

## **EMANCIPATION THROUGH VERSE: EXPLORING THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SELECTED SOMALIAN POEMS FROM THREE ANTHOLOGIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of Study:** The purpose of this study was to explore how women in Somalian society are emancipating themselves in the selected poems in the three anthologies.

**Problem Statement:** Women in Somali artistic works until now have continued to be treated as the inferior gender through ways such as being allocated inferior roles. Hence, there is need for an authoritative voice on the place of women characters in Somali poetry. Hence, there is a concern on the position that the Somali women have been placed in literary works. The research applied post feminism theory and stylistics theory.

**Methodology:** A qualitative research design was applied. Textual analysis was used as the method of analyzing the selected texts. The poems that were analyzed were from three selected diaspora Somali female anthologies; *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony*, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* and *An Anthology of Grief*. The study employed purposive sampling to select the texts that constitute the target population. Data collection was conducted through the use of notes and checklists.

**Result:** Emancipation of women in Somali poetry hence society shows that that religion plays a substantial role in women's lives. Shire's poems revealed that religion provides comfort in times of difficulty as reflected in the poem "What Your Mother Told You After Your Father Left". The poets revealed that women go through healing from absent fathers, motherlands left behind, being in unwanted spaces, sexual lingering by unwanted men or family members in order to create an identity for themselves.

**Recommendation:** There is a pressing need for educational outreach. Somali women should be made aware of the potential roles they can play in the socio-economic and political spheres of their communities. Educational institutions, in particular, play a pivotal role in this respect.

**Keywords:** *Emancipation, Women's Empowerment, Somalian Poetry, Anthologies, Literary Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Somalis have a strong affinity for poetry and are skilled at writing it. Somalia is a "Nation of Poets" and a "Nation of Bard," according to Laurence (1970). Due to the Somalis' predominantly pastoral lifestyle, Richard Burton, a British explorer who visited Somalia in 1854, said that the country teems with poets. This implies that its earliest manifestation (creation, diffusion, and preservation) takes place without the use of written language. The prosodic pattern, quantitative meter, and alliterative structure, which is maintained throughout each line of the poem, are three fundamental components of Somali poetry. Because of the Somalis' essentially pastoral lifestyle, Somali poetry is first and mostly oral poetry. This means that the initial realization (composition, distribution, and conservation) occurs without the need of literature (Ingiriis, 2015).

Somali poetry covers a wide variety of subjects and styles, which adapt and develop with time and with the culture. Initially, Somali poetry depicted work songs that reflected rural activities involving camels. Recent poetry reflects the importance of Somali women in modern Somalia's twentieth-century history. Somalia is a patriarchal society (Said, 1982). In general, males possessed ultimate control in a society of male patriarchy examined via socio-cultural lenses, while women were considered as home guardians. The female gender is often faced with cruel practices, including: female-child dissociation, involuntary marriage, withholding of a female child in her biological family for reproduction, widowhood habits, Female genital mutilation (FGM), involuntary sex and abuse, refusal of the right to inherit, bias in leadership, physical assault, purdah, discrimination on acquisition of education and employment chances (Gabriel, 2012).

Muslim women also endure different kinds of neglect in various parts of Africa (Adekunle, 2004). The use of purdah is viewed as a way to isolate females from public interaction and thus strengthens their invincibility through veil politics. According to Edewor (2001), this marginalization not only deprives women of the opportunity to advance themselves but also inevitably curtails their freedom of movement. In Northern Nigeria, where females face "*double invisibility and double persecution*", this phenomenon is prevalent. (Raji-Oyelade, 2004). This research focused on the analysis of women's position in Somali society using selected poems from Somali female anthologies. Hence, the researcher accurately addressed the role of women, influence of patriarchy on women's position, women as their own slaves in the selected works and forms of imagery that the authors have used to illustrate the position that the Somali women have been made to take in the society.

In the past, Somali women used various ways to show their place in the society. This was through stories, sayings, and songs which advocated obedience of married women to their husbands and portrayed women who refused, resisted, and regretted such obedience negatively (Jama, 1994). In ancient Somali the division of labor was done according to gender, men were given the privilege of tending camels and cattle- the most treasured animals while girls would take care of sheep and goat- less treasured animals, also, Somali women are expected to answer to the males and carry dutifully their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, this would limit the women to the set norms (Advameg, 2006).

The study critically analyses the place of Somali woman in selected poems from three diaspora Somali female authored anthologies; *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony*, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* and *An Anthology of Grief*. All the three anthologies are set within the framework of 'Post- Secular Feminism' as written by poets domiciled in the diaspora. Such poems reflect how world perceptions are interconnected as posited in 'post-secular feminism'. All the poets of the three anthologies have gone through the diaspora and that their poems depict religion and women as not only religious but also spiritual. Further, the poems delve into the experiences of the poets in diaspora. The study therefore is anchored mainly on the analysis of writing by Somali poets in diaspora under Post-Secular Feminism. Diaspora, "opens up new spaces for cross-cultural negotiation, creates a tension between two localities and a kind of spatio-temporal duality" Literature by writers domiciled in the diaspora is often written from the perspective of different cultures because of the individual writer's experiences.

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Although women's poetry was historically performed in rather private spaces for mostly female audiences, modern poetesses know the benefits of publicizing their work to wider readers and listeners, including Somali males. While poetry is still very significant, several volumes of both fiction and non-fiction have also been created by contemporary female writers in order to integrate the experiences of Somali women into the history of the Somali region. Somali women's significant contributions to society have been overshadowed by the dominant emphasis of Somali culture on men's interactions and legacies. Now, in the midst of increasing orthodox views that tend to block females from areas of social participation and history, scarce current records of women's experiences and accomplishments are challenged (Mohamud, 2015).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Somalian society is vastly patriarchal in structure; accordingly, women are depicted as an embattled gender. Hence there is need of analysis of the reflection of the repressive institutions and exploitative ideologies as presented in literary works. Therefore, this study critically examined the place of Somali women in selected poems from three diaspora Somali female authored anthologies. Initially, Somali poetry depicted work songs that reflected rural activities involving camels. Recent poetry, however, portrays the role of Somali women throughout the twentieth century in modern Somalia's history. Somali poetry serves as a medium that illustrates the historical disenfranchisement of women, often prioritizing men over women. Women in Somali artistic works until now have continued to be treated as the inferior gender through ways such as being allocated inferior roles. Hence, there is need for an authoritative voice on the place of women characters in Somali poetry. The study was concerned with how women in Somalian society emancipate themselves in the selected poems from the three anthologies.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

Explore how women in Somalian society are emancipating themselves in the selected poems in the three anthologies.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How are women in Somalian society emancipating themselves in the selected poems from the three anthologies?

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research was focused on exploring how women in Somalian society are emancipating themselves in the selected poems in the three anthologies. In terms of content the study focused on nostalgia and memory along with trauma of uprooting and identity crisis in diasporic space as a displaced individual. Thus, this study focused on experiences of Somali immigrants and their inner and external struggles in foreign countries as manifested in the poems. The study focused on topics such as cultural dilemmas, the search for identity, multiculturalism, and universal facets of human life. This study focused on three diaspora Somali female authored anthologies; *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony*, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* and *An Anthology of Grief*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Gender Roles*

Cruel behavior for example; girl-child dissociation, involuntary marriage, holding a girl in her paternal family, for the purpose of production, widowhood practices, FGM, involuntary sex, assaulting of mothers, denial of right to inherit property, segregation in leadership, seclusion, disparaging on education, job opportunities, among others (Bamgbose, 2010). Additionally, Sotunsa (2008) correctly noted that, African society is not homogenous, but it is as complex and diverse just as the numerous ethnic communities, that constitute the continent. "*This means that African regional approaches to gender debate can vary.*"

Mohamud (2015) denotes that, today, young Somali women write to regain appreciation for their innovation and social achievements. Young Somali women are existing in challenging situations characterized by wars, hunger, migration, and scarce educational chances, writing works of imagination and factual that serves as social commentaries on some of the major themes of today. They discuss issues such as the education of children, workplace discrimination, maternity, migration, politics, animal rights and others. The young authors include Zahra Qorane, a Mogadishu Arabic writer; Muna Ahmed Omar, from Hargeisa-author of the *Baadi Doon* short stories; and Sahro Ahmed Kooshin, an author/poet from Garowe, Puntland.

