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Postnational Paradoxes: Nuruddin Farah's Recent Novels and Two Life Narratives in Counterpoint

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ABSTRACT

Nuruddin Farah's most recent novel, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, provides an interesting fictional terrain within which to explore postcolonial postnationalism. This novel highlights the impacts of globalization and transnationalism on subject formation, personal and family relations, and opens up questions of sexuality in a postnational context. Connections between individual subject and nation formation have been considered across Farah's career beginning with his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, that marked the double emergence of the autonomous individual and the nation-state, to, most notably, *Maps*, which completely deconstructs the "mythical" foundations of the Somali nation. *Hiding in Plain Sight* presents an idealized, postnational cosmopolitanism with no apparent collective affiliation that is presented as the automatic outcome of constitutive hybridity and global hyper-mobility. Paradoxically, the new postnational cosmopolitanism simultaneously reconstitutes versions of ethnic, racial, and religious identities as it liberates itself from these affiliations that are linked with the nation. *Crossbones*, Farah's previous novel, reflects the hybridity, hyper-mobility, and transnationalism of global terror and criminal networks. However, the constitutive structural similarities of the utopian ideals of cosmopolitan postnationalism and dystopian realities of transnational crime and terror are not foregrounded in the novels. Two life narratives are used as a counterpoint to Farah's novels. *Inside the Global Jihad*, an autobiography of a spy using the nom de plume Omar Nasiri, underscores the idea of the transnational constitution and reach of terrorism opened up in *Crossbones*. Farah's novels are also contrasted with Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope*, the biography of a Somali refugee in South Africa that presents a different conception of transnational cosmopolitanism formed out of the affiliations associated with the nation.

Nuruddin Farah's most recent novel, *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2014), is a highly productive literary terrain in which to explore the related questions of globalization and the new transnationalisms in the context of a version of postcolonial postnationalism. This novel simultaneously and paradoxically constitutes an image of Africa and Farah's natal Somalia as it cuts itself free from bonds of affiliation linked with nationalism. (Farah was exiled from Somalia in the early 1970s and, apart from short visits by invitation of political leaders and brief research trips, he has not been able to settle there for any significant period of time.) Through the novel's protagonist, an idealized postnational cosmopolitanism is presented that is the outcome of constitutive hybridity and hypermobility, which impacts most significantly in the narrative on conceptions of personal and family relations. The novel also addresses the more familiar trends associated with postnationalism, namely globalization and digital mass communication, but opens up further to the area of sexuality. *Hiding in Plain Sight*, developing further the connections made between nationalism and "respectable" sexuality, links postcolonial postnationalism with homosexuality, in particular lesbianism, dramatized through two subordinate characters. Although Farah's earlier novels, in particular *Secrets*, alludes to numerous alternative sexualities including trans-species and incestuous relationships, sexuality in the form of homosexuality is explored in significant detail only in the postnational context of *Hiding in Plain Sight*. This novel valorizes the apparently inherent utopianism of hybridity and mobility of its cosmopolitan cast, suppressing the reflected hybridity and mobility of criminal and terror networks, which was the focus of *Crossbones*, Farah's previous novel. In *Crossbones* the crime of piracy and the terror of Al-Shabaab (The Youth) are considered in their complexity, but the irony of the postnationalism of their theater of operation is not presented as an ironic refraction of the idealized postnational cosmopolitanism of *Hiding in Plain Sight*. These recent novels by Farah will be contrasted with two life narratives, the autobiography titled *Inside the Global Jihad* by a Western intelligence operative, writing under the pseudonym Omar Nasiri, and *A Man of Good Hope*, Jonny Steinberg's biography about a Somali refugee in South Africa. *Inside the Global Jihad* underscores in greater detail than *Crossbones* the transnationalism of terror networks and *A Man of Good Hope* highlights a version of postnational cosmopolitanism that emerges from the affiliations of nationalism, critiqued in Farah's novels.

