

## **In Praise of Exile? The Case of Somali Writer Nuruddin Farah**

 Helmi Ben Meriem

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### ***Abstract***

*Throughout his fiction, essays, and interviews, Nuruddin Farah, who was declared “persona non grata” in 1976 by Siad Barre and who has returned to Somalia only a few times since then, elucidates the advantages of being in exile and its benefits to his fiction. Nonetheless, as much as Farah celebrates exile, his fiction has suffered from Farah being outside of Somalia, especially observable in certain gaps in relation to day-to-day life and the evolving political scene in Somalia. Exile has isolated Farah from witnessing firsthand the unraveling and the rebuilding of Somalia and severed him from what he writes about, reducing him to ‘a [mere] capsule of ideas,’ to quote Farah himself. Thus, by juxtaposing the advantages and the shortcomings of exile in Nuruddin Farah’s case, this essay emphasizes how exile can be a multifaceted and, at times, contradictory experience.*

**Keywords:** Exile, Nuruddin Farah, Somalia, literature.

*“Du sollst, um die Wahrheit sagen zu können, das Exil vorziehen. To be able to speak the truth, you should choose exile.”*

*Friedrich Nietzsche  
(qtd. in Hirschfeld 5)*

“In Praise of Exile,” a 1988 article by the Anglophone Somali writer Nuruddin Farah (born in 1945), illuminates how exile enabled him to write, had positive effects on his writings, and made it possible for him to deeply explore his Somali identity. As much as Farah commends his experience as an exile, however, it also had negative effects, as this article aims to highlight. The condition of exile cannot be simplified but needs to be seen, with Farah as a case study, as an evolving and all-encompassing situation.

Indeed, Farah’s exile offers a rich ground to explore how exile shapes a writer’s life and is shaped by a writer’s commitment to voice his country. Farah’s life as an exile started in 1976 when Somali president Siad Barre declared him a *persona non grata*. As he was preparing to return to Somalia, Farah phoned his brother who told him “not to come back” (“Democracy?” 41) and to “forget Somalia, consider it dead, think of it as if it no longer exists for you” (Alden 34). Being threatened by a man who is believed to have ordered the killing of his own son (Qabobe 111), Farah postponed his return and, eventually, remained outside of the country until after Barre’s overthrow in 1991. The reasons behind Barre’s régime blacklisting Farah, a young, little-known fiction writer back then, a *persona non grata* require explanation.

By 1976, Farah had only published *Amikimido*, a novel in Somali serialized in Somali News, and two novels in English, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *A Naked Needle* (1976), in which the former is an

apolitical novel and the latter represents, as Derek Wright observes, “something of an oddity in Farah’s fiction, [in that] *Needle* is the only one of Farah’s books to take anything like a benevolent view of the dictator” (*The Novels* 43). Koshin, the protagonist, advocates for “loyalty to the revolution [that he considers] a necessity in order that unification of the different sectors of this society be made a reality” (*Needle* 16). He even bestows on Barre exceedingly positive attributes: “The Old Man is decent, honest, wishes to leave behind a name, wishes to do something for the country” (80). This description begs the question: Why would Farah be exiled given such glorification of the 1969 revolution?

In a 1998 interview, Farah reflects on one possible trigger for his long exile: “I was returning home when I published a novel called *Amikimido* [1975] then unbeknownst to me it had been decided that the novel was inimical to the government of Siad Barre” (“Millennium” 28). Another plausible reason for Barre’s antagonism to Farah can be located in *Needle* because, while defending Barre as an individual, Koshin addresses the widespread corruption and financial plundering of the state funds, directing his criticism at an official who “spent [. . .] a fat amount of the government funds on ornamenting all the Ministry’s gates, ceilings, etcetera with imported Zanzibarian colour-paints” (95), and at another official, who, despite “graduating [. . .] from a university in Central Europe,” cannot “write his monthly and three-monthly reports” because of his illiteracy in the “official written languages here [Italian and English]” (134-5). Such criticisms, although not directed at Barre himself, were considered as attacks on him as he and the state were interchangeable. Barre’s frustration with Farah would be magnified with the publication of his first trilogy, *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, which comprises *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), and *Close Sesame* (1983). As the title of this trilogy suggests, it focuses on dictatorship in Somalia, its causes and the measures to counter it.

