

'WELCOME HOME, OUR BITTER HOME!': RETHINKING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN NURUDDIN FARAH'S "LINKS"

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Abstract

Nuruddin Farah's *Links* (2005) represents the civil war-torn Somalia, and particularly Mogadiscio, from the perspective of Jeebleh, who returns to his homeland after twenty years. The novel, through Jeebleh's exilic perspective, interrogates the implications of national identity and sense of collective belonging in a society driven by clan politics. This article examines the representation of fragmented nationhood as a consequence of the civil war along with the narrative's portrayal of other forms of belonging and collectivity to engender an alternative understanding of national identity. I contend that *Links*, while maintaining its focus on the national space and what the nation stands for in times of crisis, also offers ways to envision connections between the national space and what lies beyond through the implementation of exilic point of view and literary and non-literary allusions.

Keywords: national identity, nation, exile, Nuruddin Farah, Somalia

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Contemporary literary studies, while focusing on the new sites of cultural identification and representation born out of the global world order, finds itself revisiting the idea of the nation to comprehend the prevalence and reconceptualization of national identity and belonging in a period marked by fluidity, mobility, and displacement. Globalization and the increasing political, social, and cultural interconnectedness of the world figure in greatly in the representation of the nation from a transnational perspective. Nuruddin Farah's *Links* (2005) turns its gaze to the nation and its current state of crisis in an attempt to elaborate on the underlying dynamics of national identity and its transformation in a transnational context. On the one hand, the novel portrays the nation's predicament of confronting the internal tensions that fracture the sense of collective belonging, thus positioning the narrative within a specific national space; on the other hand, its utilization of an exilic perspective as a mediator between the nation and its outside, as well as the rich intertextual allusions, move the narrative beyond its immediate national context, asserting its claim to be recognized as part of the larger world literary scene.

Simon Gikandi, while outlining the complicated relationship between globalization and postcolonial studies through their shared interest in 'transcend[ing] the boundaries of the nation state and provid[ing] new vistas for understanding the cultural flows,' draws attention to the role imposed on literary texts as paradigms of globalization such as hybridity, heterogeneity and fluidity (2001, pp. 628-32). While this perspective emphasizes the mobility of people and ideas and the subjectivities emerging from new encounters as represented in postcolonial texts, it is impossible to overlook the national contexts these texts are born out of and shaped by. Gikandi underscores that even when literary texts strive to 'deconstruct the foundational narrative of the nation' and claim their status as 'world texts,' they refer to the framework of the nation through an engagement with 'its history, foundational mythologies, and its quotidian experiences' (2001, p. 632). Thus, the attempt to transcend the national context brings forth a return to the idea of the nation to uncover the dynamics that define the nation in the first place. In a similar vein to Gikandi, Paul Jay asserts that literary texts with a transnational character 'transform the scope of national literatures to which they belong and push beyond national boundaries to imagine the global character of modern experience, contemporary culture, and the identities they produce' (2010, p. 9). Rather than

undermining the significance of the national space, this approach affirms the need to reimagine the nation and national identity in a broader and more complex web of historical, social, economic, and cultural relations. Indeed, Jay aptly points out that globalization does not bring forth the 'withering away of the nation-state;' instead, the contemporary moment is marked by the simultaneous presence of globalization and nationalism, where 'nationalist aspirations and identities' still retain their strength 'in the face of homogenizing, westernizing or cosmopolitan tendencies' (2010, p. 118). In Farah's novel, the dynamic relationship between these two frameworks occupies the center in the protagonist's attempts to understand the current state of the nation along with his sense of national identity and belonging.