This essay will define and attempt to maintain some theoretical rigor in distinguishing the specificities of key terms, but, as the opening paragraph already makes apparent, the borderlines between the constellation of terms globalization, transnationalism, and postnationalism are hard to patrol. The definitions of these terms in the literature are multifarious and overlapping, but, importantly, center on the core ideas of a transformation of modernity impacting on the modern nation-state emerging out of 17th-century Westphalian models, challenges (often economic) to the power of the nation-state, and the idea of world citizenship. For Ulrich Beck, reiterating in a different discourse the analysis of other scholars, globalization is associated with the "second modernity" and is best exemplified by economic activity that increasingly threatens nation-state power, while simultaneously relying on the structures of the nation-states consolidated in the period of the first modernity (*World of Work*). According to Arjun Appadurai, as one theorist of the new social order, one might classify transnationalism as a

multiple “citizenship” that crosses national borders, but with full national location and cultural identity in none of the territories of allegiance (*Modernity at Large*). Following on, postnationalism thus is a term that highlights the waning significance and eventual demise of a world political order constructed around discrete territorially bound nation-states. The analysis of *Hiding in Plain Sight* will also introduce the concept of the new cosmopolitan, which in some ways represents the cultural superstructure of the border-crossing base of capital, communication, and population flows associated with globalization.

A brief plot summary of *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a novel that presumably launches Farah’s fourth trilogy, makes the postnational focus of the novel extremely clear. The prologue to the novel presents the Somali-born character Aar, who is stationed at the United Nations office in Mogadiscio, acting as a logistics officer coordinating staffing activities. He receives a sinister note in a sealed envelope carrying only the misspelled word “DETH,” which Aar interprets as either “DEBT” or “DEATH.” Given Aar’s subsequent death in a bomb blast, presumably orchestrated by Al-Shabaab, the militant splinter group of the Union of Islamic Courts that took control after the American-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006, it becomes apparent that the note is a warning of the threat to his life. The ironies, of course, are multiple. Aar, a Somali who has been stateless since 1991 when he flees Mogadiscio after Somalia’s plunge into civil war, represents an organization, the United Nations, that not only maintains the threatened imagined community of discrete, territorially bounded nation-states, but also the idea of their international unity (and transnational elision in its practical operations) within a constitution derived largely from European Enlightenment philosophies. Aar is a martyr for an inter/transnational institution, whose unity depends on discrete modern nation-state formations, the internal and external tensions and contradictions of which the United Nations itself attempts inter/transnationally to transcend. This unity in division and division in unity are ironized and symbolized by the fact of Aar’s overdetermined and emphatically underscored dismemberment in the bomb blast, his head “found far from where the rest of his body fell” (14). The international cohort of United Nations workers are presented as operating in a highly volatile, almost suicidal environment in the knowledge that they are infiltrated by Al-Shabaab.

The focus then shifts to Aar’s sister, Bella, the heroine of the novel. Bella’s life history, experience, and approach to the world represent a model of postcolonial, postnational idealism. Bella is the daughter of a Somali mother and an Italian father, conceived in an adulterous relationship, but raised as the child of her mother’s Somali husband. Following the flight of Somali dictator Mohammed Siyad Barre in 1991 and the collapse of the country into civil anarchy, Bella and her mother relocate to Rome where she lives with her biological father, who is a university professor. Bella and her mother subsequently acquire refugee status and live in Canada. Following her success as a photographer, Bella returns to Rome. Her apartment in Rome is a temporary base from which she travels ceaselessly for work, for pleasure, and to keep up family relations. She travels all over the world doing photo shoots and working on a long-term project funded by the EU, documenting in words and images the experiences of diasporic Somalis. She also repeatedly crosses national borders when visiting her three lovers, each embodying one of her desires. Her desire for masculine beauty, physically

embodied, is fulfilled by HandsomeBoy Ngulu, based in Nairobi; her penchant for sex is satisfied by Humboldt, the Brazilian “stud” of African descent who is also a sculptor; and her need for an intellectual equal is met by Cisse Drahme, “a Malian philosopher of note” (52). Her deepest love, however, is for her half-brother, Aar, whom she visits as frequently as possible in his current base in Nairobi, from which he travels to Mogadiscio for work stints. They also often meet up on holiday in foreign locations, their last meeting taking place in Istanbul.