Farah's exile was initially driven by his fear for his freedom and security as he indicates in "Praise of Exile": "I had to leave the country. If I hadn't, in all probability I would have spent many years in detention centers" (67); also, part of Farah's fear is linked to his concerns for his family as expressed in a 1976 letter: "I've been postponing the publication of the novel [*Needle*] for a political reason. I could not bring myself to publish it without risking the government's paranoia claws on me, say, or my brothers or sisters" ("Letter 1976" 1).

Furthermore, in justifying his self-imposed exile, Farah highlights how "prison [is] another form of exile" ("In Praise of Exile" 67). The prison, though located within Somalia, has a more alienating effect than exile itself, because it isolates detainees from the general community, unlike exile that offers the possibility to connect with Somalis and non-Somalis. In fact, Farah has always maintained that "I may be physically absent, but [Somalis] have a high respect for the principles by which I stand and still retain their trust in me" ("Combining of Gifts" 183); similarly he has stated that "I am a non person for the government, but an honored person for the people, who revere my political stand the dictatorial régime" ("Feroza" 46). Farah has made it his life's work to speak on behalf of his people, to voice their concerns, and to call for the overthrowing of Barre's dictatorship; in return for voicing Somalis, "copies of [Farah's] book[s] clandestinely entered the college [in Mogadishu] and were read by many students" (Ali Qabobe 120), a testament to the need of Somalis in Somalia for a writer like Farah with the freedom to speak on their behalf.

If any statement clearly summarizes Farah's endeavors while in exile, it would be the following: "If I am not in my country and it's because of politics, I should write something worthy of the sacrifice that I am making" ("Dreaming on Behalf" 6); Farah's balancing act of writing is an act of forever reminding himself of the country and its people with whom he looks forward to rejoining. As he went into exile, Farah carried

Somalia with him, imprinted his fiction with all things Somali, and examined his country from afar. In fact, he has made it his mission to “remain loyal to the idea of Somalia” (“Appiah” 57) that unites him with other Somalis in a quest for a better Somalia.

Indeed, one of Farah’s first acts of loyalty to Somalia was his third novel *Milk*, where the character Loyaan seeks justice after his brother is killed by the régime. Farah describes how Mogadishu “is broken into thirteen cells [where] the Security deems it necessary to break this sandy city into these, have each house numbered, the residents counted—and everybody screwed!” (*Milk* 87); by illustrating how Mogadishu has changed into a place, where surveillance and scrutiny abound, Farah explores the ways that even those who remained were suffering the effects of exile—some of which he shares with the internally exiled Somalis. Throughout *Milk*, misinformation, lack of trust, and uncertainty about what was happening results in “people [being] kept in their separate compartments of ignorance” (199); for this reason Farah stresses: “My novels are about states of exile” (“In Praise of Exile” 66), whether exile from the homeland, exile inside prison—“prison [is] another form of exile” (“In Praise of Exile” 67)—exile in death, or exile by restriction of information. Rather than succumbing and allowing exile to reduce him to passivity, Farah has opted to use his newly-acquired freedom to liberate fellow Somalis by voicing them.

Farah’s second act of loyalty to Somalia as well as the expression of his dissent was his changing the setting in *Sardines* from Milan to Mogadishu (Alden 35). Similar to its deployment in *Milk*, Mogadishu is depicted as Somalia writ large; in fact, the very inscription of Mogadishu in his novels counters the effects of exile by tracing Somali lives within the city that he could no longer physically access.

More to this point, *Sardines* presents the reader with a quasi-fictional depiction of Farah himself in the protagonist Medina. As the editor of *Xiddigta Oktoobar*, the mouthpiece of Barre's régime, Medina fights for democracy through her journalistic writings as well as within her home, facing an act of domestic silencing exacted by her mother-in-law Idil, who, as argued by Felicity Hand, ensures that the family is "the very structure that keeps Somali men and women [as represented by Samatar and Medina] very much in check" (116). In the same stream of thought, in a 2001 interview, Farah echoes Medina's life: "So what exile has done for me is that it has somehow freed me from the family constraints" and from "the pressures of family and friends who would counsel caution" ("Country" 4) and, as such, one "couldn't plot the overthrow of a tyrannical régime from [a] mother's home" ("In Praise of Exile" 65). An example of the liberating effects of exile is seen in Farah's father's comment: "Nuruddin, you're a small boy, but this is a big man's world" ("I. Samatar" 94).

