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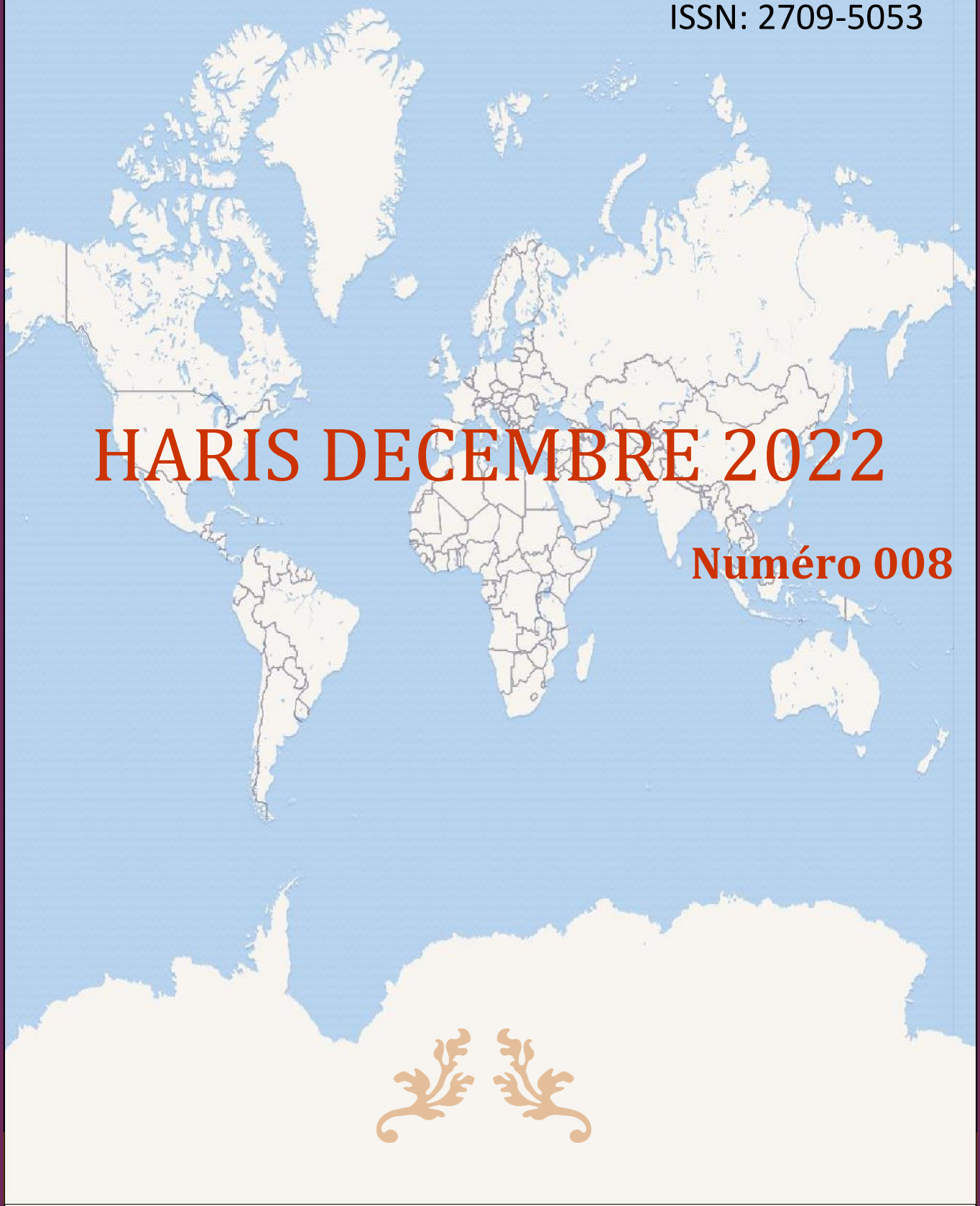

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Sommaire

Chaos in Nuruddin Farah's *Knots*
Analyse du chaos dans *Knots* de Nuruddin Farah

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the ways in which Farah's work reflects shifts in humanitarian values over years of civil war, and the different pressures these shifts exert on the preservation of humanity. Particularly in*Knots*,the narrative reveals some characters whose personal experiences related to Somalia civil war are made of anarchy and violence.To overcome this situation of chaos, some antagonists get together to bring back solidarity and humanism in the disarticulated Somalian society. Accordingly, thenarrative of Farah's *Knots* proposesactions in the light of womanismto escape or overcome thechaos in the lives of vulnerable persons.We will then point out how the chaos affects people in exile as well as the country and those trapped within its knots. Also, in the light of the Positioning Theory concepts such as symbolical interactionism or social actions for positive change,we will see if interactions based on womanism can effectively work to reduce the ambient chaos in a war-plaguedsociety and bring back humanism.

