculine, as the case may be). The result of that practice might come to be considered natural as some imagine the circumcised penis as the incarnation of the penis instead of as one possible type of penis, but the practice itself is culturally defined. While an actual circumcision is momentary, the cultural discourse that makes it seem masculine, erotic, or beautiful operates over a long period of time. (p. 95)

Similarly, in Somali culture, a boy is instructed to undergo circumcision so that he can be a man and take the responsibilities expected from a Somali man. In the novel too, Askar is made to perform the ritual of circumcision so that he can be moulded in the masculine ideals of a *raganimo*. Askar undergoes circumcision so that he “can be a man” (89) and be cleansed of all impurities.

Initially, the thought of circumcision plagued his mind, as it will separate him from Misra and make him “live in the territory of pain...and then in the land of loneliness” (89). But the religious and cultural discourse surrounding circumcision is presented in a way that makes it the most honoured way of being a complete man, as it is “characterised by dominance towards other masculinities” (Mshweshwe, 2020, para. 5). Askar’s body had undergone the pain to abide by cultural norms of manhood as he stated, “I was motherless, I was fatherless, I was an orphan and had to give birth to myself. Yes I was to re-create myself in a worldly image” (90). The “worldly image” signifies cultural inscription, and circumcision thus emphasises the construction of Askar’s body in the hegemonic masculine discourse. As such, this statement can be analysed as Askar’s effort to replicate himself as per the expectations of masculinity, consequent to the inscription of such discourses on his body.

Different cultures, through apposite discursive practices, assign meaning to the male body and it is the discourse surrounding the body that influences one’s perception of the it. This has been observed by Reeser when he discusses the discourse surrounding the penis with manhood. According to Reeser (2010), it is our preconceived notions about masculinity that shape our thoughts on the male body and male sex. Reeser notes that it is because culture attributes sexual virility to a man that “we attach great importance to penis” (p. 74). The penis embodies the symbolic power of being a man. He believes that the role of language is vital in our perception of sexual definition because it is “by our virtue of talking about the penis... assigning certain meaning to the penis, that this aspect of sex takes on meaning” (p. 75).

The association of the penis to manhood signifies the influence of the social aspect of masculinity on maleness. The role of language in making penis synonymous to manhood is witnessed in the novel when the narrator, in the second person narrative mode, mentions a conversation between Misra and Askar while the former is admitted to the hospital for her mastectomy. In the conversation, Misra expresses her anxiety to Askar regarding the attendant nurse, inquiring about her connections to Kallafo. Later, it is revealed that the nurse has asked Misra about Kallafo because of the nurse’s relation to a male patient who is admitted to the hospital because of his loss of “manhood” in the Ogaden war. The nurse narrates that the man’s testicles had been blown off by a bomb in the Ogaden war; she emphasizes that his manhood is largely abolished without his testicles by “underlining, in her voice, the words ‘penis’ and ‘testicles’” (p. 219). This incident can be construed as how the significance attached to the penis as a symbol of manhood had been culturally inscribed not only in the mental recesses of men but of women as well. And the nurse’s stress on the word “penis” and “testicles” shows how cultural influence has made “penis” a key aspect of masculinity.

Though the episode is about Misra's fear of her whereabouts being reported, the inclusion of the man's story within it is significant as it provides scope to interpret the cultural discourse on the male body. It also indicates how language is instrumental to socially configure bodies. Furthermore, the reason for men's concern with their social appearance is the panoptic effect of patriarchy that gets deeply entrenched in an individual's mind. The omnipresent power of patriarchy burdens the individual to regulate and monitor their own gender identity. The above discussion on the shaping of the male body by cultural stereotypes reflects the regulatory framework of patriarchy. In the novel, this is also determined through Askar's behaviour as he self-monitors his manhood by a certain culturally identified marker of masculinity. One such instance in the novel is when Askar's mirror serves as an instrument for observing Askar's manhood. Askar notes that the mirror "reflect[s] [his] visage, showing [him] whether or not [he has] grown a beard" (p. 19). The narrator recalls how Askar thinks that his beard is the indicator of his manliness, and he wants to determine whether "Karin's menopausal hair [is] manlier" than his, and if her hair is manlier, "then it is high time to do something about it" (emphasis added, p. 19).