### *Cultural Discrimination in the Contemporary Society*

Despite the critical role women play in Somalia's political development, prevailing cultural and religious values continue to hinder the full acceptance of their contributions. In Somali society, women are primarily viewed as homemakers, a perception that confines them to middle-level positions rather than leadership roles, as they are also expected to fulfill domestic responsibilities. This societal structure supports the notion that it is natural and expected for males to seek power and ascend to top political positions, whereas it is unusual and often discouraged for women to pursue similar ambitions. In many communities, including Somali, women are expected to be subservient to men, and aspirations to surpass men in positions of power are viewed unfavorably (Yassin et al., 2015).

In response to these cultural constraints, women in the Somali region have turned to writing as a means to challenge discrimination and express their viewpoints. By writing poems, memoirs, autobiographies, and other non-fiction works, these women not only assert their own legacies and perspectives but also reconstruct the history of the Somali region. Through their literary contributions, they provide alternative interpretations of major geopolitical events, thereby

reshaping the narrative that has traditionally been dominated by male perspectives (Mohamud, 2015).

Furthermore, the literature produced by Somali women serves as a vital educational tool, enlightening readers both within and outside the Somali community about the complexities of gender relations in the region. It challenges the stereotypes and misconceptions that often plague discussions about women's roles in African societies, providing a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between culture, religion, and gender. Haji (2018) conducted a field study on Somali oral poetry composition and performance. He noted that Somali poetry clearly outlined the role of women in the society. The roles of women in Somali culture include raising children, and this great duty is valued and celebrated by the community in its poetry. Motherhood is a highly revered occupation, and many Somali poets have expressed sympathy for mothers who struggle with raising their children. Even after marriage, mothers still love and care for the wellbeing of their children and this is shown in poetry. Here is an example of an oral paraphrased poem:

*"It's not me, but her mother said that she was  
Do not beat her and expose her to distress,  
My daughter is unable to bear this pain,  
Please send her home if you don't understand one another."*

Poetry also discloses the couple's parents' expectations of how they should relate, more so, the married the daughter, who bears the duty of upholding her family honour by being a nice, submissive and industrious wife. The following is another paraphrased stanza from one of the poems collected by Haji (2008):

"My sister, Dhuubooy shouldn't let me hear three things: That She left her house and walked around anyhow, that dust has accumulated on her utensils, or should I hear others saying that her husband shouldn't have married from our family."

The Somali women's have been discriminated when it comes to performance of oral poetry to audiences, this is due to them being restricted from moving freely unlike their male counterparts (Zainab, 1991). Considering the pastoralist nature of the Somali, this restriction on women disadvantages them from composing and performing poetry while the men enjoy the freedom to do so hence the contrast in the number of male poets to that of women.

The male memorizers have intentionally sidelined female poets thus denying them publicity (Zainab, 1994). This means that there is a bias towards female composed poetry which then further restrains potential women poets from realizing their full potential.

#### *The Impact of Patriarchy on the Place of a Woman*

Patriarchy is a social system that fundamentally privileges men by granting them considerable authority over political leadership, moral direction, and control of property, while subjugating women to subordinate roles. This imbalance permeates all facets of life—from family dynamics to broader societal norms—ensuring that men generally wield greater influence and decision-making power.

In many societies, the concept of patriarchy manifests through cultural frameworks that explicitly favor men, allowing them to exploit their privileged status to marginalize and oppress women. According to Ujomu (2001), women in such societies endure what is referred to as the "*patriarchal burden of male superiority and female subjugation*," which is symbolized by an "institutionalized loss of speech and option." This enforced silence and lack of choice relegate

women to roles requiring perseverance, humility, and obedience, often to the detriment of their own well-being and personal development.

Gender constructs within many African cultures illustrate this dynamic starkly. Men are often viewed as the "self"—the normative standard—while women are constructed as the "other," a deviation from the norm. These roles, deeply embedded in the patriarchal fabric of these communities, designate men as inherently superior to women. As a result, men use 'tradition and culture' as tools to disenfranchise and oppress women, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and subjugation (Gabriel, 2012).

This depiction is not uncommon in feminist literature, where the power dynamics between men and women are frequently explored. Rich's poem, for instance, is an examination of the voices of the "powerful and the inferior," reflecting the predominant social narrative that men are the decision-makers and women the compliant followers (Hassan et al., 2016). Such literature serves as a critical reflection on the social structures that dictate and reinforce these roles, urging a reconsideration of the norms that perpetuate women's subjugation.

Ultimately, the impact of patriarchy on women's place in society is profound, affecting their psychological, social, and economic well-being. Cultural endorsement of male dominance enforces a systemic inequality where women are relegated to inferior, dependent roles. Addressing these issues requires not only recognizing the inherent biases that underpin such systems but also actively working towards a societal structure where both genders can coexist with equal power and dignity.

#### *Objectification of Women*

The historical and contemporary objectification and exploitation of African women are deeply entrenched in both the colonial legacies and ongoing societal norms. One of the most striking historical cases involves Sarah Baartman, a woman from South Africa who was brought to Europe in the early 19th century and exhibited as a public spectacle. Her treatment was emblematic of a broader pattern of racial and sexual exploitation. Her body was objectified and hypersexualized, turning her into a symbol of colonial exploitation and racialized sexism. This example underlines a disturbing legacy where African women are seen primarily through a lens of sexual exploitation. The repercussions of such historical abuse continue to resonate today, as African women are often still subjected to hyper-sexualization and objectification in various forms of media. These portrayals typically depict African women as licentious, with supposedly insatiable sexual appetites, reducing their social and personal identities to mere objects of sexual desire. Such stereotypical portrayals not only degrade these women but also strip them of their agency, perpetuating a culture of sexual harassment and violence that silences their voices and erases their experiences.

Adichie's "*We Should All Be Feminists*" is an influential work that argues for a redefinition of feminism and gender roles, not only within African societies but globally. Through her writings and public engagements, Adichie advocates for equality and critiques the patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender disparity. Her approach is particularly compelling because it combines personal narrative with broader social analysis, making the case for feminism as a universal framework that benefits all of society by fostering more equitable relationships (Adichie, 2014).

Internationally, the role of global frameworks and treaties is pivotal in supporting the rights of African women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provide international standards and goals that countries can aspire to. These frameworks encourage governments to adopt and implement policies that promote gender equality and empower women. The global

community's engagement is crucial in holding governments accountable and ensuring that commitments to women's rights are translated into concrete actions. Through these collaborative efforts, there is a strong base for advancing the status of African women, highlighting the importance of international solidarity in the fight for gender equality.

The progress made thus far indeed provides a hopeful outlook for the future. While challenges remain substantial, the determination and resilience of African women, supported by a global chorus of voices calling for justice, suggest a bright future ahead. The ongoing efforts to ensure that African women can assert their rights and participate fully in all aspects of life are not just about achieving gender equality; they are about transforming societies to be more inclusive, equitable, and just. This transformation is critical for the current and future generations, promising a world where African women enjoy full and equal rights, free from the burdens of historical stereotypes and contemporary exploitation. This is a vision worth striving for, a cause that continues to gather strength and momentum with each passing day.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study was anchored on Post secular feminism theory. Post-secular feminism, as a theoretical framework, intricately examines the multifaceted oppression of women within religious contexts, emphasizing the influence of religion on both public and private aspects of life. This approach is particularly relevant to the study of diaspora literature, where the intersection of religion, ethnicity, and gender plays a critical role in shaping individual experiences. According to the Oxford Dictionary, intersectionality is defined as the " *The interconnectedness of social categories like race, class, and gender, in relation to individuals or groups, is seen as forming intertwined and interdependent networks of discrimination or disadvantage.*" This definition underscores the complexity of discrimination that extends beyond a single facet of identity, revealing the layered oppressions that individuals may face.

The poets selected for this study, all women of color from the diaspora, exemplify the nuanced intersections of race, religion, and gender. Their works, emerging from and responding to their multifaceted identities, offer rich sites for exploring how these dimensions interact within the broader discourse of feminism and literature. The use of poetry as both a form of expression and a means of resistance highlights the transformative power of literature to challenge oppressive narratives and structures. In the context of this research, post-secular feminism is an apt theoretical lens, as it allows for a detailed examination of how religious and cultural backgrounds intersect with gender to influence the poets' works and lives. The theory posits that women's experiences are profoundly shaped by religious beliefs and practices, often more so than by patriarchal structures alone. This perspective is crucial in understanding the specific challenges and oppressions faced by women in religious contexts, particularly those from minority communities in diaspora settings.