Keywords: chaos, exile, positioning theory, womanism, self-redeeming, reconstruction

Résumé :

Cet article analyse comment le travail de Farah reflète les changements en termes de valeurs humanitaires au cours des années de guerre civile, et les différentes pressions que ces changements exercent sur la préservation de l'humanité. Particulièrement, dans *Knots*, le récit révèle des personnages dont les expériences personnelles relatives à la guerre civile en Somalie sont empreintes d'anarchie et de violence. Pour venir à bout de cette situation de chaos, des antagonistes se mettent ensemble pour ramener la solidarité et l'humanisme dans une société Somalienne désarticulée.En conséquence, le récit de *Knots* propose des actions à la lumière du Womanism pour vaincre le chaos dans la vie des personnes vulnérables. Nous allons alors relever comment le chaos affecte les peuples aussi bien en exil qu'au pays et ceux piégés dans ces 'nœuds'. Aussi, à travers les concepts du Positioning Theory tels que l'interactionnisme symbolique ou des actions sociales pour un changement positif, nous allons voir si les interactions basées sur le Womanism peuvent travailler à réduire ou vaincre le chaos ambiant dans une société en proie à la guerre pour ramener l'humanisme.

Mots clés: chaos, exil, positioning theory, womanism, auto-rédemption, reconstruction

Introduction

The quest of democratic institutions has caused a lot of sociopolitical unrest in Africa. Thisviolence, sometimes fueled by military coups and civil wars have become the main source of chaos in most post-colonial African spaces. The structural and humanitarian chaos have become particularly endemic in the horn of Africa. The situation seems to be totally outof control according to Media's news as well as some novels set on this part of the continent.Indeed, the tableaux of afflicted countries such as Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia are almost similar to that of the civil war-torn setting depicted in Nuruddin Farah's trilogy entitled "Past Imperfect", with *Links* (2005), *Knots* (2007) and *Crossbones* (2011).

These novels enact some Somali people from inside and from the diaspora that are struggling against the chaos in their home country. Particularly in *Knots*, Nuruddin Farah depicts the experience of a returnee Somali woman from the diaspora,as she tries to bring back peace and humanity in her disarticulated home country.

From the settings of Farah's *Knots* one can perceivehow, long years of civil war have created pandemoniumin characters' lives.Over years of rivalry between clans or armed factions some important changes in social and moral values have negatively increased and annihilated the stability of the country.Thus, the paper investigates the ways in which Farah's work reflects shifts in humanitarian values over time, and the different pressures these shifts exert on the preservation of humanity.

The narrative of this novel offers itself as a theoretical exploration and application of the positioning theory, since we can observe that the main character and adjuvants use action and speech to recreate order and help people traumatized by the chaos.For R. Haré this theory aims to understand how individuals gain or negotiate access to rights and duties to performparticular kinds of meaningful actions in a social episode, which can be conversation or a narrative (Haré, 2011, p.2).

Then, this methodology provides rooms for the concept womanism which according to P. Layli"is a social change perspective rooted in [women's] everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces"(Layli, 2006, p. XX). Thenin the course of the reflection, we will analyze and understand how the disarticulated stings depicted in *Knots* project forms of chaos.

Also, we shall see how the concept of womanism on the backdrop of positioning theorycan effectively work to recreate order out of the chaotic situation.

1- CHAOS IN THE NARRATIVE

Farah's *Knots* can be read as a fiction set on a failed State with a disarticulated social and humanitarian links.The rendition of this phenomenon in the novel is to be viewed at two levels. On the one hand, the novel depicts Cambara, the main protagonist of the narratives, through a trajectory that reveals an emotional and a psychological chaosin relation to the interactions with her kinsmenexiled abroad. On the other hand, as the novel painstakingly describes a war-torn country that is in search for sociopolitical stability.

1.1-Traumatic Experiencein Exile: Emotional and Psychological Chaos

The issue of exile seems to pervade most of Nuruddin Farah's novels.Particularly in the trilogy comporting *Knots*, various characters belong to the Somali diasporic population. This situation is undoubtedly tributary to the ongoing civil war in his home country (Somalia). These exilic characters are surely running away from the dire living conditions linked to the endless war. Unfortunately, once in the countries of asylum they are still plagued by the same dictatorship structure that some Somali refugee folks transfer abroad. Indeed, in the narratives one can read thatthe main protagonistCambara and

her parents had found refuge in Canada to escape dictatorshipin their home country.