At the point where the novel opens and her half-brother, Aar, has just been killed, Bella has recently returned from a photo assignment in Bahia for a German magazine. Before returning to Rome, she made a short trip to visit Humboldt in Rio. On hearing about her brother’s death, she flies to Nairobi to settle his affairs and also make arrangements for the care of his two children, whom she hopes will not be claimed by their mother, Valerie, who abandoned them and her husband ten years earlier. Bella’s experiences in Nairobi are largely didactically presented, educating Aar’s children and the reader in the attitudes of one version of postcolonial cosmopolitanism. Thus the development one expects to see in a novel that focuses on and tracks an individual character is misplaced since Bella’s development is largely complete at the outset, highlighting instead the development of other characters and the reader through Bella’s didactic example. After various skirmishes with Aar’s ex-wife, Valerie, and her Indian-Ugandan lover, Padmini, and getting to the bottom of Aar’s financial and legal affairs, Bella appears to have made the decision to settle temporarily in Nairobi to act as a parent to Aar’s son and daughter. Knowing that she is entirely excluded from Aar’s estate, Valerie returns to Pondicherry in India with her lover to resume their management of a restaurant and hotel that they own.

Through the central character, Bella, Farah broadly continues the theme of the ethnically hybrid national in the diaspora, returning to the homeland, begun in the previous “Past Imperfect” trilogy. In *Hiding in Plain Sight*, virtually every character, whether born in Somalia or outside, is an emphatically presented transnational ethnic hybrid, but the return to the *patria* is proscribed to all except Aar whose job allows him privileged access to Somalia. In this respect, given the generally positive representation of these characters, the novel appears to endorse Homi Bhabha’s exaltation of *métissage* succinctly expressed as an “inflat[ion] of hybridity into a wellspring for the political contestation of all forms of cultural symbolization” (Cheah 294). But the unrestrained valorization of hybridity and contested identity are contradictorily also presented as disempowering, captured in the confused and exasperated conversation of the children of the new cosmopolitans who, in addition to the identity crises of adolescence, also deal with the fact that “[their] hearts are not where [their] papers are” (245). Lighting a cigarette, Aar’s son, Salif, engages a friend who says, “Who knows what will become of people like us?” To which Salif responds, “We are difficult to define, aren’t we?” (245).

Casting back into Farah’s early career, it is apparent that questions of nationalism and the mutually constitutive dynamic of nation-state and subject formation have been presiding preoccupations since he began his writing career. His first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), has frequently been read as a national allegory, where “Ebla is a symbolic analogue for Somalia on the eve of independence, her various polyandric marriages mirroring the nation’s oppressive relations with

imperial masters" (Wright 29). His second novel, *A Naked Needle* (1976), appears to endorse the experiment in socialist nationhood undertaken by Siyad Barre, through the construction of Barre as a largely avuncular national leader referred to as the "Old Man" who is, furthermore, "decent" and "honest" and who "wishes to do something for the country" (*Naked Needle* 80). (Farah has not allowed this novel to be reprinted both for the dashed hopes represented by Barre's failed socialist revolution and for what many critics have deemed the novel's misogyny.) Farah's first trilogy, "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship," by contrast, critiques the subsequent patriarchal and traditionalist bent of Somali national politics under Siyad Barre, a critique of nationalism that becomes distinctly "post-national" in the next trilogy, titled "Blood in the Sun," studied in considerable detail by Francis Ngaboh-Smart. Ngaboh-Smart makes a persuasive case in *Beyond Empire and Nation: Postnational Arguments in the Fiction of Nuruddin Farah and B. Koyo Laing* for the disavowal by Farah in the second trilogy of the value of the idea of the nation. Ngaboh-Smart shows how, in various ways, the novels *Maps*, *Gifts*, and *Secrets* undermine conceptions of ethnic, clan, gender, sexual, and religious identity linked with nationalist ideals. However, while the second trilogy may be "postnational" in its rejection of the authoritarian and identitarian logic of the nation, it is only in the third trilogy that the plot and character biographical trajectories become distinctly transnational, a trend that is taken to the final degree in *Hiding in Plain Sight*, his latest novel. *Links*, *Knots*, and *Crossbones*, the novels of the third "Past Imperfect" trilogy, all feature central characters that form part of the Somali diaspora in North America, who come to Somalia on various personal quests. The male characters of the first and third novels finally return home to the American cities where their nuclear families are based, while the female protagonist of the middle novel remains in Mogadiscio at the center of a cosmopolitan island of hope in the war-torn city.