The application of post-secular feminism in this study involves a thorough analysis of how religious or spiritual experiences influence these poets' expressions and identities. This theoretical approach also facilitates an exploration of gender theory within theological contexts, which is essential for unpacking the layers of meaning within the poets' works. By examining these dimensions, the study aims to illuminate the ways in which religion and spirituality intersect with gender and feminism, contributing to a richer understanding of the poets' narratives and artistic expressions.

Moreover, the poets' experiences in diaspora are inseparable from their religious contexts, which influence both their personal lives and their creative outputs. This interplay between religion and diaspora experience is pivotal in shaping the content and themes of their poetry. The poets utilize the medium of "micro poems" to articulate their complex identities and

experiences, resonating with a global audience and situating them within the contemporary "Fourth wave online feminist movement." This movement, characterized by its digital activism and inclusive approach to feminism, provides a backdrop against which these poets' works can be analyzed for their thematic and stylistic nuances.

The study of these poets through the lens of post-secular feminism not only enhances our understanding of the intersectional challenges they face but also highlights the role of digital platforms in amplifying their voices. The poets' ability to navigate and utilize online spaces for literary expression and feminist advocacy marks a significant evolution in the ways feminist and postcolonial narratives are disseminated and received in the global digital age.

In sum, this research leverages post-secular feminism to dissect and understand the layered experiences of diaspora poets navigating the complexities of gender, religion, and ethnicity. Through a detailed analysis of their poetry, this study aims to contribute to the broader conversations on feminism, diaspora literature, and the intersections of religion and gender, offering new insights into the dynamics of identity and expression in the contemporary world. This approach not only broadens the scope of literary and feminist studies but also enriches our understanding of the transformative potential of poetry in articulating and challenging intersectional oppressions.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Design*

Research design is an essential component of any scholarly investigation, providing a structured plan and methodological approach to inquiry. For this investigation, a qualitative research design was specifically chosen to delve deeper into complex social phenomena beyond what quantitative methods might reveal. Qualitative research is inherently interpretive and descriptive, designed to provide insights into human experiences and social processes. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that qualitative research employs systematic subjective techniques that aim not only to describe but also to interpret the meanings of life experiences, offering a nuanced understanding of the world. Further expanding on the methodological choices, this study employs a case study research design.

In the context of this research, the case study design is applied to investigate the representation of Somali women in three selected poetry anthologies. By focusing on these specific texts, the study aims to uncover the nuanced portrayal of women, examining how cultural, social, and personal dynamics are reflected and constructed through poetry. The anthologies serve as focal points for understanding broader themes of gender and identity within the Somali diaspora, making the complex and layered experiences of these women more accessible and comprehensible through a focused lens.

### *Target Population*

The target population for the study was the selected Somali female authored anthologies written by Warsan Shire, Ifrah Hussein and Ladan Osman. Warsan Shire is an author, and activist that was brought up in London. She has authored several books such as: *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (2011), *Her Blue Body* (2015), and *Our Men Do Not Belong to Us* (2015). Her poems have been published on magazines and journals, including the following anthologies: *Salt Book of Younger Poets* (2011), *Long Journeys: African Migrants on the Road* (2013), and *Poems That Make Grown Women Cry* (2016); as well as in *Beyoncé's visual album Lemonade* (2016).

Ifrah Hussein on the other hand is an award-winning Somali-Canadian poet and author of *An Anthology of Grief* (2019) and *After the Grief* (2019). Ifrah was recently named Artist of the



Year in Canada and is also the Canadian Individual Poetry Slam Champion for 2017, making her the first woman to hold the national title. Poet and educator Ladan Osman is of Somali descent. Poems of hers have appeared in a variety of prestigious literary journals, many of which focus on her Somali and Muslim roots. Poems based on her Somali and Muslim roots have found their way into a variety of high-profile literary publications. *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony* (2016) has been written by Ladan Osman; she was born in Somalia. She earned a bachelor's degree from Otterbein College and a Master of Fine Arts from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin. Her acclaimed book, "The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony," secured the esteemed Sillerman 1st Book Prize. The titles of the selected anthologies arouse curiosity in the researcher, the terms such as grief, birth and kitchen dwellers inspire the researcher to read, analyze and draw conclusions with reference to the place of Somali women in these selected anthologies.

The study used Purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is one of the non-probability sampling techniques that may be used in research. A sample that is representative of the total, as defined by Kothari (2004), is a sample selected with the intention of being representative, also known as an intentional or judgment sampling. The sample size of the proposed study will include all sections that depict the aspect of the place of women in three contemporary diaspora Somali female anthologies; *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony*, *Teaching My Mother How to give Birth* and *An Anthology of Grief*.

#### *Data Analysis*

In this study, a qualitative data analysis approach was employed, specifically utilizing textual analysis as the primary method for examining the collected data. Textual analysis is a detailed methodology that involves the decoding and deconstructive examination of texts. In this particular research, content analysis was the chosen strand of textual analysis, with a special emphasis on thematic and stylistic elements within the selected poems. The analysis was strategically guided by the research objectives, ensuring a focused examination of the textual material that aligned with the study's goals. Furthermore, theoretical frameworks such as post-feminism theory and stylistics were integrated into the textual analysis to critically examine the societal norms that confine women to specific roles. This theoretical lens helped to highlight and critique the patriarchal structures that mandate specific social positions for women.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis is within a feminist framework. Feminism places emphasis on highlighting the oppression of women and driving their emancipation. The current texts are within a diaspora space hence showing how oppression is as a result of intersectionality. "*Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of various social classifications such as race, socioeconomic status, and gender, and how they intersect to shape the experiences and opportunities of individuals or groups. This concept recognizes that these categories overlap and interact, often resulting in compounded forms of discrimination or disadvantage*" (Oxford Dictionary). Thus, in the three anthologies the oppression of women is beyond religion and its practice and they have sought an outlet of their subjugation through poetry. The analysis therefore shows how feminism shapes worldviews as revealed by the three poets. The analysis shows how the three poets from a patriarchal society that prefers women best seen than heard have found a way to express their worldviews.

*Emancipation of women in Somali society as reflected in Osman (2015), 'The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony'*

*The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony* by Ladan Osman raises questions on whose testimony is valid, and whose testimony is worth recording? Osman portrays his female speakers as

asserting and reaffirming themselves, frequently employing persistent questioning as a means to assert their authority. *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony*' is about race, displacement, and colonialism and the speakers in her work try to reach beyond their primary, apparent dimensions and better communicate. *The Kitchen-Dweller's Testimony* is about love and longing, divorce, distilled desire, and all the ways we injure ourselves and one another. This section focuses on how Osman brings out the emancipation of women in Somali society.

*Women's defiance to unfair structures*

The textual analysis reveals how women defy the set structures – legal/ social/ political restrictions in order to liberate themselves. For instance, women choose when to obey orders and when to break them as shown in the poem “*My father drops his Larynx*” Osman (2015) below:

One morning when my mother took my sister  
to the daycare past the church, in the wrong way  
to school after my brother was already waking  
with his friends my father called me  
He was not on the love seat behind coffee table...  
Please help me. He said He vomited water  
A hard ,white thing fell into bowl and I tried to stop him  
From flushing...  
“Don't leave me,” he said.  
“Don't tell your mother.”

She stays by his side thus obeying the first request but later disobeys the second one as she tells not just the mother but everyone else, thus playing a role of a witness.

The poem *Silhouette Osman* (2015) explores issues of gender inequality but she is ready to rise above them as shown:

"I am afraid of them,"  
"their smell, their cotton, their expensive running shoes,  
their faces so hard to read  
when they make odd-placed sighs  
at black people histories. There is not one bright color."...  
My voice is small as it asks,  
What will it matter to them if I make a book?  
I am one poet. Isn't there space for me?"

Osman's poem above uses questioning as a strategy to assert women and reassert in an attempt to establish authority. The above poem is about white academics that Osman encounters in this milieu. She sets a scene and places her persona in it, then moves from description to interrogation: "*My voice is small as it asks, / What will it matter to them if I make a book? / I am one poet. Isn't there space for me?*" Osman recognizes that through poetry women fight for equal treatment and civil rights. Her assertiveness is depicted when she chooses to write despite the odds being against her. She demands for her space, she writes,

“...I am one poet  
Isn't there a space for me?”

Osman fights for her space against history being primarily told from a male perspective. She goes on to mention that she has intangible qualities further displaying her assertiveness as shown:

“The colonizers couldn’t have dreamed it,  
The preoccupation with the heights of my soul  
My intangible qualities, if I only the  
Silhouette  
of shadow. If this poet is white in third  
World countries,  
What am I here? It’s possible I’m just like  
The wind in the curtains ...”

