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## Abbreviations

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Am: *Aman: The Story of a Somali Girl*

BitbR: *Born in the big Rains*

FaCR: *From a Crooked Rib*

TOoIS: *The Orchard of lost Souls*



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# 1 Introduction

Somalia is a country that is shaped by “decades of one of the world’s most complex and protracted conflicts” (UNDP *Somalia Human Development Report* xvii). Civil war and the subsequent atrocities left enormous traces in a state that is dominated by contrasts and in need of a functioning unified government. The country’s lawlessness as a consequence of on-going civil war additionally negatively influenced the progress of women’s rights due to severe shortcomings regarding a guarantee of basic human rights (Noor Mohammed 458). Resulting from Somalia’s strict patriarchy, “[y]oung women end up greatly disadvantaged in all spheres of life, a reality that hinders their rights and development, and perpetuates intergenerational cycles of gender inequality and the feminization of poverty” (UNDP *Somalia Human Development Report* xviii). Especially the frequent application of customary law strongly contributes to the violation of women’s rights as various forms of mistreatments within the domestic sphere are not meant to reach the public. Both males and females are used to distinct gender roles and male supremacy, wherefore women are not only in an inferior position regarding labour and within marriages, but also tend to consider themselves as mentally inferior compared to their male counterparts. Hence, gender discrimination frequently results in a shortage of self-confidence which in turn further enhances the dominance of men as females are accustomed to subjugation and frequently do not consider to advocate for their rights.

Publishing stories about Somali women’s traumatic experiences in a patriarchal country serves those who are unheard and had to endure severe suffering, as their narratives might be “perceived by an empathic listener” (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 27). Since the selected novels do not represent an individual’s case but rather apply to the experiences of numerous Somali females, concerned persons might feel less forlorn while readers hopefully develop an understanding and interest in distinct cultures and the struggles of others. In general, it can be assumed that novels result in an emotional response on the side of the reader while more objective texts such as newspaper articles tend to be forgotten due the information flood consumers are regularly confronted with (Mann 343).

In the selected Somali novels – *Aman* (Barnes, Virginia Lee), *Born in the big rains* (Korn, Fadumo), *From a crooked rib* (Farah, Nuruddin), and *The orchard of lost souls*

(Mohamed, Nadifa) – such traumatic experiences and their effects on women are demonstrated. Besides oppression and subjugation, the majority of female Somalis are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), a rather discriminating and brutal practice that harms women both physically as well as psychically. FGM still remains a tradition and is commonly used as it is believed to enhance a girl's purity and protect her virginity which subsequently positively influences her value. This in turn is important for her family and male relatives who often decide on her prospective husband. However, so-called arranged marriages not only tend to be non-consensual, they also contribute to a higher percentage of marital abuse and rape, as a married woman is obliged to satisfy her husband's needs. In addition to such forms of gender based-violence, Somali women also struggle from forlornness as well as the loss of beloved people due to critical development's in the country.

This thesis shows the above mentioned aspects of female Somali's suffering and analyses the physical as well as emotional consequences of traumatic experiences on the respective persons. After a theoretical background on historical and political events in Somalia that strongly influenced Somali society and an introductory part on trauma and its resultant emotions, women's suffering in the selected novels is discussed. The focus is on physical as well as emotional harm caused to women while trying to find answers to the questions what concrete forms of suffering resulting from gender discrimination are experienced and narrated and how affected persons respond to their traumatic events. The selected novels do not only represent gender-based violence and brutality, but also evoke a perceptible appeal to pay more attention to Somali women's experienced discrimination and suffering which result from a shortage of gender equality that actually "is a human rights issue that implies equal opportunities for both men and women to realise their full potential and contribute to development without barriers set by stereotypes and socially constructed gender roles" (Noor Mohammed 459).

## 2 Theoretical background: Living in a collapsed state

### 2.1 Historical and political events: Understanding a nation's struggle

According to the 2015 fragile states index of The Fund For Peace (38), Somalia is ranked the most fragile state after South Sudan. Its collapse is a consequence of statelessness and foreign intrusion. During the pre-colonial era, Somalia did not have a “political unified authority” (Mohamoud 18) as it did not consist of a political institution including people beyond popular kinship groups which were divided according to “family genealogies” (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 27) and functioned as a basis for a “political identity” (27). Usually, senior men were responsible for leading their clan. The country was merely controlled by the northern “protracted Somali expansion” (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 18) as well as “the rise and decline of Muslim emporia” (18) in the coastal area. Despite their parallel existence and diverse historical events, they were never completely independent from each other. For the development of Somalia's history, the immigration of Arabs and their settlement along the country's coast played an important role, as they brought Islam which did not only contribute to the expansion of Muslims in the north, but became the faith of Somali people (20, 22). The country's shortage of “economic means” (Mohamoud 18) and “internal social dynamics” (18) led to its inability of developing a political institution and transforming Somalia into a state that is ruled by political authorities. Both kinship and Islam dominated during the pre-colonial era; the latter being used in order to evoke and stimulate “political consciousness” (18) throughout the whole country. In this way, the Somali society managed to unite with “kinship, social contract and religion” (Hough 9) rather than a functional political institution. Until around 1860, Somalis had lived in a stateless country which then should be terminated by the forceful intrusion of foreign colonies (Mohamoud 19).

From 1860 to 1897, the British, French, and Italian colonies as well as the Abyssinian empire created a Somali state by competing for the partition of the Horn of Africa (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 40, Gardner and El Bushra 2). The involvement of the different European colonies in the division of the Somali state strongly depended on what each of them wanted to gain from the new territory (Hough 11). Britain's interest arose from their prior settlement at the port city Aden. They turned to Somali people in the north in order to ensure a steady supply of food for their soldiers in Aden and to

protect the trade route (Cohen 420). Also, Britain wanted to be present in the coastal area as Djibouti was under control of French colonies who established a trading centre as well as a coaling station (Hough 11) and had emerged as a “commercial and strategic rival to Aden” (Cohen 420). Somali clansmen aimed to maintain their independence together with the British Government and granted them their residence on the coast, but did not want to “cede, sell, mortgage, or otherwise give for occupation” (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 47) any territorial parts where their own people were settled. Additionally, the British used the Italians in order to counter and reduce the influence of the French (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 28). Italy was interested in establishing a settlement in southern Somalia as well as developing business opportunities in areas along the Juba and Shabeelle Rivers (Hough 11). The Somali state was not unified anymore: Djibouti was controlled by the French, the northern part of the country was ruled by Britain – the British Somaliland Protectorate – the southern part of Somalia and, thus, the capital city Mogadishu, were under control of the Italians, other parts in nowadays northern Kenya were ruled by Britain and Ogaden became part of Ethiopia, although the British as well as the Italian colonies did not fully accept the jurisdiction (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 29). As can be seen, today’s Somalia was merely conquered by Britain and Italy. The “encroachment by Christian colonisers” (29) led to ferocious actions with the aim to expel the “infidel’ usurpers” (29) from the country and gain independence again. After the collapse of the Ogaden leader Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan, the British and Italian colonies had even more influence and power than before. Especially under the Italians, fascist ruling resulted in a strict distinction between Somalis and Italians, the latter being perceived as the “natural rulers” (30).

On 1 July 1960, after British northern Somalia had gained independence, the protectorate became self-governing and joined the Italian territory to form the Somali Republic (33). Problems resulting from the coalition were not only language barriers, but also diverse systems of bureaucracy and administration which complicated the process of integration (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 171). Nationalist leaders knew how dangerous such divergences within a country can be, since it “clan differences and jealousies” (167) were the reasons why the past partition of Somalia had been simplified for colonial powers. A revolution followed, after then president Ali Shirmarke had been assassinated by a member of his police guards and the head of

the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), and army commander General Mohamed Siad Barre became the new president (207).

In order to reinforce the concept of one nation, clan divisions which have a long history in Somalia were to be abolished. Under Siad Barre, from 1969 to 1991, the Somali state had to undergo major changes. The country was now ruled in a military way: Traditional words such as 'uncle' or 'cousin' which were used not only to refer to family members, but also to those who "share recognised common descent" (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 49), were replaced by the term 'jalle', the Somali word for 'comrade' or 'friend' in order to avoid "potentially divisive kinship connotations" (50). Orphaned children were sent to Revolutionary Youth Centres, with the aim to educate them and instil revolutionary values and ideas. Also, military training was reinforced (39) and the death sentence was introduced again (38). Although the Somali Republic was meant to consist of a unified nation as tribalism and traditional kinship ties were undermined, the Barre regime favoured three lineages which were represented in the M.O.D. code, the "formula for ruling Somalia" (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 222), allowing the president to securely exercise his power: M stood for the president's clan, the Marrehan, O for his mother's clan, the Ogaden, and D for the Dulbahante, the clan to which his son-in-law and leader of the National Security Service belonged (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 46). The considerably high number of M.O.D. members in important political and public positions throughout the whole country clearly demonstrates that Somalia was ruled by a family dynasty, preferring their own lineage and abandoning those of others. The state was under control of its dictator Siad Barre, who could be referred to as a "master manipulator of clan politics" (Mubarak 41).

After the war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977/78 and the consequential refugee crisis, a military coup with the aim to topple the government failed and led to even more radical reactions of president Siad Barre, especially against responsible clans (Elmi and Barise 34). Further attempts of various clans – in particular of Isaq clansmen – to oppose the Barre regime ultimately resulted in the "all-out civil war in 1988-91" (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 71), costing the lives of thousands civilians. Somalis wanted to end "state repression" (Elmi and Barise 35) and punishments like "the killing of civilians, mass abuses and the destruction of areas" (35), which were

particularly endured by members of the Majerteen clan as a consequence of their dominant presence in the previous military coup. Barre's regime was ruthless and made use of coercion and extortion of other clans in order to ensure their loyalty in fighting the Isaq clan. In January 1991, Siad Barre was finally overthrown and forced to flee from Mogadishu (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 262).

Both, Barre's brutal dictatorial way of ruling and the civil war did not leave the Somali state without trace; the "economy [was left] in shambles and its economic institutions in need of extensive rehabilitation" (Mubarak 43). After Siad's overthrow, disagreements regarding power relations between the United Somali Congress Hawiye leaders and 'Ali Mahdi with his impulsive arrangement of a government-like formation resulted in a polarisation among clans, followed by a "protracted bloodbath" (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 264) in Mogadishu (263-264). Men were killed and women raped if he or she belonged to the 'wrong' clan. The capital city was the centre of violence and terror, but the fighting did not stick to the city's borders. Throughout southern Somalia, thousands of people had to suffer not only from devastation, but also from famine, as rival militia clans destroyed agricultural areas and farmers could not cultivate their land which was additionally affected by the East African drought (Mubarak 43). As there was no prospect of an end of the atrocities and suffering people had to endure, large numbers of Somalis left their homeland and tried to find refuge in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Europe, Scandinavia and North America (Lewis *A modern history of the Somali* 265). According to the U.N. and the Africa Watch, about 300,000 Somalis died from starvation, one million fled the country, and 60,000 civilians were murdered by Siad Barre's forces (264-265).

Somalia's misery finally raised attention on an international level one year after the collapse of Barre's regime in 1991 (Mubarak 44). Media as well as "other humanitarian pressure" (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 78) were used in order to activate the UN Security Council to bring peace as well as aid to end suffering and famine. However, international intervention was not fully approved by all Somalis, as especially warlords feared their authority to be undermined which led to further conflicts (Mubarak 44). Only two years later, from 1994 to 1995, UN troops (UNOSOM) decided to leave the state as no progress in reconciliation was evident; the country was deserted and declared as a failed state. After their withdrawal, Somalia's security

situation was even worse (44). Again, chaos, anarchy and violence dominated the country like a constantly recurring curse.

In 2004, after numerous attempts to build an efficient government had failed, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was formed (Hammond 183-184). Despite its unpopularity among the Somali public, it remained stable as it was financially maintained by EU and UN promoters (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 84). While international supporters proclaimed the TFG as the “legitimate government of Somalia” (84-85), the actually concerned population, the Somali people, regarded it differently since “international political engagement” (Hammond 184) was not to be trusted any longer; it seemed to be a “liability rather than an asset” (184). Despite Somalis’ understandable scepticism regarding international interventions, major steps for a positive development had been taken within the last years. A new speaker with expertise in Islamic law was chosen, and a president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, who represented the state from 2009 to 2012, as well as a new prime minister were elected (185-186). Additionally, the agreement on a smaller cabinet consisting of only ten members facilitated a more effective cooperation and more room for fighting corruption (187). Although Somalia seems to be on the rise, it still struggles with its past and ongoing challenges such as the countering of the radical Islamist group al-Shabaab. In 2006, civil war continued when Ethiopian forces backed the weak Somali TFG to fight the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) (HRW *So much to fear* 3). The state’s progress is evident, but conflicts continue and patience is necessary as changes need time and steps are taken slowly by this “fledgling government” (Hammond 192) which has to deal with “Somalia’s complex and multi-layered conflict” (HRW *So much to fear* 9).

## **2.2 Gender relations in Somalia**

Somalia consists of a patriarchal society which is clearly demonstrated as early as at the very beginning of a person’s life when the birth of a male child is acclaimed by the slaughter of two animals, while a similar sacrifice is not regarded as adequate for the birth of a female child (Gardner and El Bushra 9). Particular importance is ascribed to the delivery of a boy as Somali society is structured according to a clan system and the male child will continue the lineage his father belongs to (9). Females are thus considered as “inferior to men” (9) as soon as they are born into the world.

### 2.2.1 Marriage in Somali society

Not only the birth of a boy, also marriage functions as a means of maintaining or even extending the clan. It is considered as a “contract between families or lineages” (Ahmed 52) with the aim to establish further connections. Girls are married at an early age and not rarely without their consent. They are sheltered during their childhood to stay pure and untouched as they should neither spatter the family’s reputation nor reduce their own value for a prospective husband (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 51). Such marriages are often arranged by “elder kinsmen of the spouses” (Ahmed 53). If the prospective bride is lucky, she is admired and respected by the man who will ask her family for the permission to marry. It is then the family’s decision to agree or disagree. In case the proposal is not accepted, the girl has to decide whether to take the side of her prospective husband or her family. However, choosing the man would mean to become an “outcast from her family” (53) which can make life rather difficult for her when the marriage is not going to last. Indeed, arranged marriages not uncommonly also take place without the girl’s or even both spouses’ consent. Especially girls from families showing “admirable characteristics” (53) like “wealth, her mother’s diligence, and the girl’s rating among her peers” (53) are likely to be married at an early age and involuntarily. Male relatives including her father will try to limit opportunities for the girl to resist (53). However, some females actually manage to escape from an arranged marriage by eloping with another man of their choice. The girl will incense her family and risks suffering enormously in case the marriage fails before reconciling with her relatives (54). Nevertheless, it is an effective way to take control about one’s own future. A further type of an arranged marriage is realised by offering a woman as a prospective bride to a hostile clan in order to make peace (54). Those females are often rather young and treated like objects as they are not allowed to react with any kind of disagreement. Also, the prospective husband has no right to declare himself against the marriage; the spouses’ future basically depends on a decision taken by the elders of the clan.

Additionally, it is not unusual that a Somali man is married to various women simultaneously. Polygamy is accepted in the country; males merely have to follow the Islamic code which prescribes not to exceed marrying more than four wives at the same time (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 11). The only difficulty for the man is his duty to provide a separate household for each wife (Ahmed 56). As filing



for divorce is a process straightforward and without great effort, many males consummate “half a dozen marriages” (Lewis *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* 12) or even more in their lifetimes. Even though all wives should be treated equally by their husbands according to Islam, Somali men often pay particular attention to the most beautiful and youngest one, causing “jealousy and friction among co-wives” (12). Such young girls have to cope with fatal consequences resulting from their early marriage. They are not only forced to act as an adult which contradicts their mental capacities, they are also significantly more affected by health risks and violence wherefore many suffer “accidental death, suicide, victimization by violent crime, sexually transmitted diseases and mental disorders” (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 51). If a wife is mistreated by her husband, the only chance to receive support comes from her family and relatives, as the frequently applied customary law (cf. ch. 2.2.2) does not pay great attention to the rights of women and familial ill-treatments are perceived as a matter of privacy. Thus, whether a woman has to suffer lifelong from domestic violence or other kinds of abuse strongly depends on the willingness of her family to intervene (57).

### **2.2.2 Divisions of labour**

Gender differences are not restricted to aspects of marriage, also labour divisions are common and accepted by Somali society. Women are excluded from “employment and labour market participation” (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* xviii) as they are confined to domestic work, while men prevail in areas of the public sphere by taking “roles in society, religion and politics” (Gardner and El Bushra 9). However, the high number of divorces as well as common polygamous forms of marriage contribute to the fact that women have to participate in economics in order to sustain their families. As husbands often do not financially support all wives equally, it is not an isolated case that a woman functions as the breadwinner of the family (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 23). Especially in times during war, women played an important part for the family’s survival in a “harsh environment” (23), as it was difficult for Somalis to live with only one income due to the state’s depressed economy (Warsame 123). Women were fully responsible for their children and livestock and had to become economically active in order to keep their families alive; some even managed to found small enterprises in order to contribute to the family’s income (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 23). As a consequence, gender relations had to change. Women

could not be confined to the household as their chief task in life any longer. Rather, many became “the household head” (Gardner 104) and, thus, were not only in charge of the family’s well-being, but assumed responsibility which was previously dedicated solely to men, namely being involved in decision-making processes and acting as the family’s breadwinner (104).

Despite women’s involvement in areas exceeding the household, changes in gender relations during the time of war cannot be regarded as a progress of emancipation. Many females suffered from insecure conditions of life: On the one hand, several men were absent and women felt unprotected and in constant danger, especially those who had to flee from their homes and stay with their families in refugee camps. Being without male protection in such “insecure and alien environments” (104) might endanger women to become victims of rape or other kinds of physical and psychological violent disorder. On the other hand, men who were present often could not find a job with proper payment to support the family (105). Positions that had existed before the war were not available any longer which particularly affected males who had been used to different jobs in urban areas in the public sphere (105). Thus, regardless whether their husbands were present or not, numerous women did not voluntarily but were obliged to assume typical male roles and function as the sole breadwinners of their families.

However, from 1991 onwards with the “re-emerge of customary law” (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 23), the “extended use of sharia law” (23) as well as the prominence of “clan-based forms” (23) in politics, the exclusion of women from public roles has increased enormously. The frequent use of traditional law rather than state judiciary is one of the main problems regarding gender discrimination. It supports the rights of males but not those of females, as a woman’s life is inherently “of unequal value” (23). As a consequence, even recent developments contribute to deterioration of equality. To give an example, in 2014, with the appointment of a new cabinet the “proportion of women in cabinet” (UNDP Somalia *Gender in Somalia* 7) decreased by half, “from 20% in 2013 to 10% in 2014” (7). In south central Somalia, from a total number of 275 members of the parliament, only 37 are female (7); in Puntland two out of 66 are women (11) while an even lower amount of female participation with only two out of 82 members is shown in Somaliland (13). Moreover, inequality does not only

occur in politics. Numerous women still have to work with no other reason but to sustain their families. In order to do so, many are forced to apply for jobs in “menial positions” (8) and have to endure “sacrifice, risk and humiliation” (8). As only little money is earned in such positions, females still live in constant fear of not being able to feed their families. If a woman is actually able to escape from exclusion and manages to receive work in areas where she can participate in decision-making processes, she has no other choice than to “operate through a patriarchal filter” (8). Besides, a woman’s decision to break conventions and aim for proper work is often not welcomed by her husband who perceives his wife’s attempt as a threat to his authority (Warsame 126). Women who work in positions where they earn enough money to finance their livings and eventually even sustain their families are not dependent on a man anymore. Consequently, men lose part of their power as financial support does not function any longer as leverage to make women stay. A statement known from tradition clearly expresses men’s fear of women who possess money or valuable goods: “Never allow a woman to own anything of value: if she brings a clay pot with her to the matrimonial home, break it.” (126).

When considering those aspects of gender relations in Somalia, it is not surprising that the country is ranked fourth worldwide with a Gender Inequality Index of 0.776, which is close to absolute inequality reached by an index of 1 (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* xviii), and categorised as the second worst country to live in for women (23). From the above mentioned aspects of women’s roles and decision-taking regarding marriage and labour it can be seen that their participation is eminently limited and exclusion does not decrease (UNDP Somalia *Gender in Somalia* 3). As declared in the UNDP Somalia Human Development Report, “[t]he loss in human development due to gender inequality is alarming and calls for concerted attention” (29). Discrimination, disintegration and consequential suffering of females not rarely also due to physical and psychological violence against them results in gender-based trauma that is experienced by many Somali women (cf. ch. 2.3.4). If society keeps referring to customary law instead of state judiciary, immoral and discriminating conditions for women will remain.