Hiding in Plain Sight allows a very productive reading of postcolonial post-nationalism in the context of a number of areas that are highlighted in the novel. The transnational movements that appear to challenge nation-state sovereignty and wear down the impermeability of national territorial borders are linked with a range of developments, most of which find narrative representation in the novel. Trans/postnationalism is linked in most of the literature on the subject with global financial flows and networks, individual and mass migration, cross-national militarization, mass electronic and digital communication, and global consumerism. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga classify these developments in relation to the space in which each of the developments may be located. There is the global space of the economy and flows of capital, there are the transnational spaces of the movement of people across borders and there are translocal spaces in which globalization effects changes in local culture and social and economic relations (25).

Of course the cross-territorial movements of people, wealth, and ideas are not unique to the period of late capitalism, as Pheng Cheah points out, drawing on the work of Michael Mann. Cheah emphasizes that "transnationalism is not only a contemporary phenomenon; it has always coexisted with the state" (33). In a literary context, basing her argument on the proliferating contemporary rewritings of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Anne Marie Fallon in *Global Crusoe* suggests that *Crusoe* continues to be popular since in significant ways a nascent

transnationalism is present in the early capitalism and nationalisms of Crusoe's world, which are expanded later on. However, what makes contemporary cross-territorialities different from those in earlier periods is the difference in scale and qualitative differences in the ways in which modernized parts of the globe philosophically conceive of the person, relations among people, and people and the nonhuman world.

Apart from the trends noted above, the period of what Ulrich Beck identifies as the "second modernity," also impacts in unprecedented ways on personal relations through the concept of what he terms "world families" (*Distant Love*) and the "Brazilianization" of work (*Brave New World of Work*). The concept of the "world family" will be discussed in greater detail in relation to *Hiding in Plain Sight*. "Brazilianization" refers to the scenario where, in the contemporary absence of full-time, paid employment for the duration of one's working life, the "second modernity" obliges flexible work patterns across formal and informal sectors for both the transnational elite, exemplified by most of the characters of *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and the nation-based and displaced poverty-stricken who are unrepresented. The cross-territorial impact of the anthropocene through industrialization and other human activity are also identified in scholarship on ecology and environmental movements, captured strongly in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "planetarity," which acts as a corrective to globalization that imposes the "same system of exchange everywhere" (72). By contrast, for Spivak, "The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (72). *Hiding in Plain Sight* narrativizes the key trends associated with postnationalism and foregrounds new considerations. The novel highlights the effect on Africa of globalization and mass communication, it underscores transnational family relations and, a concern unidentified in other scholarly literature, links postnationalism with sexuality, and, finally, it emphasizes postnational mobility and cosmopolitanism. These focuses in the novel will be addressed below. *Hiding in Plain Sight* does not, interestingly, problematize the postnational dimension of the environmental degradation caused by globalization, underscored by Spivak, despite the attention in *Secrets*, an earlier novel by Farah, to questions of human/nonhuman relations. So Bella at no stage, for example, reflects on the environmental consequences of her flights criss-crossing the globe.

On the question of globalization and mass communication, Farah's novel addresses the ways in which Africa has been drawn into global networks of consumption mainly through the representation of foodways. Bella's travels without exception have large metropolises as their destination, whereas Saskia Sassen observes, in *Globalization and its Discontents*, transnational movements have their greatest impact. Bella's African sojourn is no exception to her parachuting in on big globalized cities. Taking up her role as mother to Aar's children, the novel foregrounds the global expansion and facilitation of the domestic obligation of feeding one's family in large African cities like Nairobi. The global ubiquity of the food court provides a convenience that suits the lifestyle and tastes of both Bella and the two teenage children. The global reach of dominant foodways is represented not only by the McDonalidization of the world and Coca-Cola culture, apparently culturally universal and outside of ethnicity; globalization is also represented in the Nairobi mall by franchised fast foods, ordinarily ethnically or nationally linked, for example, sushi. Bella is also surprised to find German long-life milk

in her half-brother's grocery cupboard, again emphasizing transnational linkages in day-to-day life even in the postcolonial periphery. Globalization is also brought into focus through the new axes of geopolitical power represented by the Japanese-made taxi that Bella uses (38) and the outsourcing of Nairobi traffic management to Chinese and Japanese companies (165) and highway construction to the Chinese (201). Numerous references in the novel to information technologies and forms of digital communication and entertainment manipulated and consumed by the characters attest to the contemporary global reach of the homogenization and "heterogenization" of culture, pointed out most clearly by Arjun Appadurai ("Disjuncture and Difference"). Here distinct parts of the world become increasingly the same through the dominance of Euro-American culture, with "ethnic" difference inserted into North Atlantic "universality."