Osman's depiction of assertiveness in the poem underscores how women poets have forged networks to bolster each other, leading to significant transformations within the realm of poetry. The poem illuminates how women poets have innovatively reshaped poetry's conventions, themes, and establishments, carving out space for their own experiences and voices. Osman further through her technique of questioning, she fights against the silencing of the women's voice as shown: Isn't there space for me? She asks. As she further digs deep in her place in poetry as she uses the image of a large bird as shown:

**A large bird**

What'd you want?  
Should I die so you can take this bed?  
It looked sad and faced westwards  
Eyes jaundiced. So I sat up  
And told it to leave leave  
I flapped my wrists  
It turned from me facing west  
A breeze lifted a collar of feathers  
I was again it, myself  
By then I was ready to go crazy  
And then it flew away (Osman, 2015)

The poem above shows that Osman is not ready to relent but to confront all the forces that may try to try to silence her voice just like she fights the large bird.

The poem *Admonitions*' Osman (2015) shows that even though girls are brought up to be reserved, in the poem the poet captures the picture of an assertive girl. She writes;

**ADMONITIONS**

*I always kept my knees together, even  
When I washed myself.*

*I knew the story of Mary. The miracle  
Conception.  
Maybe I would walk too many times on the  
Rusty railing out back  
like gymnastic, like I was told not to  
My aunts said girls who weren't cut had  
Dirty shame  
Could get pregnant just like that, hennaed  
Fingers snap  
Niece they'd say kohd eyes kind. Don't  
Run so fast Don't walk too far  
Don't play outside after sunset  
There are bad men in the bushes. Only  
Jinns go out when it's dark*

In the beginning of the poem the persona who sounds like a conformist turns out to be independent minded by opting to go against being reserved and instead to be outgoing like a gymnast and fighting the evil in the society such as sexual abuse.

This poem *Western gate Osman(2015)* challenges the notions of women been mere home makers by implying that women can be free if they let their imagination go rein free :

They say women's dreams stay indoors.  
These days I dream an ocean under the bed.  
I wake up and watch its tide.  
I'm myself but also a large black bird,  
like the crows near oceans.  
I sit up in bed. I perch on the concrete sill.  
I'm big enough to slap pavement on impact,  
take running steps to land.

I shout for myself to fly  
but only look back at myself  
and the water rises  
so the whole room smells like salted water  
and soaked beans. Have you ever tried to walk  
when the water recedes, leaving a chainmail pattern  
in the sand, feet sinking? Have you ever  
tried to walk watching water move  
and fallen right into it?  
The sinking woman will try to make waves  
a column, its froth a steady handhold

The persona in the poem above is a woman who is challenging the concepts of domesticity. In the poem, “*Western Gate*” Osman (2015), we see a woman character who dreams beyond set limits. The poet writes;

“They say women’s dreams stay indoors  
These days I dream on ocean under the bed.”

This is in as much as the imagination remains free: “*I’m myself but also a large black bird, a bird that not only soars but serves as a symbolic representation of the health and viability of a community*” (Osman, 2015). The poet portrays a go-getter woman character who is willing to shatter the ceiling of limitations. The use of symbolism. The large black bird shows the aspect of movement without limits just like a bird that flies from one place to another, unlimited enjoying the freedom of movement, the persona says she is free to move.

The poem encapsulates the principles of African feminism, which involve a reevaluation of matriarchal lineages subject to both internal and external definitions. The persona resists to be caught in the space of simplistic binaries and is ready to fight against gender discrimination as shown:

“Have you ever tried to walk  
when the water recedes, leaving a chainmail pattern  
in the sand, feet sinking? Have you ever  
tried to walk watching water move  
and fallen right into it?  
The sinking woman will try to make waves  
a column, its froth a steady handhold.” (Osman, 2015)

This highlights a woman character out to solve a problem rather than resign to fate. Even though the expectations are that women must submit or be suppressed which the poet likens to sinking, the woman persona highlights how one can turn a sinking scenario to a steady one. The poet writes;

“... I can’t ignore the shapes floating past my retina.  
I can’t submit...”

This brings out a non-conformist personality thus emphasizes how women characters are emancipating themselves from the rigors of patriarchy; by saying she cannot submit shows assertiveness in her quest to earning freedom.

In the above stanza the persona makes a declaration that, she shall not be oppressed and shall not turn a blind eye to the realities facing her. She is ready to push back in resistance to the forces of patriarchal oppression and subjugation. The poem fights against hyper segmentation where women are meant to be confined in their homes. Such segmentation makes women unable to unite and organize themselves in the public spheres. This then limits them to access education, employment, and political participation and decision-making bodies.

### *Fight against gender inequality*

In theory, the Quran and Islamic law uphold the principle of equal rights for both men and women. However, in practice, this equality is not always realized. The decline of the first caliphate contributed to a deterioration in the status of women. Examples include their exclusion from public life, social withdrawal, limited access to education, inability to seek

divorce even in cases of adultery or abuse, restrictions on solo travel, exclusion from leadership roles, and limitations on working outside the home. These restrictive laws often provoke feelings of repression and rebellion among women, prompting some to seek refuge in Western secular societies. However, this approach can ultimately lead to disappointment and failure (Kari, 2002). Currently among the challenges Somalia is undergoing is the emancipation of women because of its deeply entrenched patriarchal culture. For instance, Somalia's is still a culture dominated by men where many women feel they are unable to speak up or be heard. Women assertiveness is reflected in the poem "*Clearing the land*" (Osman, 2015). The poet represents the woman asserting herself in a male dominated setting as shown:

My heart is a mother who wants a farm.  
My body  
The daughter who receives land from a man  
She doesn't want as a lover. The land  
Squats  
My heart's farm not offered but found  
Sideways  
I need a little less of it. I won't use a tiller  
Here.

The above poem shows a woman who is fighting against the inheritance stereotype. The woman asserts herself as rightful owner of the land in a male dominated society. For a considerable period, Somalia has maintained a patriarchal social structure, characterized by the predominance of male authority and the pervasive discrimination and violence faced by women based on their gender. The poem above shows how poetry is used as an instrument of promoting gender equality. The poem brings out the assertiveness of the female persona when it comes to inheritance of property.

Daughters assert themselves when they see their mothers being mistreated. In the poem "The offended Tongue". We see the persona bring out discrimination of women by men and she says if her mother won't fight, she will. She blames the aspect of discrimination against women on men "*fathers*" (Osman, 2015). The poet writes;

“...It is always a father  
When a girl's shoes and her mother's shoes are put away  
While the men arrange theirs like busy teeth at the front door  
If our mothers cannot be the wind,  
I am the nail head that waits  
For the corner of your eye  
When you pass too close to a wall...”

The above poem reveals women as a group marginalized by patriarchy. The persona expresses dissatisfaction due to lack of recognition of women and lack of prioritization of gender equality in the society. The study notes that women are increasingly inclined to confront patriarchal systems due to their reinforcement of gender disparities and exacerbation of risks and vulnerabilities, particularly in domains of critical importance to humanitarian efforts. The

analysis in Chapter 4 reveals how patriarchy intersects with gender-based violence and restricts women's and girls' access to education, inheritance rights, and safety, perpetuating the notion of women's confinement to domestic roles.

The poet also presents women fighting against unfair submission as shown in the poem “*water*” (Osman, 2015) below:

I came to you carrying water. I came to you  
Carrying silted water from a well...  
In our days together I have walked  
Between well ...  
I am subject to you in the way the water is  
subject to the moon.  
You are subject to me in the way a wall is subject to its roof.  
And like the water I expect you to come upon me all of a sudden like flesh out of a slit in cloth...

The persona in the above poem questions the notion of women submitting to their husbands yet they do not do the same. Osman seem to be questioning the mutuality between submission and equality.

Women criticize men’s lack of affection for women. In “*Situations Wanted*”. The persona asserts that men should learn to love women. Just as women are taught to love men. The persona says;

“...He must know how to love his shadow how to say , 'I love you' even to the  
periphery...”

Women asserts themselves on matter sex in marriage. They question their role and criticize that men usually want women only when they ‘men’ are on heat. In Osman (2015) “*A Dove Sings for young Lovers*” The persona says;

“...The song asks, how come they keep wanting me  
When they’re in heat?”