But even living in a western country, protagonist is called to an arranged marriage with a cousin who wants to flee from Somalia.This imposed marriage is decided and planned by her own mother, a decision that is qualified as a "preposterous idea" (Farah, 2007, p. 20).Thus, we realize that the diaspora do not escape the patriarchal or matriarchal practices that can be seen as some endogenous factors of the collapse of their home country. Cambara is shocked at the attitude of her mother, probably because she understands the position her mother gives her in their relationship. As a daughter, she has to obey and do whatever the matriarch demands, as if she was under the tutelage of that one.

Out of this sequence, one can detect allusions to the status that Somalia have had under the respective tutelages of United States, USSR and United Nations since its military coup in 1967. Then it is preposterous to administrate an adult's life, which can but lead that person in a psychological disorder. Indeed, Cambara who considers herself as an ambitious woman who wants to make a name as actress in Canada is reduced by her mother to a role of sponsorship for an illegal immigration in the same country. Bringing a refugee as a fake spouse in Canada can compromise the status and the professional carrier of the lady, but her mother seems to be less concerned by this aspect.However, closely scrutinized, Cambara and her mother, even abroad, do not escape from their being women from a Somali patriarchal society where women are seen as simple appendages for men. Here, the mother acts as the representative and implementer of these patriarchal or matriarchal ethos that she has in-taken from her original cultural milieu.

In her attempts to set herself free from these patriarchal constraints reverberated by her mother, Cambara decides to venture in a real lovely relation with another Somali expatriate. In doing so, she is resolute to be full responsible of her life and destiny. The narrator accounts for this resoluteness in these terms: "it is my life, Mother, and I will do with it what I please, with or without your approval" (Farah, 2007, p. 55).

This sequence of the narrative could be meant by the Somali author to insert some womanist ideals in the characterization of Cambara. These ideals consist in equipping the lady with necessary arguments to uproot some patriarchal pressures upon women folk. Cambara's will to marry without the consent of her mother is a case in point. The lady's actioncorresponds to the idea of wrestling with one's own position and the position of others, as assumed by the positioning theory. As a matter of fact, Harré and Moghaddam (2003) indicate that a position includes rights, duties, and obligation of an individual in any social context. Basing on this assumption, we can consider that Cambara puts forwards her right to refuse her adult life to be mandated in the hands of her mother, who for the occasion is, in her eyes, the embodiment of the patriarchal system.This rupture could be due to the mother's patronizing over her life as Somali men would do in their birth country.

Once more, the narratormakes us read about the implementation of the positioning operated by the central female character: "Cambara embarked, sadly, on mapping out a plan that would alter her life from that time forward, without Arda occupying center stage" (Farah, 2007, p. 55). In this comment the narrator unveils an important aspect that is not detected immediately in the aforementioned address of Cambara to her mother.

This important element is the adverb *sadly*used to express the felling ofparadox between the position she adopts and what her relations with her mother should be.Indeed, she disfranchises from her mother with whom she is supposed to be planning and doing such things together. Marriageis supposed to be a family affairwith the real implication of each members. So it is a bit difficult for Cambara to emotionally assume her

position of total rupture and unilateral decision.The ambiguity of the position of that Somali lady lies in the fact that the marriage she wants to contract without the consent her mother is done with Wardi, another compatriot. It is as if you run from a danger and run to another. This raises the question of the unilateral decisions made by African countries when they want to get rid of the tutelage of super power while joining another one.

Yet, this hasty union with a compatriot she has chosen by herself does not bring Cambara the expected happiness and freedom, rather she comes across treason. Through the character of Wardi, the narrator puts to the fore the maliciousness and opportunism of diasporic men in what the society is undergoing. Justifiably, the narrator's question at the opening page of the novel "who do you blame?" is answerable in the behaviour of this Somali man in exile; "Wardi was to blame" (Farah, 2007, p. 56). He was to blame because he fails in any respect to go up to the standards and responsibilities marriage entrusts to a husband. As profiteering is expressible in his tricks during the wedding ceremony, the narrator unveils it "Wardi was urging her to draw up a legal document clearly stating that what was hers was his too"(Farah, 2007, p. 63).