## 2.3 Trauma in the context of Somalia

Somalia's past clearly shows that traumatic events continued or consistently recurred throughout decades; its "history is written in blood" (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 3). Depending on the personality and personal experiences, people react differently to certain events. While some can "transcend their trauma" (4) as they have learned to flexibly adapt to horrifying events, others might deeply suffer from their experiences. The term 'trauma' generally refers to "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Reasons for such experiences of catastrophes in the context of Somalia are manifold. Traumatic events during the civil war, violence, the loss of beloved people, life in refugee camps as well as oppressive regimes affected the majority of Somalis. Clan militia men were known to use rape as "a weapon of war" (Mohamed 108) and sexually abused a vast number of women without raising international awareness. Another major issue contributing to traumatising large numbers of civilians was the military intervention of the UNOSOM between 1992 to 1995 (Ljubinkovic 205). Somalis were faced with atrocities such as the "collateral damage" (205) as well as "deliberate humanitarian abuses [...] [like] killing, torture, rape, humiliation, bullying and arbitrary detention" (205). Additionally, living in a country which is declared as a failed state means struggling with a shortage of security measures and enduring constant fear and threat. Considering those aspects, nationwide suffering and traumatisation represent naturally occurring consequences of Somalis' experienced atrocities.

### 2.3.1 The notion of trauma

The term 'trauma' developed and changed its meaning over time. Originally, it was borrowed from the Greek word which was used in the medical context in order to refer to a wound, more precisely a "damage to tissue" (Garland 9), with the consequence of a "catastrophical global reaction in the entire organism" (Leys 19). A meaning shift in order to consider trauma in its psychological dimension was given among others by Sigmund Freud. He explained that particularly with "early experiences of sexual 'seduction' or assault" (Leys 20), a "deferred action" (20) leading to a "dialect between two events" (20) takes place. This is the case as children cannot fully understand the entire scope of the traumatic experience due to their sexual immaturity. However, the

meaning is grasped at a later point in their stage of development in the sense of a “delayed revival as a memory” (20) when sexual behaviour can be decoded more properly.

It can be seen that trauma was not anymore referred to as a “bodily injury” (Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert 5), but rather as a “wound of the soul” (5). Trauma does not simply emerge from suffering from a negative incident, but rather implies experiencing a threatening event with shocking and alarming impact, regardless of whether the victim is personally affected or happens to be a witness (5). Thus, trauma can be described as “the experience and psychological impact of events that are life-threatening or include danger of injury so severe that the person is horrified, feels helpless, and experiences a psychophysiological alarm response during and shortly following the experience” (5). In general, such experiences can be classified according to two categories of traumatic events which are either caused by humankind and, thus, referred to as “man-made disasters” (Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert 5), or by natural forces. Examples of the first kind of disasters are “exposure to combat, rape, torture, witnessing a massacre or mass killing, being held prisoner of war or experiencing catastrophes such as air-plane crashes or severe car accidents” (5) as well as “war and political violence, criminal violence, domestic violence, [and] child abuse” (Allen 7-9) while the latter refers to events that are not directly induced by humans like “floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, or volcanic eruptions” (Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert 5). It is evident that fear and agitation result from such traumatic events which are overwhelming experiences that can stir a person’s “deepest universal anxieties” (Garland 11).

### **2.3.2 Posttraumatic stress disorder**

Traumatic experiences often result in intense feelings of anxiety and distress. Those negative emotions are further increased by a shortage of safety since the concerned person is “emotionally and/or physically” (Bryant-Davis 14) endangered. Experiences constitute a major part of a person’s identity. It is, thus, evident that events which physically or psychically harm individuals cannot pass without trace. As Van der Kolk and McFarlane mention, although

the human capacity [is in fact able] to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people’s psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a

degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present. This tyranny of the past interferes with the ability to pay attention to both new and familiar situations (4).

While some people quickly recover from a horrifying event, others need more time and eventually have to suffer from its aftermath for years. The adaption of consecutive symptoms strongly depends on the severity of the experienced traumatic event. It is mentioned by Allen that severe effects of traumatic events frequently cause “marked distress” (169) and/or influence an individual’s “social and occupational function” (169) which can ultimately result in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is regarded as an anxiety disorder, a “disorder of memory” (Leys 2), a “failure of time to heal all wounds” (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 7), but also “a normal response to abnormal situations” (Shalev 78). It is not limited to the time frame of the traumatic event, but continues further over a non-explicit period (78). The hypothesis considering PTSD as a normal response also supports the idea that the stress disorder implies “a failure to recover from mental traumatization” (78). In this way, the mental processing of the traumatic experience is incomplete which is why the recovery from the past event seems to be so difficult. Still, reasons for mental illnesses are manifold wherefore the term ‘normal response’ remains controversial as it might lead to misunderstandings since also common events like traffic accidents or medical intervention can lead to PTSD (79). In general, people suffering from PTSD can be affected by psychological disorders such as “hyperarousal, reexperiencing the trauma” (Allen 170) or “avoidance or numbing” (170), but might also show physiological reactions like “neuropsychological (e.g. dizziness, [...] altered consciousness), circulatory (pounding heart [...]), neuromuscular (tremor, [...], weakness), digestive (nausea, [...] diarrhea, difficulty swallowing), respiratory (breathlessness [...]) and others (urge to urinate, perspiration, fever)” (173).

Hyperarousal develops from increased anxiety and might vary in its presence according to the concerned individual’s personality. Particular stimuli can evoke bodily reactions regardless whether the person is actually in a threatening situation or not (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 13). Various incidents are experienced more intensely as even minor stimuli can cause negative feelings such as “fear, anxiety, anger and panic” (13) as well as “tension [...] and irritation” (Allen 173). This phenomenon of

oversensitivity is called “generalisation of threat” (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 13). As neurons are sensitised, the nervous system is affected which can result in increased stress responsivity or even chronic arousal (Allen 173). Possible symptoms can reach from “difficulty falling or staying asleep; irritability or outburst of anger; difficulty concentrating; hypervigilance; [to] [...] exaggerated startle response” (Allen 172-173). As a consequence of hyperarousal, the individual’s feeling of safety becomes threatened. Instead of warning and alerting to be attentive before and during possibly essential or even dangerous situations as it would be the case for non-traumatised persons, increased arousal does not serve this function, as numerous occasions can easily evoke such a reaction. Thus, the “autonomic nervous system” (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 13) cannot fulfil its work and is not reliable anymore.

Re-experiencing traumatic events or intrusions are a highly common symptom of PTSD. Victims often suffer from it as an experienced traumatising event in the past has a tremendous effect on their lives in the present. Intense feelings that are connected with the traumatic memory are recurrently recollected. Rather than releasing negative emotions, victims “remain embedded in the trauma as a contemporary experience” (9). Such re-experiences are easily stimulated and can arise spontaneously and without the individual’s consciousness in the following ways:

recurrent and intrusive distressful recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions; recurrent distressful dreams of the event; acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring, including a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes; intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event; and physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event (Allen 173-174).

Memories and flashbacks are extremely uncomfortable and painful for a person as the traumatic event is visualised and brings the incident back to life again. The victim mentally experiences a past horrifying situation repeatedly which means trauma is given a certain “quality of timelessness” (174). Similarly, memories do not only occur when being fully conscious, they can also occur during sleep and dominate dreams. Victims who experience such interferences and nightmares are often scared before going to sleep which ultimately can lead to sleep disturbances (176). Memories, flashbacks but also nightmares can be evoked even by minor stimuli that are not related to the traumatic experience as a certain arousal leads to a chain reaction and can “prime the whole network of traumatic memories” (176). Additionally, many

persons also experience a re-exposure to the trauma, meaning the event is actively re-enacted (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 10). This does not only harm the victims themselves, but also other people, as the former slip into the role of “either victimizer or victim” (11). Three consequential aspects are mentioned in this regard: “[h]arm to others” (11), “[s]elf-destructiveness” (11) or “[r]evictimization” (11). While the first consequence can be threatening for society due to violent reactions, the second and third aspects are especially applicable to victims of abuse or rape (11). Also, in the case of adopting the behaviour of the perpetrator, a distinction in gender is evident as more men than women would “repeat the abuse directly” (Allen 178) while the latter rather “engage in self-destructive behavior, turning their aggression back onto themselves” (178).

The third psychological disorder that can affect people with PTSD is called avoidance and numbing (178). Since traumatic events lead to intrusive memories, victims often consciously or unconsciously avoid those intrusions and resultant or associated negative emotions (Bryant-Davis 79). Common symptoms are the avoidance of

thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma; efforts to avoid activities, places or people that arouse recollections of the trauma; inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma; markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities; feeling detachment or estrangement from others; a restricted range of affect (e.g. inability to have loving feelings); and a sense of foreshortened future (e.g. not expecting to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span (Allen 178).

As victims are often traumatised by other persons, increased arousal and anxiety can hinder establishing an intimate relationship since negative emotions like rejection could easily trigger memories associated with the traumatic experience (179). Feeling “nothing seems to be better than feeling irritable and upset” (Van der Kolk and McFarlane 12), which is why many people with PTSD are tempted to use or even abuse substances like “antianxiety medication, alcohol, or drugs such as marijuana” (Allen 179) in order to weaken any kind of arousal. Blocking traumatic memories functions as a self-defence to prevent oneself from being exposed to visualised pictures in the brain which rekindle emotions closely connected to the actual event. Some persons experience “perceptual changes combine[d] with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity” (Herman 43). This altered awareness of real-life events functions as a protective means. The victim does not have to endure negative emotions as an observation of a new and possibly dangerous



event happens from an outer perspective and, thus, loses its sense of reality (43). Since concerned persons frequently dissociate in order to increase the distance from any kind of associations with the trauma, feelings of depression (cf. ch. 2.3.3) can occur due to avoidance and numbing (Allen 179). Victims stop trying to cope with the trauma and experience “a kind of collapse” (62).

### 2.3.3 Trauma-resultant emotions

As demonstrated from people’s reactions who suffer from PTSD, many victims diminish or even fully avoid arising negative feelings. The traumatic event forces them to experience intense and extreme emotions wherefore no human being can be prepared. Still, not all feelings can be suppressed successfully, as so-called “aversive emotions” (51) are overwhelming for the victim and should in fact contribute to coping with a traumatic experience. Such reactions can vary depending on the experienced event but, above all, on the individual and his or her way to handle distressing memories. In general, Allen highlights emotions like “anxiety, fear, and panic” (51), “anger and aggression” (53), “shame and guilt” (59) as well as “depression” (61).

Anxiety, fear, and panic might be regarded as rather obvious emotional reactions since PTSD is referred to as an anxiety disorder (cf. ch. 2.3.2). Anxiety in this sense functions as a natural response to trauma as an individual’s life is threatened and his or her “sense of self and predictability of the world” (McFarlane and Girolamo 136) is attacked. However, according to Freud, anxiety also has a positive function as it can be both “*cure* and *cause* of psychic trauma” (Leys 28). This is the case, as on the one hand anxiety can support the experience of traumatic events when it comes to a “breaching of the protective shield” (28), but on the other hand it can also have a protective function in terms of an “ego’s guard against future shocks” (28). This means, being anxious can also prepare for further events and, consequently, signals “readiness for coping” (Allen 51-52). The individual’s brain ensures that strategies for coping with the experienced traumatic event can be applied, but a feeling of helplessness and loss of control is still dominant as it is unclear how effective coping will be possible (52). When feeling anxiety, the brain immediately reacts with desires to escape from the present situation. While fear generally results from a certain dangerous situation, extreme fear can ultimately lead to a panic attack that can occur anytime and without decisive reasons (52-53).

Furthermore, victims often do not only respond to events with anxiety problems, but feel natural emotions like anger, rage and aggression not only against their traumatic experiences, but also their perpetrators. Anger is another feeling preparing a person to cope with traumatic events. On the one hand, in situations that are perceived as provocative, being angry can be a rather positive emotion (54). It strengthens the victim and shows a possible way to respond to an uncomfortable event. On the other hand, anger in its extreme form resulting in hostility leads to destructive emotions like hatred, “an enduring, intense, embittered attitude that can destroy relationships” (55). A frequent experience of hostile reactions can be rather dangerous for the concerned person as a tendency to perceive pleasure in aggressive behaviour might be developed with the aim to satisfy “vengeful inclinations” (55). In this way, the person who previously had to experience the role of the victim gains power and might even adapt the role of the perpetrator (56). Besides, aggressive behaviour need not always be directed against other people, but can also result in masochism (58). Such form of self-destruction does not mean transforming aggression into pleasure, but rather creates a feeling of relief when distracting oneself from “unbearable emotional pain” (58) by experiencing a “more manageable physical pain” (58). Thus, individuals are simply trying to find a way to reduce emotional pain and suffering which can have tremendous effects in the long term, as it harms self-consciousness, increases feelings of shame and makes it difficult to engage in relationships (59).

Also, traumatic events themselves can damage a victim’s self-esteem and, consequently, evoke feelings of shame and guilt. Allen highlights the binary opposition of pride and shame, describing shame as “a fall from grace” (59) which is the reason for frequent resultant emotions such as “embarrassment, humiliation, and mortification” (59) and followed by perceiving oneself as “weak, dirty, defective, exposed, small, stupid, helpless, out of control, damaged, unloved, and unlovable” (59). It is thus not surprising that victims seclude themselves and prefer to be in isolation rather than presenting themselves to the public. Feelings of shame and guilt are particularly dominant with regard to abuse. Victims who had to endure forms of abuse by another person tend to feel ashamed and guilty at the same time (60). This is the case, as they blame themselves for acting contrary to their values and, thus, perceive the experienced violence as a consequence of their own shortage of responsibility (60). To give an example, Allen mentions that enduring rape can trigger a feeling of having

acted sinfully in a person's mind (60) which means victims blame themselves more than their perpetrators. As shame is a negative feeling that can be deeply painful, it is often avoided or results in self-attack or the attack of other people (61). While avoidance frequently implies substance abuse in order to block memories and emotions, attacks on the self and/or others are strongly connected with anger and aggression (61).

Lastly, as already mentioned earlier, many people suffering from traumatic events and PTSD feel depressed. Depression often results from anxious behaviour and can be described as "emotional exhaustion" (62). Concerned persons show a damaged self-esteem as well as a shortage of pleasure and energy resulting in surrender and lethargy. As a consequence, coping with the traumatic experience is hindered while feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are increased (62). Many individuals who suffer from depression had to experience the loss of a beloved person and consequently have to handle grief as well as feelings of being "alone, abandoned, deprived, unwanted, and unlovable" (63). Others suffer from depression resulting from failure and, thus, feel "inadequate or incompetent" (63) as well as "unworthy of others' love" (63). Often, victims blame themselves and show long term effects like the inability to establish proper relationships.

#### **2.3.4 Gender-based trauma**

If the survivor is a female, she may have had several prior experiences that have affected her sense of safety. Violence against women is one of the biggest human rights violations in the world (Bryant-Davis 15).

Women often suffer from traumatic experiences without the public's awareness, as in many countries their lives and actual conditions belong to the private sphere (Herman 28). Publicly speaking about traumatising events, especially regarding sexual abuse, would mean being confronted with "public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief" (28) which is why females avoid to do so and continue their lives behind hidden doors. This, however, is virtually perceived as a permission to "every form of sexual and domestic exploitation" (28). Being abused by a member of the family makes it even more difficult for women as public awareness and involvement often happen only hesitantly when familial matters are concerned (Bryant-Davis 16). Such kinds of violence against women in many cases continue over time and do not only include physical, but also

psychological abuse resulting in a woman's shortage of "emotional and physical safety" (16). Severe health risks like "physical disability, chronic pain, migraines, sexually transmitted infections, chronic pelvic pain, stomach ulcers and frequent indigestion" (16) can be the consequence of so-called "intimate partner violence" (16).

In addition to the above mentioned PTSD responses like hyperarousal, intrusion, avoidance and numbing (cf. ch. 2.3.2), many women cope with their negative experiences and emotions by "develop[ing] an eating disorder, misus[ing] alcohol or other drugs, self-harm[ing] by cutting or burning themselves, spend[ing] less time with others because it feels safer to be alone, [or] try[ing] to please others" (Haskell 4). As a consequence, victims often suffer from depression and/or sleeping disorder. In order to enable treatment and recovery from traumatic events, concerned females have to talk about their experiences and free themselves from denial and shame (Herman 29). It is important to raise awareness and consider familial abuse as a matter crucial enough for the public to intervene in order to provide sufficient support for victims. If violence against women belongs to the realm of the private sphere, feelings of embarrassment and fear of the public's reaction will be the result. This has to be avoided, as too many females are concerned; as Herman mentions, only after "the women's liberation movement of the 1970s" (28) it was found out that people with PTSD were above all "women in civilian life" (28) rather than "men in war" (28). Unfortunately, violence against women resulting in gender-based trauma often leaves the perpetrator without punishment as customary law is more common than judiciary (UNDP Somalia *Gender in Somalia* 3). This is aggravated by the fact that many cruelties happen behind closed doors rather than being openly discussed, resulting in Somalia's frequent incidents of maternal mortality with "1,600 per 100,000 live births" (4) as well as "rape, female genital mutilation, child marriage rates, and violence against women and girls" (3).

### 3 Representation of Somali women's suffering in literature

Narrating traumatic memories or events resulting in suffering implies recollection and verbalisation of negative emotional experiences. A confrontation with such horrifying past experiences through narration consequently “demands on the courage of both patient and therapist” (Herman 175) as the former needs to be supported to be able to “speak of the unspeakable” (175). In this sense, two different types of memory have to be considered, namely the “traumatic memory (hot memory)” (Mengel, Borzaga, and Orantes Introduction vii), which involves flashbacks, re-experiences and connected emotions wherefore a past event becomes relevant in the present of a traumatised person, and the “narrative memory (cool memory)” (Introduction vii) with which the “triggers present in the hot memories” (Schauer, Neuner, and Elbert 25) should be controlled to defuse negative emotions. It is thus evident that in order to allow for the victim's recovery, “traumatic memory [needs to be transformed] into narrative memory with the help of an empathic listener” (Mengel 144). Traumatic memory can occur spontaneously and without obvious stimuli. The patient suffers from re-experiencing conscious or unconscious conditions and is not able to control such intrusive and painful memories. Contrary, a narrative memory consists of “a beginning, a middle, and an ending” (144) which allows traumatised persons to control their recollections and enables them to “make sense of their experiences by telling a story” (144). Narrative memory thus does not represent a re-experience that dominates a person due to its arbitrariness of occurrence and impacts like a traumatic memory, but is rather an attempt to contribute to a person's recovery through the verbalisation of experiences (145).

In addition to the relevance of narrating traumatic events, also the importance regarding its reception needs to be considered. Living in a fast-paced society and being confronted with a daily information flood in both the virtual and real world frequently results in an apathetic behaviour of people. Newspaper articles about traumatic events are read and immediately forgotten due to “relentless mediated information” (Mann 343), which can be regarded as a significant argument why society has become “so inundated with images and ideas of trauma and violence that [it] [has] grown blasé about them” (343). Contrary to rather factual and objective articles about traumatic events, novels might have different effects. Regardless whether they are fictional or non-fictional, a variety of emotions is expressed which means the reader can easily

identify or at least sympathise or empathise with the persons in the story. Consequently, an emotional story told from a victim's perspective is more difficult to result in a recipient's indifference and apathy than an objective text.

The novels referred to in the following chapters – *Aman* (Barnes, Virginia Lee), *Born in the big rains* (Korn, Fadumo), *From a crooked rib* (Farah, Nuruddin) and *The orchard of lost souls* (Mohamed, Nadifa) – are selected due to their thematic relevance regarding Somali women's suffering. Prevailing aspects that Somali females are confronted with are subjugation, FGM, sexual abuse and rape, forlornness, and violence. As mentioned earlier (cf. ch. 2.2), women's rights are limited since Somalia consists of a patriarchal society. Through literature, personal experiences and stories about the subjugation and suffering of Somali women can be conveyed to a greater extent than through interviews and articles. The story of *Aman* portrays a woman's suffering in a male-dominated society in the time shortly before Siad Barre's advancement and the country's subsequent breakdown. *Aman* has to undergo female genital mutilation, forced marriage, is raped twice in her life and manoeuvred into prostitution before fleeing to Kenya due to Somalia's political developments. Her story represents the hardship of women who show ambition and courage to defend their attitudes and perspectives. Fadumo Korn's memoir *Born in the big rains* focuses strongly on female genital mutilation in Somalia and its negative impacts on women's emotional and physical health. The detailed descriptions about the procedure and its immediate as well as long-term consequences (cf. ch. 3.2) adequately represent and warn of the danger Somali girls are still exposed to. Korn narrated her traumatising experiences and now advocates against female genital mutilation. In Nuruddin Farah's *From a crooked rib*, a prevailing motif is the treatment of females like objects, contributing to the protagonist's fears and shortage of self-confidence. Since Somali society shares a strong gender distinction, powerlessness and endured violence of women are not perceived as a matter worthy enough to be openly discussed in public. Lastly, *The orchard of lost souls* tells the stories of the plight of three Somali women during civil war. Again, personal experiences of each woman are told, ranging from a traumatised orphan refugee child feeling forlorn to an old woman who suffers deeply from the loss of her daughter as well as a woman that expresses her aggressive feelings as a consequence of her harsh childhood. The vulnerability of all three characters as a consequence of their traumatic experiences dominates the story.