In this respect, Farah asserts, "If I am standing on the ground, I will not be able to see the ground I am standing on—as much as I can see the ground I am not standing on" ("Gray" 134); such a classic reading of exile foregrounds Farah's idealization of his experience as an exile, arguing that "distance had distilled [his] ideas, and that it was salutary for a writer to be away from home" ("Country" 4); the beneficial distancing effect of exile can be observed in the extent to which Farah and his writings are, as Farah expresses it, "confident and detached" ("In Praise of Exile" 67). Farah had to be severed from being in Somalia physically in order "to write a truly inspired work of fiction about Somalia" ("In Praise of Exile" 67), offering him the chance to observe without being caught in the midst of the scene, which encourages objectivity; it also gives him the certainty of being able to pursue his ideas without fearing persecution, a self-assurance that signals freedom.

On the one hand, isolation or exile's distancing effect takes the writer on a journey of inward-exploration and meditation of the meaning of Somaliness and of the position of the intellectual in an environment hostile to freedom of expression; much like the character Deeriye in *Sesame*, Farah's "lifelong self-invention, the history of world and self that he narrates, is created out of and in continuing relation to a whole, complex society of voices and ideas" (Alden 174-5), which are both indigenous to Somalia and learned from Farah's travels.

On the other hand, temptation, that is being attracted and enticed by new ideas, is at the core of Farah's experience of exile and his writings; his novels are not just a commentary on the political scene in Somalia but also examinations of very personal and usually shunned subjects within Somali culture, because his "mission has always been to go [. . .] into the hidden secrets, into taboos" ("I. Samatar" 91). In this respect, the exile dynamics of confidence and detachment also gave Farah, as he puts it: "The possibility of becoming myself, a writer with a wider, more inclusive world vision" ("Sense of Belonging" 21).

It is noteworthy to locate Farah's inclusiveness within the overall landscape of an exile who did not seek asylum in a particular country but chose to keep to the tradition of his ancestral Somalis and became a modern day nomad. Here, it is also of utmost importance to underline that Farah's first voyage abroad took him to India, a country "where there had been a plurality of truths," as he indicates in "Why I Write" (10). Also, his stay in Jos, Nigeria, where the Muslim North meets the Christian South and which is constantly "torn apart by violence between Christians and Muslims" (Griswold 18), consolidated his views on the urgency to develop a secular society. In fact, in his 1989 "Les Affaires Khomeini," Farah rejects any individual or group claiming to represent an "Islamic collectivity" (1) and calls for Muslims "to assist the[ir] community in reaching an accord of tranquility" (3) free from religious oppression.

Additionally, this Somalia forged from a writer's uprooting is as much the by-product of exile as it is a fundamental answer to an existential question articulated in *Yesterday*: "What becomes of those who are incapable of creating another country out of their sense of displacement?" (Farah 49); at the beginning, Farah's exile reduced him to a non-entity—ejected from his country and rejected by his government—that came face to face with, as Yussuf, the protagonist of Farah's play "Yussuf and his Brothers" (1982) puts it, "a universe of doubt [where] man drowns in it unless he finds a cause for which he must die [but] I am a man, and [. . .] at one and the same time a woman and a child rolled into one" (100). In fact, exile has motivated Farah to face being a pariah for the governing elite, which, in its turn, bonded him with the suffering of all Somalis living under the tyranny of Barre's dictatorship—regardless of gender, tribal affiliations, or political stances; thus, despite, and actually due to exile, many exiles like Farah, according to Edward Said, "feel an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (140-1), which keep them attached and devoted to their homeland. Exile has ridden Farah of any doubt about his convictions about democracy and freedom and it has committed him to the betterment of Somalia from the outside, by not only portraying the status-quo but also providing his and Somalis' visions of a new Somalia.

"Born out of psychic necessity, this new country stole in upon my senses [in] an exile which perforce jump-started the motor of my imaginative powers," as Farah expresses it in *Yesterday* (49); Farah, an exile, employs his creative talents for the service of his country because: "As a Somali I do reside in my Somaliness" ("Gray" 134), a Somaliness that is sustained through writing and that sustains Farah throughout his displacement. During such displacement, exile becomes the site where Farah develops, what he calls, a "loyalty to an idea" of Somalia built on "working hypotheses" (*Yesterday* 48), that he maintains may or may not succeed;



while awaiting his return to Somalia, Farah turns exile on its head and claims it as a space/time to engage home from afar: “I’ve grown accustomed to ‘domesticating’ the deep depressions of an exile by making these feed the neurosis upon which my creativity flourishes” (*Yesterday* 192-3).