Farah, 'a global nomad' in Derek Wright's words, has lived in exile for most of his life, which greatly figures in his imagination of Somali society and culture (2002, p. xv). His fiction traces the tumultuous history of Somalia from British and Italian colonialism, the Soviet and then American influence, the dictatorship of Siyad Barre to the Somalia as a failed state driven by clan loyalty. John Hawley states that Farah's keen interest in Somali culture centers on 'the tectonic friction between self-definition and tribal loyalty, between nation-building and diurnal obligations' (1996, p. 190). Farah's own displacement and cosmopolitan perspective play a crucial role in questioning the seemingly homogenous character of the Somali nation and the transformation of society. While his sense of displacement - whether physical or psychological - contributes immensely to his representation of the nation, it also marks the ambivalent nature of his relationship with the national space.

In *Links*, Farah employs the figure of an exilic intellectual who returns to his country to find himself in the middle of a politically charged environment and a highly fragmented society, as represented with the arrival of Jeebleh to the civil war-ravaged Mogadiscio after twenty years of exile in the States. As he negotiates his own status within the national space, the novel underlines the inseparability of the sense of estrangement and belonging through his ambivalent position as both an outsider and insider. His visit after so many years is prompted by several motives, the most important of which is to rediscover his Somaliness and assess his responsibility as a Somali who is both an outsider and insider due to his exilic condition. Fatima Moolla notes 'the reconstruction of self and society in the Somali civil war context' as the primary concern of the novel

(2012, p. 116). Farah's delineation of characters surrounding Jeebleh indicates that not only the city itself but also the people and relationships are tainted, in one way or another, by the destruction brought by the civil war. His old friend Bile, after spending years in prison, now runs a shelter, the Refuge, for the displaced with Seamus, their Irish friend from university days in Italy, while Bile's half-brother Caloosha, responsible for both Jeebleh and Bile's imprisonment years ago, has become one of the warlords in the north of the city. The dissolution of the society has paved the way for an overall sense of uncertainty where changing loyalties and competing stories cause Jeebleh to feel disoriented and question both the transformation of Somali society and its impact on his identity. *Links*, thus, frames Jeebleh's efforts to redefine and reconnect with his Somaliness within his rediscovery of Somali society.

The question 'What is a Somali, and what does it mean to be one?' as posed by Wright 'opens up a Pandora's box of political, ethnic, and moral quandaries' that Farah's novels interrogate on different levels (1997, p. 201). The novel portrays the dissolution of a sense of national belonging as clan identity determines the new social order in war-torn Mogadiscio. While Jeebleh's rediscovery of his Somaliness in this volatile environment discloses the transformative power of the national space, for better or worse, Farah also represents the interconnectedness of the local and the global through Jeebleh's outsider and insider status. In this article, I focus on the novel's representation of fragmented nationhood and the disappearance of collective belonging in times of disorder. The protagonist's ambivalent relationship with national identity will inform the analysis of national self-perception and self-representation to explore the narrative's portrayal of alternative ways of re-imagining the nation through its heterogeneity.

Rediscovering the Homeland

Links represents Jeebleh's transformation from an observer who has 'come to learn and to listen' to an active participant who is 'now part of the story, in that [he has] taken sides and made choices that put [his] life in danger' (2005, pp. 9; 215). This transformation compels him to become familiar with the new Mogadiscio defined by clan politics and lawlessness, as well as to consider his own responsibility inside and beyond Somalia. The novel, while delineating the dynamics of a Somali society driven by clan warfare, points outward to the media representation of Somalia and its peoples on an

international scale, especially during the US intervention as well. Jeebleh's characterization as a Somali American presents an opportunity to explore the ramifications of an exilic perspective when it comes to comprehend the social dynamics of civil war and its consequences on individuals. In this way, *Links* traces not only the dissolution of the society under clan politics but also the possible ways of reconstructing a sense of collective belonging that goes beyond blood lineage and clan differences.