The cultural discourses of different cultures construct certain markers of the body as indicators of one's masculinity or femininity. In many cultures, the beard is validated as a marker of one's masculinity. This marker of masculinity is ingrained in Askar's mind, so he becomes the observer of his manliness and the mirror becomes instrumental in monitoring his masculinity. Thus, in this regard, the imagery of the mirror here is significant as it foregrounds the dynamics of watcher and watched, "as a way of keeping male behaviour in line with the current norms of masculinity and accepted gender standards" (Buchbinder, 2013, p. 81). Thus, the above instance from the novel *Maps* shows how the male body is constructed in adherence to the discourse of dominant masculinity.

Nationalism

Another influential tool used in the construction of masculinity is nationalism. Nationalism becomes a vital forum to accomplish and substantiate a certain kind of masculine identity recognized by society. Several factors like hierarchal gender structure, assignment of decision-making policies to man, division of labour, public and private sphere incline in favour of men. Furthermore, Joanne Nagel (1998) in her essay "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the making of Nations" notes that "terms like honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery, and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness" (p. 252). The significance of nationalism, patriotism, and militarism in the construction of hegemonic masculinity is also witnessed in the novel *Maps*. Somali masculine ideals emphasise the ability to protect the clan and nation as the utmost duty of an ideal Somali man. Somali nationalism and the construction of an integrated Somali identity is one of the core thematic concerns in the novel. The nationalism promoted by Somali society corresponds to how "the culture of nationalism is constructed to emphasize and resonate with masculine cultural themes" (Nagel, 1998, p. 251). In *Maps*, the character of Armadio (Karin's husband), through his patriotism for the Somali nation, corresponds with the attributes of normative manhood. He hastily marries Karin and impregnates her, but soon after disappears mysteriously saying, "I have a job to do" (p. 74). He frequently disappears by mentioning the job he must perform.

One night he tells Karin to sell his house and move to Kallafo, as he will not return for a long period. Years after his departure, it was revealed that he was a "member of a cell of the Somali Youth League which was agitating for the reunification of all the Somali-speaking territories"

(p. 75); he was captured by the Ethiopian armed forces and sent to jail. After his tenure in prison, he returned to Karin. But one morning while performing his prayers he hurt his back and was no more able to stand. When Karin insisted on consulting the doctors, he prevented her by saying “I had no more jobs to do” (emphasis added, p. 76). For Armadio, his only job is to fight for his country’s honour and glory, and nothing else matters. Thus, the character of Armadio, through his selfless patriotism, represents the dominant masculine ideals reinforced by Somali society.

The social discourse surrounding masculinity is intertwined with nationalism and militarism, as it is seen as the most honoured way of proving manhood. According to Bracewell (2000), the theoretical realms on gender and nation “have too often treated men and masculinity as stable, undifferentiated categories, and have posited a straightforward equation between male interest, masculinity, and nationalism” (p. 566). This is witnessed in *Maps* as well, as the novel shows how nationalist discourse is used to construct the hegemonic masculinity that the protagonist Askar is expected to perform. After Askar transitions into manhood through the ritual of circumcision, he starts behaving like a man who is burdened with the responsibilities of the Somali people. He is transformed in such a manner that he can now identify with the Somali community at large. It was during the period of his circumcision that the Ogaden war begins.

To Askar, the Ogaden war became a significant matter as he believed that the war “predicted a future in which he would be provided with ample opportunities to prove that he was a man” (p. 100). He started predicting a future when he would be recruited as a soldier of the Western Somali Liberation Front, or be the flag-bearer of his people. Since Askar’s father died as a member of the Western Somali Liberation Front, he thought that he too could prove his manhood only if he participated in the war effort by joining the Western Somali Liberation the Front. Askar’s patriotism resembles Joanne Nagel’s idea of the interconnection between patriotism and masculinity. Nagel, in his discussion on masculinity and nationalism, mentions how “patriotism is a siren call that few men can resist, particularly in the midst of a political ‘crisis;’ and if they do, they risk the disdain or worse of their communities and famil[ies],” (p. 252). Nagel’s observation on patriotism is reflected in Askar, as he can’t resist the discourse that with the boys’ stepping into manhood they must not refuse the opportunity of fighting for their country. Askar began to imagine Somalia as his mother, and felt that his allegiance and loyalty should be only towards her. This becomes evident when the omniscient narrator states Askar’s views:

What mattered, he told himself, was that now he was, at last, a man, that he was totally detached from his mother-figure Misra, and weaned. In the process of looking for a substitute, he had found another—Somalia, his mother country. It was as though something which began with the pain of a rite had ended in the joy of a greater self-discovery, one in which he held on to the milky breast of a common mother that belonged to him as much as anyone else. A generous mother, a many-breasted mother, a many-nippled mother, a mother who gave plenty of herself and demanded loyalty of one, loyalty to an ideal, allegiance to an idea, the notion of a nationhood—no more, and no less. (p. 100)

This points to the fact that Askar’s mind was impregnated with the idea that he needed to be a strong man to be conscripted in the army, and be ready to kill and die for his country. This is further depicted in the second person narrative voice’s description of how young Askar used to eat voraciously and performed rigorous exercises, like lifting rocks and climbing trees, to

flex his arm and leg muscles. Askar did this to “become a man, a fully grown man, tall, broad-shouldered and perhaps bearded too” (p. 109). In this episode, Askar’s desire to be a strong, valiant, and sturdy man connotes how certain traits are considered masculine and appropriate to the nationalist agenda. Moreover, young Askar, along with a group of young boys, begin thinking of themselves as flag bearers of the Somali people and train themselves as guerrilla warriors to combat the nation’s enemy. Thus, nationalism and patriotism are infused in the mind of the protagonist as the ideal way to prove oneself worthy of being a man.

Masculinity

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), “hegemonic masculinity refers to the normative ideology that to be a man is to be dominant in society and that subordination of women is required to maintain such power” (qtd. in Smith et al. 161). Men are socialized in a discourse that puts them in a superordinate position and women in a subordinate position. The heteronormative and patriarchal nature of society construct distinct gender roles for men and women and expect them not to violate the hegemonic behaviour. Even in Somali society the cultural and structural inequality between men and women is stark. The customary law (*xeer*) that defines the gender demarcation in Somali society expects *raganimo* to offer women “care, respect, value, and influence, yet assumes their minor legal status, dependency on men, limited agency, and no publicly visible participation in decision-making outside the home” (El Bushra and Gardner, 2016, p. 454). Women are simply expected to look after the family and adhere to the laws governing their behaviour. Mothers are expected to educate boys and girls with correct masculine and feminine behaviour so that they don’t violate or pose threat to the power hierarchy. Somali society instructs the male child that to be born as a boy is a privilege in itself. These notions get intensified in the boys during their adolescent period and they believe that they can prove their masculinity by adhering to the hegemonic norms of gender hierarchy.

In the novel *Maps*, Askar undergoes a socialization process as a result of which he starts believing that he should not practice any feminine behaviour that will dishonour his masculinity. One such incident reflecting this notion is when Askar wakes up from his dream and there is blood in his urinary tract, and Misra comments that he has begun menstruating. He gets angry on hearing it and states that “But I am a man. How can I menstruate?” (110). He ponders on how his “body misbehaved”. Askar rejects the prospect of his body performing as a woman’s body, and he says to Misra that he would rather fall sick than be considered a woman. It must be noted that when as a child Askar was under Misra’s care, unexposed to patriarchal principles, he felt Misra’s menstrual pain. He shared with Karin his intention of sharing Misra’s pain as he said, “If I had some of it, then Misra will have less of it...” (p. 51). But with his social conditioning to the male-centric world, the pride of being a man gets so deeply rooted in his psyche that he not only detaches himself from the mother and her maternal sensibilities, but the resemblance to a woman (bleeding from his genitals) makes him feel ashamed. This episode indicates how antifeminine attitudes and norms are internalized in boys because they serve as a crucial indicator that they are upholding their masculine identity.

Another way of subordinating women in the patriarchal framework for the sustainable functioning of male dominance is the institution of motherhood. Different social, cultural, and religious discourses make motherhood the most desired aspect of womanhood. Motherhood in African societies is idealized and considered a source of life. African culture postulates that a woman is complete only when she begets children. Family is the core of African culture, and a mother is revered because of her ability to perpetuate the continuation of family and society. But the problem arises when motherhood is defined through a particular image by

society. As noted by Adrienne Rich (1976) in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, mothering as a personal experience is “the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction—and to children,” and motherhood is a patriarchal institution “which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under the male control” (p. 13). Patriarchal institutions create certain norms for a woman to meet the standards of being a good mother. According to the institutionalized definition, a mother should be selfless, caring, nurturing, all giving.

