

## MIGRATION AND RADICAL IDEOLOGIES: NURUDDIN FARAH'S *NORTH OF DAWN*

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### Abstract

The history of a nation affects the future of a nation for generations. After the end of colonial rule, Somalia witnessed the dictatorial rule of Siad Barre which is followed by disastrous civil war, violence, endless suffering and massive migration of Somalis to the neighboring nations and into different parts of the world. Nuruddin Farah, a major postcolonial Somali novelist, in his thirteenth novel *North of Dawn* (2018) captures the violence, devastation, terrorism, and the effects of decades of civil war in Somalia. This paper will explore how the novel *North of Dawn* brings out the horrific images of refugee camps, gender violence, and the existence of radical extremist religious ideologies in every religion, society and nation.

**Keywords:** Somalia, Migration, Violence, Ideology.

Migration is a human tendency. It affects human lives in different ways and has multilayered impact on socio-cultural, political, and psychological aspects of human beings. For different socio-cultural, political, economic, or for environmental reasons people migrate. Migration is also a cause of human discrimination. To avoid these discriminations and to merge with the foreign community human beings sometimes camouflage their behavior (social, cultural) so that the host community accepts them in spite of the differences. They try to 'mimic' the foreign socio-cultural behavior for their acceptability in the foreign land. War and violence are significant reasons for forced cross border migration and for the increase of refugees in post-colonial era.

Along with humans migrating from one geographical location to another, the ideologies also move, shift, and disperse. Ideologies move from one generation to another and move faster than human migration. Ideologies make impression on society whether it is radical or liberal, whether it is against humanity or for the welfare of humanity, whether it is an eye opening insightful theory or it follows the ancient rigid rules and stick to the ancient superstitious radical ideologies. Michael Freeden in his book *Ideology A Very Short Introduction* writes:

Ideology is a word that evokes strong emotional responses...artificially constructed sets of ideas, somewhat removed from everyday life, are manipulated by the powers that be

– and the powers that want to be. They attempt to control the world of politics and to force us into a rut of doctrinaire thinking and conduct (1).

Significantly, people who harbor radical ideological thoughts target two most powerful agents of society: one is youth, second is religion. First of all, they target the youth as an agent for dispersal of their radical thinking and ideologies. When the youth absorb the radical thoughts, the radical ideologies move faster, contaminate the society in a rapid way and create devastation. Secondly, they try to fuse their radical thoughts and ideologies with the emotions of religion. The amalgamations of radical ideologies with religion moves fast and disperse among the mass and affects and creates massive disaster in society. The clash of two radical extremist ideologies creates violence in society. Then it becomes difficult for every nation and every society to pacify the radical thoughts and bring peace. Again, the radical ideologists fuse terrorism with the religious sentiments and then they invade the mind of the youth and permanently configure the young mind in such a way that they are unable to return to the mainstream of life.

In Nuruddin Farah's *North of Dawn*, the prologue draws the reader's attention to the endless violence and disaster not only in Mogadiscio, the capital of Somalia but in the entire nation. Continuous violence, blasts, insecurity and the deaths of the civilians have led the nation into anarchy. Amidst continuous violence in Somalia, Gacalo, an expatriate Somali mother, based in Norway, continuously checks the articles for the news from Somalia. Her only son Dhaqaneh who had left Norway for almost five to six years has engaged himself with terrorist activities in Somalia. Gacalo's husband, Mugdi, a "former ambassador in Somalia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs" (7) left Somalia just before the break of civil war and came to Norway in the year 1988. He compares the internal violence of Somalia with "terminal cancer that has infected his nation" (14). The clan politics and civil war in Somalia have caused so much damage to the internal structure and the governing system that Farah has compared the damaged with the incurable medical condition. In third person narrative voice, Farah brings the reader's attention to the year 1991 when civil war broke out in Somalia and describes Mugdi's agony for his motherland: "He detests Somalia's dysfunction, unrelenting since 1991, the year the country collapsed after its clan politics had gone awry, and Mogadiscio became a killing field" (14). It denotes Mugdi's helplessness as he observes his motherland Somalia getting involved in clan politics, civil war, bloodshed and violence. Though he stays away from Somalia, his mind remains connected with his motherland:

Instead, he did what he could for his country from afar, writing articles and editorials in which he advocated for peace among the warring clan militias. Then he joined a group of former Somali ambassadors, politicians, and intellectuals whose aim was to

deal with the rupture in Somalia's body politic, to stop the hemorrhage, but to no avail. (14-15)

It denotes his firm determination and desperate efforts to stabilize the violence by political negotiations. Though he remains physically separated from his nation but his continuous thinking and his contribution in writing for his nation in articles and editorials suggest his deep emotional attachment with his motherland. In spite of his multiple failures to bring peace in Somalia he constantly put his efforts and goes to "New York to provide background documentation for the United Nations Security Council meetings on Somalia" (15). Later, he also engages himself in a "new Somali political collective" for "another peace dialogue" (15). His participation and intervention in Somali's politics suggest his love, deep devotion for Somalia and his desire to return to his native land. Mugdi's deep concern for Somalia, his multiple efforts to bring peace and his multiple migrations affect his personal life deeply. In spite of his wife's requests he fails to give time to his family and especially to his son Dhaqaneh. As Mugdi's mind remains absorbed for the welfare of his motherland it creates physical and emotional distance from his family.

Mugdi is a Somali Muslim. After arriving in Norway, he comes to know about the existence of communal and religious violence in Norway. He hears about a "nineteen-year-old Norwegian member of the right wing National Popular Party who had launched a bomb attack on Nor Mosque in 1985 – a forewarning of the attacks that would increase in frequency" (14). From his Norwegian friends, Johan Nielsen and his wife Birgitta, Mugdi comes to know about the existence of religious hatred and the clash of radical ideologies of Islam and Christianity in Norway. The existence of religious hatred, clash of radical ideologies, rivalry and violence in Norway disturb him. He even thinks of returning to his motherland but drops the idea of returning to keep the request of his wife Gacalo for the benefit of their children. Paradoxically, though Mugdi has successfully avoided the consequences of civil war by migrating from his nation Somalia and settling down in Norway, he fails to protect his son from absorbing the vibrations of radical ideologies. His son Dhaqaneh had fled to Somalia where he engaged himself in terrorist activities and later killed as a suicide bomber. Mugdi continuously blames his fate by comparing himself with "a man born to grief" (13).

Mugdi and his wife Gacalo understand the irreversibility of the path and ideology of their son Dhaqaneh as he becomes a leader of "a group caught in an unpremeditated fistfight with swastika-bearing skinheads" (15) and entangled in troubles with the police. Mugdi feels alienated from his motherland Somalia, but paradoxically his son alienated himself from his parents both emotionally and ideologically. Dhaqaneh not only accuses his father of his failures in life but also shows his disrespect by describing him as "a dud politician, incapable

of succeeding where his peers had excelled” (16). Dhaqaneh’s view about his father captures the irony of Mugdi’s life. On the one hand Mugdi fails to counsel and channelize his son’s teenage sentiments which lead to his son’s inclination towards radical Islamist thoughts followed by his engagement in terrorist activities; on the other hand, he also fails to control Somali’s body politics. Mugdi also becomes unsuccessful when his role shifts and changes in the family:

On reflection, Mugdi would hand it to Gacalo that she had succeeded in her interventions with the boy early in his youth, when he worked and she was a housewife. When the roles reversed, she the breadwinner and it falling to him to be patient, tactful, and loving to the boy, he had failed. (17)

The novel captures Dhaqaneh’s physical migrations and the movement of his thought process during his transition from teenage to adulthood. During teenage he was considered as “his mum’s boy” (16). Mugdi was at that time posted in Bonn, West Germany as Somalia’s ambassador. Later, when his parents observe the characteristics of teenage sentiments they decide on shifting Dhaqaneh along with his mother Gacalo to Mogadiscio for a few months where Mugdi owns a studio apartment. Dhaqaneh shows his affirmation and expresses his desire to “deepen his knowledge of Somali” (16) and his “commitment to singing and writing lyrics in Somali” (17). Soon, his interest vanishes and both Dhaqaneh and his mother return to Bonn. This temporal move is actually the couple’s desire to settle in the lost native land, an endeavor to retrieve their son into the main stream of life by going to the roots – their ancestral native land.