Despite Farah’s emphasis on the benefits of exile, one cannot overlook the drawbacks that being a full-time exile has had on his fiction. Indeed, responding to a question by James Lampley on the effects of exile on his works, Farah puts forward the rhetorical question: “I have written all my major works about Somalia. Do they read to you, as though they were written by an exile?” (“Lampley” 81). This essay, at this point, argues that Farah’s fiction, anchored as it is in Somali culture, politics and history, has, undeniably, suffered from his exile. Some of Farah’s novels, or at least parts of them, indeed do appear as if they “were written by an exile”.

First of all, earlier in this article Farah’s fiction has been linked to his insistence on a “loyalty to an idea” of Somalia (Farah, *Yesterday* 48); actually, this idea of Somalia is at the core of exile’s detrimental effects on his fiction because rather than having Somalia as its setting, Farah’s fiction is largely set in his own constructed and imagined Somalia, one that, at times, seems to lack accuracy and bears little resemblance to the Somalia that Somalis were and are witnessing. As a matter of fact, Farah compares himself to an “exiled novelist [. . .] writing about an imagined place, which she/he equates to its invented reality” (“Sense of Belonging” 19); Farah’s statement shows a difference between his Somalia and the real Somalia which can be traced back to exile’s distancing him from witnessing first-hand the Somalia that emerged following his exile, with the strengthening of Barre’s régime and the ensuing civil war.

In the same stream of thought, Farah’s Somalia can be linked to the multitude of experiences that he had during his exile, and even earlier.

Responding to Ahmed I. Samatar's question, "What does exile mean to you" [in terms of] exile and the contradiction of exile" (94), Farah relates a story from his childhood:

As a young boy, I was sent to school in Ethiopia away from home. On my first return, I discovered that I was bursting with stories I wanted to tell people. However, the second time I didn't want to share because I realized that many of the things that I saw could not be explained to people who have never seen it. ("I. Samatar" 94)

During his early years in Kalafo, as an impressionable young student Farah experienced the West, its culture and values without having to leave Ogaden or Somalia; by returning to his family and the native culture again, Farah's fascination with the West intensified because Western ideas and values seemed distant, formless and irrelevant to those who were ignorant of them. In his short story "America, Her Bra! [Land Beyond]" (2001), which is loosely based on his experience in Kalafo, the protagonist, crossing the Shabelle River separating the native Somali from the Westerners and arriving at the American Missionary School in Kalafo, expresses the reality of being exposed to the West: "We were abandoning our eating habits [. . .] Our vocabulary was enriched daily by new words of foreign derivation" (61). If as Farah writes in *Yesterday*, "in Somalia, language is the linchpin of identity" (53), then what happens to a writer who not only adopted few new words from foreign languages but actually made a foreign language, English in this case, his adoptive language?

Indeed, much like the protagonist in "America, Her Bra!" Farah argues that he is forever exiled from Somalia because his experiences cannot be incorporated into a Somali culture that is homogenous and mono-cultural. As he expresses it: "Even if I returned, I would still be in exile" (qtd. in Alden 40). Farah is much more at ease at the "Land Beyond" the Shabelle

River and Somalia than within Somalia since his values and perceptions have become more attuned to and compatible with the land beyond. Therefore, one could argue that exile for Farah moved from being an inescapable necessity—for fear of being imprisoned or killed—to an inescapable escape; exile imprinted Farah’s mind and knowledge in such a way that, ultimately, exile, as an escape from Barre, becomes an inescapable condition that is self-generating.

Moreover, subsequent to his few returns to Somalia, Farah has become preoccupied with his identity as an exile, who can cease being one and permanently reside in Somalia: “I ask myself if I am losing the art because I am no longer a full-time exile” (“Appiah” 58). Farah’s questioning his position as an exile is an inquiry into the meaning of exile for him, into the changes that occurred in his life since he first exiled himself and their implications for his exile status, and into his future life as a former exile. Actually, Farah’s exile could be perceived as a blessing in disguise, that is, exile is now part and parcel of his identity as a writer and cannot be severed from his life—because exile and Farah’s life have been feeding each other for decades. Within this framework, one can locate Farah’s affirmation in “Country”: “Perhaps it is a rank heresy to assume that all exiles long to return to the country they thought of as ‘home’ [. . .] It is a fallacy to believe that the die of an exile’s mind is forever cast around a distant mold, that of a faraway homeland” (7). Even though Somalia provides the background for his fiction, Farah does not wish to be a full-time resident of Somalia because his idea of home has been evolving over the years so that Somalia, the physical land with its people and values, no longer represents his advanced understating of home.

