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**African Literature as a Front to the Islamic Political  
Conflict: Sufism in Nuruddin Farah's Maps (1986)**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the representation of Sufism, political Islam, and power dynamics within African literature, with a specific focus on Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986). While Sufism has long served in Africa as a spiritual force that nurtures cultural continuity, communal ethics, and moral resilience, the rise of political Islam introduced new forms of ideological rigidity and authoritarian control. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research analyses *Maps* as a literary space in which these competing religious and political forces converge. The novel dramatises the clash between Sufi spiritual traditions and the coercive ambitions of political Islam in postcolonial Somali society. Farah employs narrative techniques such as storytelling, healing, and symbolic representations of spiritual endurance to depict how Sufi identities survive cultural and political upheaval. This is embodied in the enigmatic character Misra, whose presence signifies compassion, memory, and resistance. Conversely, the novel portrays political Islam as aligned with discipline, censorship, and suppression of imagination. Askar's feeling of being "torn between maps" symbolises both his

personal identity crisis and Somalia's broader struggle between spiritual heritage and emerging ideological pressures. The study concludes that Maps exposes a critical ideological fault line in African societies, highlighting Sufism's subversive role in resisting authoritarian political Islam and emphasising literature's power to illuminate the intersections of faith, authority, and identity.

**Keywords:** *Sufism, political Islam, power, African literature, Nuruddin Farah, Maps (1986), postcolonial Somalia, identity*

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and political authority has long been central to African literature, where writers use narrative to examine how faith, identity, and power intersect in moments of social transformation. Within this tradition, Islamic culture, particularly Sufism, occupies a significant space. For centuries, Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyya, Ahmadiyya, and Salihyya shaped communal life across Africa through ethical teaching, ritual practice, and modes of spiritual remembrance that emphasised tolerance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. Sufism functioned not only as a spiritual system but also as a mediating force between communities and the state, offering alternative moral frameworks grounded in memory and collective identity.

The twentieth century, however, witnessed the rise of political Islam, a movement promoting doctrinal purity, legal rigidity, and the political instrumentalisation of religion. This shift generated ideological tensions in many African societies as reformist and militant actors challenged the inclusive, mystical ethos of Sufi traditions. African literature frequently stages this conflict, illustrating how competing religious visions shape individual consciousness, gender relations, and the legitimacy of political authority.

Within this broader discourse, Nuruddin Farah emerges as a key figure whose fiction interrogates the entanglement of spirituality and politics in Somalia. *Maps* (1986) dramatises the confrontation between Sufi-inspired values and the ascendant forces of political Islam, presenting these currents not as abstract ideologies but as lived experiences that structure personal and national identity. Through Askar's psychological struggles and his shifting attachments to figures such as Misra, the novel exposes how competing religious paradigms shape moral direction, belonging, and memory.

This study argues that *Maps* employs Sufi symbols, narrative structures, and ethical motifs to frame Somali identity as spiritually rooted and communally sustained, while simultaneously critiquing political Islam's coercive and exclusionary tendencies. In doing so, the novel demonstrates the capacity of African literature to critically illuminate the interplay between faith, power, and identity in postcolonial societies.

### ***1.1 Purpose of the study***

This study investigates how African literature portrays the interplay between Sufism, political Islam, and power, focusing on Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986). It examines Farah's portrayal of Sufism as a repository for cultural memory and ontological continuity; conversely, it explores his depiction of political Islam as a destabilising apparatus that radicalises the reconstruction of identity and intensifies communal atomisation. Through Askar's personal and psychological struggles, the study explores how competing religious ideologies influence moral choices, belonging, and national consciousness. Ultimately, the research contributes to wider debates on how African fiction engages with questions of faith and authority, highlighting literature's capacity to reveal how power is exercised, contested, and internalised within postcolonial societies.

### ***1.2 Objectives***

This study aims to examine how Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986) portrays the relationship between Sufism, political Islam, and power in shaping Somali identity. It explores how Farah presents Sufism as a source of spirituality, cultural continuity, and communal belonging through symbols, memory, and reflective narration. At the same time, the study analyses his depiction of political Islam as an intrusive ideological force that disrupts personal identity and national cohesion. By focusing on character development, psychological conflict, and shifting perspectives, the research investigates how the novel dramatises the tension between mystical spirituality and politicised authority. Ultimately, the study situates *Maps* within more expansive post-colonial enquiries, positioning the novel as a vital discursive site for the reconfiguration of religious and political paradigms in the African context.