### 3.1 The low value of women in *From a crooked rib* and *Born in the big rains*

As mentioned earlier in this thesis (cf. ch. 2.2), gender roles in Somalia's patriarchal society are clearly defined; it is a country in which "the world belongs to men" (BitBR 19). Somalia's instability, ongoing conflicts as well as "the absence of a functional central government" (Noor Mohammed 458) negatively influenced and restrained "the progress of women's development" (459) and caused "serious violations of women's rights" (459) instead. Certain cultural practices like FGM (cf. ch. 3.2) contributed to the fact that Somalia's society, including both men and women, perceive women as inferior to men. In Nuruddin Farah's *From a crooked rib*, the character of Ebla fully adopts the gender discriminating perspective she has been raised with and demonstrates the effects of a patriarchal structure on females who are not supposed to make their own decisions. Similarly, Fadumo Korn mentions in her story *Born in the big rains* the obvious distinction of gender roles:

In Somalia, the relationship between the sexes is clearly defined. A man never does women's work. [...] Men take themselves seriously, and women treat them as if they are right to do so. Even as small children, girls learn to serve and respect their brothers, fathers, and uncles. A girl rises when a man enters because he might like that precise spot where she has been squatting. Men are always served the best meat, and women the leftovers (BitBR 18-19).

The explicit distinction does not only assign specific roles to men and women, but it clearly shows that the sexes are not considered equal. *Born in the big rains* tells the misery of a woman who is raised in such a patriarchal society, has to undergo procedures discriminating her sex (cf. ch. 3.2), and is repeatedly deported by others without even considering her opinion.

#### 3.1.1 Marriage as a necessity in a patriarchal society

Due to women's inferior position, more importance is attached to marriage as it is a woman's most popular way to receive money, raise a family and follow her duties. As a result, the assumption that "marriage [is] [...] a sound refuge" (FaCR 114) is widespread among female Somalis. However, marriage, especially when being arranged (cf. ch. 2.2.1) by male relatives, often simply represents a shift of control over a young female from her father to her husband: "[M]arriage removes a woman from her father's moral authority and places her under that of her husband. Throughout her marriage she is expected to obey, honour and respect her spouse, and to be

particularly scrupulous in this regard in the early years of marriage" (Lewis *Blood and Bone* 56). In Nuruddin Farah's novel, Ebla experiences a series of marriages that are not conducted of her own accord, but rather arranged or suggested by others. Throughout the story, it becomes evident that she actually aspires after gender equality and being a free woman, but she fails to even approach this goal as she has fully internalised the patriarchal structures and the way of living she has been raised with. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the story, Ebla appears rather naive as she seems to be sure of her independence when she decides to refuse being married to an old man she barely knows: "It was yesterday morning that her grandfather had accepted Giumaleh's proposal. He was an old man of forty-eight: fit to be her father" (FaCR 8). Rather than accepting the arranged marriage as it is common for numerous Somali women, Ebla wants to avoid being "subjected to the decisions of the family" (Bravo, Martínez, and Ruiz 568) which would presuppose her being "ignorant of the fact that this is [...] a violation of [her] [...] rights" (568). Her strong desire to escape encourages her to secretly sneak away without raising her grandfather's and her brother's attention and to take the caravan to Belet Wene, a city in south-central Somalia:

Her escape meant her freedom. Her escape meant her new life. Her escape meant her parting with the country and its harsh life. Her escape meant the divine emancipation of the body and soul of a human being. She desired, more than anything, to fly away; like a cock, which has unknotted itself from the string tying its leg to the wall. [...] She wanted to go away from the duty of women (FaCR 10-11).

Unquestionably, Ebla's courage to actually escape from her family in order to avoid being married to an unknown person is remarkable as she opposes a discriminating tradition. However, she appears too euphoric and naive as she neither has a proper plan where to live nor how to receive money to continue her existence. As a single woman who escapes from her arranged marriage, life can be rather difficult since she is considered an outcast by her family and consequently lacks sufficient support.

When Ebla arrives in Belet Wene, she manages to reach the house of her cousin Gheddi who subsequently agrees to accommodate her. Ebla soon recognises that Gheddi and his pregnant wife treat her like a slave and turn her into a servant on her first day in town; she even has to support her cousin's wife delivering the baby. During her time at her cousin's house, Ebla's behaviour changes enormously. Her previous longing for freedom and emancipation diminishes noticeably as a consequence of the shortage of appreciation and respect she is confronted with. She seems to stop acting



in her own interest and submits herself to her cousin: "She was willing to get entangled in any situation as long as it would help her cousin and his wife. She walked behind him, losing courage now, then regaining it" (55). Since Gheddi continues to take advantage of Ebla, his maltreatment shows severe negative effects on her self-esteem: "Ebla woke up [...] feeling morbid and rather sickly. But she wasn't in the least worried about it. 'Why should I? I am only an intruder into this world. [...] [T]he future is black'" (64). As can be seen, Ebla has lost her motivation and positive attitude towards becoming an emancipated woman who can enjoy freedom the same way than men. She feels neglected and perceives herself as a person who merely interferes and annoys her social environment.

In order to dispose of Ebla, Gheddi decides to give her hand to a broker, an old man with tuberculosis. Again, she is promised to a man she neither knows nor is willing to marry. When Ebla hears about the arranged marriage by the widow next door, she feels overcome by negative emotions and is "paralysed in the region of the mind which gives one suggestions for things to do and paths to follow" (71). She realises the inequity females are confronted with and reasons that she cannot favour "this sort of marriage" (71) since she does not "want to be sold like cattle" (71). The widow, who presumably had to endure numerous incidents of gender discrimination in her life, cannot fully comprehend Ebla's reaction, as she herself knows that "that is what we women are – just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband." (71). Also Ebla seems to be aware of the inferiority of the female gender:

From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shopkeeper, what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing (75).

For sure this world is a man's – it is his dominion. It is his and is going to be his as long as women are oppressed, as long as women are sold and bought like camels, as long as this remains the system of life. Nature is against women (75).

In a patriarchal society, it is not surprising that women are treated like objects while power and important positions are ascribed to men. In such a discriminating ideology, a man is regarded as representing "the 'noble' Somali" (Choi Ahmed 161) while a woman stands for "the 'commoner,' 'slave,' or 'low caste person'" (161). This perception becomes evident both from Ebla's description about the conventionality for

men to sell and buy a woman as well as from the experiences at her cousin's house, who does not treat her like an equal human being, but rather as a servant beneath his dignity. Ebla has no right for self-determined actions or to simply express her own opinion since being accommodated by her cousin and his wife implies obeying submissively.

Ebla knows that staying at her cousin's house would mean being married to the old broker which she obviously wants to avoid. She also knows that one way to escape from an arranged marriage is to elope with another man. Since being without a man is not an option as she presumably would be unable to earn a living and damage her reputation, Ebla agrees to the widow's suggestion to marry her son Awill. She moves with him to Mogadishu where for the first time she is confronted with marital duties that in her case primarily focus on satisfying her (prospective) husband's needs (cf. ch. 3.3). Although Ebla disapproves of Awill's demands, she does not consider refusing as an option since he is not acting against the ideology she has been raised with: "It was not that he was stronger than she, but a woman never fought with a man, she should be submissive and never return his blows. A good woman should not even cry aloud when her husband beat her" (FaCR 86). Apparently, Ebla has fully internalised the common assumptions of her social environment about gender roles and seems to be rather sure about what constitutes a 'good woman'. Different than initially planned, she definitely does not live a life in freedom apart from women's duties, but instead completely accomplishes her role as an obedient wife without recognising her behaviour.

However, when Ebla receives a photo showing her husband, who is currently in Italy, with another woman, she recognises that he has been unfaithful and is subsequently persuaded by the landlady Asha to counteract and secretly marry a rich man called Tiffo during Awill's absence. She knows that a further escape would make her life even more difficult since she already "had run from country to a town, and from there to Mogadiscio. Now if she ran from Mogadiscio, she would run into the ocean" (111). Even though Ebla seems to adopt gender specific roles according to a patriarchal ideology, she still desires to feel free: "'One should do whatever one wants to – that is life. That is what I love.' Freedom: that was what she worshipped" (114). Contrary to her aims, she engages with another unknown man who even frightens her. She also

realises that she does not use her own voice to express her personal needs and desires, but simply follows the decisions and suggestions of others:

The suggestion to marry Tiffo was Asha's, the one to marry Awill was the widow's, the one to get engaged to an old man in the country [...] was her grandfather's. It was always someone else's suggestions that she either accepted or rejected. One is fed with suggestions all through one's life [...]. But it is a life that has been poisoned, the potion has been fed to us, like medicine (116).

Never for one single instant did she believe that she was responsible for what she was doing (119).

The contradiction of Ebla's believed aims in life compared to her actions in reality is obvious. Clearly, Ebla is trapped in a patriarchal system and too weak to fully break conventions and rules in order to become what she desires to be. The consequences of her inability to be responsible for important decisions in life negatively influence Ebla's behaviour and her attitude towards a woman's life in general.

### **3.1.2 Women as "a man's property for sale" (FaCR 150)**

Ebla's overvaluation of marriage, her belief in the necessity to marry a man in order to live a fulfilled life, apparently leads to a series of overwhelming and negative experiences with men. After marrying the rich man Tiffo, she starts reflecting on her actions and becomes even more insecure and desperate. Her experiences are threatening and traumatising and the reason for her imaginative fears and her "dreadful sleep" (122) that is dominated by nightmares about the arranged marriage by her grandfather:

She was too dog-tired to stand, too thoughtless to think, too tired to move, too disgusted to do anything (121).

For one second, she thought the whole world – beasts, human animals and oceans, buildings – was stampeding and would crush into pieces. For one second a psychiatrist would have considered her case as a dangerous one. She hung somewhere between the seven seas and the seven hills and the eight heavens. Her head whirled, but she shook it. [...] [S]he had experienced [...] a day-dream in which she was still awake, seated somewhere in Mogadiscio (121).

Ebla clearly suffers from the oppression she is confronted with. She did not voluntarily decide to leave her family and move to a town, but simply because she could see no other option since staying would have meant her non-consensual marriage with an old man. Her daydream shows the seriousness of her emotional drain, as for her, the world has become unstable and her life rather depressing.

Additionally, Ebla's escape brought enormous disgrace upon her family, since she ventured to oppose her grandfather's decision. Even though her escape enables her to act independently from her family, she in fact is still dependent on others and, as she even mentions herself, neither able nor responsible for making decisions in her life. When her brother visits Ebla in Mogadishu, her perceived inferiority as well as gender discrimination in general are evident:

'What was wrong with that man?'

'With whom?'

'With the one Grandfather wanted you to marry?'

'I did not want to marry him.'

'Then what happened to you when you came to Belet Wene?'

'Our cousin did the same.'

'And then?'

Those 'and thens' were too much for her. [...] Although he [her brother] was very much younger, he was a boy, and therefore not as incapacitated as a woman. Although he was younger, he surely had better and more formidable and also more fascinating ideas. 'If his ideas are not very good ones, at least they are better than those of a woman like myself', she thought (125).

Clearly, Ebla has fully internalised a patriarchal ideology and its idea that females are dependent on males in order to succeed in their lives. As a woman, Ebla is naturally positioned below men, even below her brother who is younger than her. Consequently, it is in the nature of a woman to be incapable of making decisions that are as decent and wise as those of a man. Ebla's opinion on the distinct capacities of the sexes clearly shows the effects of gender discrimination on females. Considering herself as an inferior human being obviously results in a lowered self-esteem and a perceived sheer impossibility of an independent existence. Besides, not only females adapt to a patriarchal society, also men are concerned. This is the case as in a society in general, gender roles and "identities are socially constructed, learned and internalised and can be recognised [...] in the notions and expectations [...] the community has about women and men and their societal roles" (Günther and Niehaus 111). While Ebla feels weak and incapable of making decisions affecting her private life, her brother, coming from the countryside, is shocked about the behaviour of men and women in the capital city:

'I loathe it. Half-naked women and crazy men, noisy places, men and women hand in hand, and all crazy people. They ought to be shot – all of them, even you.'

'Why?'

'Because they don't have any self-respect in them. You know, this place is full of people like yourself, all the outcasts, all those who could not get on well with their people in the country' (FaCR 126).

For the reader, the assertion about men and women in Mogadishu as well as the way Ebla's brother addresses his sister are presumably considered insulting, but for him, those people are extremely disgraceful since they bring discredit upon themselves as well as their families which is why it is totally legitimate to regard them as social outcasts. As a result, it can be seen that the internalisation of gender roles not only concerns women like Ebla, but also men like her brother.

Furthermore, women's inferiority in a patriarchal society is especially noticeable within the relation of Ebla and her second husband Tiffo. Although being warned by Asha, Ebla allows Tiffo to play a trick on her as he manages to avoid paying the waji-fur fee that is due to the bride at the wedding night when she has to cover her face until the man effects the payment. Instead of paying the fee, Tiffo pays money whenever having sexual intercourse with Ebla: "He came to her place whenever he could, leaving behind some money, somewhere, underneath the pillow or on the table" (129). Since Tiffo does not only pay for intercourse but also visits her infrequently and whenever suitable for him, even at late hours, Ebla is told by Asha that he does not treat her like his wife, but rather "like a harlot" (129). The low value of her gender as well as the payment she receives after each visit of her second husband leaves Ebla in despair about the perception of herself as a human being that should be equal to all other human beings. She feels frustrated about her inability to recognise her behaviour resulting from the engagement with Tiffo which involuntarily has transformed her into a prostitute:

With her hand she felt down her body, naked under the sheet; she scratched her sex, then chuckled. 'This is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence.' (146).

She thought she had lost the game: she had become a prostitute without realizing that she had become one (147).

Consequently, Ebla realises from her experience with Tiffo that rather than a free woman who can be as unfaithful as her husband, she has become nothing more than "a man's property for sale" (150).

In addition, when Tiffo hears about Ebla's husband Awill, he is infuriated even though he himself is married to another woman. In Somali society, polygamy is common (cf. ch. 2.2.1), but exclusive for men: "[...] I am a woman, and for a woman there are many limitations. For one thing, Awill could marry another woman and bring her home, and I would not be able to say a word. He could marry three more, if he wanted to. I wish he

would do that. Maybe dwelling in hell is preferable to being its neighbour” (140). Even more precisely, Tiffo expresses his doctrine about gender roles that corresponds to the ideology of a patriarchal society: “We are not equal. You are a woman and you are inferior to me. And if you have another husband, you are a harlot” (132). As a result, he immediately divorces Ebla which actually does not emotionally affect her as she merely intended to take vengeance for the unfaithfulness of her husband Awill by marrying Tiffo. Nevertheless, Ebla's numerous experiences with men result in her desolation regarding the role of women. Her initial pursuit of freedom and independence basically lead her to the conclusion that male dominance is prevailing and causes females enduring serious oppression:

What is the use of life? Especially for a person like myself? I am nothing but an object. I am nothing (139).

I am weak in the sense that I accept whatever an older person dictates to me. [...] The only way, maybe, is to take a knife and cut my throat, but I am a woman and I cannot do that – I lack the courage. [...] My only advantage over a camel is that I can try to reason with myself, and speak out. But to whom can I speak? Maybe only to God [...]. One by one I am losing my acquaintances, and even my relations (143).

Ebla's gained knowledge that women are treated like objects as well as her realisation that she herself is subjected to such a perception and even behaves according to it obviously leaves her in despair. The decisions to turn away from her family and to escape from Belet Wene now result in her confrontation with gender discrimination without receiving support from her family. She feels deserted and has no one to consult which is why she mentions God as the only one in her life to rely on. Although Ebla opposes male supremacy and unsuccessfully tries to escape from oppression throughout the story, she does not only adhere to discriminating social norms and conventions due to her unconscious internalisation, but also consciously shares Somali's strong belief in God as a powerful and reliable force. As a result, Ebla's story demonstrates that norms and (religious) beliefs are deeply rooted wherefore an actual escape is rather difficult or, as in Ebla's case, almost impossible. This, in turn, can lead to psychological consequences when women are aware and confronted with their inferior position day by day, as it conveys a feeling of being impotent and trapped within a patriarchal system.

### 3.1.3 Relocating a girl like an object

Similar to Ebla's confrontation with gender discrimination, in Fadumo Korn's memoir *Born in the big rains*, the author addresses a female's inability to express her opinion and become responsible for her own decisions within a patriarchal structure. Since gender roles are clearly defined and a woman is not designated for being in charge of the course of her life, family members, especially male relatives, usually make important decisions for her. For Fadumo, this means being moved from one family to another without asking her about her own preferences.

When Fadumo is suffering from her pain after her circumcision (cf. ch. 3.2) and has "become a burden" (BitBR 46) for her family as she cannot contribute her share of work, her parents decide to take her to Mogadishu where she should stay with her wealthy uncle Abdulkadir and his wife aunt Madeleine, who should then arrange suitable medical treatment for their niece. Fadumo feels welcome at her uncle's house and enjoys the luxury she has not been confronted with in her simple life before. After being told by a Somali physician that she suffers from rheumatism which means the impossibility of providing proper treatment, Abdulkadir decides to take Fadumo to Italy. After two weeks, he returns to Somalia while in the meantime, similar to the situation in Mogadishu, Fadumo is discharged from the Italian hospital without explanation but the excuse that her "nerves were sensitive and intact" (87) wherefore the doctors are "unable to cure [her] [...] rheumatism" (87). Subsequently, Fadumo has to move to Abdulkadir's brother Omar who lives in Rome and works as a secretary to the ambassador in the capital city and also provides shelter for her sister. The latter works for Omar as a maid which clearly shows how the environment in which both girls have to grow up influences their future perspectives: "Our lives had unfolded differently, because we had been placed in the care of two quite different men. While I had been sent to school to become an educated person, Khadija had been treated as a slave. She could not read or write" (86).

Unfortunately, Fadumo can only stay for a couple of weeks with her sister and Omar as he is transferred to the embassy of Kenya and, instead of taking Fadumo with him so that she can stay with her sister, he arranges her flight to Germany where a friend in the embassy in Bonn is told to take care of her. At the German airport, Fadumo waits for a stranger to be taken to his house. She is frightened and overwhelmed by the

cultural differences, as “[p]eople hurried past. They seemed to be fighting with one another, their language sounded so harsh. Nobody smiled” (88). When she finally reaches the house, she immediately feels that she is actually not welcomed here and even told that she need not unpack as she is not going to stay for a longer timer:

During the days that followed, I lived in an atmosphere of similar cold indifference. No one showed an interest in me and nobody talked to me. When they did I was spoken to as if I were a beggar. I was told that I belonged to another tribe, and that my family was not well respected. I felt as though I had been hit on the head (90).

On a mattress on a floor in a foreign country, I cried myself to sleep (90).

Clearly, Fadumo feels lonely and unloved. She is brought to a foreign country without her consent and does neither understand the language nor know the people she has to live with. She feels lost in a country that cannot be more different than the place she grew up. Additionally, Fadumo has to accept that she is not recovering from rheumatism which means that the clinic in Bonn can only “delay progress of disease” (91). Her rheumatism program distracts Fadumo from her loneliness and her need for a stable home with her family. Consequently, she has a feeling of great anticipation when her uncle Abdulkadir arrives in Germany and announces that he is going to take her back to Somalia.

In Mogadishu, Fadumo recognises that she merely had to return in order to be informed about the death of her mother. After all the physically and emotionally demanding experiences in her life, the loss ultimately means Fadumo's disruption of her world. She feels weak, stops eating and does not consider her life as precious enough to be continued:

My body was feather light, and yet every movement was heavy, as though some force were pulling on each limb. Such breathtaking emptiness. They had passed me from one family to the next. And the only person to whom I felt deeply inseparable had died. What meaning did life have now? (98-99).

I hated everyone who forced me to remain alive (99).

For Fadumo, the death of her mother means the greatest loss in her life. She could endure being taken from one place to another without being asked about her feelings when living with foreign families in different countries, but now she knows that returning to her own family is impossible as the most important person in her life passed away. From Fadumo's desire to put an end to her misery it can be seen that she has become rather depressive as a consequence of the numerous negative experiences in her life which are the reason for her consistent feelings of loneliness and shortage of affection;



she clearly longs for a stable home and family. Contrary to her needs, staying with uncle Abdulkadir and his wife again feels different as they are not as luckily married as before. Fadumo suffers vicariously with them as she is desperate when having to observe how “everything fall[s] apart” (100). She feels depressed and hopes “that robbers would break in, steal everything, murder us all, and put an end to life” (100).