### *Fight against sexual objectification of women*

Sexual objectification refers to the perception and/or treatment of individuals, typically women and girls, as mere objects, particularly for sexual gratification, rather than recognizing them as fully-fledged human beings. This perspective reduces women and girls to objects of desire, focusing solely on their physical attributes, rather than acknowledging their complete identities, which encompass emotions, personalities, and behaviors beyond sexual acts. The poems analyzed reveal that the objectification of women permeates Somali community. The data shows that in the Somali community women are objectified, whereas their male counterparts are accorded subject status. Such beliefs and attitudes are passed onto generations through the

socialization process. Osman in the poems fights against sexual objectification of women as in Osman (2015) “*The glass Images*”:

...A man in a store taking enhancement pills  
So, he can expose himself to Barbie...  
Yu don't tell me if she's the real Barbie  
or the kind who is too big in the middle  
and wears smudged lipstick...  
...I don't wear shorts for my husband.  
I'm not used to showing myself..

Line 2 and 3 reveal how men take pills for the purposes of sexual exploitation and sexual violence. Line 10 and 11 shows instances where women refuse to dress indecently for the purpose of pleasing their husbands. Also, in Osman (2015) “*To the Angel to Account on the Holy Night*” the poet presents women who are fighting against sexual abuse as such:

“I am not the woman who sells shining pots  
Ceramic dishes for burning scented coals  
And gold for every size of wrist and finger  
...If the heart is the flesh that taints the body isn't mine the spiderweb of a spoiling apple.  
Whose hand has sliced it open? Who is holding the knife?  
Close the apple, I want to say to the Angel who takes account  
Leave it. I am not ready for you tonight.  
I am not ready any night”

The women character in the poem above denounces objectification of women for promiscuity. The poem shows how women confront the aspect of sexual objectification as shown:

Leave it. I am not ready for you tonight.  
I am not ready any night”

#### *Divorce as a form of resistance to unfair Islamic cultural norms*

Osman's poems also show that women use divorce as a form of resistance in Islamic cultural norms. In Islam, marriage is regarded as a highly esteemed and sanctioned union. Nonetheless, the termination of a Muslim marriage can transpire through various means: unilateral divorce initiated by the husband, termed as “*talaaq*” mutual agreement, referred to as *khula* or *mubarat*; and judicial dissolution at the petition of either the wife or husband. Judicial divorce represents women's assertion against the hegemony of local interpretations and implementations of family law.

In Osman (2015) “*That which Scatters and Breaks Apart*” , the persona – a woman is in a strenuous relationship. But seek for divorce as a way of finding peace as shown:

“*Everywhere they turn, the walks ask, why,*



Why not,  
From every space someone calls a question  
And their echoes so many answers, its  
Impossible to hear

Save me, he calls  
Open me, she calls. Divorce me  
Their despair is a bird in an abandoned  
Nest,...

“...You are here because you said  
I hate you instead of I’m sorry...”

Reading the poem further brings out the assertiveness of a woman speaking her mind. The poet show that women are aware of their right to divorce which may be granted by judicial intervention (*tafriq*) and usually granted by a religious judge (*qadi*), and is available in instances of abuse or abandonment.

In Osman (2015) “*The Kitchen Dweller Testifies*” the woman narrator leaves a strenuous relationship as she testifies against him:

“My husband has attempted murder with  
My own heart  
Percuss my chest and feel its resonance...  
Ask him about the night he told me he  
Didn’t know me  
And untangled me from himself like the  
Tassels of an old shawl...  
“...I cursed myself for leaving him without my papers and gold.  
How could I leave without my two of my three wealth’s...?”

In the above poem the persona testifies against an abuse. Moreover, whereas a woman is expected to apologize even when she has been offended, the woman persona here shows one who speaks her mind.

Some women opt to leave abusive relationships. In Osman (2015), “*Women, Ego, Shadow*” the poet writes;

“...Where has she packed her purse and gone off to this time?  
She could never tell if she would take the train north or south...  
...When turn to see if she’s there, she goes  
I am looking for myself

If you...see her  
Tell her I have a knife  
For the place between her shoulder blades  
Tell her she's missing all my wilderness and if she doesn't come on soon,  
I'll have to go for my shadow, and myself knows  
Shadow's the kind who don't take her shoes off for nobody..."

This brings out how a woman emancipates herself from the jaws of an abusive husband. The husband acknowledges that his estranged wife is one who doesn't bow to anybody.

*Emancipation of women in Somali society as reflected in Shire (2011), "Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth"*

This section focuses on emancipation of women in Somali society as reflected in "*Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*" by Warsan Shire. Warsan Shire's poetry engraves the postmodern condition of both unbelonging and displacement, on the one hand, and an excess of belonging, on the other. Her work represents supremely and foregrounds the subject of transculturalism in the so-called "New Diaspora". Shire's poetry reflects on women's empowerment in war-ravaged Somali and the gendering of war and conflict with the corollaries of misogyny, rape, mutilation, killings and loss as discussed in section 4.2. This section therefore focuses on emancipation of women in Somali society as refugees and migrants.

*Women and Religion*

The data analyzed reveals that religion has a critical position in the lives of Somali women, since they are made to feel like the 'other' gender -inferior- by both men and religion. Moreover, after displacement occasioned by civil strife in their home country, Somali women find often find solace in religion (Islam) as they grapple with the challenges of been refugees. Shire's poems reveal that religion provides comfort in times of difficulty as reflected in Shire (2011), "*What Your Mother Told You After Your Father Left*":

I did not beg him to stay  
because I was begging God  
that he would not leave

In the poem above the mood is that of resignation. The persona who is the mother resigns herself to God since the husband had decided to leave. The persona, highlighting the challenges of subjugated women illuminates that socialization had taught women to accept their men's decisions without question. The level of despair is felt when the persona instead of confronting her husband opts to turn to God (Religion). The data illustrates that women interpret their religious beliefs through various perspectives, encompassing spatial arrangements, daily rituals, social interactions, and cognitive processes regarding their existence. Religion also provides them with a significant framework of rituals and beliefs that offer support during periods of exile, displacement, resettlement, and emotional turmoil. The woman approaches God as a spirit in Islam who is a neutral supreme being because the teaching of Islam (at least in theory) is that none of the two genders is superior to the other. It is clear women turn to religion as the only avenue where women's concerns are heard. The patriarchal nature

of the society has placed certain expectations on 'the proper woman'. In this case, the proper woman is submissive and demure and there should always accept the dictates of her husband without question.

### *Hurt and Healing*

Shire's poetry explores the pain inflicted by various intersecting factors and the anguish experienced by the diaspora, leading to turmoil. However, the poets also find solace and offer hope for their own healing journeys. They depict women undergoing the process of healing from the absence of fathers, the loss of their motherlands, displacement into unwelcome environments, enduring unwanted advances from men or family members, and striving to forge their own identities. Healing is achieved through a combination of religion and spirituality as part of the persona's healing and intersectionality. The poem below expresses hurt and healing as a way of moving forward of a woman:

"When We Last Saw Your Father"  
He was sitting in the hospital parking lot  
in a borrowed car,  
counting the windows of the building and  
guessing which one was glowing with his mistake." (Shire, 2011)

The persona in the above poem reveals a woman who is experiencing hurt and due to an absent father. From a feminist point of view the poet seems to ask who is a father? And that a man who only took part in the biological process of conception but is absent during the nurturing of child (absentee father), does not deserve to be called a father. Shire (2011, p.) "When We Last Saw Your Father" raises the fundamental question, does a man whose only participation in a child's life could reduced to "he sired you and left" qualified to be called a father? The voice in the poem is that of an abandoned single mother and the tone reveals the pain she feels because of the actions of a man who impregnated her and disappeared from her life. The persona shares that the "father" only came close to the parking lot, and refers to the child as a "mistake," a word that can inflict deep and lasting hurt upon the child. Describing a child in such a manner can cause wounds that may never fully heal. The child may have remained unaware of this if not for the mother's disclosure. This underscores the significant influence mothers have on shaping the voices and identities of their children.

The voice of the mother is that of anger. Although by having raised the child the poet shows how women embrace the hurt, pain and suffering they go through.

Hurt and healing is shown by both Africa and Women as shown in the poem ugly below:

**Ugly**  
"... Your daughter is ugly.  
She knows loss intimately,  
carries whole cities in her belly.  
  
As a child, relatives wouldn't hold her.  
She was splintered wood and sea water.  
They said she reminded them of the war..."