In fact, in “If All Stories. . .!” (2001) Farah argues that “we’ll not have heard the whole story [. . .] if we divide the world into cantons and the continents into markets of sectional interests” (19); exile encourages

Farah to pursue an idea of home not based on a nationality, ethnicity, religion, or color, but founded on common values, such as democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, and emancipation of the oppressed. Somalia is not Farah's home because he dwells in a home of ideas, which does not have physical boundaries and which is ever-evolving: "I felt more joined to my writing than to any country" ("Country" 4).

In defending his decision not to write about Nigeria, where he lived for a few years, Farah states: "One has to know a lot more about a place and her people before one writes creatively about it" ("Millennium" 30); it is here that exile's detrimental effects manifest themselves, in Farah's apparently limited knowledge about Somalia. In fact, the question of Farah's knowledge about his homeland is as old as his debut Anglophone novel, *Rib*, since "may Somali readers criticized the book, saying that she [Ebla] was not at all a typical Somali nomad woman" (Kelly 71).

In this respect, having been in exile since 1976 and having only returned to Somalia in 1996, it is curious to apply Farah's own judgment to his fiction about a Somalia that he did not witness. In other words, to what extent can Farah write novels, dealing with a war-ravaged Somalia, when he lacked the knowledge about the suffering of people caught in the war? Farah has drawn on his memories of Somalia in order to write his novels in the belief that, as he puts it, "memory is active when you are in exile, and it calls at the most awkward hour, like a baby waking its parents at the crack of dawn" ("In Praise of Exile" 65) and "memories are like springs. The more water comes out the more it continues" ("Millennium" 33). However, even Farah acknowledges the shortcomings of memory: "Admittedly, there have always been gaps in my anthropological knowledge of these people's day-to-day existence" ("Savaging" 17).

It is of importance here to qualify Farah's "these people" and to understand its implications for an exiled writer; if Farah's fiction can be

summed up in one word, it would be ‘elitist,’ in the sense that he writes novels that deal mostly, if not exclusively, with well-educated, well-positioned, and well-off Somalis, the only exception being *Rib*. Farah’s “these people” does not refer to lower-class Somalis unable to provide the basic necessities, to Somalis who know only Somali, or to individuals whose perception of the world goes as far as their settlement; instead, Farah’s “these people” is about “an extremely limited [group], that of a narrow circle of a ‘privilegentzia’ in Mogadiscio who all know one another, are well-to-do, sophisticated, widely travelled” (Turfan 277).

Even the novels published after Farah managed to return to Somalia remained centered around a privileged group of Somalis; for example, *Links* (2003) is the story of Jeebleh, a Somali American returning to Somalia, bringing with him “a few thousand US Dollars” (6) and paying “four dollars a minute” for calling his wife back in the US (47); also, in *Knots* (2007), Cambara, a Somali Canadian going to Mogadishu, brings twenty thousand dollars (201). One might argue that Farah’s exile has not allowed him to “have the experience of living like an ordinary person,” a criterion for a serious writer according to Farah himself (“Millennium” 28); in fact, Farah’s inability or reluctance to write a novel from the point of view of underprivileged or uneducated Somalis might be traced to his views regarding African writers: “In Africa, the writers themselves belong to the same elite as the people about whom they are writing, the politicians” (qtd. in Alden 191), who occupy a privileged space of power that the best part of Somalis have no access to.

As a matter of fact, exile has only made Farah more distant and isolated from the ordinary, common Somali; he is unable to write about a Somalia that is the one experienced by the majority of Somalis and of which he has no practical knowledge, because even his memories, even if they were not defective as they are at times, are about a peaceful Somalia, albeit suffering from political tyranny. It is reasonable to inquire, using Stephen

Gray's own question to Farah in a 2000 interview: "How real is the Somalia you continue to depict, or has it by now become a fictional construct?" ("Gray" 134); in response, Farah argues that "it is as real as the very photograph of a person you know, taken at an occasion at which you were present" ("Gray" 134). But it is not as real because Farah's Somalia has become more exclusive and excluding because as he puts it in another interview: "The Somalia I bring into my imagination and bring forth into the world is more orderly, less chaotic, more truthful" ("Binyavanga" n.p.); it is this orderliness and truthfulness that need to be scrutinized since they do not refer to a lived Somalia but rather to Farah's Somalia imagined from his place in exile, where famine, drought, and fear of periodic mortar shelling is not part of his daily life.