Jeebleh's return to Mogadiscio is prompted by his life and death experience in a traffic accident caused by a Somali driver in New York. Although this event works as a trigger and sends him to Mogadiscio 'to disorient death,' the real reasons behind his decision appear more complex, connecting his personal history and the history of Somalia. While he publicly mentions his desire to find his mother's grave and honor her memory, his hope to help the recovery of his friend Bile's kidnapped niece Raasta and her friend Makka, and take revenge on Caloosha, Bile's half-brother responsible for Jeebleh and Bile's imprisonment and possibly the kidnapping, emerge as parts of his agenda as well. Eleni Coundouriotis draws our attention to the almost too obvious allegory between the dead mother and the 'war-torn and unrecognizable Somalia,' the motherland (2014, p. 254). Jeebleh's attempt to honor his mother's memory is juxtaposed with his desire to witness the devastation of Mogadiscio and come to terms with it. However, the other items in his agenda eventually lead him to take up a more active role than that of mere dutiful son, leading to another allegorical representation when Jeebleh appears as a responsible son of the motherland through a more direct engagement with the ills of Somali society. On a more profound level, Jeebleh's quest for self-discovery and questioning of his identity as a Somali problematizes Somaliness within and outside the national borders. Jeebleh has come back not only 'to assess the extent of [his] culpability as a Somali' but also 'to reemphasize [his] Somaliness – give a needed boost to [his] identity' (2005, pp. 32; 36). Farah illustrates the complexity of self-definition as Jeebleh faces the dilemma of stripping himself of both Somalis' and Americans' imposition of clan identity on him and maintaining his now newly imagined Somaliness. Moolla states that Jeebleh's return to Mogadiscio 're-establishes a "link" with the homeland' through which he re-discovers himself and connects with people having the same mind-set as he does (2012, p. 119). However, the novel also indicates the difficulty of leaving behind the

already existing links, namely blood lineage, despite Jeebleh's disdain of clan politics and ancestry as the basis for identity.

Links opens with Jeebleh's arrival to Mogadiscio, a city that is both familiar and strange after all the destruction and thus serving as a microcosm of the nation. As the narrative follows him from the moment of his arrival in Mogadiscio to his departure for the States, the city, through its past and present, emerges as a key character for understanding the current dynamics of Somali society. Driven by clan warfare, Mogadiscio presents Jeebleh with a glimpse of prevalent violence shortly after his arrival at the airport as an armed young man shoots a random person – a ten-year-old boy – on a bet (2005, p. 16). The contemporary Mogadiscio is governed by new sets of rules in the absence of a central authority and state, entirely different than the Mogadiscio Jeebleh remembers: 'orderly, clean, peaceable, a city with integrity and a life of its own, a lovely metropolis with beaches, cafes, restaurants, late night movies' (2005, p. 35). According to Coundouriotis, this nostalgic portrayal of the city, through the omission of its status as a colonial city, places Mogadiscio both in and out of history (2014, p. 241). In a way, it is possible to see his description as the ideal image of the city that Jeebleh cherishes through his personal connection to Mogadiscio. However, Farah is far from depicting Jeebleh as ignorant of the damage created by different parties throughout time. In fact, while the novel presents us this almost too idyllic image of Mogadiscio that Jeebleh holds dear, the overall narrative emphasizes the painful history of the city that finally brings it to the brink of destruction in the hands of Somalis themselves. The novel, early on, provides the reader with a brief history of Somalia, and in a sense Mogadiscio, that traces the violent interventions upon the country throughout centuries:

[O]ne army leaving death and destruction in its wake, to be replaced by another and yet another, all equally destructive: the Arabs arrived and got some purchase on the peninsula, and after they pushed their commerce and along with it the Islamic faith, they were replaced by the Italians, then the Russians, and more recently the Americans, nervous, trigger-happy, shooting before they were shot at. The city became awash with guns, and the presence of the gun-crazy Americans escalated the conflict to greater heights. Would Mogadiscio ever know peace? (2005, pp. 14-5)

What is missing from this history is the destruction and violence brought upon the country by Somalis themselves, namely Siyad Barre's dictatorship years and the current state of lawlessness with the rise of warlords. The novel, while acknowledging the violent history of foreign occupations, directs its focus to the contemporary moment where Mogadiscio is transformed and destroyed, both spatially and socially, through clan politics. As the city is divided into two main zones controlled by StrongmanSouth and StrongmanNorth, along with areas of no-man's land, Harry Garuba, in his analysis of the spatiality in the novel, states that 'blood lineage determines physical residence, the social space of possible association and of possible political loyalty' (2008, p. 187). While this re-organization of the city along bloodlines does not prevent civilians from crossing the green line, as evinced by Jeebleh's trips between the north and south of the city, it nonetheless limits the mobility and the possibility of interaction between people from different clans, bringing forth the question of how to envision the Somali nation as a whole again.