When Abdulkadir and his wife decide to separate, Fadumo is sent to Germany again. This time, she is ordered to stay with Sahra, a cousin of aunt Madeleine who lives with her brother and stepson in a small apartment in Munich. Fadumo has to share a bed with her flatmates and is expected to do the household and look after the baby. She is told that she cannot continue school as money is limited. If any, Fadumo shows only little reaction and simply agrees to the decisions made for her. Throughout the story, she seems to become more and more apathetic and lives her life in complete passivity, without even trying to break rules in order to make a step towards independence. Her hopelessness and lethargy can be linked to her depression resulting from her numerous negative experiences (cf. ch. 2.3.3). Indeed, she is still a young girl that suffers from a complex disease and consequently needs financial support for suitable treatment, but she never even seems to consider agreeing or disagreeing with the decisions made for her by others. Without reflecting, she simply obeys and acquiesces in the demands. Unfortunately, Fadumo has to stay with another family soon, after Sahra and her husband move to the United Arab Emirates and are not willing to take Fadumo with them. Since Fadumo has no idea where to go as no plans are made for her, she feels lost and desperate again:

I don't know how long I sat there. At some point, I remember, a cry rose in my chest – an immense pressure grew and then broke, shattering the stillness. Its echo fell back from the walls and pierced my breast, crashing into my body. I felt as though a club had been pounding my torso. At the same time, I wanted someone to hit me – anything so that I might feel again (110).

Fadumo's description of how she feels when being left alone in a foreign country shows the effect on her emotional health. For the first time, she realises the amount of pain she has to endure as a consequence of being sent from one family to another. She feels completely lost and desperately needs someone to rely on in her life.

Since Fadumo cannot survive on her own in a foreign country, Sahra's brother takes her to Augsburg where she can stay with another family that welcomes her immediately. Still, Fadumo has become rather homesick and tries to establish contact

with her relatives in Somalia. When calling uncle Abdulkadir in Mogadishu, he commands her to remain in Germany as there is no future in Somalia which makes Fadumo feeling rejected again as she is not informed about the instable conditions of her home country. Similar to her previous living situations, Fadumo does not stay long with the family in Augsburg as she soon meets her prospective husband Walter with whom she moves into a small apartment. For the first time, she is able to make her own decision about her living condition which represents a huge step towards her independence. Clearly, Fadumo "longed for family, peace, and harmony" (116) which has been withheld from her before.

In order to find peace and harmony, Fadumo wants Walter to meet her family and to show him her home country, when she realises that Somalia has become a dictatorship. After hearing about the large numbers of Somalis who are forced to flee in order to "escape hunger and war" (150) as well as the numerous women who are "abducted, raped, and dishonored for life" (150), Fadumo has a nervous breakdown. She has to live "in a permanent state of anguish" (152) as she fears for her relatives and reaches her "financial and emotional limits" (150) when sending money to Somalia in order to support them. She desperately longs for returning to her home country and for showing her little son his "African roots" (153). Although she is now able to make her own decisions, she is forced to stay in Germany since the Somali state is failing:

If a boy wanted a man's shirt, he would simply shoot him to get it. Or a man could be shot not for his shirt but for someone's pleasure in killing him. Human life was cheap. Adolescents raped women for fun. Children vanished. Their organs wound up on the international market in exchange for cash. It was a nightmare. The world closed its eyes (153).

Fadumo's despair results from her knowledge about the impossibility to return to her home country, but also from her impotence to support her relatives. Living in a peaceful European country while Somalia is collapsing makes her feeling faint. Not men, but the collapse of her home country now prevent Fadumo from her return. While she is forced to stay, numerous Somalis are forced to migrate to another country. In the 1990s, insecurity as well as famine resulted in an "extreme humanitarian crisis" (Abild 76) causing the death of 500,000 people and the forcible displacement of two million Somalis (76). For Fadumo, the crisis causes an enormous emotional drain as she has to follow the shocking news from a distance and knows that returning to her home country and her relatives is sheer impossible.

### 3.2 FGM in *Aman* and *Born in the big rains*

FGM is a brutal but widespread practice the majority of Somali girls are subjected to. Both stories, *Aman* and *Born in the big rains*, vividly describe the painful procedure from a victim's perspective, representing its immediate as well as long term consequences females have to suffer from. Virginia Lee Barnes' and Fadumo Korn's novels clearly show that circumcised Somali women are traumatised by the horrifying event they had to endure as young females and that physical and psychical consequences are often understated or ignored as the procedure remains a traditional practice.

#### 3.2.1 Types and procedures of FGM

In every society in which it is practised, female genital mutilation is a manifestation of gender inequality that is deeply entrenched in social, economic and political structures (WHO *Eliminating FGM* 5).

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a collective term referring to various practices involving cutting, removal and alteration of female genitals for nonmedical, but traditional reasons (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 3). Various names are given to describe the procedure, such as "female circumcision, female surgeries, female traditional surgery, cutting, and excision" (Skaine 7). The range of different designations is not unproblematic as it does not only entail controversial debates among scholars, but women who had to endure FGM often perceive certain terms as offensive since they do not accept to be considered as mutilated persons (7-8). To avoid ambiguity and for the sake of simplicity, the abbreviation FGM will be used continuously throughout this thesis, referring to various kinds of female circumcision.

Although FGM has been claimed illegal in Somalia since 1991, no national law against it exists (Skaine 244); it is still practised and remains "an unpunished crime" (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 51). According to statistics from the WHO, it is estimated that 100 to 140 million females had to undergo forms of FGM in 2000 and 3 million African girls are in danger of being circumcised per year (WHO *Eliminating FGM* 4). Forms of female genital cutting or mutilation can be categorised into four major types. Type 1 is called 'clitoridectomy' as it is executed by "partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce" (4). In Somalia, this type is often called 'sunna', a term coming from the Islamic culture with the meaning of 'tradition' (Skaine 8). For Type 2,

the 'excision', "the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora" (WHO *Eliminating FGM* 4), are removed. Somalis use to call this procedure 'khafd', meaning 'reduction' (Skaine 8). Type 3 refers to an even more radical form of FGM, namely 'infibulation', involving complete removal of the female genitals which is often practised by "[n]arrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris" (WHO *Eliminating FGM* 4). Females have to suffer from this form of FGM in the long term, as only small openings are left in order to be able to urinate and menstruate. The execution of this type is common in countries like Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, and Ethiopia (Skaine 10). In Somalia, infibulation is executed on 98 percent of young females (BitbR 41). The last category, Type 4, involves further harmful procedures like

pricking, piercing, or incising of the clitoris and/or labia; stretching of the clitoris and/or labia; cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue; scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice [...] or cutting of the vagina [...]; [as well as] introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding or for the purpose of tightening or narrowing it (Skaine 8).

Although Type 3 represents the most drastic form of FGM, all four types show severe consequences on women's physical and psychical health in the short and long term (cf. ch. 3.2.3) (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 93). Every single type represents an injurious practice and "a violation of the human rights of girls and women" (WHO *Eliminating FGM* 8).

In most cases, FGM is performed by elderly "[t]raditional practitioners" (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 11) who do not have any kind of medical education or training. The operation is performed either at home or outside, without attaching great importance on the sterility of the procedure. Typical instruments that are used are "special knives, scissors, razors, [...] pieces of glass [...] [or] sharp stones" (WHO *FGM Teacher's Guide* 31). Depending on the practitioner's experience as well as the type of FGM and the female's reaction, the procedure takes about 15 to 20 minutes. Afterwards, the sore genital area will be "dabbed with anything from alcohol or lemon juice to ash, herb mixtures, porridge, coconut oil or cow dung" (31). Additionally, many practitioners bind together the female's legs in order to avoid deceleration and interference of the healing process (31).

### 3.2.2 Performance and reactions of FGM

*Aman* by Virginia Lee Barnes tells the story of a Somali woman under the pseudonym equalling the title. The protagonist shares her traumatising experiences starting with her circumcision as a child, followed by further atrocities like the murder of a friend, her abuse and rape, as well as her struggle to survive without support from her family.

At the age of nine years, Aman is informed by her aunts about the upcoming circumcision which shall be performed without her mother's knowledge as the latter cannot afford the procedure and Aman's aunts consider it to be shameful for the whole family if their daughters are circumcised while their niece is left out. The event is planned in detail, Aman is woken up in the morning, "should be good and take a shower and come back" (Am 54). The circumcision takes place outside and people were invited before to clap and sing in order to drown the screams of the girl in pain. Aman is scared and suffering, but she is too embarrassed to scream. Instead, she asks a woman next to her to hold her tight and tries to bear the pain silently:

My body was gone in a second [...]. I could hear *shuuu...* like the sound when they are slicing meat – just like that was the way she sliced my body. She cut everything – she didn't cut the big lips, but she sliced off my clitoris and the two black little lips which were *haram* – impure – all that she sliced off like meat. [...] I thought I was going to die. I opened my eyes and looked down at myself, and the blood was coming out (56).

I asked her if she was finished, and she said no, she was going to do it again. [...] Every time I wanted to cry, I looked around to see if someone would help, but I just saw smiling faces and I felt shy again and I opened my mouth and pretended I was laughing, but I was dying inside. She sliced the top off my big lips, and then she took thorns like needles and put them in crossways, across my vagina, to close it up (56).

As can be seen from the quotes above, Aman has to undergo Type 3 of the categories of FGM, the infibulation. She is fully conscious when the practitioner cuts her clitoris, labia minora and even the top of her labia majora before sewing her up. The pain caused by this procedure must be unbearable, but Aman obviously does not perceive the event as a vicious act or torture of a child, but rather as an experience a young female has to undergo since it is expected by the community. This is the case as although FGM is in fact violent, societies that are used to such procedures do not consider it "as an act of violence, but rather as a necessary step to enable girls to 'become' women and to be accepted into the community" (Rushwan *FGM women's reproductive health* 131). As a consequence, girls who will be circumcised at an age

when they partly know about FGM are often in favour of the procedure as it conveys a feeling of appreciation and prestige; it means “spiritual purity and makes the girl beautiful” (Skaine 17). From this perspective, Aman’s restrained behaviour becomes more understandable, as resisting or even showing naturally resulting emotions from a procedure like infibulation would be shameful for her as well as for the whole family. For the reader, empathy with the protagonist and rejection of FGM increases enormously within those lines as the event is explicitly described from the perspective of a young girl. By narrating her traumatic experience as a child, the story is portrayed “[w]ith the honesty of [her] childhood self and the insight of an adult” (Mann 338-339) with the effect that the brutality done to her in such a “world of obscurity” (336) is reinforced.

Similarly, in *Born in the big rains* Fadumo Korn tells about her experiences in a “country marked by masculinity, despotism, and violence” (BitbR 19). Like Aman, she is subjected to Type 3 of FGM as a young female without sufficient knowledge about the procedure and its consequences:

Hands touched my body everywhere, a horde of hands, pressing, tearing, pulling. A voice said: ‘Hold her tight!’ A hand gagged my mouth. The first cut was ice cold. A deep blue pain. A lightning bolt to the head. The voice of my mother, calling: ‘Don’t scream like that. Don’t shame me. Be a big girl!’ [...] Blood on my backside, ice cold blood. [...] The world stopped spinning. Everything went numb (38).

The event is told without details of the cutting itself, but the experience seems to be rather similar to Aman’s. Both girls do not lose their consciousness but feel a certain kind of passivity. Their bodies seem to stop fighting against the pain, despite its intensity that is vividly described. Fadumo cannot tolerate it silently and starts to scream which immediately evokes a feeling of shame by her mother.

Shame is an important aspect of FGM. Not only does it arise when young females express their pain or show resistance during the operation, but also regarding girls and women who are not circumcised which implies “a lack of purity” (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 95). Enduring the pain and not showing emotions of suffering is a result of Somali girls’ education as they are taught to hide feelings of discomfort (95). This does not only apply to girls, but to females in general, as one interviewee from Somalia explains: “If you scream, you are supposed to feel shame... [...] you just have to endure” (95). In *Aman*, it can be seen that the protagonist is educated in this belief as

she feels the pain in its full intensity but avoids screaming in order to protect herself and her family from disgrace. She behaves the way she was told by her aunts before the circumcision: “Don’t let your family down. Don’t let yourself down. The children will laugh at you tomorrow if you cry today” (Am 55). In *Born in the big rains*, Fadumo’s mother immediately tries to stop her daughter from screaming; not by comforting her as it might be expected, but by mentioning that she would bring shame on her. When Fadumo starts to cry more intensely, she is pressed down by the excisor and told by her mother to “[h]old still. It will soon be over. [...] You’re not the first to go through this” (BitbR 40). Thus, it can be seen that the amount of pain felt during the procedure is not considered as something unbearable, but rather as a side-effect of a necessary measure which young girls simply have to endure as it is meant to contribute to their purity.

After the procedure, Fadumo’s mother is proud of her daughter who could preserve the honour of the family by enduring her circumcision: “Now you’re a clean girl,’ my mother said and stroked my cheek. ‘You’ll glow. You’ll shine.’” (BitbR 41). Being ‘pure’ or ‘clean’ ascertains the protection of the family’s honour as the circumcised female can hardly engage in sexual activity without her relatives’ knowledge since her virginity, the “absolute premarital requirement” (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 95), will be proved after her wedding night by an “evidence of bleeding” (95). If the woman is not a virgin anymore, the whole family is confronted with disgrace and humiliation. Since Somalis want to prevent “rumors of presumed ‘bad behaviour’” (95), their daughters are circumcised before the age they can sexually interact. In an interview, a Somali woman clearly expresses why FGM is so popular in her country of origin: “You circumcise so you don’t have to feel shame... damage the family’s honor. I protect my sexuality and this protects my family’s honor. It is the family’s sharaff you protect, the family’s honor” (95). In Aman’s social environment it is common to check a girl’s virginity not only after the wedding night, but weekly after her genital cutting. However, according to the protagonist it is unusual for a circumcised girl to voluntarily sexually engage with another man before her marriage, as she is not only scared of her family who will discover the misconduct, but of the physical pain the intercourse will cause (Am 59).

In most cases, it can be distinguished between social, physical as well as religious purity that is claimed to be reached through FGM (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 96).

Social cleanness is essential for females in order to be integrated and respected in their communities. A woman who was not circumcised as a girl risks to be perceived as unmarriageable since men often expect their future wives to be pure and untouched. Also, “unless her clitoris is removed” (Skaine 17) a woman is not going to be regarded as a “mature person” (17). Physical cleanness refers to hygienic and aesthetic aspects as well as to the fact that females’ external genitalia are deemed to be “ugly and dirty and they will continue to grow” (17) leading to a woman’s “overactive and uncontrollable sex drive [...] [which] will [...] be a menace to all because the uncut clitoris grows big and puts pressure on this organ” (27). The most controversial debates presumably occur regarding religious purity. Many Somalis consider the practice as a tradition resulting from spiritual and religious beliefs. However, female circumcision is not actively encouraged by religion as it is neither “an obligation to Islam” (Rushwan *FGM women's reproductive health* 131) nor to Christianity, but rather a cultural practice which only shows religious roots as religion and culture in Africa were combined in the past history (Skaine 117). Nevertheless, the perception of FGM as a practice contributing to “religious identification” (18) increased after 1990 as an “Islamic process” (Isman, Ekéus, and Berggren 96) when more importance was ascribed to religion and people wanted to “improve themselves as Muslims” (96). Controversies exist regarding the conception of FGM in the sharia law, but considering female circumcision as a religious practice would be a misinterpretation of the Quran (96).

For Fadumo, social and physical aspects of purity seem to prevail, but she also links her circumcision to its supposed importance in religion. At the age of nineteen, Fadumo lives in Germany where she meets and later marries Walter. The closer the couple becomes, the more embarrassed Fadumo feels as she is not able to have sexual intercourse with Walter since she needs to be cut open before. Her friend Maryan comforts her after her negative experience with a German gynaecologist who was unable to cope with her genital mutilation. Fadumo does not know about FGM as a cultural practice and is told by Maryan that it is not applied on German females:

“[...] [T]hat's disgusting!’ I swallowed. Actually I almost laughed. It sounded so absurd. ‘You mean, all the women in this country are dirty?’ [...] A spontaneous feeling of superiority came over me – just a hint at first, then my pride grew. It filled me up, carried me, erased my shame, shoving sadness aside. I was clean in a country of the unclean. A child chosen by God.” (BitbR 121).

From her reaction it can be seen that she feels superior to females who were not subjected to any form of FGM. The feeling of shame she experiences when she has



to undress in front of her gynaecologist is immediately undermined by pride and changes in self-perception; knowing that she is a 'pure' and 'clean' woman surrounded by uncircumcised and, thus, 'unclean' females allows her to grow in confidence by feeling special and more attractive. In addition to aesthetic aspects, female circumcision seems to convey power and a strong belonging in form of developing a group identity (Levin 137). When staying with her uncle at his residence in Mogadishu, Fadumo meets two Spanish girls who obviously annoy the protagonist and are blamed for not being circumcised in reverse:

'You stink!'

The little daughter of the ambassador started to cry. [...] 'We're circumcised too,' she explained. 'We were done a long time ago.'

'I don't believe it,' I said.

'It's true.'

'Then show me!' [...]

'You're dirty. Ugh!' I made a face and bent down toward the younger girl. 'You dribble. You're going to hell.' [...]

The older sister wiped her tears. 'We're circumcised just like you!'

'Prove it,' I commanded with the self assurance of a born leader. 'Come on, let's go upstairs.' (BitbR 76).

By using aspects influencing aesthetics, like an uncut vagina that dribbles and smells, the narrator expresses the inferiority of uncircumcised persons. Fadumo and the other Somali girls who are present and show the same attitude towards the foreigners are consequently not only more attractive and clean, but also strongly aligned resulting in their dominance and apparent superiority. As the Spanish girls are urged to show their genitals to strangers, a reversal of roles takes place. It is not Fadumo herself who has to openly present a human being's most intimate body parts as it was the case at her circumcision, but she is now the person in power who can command others to do so. Consequently, the "strength of the practice's emotional appeal" (Levin 137) becomes evident. Instead of previous feelings of shame and physical as well as emotional pain, Fadumo feels pride, power and a strong belonging to those who are "in the right" (135).

Similar to Fadumo, Aman is proud of having endured the pain and being a circumcised female. For her, physical but above all social purity seem to be the dominant reasons favouring the procedure. She especially highlights the importance of FGM regarding marriage, as "your husband will know you are a virgin" (Am 59) and does not have to worry that "you played around" (59). Aman expresses her pride to her mother who is obviously not pleased with what happened to her daughter without her knowledge: "I knew she was angry, but I was proud, so I told her to be happy for me. I said, 'They

did it because they love me” (57). Again, it can be seen that the brutality of the procedure is undermined by the pride it seems to evoke; in Aman's case not by her mother, but by herself. Being circumcised is perceived as a tradition that is necessary for girls to ensure beauty and cleanliness which contributes to their acceptance in society. From this perspective, it is also more understandable for the reader why Aman assumes her circumcision to be an essential event her aunts planned for her in order to express their affection.

### **3.2.3 Emotional and physical consequences of FGM**

So far, it has been made clear that FGM is in fact a violent act torturing young girls with horrifying minutes or hours of pain while the majority of people regardless of the degree of relationship tolerate or even favour the procedure. This is the case as the consequences of female circumcision are often unknown, concealed or simply not perceived in its full scope.

FGM does not only cause pain and shock during the excision, but has serious effects on women's health. Possible consequences frequently include “scarring, infertility, painful sexual intercourse, rupture of the vaginal walls, long and obstructed labor, chronic uterine and vaginal infections, bladder incontinence, dysmenorrhea, and obstruction of the flow of menstrual blood” (Skaine 23). Additionally, when delivering a child, women are often exposed to “the risks of maternal death, stillbirths, haemorrhage, and infection” (23). Type 3 of FGM results in a “direct mechanical barrier to delivery” (25), while Types 1, 2 and 4 are likely to be the reason for “severe scarring that causes an obstruction during delivery” (25). Concerns also occur as instruments are often shared for multiple operations, which can lead to an easy transfer of HIV (25).

Furthermore, circumcised women are not only exposed to physical effects, but also to psycho-social-sexual consequences (27). Many females feel incomplete as a healthy part of their body was cut while they were fully conscious. Fadumo experiences such kind of incompleteness, as she mentions “They had separated us – my body and me. We were no longer a whole” (BitbR 40). Other psycho-social-sexual effects include anxiety and depression resulting from FGM as a traumatic experience. Many circumcised women are not able to enjoy their bodies, as they neither want to touch their genitals themselves, not even for cleaning, nor develop a sexual desire for

another person (Skaine 27). Somalis are fully aware of circumcised females' lack of desire, but consider it as a positive effect of FGM since "a woman will maintain her chastity and virginity before marriage, maintain her faithfulness during marriage, and increase male pleasure" (27-28). Thus, fulfilling her tasks in the domestic sphere (cf. ch. 2.2) as a loyal wife and mother is supposed to be more likely accomplished by a woman who is circumcised since she will not show any interest in "play[ing] around" (Am 59).