The poem above portrays the concept of beauty in Somali culture women's beauty in society by an outside appearance that is outward beauty, as by the first line of the poem which asserts that "your daughter is ugly". The poem further shows that her daughter's beauty is compared to the war-the colonialism, the African legacy. Through the use of imagery war is compared to her daughter carries whole cities in her belly. This painfully reminds her of the war. The poem shows the effect of weaponization of sex during war. In war many women are raped and sometimes they conceive children who live a life of stigma because they were not conceived out of love but rape. The poet depicts the mother and daughter as being familiar with loss, but primarily, it is the loss of community that resonates deeply. This loss extends to a broader sense of loss, encompassing Africa itself, which is described as carrying "*whole cities in her belly.*"

In the same poem acceptance of pain and suffering is shown and progress made by women as they face the challenges that result due to war:

On her fifteenth birthday you taught her  
how to tie her hair like rope  
and smoke it over burning frankincense.

You made her gargle rosewater  
and while she coughed,  
said *macaanto* girls like you shouldn't smell  
of lonely or empty

The third and fourth stanza show how women carry out their gender role of raising children in spite of the conditions they were birthed in. From the poem mentorship roles are shown: Shire (2011) "*On her fifteenth birthday you taught her how to tie her hair like rope and smoke it over burning frankincense*" and providing and caring for them: *You made her gargle rosewater and while she coughed*. The poem reveals the role of the mother as the opportunity to bestow life not only to offspring but also to society at large. The mother is the sole provider for the children; mothers teach children the basics and are refuges from the earliest memories as shown:

"...You are her mother.  
Why did you not warn her,  
hold her like a rotting boat  
and tell her that men will not love her  
if she is covered in continents,  
if her teeth are small colonies,  
if her stomach is an island, if her thighs are borders?

What man wants to lay down  
and watch the world  
burn in his bedroom?

Your daughter's face is a small riot,  
her hands are a civil war,  
a refugee camp behind each ear,  
a body littered with ugly things..."

The poem reveals the rituals the daughter performs, and all the warnings from her mother, the isolation from family members and men not desiring her. The poem ends with the healing process where regardless of all the undesirable words relating to both the daughter and the war, the woman is resilient and strong as shown:

"...but God,  
doesn't she wear  
the world well..."

The poem ends on a positive note as the woman stands tall. This implies that women are arising above the society, patriarchy and colonization which cannot bring them down no matter what.

#### *Women's voice about home, identity and exile*

The poems present the concept of home from different perspectives. In some poems, for the persona home is where is domiciled at a particular point in time while in other cases the persona feels that home is defined by the atmosphere created by the relationship you have with the one(s) you share it with. In this context home is a place the persona had to flee from for varied reasons. There is a tone of longing and a mood of disillusionment in some of the poems because no matter the travails of being refugees in foreign land, the situation back home is worse. In Shire's poems, women were exiled from home by either choice or circumstances and have felt the wrath as foreigners, thus their poetry provided a place of safety. Shire's like other poets in diaspora have embraced poetry because of its therapeutic effect on them. Also, coming from a patriarchal society where women are to be seen not heard, poetry gives them of airing their worldview in an unhindered manner. The poets find different ways of coping with the diaspora; they turn to their religions and find solace in celebrating who they are and where they come from. In Shire (2011, p.) "*Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*", the poem shows women trying to define their identity:

#### **Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)**

Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth.  
God, do you know how difficult it is,  
to talk about the day your own city dragged you by the hair, past the old prison, past the school  
gates, past the burning torsos erected on poles like flags?  
When I meet others like me I recognise the longing, the missing, the memory of ash on their  
faces.  
No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.  
I've been carrying the old anthem in my mouth for so long that there's no space for another song,  
another tongue or another language.  
I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs.  
I tore up and ate my own passport in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't afford to

forget

In the poem “*Conversations About Home*” Shire (2011) tries to make one understand the flight of refugees at diaspora by making it part of who she is, part of her intersectionality. The poem is an intersection between exile, women and Islam which makes this poem so powerful, so relevant and so true. The persona has memories of home but they are memories of a home country she had to flee from. However, even in diaspora her heart is in her home country as seen in that she still holds her country’s national anthem dear. The persona has also refused to learn other languages because she cherishes the language of her motherland. The persona reveals that socially they had been rejected by their host country and now they are on their way out of the country that they had fled to in the hope of finding refuge.

Warsen Shire as a woman is the voice of the voiceless in the society as presented in the conversation’ of this poem. Shire presents pain and suffering through the hybrid position they occupy in society. Shire inhabits an intersectionalspace of race, religion and migration. The first lines reveal how novel social bodies and by extension personalities emerge with the opening lines,

Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth. God, do you know how difficult it is, to talk about the day your own city dragged you by the hair, past the old prison, past the school gates, past the burning torsos erected on poles like flags? (Lines 1-4) (Shire, 2011)

Shire seems to be pleading the host countries to empathize with refugees since home is extremely dangerous- as shown by the metaphor of a shark. The poem also reveals how Somali citizens fight each other. The poem emphasizes the hostile, inhospitable environment in which the citizens live under as shown:

Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth

The stanza employs personification, portraying the country as expelling its citizens, to illustrate the profound loss of home and identity experienced by those seeking refuge from violence and war. The poet further emphasizes the indignity of this loss, likening the feeling to being forcefully dragged by the hair.

“...God, do you know how difficult it is, to talk about the day your own city dragged you  
by the hair, past the old prison past the school gates,  
past the burning torsos erected on poles like flags?”

In Islam hair is a source of pride and beauty. Thus, when it is pulled out it shows lack of respect and an act to humiliate a woman. Shire therefore through her voice exposes the pain and humiliations women faced as they fled their home. The flag in the poem is ironically presented since instead of identifying a country, feelings of patriotism and nationhood among its citizens in the poem it shows how the flag is a symbol of loss of identity. In the poem Shire reveals her home forced her to leave because of the war, dragged her past old buildings and dead bodies. She says:

“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark”.

Shire shows that people do not willingly leave home but war makes refugees out of innocent ordinary men and women. The last part of the conversation ends with a nostalgic tone and creates a sad mood to the reader as Shire shows that the desire to stay and retain identity is something that every human being craves for and is made as a call to the plight of the refugees to the hosting nations as shown:

I know a shame that shrouds, totally engulfs. I tore up and ate my  
in an airport hotel. I'm bloated with language I can't  
afford to forget (Shire, 2011 p.24)

The above lines show how refugees struggle with identity crisis. The aspect of language as a symbol of identity and belonging is mentioned. Being exposed to a new language leaves them bloated which implies that refers to a feeling of discomfort and the sense of hopelessness which persists and will continue to shape their identity. This is shown in the line below:

I'm bloated with language I can't afford to forget

The poem shows how refugees struggle with staying in a place where people speak a different language. Shire interrogates identity crisis in stanza two of Shire (2011) "*Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*" as shown:

"...They ask me how did you get here? Can't you see it on my body? The  
Libyan desert red with immigrant bodies, the Gulf of Aden bloated,  
thecity of Rome with no jacket. I hope the journey meant more than  
miles..."

Shire shows how refugees struggle with identify questions as shown above. The poem illustrates the risks and vulnerabilities encountered by individuals who pursue a new life away from their ancestral homes. It compares these perils to a tangible scar on the body. The stanza vividly portrays the staggering loss of life in this journey, depicting the Gulf of Aden as swollen with the bodies of immigrants, symbolizing death. On the other hand the inhuman conditions that the refugees are exposed to are highlighted:

Thecity of Rome with no jacket.

The line shows the perilous Mediterranean sea crossing African migrants make from Libya to Italy with no life jackets. In case the boat capsizes, many of the African migrants fleeing their home countries drown. The use of personification shows the cruel life the refugees face when in foreign countries whereby the host citizens do not welcome them but see them as foreign in their land.

Shire seems to be pleading against the hostility and loneliness that refugees go through as summarized in the concluding stanza:

I hear them say *go home*, I hear them say *fucking immigrants, fucking refugees*. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know that stability

is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second; the next  
you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency  
waiting for its return... (Shire, 2011, p.27).

The use of abusive language *go home*, I hear them say *fucking immigrants, fucking refugees* shows lack of empathy by the host countries and a sense of hatred and indifference, which is attached to the plight of refugees.

In summary Shire as a woman manages to expose both the physical and social betrayals that refugees go through during the war. The poet likens the experience of once being loved to the early stages of a relationship. This shift in a formerly stable country results in its gradual descent into instability, ultimately crumbling overnight.