The novel's representation of the dividedness of the society through Mogadiscio's spatial organization finds its counterpart in Jeebleh's obsession with pronouns, especially 'we,' as a marker of clan-based identity politics. Pronoun confusion or obsession, as described by Jeebleh, proves crucial in comprehending people's idea of collective identity through blood lineage in a war-torn country and its significations for Jeebleh. Early on, he questions every utterance of 'we,' such as by Af-Laawe, the mysterious figure welcoming him at the airport who, later on, turns out to be Caloosha's man, as well as by the hotel manager Ali. Jeebleh half-heartedly interprets these utterances as emblematic of inclusivity coming from sharing the same clan. While this use of 'we' imposes a clan-based Somali identity on him to a certain degree, his status as an outsider along with his commitment to a self-definition independent of blood lineage establishes a division between him and those who define themselves through clan. He is unsure of 'how to define himself here' with 'his ability to choose whom he would associate himself with,' unlike other characters who have, willingly or unwillingly, yielded to clan-based identification (2005, p. 41). When one of the gunmen confronts Jeebleh about his disregard for blood relations and, instead, prioritization of friendship, the narrative underlines Jeebleh's privileged position, namely his life in the States, which sets him apart from those in Somalia, creating another 'we' and 'they' distinction that goes beyond the

national borders and blood lineage. In this case, his Westerner status, or Americanness rather than Somaliness, determines his perception in the eyes of others. However, the novel presents the most insightful approach to the use of 'we' and 'they' through Seamus. When Jeebleh tells him that he is using 'we' to refer to Somalis in general and 'they' to refer to clan politics and its supporters, he responds: 'Enemies matter to those who create *them* ... when you think of *them* as "they" and therefore create *them* yourself, then it follows that you become an enemy to *them* the moment you opt out of their inclusive "we"' (2005, p. 219, emphasis in original). The clan members' botched attack on Jeebleh, after he refuses to finance their war efforts, provides a concrete example of Seamus's conceptualization of the distinction. Once Jeebleh denounces his clan identity and disrespects the clan elders, he turns into an enemy in their eyes, no more included in their 'we.' These different layers of 'we' and 'they' underscore the instability and complexity of self-definition, especially for an outsider like Jeebleh, and undermine any possible imagining of a unified Somali society until people are ready to overcome the inherent animosity in the 'we' and 'they' distinction.

While Farah's novel portrays how clan identity drives society to its edges, it also draws attention to the deeply ingrained sense of distrust and betrayal among Somalis, which hinders the creation of any meaningful and genuine connection among individuals. In a way, the novel searches for answers to the question 'how does one know anyone in a land where people are constantly reinventing themselves?' through Jeebleh's attempts to form an opinion about the civil war and the new Somali society based on different stories he hears (2005, p. 23). Jeebleh soon realizes that in a society where rumor serves as the main source of information, he must be suspicious of everyone and every version of events. Moolla asserts that betrayal, especially 'the betrayal of one Somali by another,' lies at the core of the hellish atmosphere of Mogadiscio (2012, p. 122). The novel, through Af-Laawe, points to a more horrifying aspect of betrayal in the Somali civil war context: 'You're killed by a person with whom you've shared intimacies, and who will kill you, believing that he will benefit from your death' (2005, p. 137). Indeed, betrayal or its suspicion is presented as the reason for several shattered relationships in the novel: Caloosha has betrayed both his brother and Jeebleh by imprisoning them – and possibly killing Bile's father; Faahiye, Raasta's father, is suspected of working with his daughter's kidnappers; Jeebleh feels the need to clear the air with Bile in case his own early release