In *Born in the big rains*, Fadumo is faced with consequences of her infibulation shortly after the excision. If she wants to urinate, she must be taken to a place where she can lay down since the pain is too intense to either walk or sit. When trying to empty her bladder, her mother recognises that she is sewn up completely wherefore "not a drop emerge[s]" (BitbR 40-41) and the excisor needs to operate on the girl again in order to open her slightly: "With cold fingers, she pulled a thorn out of my flesh. It squealed. [...] It took half an hour to empty my bladder. The urine burned the open wound; tears ran down my face. Then the old woman replaced the bandage from hip to knee. Thorns bit into my thighs" (41). Retention of urine is a common consequence of FGM which many circumcised females have to suffer from. For most infibulated girls, it is difficult to urinate like an uncircumcised person, as "[p]ain, or fear of pain," (Rushwan *FGM women's reproductive health* 131) frequently hinders "the natural flow" (131) during urination. For some girls it is even impossible like in Fadumo's case, when the female is sewn too tightly and "[t]he taut bridge of skin [...] leave[s] insufficient space for passing liquid waste" (Rushwan *FGM women's reproductive health* 131). Urine retention often causes infection and can in the worst scenario lead to the person's death. In addition to the inability to empty her bladder, Fadumo has a fever shortly after the circumcision and is in a life-threatening position due to shock and illness: "The stink of pus and rotting flesh began to spread. [...] I felt as if I were being boiled alive with the heat and the pounding, the hammering inside me, the swelling even louder – roaring. My face burned. Hellfire. Everywhere" (BitbR 42). The pain she has to endure is unbearable for her body; she loses consciousness and has been watched over by her mother for seven days. It is not uncommon for girls to die from circumcisions as many have to give their lives either as a consequence of infections or the loss of blood, or their bodies and psyches simply cannot resist the shock and pain (42).

A deferred but even more painful complication from infibulation arises monthly during Fadumo's menstruation. When having her period for the first time, she does not know what is happening to her body. She feels anxious and panics as blood stains in her underpants can only come from her genitals. She knows about women bleeding in the wedding night, but nobody has ever told her about a woman's menstruation. Immediately, Fadumo recollects aspects of the traumatic event, her infibulation, as this was the only time she saw blood coming from that part of her body. She visualises the threatening appearance of the old woman who operated on her: "Like a ghost, the excisor suddenly appeared before me – her crippled fingers, the clearing, the thorns." (BitbR 93). Obviously, she also remembers the pain and feels anxious since she believes to be physically endangered as she reasons that the traumatic event has to be experienced again as a consequence of her bleeding: "I didn't know what it was, but clearly something in me had broken. They were going to sew me up a second time! Fear grabbed me by the throat. What had I done wrong? [...] In any event, it was my fault. That much was clear" (BitbR 93). In addition to her feelings of anxiety, Fadumo instantly considers herself as the person to blame without even knowing what is happening to her body and where the blood stains in her underpants could come from. As mentioned earlier (cf. ch. 2.3.3), a traumatic experience often results in damaging an affected person's self-confidence which obviously applies to Fadumo. Rather than trying to find out why she is bleeding, she feels shame and is sure that she is the one that has to be accused. Unfortunately, her menstruation does not only trigger trauma-resultant emotions and reactions, but also leads to monthly suffering from physical pain as a further consequence of her infibulation:

The blood seeped out of the tiny opening much too slowly, sometimes blocked by clots. The pain was much more intense than when I urinated (101).

Hardly had one period passed than I began to fear the next. Half my life was filled with pain; the other half, fear of pain. [...] If I made it to school, they sent me home. Suddenly I understood the high absentee rate among nearly all the girls (101).

As it is often the case with infibulated females, menstrual problems occur due to "partial or total occlusion of the vaginal opening" (Rushwan *FGM women's reproductive health* 132). This does not only result in huge pain and fear, but can lead to severe consequences like "dysmenorrhea, [...] [or] haematocolpos, the accumulation of menstrual blood in the vagina and uterus" (132). Such physical effects cause suffering and can lead to psychological consequences, but they also hinder young females in their daily lives as the pain is too severe and intense to be tolerated and dissembled.

To give an example, circumcised girls are often not able to attend school regularly due to their menstrual problems which can be seen from the quote above. This means, numerous young females show shortcomings in their education. Consequently, literacy rates are higher among males which in turn leads to the fact that females are underrepresented in formal employment (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 51). From this it becomes evident that consequences of FGM are not limited to the physical and psychical pain of an individual, but can influence a whole nation's gender relations.

Fadumo experiences traumatic events repeatedly during her life; she is obviously deeply traumatised and not able to fully recover from what she had to endure. During the circumcision, she becomes unable to express her pain: "A shriek to the ends of the world wanted to escape but stuck in my throat" (BitbR 38). The description of her inability to scream is followed by her change in personality. A previously lively and cheerful child changes into a rather quiet, conscientious and depressive one:

I felt wiped out, shrunken, worthless. My energy had evaporated. Instead, fear and mourning ruled my body. 'You've changed,' my father remarked. 'What's the matter with you?' I didn't have words with which to answer him (43).

I was crying. I wanted to leave my body behind. I had been deceived. Everything promised had turned into illusion, rotten, nothing but dust in my hands. They had betrayed me. I had not become beautiful. I didn't radiate. Instead, I had fallen into an abyss. And now, upon landing, there to meet me was the cold blue pain that my body never forgot. [...] I felt walls growing up, separating me from those I loved (44).

As can be seen from the quotes, Fadumo shows trauma-resultant emotions like her shortage of energy, feeling of worthlessness and abandonment which are prevailing indicators of a depressive personality (cf. ch. 2.3.3). After the infibulation, she is dominated by negative emotions and fear. She feels betrayed by the world and the persons she loves most resulting in experiencing instability and insecurity; feelings that are exactly the opposite from what a child at Fadumo's age needs to develop and become a well-adjusted and self-confident mature woman. Since circumcision is an ancient tradition and applied on almost all girls in Somalia, Fadumo's experience is not considered as a traumatic event by her social environment. Consequently, neither her family nor other relatives or acquaintances can see a necessity to provide support for the recovery of her traumatic experience. Fadumo herself seems to be rather confused by her emotions as she knows that what she had to endure applies to the norm and is perceived as a procedure women undergo in order to become beautiful and clean. She

has been educated in this believe, “they’d hammered it into [her]” (45) which is why she dismisses a girl with the words “Go away, [...] [y]ou’re dirty” (45) shortly after her circumcision. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Fadumo suffers from the event lifelong as her daily life is influenced by occasional re-experiences of her circumcision. She repeatedly refers to her infibulation as an event where she had to endure “icy pain” (45) or “blue pain” (38, 143), providing an even more dramatic image of her experienced brutality for the reader. The most vivid memory occurred to her shortly before her operation to be defibulated, meaning “the medial cutting of the scar tissue resulting from infibulation” (Rushwan *FGM pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum period* 100), in a German hospital. Obviously, the upcoming medical treatment of her genital area which she does not want to be touched again after her circumcision (BitbR 45) triggers traumatic memories that are now even more relevant: “I wasn’t afraid. I was panicked. [...] When I closed my eyes, I saw the clearing. Sometimes I heard the squeaking of a thorn. My circumcision was thousands of miles away, and yet I remained fearful of the excisor’s dirty fingers and the pain they had wrought” (123). Fadumo’s memories are clear symptoms of PTSD. She is horrified and has to mentally re-experience the pain as a consequence of her inability to recover from trauma and release fears. Moreover, Fadumo does not only experience traumatic memories in conscious conditions, but is also not spared nightmares during her pregnancy. Every night, she wakes up due to the fear experienced in her dreams resulting from the reoccurring vivid picture of her “womb sewn shut, and the child unable to be born and dying” (143). Fadumo’s anxiety seems to dominate her mind leading to negative emotions and horrifying daydreams:

Then the fantasies started coming by day. Within seconds, I was dizzy, trembling, and had to sit down. I saw the excisor’s hands and heard the squeaking of the thorns. I smelled the dust and the blood. My memories were sharp and clear. Blue pain seized my legs, pounding them from heels to hips. And suddenly I felt again, the old separation, the old enemy. My lower body wasn’t mine (143).

Fadumo is deeply traumatised and cannot control her emotions. No further stimuli are necessary to trigger traumatic memories, her pregnancy and the fear of delivering her child are sufficient criteria to result in flashbacks and evoke anxiety and shock. Regardless whether she is conscious or unconscious, Fadumo is haunted by the brutal infibulation she had to undergo as a child. Additionally, as a consequence of either her trauma or an undiscovered infection caused by the circumcision (152), she is diagnosed with rheumatism. Her hands, feet, knees and hips are degenerated, her hands and feet showing “the most advanced bone damage” (91).

As mentioned earlier, not only urination and menstruation can be difficult and painful for circumcised girls, also intercourse, especially the first time, becomes a rather negative experience. Many girls fear their wedding nights not only as blood stains need to be on the bedlinen in order to prove their virginities, but also because of the pain they expect to endure. For Aman, the first sexual engagement becomes a nightmare (cf. ch. 3.3). She fears the pain and has no desire to fulfil her duties as a wife as her husband is rather old and does not attract her in any way. In addition, due to her infibulation she needs to be defibulated before being able to sleep with him. Her husband obviously knows rather well about the procedure to enable his wife satisfying his needs:

I knew he was going to chain me to the bed and use the scissors and razor to open me up. And I knew I could die that way, if he cut me the wrong way (Am 133).

I know what you've brought and I know what you're going to do, and I'm scared because I might die. If you want me dead, do it. Otherwise, take me to the doctor in the morning (133).

Aman luckily has the strength to prevent her husband from cutting her whereby she would risk a haemorrhage. Using materials like scissors and razors to open a woman's vagina is not only painful and involves high risks of infections, but can result in life-threatening conditions for the wife if her husband has too little knowledge about the procedure. Unlike many other females who are still cut by their husbands or forcefully opened through penetration, Aman is defibulated by the woman who circumcised her before. She has to prove her virginity to the people who are invited to the event and submits to the cutting without showing any emotions. Obviously, Aman's fear of her husband cutting and deflowering her is greater than the pain during the opening by the excisor. However, what is left unsaid again is that the woman does not have any medical training wherefore Aman is repeatedly exposed to the danger of "serious injury, infection, [...] [or even] death" (Rushwan *FGM pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum period* 101).

In addition, it needs to be considered that females like Aman are not only subjected to defibulation, but also to the pain of the subsequent intercourse. Often, infibulated women have life-long problems to enjoy sexual intercourse with their partners due to "coital difficulty [...] [and] an unsatisfying sex life" (Balk 60). This also applies to Fadumo despite her voluntary marriage with a man she loves: "After the first time Walter and I made love, a wave of relief and pride swept over me. Finally I had become

a real woman and wife, had managed to do what was expected of me, and the act had not destroyed me. I had survived! I felt fulfilled" (BitbR 138). As can be seen from the quote, the prevailing motif of sexual intercourse seems to be fulfilling the duty of a wife rather than pleasure, satisfying one's own sexual needs and expressing affection for the partner. Fadumo apparently feared the intimate situation with her husband before, as she talks about an act that could have destroyed her. Fulfilment is consequently not provided by becoming intimate with the person she loves, but by knowing she did what society expects from her and by 'surviving' or overcoming the act itself. Besides, if women who had to undergo Type 3 of FGM like Aman and Fadumo are not defibulated, they might not be able to have penetrative intercourse at all due to "the tough fibrotic skin closing the vaginal introitus or by stenosis as result of scarring and or through severe vaginismus or dyspareunia" (Rushwan *FGM pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum period* 101). As a consequence, it is not uncommon that couples who do not consult medical advice for the injured woman only can have intercourse either anally or through a false vagina that is formed by "internalization of skin as the result of repeated penial pressure" (101).

For a circumcised woman, complications and severe physical pain have to be endured especially during childbirth. Females at highest risk are those who had to undergo Type 3 of FGM (102). Due to infibulated women's tight introitus, vaginal examination during labour might be impossible wherefore defibulation is necessary (102). Furthermore, it is even more problematic that infibulation hinders the baby to pass resulting in incredible pain for the woman in labour, as enormous pressure of "the fetal's head against adjacent organs" (102) is exerted. As a consequence, the woman risks suffering from fistulae which can lead to urinary incontinence in addition to frequent endangering bleeding resulting from "vaginal and perineal tears" (102). Aman is exposed to such incredible pain caused by the baby pressing against organs when she is in labour with her second child: "The pain is still there, but I feel the baby coming out and it has no room. It feels like my skin is breaking [...]. I can't stand the pain any longer" (Am 281). A doctor who passes Aman's room hears her screams and defibulates her with his scissors; otherwise she would not be able to give birth to her child. After the delivery, women are often reinfibulated which implies "re-stitching together of the scar tissue" (100):



They sewed me up, alive again. There were eight people holding me. Each cut took four or five stitches – imagine, they were sewing me just like clothes. I was tired and was saying, 'Allah, take me away...' (Am 238).

Now the pain of the baby was gone, but the pain from the stitches felt like a snake was in there eating me (238).

As soon as she has delivered her first child which made her suffer from enormous pain, Aman has to undergo reinfibulation. From her description, it becomes evident that the procedure is a cruel and inhuman treatment of a woman who is still exhausted and harmed by the painful childbirth. Aman feels weak and inferior to the people who are holding and sewing her. She becomes passive and does not want to continue an existence in a world with such brutality and ignorance for both body and feelings of other human beings. In fact, "[r]einfibulation violates human rights to the highest attainable standard of health and to bodily integrity in the absence of any medical benefit" (Serour 94). It harms women physically as well as emotionally and increases health risks enormously. Depending on the hygiene of the setting where the procedure takes place, women are exposed to various infections and gynaecological complications (94). Females who were defibulated before in order to have sexual intercourse with their partners or to deliver a child are returned to an infibulated state and, thus, are faced with prior or even worse consequences (94). Their lives are organised in this vicious circle that is hard to escape from if one wants to avoid risking one's own as well as the family's honour. In the case of Aman, she was infibulated as a child, defibulated in order to have sexual intercourse with her husband, reinfibulated after the delivery of her first child and defibulated in order to deliver her second child. The damage done to her body and psyche is almost unimaginable. Aman's behaviour and reactions are a consequence of her traumatic experiences with FGM and men (cf. ch. 3.3), leading to an "intertwining of sadism and sexuality in a culture that practices female circumcision" (Boddy 308).

### 3.3 Rape and abuse in *Aman* and *From a crooked rib*

*Aman* and *From a crooked rib* tell the stories of two Somali girls who are traumatised by their atrocious experiences as young females. Aman does not only suffer from immediate and long-term consequences of FGM, but is sexually abused and raped repeatedly. She has to grow up in a time when Somalia is on the move and Siad Barre seizes power; a time, which is especially dangerous for females. In Nuruddin Farah's story, the protagonist's traumatising experiences are more complex as Ebla has internalised patriarchal structures (cf. ch. 3.1). On that account, she does not consider her sexual intercourse with her husband against her will and without his consideration of a female circumcised body as rape. Although Farah's story is fictional, marital abuse and rape are no isolated cases, but often tolerated by females and concealed from the public.

#### 3.3.1 Sexual violence in Somalia

In 2013, from January to June “nearly 800 cases of sexual and gender-based violence in Mogadishu alone” (HRW *Here, rape is normal* 1) were reported by the United Nations. It can be assumed that the actual number including unreported cases is much higher. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are strongly connected to gender inequality (41) as in patriarchal countries like Somalia, the “gender gap” (41) contributes remarkably to the likelihood that women are “subjected to violence” (41). Thus, the aim to reduce forms of sexual violence cannot be achieved without progression and further development of gender equality (41).

In Somalia, “rape is normal” (HRW *Here, rape is normal* 4) wherefore only little attention is drawn to victims who lack support for recovery and consequently do not consider reporting their experienced violence. Somalis generally distinguish between the term ‘kufsi’, which can be translated with the English word ‘rape’, and the term ‘faroxumeyn’, meaning ‘sexual assault’, which implies “any malicious actions intended to produce physical or psychological harm to women” (Musse 77). Kufsi is frequently understood as “penetrative intercourse with a woman by an assailant using force, against her will” (77). Cases of rape and sexual assault occur increasingly in times of conflict, since sexual violence often functions as a “weapon of terror and intimidation” (Kumar 113) against hostile clans. For this purpose, the primary aim for the perpetrator

is not to satisfy his own needs, but to convey a threatening message to rivals by raping a woman (Card 6). Consequently, rape in this sense is not only a violent crime harming and traumatising an individual, but also an act of terror that is meant to raise public awareness in order to express dominance and power: "Martial rape domesticates not only the women survivors who were its immediate victims but also the men socially connected to them" (7). After the state collapse, Somalia's crisis allowed militia men "to rape women with impunity" (Kumar 113) resulting in a long-lasting "widespread rape" (113) across the whole country. Its peak was reached in the years from 1991 to 1992 when women lived in a constant fear of being raped, abducted or forced into marriage, but those life-threatening conditions were certainly not only restricted to this period of time (113).

Sexual violence in Somalia is not necessarily confined to war, but also occurs in civilian life to force a marriage, express male dominance or satisfy personal needs without consent of a sexual partner. Its "fundamental function" (Card 7) of either martial or civilian rape seems to apply to all incidents, namely "to display, communicate, and produce or maintain dominance, which is both enjoyed for its own sake and used for such ulterior ends as exploitation, expulsion, dispersion, [or] murder" (7). Rape as a means to force marriage is especially used among nomadic societies (Musse 77). It mostly occurs when a woman's bride-wealth demanded by her father is regarded too high and, thus, "beyond the means of eligible suitors" (77). As a result, the girl will be raped which does not only reduce her value, but also leads to an earlier marriage than planned by her family wherefore the prospective husband has the opportunity to negotiate about the payment (77). In addition, what is often ignored is that rape does not only occur before marriage, but also afterwards between husband and wife. Especially in patriarchal societies, gender-discriminating perceptions are conveyed from "earlier precedents" (Flowers 40) to the present. It is thus not uncommon that females are considered to be the "property by their husbands" (40) which contributes to a general assumption that marriage automatically implies "the man's right to sexual intercourse without the woman's right of refusal" (40). As a consequence, a married woman forced by her husband to have intercourse with him is frequently not regarded as a victim of sexual violence (Smith 169). This common perception has been conveyed "throughout much of history and is the case in many nations today. [...] By 2000, only 26 countries worldwide had laws recognizing marital rape" (Smith 169).

Nowadays, in countries like Ghana, Zimbabwe or South Africa, “laws prohibiting marital rape do exist” (London 127) but “are rarely enforced” (127) while in countries like Somalia, “rape is part of women’s everyday experience of violence” (127). Usually, percentages of marital rape incidents are rather low, as cases are often not reported due to feelings of shame or a lack of knowledge about where to receive support. It is further problematic that in many areas, sexual violence between a married couple is not even recognised as rape with the consequence that “familial relationships within certain cultures may sanction, condone, or accept sexual violence against women under the guise of normal and legitimate marital relationships” (Parrot and Cummings 97). Marital or spousal rape frequently “coexists with other violent forms of control in marriage” (97) such as “[b]eatings torture, sexual abuse, and psychological control” (97). Such forms of domestic violence including marital rape result among other aspects from gender discrimination (OECD 262). Somali women’s “physical integrity” (262) is endangered as laws against rape are rarely applied and “no legislation against spousal rape” (262) exists. It is thus difficult for a woman to receive support if she is sexually abused by her husband since “Somali society is conditioned not to openly discuss issues such as domestic violence and rape, which [...] hampers women’s access to justice” (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* xviii). Additionally, raped women often do not even want to report their cases, as victims are often confronted with a “loss of dignity” (Abdullahi 30) resulting in their “fear of shame and social stigma” (30). As a consequence, a stigmatised female risks to be considered as unmarriageable or might be divorced due to the shame she brings to her family. Thus, her violent experience does not only traumatise her, but credits her with the burden of a “lifelong stigma” (30).

### **3.3.2 Marital abuse and rape**

At the age of thirteen, after being forced to separate from her boyfriend, Aman is persuaded to marry “[a]n uncle on [her] mother’s side” (Am 102) which seems to be acceptable for her as she will be able “to get money and be somebody” (103). For Aman, the aim of her marriage is to receive money to support her family, but she is too scared about her assumed duties as a wife so that she repeatedly tries to run away before her husband can touch her. Each time, she is taken back and ultimately forced to stay as doors are locked and watchmen organised to keep Aman under guard. Like for many young girls, her arranged marriage with an old man can be regarded as a

“loss of dignity” (Abdullahi 30). Being subjugated and suppressed as a consequence of a long-lasting patriarchal structure that provides only men with a valid voice, Aman is obliged to do what her father and afterwards her husband expect from her (cf. ch. 3.1.1). At night, she is forced to endure whatever the latter desires:

I was scared to death of what he was going to do to me (Am 131).

[...] [H]e started coming to me, and he was so big, with a big stomach, and I was a skinny little girl. I tried to get away, but I couldn't (132).

I was jumping up and down, trying to get away, and I was crying and asking for help, but nobody would come, because that's the system – once you're married [...] nobody will come and help you, because that's your husband and he has to disvirgin you, and they know it's painful, but that's the custom. So I cried and shouted, but nobody came (132).