These adjectives that describe a good mother are injected into the social ethos through the use of tropes. One such trope that a mother is associated with is Nature. In many cultures, Earth has always been considered female and given the stature of a goddess. In Greek mythology, Gaia is worshipped as the earth goddess and addressed as Mother Earth for her ability to give life to all others. Similarly in Igbo culture, Ani is a female deity who is considered as earth and attributed with characteristics of fertility, creativity, and the productivity of the land. Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* writes about the sacredness bestowed on motherhood in African culture, and its association with the earth. She states that “maternity is viewed as sacred in the traditions of all African societies” (191). She further elaborates that “the earth’s fertility is traditionally linked to women’s maternal powers. Hence, the centrality of women as producers and providers and the reverence in which they are held” (ibid).

The construction of such tropes serves as hegemonic tools in subordinating women by limiting their role as caregivers and nurturers. *Maps* has also dealt with the irony of using Nature as an archetypal image for women as it homogenizes women’s identity and, as resources amenable to masculinity’s demands, reduces them to objects of male exploitation. In *Maps*, Askar associates Misra with earth because like Mother Earth, who is seen as a nurturer, caregiver, all-giving, Misra too is portrayed as an all-giving human mother that “always remained maternal, just like the cosmos, giving and giving” (6). One such episode in which Askar associates Misra with Mother Earth is when she teaches him the first Somali gutturals, and on asking him about the location of the earth, he would point his finger toward her: “‘Where is the sky?’ she would ask him. He would point at it. ‘And the earth, where is the earth?’ And he would point at her” (p.56). Her association with Mother Earth’s trope objectifies her as a particular image and dismisses the dynamism of her character.

For Askar, Misra should cater only to his needs, and he feels agitated if Misra drifts her attention from him to Aw-Adan. This is witnessed when the second person narrative voice accuses Askar of trying to control Misra: “Aw-Adan and you didn’t take to each other right from your first encounter. You didn’t like the way he out-stared you, nor did you like him when Misra paid him all her attention, leaving you more or less to yourself” (p. 11). The narrator further states that the reason behind Askar’s dislike is because “[he] determined what Misra’s life would be like the moment [he] took it over” (p. 8). The narrator states that the moment Askar took control of Misra’s life “her personality underwent a considerable change” (p. 8), and she was confined only to the role of a mother. Moreover, Misra’s identity as a mother in the novel is narrated by Askar, and his narration of Misra’s figure at times reflects his attempt to portray his superiority over her. This is evident in the episode when Askar narrates the story in which Uncle Qorrax instructs Misra to dress Askar for his formal introduction to his uncle. It is here that Askar states that, “Misra, until then, was not a *bona fide* member of the compound. It appears she became one, especially when I chose her—chose her in preference to all other women who had been tried on me, ...” (p. 28).

It becomes evident from Askar's statement that he attempts to establish his ownership over Misra by indicating that she received social validation only through him. The way Askar speaks about reviving Misra from her peripheral existence is influenced by his underlying attitude that the male is the decision-maker in any relationship. A dominant masculine identity is developed through a process of "self and the other" relation where "other" connotes women, Nature, body, etc. The superiority of the masculine identity relies on the systematic and pervasive construction and depiction of the dualised "other" as inferior. As such, Askar's construction of Misra in the figure of Earth shows his inclination toward the ideals of motherhood institutionalized by patriarchy. The novel's stereotyping of women in particular tropes or symbols shows the detrimental effects of such tropes on women's subjectivity. This analysis of the novel corresponds to Byron Caminero-Santangelo's view on the objectification of women. In his book *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology*, he claims that "women's objectification is legitimated through their association with nature, while nature by being feminized, is positioned as in need of male mastery".