from prison created any suspicion of betrayal in his friend's mind. The novel, while acknowledging the exacerbating impact of the civil war, re-positions the theme of betrayal and distrust beyond clan-based strife, more as a continuation of the ills of the violent past marked with, first colonialism and then dictatorship. As Jeebleh thinks about Somalis' deference to guns rather than uniforms and badges as a sign of authority, he realizes that Somalis' mistrust in the authority of uniform goes back to the nation's history where those in uniform, and in power, have proven to be corrupt and unjust (2005, p. 8). Thus, by reminding the far-reaching effects of the past violence and suffering, the novel indicates the gradual fragmentation in the social fabric of the nation and its zenith with the present moment.

Rebuilding the Community

If the novel represents the dissolution of society on various levels, it also offers examples of alternative forms of social spaces that defy clan politics and promote inclusivity regardless of clan, religion, or any other social identification. The portrayal of these spaces bears significance for the narrative's unearthing of the inherent potential to overcome the dividedness of the society. Three such places emerge as examples where people bond with one another not through blood or clan but through their choice and commitment: Jeebleh and Bile's childhood home; Seamus, Jeebleh and Bile's apartment in, first, Padua and then Mogadiscio; and the Refuge. The household constituted by Jeebleh and Bile's mothers not only challenges the traditional patriarchal values of Somali society but also establishes an environment where two children from different clans (Jeebleh and Bile) grow up almost as brothers. Here, it is important to note that even though Caloosha shares the same space, he remains outside the familial bond between the other two. While Caloosha and Bile share the same mother, they are fathered by two different men from different clans. Since Caloosha's father is from the same clan with Jeebleh's, in Somali traditions they are regarded as closer to one another as members of an extended family. In fact, it is Caloosha's 'unusual cruelty' as a child that intensifies the bond between Jeebleh and Bile as they try to avoid his bullying (2005, p. 94). Without his desire to be part of this relationship, neither his connection to Bile through blood nor to Jeebleh through clan can serve as a link to tie him to this fraternal bonding, thus noting the novel's emphasis on the individual will in the creation of transformative alternative spaces. Jeebleh, Bile, and Seamus's shared flat, first in Padua and then in Mogadiscio, creates an

environment where friendship creates its own country, 'spacious, giving, and generous.' (2005, p. 56) Annie Gagiano underlines 'the integrity of chosen affiliations' in the face of clan or national identity, and states that their friendship is emblematic of 'the common good, humane values, moral courage and energetic enterprise' (2006, p. 265). 'The country of their friendship' that started in Padua and reached to Mogadiscio finds a new symbol in Seamus's mind, an olive tree: '[W]hen the top branches die, a fresh trunk with a new lease on life emerges. And the tree bears fruit between the ages of five to ten years, and may not reach full maturity until after twenty!' (2005, p. 193) As their friendship gets older, it also matures and ties them to another more strongly than before. Seamus's flat in Mogadiscio, thus, serves both as a reminder of their old days in Padua and a starting point to conceive a new form of collective space that can be built upon the values of their friendship. These two households, with their substitution of the traditional family structure, enable the emergence of new forms of affiliation that can replace kinship with a personal commitment as the foundation for a sense of belonging.