Due to Aman's infibulation and her husband's disability to open her through forceful penetration, she is spared being violently disvirgined. Her husband repeatedly abuses her the following nights in order to satisfy his needs which is tolerated by Aman as she knows she could be confronted with even worse conditions. From the description of her husband's appearance as well as her reactions, the discrepancy in age is clearly expressed. Aman is a child with fears as she is not mature enough to have prior sexual experiences and, thus, has no idea of what is going to happen to her body. Regardless of the females' age, newly married wives are expected to sexually engage with their husbands, who are often considerably older than their wives, during the wedding night or, at the latest, the night after. In cases where the marriage was arranged by relatives, it is thus likely that physical intimacy does not result from a couple's affection for each other, but is rather forced by the male partner as it is expected by society and perceived as the duty of his wife to satisfy his needs. Since arranged marriages are common in Somalia (cf. ch. 2.2.1), it can be assumed that such kind of sexual abuse is endured by numerous women. It is not only traumatising, but can be rather dangerous especially for females who are at Aman's age or even younger, so-called “prepubescent girls” (Levesque 131) who are promised to older men. This is the case as young girls who are forced to sexually engage with their husbands often become pregnant before their bodies are mature enough to give birth to a child. Consequences can reach from “illness [to] [...] death from childbirth” (131) which is supported by a study showing that “in Nigeria, women younger than fifteen years of age are four times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than women aged fifteen to nineteen” (131). Despite the evident abomination and brutality of forced sexual intercourse between older men and young girls, Aman correctly mentions that nobody will interfere in order to support

those young females as it is accepted and tolerated by society. A married woman has to fulfil her duties regardless of her age and affection for her husband.

In Nuruddin Farah's novel, Ebla internalises Somalia's prevalent image of a married woman completely. While Aman appears to be more emancipated due to her strong will and repeated attempts to escape and free herself, Ebla seems to be restricted by her own limited perception regarding women's rights and duties which is influenced by an upbringing according to common beliefs in a patriarchal system. Although Ebla is frequently presented as an eloquent young woman with a longing for freedom and independence who is even partly aware of women's inferior position (cf. ch. 3.1), she has adopted the general view which presupposes that as soon as a female is married, she has to dedicate herself to her husband's needs and desires. When Ebla has to spend the first night with her prospective husband Awill, she is horrified by the thought that he could touch her before their marriage:

Awill went towards the door to check if he had bolted it properly. Ebla lay terrified on the bed, her elbows underneath her belly, raising her head a little bit to have a better view of what Awill was doing (FaCR 85).

Awill stood up straight and showered hard blows upon Ebla – in the mouth, at her head, on her belly. He gave her a kick or two on the belly as she tried to bite him. Ebla did not cry, she wanted to, but she knew she should not. Awill grasped her by the plaited hair and pulled her down. Now he jumped over her and sat upon her belly, her body heaving underneath his.

'You are my wife.'

'When I have become your wife, I will accept everything. But this is rape. Do you want to rape me?' (86).

From Ebla's reaction to Awill's intention it can be seen that she shares the opinion that sexual intercourse against her will is only to be considered as rape if she is not married. This means, the man's dominant and frightening appearance as well as Ebla's emotions of fear and insecurity would be irrelevant if they were married since Awill's behaviour could be considered normal as he would simply claim his right to sexually engage with his wife. Besides the perception of rape being non-existent within marriage, it can be assumed that Ebla fears to damage her reputation if she loses her virginity before the wedding night. Sexual intercourse before marriage does not only bring shame on the respective woman and her family, but also reduces the bride's value enormously (cf. ch. 2.2.1). Consequently, if Awill refuses to marry Ebla after having sexual intercourse with her, it could be rather difficult for her to find another prospective husband. Despite Ebla's concept of rape, it must be said that non-

consensual sexual intercourse, regardless of age, gender and marital status, is in each instance to be defined as rape.

Additionally, fear of sexual intercourse in general is experienced by numerous women who had to undergo forms of FGM. As mentioned earlier (cf. ch. 3.2.3), victims avoid touching their genitals or being touched by others due to their painful and traumatising circumcision. In their first night together, when "Awill thought that he had better talk her to bed" (86), Ebla remembers her clitoridectomy, the removal and stitching of her clitoris, when she was only eight years old. She is frightened of the pain she will have to endure when sleeping with her prospective husband and "wished more than anything else that she was not a woman" (87). As Ebla comes from the rural area of Somalia where she grew up as a nomadic girl, she has only little knowledge about life in big cities such as Mogadishu. She knows that for a woman in dwellings like she used to live in, sexual intercourse with a man would mean that "her relations either shot her or knifed her to death" (87). Since her life in Mogadishu is completely different, she assumes that her reputation is unlikely to be negatively influenced by sexual relations as hardly anybody would notice in such a big city. Ebla seems to ignore her emotions, demands from Awill to swear marrying her the following day and stops fighting her prospective husband's approaches:

Ebla believed what he'd said; actually she mesmerized herself to believe it. Awill moved towards her slowly, placed his hand on her breasts and touched them. He then started to breathe fast and quick. In a couple of hours and after a great deal of sweating he succeeded in breaking the virginity of Ebla. She moaned and groaned and bit the edge of her cloth. She closed her eyes so that the sweat would not go in, and tasted the sour sweat which dripped into her mouth. She bled a great deal (89).

In general, rape can be defined as "forced, non-consensual sexual intercourse" (Flowers 22). Although Ebla finally does not react against Awill's pressure, she mentioned earlier that she shows no interest in having sexual intercourse and even tried to defend herself, but at some point she seems to surrender. She obviously does not enjoy what Awill does to her, but she simply stays passive and submits to it until it is over. For the reader, it is obvious that she is sexually abused by the man she is going to marry. The brutality of the event becomes even more evident when Ebla recollects the pain she had to endure during her circumcision as well as her first night with Awill, "two times that she wished she had not been born" (FaCR 137): "She [...] recalled that other night of pain – the first time she had ever had sexual contact. It was

with Awill, and it was very painful, indescribably painful. She had bled and he rejoiced seeing her blood, as his manhood depended upon breaking her chastity" (137). Awill's strong desire and pressure applied on Ebla resulting in his final success represent his male dominance and superiority, while Ebla has to bear the consequences. Her physical conditions deteriorate shortly afterwards as she feels nauseous the next day as soon as she wakes up and is unable to move: "I cannot move. I cannot go out.' She thought, 'You have almost cut my intestines to pieces'" (90). Ebla feels "morbid and weak" (92), she wants to use the lavatory and appease hunger, but she lacks energy to get out of bed. It is "the pain she felt in every joint of her body" (94) that prevents her from daily routines and natural behaviour. While Ebla suffers from her physical condition, Awill shows neither understanding nor any sense of guilt. Rather than caring for his prospective wife, he speaks to a Sheikh to accomplish the formalities of their marriage. After being called husband and wife, "Awill came to satisfy the animal desire in him. Being the second time, it was painful, but not as bad as the first time" (97). Although Ebla is still in pain from the first time sleeping with Awill, her husband shows no other interest but to sexually engage with her again. Also for his wife, his behaviour does not seem to be amoral or violent; she presumably believes that from now on she has to endure it due to the conducted marriage. She accepts the pain and her duty to fulfil Awill's desires while suppressing and hiding her own feelings and needs. Not surprisingly, her second sexual intercourse with her husband is described without positive emotions but rather neutrally with a negative overtone. The fact that Ebla sleeps with her husband without showing or uttering her displeasure clearly represents gender differences in Somalia's patriarchal society. Male dominance is obviously deeply rooted and accepted, even within marriage, where a wife always has to "provide for her husband's sexual needs" (Lewis *Blood and Bone* 57).

In the story of Aman, the protagonist is sexually abused by her husband repeatedly. Due to her infibulation as well as the man's weak erection, she escapes from being forcefully opened and disvirgined. In order to satisfy her husband's needs and to be able to have sexual intercourse, she needs to be defibulated (cf. ch. 3.2.3). After the painful procedure, Aman feels weak and has a fever which seems to be irrelevant for her husband who basically wants to show his wife the duties she has to fulfil:

He didn't care if I was sick or not, he wanted to do it. He did it. I cried, there was pain... because he was using his finger to make my hole bigger. [...] I started



crying and fighting back, and he slapped me a couple of times [...]. He came during the fighting – while we were fighting, he just did his thing (Am 141).

He wanted to make my hole bigger, but he didn't stay that long. He just made a little bit of pain and then he came, and after that it was calm. I didn't want that. I hated that. He slept, he snored, but I wasn't sleeping – I was thinking furiously... how to get away... (142).

Aman is sick and in pain, but her husband ignores her physical condition and treats her "like a slave" (142). The relation in power is clearly expressed as he obviously feels superior to his wife who is subjugated by her husband. Rather than showing respect and understanding for Aman's pain after her defibulation which caused wounds in her genital area, he treats her even worse by forcing her to have sexual intercourse with him. As Aman had to undergo the most intense form of FGM, she is unable to have carnal intercourse despite her defibulation. The excisor cut her open only a little, which is why her husband cannot easily disvirgin Aman and uses his fingers. As more precise definitions of rape often "vary by time, period, place, and gender" (Smith 169), a common perception remains, emphasising "that it involves the non-consensual penile penetration of the vagina" (169). Although for the reader Aman's description of her abuse by her husband might be a clear indication of marital rape, she insists on still being a virgin as penetration was only partial. Nevertheless, evidence for rape is not only given by the brutality used against her, but also from Aman's behaviour. She definitely has no interest in sleeping with her husband and even tries to defend herself not only verbally, but by fighting him back. Additionally, her husband's dominance becomes evident as well as her expressed disgust and aversion for him when mentioning that he ejaculates while they are fighting and snores during his sleep. Those aspects clearly show that the sexual intercourse was not consensual. Aman's husband is represented as an old man that cannot attract her in any way since she is just a young girl longing for freedom and a way to escape. This, however, is also obvious to her husband who abuses Aman further and "locked [her] in and took the key with him, and told the servants to give [her] food through the window" (142) as soon as he leaves the house. His dominance and his urge to subordinate his wife leave her without any rights but only the duty to obey and be at his disposal whenever he desires satisfaction of his sexual needs. By doing so, he might not even recognise that he repeatedly rapes his wife, but so-called "unconscious rape ignores or greatly undervalues a married woman's sexual autonomy – particularly her freedom to decide whether and when to engage in intercourse" (Anderson 182). It leaves the woman powerless and entitles the man to fully control the sexual relation. However, Aman

never refers to her husband's violent actions as rape, either as he is unable to disvirgin her in her perspective, or as she, similar to Ebla, does not consider sexual violence between husband and wife as rape.

### 3.3.3 Repeated sexual abuse and rape

In order to financially support her family, Aman starts working as a babysitter for the District Commissioner and his wife. However, instead of driving her home after she has barely seen her family within the last weeks, he

would drive out to the countryside, stop the car anywhere, and ask me to come out of the car. He would pick me up and put me against the car, and hold me against the car like that, his hands against me, take my wrap-dress up, pull my underwear down holding my leg and putting his... and he was doing things. He didn't try to go in [...] I was just staying there quiet and still because he wanted it. If I refused, I thought he would stop helping my family. [...] I never told anybody (Am 68).

From Aman's description of her abuse it can be seen that she is a young girl without proper understanding of what is happening to her. She knows that she does not like what the man is doing and she is aware of the fact that it must be wrong, wherefore she avoids telling her family or friends about the abuse. The District Commissioner is obviously rather careful as he himself would risk his reputation if people know that he raped a young girl. Consequently, he tries to find sexual satisfaction without penetration in order to protect Aman's virginity. Although Aman is spared physical pain, she has to live with her feelings of confusion and shame. In the course of time, she repeatedly becomes a victim of sexual abuse and rape, starting by the misdeeds of the District Commissioner, the rape of her husband and later on the violent abuse of her boyfriend.

After Aman could manage to escape from her husband who sexually abused her and treated her like a slave, she is on her own and meets people with similar experiences. Life is difficult for her and she knows that she needs support in a patriarchal society where single women certainly do not have the most attractive future perspectives: "I didn't have anything. No education, no money, even in my family my mama had become poor. I still thought, if I could get a good man, I could really help myself and my family" (Am 176). Aman is a sociable young woman and not averse to meeting other men in order to find someone who could provide enough support for her and her family. Her ambition of engaging with such a man is common for young girls who are

on their own, especially in conflict areas, as “women and girls often find themselves in vulnerable positions” (Murphy 234). However, Aman's social environment unfortunately has a rather negative influence on her. She starts drinking and engages with a man she considers as a suitable boyfriend, but who solely shows sexual interest for her:

He was drunk. Rahima, when I pushed him, he got mad and he grabbed me by the hair. He was big – tall and heavy. In less than a second, he put me down on the ground beside the car and raped me. Raped me and disvirgined me. I fought, but he was strong and drunk, and he began to slap me. I yelled for help, but he put his hand over my mouth. None of the others came. I will never forget the pain. I remember hearing my circumcision rip open with a sound like the tearing of a piece of cloth and feeling at the same time the most awful pain. Then I became unconscious (Am 178-179).

There was blood... pee... and dirt... everywhere, because I had been struggling even before he put me on the ground. I was in so much pain that I couldn't move my legs. It was as though I was paralysed. And the blood wouldn't stop flowing. [...] I was hemorrhaging, but I couldn't go to the hospital, there was too much shame (179).

From Aman's description, the brutality and abomination of her traumatic experience that night becomes more than evident for the reader. Contrary to the prior experienced sexual violence by her husband, she is fully aware that she now has become a victim of rape. She is left in horrible physical and psychical conditions and would presumably risk her life without the help of her friends who try to stop her bleeding and “wash [her] with warm water and salt” (179) as Aman additionally suffers from an infection: “My genitals were swollen, hot and throbbing from the infection, so she used a raffia fan to make it cool down and feel better” (179). Victims of rape frequently show physical consequences such as infections. In general, both immediate as well as long-term symptoms can occur, ranging from “injuries to the vaginal and anal areas, lacerations, soreness, bruising, torn muscles, fatigue and vomiting” (Anderson 182) to “broken bones, black eyes, bloody noses, and knife wounds that occur during the sexual violence” (182). In addition, rape victims risk suffering from gynaecological problems which cause even more extensive consequences, like “vaginal stretching, miscarriages, still-births, bladder infections, infertility” (183) as well as “sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV” (183). Although such negative effects on a victim's physical condition can be extremely painful, the psychological damages are even more fatal and distressing as they are in any case long-lasting and frequently re-occurring (cf. ch. 3.3.4).

Aman's repeated experience of sexual violence does not leave her without traces. For the reader, she more and more appears as a person that is predestined for finding herself in situations in which females are confronted with sexual assault, danger and violence. After escaping from her husband who sexually abused her and surviving the brutal rape of her barely known boyfriend, Aman feels forced to flee from Somalia due to political unrest after the revolution followed by Siad Barre's seizure of power. As she is pregnant with her first child, she aims to gain security and stability which is what she as well as her accompanying female friend hope to find in Kenya. However, at the D.C.'s office, both of them are told by the officers to "go to bed with them" (Am 262) in order to receive the papers to be allowed to stay in the country: "One of the guys took me outside. It was dark [...] I was standing against the fence. He did it standing up. He came, and I wiped it off. We waited for the two of them inside to finish and then we went inside. It was like a business. [...] After they left, we washed ourselves and our clothes" (262-263). Aman surely knows that what she is forced to do in order to receive permit of residence in Kenya must not be considered as ordinary as it seems to be for the men who demand it. However, when comparing the quote with prior ones like her rape by her husband or boyfriend, Aman obviously has become more apathetic. She basically describes what is happening to her without referring to her emotions which is rather unusual for her character. She presumably knows that she is sexually abused by the men in the D.C.'s office, but she tolerates it as she has already experienced worse events in her life. Her change in behaviour clearly indicates the psychological consequences of being raped and sexually abused repeatedly.

### **3.3.4 Emotional consequences of rape**

Victims of rape, regardless of its form, often suffer from severe psychological consequences. The violent experience leaves them traumatised with common symptoms like "post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicidal ideation, and alcohol and substance abuse" (Messman-Moore et al. 1731) as well as "altered emotional states, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, [...] fear, lack of sexual desire" (Flowers 33). Victims of rape are supposed to represent the "largest proportion of persons with PTSD" (Allen 172) as among them, "symptoms of PTSD are evident in more than 90% soon after the rape, [and] nearly 50% of these women continue to experience PTSD symptoms 3 months afterwards" (172). In addition to the necessity to cope with the traumatic experience, women who had to endure forms of sexual

violence are often rejected by their friends and relatives as rape victims are connoted with shame and negative reputation for the whole family (HRW *Here, rape is normal* 15). As a consequence, numerous female rape survivors develop “feelings of helplessness, [...] self-criticism and guilt, [...] [as well as] increased feelings of vulnerability” (Flowers 33-34), instead of reporting their traumatic experience to family members or official service points which offer post-rape care.

In the story of Aman, the above mentioned symptoms are clearly shown, especially after the rape by her boyfriend. The experienced brutality leaves her traumatised with the inability to clearly express her emotional state: “I can't find words to describe it, but I know I felt all the pain – so ashamed and full of disgust. I was ashamed to go out with my friends that I knew, because I wasn't a virgin any more. I didn't have anything any more, really – nothing. It was as though I was dead” (Am 179). Aman suffers from her decreased self-esteem and most of the time secludes herself from her friends and acquaintances. For two weeks, she has not left the house and has tried to find an answer why a person she believed to be her boyfriend could treat her in such a brutal and vicious way. The greatest concern she immediately worries about is the shame she from now on has to live with as a consequence of the violent way her boyfriend broke her chastity: “Once you lose your virginity, that is the end of you. It can break your heart. Especially the way I lost mine. It was horrible and dreadful and shameful [...] I had killed my name. I wished I was dead so my family wouldn't see my face any more” (180). Feeling shame is a typical symptom of gender-based trauma (cf. ch. 2.3.4). Obviously, Aman is not only ashamed due to the most intimate violence she had to endure, but she also seems to fear the reaction of her family. She is aware that she risks being “socially stigmatized” (Abdullahi 30) and spoiling her family's reputation as soon as others hear about the rape. It is not unusual that relatives and friends “distance themselves for fear of derogation” (Perilloux, Duntley, and Buss 1100) and subsequently cause “damage to kin relations, friendships, and social alliances” (1100) which means rather than receiving support from the emotionally closest people, victims feel stranded and forsaken. In order to avoid a negative reputation for the family as well as undergoing punishment and damaging social relations, Aman regards silence as the most appropriate way to behave: “Girls couldn't tell their families because they were too ashamed and scared they would get whipped. So a lot of girls kept it to themselves. I kept it to myself” (Am 181). As mentioned earlier (cf. ch. 3.3.1), rejecting

to report one's rape applies to numerous victims for reasons such as shortage of confidence or knowledge as well as shame. However, being left alone in an emotional state like Aman is not only difficult for the victim, but can be rather dangerous. Aman wishes herself dead as life after her experienced sexual violence does not seem to make sense anymore. She can hardly release herself from the horrifying memories and establishes emotions of anger against her perpetrator (cf. ch. 2.3.3) with an urge to face him again, as a way of coping with her traumatic experience: "I was full of anger at him, so I had to see him one more time – to see his face and find out what he had to say" (Am 181). Like many victims of trauma, Aman appears rather depressive and shows changes in her behaviour.

Aman's altered personality after the rape of her boyfriend especially affects her sexual behaviour. She starts going out with strangers since she has no money to feed herself. While she initially only provides company without sexual engagement, she becomes more confident by the time and knows that she will benefit from going one step further:

[...] [T]hey kiss you, the next thing you know they want to take off your dress. You say no and no, and then you get tired of saying no. In those kinds of situations, girls would allow men to 'paint' them by 'brushing'. You didn't allow them to go in – just held your legs together and they put themselves between your legs. 'Kiss and brush' if you wanted to stay a virgin. They did their thing between your legs – like that uncle did to me when I was a little girl (Am 196).

What I could get from them I would get, and what they got from me they got. But doing that is hard, very hard. All you see is pain, pain, pain. No more love either (196).

In order to survive as a single young woman in Mogadishu, Aman decides to sell her body. Allowing other men to 'paint' – meaning having sexual intercourse without penetration – in order to receive money, food and a place to sleep seems to be the most appropriate way for Aman to be well provided and able to support her family. Her vulnerable position due to the traumatic experiences as well as her miserable living condition are the reasons for her desperate situation, resulting in her willingness to sympathise with the business of prostitution. Sexual engagement with men in order to "obtain food, money or protection" (Murphy 234) is "commonly referred to as 'survival sex'" (234). Such a relation obviously applies to Aman, but also to other women especially in "post-conflict environments where women and girls often find themselves in vulnerable positions" (234). After accustoming to the business she has already entered, Aman becomes even less reserved and careful: "I said to myself, Anyway, you're not a virgin any more. What are you afraid of? This man is kind and he's an old

man, maybe he can't manage much" (Am 202). Aman knows that having sexual intercourse with a strange man is considered as "the worst thing of all the things" (202), but she appears indifferent and desperate as she has already lost her virginity in the most shameful way. Her changes in personality are highlighted by her promiscuous behaviour and her attempts to stress her outward appearance; indications which are not unusual among rape victims. After using her body to allow men to 'paint by brushing', Aman engages with an elder rich man. She seems to be conscious about her behaviour and emotional state but perceives her situation as forlorn without any further perspective:

I knew I was destroyed – that I had destroyed my family's name – but I felt a bit better about myself since I had found this man (203).