Intimate relations, by their very definition, appear to resist the idea of transnationalism since they would appear to need the human contact that proximity brings. Ulrich Beck in *Distant Love* challenges this intuitive understanding through the concept of the "world family," an idea that is powerfully presented in fictional form in *Hiding in Plain Sight*. For Beck, the world family comes into existence as a consequence of unprecedented rates of migration, mobility, the possibilities of technologized communication, and also unequal balances of power and wealth. The world family may be contrasted with the model of the nuclear family constituted by and based in the nation-state. Farah's oeuvre presents "classic" examples of both types of family. *Sardines* (1981) the middle novel of the "Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship" trilogy, is an example of the latter.

It presents a nuclear, heterosexual family whose internal gender tensions are reflected in the challenges presented to the Somali dictator, the patriarch writ large, by the wife/mother, Medina, who is an international cosmopolitan raised in the glittering capitals of the Western world. An important part of negotiating domestic, traditional, religious, and secular nationalist patriarchy and authoritarianism involves Medina's attempts to belong fully to Somalia as a nation—she needs to find ways to be a host not the guest she often experiences herself to be. The family presented here is wholly nationally located, symbolized by the sardine tin—allusion of the title, monogamous, heterosexual, and nuclear. The novel highlights Medina's international cultural exposure through the identity construct of the Somali nation, rather than a flexible identity developed out of metaphorical and literal border crossing.

By contrast the family in *Hiding in Plain Sight* transnationally explodes the normalized and naturalized assumptions about the family and the individual contained within the nation. Not one of the characters in *Hiding in Plain Sight* was born, works, marries, and dies within a fixed locale. Every one of them is a cultural, ethnic, or national hybrid who is globally or continentally itinerant with networked, highly flexible intimate relations. Bella is half-Somali, half-Italian with allegiance to the fragmented, civil war imploded motherland, Somalia, and fully at home in the fatherland of Italy. Monogamy in the earlier novel is contrasted with Bella's polyamory, with three lovers meeting discrete desires, transiently based in three different countries, since the lovers too are hyper-transnationally mobile. Each of the lovers in turn is also polyamorous, the relationship with Bella not excluding other intimate relationships. "Distant love" is what Beck suggests remains "when work and career overwhelm everything else, sweeping away the

frontiers protecting private life" (52). He suggests furthermore that "Children no longer have any place in such a society. The 'we' of distant love can be summed up in the formula: self-love à deux plus career as a hobby, but without children. This 'we' does not acknowledge the existence of the following generation, and in that sense it has no future. It is the residual 'we' of the radically individualized society" (53).

However, for Bella, distant love appears more of a choice of the self-authoring individual than the inescapable consequence of the demands of work. Paradoxically, Bella's future orientation through children is ensured through her foster-mothering of her brother's children. Bella is obliged to become a "mother" to the two children since their father, who has been acting as mother and father since their abandonment by their biological mother, has been killed. The children's world family thus includes their biological mother, Valerie, who has been shuttling between India and Uganda, their foster mother Bella, and a grandmother in Leicester whom they frequently visit. Valerie herself is the product of a failed marriage transatlantically split between London and Hollywood, where her film director father insists on frequent daughterly visits as a cover for his incestuous relationship with her. The marriage of the English-American Valerie to the Somali, Aar, represents a world family that creates a new combination of equal Global North and unequal Global South societies and a combination of radically different cultural and social norms. The couple thus confront the conflicts between the developed and underdeveloped world "in the interior space of their own lives" (Beck, *Distant Love 2*). The transnational intimacies of the central characters are reflected and refracted not only in the lives of the central characters, but in the lives of virtually every one of the other characters also. However, Beck makes a distinction between the world family and the citizen of the world, which necessarily inflects the analysis of the relationships presented in *Hiding in Plain Sight*. While world families bring national and other affiliations into their relationships, the citizen of the world, defined by Beck as "the caste of educated upper-middle class who are open minded about the world" (2), bring a cultural autonomy and culturally disengaged self-reflexivity that seem to elide all affiliation. This is a question that will be returned to later when *Hiding in Plain Sight* is contrasted with the autobiography of a global jihadist and the biography of a Somali who is the victim of xenophobic attacks in South Africa.