While these two examples indicate private spaces with transformative potential, Farah delineates the Refuge as the embodiment of an alternative public space that can overcome the damage created in Somali society by the civil war. The Refuge stands out as a center of peace with its sheltering of the displaced, schools and dormitories for children, and a medical clinic. In order to analyze the significance of the Refuge within the narrative, one should consider the role of Raasta in the creation of this peaceful space as well as the implications of her "miracle child" status for the society. Raasta, whose given name Rajo means hope, draws people around herself together in peace, and people believe that 'anyone in her proximity is safe from the harm of civil war' (2005, p. 304). Raasta is always accompanied by Makka, an orphan with Down syndrome who 'communicates boundless, generous love' (2005, p. 161); together they embody the spirit of the Refuge with their openness and inspiration for love and hope. In the novel, Bile explains that, unlike other miracle children, 'his niece had "secular" beginnings, and had nothing to do with the religious fervor.' (2005, p. 302) However, the names of two children, Raasta and Makka, have obvious allusions to religious traditions: Raasta with Jamaica-born Rastafari, which considers Ethiopia as a mythical homeland and worships Haile Selassie I who was crowned as the king of Ethiopia in 1930, and Makka with Islam, the predominant religion in Somalia. Garuba suggests that Raasta's body 'becomes the site around which the

conventional heterogeneity of city life can be performed,' whereas Makka signifies 'the arrested development of the country and the city and the potential locked away in its inarticulacy' (2008, pp. 193-4). Their inseparability, along with their presence in the Refuge, represents the seeds of a new social order that can heal the wounds of the civil war. The implementation of *mayida*, the traditional practice of eating together, in the Refuge aims to instill trust and collective good through shared meals, hence keeping hatred and animosity out of this new social space, and perhaps out of people's lives as well. As Bile describes it: 'anyone meaning to do harm to a fellow sharer of the *mayida* will not dare look him, or anyone else, in the eye,' which prevents the presence of anyone with hostile feelings in the Refuge (2005, p. 158). Thus, there cannot be 'bad blood' between those who share the *mayida*, which ensures peaceful communality. In this way, the novel portrays the Refuge as a microcosmic experiment of how the future Somali society, or Somali nation in a broader sense, could be constructed around new values independent of clan identification and its divisive politics.

The Refuge provides Jeebleh with the opportunity to envision a different future Somalia with its potential for healing and focus on fostering dialogue and fraternity. While the city he remembers is long gone, the new Mogadiscio can be built upon the example set by the Refuge. Given that Raasta and Makka constitute the soul of this safe haven, their abduction, inevitably, affects Jeebleh as well. As mentioned before, facilitating the girls' release constitutes one of the motives behind his visit to Mogadiscio. In a city where people are reinventing themselves, Jeebleh reinvents himself as 'the white knight figure' (Bystrom, 2014, p. 413) in the belief that he can 'recover the two girls from the clutches of their captors' (2005, p. 92). His self-assigned role as a hero coming from afar to rescue the girls, and to kill Caloosha, presents a rather problematic aspect of Jeebleh's transformation in Mogadiscio. While the novel discloses moments of self-doubt about the increasing influence of the civil war atmosphere on his personality, Jeebleh is depicted as justifying any possibility of his participation in a crime through an appeal to common good and justice. One of his contemplative moments demonstrates a rather telling characterization of Jeebleh: 'He knew he was capable of pulling the trigger if it came to that. His hand went to his shirt pocket, where he had his cash and his US passport' (2005, p. 69). That he checks his wallet and American passport right after considering committing a crime underscores the fact that he has the means to flee the country once

the crime is committed. The novel's juxtaposition reasserts his outsider status; unlike Somalis living in Mogadiscio, he is only visiting and can go back to his home in the States anytime, leaving the violence and uncertainty behind. Furthermore, it begs the question to what extent Jeebleh is willing to become part of the future Somalia and to contribute to its transformation to a more peaceful society in his ambivalent position and self-identification.