He was giving things to me – and I took them and I had to give him what he wanted, which was my body and myself. He was getting what he wanted, I was getting what I wanted. It was what I had to do to survive. Otherwise I'd be in the street again. I was not happy to do it. But there was no other way (204).

Aman clearly expresses how she feels and why she sexually engages with the man. She is also concerned about what her family and other people from Mango Village, the place she grew up, will presumably think about her: "They used to call me a *sharmuuto* [whore] when I was with my family – imagine now, I was a big, big *sharmuuto*" (205). Although Aman's behaviour is strongly influenced by her hopelessness due to the fact that she is a young single female without proper education who lost her virginity, her promiscuousness can also be traced back to her traumatising sexual experiences. In reoccurring situations of despair and distress, she can see no other option than to engage with strangers to receive money. She knows about her miserable position and is fully aware of what she is doing: "I felt like I was filled with shame. I was doing it a different way, but I was one of the prostitutes" (283). Again and again she finds herself in the same position, selling her body in order to survive. According to a study, female victims of rape show "higher levels of dysfunctional sexual behavior" (Messman-Moore et al. 1742) which "may be indicative of using sex to meet nonsexual needs such as to reduce negative affect or feelings of loneliness or isolation" (1742). Thus, prostitution can be regarded as one plausible consequence of sexual victimisation.

Lastly, although "stranger rape receives the most attention from social scientists, criminologists, medical professionals, and the media, acquaintance rape is more prevalent and the consequences equally devastating" (Flowers 38). As mentioned earlier, marital rape victims are often suffering in the longer term and do not report their

cases as a consequence of shame or lack of knowledgeability about the existence of rape in marriage. In general, symptoms of marital rape like “depression, anxiety, fear, shock, suicidal tendencies and posttraumatic stress disorder” (Flowers 46) are similar to those of other forms of traumatic experiences. Also, victims frequently suffer from additional long-term consequences such as “eating disorders, sleeping disorders, self-blame and problems with trust in a relationship” (46). However, in comparison to stranger rape, it was found out that marital rape survivors often show “higher rates of depression and anger” (46). This is presumably the case as victims are more emotionally involved and have to experience a serious betrayal of confidence due to the endured violence by the most intimate person. In the story of Aman, her increased emotions of depression and anger after being raped by her husband are evident. She herself expresses her changed feelings, especially her hatred: “[...] I became a fighter: fight, fight, fight – an angry girl. I hated everybody” (Am 154). Her strong emotions finally contribute to her decision to escape from Mango Village, leave her family and friends behind and start a new life in Mogadishu.

In contrast to Aman, Ebla does not have the strength to leave her husband in order to avoid being further abused. She feels weak, desperate and unable to eat, but seems to perceive her situation as one a newly married woman simply has to endure:

Like everybody else, she wished she could be what she wasn't. She knew she was catching at a straw, wishing for the impossible. What she wished was that she could be somebody else, either an old woman, so that she could look back on this day as one in a long forgotten past; or a man, so that she would not have to worry about it (FaCR 94).

Rather than questioning why females have to endure forms of sexual violence while men enjoy freedom, she takes her situation for granted and becomes absorbed in thoughts about people she would like to be. Although she claims to be indispensable since men need women in order to have a “companion for life” (95), she does not reflect on her rape since she is unknowing that her non-consensual intercourse with Awill is to be considered as such. Being a sexually autonomous woman who can enjoy intercourse seems to be inappropriate in a world where differences in gender are ubiquitous. Like Ebla, staying with their husbands after being sexually abused or raped applies to many women (Anderson 182). Regardless of their motives reaching from being unable to leave to still feeling love for the perpetrator, every incident is to be condemned as sexual violence.



### 3.4 Forlornness and violence in *The orchard of lost souls*

Nadifa Mohamed's *The orchard of lost souls* is set in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, from 1987 to 1988, shortly before the outbreak of Somalia's civil war. The story focuses on the lives of three protagonists called Deqo, Kawsar and Filsan. Deqo was born in the Saba'ad refugee camp where people affected by the Ogaden war 1977/78 between Somalia and Ethiopia found shelter. She was left behind by her mother and escapes from the camp at the age of nine years which leads to a series of miserable conditions in life of a homeless orphan girl. Her story represents how forlornness, fear and despair dominate her life as well as those of other female refugee children. Kawsar is a desparate widow who suffers from being maltreated by the police, her miscarriages, the death of her husband but especially the traumatic loss of her daughter. She feels too old to continue fighting and is overwhelmed by her shocking and distressing experiences. The character of Filsan is probably the most complex one regarding reader empathy as she appears violent and without compassion, but seems to humiliate and beat others with ease. However, her behaviour can be understood more properly when learning about her childhood and the harshness she had to experience herself.

#### 3.4.1 Disruption of a girl's world

Shortly before but especially during Somalia's atrocious civil war, children were particularly vulnerable. Witnessing war crimes and being confronted with the loss of family members does not only cause emotional scars, but results in threatening instability leading to the collapse of a child's world. Girls like Deqo belong to the largest and most vulnerable group of IDPs (internally displaced people), as about "70-80% of IDPs and refugees are women and children" (UNDP Somalia *Gender in Somalia* 4) while males "have either died or been recruited by armed groups during the course of on-going conflict" (4). Displacements do not only separate family members, but are especially dangerous for females as women and girls are confronted with "sexual and gender-based violence [...] both en route to and within settlement camps" (4). Deqo herself is spared experiencing such forms of violence, but she has to live a life dominated by emotions of fear and insecurity: "In the camp it was as if each day brought a new threat – maybe a fire, or flooding, a new outbreak of illness, or someone would die inexplicably; life was just a tightrope to be walked pigeon-toed" (TOoIS 97).

Additionally, it strongly concerns Deqo that only little is known about her mother who presumably had to endure rather miserable life conditions, otherwise she would not have the reputation of a prostitute who abandoned her child as soon as it was born: “Whore’s child, whore’s child, whore’s child! That’s what the other children in the camp had yelled at her for as long as she could recall” (69). Deqo learned from others in the camp that “[s]he was born of sin, [...] the bastard of a loose woman” (69), but as a nine-year-old child she is too young and naive to both understand and question what is actually meant by the term ‘whore’.

Leaving Saba’ad camp could spare Deqo sexual and gender-based violence, but from now on she is an unaccompanied orphan child living on the streets in a country that is ruled by a ruthless dictator who will be ousted soon. Deqo is aware of her solitude and occupies herself with observing rebellious schoolchildren claiming “[n]o more arrests, no more killing, no more dictatorship!” (59). Her curiosity immediately jeopardises her as she is mistaken for a protestor and consequently caught by soldiers like the other schoolchildren:

The schoolchildren are silent, nervous, and when a whistle blows they scream and run back in the direction they came. The lean, tall soldiers pull out batons and chase the children. Deqo is caught in the melee and joins the stampede to avoid getting trampled. She feels like a sheep being herded into an enclosure. Hands grab her and push past, some almost dragging her down, but there is nowhere to escape [...] (60).

Reaching for the soldier’s hand, Deqo tries to plead with him to let her go but he slaps her in the mouth. The taste of blood on her tongue, she looks around in shock at the flying skirts and limbs, as more and more children are forced into the vehicle (61).

The brutal and fierce behaviour of the soldiers shows their power they have already gained. People who act contrary to the regime’s interest are to be punished and arrested, regardless whether adults or children are concerned. As a result, Deqo, who desperately tries to express her innocence, is immediately mistreated by a soldier as she does not behave according to those who claim to be in charge. The soldiers’ reaction to the young protestors merely demonstrates the military’s strict obedience within the Siad Barre regime which was rather oppressive and favoured only those who remained loyal and did not revolt against political operations. As a consequence of Somalia’s instability and efforts to topple the country’s dictator, the regime “became more violent and brutal in its attempts to hold on to a power that was rapidly slipping away” (Hashim 529). Being regarded as protestors as it is the case for Deqo and the

other children, the regime intends to take them to the police station where the girls are “put into one communal cell” (TOoIS 63). The appearance of the policeman is extremely threatening to Deqo, as “he is like a figure in a bad dream, silent, cruel and persistent” (62-63), who shows no respect in dealing with imprisoned persons: “She [Deqo] squeals in pain as his vice-like hands grasp her ankle, another hand moves to her thigh and he yanks her out. Her body is not her own, she thinks; it is a shell they are trying to break open” (63). Deqo does not seem to fully understand the situation, but she knows that she is mistaken for a protestor and, thus, unjustly has to endure such harsh treatment and threats. She is ultimately released as the officers themselves consider her as “a waste of bread” (68).

As a street urchin in Hargeisa, Deqo tries to find a place she feels comfortable spending her nights. The first time, she sleeps in the market until she is found by stray dogs whose barking raises the watchman's attention. She then relocates her sleeping place to a ditch where she convinces herself to be “unafraid and undisturbed” (72) and feels “perfectly comfortable sleeping within its deep darkness” (72). Only later in the story she recognises that the place is nothing more than “a wild, dark jungle, a no-man's-land full of threat and danger, her barrel probably full of snakes or scorpions by now. It is the kind of place where human skeletons might sink into the soil undisturbed and unmourned” (108). From the description it can be seen that Deqo's childlike perception of the world enables her to survive as an orphan girl in a country that definitely does not provide proper security, especially for a young girl alone in the streets. Since she has no knowledge about the imminent civil war and the danger Somalis are confronted with, she simply tries to find a place where she can sleep without disturbance. However, from her second description it becomes evident that she has developed and gained knowledge about the dangers in life wherefore she shows a more realistic view of the ditch that is also more comprehensible for the reader.

When earning money by selling collected fruits, Deqo meets Nasra again, a prostitute who was also imprisoned when Deqo was mistaken for a protestor. Nasra's curiosity and blunt remark about the girl's way of living strongly contributes to Deqo's growth of insecurity and emotions of fear while her childlike perception of the world seems to gradually decrease throughout the story: “What is it like being all alone in the world at

your age?' The question hits Deqo like a falling branch. She shuffles her feet a little and tries to pick through the words lodged on her lips: frightening, tiring, free, confusing, exciting, lonely. She mumbles incoherently and then stops. 'I can still have a good life.'" (79). Deqo obviously knows that her future perspective is not rather auspicious, as she neither has a home or enough food to survive nor a chance to receive education. For her, places like "[t]he library for keeping books to learn from, the museum for interesting objects from the past, the schools in which children are corralled and tamed" (71-72) only provide passive pleasure, as she can feel that "as a refugee she is not welcome inside" (72). In Somalia, "disadvantaged groups such as migrants, displaced persons, street children, indigenous and nomadic youth in rural areas, and young people with disabilities" (UNDP Somalia *Human Development Report* 55) have hardly any chance to receive educational training. Life strongly depends on which clan you belong to, whether you live in the urban or rural area as well as the financial well-being of your family and relatives.

Deqo's infantile perspective enables the reader to sympathise and especially empathise with her immediately. Nevertheless, it is obvious, also to Deqo herself, that she has no chance to survive as a girl on the streets of Hargeisa in 1987. She realises that "the dark clouds and the empty street drag down her already low spirit" (TOoIS 81), that a child at her age "should be at home with a family" (81) which subsequently causes her feeling "cheated and spurned by the world" (81). She noticeably underwent a change in personality, as her infantile and optimistic character seems to have been replaced by a more depressive one. Her feelings of depression can be regarded as a consequence of her traumatic changes in life as well as her regular confrontations with emotions of anxiety (cf. ch. 2.3.3). She deeply suffers from insufficient knowledge about her mother she has to live with as she struggles to comprehend why she was abandoned while Nasra's housemate, a prostitute like her mother, keeps her child: "The truth is so brutal in contrast. She has no knowledge at all of where the rest of her family are; there are no stories passed on by cousins, no villages to return to, no genealogy to pass on if she ever has children of her own. She is like a sapling growing out of the bare earth while others are branches on old, established trees" (94).

As a consequence of Deqo's despair and forlornness, she feels convinced that "*Whores live well*" (83) as Nasra and her housemates seem to enjoy a rather luxurious

life and decides to accept Nasra's offer to move in with them, who empathises with Deqo since she was once also "lonely, hungry, and uncared for" (84). Deqo assumes that she has the opportunity to learn something about her past as she supposes "the origins of her own story lie in a place like this" (86), but her sense of curiosity is soon mitigated by recurring feelings of anxiety due to her inexperience and naivety regarding the business of prostitutes:

All through the night Deqo is woken by slamming doors, raised voices and other more mysterious sounds. She feels more anxiety here than in the ditch [...] (86).

She spends another sleepless night in the kitchen, her sense of safety breached, waiting for more giants to jump over the wall and appear right before her in the middle of the night, with guns, or knives, or with nothing but their strong hands to squeeze the life out of her (96).

Deqo is unable to rest as unfamiliar noises and sounds during night-time result in her increased emotions of anxiety, making it impossible to feel safe again. She is frightened due to the appearance of strange men at night and cannot reason what those sounds she hears could mean due to her immaturity. She can only conceive the perceived harshness her housemates seem to be confronted with which consequently contributes to her feelings of fear and insecurity. Deqo's job is simply to "clean and run errands" (89), but she is not aware of the fact that she is accommodated with the purpose to become a prostitute herself after gaining more insight into the business. Even when receiving a hint by Karl Marx, a prostitute living with her, who is able to explain her profession so that Deqo fairly understands, the latter is too naive and occupied to assimilate the information:

'You one of Nasra's?'

'Haa, yes.'

'You selling?'

'Selling what?'

'The thing between your legs.'

Deqo takes a minute to decipher what could be worth selling or even possible to sell between her legs. [...] She imagines Karl Marx doing what the goats and stray dogs do when they mount each other and is disgusted. That is what makes a whore a whore, she realises, and her eyes widen.

[...] 'I was your age when I started this.' (89).

Deqo's experiences in life do not represent an isolated case. Separation of children from their families, especially during Somalia's civil war, frequently resulted in "children becoming involved in prostitution and selling drugs" (Jones, Hiddleston, and McCormick 242). Such forms of child labour for "unaccompanied children" (242) destroy a girl's or boy's future perspectives and leave them physically as well as

psychically damaged. Depending on their “capacity to cope or not” (242) as well as the amount of support they receive, they risk severe mental health problems.

In Deqo's case, she more and more suffers from her knowledge as well as from the obviousness that she will remain unaccompanied and lonely. When even Nasra and the other housemates have to leave her behind due to the country's development and its indications of the imminent civil war, Deqo's world is ruined. She stays in the house until a man who should care for her violently but unsuccessfully tries to rape her; she “feels her strength seeping out of her” (TOoIS 117). She runs away and perceives the country in a more realistic way than at the beginning of the story, showing how desperate and threatening the city Hargeisa appears: “Everyone is angry – even the sky is grey and motionless; there doesn't seem to be space for anything but silence and obedience” (114). Clearly, Deqo's infantile behaviour and perception of the world have changed as a result of her traumatising experiences. She suffers from anxiety and the re-occurrence of past memories, wherefore she “feels herself retreating into the past” (114). In the course of the story, she becomes apathetic regarding atrocious images and seems to avoid feelings causing negative emotions. She is obviously deeply traumatised but too occupied to cope with her trauma, since as an unaccompanied young girl she is in constant danger.

### **3.4.2 The loss of beloved people**

From Kawsar's perception of Somalia from 1987 to 1988, the reader gains a personal and subjective insight into extensive impacts of a country's collapse. Her character is introduced by her violent experience with the police officer Filsan who imprisons and maltreats her so that she is incapable to move again, as she was beaten “like a disobedient donkey” (TOoIS 124) and told by a doctor that she is too old and “[t]he hospital is short of equipment [...] all we can do is make sure the pain is under control” (124). Due to Kawsar's severe physical injury, her only occupation is to lay in bed and reflect on her life which triggers past memories leading to an incessant struggle with traumatic experiences.

Kawsar's ordinary life started to take a decisive turn in February 1982, when her daughter Hodan participates in a demonstration that actually took place in Hargeisa. Students protested against the trial of the Hargeisa Group which caused the arrest of

“thirty doctors, engineers, teachers, government employees and economists who had organized a self-help scheme to improve local facilities” (HRW *Government at War* 37). As a response to the trial as well as the sentencing of three defendants, protests led by “intermediate and secondary school students” (Gardner and El Bushra *Appendices* 231) with the counter reaction of soldiers firing on unarmed students caused major riots. Hodan has to spend three nights in prison, as girls are held captive inside the police station and boys are taken to the military headquarter. Kawsar then realises that “life had no shape without her daughter” (TOoIS 176); she is threatened by the thought of what those angry policemen could be “doing to the girls behind the walls” (175) and is “hoping against hope that what she feared hadn’t happened” (176) after discovering bruises on Hodan’s thighs when the latter is finally back home. However, Kawsar obviously knows that her daughter was sexually abused at the police station but avoids addressing the topic in order not to be confronted with unbearable shame that “would replace everything else in their lives” (178). Hodan’s changed behaviour like her refusal to go back to school, her obsessive cleaning, her reticence as well as her new habit to “hit her own temple with a furious fist as if trying to knock difficult thoughts out of her head” (179) finally result in her “succumb to violence” (181) as she commits suicide when she “took a can of gasoline and a box of matches into the bathroom and set herself on fire” (185).

Clearly, Kawsar suffers from the traumatic and sudden loss of her daughter: “The image of her bald head, marbled skin, and grinning, skeletal face has never left Kawsar” (185). Her immediate reaction to the cruel image of Hodan’s burnt body is anger. She is unable to understand why she would “deserve such punishment” (185) and convinced that “the humiliation could not have been greater” (185). Her emotion responding to her daughter’s death can be regarded as a way to cope with the traumatic experience. She seems to consider Hodan’s suicide as provocative, wherefore anger as a counter reaction is not only a natural, but also a positive feeling as it can support reducing the emotional pain (cf. ch. 2.3.3). In addition to anger, shame seems to be a dominant emotion evoked by the way her daughter decided to end her life. She feels humiliated and even mentions that it would have been less disgraceful if “Hodan had become a whore selling her body in the street” (185). Since Hodan’s suicide is regarded as a consequence of the student protest and the negative experiences she must have had to endure during her detainment, Kawsar considers

'General Haruun', who functions as a fictional substitute for Siad Barre, as the main culprit:

He is like a hyena – sparse, menacing, his very presence seeming to herald death. She blames him not just for Hodan's passing but for her arrest, her disappearance and her decline into a huddled, diminished figure. [...] Kawsar feels a wall of black grief descending on her, leaving her blind and deaf and voiceless as if she is at the bottom of a well, only ever able to climb halfway up before losing her grip yet again (16).

Obviously, her anger is deeply rooted and does not only result from the traumatising images of her dead daughter's body, but also includes her dissatisfaction with Somalia's corrupt regime that is led by a ruthless dictator. As a result of the traumatic event, Kawsar's behaviour as well as her general perception of life changes; she "had been strong but then her child had taken a knife and cored her" (184). She struggles with intrusive memories and is confronted with the grievous loss even in her dreams which is the only place where she can pull "her child against her chest" (152) again. Her grief and despair as well as further trauma-resultant emotions of anger and shame result in unbearable emotional conditions wherefore Kawsar tries to occupy herself in order to cope with her trauma: "After Hodan had died and been buried in the formal, desolate cemetery in town she had turned maniacally to her orchard, forcing life into every spare inch of it" (169).

Kawsar's orchard symbolises further traumatic events she experienced in life. Before the birth of her only daughter Hodan, she had to endure several miscarriages. In order to find a way for coping with those losses, she buries the miscarried fetuses in her orchard and plants a tree above each one:

In her orchard the trees had been born from deaths; they marked and grew from the remains of the children that had passed through her. She never picked the fruit that fell from them, believing it a kind of cannibalism [...] (167).

The infants in the orchard all had names [...]. The largest of them was Ibrahim, a nearly perfect boy [...]. Seven whole months he had survived in her harsh womb. [...] [S]he thought she had seen him take one deep, resigned breath in her arms before he put down his clubbed hands and surrendered the fight. It had been difficult to bury him; he had toes, fingernails, a good head of hair, puffy eyes that clearly would have taken the shape of her own (167).

Kawsar clearly establishes a relationship to her miscarried children which becomes especially obvious by naming them as well as by referring to cannibalism in case she would eat the fruit of the trees which symbolise the vitality of the dead infants. From Kawsar's memories of her child Ibrahim, the extent as well as consequences of her



loss become even more comprehensible for the reader due to the horrifying description of her duty to bury her seven months old son. In addition to emotions of grief and despair, Kawsar feels weak and unable to bear a child which damages her self-esteem. She obviously blames herself for the miscarriages and establishes a guilty conscience, particularly towards her husband: "He must compare her to other women, she told herself, clean women who delivered healthy, thick-jowled babies one after the other and jumped to their feet within a few hours to cook the next meal" (169). Her feelings of failure as a woman have severe consequences on her emotional health as she appears rather depressive, without any zest for life. Instead, she perceives "a still point" (21) in her life, showing the "emptiness that seems to reflect how she feels" (21).