Farah develops the focus on human relationships in the period of postnationality further than their embodiment in world families through an expansion on to the question of sexuality. *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (Parker et al.) develops in a broader historical and geographical frame the groundbreaking study *Nationalism and Sexuality* by George L. Moss, which "sketched a double history of European nationalism and 'respectable' sexuality as these emerged together at the end of the eighteenth century" (2). Rhonda Cobham's essay on Farah's novel *Maps* in the above volume highlights the ways that postcolonial national crises present as crises of gender and sexuality. While nationally defined norms of sexuality begin to be deconstructed in *Maps*, the first novel of the "Blood in the Sun" trilogy that is also Farah's most consciously postmodern novel, it is in *Secrets*, the final "civil war" novel of the trilogy, where the imminent collapse of the state is linked with the explosion of "normal" national sexuality expressed as love of the mother/fatherland, brotherly love of patriots, and so on. Normalized conceptions of sexuality

in *Secrets* are challenged through “a prurient interest in bestiality, paedophilia, homo- and bisexuality, onanism and incest” (Moolla 150), symbolized by the shape-shifting character Sholoongo. Cast in a realist frame, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, by contrast, links a less sensationalistic loosening of the boundaries of “respectable” sexuality through the lesbian relationship of Valerie and Padmini, with the porosity of postnational borders.

Lesbian sexuality would appear to be the symbolic individual liberation from patriarchy and heterosexuality with which postnationalism as an ideal is linked in this novel. Carrying slightly less of an ideological burden are Bella’s polyamory, discussed above, and Aar’s relaxed attitude to monogamous, heterosexual marriage for life, evidenced in his final casual acceptance of his wife’s adultery. Valerie leaves Aar and the children for Padmini with “not even a note saying where she had gone or when she would be back” (122). Valerie’s departure comes after a long itinerary of the family’s transnational movements for work and vacation in an attempt to salvage the marriage, in which Valerie has clearly lost interest. In fact, the title of the novel comes from a line uttered by Valerie in the course of a rather caustic conversation with her lover, Padmini, at Bella’s expense. The couple presumes that because Bella is so discreet about her intimate relations, she is a closet lesbian who “hide[s] in plain sight” (123). The links between one form of alternative sexuality (alternative from the point of view of heterosexual nationalist sexuality) and a postnational sensibility are made clear in Bella’s long internal monologue occasioned by her fears at the outcome of the children’s finding out the truth of their mother’s relationship with Padmini when the couple sleep over at the family home:

Freedoms are a package deal, she thinks, useless unless you value them all. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom to associate with whom you please—all of these are as important as the right to education, to food to clean water. In Africa, gay men and women are seldom open about their sexual preferences. In many countries homosexuality is a crime, and even where it is not, people talk as if it were alien to culture of the continent, even though, of course, there are gay people in every society everywhere. In South Africa, the most democratic nation on the continent, vigilantes organize “corrective rape” rampages on known lesbians in the absurd belief that such actions will keep women from desiring relations with anyone besides heterosexual men. (156–57)

The novel thus creates a clear link between a cosmopolitan ethos, established in the earlier analysis of the character Bella with liberatory networked, individually defined rights-based notions of human relations and the effacing of borders associated with postnationalism. What this approach does not begin to address, of course, in the reference to homosexual attacks in impoverished black townships in South Africa is the context of brutal colonial and apartheid history and a contemporary inclusion in unequal global networks that produce violence not only on homosexuals, but also in xenophobic attacks on relatively less mobile African transnationals, among many other groups defined as “other” within pressure cooker–localized contexts.