The novel continuously captures the sense of alienation of the characters. Mugdi owns a studio apartment in Mogadiscio in spite of his permanent shift in Norway. This ownership of a studio apartment, a tiny space, in his native nation denotes his nostalgia and hidden desire to return to his motherland if possible in the future. For this nostalgia of returning, he involves himself and works tirelessly for his native nation by engaging himself sometimes writing articles, editorials or sometimes engaging in peace talks to change Somali’s turbulent politics. It denotes his deep love, and longing for his native place by keeping a tie with his lost home and also his hidden desire to relocate.

Later, during obtaining the degree in media communications in the university Dhaqaneh becomes serious in his studies and visits the mosque frequently. His parents remain unaware about the influence of the imam of the mosque on their son. They first sense his inclination towards radical ideologies when he shows his “first signs of displeasure at his family’s secular behavior” (18). Both Mugdi and Gacalo have made all the efforts to shape the adolescent mind of Dhaqaneh but they fail. Though his parents have failed to shape the

teenage sentiments but the imam in the mosque has successfully influenced him and gives him direction towards radical Islamist ideologies. Here, the incident captures the bitter reality of how radical ideologists target the youth in the society to disperse their religious ideologies and sentiments. The imam in the mosque changes Dhaqaneh's outlook of the world. He injects the poison of hatred towards other religions.

The novel captures the concept of return to the native land Somalia as a paradox. At the beginning of the novel, when Mugdi first came to Norway he "felt so unwelcome and unsafe" (14) after listening the clash of radical religious ideologies and even thought of returning to Somalia. Again, during teenage Dhaqaneh and his mother Gacalo also returned from Mogadiscio as Dhaqaneh felt detachment and disconnection in Somalia. He "couldn't think of Somalia as his country" (17) as he was born and brought up in different parts of European cities due to his father's postings. Paradoxically, after coming into contact with the imam in the mosque Dhaqaneh's views change. The readers as well as Mugdi are shocked by Dhaqaneh's physical appearance and his declaration of radical ideologies. Dhaqaneh who disliked Somalia in his youth now loves Somalia. He stays in Mogadiscio continuously for four years. Farah captures Dhaqaneh's extreme radical views when during dinner, Mugdi and Dhaqaneh's conversation touches on the issues of terrorist attack on US embassies in Nairobi, in Dar es Salaam and on 9/11 terrorist attack. Dhaqaneh declares that Islam is the only religion and is the only savior in the world. His father reminds him about their hosting nation, Norway's humanism, in spite of the "bold defiance of right-wing politicians and xenophobes" in the country. He also reminds him that Norway has given shelter to "thousands of migrants and refugees" without identifying their religion (19). In contrast Dhaqaneh continuously reiterates his hatred towards non-Muslims:

I view all non-Muslims as creatures bereft of souls and, as such, they are in no position to decide what they do. Rather, it is Allah's will that makes them host Muslims, and feed the multitudes starving in the famines in Somalia. In short, they have no choice in the matter. (20)

Dhaqaneh's brutal extremist ideology is again revealed when he further states that he does not consider non-Muslims as humans, not even Mugdi's non-Muslim Christian friends like Johan and Birgitta and also declares that he will not hesitate to kill them: " "I don't think of them as full humans," said Dhaqaneh, "and yes, if it came to it, I wouldn't hesitate to exterminate them" "(20).

In Oslo, Dhaqaneh engages himself in giving "free instruction to young Somali students in math and science" sponsored by a "Saudi-funded Muslim charity" (19). He decides to teach without taking any remuneration. In spite of staying at parents' home, he located himself in a

“one-room studio near the mosque” (19). For his daily expenses he runs evening classes for adults and even drives taxi. Here, the use of the phrase “free instruction” disturbs the readers as it denotes different connotative meanings. The readers suspect the further dispersal of his radical ideologies into the space of young minds amidst his ‘instructions’ of math and science curriculum. Gacalo shows her satisfaction by observing her son’s popularity amongst the Somalis, while in contrast Mugdi shows his dissatisfaction by describing his son’s teaching venture as “lack of ambition” (19). Here, Gacalo’s happiness denotes her nostalgia for her motherland Somalia, where she and her husband cannot relocate but her son’s closeness and popularity among Somalis rejuvenate her sentiments of homeland. She feels a sense of nostalgic connectedness with the lost territory. While Mugdi deterritorializes himself from Somalia and settled in Norway on the other hand his son Dhaqaneh deterritorializes himself physically and psychologically from their parents’ home in Oslo, Norway and from humanistic ideologies. He reterritorializes himself physically in Somalia and mentally into the space of radical ideologies. Here, while a father has strived hard in his life to normalize the turbulent political situation in Somalia, paradoxically his son involves himself in terrorist activities in Somalia. Dhaqaneh’s extreme radical ideologies and hatred towards other religion is revealed when he writes a letter to his mother and denies to reissue his Norwegian passport as the “cover is adorned by a cross” (2). He not only shows his dislike towards the “flagrant Christian symbol” (2) inscribed on the front page but also buys a Somali passport and shows “his determination never again to set foot in Europe, believing that Somalia, as he put it to his mother, “was the closest we have to an Islamic state, after Iran” ” (3).