Moreover, Farah, an exiled writer, who has chosen to live mainly in Africa, has been critical of African writers residing outside of Africa: "To talk politics as some Africans do while living in Europe is an absurdity, it is a betrayal of Africans to choose to speak on their behalf while living in the West" ("Combining of Gifts" 187); one can further develop Farah's reasoning to question Farah's continuing to live in and write from exile when Somalia's war ended and a process of recovery was initiated, and some of whose positive effects are visible in modern day Somalia. In fact, to use Farah's own words: "When you lose touch with the realities in which you must be grounded, your books would become, you know, uninteresting" ("Millennium" 28), less genuine, and more artificial. Also, contrary to Farah's assertion that "it hasn't mattered to [him] for two decades whether or not [he] knew the physical layout of the cities that serves as the background of the stories [he]told" ("Savaging" 17), knowledge about this aspect of Somali cities is of utmost importance because a keen sense of place, where the actions are set, draws attention to elements of the story that, otherwise, might not be as appreciated. Perhaps this is why Farah acknowledges that "some of [his] novels could with little change be set somewhere else if you like" ("Feroza" 49); this

lack of spatial anchor reduces the emphasis on Somalia and makes it appear almost like a non-descript political entity.

Indeed, Farah is conscious of the negative effects of exile on his fiction, denying him access to the day-to-day lives of Somalis and to the changing landscape of Somali cities, especially war-torn Mogadishu. In a 1996 interview, he highlights the double-edged nature of exile in the exchange of safety for genuineness: “I put it [*Milk*] on hold on the assumption that I would go to Somalia and finish it in Somalia, in other words, with some authenticity” (“Democracy?” 41). If Farah realized the need to anchor *Milk*, a novel published approximately three years after his exile, in a directly experienced Somalia and Somaliness, one can ponder the effects of so many decades of exile on the authenticity of Farah’s fiction. Actually, Farah’s own insecurity about authenticity can be detected in his statement in 1998 about his eighth novel *Secrets* (1998): “I finished it in 1991 [. . .] I more or less sat on it until 1996, when I went back to Mogadishu for the first time” (qtd. in Stoffman n.p.) only after which, according to Stoffman, “Farah says he was able to cut and reshape *Secrets*” (n.p).

The effects of Farah’s exile on his fiction can be summed up using Edward Said’s words: “The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever” (137). What is left behind is the milieu around which fiction is structured. As Farah himself admits, “if you studied the structures of the novel [*Milk*] you could see that you could have done it in just two rooms” (“Democracy” 43), an admission that is also valid for *Sesame*, where “a third of the book has passed before the protagonist emerges from the house where he lives” (Alden 44), as well as for *Links*, *Knots*, *Hiding in Plain Sight* where actions mainly take place within enclosed spaces of safe houses, restaurants or well-guarded hotels.

It is within this framework that one can situate Farah's recognition of the positive effects of occasionally immersing himself in the Somali environment: "My writing has benefited in the six or seven years I've been able to go back, becoming sharper where before it may have been dull around the edges" ("Appiah" 58); as a consequence of these stays in Somalia, "the rift, ultimately, between [him]self and [his] country," that Farah describes in his 1992 "Country" (7) is healing and producing a more authentic and genuine Somalia that is closer to the lived-Somalia. Furthermore, in contrast to his 1987 idea of the over-stimulation that he would have suffered from had he stayed in Somalia—"if I lived in Somalia, it would be in my eyes, my throat, my blood, my food, everywhere, and I would be so obsessed that I wouldn't be able to write" (qtd. in Alden 40)—Farah's long exile has demonstrated to him the need, especially since he is now free to return to Somalia, to find equilibrium between over-stimulation and under-inspiration.

As this essay has argued, exile is not a monolithic experience. Farah's exile and its implications on his writings cannot be taken to represent all exiles, or as Farah puts it: "I could not say whether or not my approach is healthier or 'better' ... [It] has been of use to me but [. . .] I doubt very much whether it could be of use for any [other] writers" ("Armando" 71). Instead of painting exile with a broad brush as either a positive or negative experience, one needs to perceive exile in its totality as a complex and, at times, paradoxical state. One must continuously weigh the gains and losses incurred by a physical removal from a particular place despite an intellectual and psychological attachment to its people, culture, and memories.



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**About the Author**

**Helmi Ben Meriem** holds a PhD in English Literature, a specialist of Somali Anglophone literature, from the University of Sousse, Tunisia. He is a fiction writer and has published several academic papers.

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