### *Female body transformation*

Shire employs the body in her poetry as a nebulous yet paradoxically powerful entity—simultaneously a locus of oppression and a locus of resistance aimed at liberation. This segment illustrates how, despite being subjected to oppression, the female body can defy the forces that uphold patriarchy and gender inequality. The poet shows how women bodies are sites of violation. In the poem “*Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)*” Shire (2011) uses the female body to recount the experience of flight and loss of home. The second stanza lines three and four narrates a mother grieving the loss of her children:

I hope the journey meant more than miles because  
all of my children are in the water.

The lines above show that the persona is anxious about the safety of her children. The persona states that her children are on water in reference to a dreadful journey that refugees make on boats and ships across seas while heading to European lands seeking asylum. In the same stanza line five the persona discusses the female body as shown:

I want to make love, but my hair smells of war and running and running.  
I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young  
and asleep

The lines above show the pain that the female body went through during the war. The persona recounts that her hair smells of war and running and running. Yet in Muslim the woman's hair is a sign of beauty and pride. The pain and the trauma she suffered are thus inscribed on her body. The poet further shows how women endured the pain inflicted on their bodies as depicted in Shire (2011) “*Maymuum's Mouth*”. “*Maymuum's Mouth*” is a story of a young immigrant who is settling in the West. The poet shows how Maymuum had to adjust her speech in order to adapt to the new society. In this way she also loses her identity:

“...Maymuum lost her accent with the help of her local community college  
Most evenings she calls me to talk about the pros and cons of  
heating molasses in the microwave to remove body hair” (lines 2 –3)  
(Shire, 2011)



The lines above show how the persona in the poem makes accent and physical transformations as a way of fitting into the new social environment she occupies. First she loses her accent as the first line in the poem indicates which meant a loss to her former identity in order to gain acceptance in the new society. Line 2 and 3 show that the persona transforms her physical appearance in order to be accommodated in the new environment. In this new place body hair is only desirable at the head thus a woman with hair on arms and legs has to cut it so that they maintain their beauty as shown by the line: *heating molasses in the microwave to remove body hair*. Removal of hair from arms and legs to achieve smooth skin is regarded as being beautiful in most western cultures. The poet shows that the body goes through a process of transformation as it seeks approval in the new social space.

Maymuum also adjusts to new ways of making money as shown in line 4:

“...She has taken to dancing in front of strangers.

She lives next door to a Dominican who speaks to her in Spanish

whenever they pass each other in hallways

I know she smiles at him, front teeth stained from the fluoride in the water back home.” (Shire, 2011)

The line: *She has taken to dancing in front of strangers* refers to the new occupation that of a strip dancer in order to support herself. This is against Muslim religion where decent females are must cover themselves in a hijab or buibui while in public. The poet also shows how she has adjust to other cultures other than Somali. In the poem Maymuum also shares her experience back home as shown in lines 8-9:

“...We’ve received photos of her standing by a bridge, the

baby hair she’d hated all her slicked down like ravines.” (lines 8-9) (Shire, 2011)

The above description shows transformation, Maymuum has undergone in order to fit in the new social setting as shown in the photos. The poet shows how Maymuum as a woman is able to take charge of her life in a new environment. She changes her lifetime as a way of adjusting to life the Western culture.

### *Fight for freedom and resistance of unfair cultural norms*

In Shire (2011), ‘*Birds*’ we see the persona narrating how Sofia fights the cultural and sexual balance of power by tricking her husband that she was a virgin on their wedding night using pigeon blood as shown:

“Sofia used pigeon blood on her wedding night

Next day over the phone she told me

How her husband smiled when he saw the sheets” (Shire, 2011)

The lines above show how women have devised ways of conforming to unfair societal norms. Sofia has to devise ways to make her husband and mother-in-law believe that she was a virgin. The poet shows that women in their own way are trying to fight and subvert the double standards set in society. A woman is expected to be a virgin before marriage a norm that does not apply to men.

In the poem 'Fire' Shire (2011) shows how Women create their liberty and resistance around their bodies. The poem speaks of a couple who argued and the husband was made to leave the house because he beat his wife. In the second stanza the husband the demise of a dishonest husband whose wife burnt to death as narrated:

“...The wife, waiting for her husband to come home,  
doused herself in lighter fluid. On his arrival  
she jumped on him, wrapping her legs around  
his torso. The husband surprised at her sudden urge, carried  
his wife to the bedroom, where  
she straddled him on their bed, held his face  
against her chest and lit a match.” (Stanza 2 lines 13 – 19) (Shire, 2011)

The poem reveals that as much as the wife exerts revenge by burning her husband for his unfaithfulness, she also kills herself in the process. The last stanza of the poem shows that as the husband who left the family home after the quarrel while checking into a hotel meets a young man who remarks:

“...the rooms in this hotel are sweltering.  
Last night in bed I swear I thought  
my body was on fire.” (Stanza 3, lines 4-6) (Shire, 2011)

The lines above sounds as a premonition the man has of what his outcome may be. The poet uses the image of fire to compare how hot the rooms in the hotel were the previous night to body being on fire.

### *Emancipation of women in Somali society as reflected in Hussein (2019), 'An Anthology of Grief'*

In *An Anthology of Grief* the poet presents how poetry is used to distill human experience and emotions. Hussein (2019) *Anthology of Grief* encloses the themes of grief, diaspora, love and existing as a Somali woman. An anthology of grief speaks for itself in tales of defiance and love. The poems are about suffering and overcoming loss. The analysis in this section focuses on the different ways women overcome loss and pain.

### *Religion*

The text analysis of *An Anthology of Grief* shows the role of religion in the lives of Somali women. Somali women are made like lesser beings by both the men in their community and the religion they practice. The analysis shows that religion provides guidelines and comfort in times of difficulty as shown in the poem below:

The blood of Somali boy is still searching for a home

A wall to dry peacefully on  
Maybe this is why mama fled  
In search of a death  
That may approach sooner than we pray for it to  
“... Maybe this is why *hooyo*(mother) always says  
... *God, please do not take my children before me...*”

The persona in the above poem reveal cases of displacement as shown in the line *The blood of Somali boy is still searching for a home*. The persona makes a plea to God requesting that they should die since she doesn't know where they are. In the poem '*Black men Don't lie*' Hussein (2019, p.) Women are presented praying for their men as shown:

Here they don't pray  
Unless they are sure heaven is safer than this world  
Here we are an abundance of lonely and stillness  
Here we pray in our sleep and awake  
In our supplication, we ask God to keep us here  
For another moment

The poem shows how women rely on religion in difficult times. The persona says they run to God always: *Here we pray in our sleep and awake, in our supplication, we ask God to keep us here for another moment*. This reveals that prayer is part and parcel of their lifestyle even though their being is unpredictable.

Religion has been presented as a powerful institution for perpetuating sexism and patriarchal authority; it also has the potential to address the very problem of oppression as shown in Hussein (2019) *The birth and death of Somali boys* :

There are very little words and more prayer  
More supplication and begging  
When Somali pray,  
We ask God to keep our children alive  
Before their health and their wellness  
God if there is anything I ask you for  
It is to protect my child  
From the hands of other Somalis  
protect my child from himself  
protect him from his anger  
Keep him alive long enough

The poem above shows how religion can be a powerful instrument to deconstruct oppressive social stereotypes and to work to transform attitudes and social behavior as shown by the

persona revealing how they pray as Somali's and the challenges they are facing as a nation. Although gender discrimination is revealed as this poem advances:

I heard Habo supplicating to God  
Asking Allah to give her another Girl  
Because she doesn't know how  
To grieve quietly for a boy ...

God mantle your mercy  
on the unresolved carnage  
Surely the wound of man  
Is still burning clamor for the Somali kids

Hussein (2019) uses religion to show how it forms each one's identity. Religion thus, is a central part of women's identity and portrays a feminist view. For instance, the above stanzas reveal how oppression can take place within themselves and the societies they live in. It is obvious that patriarchy is entrenched in Somali community and that a boy child is valued more than a girl child. Thus, as much as the poem has a religious aspect it is not entirely religious. It shows how in Somali culture has controversies as shown:

“...The ciyaal baraf era is unburnt sage  
That sits uncomfortably  
In the battlefields of our own culture...”

In Hussein (2019), “*Reclamations*” the persona is directly addressing a God in a prayer. God is presented as encompassing, omnipresent, despite circumstances or reason as shown:

Yaa Allaah  
Protect me from my home  
I think its waging a war against me  
And *longing for me to return everyday*

Yaa Allaah  
Please give me children  
Who love me more than they fear my love.