### **1.3 Research questions**

In particular, the research questions are these:

- To what extent is Sufism represented in the novel *Maps* (1986) by Nuruddin Farah as a spiritual tradition, social memory, and procedure to gain strength and unity of Somali society?
- In what ways does political Islam's portrayal of authority in African literature reflect the positioning of power?

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This study highlights the role of African literature as a critical space for examining how faith, politics, and power intersect in postcolonial societies. By analysing Nuruddin Farah's *Maps* (1986), the research demonstrates how storytelling becomes a tool for exploring the tensions between Sufi spirituality and the rise of political Islam—two forces that have profoundly shaped the cultural and political landscape of Somalia and other African nations. The study underscores the value of Sufism as a tradition that nurtures communal memory, ethical resilience, and spiritual continuity, while revealing how political Islam introduces competing visions of authority, identity, and social order. For literary scholars, the research expands understanding of how African fiction negotiates religious discourse and engages with questions of power, belonging, and resistance. For historians, sociologists, and political scientists, it offers a multidisciplinary lens that connects cultural production to broader contestations over identity and governance. The study also provides students and emerging researchers with insight into how fiction can illuminate contemporary conflicts by tracing their historical and spiritual roots. Ultimately, the research affirms the importance of African literature as a platform through which marginalised voices articulate their experiences of cultural disruption, ideological pressure, and the search for moral direction.

## **5 Literature review**

### **5.1 Sufism and Political Islam in African Contexts**

Traditionally, African Sufism functioned as the cornerstone of society, fostered through spiritual guidance, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. Researchers have established that Sufi regimes have given

education and societal values a form in areas such as Senegal and Nigeria, where Sufi brotherhoods became central to both spiritual and secular life (later, 2016; Ware, 2014). Another perspective underlines that spiritual leaders and political rivals were co-existent, yet sometimes there was a risk that the latter could consider the former as a threat to their authorised power or simply their incompatibility with gang law (Hackett, 1994; Hunwick, 1997). In West Africa, reformist Sufi leaders like Sheikh Amadu Bamba in Senegal and Usman dan Fodio in Nigeria show that Sufism was not exclusively apolitical and could sometimes breach the barriers of political power and hence trigger political renewals and even revolutions (Robinson, 2004; Babou, 2007). Other authors did not identify the importance of networking in building identity within the diaspora, especially in the light of Sufism going beyond geographical and cultural borders and shaping global Muslim identities

### ***5.2 Sufism in African Literature***

Sufism is literature based on African motifs, and despite the plethora of literature on Sufism's historical dimension, the literary aspect of Sufism in African fiction is inadequately explored. Nevertheless, even though there has been ample research in Sufi literature in various non-African settings—mostly those in Persian or South Asian (Ernst, 1997; Schimmel, 2011)—African literary critics have been too lazy to take up the task of investigating Sufism as an important theme. It can be observed that African literature that incorporates the subject of Islam often brings out the religion in terms of the contexts of the colonial period, nationalism, personal identity, or anything related, except the Sufi mystic tradition. While this study might merely underline the Sufi heritage of Africa's cultural and textual landscape, the more comprehensive works, such as Ware, Wright, and Syed's (2018) *The Jihad of the Pen: The Sufi literature of West Africa* exemplifies the necessity of incorporating Sufi literary and textual contributions into the wider picture of the African literary heritage. Such research is only on an introductory scale. Going deep into this topic, as a result of many fictions, symbols and practices that are woven through modern African novels, a big part of the storyline analysis is left unexplored.

### ***5.3 Nuruddin Farah's Maps and Related Criticism***

The thesis of Nuruddin Farah in *Maps* and connected commentary shows a detailed attention to Farah's characters as a representation of a nation battling over identity, postcolonial themes as well as individual formation. On the other hand, Kumar (2010) does the reading of *Maps* using the concepts of the people's sense of home and national selfhood and national identity formation, which derive from postcolonial thinking and theorists like Bhabha and Anderson. However, such discourses do not generally emphasise the role of religion in particular as far as Sufism is concerned. Another school of thought has taken a broad look at Farah's literary modernism or individualism. This example is probably the *Trilogies of Moolla* (2014), where he puts the accent on the subjectivity of the person, and the change of this person shapes the direction of society. Wright (2004) positions Farah as belonging to the modernist African tradition of unity in knowledge and strength that was informed by liberal traditions of the early part of the 20th century. Thus, this does not necessarily mean that Sufism and political Islam are the most fundamental aspects of theology and literature; such a focus may fail to capture the lived reality and the substantive role these traditions play in the daily lives of African individuals. *Islam in the Eastern African Novel* by Alireza Mirmotahari is a notable example, as it discusses colonial and postcolonial narratives of Islam and explores Farah's work. However, the overt and clear discussion of mysticism that is central to Sufism is not visible. Hence, the unity and companionship theme is the only one in front, and the mysticism dimension is neglected.