Reconsidering the Outside and the Inside

Jeebleh's status as both an outsider and insider to Somali society comes under scrutiny in different ways. His view of present-day Somalia is mostly informed by what he has seen in the international media. Although he strives to maintain his distance from these sensationalist representations of civil war, they appear to be all he has as an outsider. Bile and Jeebleh's conversation on an American journalist's view that Somalia is better off without a government, in fact 'an ideal model' for other African countries, reveals Jeebleh's limited knowledge, or ignorance, about the current dynamics of Somali society (2005, p. 153). As Bile fervently opposes the idea, pointing to the scarcity of social services without a central government, he also explains the tightly knit relationship between warlords and business cartels. Jeebleh's response is quite revealing, 'It doesn't look that way from the outside!' (2005, p. 154) Moolla suggests that Jeebleh's limited view of the crisis in Somalia leads him to undertake 'his singular intervention,' namely rescuing the girls and arranging the death of Caloosha (2012, p. 124). However, it is also his strong desire to be part of the story and to re-affirm his Somaliness that impels him in his actions. Coundouriotis describes Jeebleh's undertaking as 'his own Operation Restore Hope' with Raasta's given name Rajo meaning hope (2014, p. 240). In addition to the meaning of her name, Raasta stands for the hope of peace for Somali society; seen in that way, Jeebleh's participation in her rescue will serve the greater good and connect him to his nation.

Farah's portrayal of Jeebleh's mission, however, brings forth problematic parallels with the original Operation Restore Hope, as the novel depicts both these interventions coming from the outside and unsettling the already fragile dynamics with questionable outcomes. To examine these parallels, one, first, needs to look at the novel's discussion of the US presence in Somalia. If, as Bile argues, Americans 'started putting on a circus for the benefit of prime-time TV back home,' Farah elaborates on the underlying dynamics of

the failed intervention and its consequences for Somalis (2005, p. 260). Dajal's elaboration on the difference between American soldiers and himself illustrates the intervention's inevitable failure: 'I was prone to fear, like the Marines, and alone in my fear too. But I wasn't in a strange country, I knew *why* I was doing what I was doing, and I knew *where* I was, even in the dark!' (2005, p. 269, emphasis in original) Compared to Dajal, the Marines are disoriented, both literally and figuratively. *Links* underscores the uncertainty surrounding the US presence in Somalia; while they arrive on a peace mission, their presence perpetuates violence, followed by their sudden departure, which leaves the country in more chaos than before. With Jeebleh, the circumstances surrounding his visit are more complicated, involving both his and the country's past, present, and future. However, he is almost as equally disoriented as the Marines when he realizes that the dynamics of war-ravaged Mogadiscio are difficult to interpret and draw people to violence, including himself. Seamus's cautionary words, 'make sure you aren't sucked into the vortex,' foretell the danger awaiting Jeebleh (2005, p. 215). While Jeebleh justifies his role in Caloosha's death in the belief that it will 'improve the lives of many others,' he can be now seen as culpable as any other Somali through his rationalization of violence (2005, p. 332). Indeed, his sudden departure, without saying goodbye to his friends in the fear that 'he might alienate them,' indicates a sense of guilt while 'the sun intruding on the horizon of his mind' suggests a realization that he will have to face the consequences of his participation in violence (2005, p. 334). In the end, we can consider his Operation Restore Hope successful: the girls are released and Caloosha is dead. However, in addition to Jeebleh's departure, Bile's distraught and disconcerted state after his half-brother's death leaves the novel rather open-ended with respect to the overall outcome of Jeebleh's intervention, in a way similar to the novel's emphasis on the ongoing repercussions of the US intervention in Somalia.

The novel's preoccupation with the US intervention and its impact on the Somali nation reveals itself in two main areas: the representation of the intervention and crisis in international media, and the Somali side of the story. The novel presents these versions not as competing but as complementary narratives that need to be examined side by side to assess the constructed nature of media representations as well as the missing voice of Somalis in these narratives. The narrative notes that Somalia stands for arbitrary violence and death for those whose opinions are formed by media representations of the country