In so doing, this man, not to be trusted succeeds not only in robbing Cambara's love but above all her property. Also, this man, though travelled abroad did not change in mind. He has gone to Canada bringing with him the sad image of patriarchy, thus positioning himself as tributary of the behavioral heritage of men of his home country. Being unable to be a polygamist in a western world, Wardi resorts to philandering, as testified by the narrator:

> then one day, she (Cambara) left her son, by this time an exuberant, bumbling nine-year-old in Wardi's care, only to learn barely six hours later that afternoon that Dalmar had drowned in the pool while Wardi was giving Susannah, his host and law partner, a tumble. (Farah, 2007, p. 56)

This is part of the situations that will constitute the bed for Cambara's psychological and emotional pandemonium. Firstly, Wardi's irresponsibility coupled with his infidelity culminated in the tragic death of Dalmar, their only son. Consequently, this betrayalbecomes the outburst of Cambara's wrath not only against Wardi but also against men folk who are responsible for the violence unleashed on Somalia. In this perspective, the narrator seems to position Dalmar's death as the trigger and catalyzing scene to Cambara's forthcoming actions. Away from her home country for two decades, Cambara is caught up by the dictatorship of Siyad Barre that paves way for clannish conflicts and guerilla warfare. Secondly, the narrator accounts for Wardi's opportunistic stances through Cambara's despoiling of her apartment in Canada, asthe narrator makes us read,

> while she was down, he (Wardi) informed her that he would be leaving for a long weekend and that when he got back he did not want her to be in the apartment –her own apartment, bought with her mother's money – because he was selling it and collecting his share. Moreover, she knew where he would go and with whom. She felt frustrated at his attempt to swindle her out of what had been legally hers. So that was where trust got her? (Farah, 2007, p. 58).

This question fully conveys the immensity of Cambara's downcast, the treason of men in love affairs. She has blindly trusted men who tuned up to psychologically and physically destroy her. The fake marriage with Zaak for the latter to reach Canada, the despoiling of her apartment, the loss of her son and the ensuing divorce concur to devastate Cambara. The psychological chaos of Cambara metaphorically amounts to Somalia, her birth country. Indeed, through the collapse of Cambara's life,provoked by her own compatriots in exile, the narrative seems to be revealing that the chaos in the Africanhome

country is seeded by Somali people's own nature. Then, we can draw that Farah tries to make all the Somali folks feel guilty of the country's situation. Thus, through this collective responsibility and guilt, there is an urgent call for Somali diaspora to return home and reconstruct the country as well as their selves.

1.2-Rediscovering a Home Country

One of the themes in Farah's latest trilogy "Past Imperfect" is that of return. After experiencing exploitation, treason and emotional chaos during her stay in the exile country, Cambara comes back to her home country. Unfortunately, the lady rediscovers a Somalia that "had been reduced almost into a state of Hobbesian anarchy and war of every family against another"(T. Kivimki, 2001, p.6).So, she witnesses a country where violence looms everywhere, with sociopolitical fragmentations characterized by internal rivalry between warlords on the one hand and between clans or religious extremists on the other. As a result, the country is sadly disfigured, structurally and even socially, as painted by external narrator of the novel,

> she sees the giveaway evidence of civil war devastation wherever she turns: building leaning in complete disorder, a great many of them boasting no roof, other boarded up, looking vandalized, abandoned. The road – once tarred and good enough for motor vehicles –is in total disrepair. The walls of the hose fronting the street are pocked with bullets, as if a terrible sharpshooter with assault rifles has used them for his target practice. Skirmishes (….). How many militia men died? Only unarmed civilian. (Farah, 2007, p. 5)

These quotations are the vivid accounts of how the country, after the dictatorial leadership of Siyad Barre (1969-1991), is beheaded in terms of infrastructures and civilians. Obviously, the core motive of Cambara's return to Mogadiscio is to retrieve her family property besieged by Gudcur, a minor warlord. However, she is confronted to other great challenges and phenomena subsidiary to the civil war situation. Among them, we have women's conditions and child-soldiers' issues.

Heedless the UN convention on the rights of the child in 2000 which bans the use of soldiers under the age of eighteen (J. S Burnett, 2007, p. 140), many warlords and terrorists still engage children in the conflicts, endangering their lives. In *Knots*, Cambara heads up the struggle to rehabilitate child-soldiers at the hands of these warlords. As a mother who has already experienced the tragic loss of her own born child, she laments the abuse and exploitationthat many boys and girls tragically undergo in Somalia civil war. Many of these children have been made orphans by the extermination of their family members, rendering them easy preys to the militiamen.

The narratives reveal on this account that SilkHair's parents are killed during the conflict; Gacal becomes a child-soldier after his father, a Somali expatriate living in the USA had been abducted and killed by militiamen during a visit with his son to Somalia. The following dialogue between Cambara and the waiter at the Café clearly underscores Gacal's status:

> "do you happen to know the boy or what his name is?"
> "Gacal is his name"
> "Whose son is he?"
> "He is no one's son" replied the waiter (Farah, 2007, p.228).