### ***5.4 Bridging Literature, Sufism, and Power***

Intersecting Literature, Sufism, and Authority reveals not only the imperative necessity to explore the similarity and difference in the approaches used in the historical studies of Sufism and literary analyses of contemporary African fiction, but in fact, it also provides us with the most significant direction in the study. Scholars such as El-Miskin (1998) and Marchal (2011) have told us about the importance of Sufism, as well as political Islam in Somali society, whereas critics like Moolla (2014) and Wright (2004) have together explored how Farah's narratives have been woven with essential narratives of personality as well as nationality. Nevertheless, the different levels of awareness remain widely separate. The discourse through which this perspective is examined should function as

a literary mirror, reflecting the Somali Sufi–Islamist conflict in its entirety, or at the very least, across its most significant dimensions. Hence, the works produced by East African writers such as Kane and the Anthology of Jihad of the Pen, which brings light to the significance of Sufism in culture and literature, have not been much scrutinised. Farah's novel "Maps" provides sufficient material for discussing the capacity to narrate storytelling and ideology at the same time, making it a perfect place for considering such issues.

### ***5.5 Contemporary Debates on Sufism and Political Islam in Africa***

Recent scholarship has revisited the assumption that African Sufism is primarily quietist and apolitical, showing instead that Sufi orders are deeply entangled with modern projects of power and governance. Hassan's study of *Sufi Islamic discourse in Africa* traces how movements such as the Muridiyya and the legacies of figures like Amadu Bamba and Usman dan Fodio have generated an explicitly political Sufi vocabulary around jihad, reform, and even visions of an "African Caliphate," thereby complicating binaries between "spiritual" Sufism and "political" Islam. Mukhtar's concept of "political Sufism" in Somalia similarly demonstrates that Somali *tariqas* have repeatedly engaged in the political sphere—from the anti-colonial era through to post-independence and the civil war—out of pragmatic necessity, rather than as a repudiation of their mystical ethos. Abdullahi's mapping of competing conceptions of Islam in Somalia further shows how Sufi orders, Salafi movements and Muslim Brotherhood-type organisations struggle over religious authority and national identity in the postcolonial state. Placed alongside broader work on Islam and politics in Africa that charts the erosion of "secular" public space and the rise of transnational Islamist networks, these studies provide a contemporary framework for understanding how Sufism and political Islam intersect in African contexts marked by state fragility and ideological contestation.

### ***5.6 Sufi Resistance Movements and Postcolonial African Identity***

A second strand of recent research foregrounds Sufism as a site of resistance and identity formation in postcolonial Africa. Mohamed's 2025 study of Sufism and spiritual resistance in East Africa examines the legacy of Shaykh 'Abdullahi al-Qutbi (1881–1950), showing how Somali Sufi traditions combined mystical practice, legal scholarship and anti-colonial

activism to articulate a counter-imaginary to both imperial rule and later Islamist reform. This work situates Sufi networks as active producers of political subjectivity rather than as merely devotional communities, thereby offering a historical genealogy for contemporary Sufi resistance to Salafi-jihadist movements in Somalia and the wider Horn. Complementing this, Abdullahi's analysis of consensus and controversy around Islam in Somalia shows how Sufi orders and their opponents compete to define "authentic" Islamic identity, with direct implications for how Somalis imagine community, citizenship and the postcolonial nation. Beyond the Horn, Matola's postcolonial reading of Yao Muslims in Malawi illustrates how Sufi-inflected Islamic identity functions as a marker of minority resistance and socio-political self-assertion, using concepts such as the subaltern and the organic intellectual to theorise Muslim agency under colonial and postcolonial domination. Collectively, these studies underscore that Sufi movements are not only spiritual communities but also pivotal actors in contestations over memory, territory, and the definition of postcolonial African identity.