Dhaqaneh has dislocated himself from his parents’ ‘home’ in Oslo and from humanistic ideologies and marries Waliya, who has two children Naciim and Saafi. After Dhaqaneh’s death Gacalo brings his wife Waliya and her two children to Norway as she had promised her son to take care of his wife and the children if he dies. The novel captures the multiple exhaustive migrations of Waliya and the children from Nairobi as they travel through six countries to finally reach Norway. After coming to Norway, Naciim and Saafi deterritorialize themselves from the rigid cultural structure of radical Islam which their mother follows. Naciim who is “intelligent, hardworking, outgoing, and ambitious” (32) absorbs the cultural environment and vibrations of Norway. He gradually “unlearns” (53) radical Somali patriarchal structure of a family where he was considered as “the man of the house, the boss of the womenfolk, the Mahram” (52). He breaks his mother’s encirclement of religious orthodoxies. He shows interest in learning European languages like Norwegian, French, Italian, and English when his sister Saafi reminds him of his duty as a Muslim to learn Arabic language, the “Prophet’s tongue” (50). Waliya shows her displeasure when she hears that Naciim and Saafi visited the gym and the swimming pool with Mugdi. She becomes shocked after hearing from Naciim the descriptions of the gym where “men and women mingle and

share the facilities, stretching, squatting, lifting weights, riding exercise bikes and treadmills, even swimming together” (204).

Waliya encircles herself around the rigid oppressive structure of religious ethnocentric ideologies and she also wants to tie Naciim and Saafi inside the territory of this ideology. Naciim easily frees himself when the exposure of freedom and “kaleidoscope of mixed fortunes, mostly of the positive variety” (117) given by their grandparents. While Waliya constantly forces them to follow the radical Islamist ideologies, on the other hand Mugdi, Gacalo, and Timiro give the children love, warmth, affection and exposure to freedom and modern European thinking.

Saafi, unlike Naciim, gradually retracts within herself and entangled herself within the encirclement of her mother’s radical ideologies as she has suffered the gang rape at the refugee camp in Kenya which has led her into the “subsequent trauma to her psyche” (32). She struggles and gradually comes out of the periphery of her mother’s ideologies. Timiro helps Saafi to revive from the trauma with the help of the Somali psychologist, Qumman. Saafi distances herself from her mother as Waliya fixes her daughter’s marriage with the old Imam Fanax “to protect her daughter, knowing what she has been through” (189). Here, Waliya follows the radical “Somali or Islamist tradition” according to which marriage of a girl “guarantees the girl’s protection” (189). It shocks the reader when Waliya marries Zubair and tolerates severe beating. Saafi not only protests against her marriage with Imam Fanax but also shows her desire to learn Norwegian language. She declares her dislike of the feeling of alienation in Norway and also in their grandparents’ house when they speak in Norwegian language. Even she declares her wish to go to the gym with Mugdi and Naciim. She gradually realizes the differences between radical religious restrictions which were imposed on her and the freedom enjoyed by the women whom she observes during her visit to the gym:

“All my life, I’ve been used to one way of looking at the world. Now the visit to the gym has shown me that there is an entirely different way of seeing”... “At the gym, the women struck me to be without fear and behaved, from the little I saw, as though they were equal to men”...“It makes me feel, from what Qumman has explained to me, that I am in this world for the sole purpose of giving pleasure to men” (201).