After being beaten by a police officer so that Kawsar is confined to bed, she suffers from her physical as well as emotional pain. She becomes bitter and frustrated and shows increased feelings of anger and grievance, an emotion that involves considering oneself as a "victim of injustice" (Young and Gibb 82). Kawsar's inability to care for her orchard which functioned as an essential occupation for coping with her losses as well as her solitude in general result in her belief that her life is without meaning and value: "This is her life now, no orchards, no family, no movement. She is just a stomach to be filled and a backside to be wiped" (TOoIS 143). She is obviously unwilling to continue fighting, as the pain she has to endure is unbearable for "an old crone" (162) like her whose "time is over" (163). In this sense, Kawsar remains stuck in the role of the victim as "the sense of grievance and of being ill-treated persists" (Young and Gibb 84). She perceives injustice predominating her life which has been both too long and painful for her. Consequently, Kawsar continues mourning her losses: "Holes in the roof let rainwater trail down the blue paint leaving ghostly tears, as if the room is mourning all the deaths it has witnessed" (TOoIS 184). Since various types of losses exist and grief is a rather individual response to a traumatic event, "the length and depth of the grieving experience" (Harvey 37) is not equal for every victim. In general, it can be distinguished between "'high-grief' deaths versus 'low-grief' deaths" (37). While the former has severe effects on the victim's ability to cope with the trauma, the latter applies to victims who had to endure the death of a person "who had reached a quite advanced age and who had lived a long and fulfilling life" (37). As a result, Kawsar's miscarriages as well as the suicide of her daughter definitely apply to the category of high-grief deaths wherefore "intense emotional and physical reactions to loss" (37) are

predictable. This can also be seen from Kawsar's desperate demonstration that she is willing to end her torture as she has suffered enough and only craves "a simple death after such a long, complicated life" (TOoIS 289): "Only her heart seems distant from this skirmishing, its beating muted but insistent; it has suffered so many shocks that its exterior has thickened, padding it like gauze from further hurt" (202).

In addition, Kawsar's despair does not solely result from her personal traumatic experiences in life, but is further enhanced by negative developments she could witness in her country. Contrary to Deqo's infantile perception of the world, Kawsar knows that fear dominates due to the perceptible danger of an imminent war:

It is fear that makes the soldiers brave, that emboldens the policemen to loot, that gives life to that old man in Mogadishu (20).

Women are running their families because the streets have been emptied of men; those not working abroad are in prison or have been grabbed off the street and conscripted into the army (149).

She notices that society has changed as "[v]iolence was an article of faith nowadays" (181) which is used by her as a further argument for her daughter's way of ending her life. She wants release, as "[t]he whole country has ceased to make sense to Kawsar – policewomen have become torturers, veterinarians doctors, teachers spies and children armed rebels" (183) and "[n]othing she believed in matters anymore: religion, tradition, civilisation has been swept away. Hodan was right to have gone when she did" (330). Obviously, Kawsar's trauma, resulting from physical and emotional pain, ultimately leads to perceiving herself as an old handicapped woman who has no reason to continue her life in a country that is dominated by injustice and violence.

### **3.4.3 The cycle of violence**

Somalia's instability and the danger of war are particularly obvious by reference to the character of Filsan who appears rather insensitive and violent. While it seems to be difficult to comprehend the way she behaves, her character gradually becomes more transparent throughout the story when outlining influencing childhood experiences. After the divorce of her parents, she lives with her father who is a strict and rather callous man whose "shadow he cast on the ground was huge and terrifying" (239). When coming home late accompanied by boys who wanted to be polite by taking her back safely, Filsan is confronted with the pitiless consequences:

It was almost a release when the first blow came, a backhanded slap to the side of her head that pulled out the Minnie Mouse clips her cousins had bought her. [...] She was limp, like a doll, as he took her arm and threw her up the steps to the veranda. [...] [H]er senses were shrouded, as if parts of her mind were shutting down, faculty by faculty (240).

'Where have you been?' His spittle landed on her neck as he shook her head from side to side. 'Is it time for you to follow in your mother's footsteps? I shouldn't have kept you! You scorpion, you whore, you don't deserve to carry my name or my father's. [...] Idiot! I should throw you out! Let you live in the gutter with your filthy mother.' (240-241).

His blows were losing their force and he turned to sharp slaps instead, his untrimmed nails sometimes catching her skin (241).

After being violently mistreated by her father, the housekeeper has to check Filsan's underwear to prove whether she is still a virgin before being locked in her bedroom for two days where she remains threatened and shocked, being "too afraid to switch the light on" (242). Her body is bruised from the series of blows by her father and she refuses to eat. Her behaviour clearly shows that the physical violence she had to endure affected her emotional health, as she appears daunted and anxious. When she is finally unlocked from her room, she is too weak to even stand up without the help of the housekeeper.

Filsan remembers the brutality she was exposed to when she feels "a similar sense of disintegration" (233) and recognises her reflection in a mirror as an "anonymous, innocent" (232) appearance that is basically "just a human silhouette" (232). Particular stimuli trigger emotions experienced during and after the violent treatment by her father, resulting in Filsan's emotions of breakdown and seclusion; she feels "alone, untouched, forgotten. She opens her eyes with her hand on her stomach, imagining the hand is someone else's" (211). She "feels like an orphaned child rather than just a motherless one" (213) and she experiences her loneliness remaining "as dense and close a shadow" (214). Even as a young woman, Filsan is locked away by her father which increases her feelings of anger as she recognises her life as "small and inconsequential" (215) and her room as a "two-metre-by-two-metre cell [which] should be the span of her world" (215). She feels desperate and perceives her life as a rather worthless one that has to be lived by an inconspicuous person: "All her life she has been left to gather dust, as unseen as a picture on the wall, and to wail and roar and strike out sometimes seems the only way she will ever be heard" (215). Her shortage of self-esteem that dominates her behaviour in the course of the story obviously results

from the conditions under which she has to grow up. Living with her father soon becomes unpleasant for Filsan as he is unable to bear the striking resemblance of his daughter and her mother:

Filsan's father did not budge: from the time Filsan was five to when she turned thirteen, she was his alone. But as she got older and began to grow into her mother's face and body, he started to send her away for days to that messy, mud brick house. The way he looked at her hardened, he stopped embracing her, became impatient with her hovering around. She stopped being his and became nobody's (258).

Filsan's mother is presented as a rather poor woman who is educationally alienated and living in a filthy house "crammed full of the fruits of two failed marriages and the most current one" (257). Not only is it impossible for Filsan to grow up under the conditions her mother has to live, but also due to the frigid and harsh behaviour of her mother who mentions that her daughter "doesn't look like the marrying kind, face like a shoe" (258) and calls her "[h]is hostage" (258) which shows that she seems to be aware of what Filsan has to endure when living with her father. It can be seen that Filsan's parents failed to provide a warm-hearted, child-oriented atmosphere, but instead confronted their daughter with personal conflicts resulting from their inability to co-operate with each other. As a consequence, Filsan is faced with physical violence and emotional drain. People let her feel that she does neither belong to her mother nor to her father which naturally increases her emotions of loneliness and neglect. The re-occurring negative memories from her childhood as well as her decision that "it is easier to leave her mother to the past" (258) than to find a way to cope with the emotional pain do not only result in Filsan's suffering, but obviously show influence on her future performance and actions. In this sense, her character clearly demonstrates the consequences of "violent childhood experiences" (Bryant-Davis 4) which frequently show "significant emotional, cognitive, and behavioral effects on survivors" (4) that can vary depending on the victim's personality as well as the severity of the trauma from "anxiety, fear, depression, somatic complaints, aggression, sexualized behavior, learning problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, behavior problems [...] [to] self-destructive behavior" (4).

Filsan's behaviour in the course of the story is dominated by feelings of anxiety, fear and aggression. As a child, she becomes a victim of a violent and harsh atmosphere. As a young female soldier, she escapes from being raped by General Haaruun who assumes that she is "a virgin, [...] [a] clean girl" (TOoIS 38) and insults her by calling

her "cunt" (39) before pushing her out of the car. However, as a more experienced female soldier, she is not only confronted with physical violence, but also a main actor of it. Her childhood experiences as well as the threatening event with General Haaruun result in Filsan's ease to lose her temper and increase her propensity for aggressiveness. She seems to react equally brutal like her father and humiliates others in order to find satisfaction and reducing her rage:

The blows come one after the other. The first to her ear as loud as a wave hitting a rock, then to her temple, cheek, neck. [...] A swirl of sound and sight engulfs her until a punch to the chest knocks her from the chair onto the cement floor. Landing on her hip, Kawsar hears a crack beneath her and then feels a river of pain swelling up from her stomach to her throat, obstructing her breath. Resting her weight on one hand, she lifts an open palm to the soldier. 'Please stop!' she cries (45-46).

The scene is described from the perspective of Kawsar who has to endure the physical abuse by Filsan in the police station. Filsan is overcome by feelings of aggression and rage to such an extent that her violent reaction seems to be absolutely irrational, without her being fully conscious about the brutality her victim is exposed to. Her behaviour is reminiscent of the violence Filsan had to endure herself as a child by her father.

During a military operation in a village where elders are assumed to assist the outlawed National Freedom Movement, Filsan and her comrades should destroy the so-called 'berkeds' (traditional Somali cisterns) through targeted detonation. Naturally, the villagers are furious and do not understand the soldier's relentless and violent approaches. When one of the elders "swings his cane at her face" (228), Filsan feels enraged again and loses her temper, resulting in her uncontrolled brutal behaviour:

She doesn't notice her finger squeeze the trigger of her rifle as her whole body recoils from the blow. The knock of the rifle against her chest surprises her, as does the sudden pop of bullets. When the elder falls back onto his behind she assumes that he has lost his balance trying to strike her, until points of blood spring up over his shirt, turning the white cloth a red that darkens before her eyes (228).

Filsan shoots the elder without being fully conscious about her action. Her uprising aggression is an emotional response to the provocative behaviour of the villager, but she did neither plan nor reflect on killing him. Afterwards, she is in a state of trance, unable to move and in disbelief and shock about what she was actually capable of doing: "But what happened? Who killed them?" she whispers" (230). Filsan obviously does not properly remember the cruel event she is responsible for. For soldiers in

general, killing frequently takes place in an unconscious condition, as it “is completed in the heat of the moment” (Grossman 233) and happens “reflexively, without conscious thought” (233). However, as soon as Filsan is back in her room, the memories “flash across her mind” (TOoIS 230) and leave her in deep despair and strong feelings of guilt, despite the fact that she is unable to remember how she fired the gun: “[S]he begins to cry, unstoppable tears that sting her eyes. The thoughts that had buzzed around each other now fuse and spell out m-o-n-s-t-e-r in glowing letters across the blackness of her mind. The letters dance and mock her” (231). She knows that she simply tried to follow orders as she was “desperate for a pat on the head” (232), but instead of being proud about her brave actions, she perceives herself as someone who has become “unsuited for the real world, a freak” (232). In the course of the story, Filsan is haunted by memories about the elders that occur during her sleep, leaving her with nightmares about the killing she is responsible for. She awakes in fear, “hoping for the dread to pass” (266) and imagining the elders telling her that they “will not be forgotten so easily” (266). Filsan’s life in the present seems to be dominated by memories, negative emotions such as anxiety and guilt as well as fantasies about the killing of the elders. She is not only distressed during her dreams, but also her daily life seems to be affected, as her imagination shows no limit: “She can feel the elders leaning over her shoulder to peer at the typed pages she has written, their breath on her neck tickling to an infuriating degree; she turns around and shouts, ‘In the name of God, leave me alone!’” (270).

It can be seen that although Filsan adopted the role of the perpetrator rather than those of the victim by shooting another person, she shows PTSD-related psychological consequences. This is the case as “killing is a stressor with certain common features in its psychological aftermath (violent outbursts, intrusive imagery, perhaps a sense of disintegration” (MacNair 91). Filsan’s traumatising memories re-occur repeatedly and result in her feelings of fear and guilt. In this way, she can be regarded as the perpetrator of a murder, but also as a victim of a traumatic event. According to Grossman, the killing of soldiers can be categorised into the following response stages: “concern about killing, exhilaration, remorse, and rationalization and acceptance” (231). In Filsan’s case, remorse seems to be the most important stage. While another killer eventually “denies his remorse, [or] deals with it” (237), Filsan is obviously overwhelmed by her horrifying memories and emotions. However, rather than entering

the next stage of rationalisation and accepting what she actually did which is in fact a “lifelong process [...] [that] may never truly be completed” (237), she experiences a state of exhilaration when participating in a fight against rebels around Hargeisa:

Filsan doesn't stop shooting. Her gun spits out bullets and unlike in Salahley everything feels wholly real: her heart is thumping hard, she is aware of the smallest sound, feels like an animal about to be ripped apart. The smell of burning flesh blows over to her and she holds her breath (TOoIS 299).

She continues shooting, her whole body shuddering with relief and fear (300).

Obviously, Filsan is fully conscious about her actions and feels a certain “high of killing” (Grossman 234) that can be rather dangerous as it often results in “combat addiction” (234) since perpetrators experience a strong feeling of satisfaction and adrenalin rush. Nevertheless, in most cases the stage of exhilaration is not long-lasting as concerned persons will be confronted with remorse. For Filsan, her past events in life seem to be too imprinting to move on to remorse, rationalisation and acceptance:

Filsan does not feel guilt or remorse as she gazes over the bodies, rather an insatiable curiosity and desire to know when and where her own death will come and what expression she will wear to meet it. She has never been like other people, [...] she has no useful place on this earth; she is doomed to be nothing more than one of death's handmaidens (TOoIS 321).

Rather than coping with the traumatic event and trying to accept the crime she committed, Filsan experiences a strong desire to surrender. The social environment she had to grow up with as well as being surrounded by solders and struggling with negative emotions resulting from feeling disintegrated, isolated and lonely strongly contribute to her shortage of self-esteem. As a consequence of the traumatic events in her life for which she is partly responsible herself, Filsan even starts imagining her own death without feelings of fear. She apparently does not value her life as she perceives herself as a rather useless human being that has no other function than to kill others.

## 4 Conclusion

Unquestionably, Somalia is a state with a violent and ferocious history that carries its struggles further to the present day. Political difficulties such as the dominance of kinship groups, the intrusion of foreign colonies, but above all the shortage of a unified authority caused a traumatised nation. As a result, the formation of a government in order to reduce civil unrest occupied the country in so far that human development is rather low and gender inequality strikingly high since those aspects hardly represent matters of national concern. The exclusion of women from the public sphere in general places women in an inferior position and enhances gender discriminating conventions which have become cultural as well as social norms resulting from ancient traditions, like FGM or arranged marriages. Consequently, rather than administering a patriarchy, “[a] powerful new vision for Somalia is required, one oriented around building an inclusive society, where all people feel empowered, and have the capabilities and opportunities to improve their lives” (UNDP *Somalia Human Development Report* xvii). From the selected Somali novels it can be seen that female traumatisation not only results from events caused by the country’s instability, but above all from gender discriminating experiences.

Female suffering is prominently caused by subjugation and women’s low value in a patriarchal society which is evidently shown in the stories *Born in the big rains* as well as *From a crooked rib*. The protagonists’ ascribed and perceived insignificance shows the severe consequences on their emotional health. Fadumo (BitBR) is treated like an object as she is sent from one family to another across borders. The instability as well as the mistreatment and shortage of appreciation in her life result in her emotions of depression and lethargy. Similarly, Ebla (FaCR) is confronted with her perception as an inferior human being which causes her inability to be responsible for decisions. Her arranged marriages lead to her dependence on men and result in feelings of depression as well as a lowered self-esteem; her case shows the severe consequences of male supremacy and the subsequent oppression of women.

Furthermore, although 98 percent of Somali females are infibulated, the consequences from the experienced traumatic event are rarely publicly discussed; FGM remains a tradition and is still practised in various regions of the country. Both Aman and Fadumo are subjected to Type 3 of FGM, the infibulation, which is described in detail to



demonstrate the brutality applied on young females with the main purposes of enhancing their purity and ensuring their virginity until the wedding night. What is regarded as a traditional practice or even a necessity girls have to experience is shown to cause severe physical and psycho-social-sexual consequences for Aman as well as Fadumo. Trauma-resultant emotions reach from anxiety to depression, while females like Fadumo additionally feel incomplete due to the brutal removal of a healthy body part and re-experience the traumatic event repeatedly.

Severe suffering is also endured by numerous Somali women who are exposed to sexual abuse and rape either within the domestic sphere or by strangers, particularly in times of civil unrest. While sexual violence is known to be used as a weapon of war, it is frequently not reported within marriages since victims often feel humiliated and refuse to attract public awareness or do not consider non-consensual intercourse as rape due to women's obligation to satisfy their husband's needs without opposition. The characters of Aman and Ebla clearly demonstrate how experiences of sexual abuse and rape – marital abuse as well as rape committed by a stranger – affect a victim's emotional health and result in emotions of shame and disgust, a decreased self-confidence and an altered sexual behaviour.

Additionally, Somalia's instability, especially shortly before as well as during the civil war, severely affected women and girls who had to endure violence, the loss of beloved people, forlornness and often functioned as the sole breadwinner of the family. In *The orchard of lost souls*, the protagonists demonstrate the consequences of Siad Barre's ruthless regime as Deqo is mistreated and just manages to escape from being raped while Kawsar suffers deeply from the suicide of her daughter as well as the dramatic developments of her country. The characters mirror how brutality and discrimination ruled Somalia and ripped apart families.

The analysed novels show a selected representation of Somali literature and certainly do not address the full scope of female suffering, but they clearly demonstrate the consequences of a patriarchal society in which females are subjugated and exposed to various forms of violence. Nevertheless, the novels generally convey a feeling of hope as the characters find a way for coping with traumatic experiences which shows that violence will not be forgotten, but does not imply an ineffective healing process.

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## 6 Appendix

### 6.1 German abstract

Somalia ist zweifellos ein Staat, der geprägt von seinen Gräueltaten der Vergangenheit mit den Konsequenzen von Bürgerkriegen, politischer Unruhen und der Einmischung von Kolonialmächten bis heute zu kämpfen hat. Als offensichtliches Resultat zeigen sich sowohl ein bedenklich geringer Index für menschliche Entwicklung sowie geschlechterspezifische Diskriminierung im privaten als auch im öffentlichen Bereich. Die männliche Vorherrschaft in der somalischen Gesellschaft führt zur Unterdrückung der Frauen im Allgemeinen und ist in vielen Fällen folgenschwer, sowohl auf psychischer als auch auf physischer Ebene. Dies zeigt sich besonders deutlich anhand der traumatischen Erfahrungen der Protagonistinnen in den folgenden somalischen Romanen: *Aman* (Barnes, Virginia Lee), *Born in the big rains* (Korn, Fadumo), *From a crooked rib* (Farah, Nuruddin), und *The orchard of lost souls* (Mohamed, Nadifa).

In Somalias patriarchaler Gesellschaft, weibliche Genitalverstümmelung (FGM) ist bis heute eine traditionelle Praxis, die am Großteil der weiblichen Bevölkerung vorgenommen wird. Daraus resultierende Konsequenzen werden besonders deutlich in *Aman* und *Born in the big rains* dargestellt. Neben zahlreichen physischen Folgen sind betroffene Frauen vor allem auch langfristig psychisch belastet. FGM soll die Reinheit des weiblichen Geschlechts bezwecken sowie zur Vergewisserung der Jungfräulichkeit der Frau bis zur Ehe beitragen, die letztendlich oftmals von der Familie arrangiert wird. Dies wiederum führt oft zu sexuellem Missbrauch, welcher kaum als Verletzung der Menschenrechte angesehen wird, da eine verheiratete Frau ihren ehelichen Pflichten und somit auch der Befriedigung sexueller Gelüste ihres Ehepartners nachkommen muss. Sowohl *Aman* als auch *Ebla* (FaCR) erfahren derartige Missbräuche und folglich Veränderungen in ihrem Verhalten durch die traumatischen Erlebnisse. Des Weiteren wird aus den ausgewählten somalischen Romanen ersichtlich, dass Frauen vor allem in instabilen Zeiten Gefahren ausgesetzt sind und mit Gewalt konfrontiert werden. Oft sind sie erstmals selbst dafür zuständig, die Familie zu finanzieren und haben zusätzlich mit dem Verlust geliebter Personen und dem Gefühl andauernder Einsamkeit und Verlassenheit zu kämpfen. Resultierend aus ihren traumatischen Erlebnissen leben sie mit negativen Emotionen, eventuell bis hin zu dem Wunsch, ihrem Leben ein Ende zu setzen.