Consequently, this pitiful situation creates an atmosphere of insecurity all over the country. Since they are brainwashed by their pseudo-protectors, boy soldiers are not only insecure but have become source of insecurity. The brainwashing, fuelled by *Qaat* chewing and indoctrination, consists in making them believe that with guns they are safer. They mistakenly feel utterly insecure without guns which become the substitutes of their protecting parents.

To some extent, they are taken hostage by these guns, real captives of their arms. Cambara witnesses the ill effects of this psychological indoctrination when she asks a group of boy soldiers to do an ordinary domestic chore: "how clumsy they appear now that they are missing their weapons, which over the years have become extensions of themselves; they appear wretched without them" (Farah, 2007, p. 98).

Since the guns have become extensions of themselves, child-soldiers believe that they have become by the same token the best means for them to fulfill their desires and needs. Everything for them can be gotten with guns. They are escorts "meant to protect the truck they are travelling in from being attacked by other armed gangs, for gangs rule the city" (Farah, 2007, p. 87). Thus, in this generalized atmosphere of violence, the passengers become hostage of these child-soldierswith the power of the guns they are able to constraint people under their "care" to abide by their will. Zaak explains,

> we're hostages to their guns, that's true. They put the guns to your heads whenever they want to blackmail you into granting them more concessions than you are prepared to grant them. (…) We do their will, bribe them with *qaat*, pay them extravagant bonuses, and humor them as best as we can. With death being near, as close as their fingers are to their trigger guards, we value our life and appreciate every second of it. (Farah, 2007, p. 85-86)

Here is one of the sad exploits of civil war, turning these "angels" into demons. Instead of sending them to school, pens and school bags are replaced by guns transforming them into sources of permanent insecurity. K.Tunai alludes to this physico-psychological damage upon child soldiers when he puts that "this recruitment of children at these ages is an abuse of their childhood and it leads to improper development and has psychological and emotional long-term repercussions." (Tunai, 2016, p. 57). Besides this, Farah's narrative highlights how women's conditions are remarkably treated in the setting depicted in *Knots*. Indeed, women appear to be doubly victims in this Somali society. The traumatic suffering civil war has worsened the lot of female characters who are already bludgeoned by a patriarchal system and religious bigotry. Safia Shire aptly goes along with it and asserts,

> the civil war in Somalia has taken a tall on the entire population, but it is said to be having the greatest impact on women and children. The tragedy of current destruction and violence in our country has been levelled disproportionately against the Somali women. It is not spring that this is so, given that women have, for a long time, occupied a marginalized and powerless position in our society. (Shire, 1993, p. 70)

Justifiably in *Knots*, women and children bear the traumatic sufferings of this civil war. The war tears apart social and family life, and women are visibly caught in its quagmire stirring to support their children and disabled husbands. From the debut of the novel, Cambara witnesses it; the narrator puts forwards:

> Cambara remarks that they are close to an open-air market. In fact, they meet shoppers returning, the forlorn expressions of the women swathed from head to toe in cheap veils evident, on occasion with only their eyes and hands showing. The women are carrying their small purchases in black plastic bags. To encounter these women in their miserable state saddens Cambara. (…) the women have nothing of importance to expect, save more war-related miseries and rape and sick children to care

> for, useless husbands whom they serve hand and foot (Farah, 2007, p. 6)

Once again, we notice the despicable fate ofvulnerable people such as women in this civil war environment, where gender violence and rape are rampant. However, these victims seem not to be resigned to their vulnerability. They still put forth some determined effort to take care of what is left in their households. These brave women prove that they remain the bedrock and glimmer of hope forthe vulnerable members of their families, communities and even the whole society. Through their actions, they contribute to maintain a kind of twilight zone between humanity and total madness or despair.

In *Knots*, the narrator illustrates the plight of female individuals through the life of Jiijo. The once decent life of this girl has turned into a nightmare with the chaotic situation created by the proliferation of armed and uncontrolled gangs. She is passed over from a gun man or violent man to the other. The patriarchal yoke on women has been worsen by the ongoing civil war.Rape and ill-treatment are their daily lot. If they are not striving to minister to their sick children and useless husbands, they are victims of sexual abuse and beatings, physical and emotional suffering.