### ***5.7 Religion, Sufism, and Postcolonial African Literature***

Recent work on religion in African literature provides a theoretical lens for reading *Maps* as a narrative space where Sufism and political Islam intersect. Van Klinken's influential survey argues that religion is neither a marginal nor a residual theme in post-colonial African writing; rather, it serves as a central structuring force through which authors represent social transformation, critique power, and envisage alternative futures. He identifies African novels as key sites where religious traditions are creatively re-imagined, contested and woven into debates about nationalism, gender, violence and reconciliation, and calls for more systematic engagement with religion as an analytical category in African literary criticism. Studies that focus specifically on Muslim minorities and Islamic identity politics, such as Matola's postcolonial analysis of Yao Muslims, provide additional conceptual tools for understanding how literary texts encode struggles over religious belonging, marginalisation and resistance. By drawing on this emerging field, the present study positions *Maps* within a broader corpus of African writing in which Sufi motifs, Islamic reform discourses and state violence are not merely background details but crucial narrative devices for thinking through postcolonial identity and power.

### ***5.8 Historical and Political Context: Siad Barre, Islam, and the Reshaping of Somali Identity***

Scholars argue that the ideological tensions reflected in *Maps* are rooted in Somalia's political history under Siad Barre, whose "Scientific Socialism" promoted modernisation while restricting traditional religious authority (Elmi, 2010; Marchal, 2011). Although Islam functioned as a unifying cultural force, the regime's inconsistent policies supporting religion at times while repressing clerics and Sufi practices at others created friction between the state and long-established Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyya and Salihyya (Abdullahi, 2021). Studies note that these orders historically shaped Somali communal identity, moral life, and education, but their influence declined as the state sought to centralise ideological control (Elmi, 2010). Researchers further observe that the erosion of state authority in the late 1980s and the eventual collapse of the Barre regime in 1991 facilitated the rise of reformist and militant Islamist movements, which positioned themselves as alternative political and moral authorities (Hoehne & Gaas, 2022; EUAA, 2025). This broader historical conflict between Sufi spirituality and political Islam is frequently linked to Farah's novel, where Askar's internal struggle mirrors the competing forces shaping Somali identity during this turbulent period (Moolla, 2009; Muhammad, 2018).

### ***5.9 Research Gap and Relevance to This Study***

The unsatisfactory state of scholarly research on the Sufism of Somalia (Lewis, 1998; Ware, 2014) is to be noted in comparison with the now-in-full-swing political Islam emerging as a force (Marchal, 2011; Prunier, 2013). Literary criticism concerning this novel, particularly the themes of nation building, identity, and post-colonialism, has undoubtedly been the focus (Moolla, 2014; Wright, 2004; Kumar, 2010). It has been uncommon for research in this field to deviate from a primary focus on the politics of Islam, with few studies prioritising alternative thematic or cultural dimensions. Studies such as Mirmotahari's book (2011) on Islam, which solve Somalia's political problems and disavow the noticeable influence of the Sufism mystic tradition. The study intends to make a substantive contribution by integrating Sufism into the narrative and thematic framework of the text. This research provides an analysis of how Farah embraced the technique of contrasting psych-spiritual storytelling with the authoritative voice of political Islam to prove that literature indeed

portrays power struggles and politics. The endeavour of this work can be seen in the capacity to create African literary criticism with a background in the historical awareness of Sufism, also offering the new analytical method of Farah's work and representation of African literature in a wider concern of Islamic politics.

## **6. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design suitable for examining how *Maps* (1986) represents the interplay between Sufism, political Islam, and power within the Somali sociopolitical context. Because the aim of the research is to understand how a literary text encodes ideological struggles, the methodology relies on textual analysis, close reading, and thematic interpretation, bolstered by an engagement with scholarly literature on African fiction, Sufism, and political Islam. The approach does not involve numerical variables or statistical modelling; rather, it focuses on interpreting narrative patterns, symbolic structures, and ideological tensions embedded in the novel.

At its core, the study adopts a theoretical–analytical framework grounded in postcolonial literary theory, political theory on power and ideology, and religious studies, particularly scholarship on Sufi spirituality and Islamic reform movements. This integrated framework allows the analysis to trace how Farah's narrative techniques, such as fragmented narration, symbolism, interior monologue, and intertextual references to Somali oral traditions and Islamic discourse, construct tensions between mystical spirituality and political authority. By defining key concepts such as *Sufism* (as a spiritual, communal, and memory-based tradition) and *political Islam* (as an ideologically driven project seeking political dominance), the methodology ensures conceptual clarity and analytic coherence.