In this context, Askar's association of Misra to Mother Earth objectified her into a particular image which in turn helps him claim his mastery over her. Hence, by stating that Misra got a subjective presence in his society only because he acknowledged her as his mother demonstrates his construction of a dominant masculine identity, one where men are considered superior to women. Thus, these episodes in the novel show that the exertion of power by men in the gender order depends on the subordination of women through gender stereotype roles. This has also been observed by Connell, when she emphasizes the inherently relational characteristic of masculinity "which does not exist without its contrast femininity" (p. 68). The relational characteristic is structured in a way that only in the subservient position of women can a dominant ideational version of masculinity function. As witnessed in *Maps*, Askar attempts throughout the novel to create his masculine identity through his narration of Misra's story.

Another component of the system of domination is violence. According to Connell (2005), violence is used by men to sustain their power. She states that: "Most men do not attack or harass women, but those who do are unlikely to think themselves deviant. On the contrary, they usually feel they are entirely justified, that they are exercising a right. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (p. 83). Violence helps men to assert their masculinity. There is an interconnection between violence and masculinity because violence is "embedded in a network of physicality, experience and male culture such that it is more easily used and more readily available as a resource" (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, p. 162). According to them, men act violently not just to attain masculine identity, but its significance lies in the reassertion of their predominance over women (p. 162). Among the different forms of violent behaviour, rape is "the most extreme form of violence that men use to control women" (Alden and Tremaine, 1999, p. 134). It is an "unlawful 'invasion' of the body, mind and spirit [...] a violation of a person's humanity" (Deer, 2009, p. 137).

Throughout history, women's bodies have been used by men as convenient sites to glorify their masculine prowess or humiliating the honour of enemies during armed conflicts, etc. Similarly, in *Maps*, Misra becomes a victim of rape in the name of the Somali nation. The Somali community assumed her to be the traitor who led to the death of six hundred Somali people. This "Tragic Weekend" ignited a fury among the Somali youth and to avenge the death of their people they started assaulting her first by burning her hut. Then they deceived her by misinforming her that Askar's uncle was looking for her and took her to a hut, and, as she

described it, “several strong men sprang on me out of the dark and they raped me” (p. 194). Later those men spread the rumour that she “had been raped by baboons” (p. 195). Those men justified her rape as a punishment given by the baboons as “they smelt her traitor’s identity underneath the human skin and went for it again and again” (p. 195). However, it cannot be determined that Misra’s Amharic descent made her a victim of the Somali youths’ vindictiveness because Aw-Adan also shared a non-Somali identity, but no one questioned *his* loyalty. It is because she is a woman that she becomes an easy victim of men in a show of authority. The incident also reflects the social conditioning of men, where sexual and gender-based violence are normalised in the name of nation and clan.

Farah’s representation of male and female characters in the novel *Maps*, from the Blood in the Sun Trilogy, brings to light the influence of society in constructing a dominant form of masculinity that is in agreement with patriarchal codes of conduct. According to Foucault (1980), power is “employed and exercised through a net-like organisation” (p. 98) where individuals act as both agent as well as recipients of power. He further discusses that power is reinforced in society through numerous social and institutional discourses. Taking into consideration Foucault’s observations on power, it can be argued that the entire construction of masculinity in hegemonic ideologies is rooted in the production and generation of power according to the patriarchal paradigm. The construction of masculinity in Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps* corresponds to Foucault’s concept of power. Through the analysis of the shaping of Somali masculinity in the novel, it is revealed that gender-based expectations are induced in the mind of young boys at an early age, whereby society acts as a constant reminder for correct masculine and feminine behaviour. It is the desire for power that is at the core of the formulation of hegemonic masculinity, or *raganimo* in the Somali context. Patriarchy normalizes their exercise of power by inventing certain elements as “anti-norm” that, as antitheses, help to erect a particular kind of masculinity or femininity as the norm.

Conclusion

Men have so far considered themselves as “genderless masters” because of the appropriation of masculinity as natural. However, the escalating discussion on men as a gendered subject has “opened a discursive space around men’s identities, roles, and power” (Ashe, 2007, p. 2). This study has highlighted Askar’s attempt to assert his gender identity as a man by conforming to the socially accepted markers of a “true” man, but he has to naturalize it through repetition of the performance of normative masculinity. Ironically, the configuration of a dominant masculinity through enactment of culturally validated gender attributes signifies that masculinity is not a stable concept, but shaped through discourse.

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Corresponding Author: Sehnaz Rofique Saikia

Email: Sehnaz036@gmail.com