Nuruddin Farah in his essay “Celebrating Differences: The 1998 Neustadt Lecture” shares his childhood experience of the politics of religious conversion by Christian missionary group. Farah and his brothers used to go to a school established by Christian missionary group in Somalia which was “run by evangelists, eager to win converts to their faith” (“Celebrating Differences”17). Farah writes that the poor students who were not in a position to pay the school fees had to “attend the special Bible classes in the after-school hours” (17). He goes

on narrating that it was not mandatory for him and his brothers as the school fees were paid by their parents in due time. In the essay he points out his childhood days in Somalia when secularism, diversity of religion, cosmopolitan existence of “a wide variety of other peoples from different parts of the world” (17) could be observed. He reiterates the presence of Yemeni Arabs, farmers from East Africa, “a wide array of Somalis from other corners of the peninsula,” refugee Palestinian families in Somalia (“Celebrating Differences” 18). In Somalia, during the colonial era, in spite of the existence of people from different geographical locations and religious diversities the existence of “tolerant Islam” could be observed (“Celebrating Differences” 18). In the novel *North of Dawn*, when Mugdi waits for Waliya and the children at the airport in Norway, he feels sad when he observes the presence of people of various nationalities and laments that the “scenes such as this, where a variety of races congregate at a public arena, are unavailable in Mogadiscio” (21).

The novel *North of Dawn* captures the existence of racial and religious hatred not only in Somalia but also in developed European countries and throughout the world. The characters in the novel migrate, travel, shift several times from one nation to another, sometimes within the nation from one ‘home to another’. In African continent, as Somalia is situated in easternmost point, it is the first nation where ‘dawn’ breaks. Norway observes “half a year of sunless darkness,” (32) often called as land of the midnight sun. Norway is situated in the north-west corner of Somalia and north of African continent. The characters in the novel have migrated and shifted their geographical locations of extreme geographical conditions – from Somalia to Norway. Though Somalia observes the first ‘dawn’ in Africa but the engagement of decades of civil war, violence, terrorism, clan war, politics, patriarchal violence and existence of radical religious ideologies have pushed the nation into darkness. Due to this instability, a massive human migration from Somalia to different parts of the globe can be observed. Mugdi, his younger brother Kaluun, Himmo and all the Somali characters in the novels have migrated from Somalia to Norway and in other European nations to avoid the civil war, terrorism, violence, clan war and politics. Dhaqaneh was born, brought up in Norway amidst the availability of all the facilities and modern European thinking but paradoxically he becomes highly motivated by extreme radical Islamist ideologies. He goes back to Somalia and engages himself in terrorist activities and finally dies as a suicide bomber.

In contrast, the novel also captures the gradual transformation of the personality, outlook and vision of the children from radical Islamist ideologies to free modern European thinking. Both the children Naciim and Saafi remain in Norway with their grandparents and they understand the differences between radical forceful oppressive ideologies of religion and to follow the religion amidst the hybrid, cosmopolitan modern European thinking. They break the rigid religious barriers and pursue their studies but it is a paradox that their mother,

Waliya remains unchanged and uninfluenced in Norway amidst the exposure of freedom and modern thinking. She remains within the encirclement of radical Islamist ideologies and finally returns to Somalia where she thinks she will not be asked questions about her “Somaliness anymore after many years of being a stateless refugee in a camp in Kenya” (366). Nick Mdika Tembo in the article “Perceiving precarity and extremism in Nuruddin Farah’s *North of Dawn*” writes:

Farah makes a play on the words *north* and *dawn* to suggest that something is literally *out of joint* on the other side of dawn. In literary studies, dawn conjures notions of illumination and hope, the beginning of a new day and thus a chance for happiness and improvement. Something on the north of dawn is, in this case, out of sync with hope or a new beginning. It is a morning that brings with it some sort of uneasiness (97).

Naciim in the novel becomes true ‘Mahram’ in the family as he protects his sister Saafi and cautions his family and grandparents all the time from forthcoming danger. Here, the children become a bridge between their grandparents Mugdi and Gacalo and their mother Waliya.

Thus the novel captures the existence of radical thoughts, extremist views in all religions, in all nations throughout the globe. People face these extremist thoughts and when people fail to identify and differentiate these radical extremist ideologies from humanistic values it creates violence and disaster in the family, society and nation. Farah attempts to highlight the suffering that radical ideologies create. He promotes simple human values. He highlights the dilemma situations create, and how people are victims to the forces of society. Migration does not always help as people are always close to their roots. Extremist thoughts can only lead to trauma and sorrow. Adapting and adopting to free inclusive societal beliefs is the way out of suffering. Farah advocates a modern, free society where people can live happily and peacefully.

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