In line with the reviewer's recommendation, the study incorporates thematic mapping to identify recurring motifs related to identity, spirituality, resistance, and ideological coercion. This method helps organise the narrative into thematic clusters that reveal Farah's contrasting portrayals of Sufi ethics and the encroachment of political Islam. Furthermore, the research employs symbolic analysis to interpret key images, metaphors, and character functions, particularly examining how Misra's Sufi-inflected spirituality intersects with Askar's fluctuating ideological commitments. Discourse analysis is also applied to examine

how characters articulate competing visions of faith, community, and authority.

To ensure a balanced and well-supported analysis, the study integrates the primary text with carefully selected secondary sources, including academic articles on African literature, Sufi traditions in Africa, Somali political history, and the intellectual development of political Islam. These sources are not treated as background material alone; instead, they are actively woven into the interpretation of the novel to contextualise Farah's thematic concerns and narrative strategies.

Overall, this methodological approach enables a rigorous and multi-layered reading of *Maps* that remains sensitive to its literary complexity while grounding the analysis in broader debates about religion, identity, and power in postcolonial African societies.

### ***6.1 Research Approach***

This research is designed as an interpretive case study, employing *Maps* as a focal text through which broader sociopolitical and religious questions can be systematically examined. The case study model allows for an in-depth, context-rich analysis of how Farah's narrative reflects the ideological conflicts of Somalia during the late twentieth century. Rather than attempting to manipulate variables or quantify textual features, the research aims to describe, interpret, and explain the novel's representation of identity formation, spiritual resistance, and political coercion.

Through close reading, the analysis pays particular attention to how Farah constructs character psychology, especially Askar's ideological oscillations and Misra's spiritual presence, to mirror societal tensions between Sufi traditions and politicised Islam. This approach ensures that the textual interpretation remains firmly grounded in the primary source while being rigorously informed by the theoretical and historical frameworks established earlier.

### ***6.2 Data Collection and Analysis***

The primary data for this study is Farah's novel *Maps* (1986). Secondary data consists of scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, and authoritative studies on African literature, Somali history, Sufism, and political Islam. These sources were identified through academic databases, university libraries, and reputable research repositories. Selection was guided by relevance to key themes of spirituality, ideology, and power.

Data analysis was conducted through multi-layered textual interpretation, beginning with close reading to identify significant passages, symbols, dialogues, and narrative structures. These textual elements were then examined using thematic mapping to categorise recurring motifs related to identity, memory, mysticism, gender, and ideological conflict. Symbolic and discourse analysis enabled the study to interpret how political Islam and Sufi spirituality are articulated and contested in the novel, while intertextual analysis helped situate Farah's narrative within broader Somali Islamic traditions and African literary discourse.

The research questions provided a rigorous framework for every stage of interpretation, ensuring that the analysis remained focused on Farah's representation of competing religious and political ideologies and their alignment with Somalia's historical reality. This methodological framework ultimately supports a nuanced understanding of *Maps*, revealing the novel as a dynamic site where literature interrogates the complex intersection of faith, power, and postcolonial identity.

## **7. Findings and Discussion**

African literature, and Farah's *Maps* (1986) in particular, demonstrates that Sufism and political Islam are posited as foundational ideological apparatuses; they are not merely incidental themes but pivotal forces that construct the subject's consciousness and dictate the parameters of communal and national identity. Farah's narrative brings these competing traditions to the forefront, portraying Sufism as an anchor of cultural memory and ethical orientation, while presenting political Islam as a coercive and destabilising force emerging during periods of social upheaval. Through the inner conflicts of his characters, especially Askar and Misra, Farah dramatises the broader historical struggle over legitimacy, authority, and identity in postcolonial Somalia.