Cambara's encounter with Jiijo makes her realize that Somali men's exploitation and misogyny are innate. Here, Cambara and Jiijo represent these Somali women who heedless their status and their class witness men's brutal treatments. Somali men are then capable of inflicting brutality to women in their home country as well as abroad. Contrary to Cambara who is abroad with her mother, Jiijo's destiny is blurred by her dropping out of school. She sadly accounts

> I am the only one among my cousins who has some kind of education. I was preparing to take my high school finals and then go to university when I became pregnant out of wedlock. There was no alternative but to marry, not the father of my baby but a cousin several times removed, who came from the richer side of my extended family. (Farah, 2007, p.178)

This illustration convinces the reader that there is very little way out for women in this society even before its collapse. In a society pervaded by poverty and patriarchal ideals women can hardly be sent to school and they seem to have no right to marriage by consent. So these preexisting conditions added to the ones created by the collapse of the State have brought about a more dramatic situation of womenfolk in Somalia.

As parodied in the novel, women have become sexual objects in the hands of warlords and militiamen. In fact, in this society riven by clan's conflicts, rape has become a weapon of mortification for warring communities to show their supremacy. "Some have reportedly been harassed and run out of town; others have been humiliated and their womenfolk raped to teach them a lesson." (Farah, 2007, p. 80)

The narrator reports. Through this, it can be stretched that teaching them a lesson amounts to subdue them in a degrading manner.Beyond the fact of considering it as a weapon for the militiamen, "rapping women is the principal delight of Mogadiscio youth"(Farah, 2007, p.162), the narrator puts forwards. The chaos has then made this cruelty appear like something banal. An act that inflicts physical and psychological harm to women is transformed into a mere entertainment.

More importantly, Jiijo's story best illustrates the predicament of Somali women during this war, besides her daily beatings by the warlord who holds her in hostage, she is terribly marked by rape. She testifies "I have known gang rape as much as you can get to know someone on a first-name basis"(Farah, 2007, p.178). In most of his writings, Farah seems to devote a particular attention to female and child characters, unveiling his womanist leanings. In the Somalia of his imagination, Farah envisions a better protection for this fragile and helpless

category of population in the hands of crude and sadistic men.

The shortening of Khadija's into Jiijo coupled with SilkHair, Snub Nose, Tiny Feet, Red-Eyed Randy – thenicknames given to childrenout of their physical appearance –symbolically conveys that women and children have been robbed of something. They have been denied proper personality, part of their identity, their innocence and dignity. Through ill treatment, rape and other gender violence, civil war supposedly "a man problem" (Farah, 2007, p. 146) has brought unprecedented chaos among women and children. Out of this part of the analysis, we notice that Cambara returns home and discovers a country devastated by fratricide war, with a deeply disarticulated social life. However, this postcolonial space is not beyond change.

2. MADIATING ORDER OUT OF CHAOTIC SITUATION

In his literary endeavor to keep Somalia alive, Farah is hopeful that change is impending. Of course, the depicted Somalia in his novel under study is undergoing anarchy and chaotic situation still, it is not beyond repair. Considering the ongoing state of trauma as a man problem, the Somali novelist seems to be mediating actions from inside and on the part of womenfolk, which remain the last hope for sociopolitical stability. That is why in the narrative, we can see that female characters are vested with the necessary power to rehabilitate people's humanity and reconstruct the country and all its landmarks.It consists essentially to invite all the Somali diaspora to reconnect with their essence and participate in bringing change in their home country.

2.1. The Theme of Return: Self-redeeming throughRelocation

With regard to characterization in *Knots,*Cambara can be projected as a metaphor of the fragmented Somalia.She, herself, needs apsychological renewal before embarking on the mission to reconstruct the country. She first needs "getting reacquainted with the country of her birth" (Farah, 2007, p. 3) in order torepair or reinitialize her relationship with a Somalia she hadbeen absent from for too long.

This textual element goes along with the thematic of return as projected by Farah throughout the trilogy comprising *Knots*. That is certainly why in this novel we read that, Cambara decides to patch up with her birthplace, where she could not only mourn her lost son, but also take actions for self-actualization. The lady enacts her self-redeeming through two major actions. Firstly, "she will work on regaining the inner calm that she first lost on the day her son died (…). She intends to reject death; she means to celebrate life" (Farah, 2007, p.81), the narrator makes us read.

Cambara's moral reconstruction passes by the transfer of her son's love to SilkHair, an orphan boy-soldier. Then, she "will take care of him, disarm him, school him, and turn him into a fine boy, peace-loving, caring" (Farah, 2007, p.92).Providing such a motherly attention to SilkHair also resuscitates the maternal love she misses after the death of her son Dalmar. Turning the boy soldier into a cause amounts to this vital need to re-invent herself for mental healing.