Yaa Allaah  
When my mother passes  
Please instill in me  
The strength to wash her body  
Aameen

Following feminism the poem above reveals the role of religion in women's lives. The poem shows how women's experiences are understood within the realm of religion and in a less patriarchal context. The poem shows the spiritual experiences of women while they are away from home. Thus, feminism as a theory reveals aspects of intersectionality and gender.

### *Grieving and healing*

Grieving in *'An Anthology of Grief'* has been depicted as an important way women use to cop up with pain and loss. Grief is a natural response to loss. It's the emotional suffering you feel when something or someone you love is taken away. A textual analysis of the poems reveals that women resort to grieving their husbands when they die due to war. In Hussein (2011) *'Black men Don't lie'* theme of Grief is presented as shown:

But to live in a world that makes waking up  
More painful than my blood drawn?  
They take our men then they tell us to grieve quietly  
Black women don't know how to grieve quietly

The poem above reveals the concept of feminine grieving where women are depicted to grieve loudly. On the other hand, the poet represents men as taking revenge as a form of grieving as shown in the poem: *"The birth and death of Somali boys"*, Hussein (2019) says

“...I heard my mother say  
Walaalo is naceb, qabuurade badiyaan  
This means: brothers who hate one another  
Increase the graves in numbers...  
I've forgotten how to cry for my brothers  
who learn how to kill one another  
Quicker than they learn to speak Somali...”

The poet reveals that men instead of grieving they resort to violence: *brothers who hate one another... who learn how to kill one another.*

In Hussein (2019) *'The burnt land further'* the poet illustrates how women grieve about the destruction of their land as shown:

“...When a Somali woman is in mourning  
She brings her hands up to her head and says,

O God what has burnt our people like this?...”

The use of a rhetorical question provokes the fact that abstract ideas such as death may be beyond human understanding and its only God who may have answers.

### *Self-Love*

Embracing self-love establishes a foundation for how one is perceived by the world and subsequently treated; it's the choice between placing oneself on a pedestal or allowing the world to trample over. Self-love and self-care often intertwine, as nurturing both oneself and others is an expression of love. Self-love entails accepting and prioritizing one's own well-being and happiness, a fundamental aspect of human nature. It serves as a prerequisite for fully engaging in the abundant flow of light and love present in the world around us, ultimately shaping the identities of poets and individuals alike.

In the poem "*Reclamations*" Hussein (2019, p.) creates a persona who expresses self-love in spite the challenges she faces as shown:

"The innermost part of my aloneness  
Usually disavows a man's love  
It recoils itself into the basement of my ineptitude  
And when I catch myself  
On the wings of I love you too  
It is because I got tired of the piercing silence  
When I do not give you what was mine to begin with"

The above poem shows a woman who has decided to love herself even after being oppressed and silenced into thinking less of herself for years. The woman has learnt to love herself and cares less about men: *The innermost part of my aloneness, Usually disavows a man's love.*

The Hussein (2019) "*To surrender oneself*" shows a woman who has decided to give herself love and opt out of romantic relationships when they feel under-loved as shown:

I fell perilously into love and then out of it  
When I started leaving my joy  
on the kitchen table  
I gave portion to myself  
In quantities that were too  
large for his appetite

Self-Love brings the persona a lot of joy and satisfaction as shown: *I fell perilously into love and then out of it, when I started leaving my joy on the kitchen table.* This clearly shows that women emancipate themselves from desperate situations by accepting and loving themselves. The woman persona opts out of love relationship as she feels the love she gave wasn't reciprocated. The persona even rejoices that as much as the mother was raised in difficult times and in extreme circumstances she is still strong. The resilience of being an African is further revealed as shown:

"...Let my mother ascend through the ashes of 1991

Stand as a proof that Africa does not die  
That African woman does not die  
Without reminding the world  
That we are excessively gold (Hussein, 2019)

The above stanza shows how it is a brave thing when a black woman loves herself; being oppressed and silenced into thinking less of herself for years as shown: *let my mother ascend through the ashes of 1991*. The persona has learned to love herself as an African. The poem shows how African women are finally accepting themselves: *That we are excessively gold*.

In the poem ‘*The Black Hoe / Women*’ Hussein (2019). The poet highlights the power women wield over men.

“... Call us the mortuary abyss  
Some have long fallen into  
While trying to find a home  
To place their love-  
Or a black hole  
And how we are the gravitational effect  
Nothing can escape from.”

#### *Reflections about empathy, acceptance, and forgiveness*

Some poems are about empathy, acceptance and forgiveness as a way of moving forward. The poems reveal that empathetic understanding can encourage acceptance and forgiveness among the members of different social groups in the Somali society as shown:

“...Our women are a world of bodies  
Being forced to lament  
Forced to exist futility  
Because we’do it too much  
Allow it to endure the world so willingly  
Our bodies, too candid and forgiving...”

Forgiveness means to let go of the feelings of anger and vengeance towards someone who has wronged you. The poem shows how the women embraced self-forgiveness as a process of self-acceptance and relinquishing self-hate. Reconciliation is part and parcel of Somali society where reconciling the present is emphasized.

Some poems are about why unity of people is critical. Islam, as a religion, encourages empathy. When we are empathetic towards one another, we build each other up emotionally. In the poem ‘*The birth and Death of Somali Boy*’ Hussein (2019), shows a woman reminding men to embrace forgiveness that can repair damage and can restore trust between different members of community as shown:

“...When my unbounded blood Brother Ahmed  
Hit the ground of Eaton center  
And when Abdulle died weeks later  
Stripped naked of all nationalism and goodness...  
My brother Mohamud died in Malaysia  
But nobody will tell me how  
or if ever he found God again before doing so  
Ibrahim Ali sprang intelligence  
The way you men kill each other

The poem shows how women play a role in peace building and preaching healing which will not come without forgiveness. The persona enumerates her own loss which evokes empathy from the audience. Empathy helps us to fully understand the pain of those who we want to help. Empathy builds a good relationship among the members of the community.”

### *Women empowerment*

Women unite for the common good. In the poem ‘*Learning from Hooyo (mother)*’ Hussein (2019) rallies women to unite amidst male domination.

“... She said women should know  
How to put themselves together  
Before the men take them apart...”

Women should arise and talk about gender violence. Women face violence in marriage. In the poem ‘*To the Death Of Me*’ Hussein (2019) writes;

You killed me over and over again  
But still, you searched for my corpse  
Held me while you wailed to God  
Confessing out the reasons  
Why you’d never kill me again...

In the poem ‘*Mama’s Land*’ Hussein (2019) poet compares male dominance over women to that of colonizers over their subjects. She uses a critical tone to bring this out.

“... It bums us sometimes the way our men do  
... like the colonizers did  
When they tried to feed us a lifeless world.”

Men who are bent on finding fault in women are criticized. In the poem ‘*The Black Hole / Women*’ Hussein (2019) writes;

“... We met the men at the door  
And without greeting



They chewed at the corner of our grace;  
Swallowed us entirely  
And said we were hard to stomach.  
But what man can eat a buffet of goodness  
And be opposed by the desert of us?"

She goes further in criticism;

"... Or be content with the flavour a woman  
Without searching for the bitter  
In a mouth plagued  
By whatever is less than gratitude."

## CONCLUSION

At the heart of these literary works lies a narrative of emancipation – a journey of self-discovery, empowerment, and liberation from patriarchal constraints. Despite the pervasive influence of androcentric cultural norms, Somali women assert their agency and challenge traditional gender roles. Through acts of defiance, resistance, and solidarity, they carve out spaces of autonomy and self-expression, defying the limitations imposed upon them by society. The poems also serve as powerful platforms for amplifying the voices of Somali women and shedding light on their experiences of oppression and marginalization. From the horrors of war and displacement to the insidious forms of gender-based violence, the poets courageously confront the harsh realities faced by Somali women, bearing witness to their pain, resilience, and unwavering spirit.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study advocates for government officials in Somalia, along with organizations that deal with refugee issues, to proactively tackle the challenge of gender inequality. It is crucial for these bodies to not only recognize but also actively combat the cultural stereotypes that undermine women's status in society. This could involve public awareness campaigns and policy reforms that explicitly focus on elevating the position of women and ensuring their rights are protected. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for educational outreach. Somali women should be made aware of the potential roles they can play in the socio-economic and political spheres of their communities. Educational institutions, in particular, play a pivotal role in this respect. They should strive to educate both women and the wider community about the detrimental effects of outdated oral traditions that serve no purpose other than to reinforce historical gender biases. By shifting the narrative around these traditions, educational efforts can help foster a more inclusive cultural perspective that values women's contributions to society.

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