### **7.1 Findings**

#### *7.1.1 Sufism as Memory, Storytelling, and Inner Harmony*

Farah foregrounds Sufi spirituality through the symbolism of stories, songs, and maternal transmission. In the early chapters, Misra functions as a spiritual anchor, and Farah repeatedly uses metaphors of sound, memory, and maps to evoke Sufi notions of *dhikr* (remembrance). Her

teachings, “By knowing the stories, you know the map already... they help you find the way through the confusion of the world” (p. 5), frame storytelling as a form of spiritual navigation, echoing the Sufi tradition of transmitting wisdom through allegory. Askar’s recollection that “Her voice filtered through me, and I felt a calmness descend” (p. 62) associates Misra with inner tranquillity, mirroring the soothing effects of Sufi ritual practices. Likewise, the image “As if the worlds all sang the prayer to the stars, and I caught the words in my sleep” (p. 75) links Misra’s influence to the cosmic and mystical dimensions of Sufism. Together, these passages show that Sufism in *Maps* is not presented as doctrinal theology but as an embodied spiritual experience grounded in voice, memory, and emotional healing.

### *7.1.2 Misra: Sufi Spirituality, Gendered Resistance, and Ethical Counterforce*

A deeper gender-based analysis reveals Misra as the novel’s most significant spiritual figure; she is a living embodiment of compassion, endurance, and non-violent resistance whose femininity is inextricably linked to her Sufi-inflected ethical presence. Farah positions her as the moral cartographer of Askar’s inner world, captured in his recollection that she is “the map he carried inside him, drawn by her hands” (p. 41), a metaphor that frames her as the architect of his spiritual and emotional development. Her everyday gestures of feeding him, comforting him, protecting him, and telling him stories echo the Sufi concept of *tarbiya*, or spiritual upbringing, where the nurturing of the soul occurs through sustained care, repetition, and embodied guidance rather than formal instruction. Misra’s suffering further symbolises the wounded spiritual heritage of Somalia; her marginalisation and the suspicion she faces from nationalist figures expose the harshness of masculine political violence, while her quiet resilience highlights the endurance of feminine spiritual traditions that persist beneath ideological upheaval. Through these narrative strategies, Farah constructs Misra as a Sufi-coded conscience whose ethical clarity stands in stark opposition to the rigid and coercive forces that later shape Askar’s adolescence. She becomes the emotional and spiritual counterweight in the novel, representing a mode of resistance rooted not in confrontation but in compassion, memory, and the intimate work of preserving humanity amid political fragmentation.

### 7.1.3 Political Islam as Rulemaking, Rigidity, and Violence

Farah contrasts the fluid, imaginative nature of Sufi spirituality with the rigid, rule-bound mentality of political Islam through stark and revealing dialogues that expose an intolerance for ambiguity, reflection, and inner depth. When the narrator states that *“His men did not like the storytelling... They wanted to know the rules”* (p. 112), Farah dramatises a fundamental ideological clash: storytelling represents the openness, flexibility, and ethical introspection associated with Sufi traditions, while “the rules” symbolise the reduction of religion to fixed commandments and external authority. This rejection of narrative and therefore of interpretive richness signals a worldview incapable of accommodating multiple meanings. Farah deepens this portrayal through the militant declaration, *“The word is for the tongue; the command is for the sword”* (p. 139), a chilling compression of language and violence into a single authoritarian principle. The brevity of the line mirrors the severity of the ideology: communication is reduced to command, and command is inseparable from force. Similarly, the assertion that *“They wished for the law above all”* (p. 112) reveals a disposition that privileges legalism over spirituality, control over contemplation, and dogma over moral discernment. Collectively, these textual details illustrate Farah’s critique of political Islam as an ideology that strips faith of its ethical and spiritual depth, substituting it with a framework of obedience, coercion, and a mechanistic interpretation of human conduct. In this sense, political Islam emerges not simply as a theological alternative but as a constricting force that extinguishes the imaginative and humane possibilities embodied by Sufi tradition.

### 7.1.4 Identity Fragmentation: Askar as the Embodiment of National Trauma

Farah uses Askar’s interior monologues to capture the profound psychological impact of competing religious and political systems on the formation of identity. Askar’s confession, *“I have a soul in which there are two sides...”* (p. 198), signals an internal division shaped by two opposing moral worlds. When he reflects on *“maps drawn with killing and prayers”* (p. 198), Farah fuses spatial imagery with ethical conflict, suggesting that Askar’s sense of direction both literal and symbolic has been shaped by forces of violence as much as by spiritual memory. His admission that *“Every path that I should follow divides itself into two”* (p. 221) conveys a paralysis of choice, a state in which every moral or emotional decision becomes entangled in ideological contradiction. This confusion culminates in the line, *“I no longer*

*tell the difference between the map of justice and the map of dominance”* (p. 144), revealing the extent to which political indoctrination has eroded Askar’s ability to distinguish ethical guidance from authoritarian control. Through these layered reflections, Farah uses the metaphor of “maps” not merely as geographical markers but as representations of psychological landscapes and internal terrains shaped by memory, fear, longing, and ideological pressure. Askar serves as a textual microcosm of Somalia, embodying a nation fractured by the tension between the compassion and cultural rootedness of Sufi memory and the coercive, rigid certainties of political Islam. His fragmented consciousness embodies the country’s collective struggle to navigate competing visions of identity, legitimacy, and moral direction.