(especially the footage of the US Ranger being dragged on the streets, which the novel brings up in precisely this context). As Jeebleh's daughter tells him 'no body bags, please' with the other daughter describing Somalia as a 'god-awful country' before his trip, Farah's novel, in fact, strives to complicate the logic behind these assumptions based on Western interpretation of the events (2005, p. 17). Ines Mzali states that Farah's novel illustrates literature's contribution to the contextualization of the international intervention, which is mainly framed by reductive journalistic narratives (2010, p. 85). The novel, by juxtaposing the image of the dead ranger with the image of Dajal's granddaughter blown into the sky by a US helicopter, creates an alternative representation of the events that includes the Somali side without renouncing the atrocity of the ranger's death. The baby girl, left permanently damaged and incommunicative, alludes to the lost voice of Somalis in the international media. The narrative, moreover, strives to position the Somali case next to other international interventions, such as the one in the Gulf, where violence becomes a staple along with the sensationalist media representations. Coundouriotis asserts that this attempt places 'civil-war Mogadiscio in an expanded context, both geographically and historically' (2014, p. 243). By moving the Somali national context to a transnational perspective, Farah opens a window to consider Somalia as part of a broader world history marked with interconnectedness rather than singularity.

In addition to Farah's efforts to connect the story of Somalia to other historical and geographical contexts via media (mis)representation, his utilization of Dante's *Inferno* works as a structural and thematic thread in Jeebleh's journey to Mogadiscio and repositions the national vis-à-vis the transnational. Each part of the novel opens with an epigraph from *Inferno*, so the reader first comes across Dante's lines before starting to read the novel itself. The first epigraph evokes not only the violent and bleak atmosphere awaiting Jeebleh in Mogadiscio with the words 'suffering,' 'eternal pain,' and 'miserable people' but also the familial bonds that shape contemporary Somali society with the question 'who were your ancestors?' as posed by the guide. As it ends with 'they said he was a liar and father of lies,' the first epigraph, in a way, encapsulates the major thematic strands of the novel, namely the destruction brought about by the civil war, clan politics, and the uncertainty surrounding the different versions of events. While the epigraphs work as signposts, they invoke Dante's hell as a backdrop to Farah's representation of

Mogadiscio, through which the city becomes associated with an un-worldly place. One can argue that civil war conditions strip people of their humanity to the degree that they are ready to kill those who are close to them, as illustrated by Af-Laawe's remarks about intimates becoming the enemy. With the signs of death everywhere in the city, such as carrion-eaters looking for food, armed youth happy to pull the trigger, and the funeral service provided by Af-Laawe, Mogadiscio conjures up a hell in the world. As the novel informs the reader that Jeebleh worked on a Somali translation of *Inferno* during his days in Italy, the intertextuality gains a personal aspect as well, conjoining Jeebleh's past and present. When we consider the fact that Italy was one of the invaders in Somalia's history, Farah's intertextual reference to a classic work of Italian literature in a novel about Somaliness can be regarded as connecting past and present on a broader context with an allusion to the history of colonialism. In contemporary Mogadiscio, Jeebleh encounters, in a way, another translation of *Inferno* where 'hell is a warlord who's ransomed his soul to Satan, in exchange for elusive power' (2005, p. 58). Jeebleh, taking over the role of the pilgrim, lives his own version of Dante's *Inferno*, where he is to experience the devastated city and its people, which transforms him for better or worse.

Conclusion

Links, through the exilic figure of Jeebleh, problematizes the implications of Somaliness both in the defunct nation-state of Somalia and in a transnational context. The ambivalent status of Jeebleh as an outsider and insider enables a more profound engagement with what is seen from the outside and what is really happening in Somalia. It is only through this status that he is able to hear the untold stories and reposition himself in Mogadiscio. Jeebleh's failed attempts to navigate the seemingly familiar social order and to distance himself from the violence engulfing the society underscore not only the transformation of the nation but also its transformative power on him. Furthermore, the national space not only transforms the exilic individual but also becomes transformed by him, as evinced by Jeebleh's actions in Mogadiscio. Although the extent and form of transformation in the novel is open to discussion, it nonetheless assigns agency to the national space and indicates openness to change and a possibility for a better future. At the end, Jeebleh's embrace of his share of guilt in the civil war eventually emphasizes his insider status, thus his actions in the national space disclosing the unsevered ties to Somalia and his responsibility and culpability in its past, present, and future.

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