At the onset of the novel, Cambara assesses the seriousness and complexity of her mission. She "is consumed with doubt, wondering if it is possible to accomplish such a feat without a lot of help from a lot of people" (Farah, 2007, p.3). From this wondering, it can be stretched that unless she folds together with other women, she cannot achieve her undertaking. F. Moolla concurs with that and writes "thus, Cambara's growing dependency on the women's network does not only signal how her project of individualism fails in the material and cultural contexts of Somalia" (Moolla, 2014, p. 176).

In a nutshell, Cambara's journey back to Somalia amounts to this process of recovering her identity, her story. Still, she is fully aware that the self cannot be

constructed without the other, the dignity/identity.

Then, for Farah identity of the self cannot be separated from the dignity/identity of the other. This approach of the Somali novelist is first introduced in *Close Sesame* (1983) through Deeriye when he aptly puts "[we] are note only ourselves, we are others too, those we love, those who have influenced our lives, who have made us what we are." (Farah, 1983, p.231). The rendition of this philosophy in the narrative of *Knots* is then enacted by Cambara's engagement with her community, especially, a women network or a kindof sisterhood movement which H. Blumer qualifies as a symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986:88). She has understood that once in her native setting, she needs to get rid of western individualist posture and grab on collective ideology that characterizes African community.

To achieve all these, Cambara enacts an important assumption of positioning theory by making her 'sisters' and the boy-soldiers tell their stories.Storytelling could strengthen their ties, for she believes that it helps not only one rediscover one's story but also others'. This understanding concurs with the idea that "constant flow of everyday life in which we all take part is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of both our biographies and of the social world" (Harré&Luk, 1999, p. 4).

Thus, the first women with whom Cambara knots in sisterhood feeling is Kiin, the leader of an association called *Women for Peace*.By virtue of sisterhood, she tells about her story to Kiin, expecting that she will be an ally and sympathize with her cause. This sisterhood is based upon an individual, one-to-one relationship that goes beyond public and political action of the Women for Peace network. Cambara believes that interpersonal relationship is very important in that it can turn out to strengthen much more the group commitment.

2.2. Reconstruction via Social Interactions

A careful reading of *knots* forces the reader to notice how Nuruddin Farah lays the blame on menfolk for the chaos in Somalia. We concur with him since we can notice that men are doubly responsible for the country's destruction and women's oppression in a country galore with harsh patriarchal practices. However, the narrative projects an optimistic vision on the fact that Somalia is not beyond change.Then, thenarrative uncloses an internal gender collaboration to help out the country from the quagmire in which men mired it.Indeed, with Cambara's engagement with the reconstruction of her country from inside, Farah seems to be mediating the internal action for peace and stability, instead of the peace and reconstruction process that according to T. Kivinâki "has had to take place outside the country (mainly in Ethiopia and Nairobi) with no significant success"(Kivinâki, 2001, p. 7).

The contact with her home folks through geographical relocation help Farah's female character achieve this internal process with some other dedicated men and women in Somalia, in addition to her self-actualization.

As an African postcolonial feminist, the Somali author advocates the idea ofwomanism defended by Chikwenye Ogunyemi Okonjo (1985) as she opposes to the sisterhood vision of the Afro-American Alice Walker (1983) on her womanist approach. As a matter of fact, to reconstruct Somalia and its people, it is worth mentioning that sisterhood only cannot heal chaos in this country. A lasting peace and sustainable reconstruction in Farah's *Knots* require this mutual collaboration of men and women. Though inspired by the mood of feminism, African womanists distance themselves from the exclusionist Western feminism.

Farah and his predecessors Chikwenye Ogunyemi Okonjo (1985),Ifi Amadiume (1987) and Acholonu Cathérine Rose (1995)maintain that Africans need not exclude men from the struggle for women's emancipation. As a

continent, Africa has its peculiarities in terms of gender issues and for that these issues must be addressed according to its worldview.

The term womanism is originally coined by the African-American female writer Alice Walker in 1983 to address the issues of women of color all over the world. In 1985, Chikwenye Ogunyemi Okonjo creates an African outgrowth of this approach which, she believes better suits African women's lives and experiences. She refutes Walker's womanism which overgeneralizes and homogenizes women's issues. For her, the African-American feminist overlooks African peculiarities. So, there is a need to define African womanism, which she justifies as follows: "It is necessary to reiterate that women praxis in Africa has never totally identified with all the original Walkerian concepts" (Okonjo, 1996, p.133).