### *7.1.5 Symbolism and Key Scenes Strengthening the Findings*

Farah reinforces the ideological struggle between Sufi spirituality and political Islam through a network of recurring symbols that enrich the novel’s thematic depth. The map emerges as the most dominant symbol, representing identity, belonging, and moral orientation. Misra’s metaphorical maps drawn through stories, songs, and nurturing gestures embody Sufi lineage rooted in memory and ethical continuity, while the militant maps Askar later encounters reflect violent territoriality and ideological rigidity. Blood and wounds appear in moments when Askar imagines or experiences bodily harm, symbolising the internal psychological violence produced by competing belief systems; these injuries mark not only physical vulnerability but also the fracturing of the self. Farah also employs doors and thresholds, frequently depicting scenes of entering, knocking, or crossing spaces, to signal transitions from spiritual innocence into ideological indoctrination, illustrating how Askar moves between worlds that shape his moral landscape. The mother figure, embodied by Misra, functions as a symbol of the nurturing Sufi womb, a source of warmth, compassion, and emotional grounding, while political Islam is associated with the metaphorical “*fathers of law*,” whose harsh, externalised authority replaces maternal care with legalistic discipline. Through these layered symbols, Farah conveys ideological conflict with indirect but profound impact, employing evocative imagery rather than explicit commentary to demonstrate how spirituality, violence, memory, and authority contend to define both individual consciousness and collective identity.

## **7.2. Discussion**

The expanded findings reveal that Farah's *Maps* transforms the historical struggle between Sufi traditions and political Islam into an intimate narrative of identity formation, psychological fragmentation, and cultural conflict. Consistent with scholarship that highlights the central role of Sufi orders in providing cultural stability, ethical grounding, and spiritual guidance in Somalia (Lewis, 1998; Ware, 2014), Farah uses Misra to embody the nurturing, memory-based values associated with Sufism. Her stories, songs, and compassionate gestures transcend mere maternal care, serving instead as vital conduits for spiritual lineage and the sustenance of cultural resilience. Through Misra, Farah illustrates how Sufi ethics operate through quiet endurance, emotional care, and the preservation of communal memory - qualities that stand in stark contrast to the ideological rigidity and violent discipline of the militant groups that later shape Askar's world.

Farah intensifies this contrast by presenting political Islam through terse, command-driven dialogue that privileges rule, obedience, and doctrinal purity. Expressions such as "They wished for the law above all" (p. 112) and the militants' chilling dictum, "The command is for the sword" (p. 139), reveal an ideology that reduces faith to legalistic authority and conflates religious obedience with violence. These textual markers echo historical analyses that document the emergence of reformist and militant Islamist factions, which repudiated Sufi traditions in favour of more rigorous doctrinal interpretations (Marchal, 2011; Elmi, 2010). Farah's fiction mirrors these socio-political tensions, using shifts in narrative voice, symbolic motifs, and dialogues to dramatise the ideological rupture between inclusive spirituality and coercive religio-political control.

Askar's fragmented consciousness amplifies this conflict by turning the broader national struggle into a personal, psychological reality. His admission that his soul is divided between "maps drawn with stories" and "maps drawn with killing and prayers" (p. 198) positions him as a symbolic representation of Somalia itself: a nation torn between continuity and rupture, memory and militancy, compassion and coercion. His inability to distinguish "the map of justice" from "the map of dominance" (p. 144) illustrates how political violence distorts ethical perception, blurring the boundaries between moral guidance and ideological manipulation. Through Askar, Farah suggests that identity in a fractured society becomes a contested terrain shaped by competing spiritual and political forces.