It is obvious that Walker has used the term to refer to black class, while Ogunyemi uses it for Africans with the goal of uniting the blacks everywhere. More interestingly, the peculiarity between Ogunyemi's womanism and that of Walker is that, it includes both genders (female &male) in the struggle to create a harmonious life in post-colonial societies.

Arguably, in *Knots*, Farah unveils his womanist leanings fueled by Symbolic Interactionism. It takes the form of gender collaboration to heal chaos in Somalia. It calls on the country's people men and women young and old, rich and poor, able and disable to join hands and save the country. Cambara first enacts this symbolic interactionism with the Women's Network for Peace and the young militia boys. She reconciles Gacal with Silkhair respectively representatives of two warring clans. She reconnects Gacal with his biological mother Qaali and then with men, she cares for Bile during his sickness.

Caring for Bile is highly symbolic for the reader. Bile is terribly affected by the chaos due to the permanent civil war. He is in a deteriorated state of corporeal and mental condition thus, Cambara's ministering for him symbolizes her care for the menfolk in her "dream" to rehabilitate and reconstruct men's mind and body. The narrator testifies:

> it takes several clumsy efforts for her to help him remove his trousers, (…) Then despite the pervasive odor, she remains with him until she runs the water and he has had a douche. Then she finds and then passes him a clean towel, a pair of slip-ons, a T-shirt, and a sarong. (Farah, 2007, p.318)

Through these actions, it can be stretched that Farah endows Cambara with the mission to web both sexes around this national concern. In doing so, she implements *communitarian*method which is part of womanist ideals. Putting together actors from different clans, social classes and genders, she enacts togetherness and national symbiosis to create social peace. Layli pens that communitarian "refers to the fact that womanism views commonweal as the goal of social change.

Commonweal is the state of collective well-being; it is the optimization of well-being for all members of a community" (Layli, 2006, p.xxv). For the optimization of the collective welfare, the novel unveils a network of interactions between characters of various background, having Cambara in the center.Herbert Blumer is in line with this vision and explains how womanism and symbolic interactionism mingled can help the characters reach their goal:

> (…) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Such things include everything the human being may note in his world (…) meaning arises in the process of interaction between people. In this sense, the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the

> ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person. (Blumer, 1986, p. 2)

Here the things are the national issues, since the action of Cambara is geared toward the reconstruction of the country. The common denominator of the community created by Farah's character is that they are all from Somalia, living there or have their relatives there. Which means that the national stability and restoration are the meanings that the things have for them. That is the reason why people from different credentials engage in interactions to form a restoration network.

As a matter of fact, the reader is convinced about the novel's womanist ethos when you consider the symbolic interactions with Kiin the owner of the Hotel Maanta that shelters the 'new society' of peace redemption, Raxma the diasporic representative, Maimouna the lawyer, Seamus the spokesman of the international community, the child soldiers and the reconstructed men. Thus, through these characters, we realize that womanismoffers a more inclusive context for collaboration, coordination and mutual aid.

The collaborative or solidarity group erected by Cambara along her mission of reconstruction is made of people according to what they can bring as value. Through this selective recruitment, Cambara enacts the *nonideological* method which suppress clan, social and regional barriers. Expanding on the definition of this notion, Layli puts that "Womanism is not about creating lines of demarcation; rather it is about building structures of inclusiveness and positive interrelationship from anywhere in its network" (Layli, 2006, p.xxv).What is important here is the value added that anyone can display in order to put forth actions for the collective wellbeing of Somali people and the restoration of their country.

It seeks to create a community around the national issue, regardless their gender or clan status.

Conclusion

Farah's depiction of chaos in *Knots* is conceived through the psychological and moral collapse of the populations inside Somalia as well as the diasporic ones. The endless civil war has also disfigured the social and structural shape of the country. Then, bringing back order and humanity remain the main challenges of the protagonist characters in the novel. Thus, the narrative proposes various forms of action to escape or overcome these challenges.Among the solutions, there is the question of return from exile to partake in the reconstruction of the broken country and that of various inner interactions to overcome the chaos. Indeed, Farah's depiction of the idea of return is marked by the necessity of the returnees to interact with locals in order toreconstruct the version of the home country that will be safer for all. The reflection has permitted to understand thatone can believe in the symbolic interactions between different genders for the implementation of *arbitration and mediation* to calm down rival groups.

This strategy is necessary to restore peace, stability and harmony in Somalia or any other country, which are the very conditions for social reconstruction and self-redeeming. Definitely,men and women are needed to get together to build a new African citizen in order to have a newpost-colonial society.

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