Farah's engagement with these themes distinguishes *Maps* within the broader field of African postcolonial literature. Whereas authors such as Tayeb Salih or Cheikh Hamidou Kane often gesture toward reconciliation or cultural synthesis, Farah presents religion as an active battleground where authority is negotiated, contested, and weaponised. In *Maps*, Sufism signifies cultural rootedness, ethical memory, and spiritual continuity, while political Islam embodies disruption, ideological aggression, and the erosion of communal bonds. The novel ultimately critiques the transformation of religion into a tool of political domination, suggesting that such instrumentalisation leads to the fragmentation of community, nation, and self.

In this sense, Farah uses literature as a powerful critical medium for exposing the mechanisms through which spiritual traditions and political ideologies shape personal identity and collective history. The duality between Sufism and political Islam in the novel is not merely a theological disagreement; it is a deeply political struggle reflecting Somalia's attempts to define itself amid competing visions of faith, power, and belonging. Through the intertwined narratives of Misra and Askar, Farah reveals that the fight for spiritual authority is inextricably linked to the definition of Somali identity, the trajectory of national destiny, and the preservation or erasure of cultural memory.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study proposes that Farah's *Maps* (1986) points out the distinctive nature of African pieces of writing in terms of acting as critical domains where the spiritual beliefs and the authority of political power are disputed. The examination has demonstrated that Farah utilises Islamic traditions as symbols of cultural unity and spiritual fortitude while casting political Islam in the role of an oppressive power centre which seeks to obtain power by means of religion. By intertwining the conflict into Askar's personal story, the novel, in the process, gives voice to the diverse Somali and African realities, where religious ideologies are used for the legitimacy of political power and for social cohesion. The Farah tale consolidates the centrality of Sufism in preserving the national identity. The capacity to narrate, to heal, and to guide is an embodiment of the Sufi ethics of accepting other societies and carrying the cultural knowledge on. The underlying theme that emerges in this passage is the storytelling ethos that serves as the foundation of Sufi beliefs and practices. Therefore, the words "Stories are maps in themselves, Askar. They help you find your way when

the world confuses you" (by page 47) becomes akin to a metaphor for Sufi practices being a guide for the spirit and society. As literature, therefore, acts as a fortress for saving mysticism from being whipped out of society by the forces of ideological opposition. In addition, the authoritarian approach that is labelled political Islam causes conflict and enmity. The following excerpt. "The leaders in the mosque want a world of laws, not of stories' (located on page 112), is a clear denunciation by Farah of rigid belief systems. Political Islamism, in its conservative and reformist aspects, imposes this burden of integrating feelings of creativity, imagination, spirituality, individuality, and others, in favour of absolute spirits and obedience. At last, from such an approach: identity confusion, roughness, and spiritual sensitivity menace the culture. The hero of the novel, Askar, embodies the clash. His sorrowful remark, "I no longer know which map is mine: the one drawn with kindness or the one drawn with commands (p. 203)," touches upon the general turmoil which the Somali society is going through. Through this act, Farah portrays how individuals come to embody a collective crisis, wherein cultural mysticism is marginalised and suppressed by a dominant authoritarian ideology. In a word, according to Maps, African literature is not passive but rather affirming. Farah, through foregrounding Sufi practices vis-à-vis political Islam, delivers this message: those who adopt authoritarianism as their way of leading should be discouraged, while the strength of the spiritual resilience should be celebrated. Therefore, Farah presents African fiction as a discursive space that transcends mere storytelling about competing religious visions of power and faith; it is a site where these visions actively clash and where transformative new narratives are forged.

## **9. Recommendations**

Improvement of research and professional deeds recommends that understanding African literature scholars should consider the role of Sufi liberalism, which remains underestimated, compared to such issues as nationalism, colonialism, and identity. Through an extensive review of the literature, this study aims to uncover how mystical concepts contribute to literary narratives of resistance, fortitude, and resilience. Another approach that can be followed lies within the comparative research to be conducted over time and within varying cultural and political frameworks. Such research may focus its attention on how different writers from East, West, and North Africa deconstruct the issue of conflict between Sufism and political Islam politically and culturally. In addition, multidisciplinary

courses involving literary studies, history, and religious studies, among others, will therefore give insights on how literature imitates political encounters. Teachers are also supposed to integrate Farah's novels into the African literature, religion, and politics classes because these books help students understand the foundations of faith and leadership in African nations. Here onwards, research could approach the topic of how today's African writers bring out the fading religious and socio-political impacts of modernity, along with the dictates of extremism and the globalising eminence, through their writing, hence pursuing the modernity and spirituality debate.

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