The novel does not valorize nationalist sentiments, but it does, as part of its narrative backdrop, present the problems associated with postcolonial nationalism that flow from its status as what Partha Chatterjee defines as a “derivative

discourse," where postcolonial nationalisms inflect in disjunct contexts and historical periods European Westphalian models. The novel's African transnationalism centers on the increasingly globalized cities of Nairobi and Cape Town, which are presented as localized embodiments of a new universalism of thought (which elides its sovereignty), expressed through the particular case of an ethical position on homosexuality. Valerie and Padmini, after having been arrested in a compromising position in Kampala, fly to Nairobi since it has "one of the largest communities of homosexuals, second only to Cape Town on the entire continent," for which reason the couple will "feel comfortable there" (60). When visiting Cape Town for Gay Pride Week, Padmini and Valerie feel so comfortable in the upmarket, cosmopolitan districts that they consider relocating. But the balancing horrors of xenophobia and homophobia are a reminder that the postnationalism of the postcolony is at most an enclave postnationalism. South African society, reflecting the pattern in the African "powerhouses" of Nigeria and Kenya, is one of the most unequal on the African continent, with rates of inequality increasing after the advent of formal democracy in 1994. *Hiding in Plain Sight* alludes to these disparities in its references to the lifestyles of the trendy, upmarket zones of the city and the suburbs, contrasted with the elided histories of structural violence generating the criminal violence of the townships. In these contexts, the worldviews of postnational cosmopolitans coexist coevally within a radius of a few kilometers with worldviews shaped by the long history of colonialism, apartheid, and the often masked injustices and inequalities of globalization. The broader landscape of the range of affiliations of nationalism that continue to motivate the lives of people on a daily basis are unacknowledged by postnationalism and the version of cosmopolitan politics presented in *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

As has already been made apparent, Farah's latest novel foregrounds the hybridity and unprecedented mobility of a broad range of people in the contemporary period, represented in his narrative. Cultural/religious/ethnic/national *métissage* and transnational border-crossing are presented as the physical embodiments of a cosmopolitan ethos, itself based on difference and transgression of collective ethical horizons. The novel thus reflects in its postcolonial cosmopolitans the dominant understanding that it has a claim "to universality by virtue of its independence, detachment from bonds, commitments and affiliations of nation-bound lives" (Robbins 1). This understanding of the cosmopolitan is frequently disparagingly described as an existence that is "luxuriously free-floating" (Ibid. 1). Analysis of a section of dialogue in the novel quite clearly dramatizes the connections between hybridity, transnational mobility, and a postnational virtue ethic, which in this specific case, again, are highlighted through the particular example of lesbianism. Bella's nephew and niece have just discovered the true nature of the relationship between their biological mother and Padmini. The moralizing didacticism of Bella's instruction in one conception of universal human rights and the right to difference, at a literary aesthetic level, of course, contradicts, in its lack of sophistication and irony/parody, the lesson she is teaching. Paradoxically, Bella teaches "openness" in the style of an avuncular dictator:

"I've nothing against Mum going gay," Salif says.
 Dahaba says, "It just gave me a shock, seeing them and all."
 Bella looks at one and then the other, and speaks with extra caution.

"In much of Africa, being gay is considered an abomination. I hope you are more advanced in your own views and are more tolerant of other people's choices. What people do and who they do it with is their own private affair." ...

"What's your position, Auntie?" says Salif.

Dahaba says, "Auntie lives in Europe, where they accept such behaviour, where they tolerate it."

"What are you saying?" Salif challenges Dahaba.

"In Europe, being gay is no big deal."

"Why don't you let Auntie answer?" he says.

Bella says, "People everywhere should be in a position to make their God-given choice and to be with those they choose to be with. We Africans lag behind the rest of the world, and we waste our time putting our noses in people's private lives. We have no business there."

"Did living in Europe change your views," Salif asks, "or are those the views you held before you left Africa?"

"I've always appreciated differences," Bella says. "My mother had a lot to do with that. She appreciated the things that set people apart. She was never one for monotony."

"Why are most of us so wrong about this?" Dahaba asks.

"We are ill informed about the world, ill educated, intolerant of the views of others when they do not agree with ours," Bella says. "We are undemocratic, just like our governments. But sex is a personal matter that our societies and governments have no business with."

The children are proud of her strong statement, she can tell. Especially Dahaba, who makes as though she might applaud. (194–95)

The dialogue makes both direct and allusive links between Bella's ethically open stance and her inherent and acquired hybridity and mobility. She upholds the value of free choice, blind to the universalizing ways in which the ranges of choice are largely predetermined by a globalizing culture and the ways in which the act of free choice is practically and materially constrained in local contexts. Bella's discourse reproduces and promotes as natural and obvious the historically, geographically, and culturally specific idea of the strict separation of public and private spheres and masks the historically and culturally shifting and varying borders of public and private.

Bella's views do not encompass the range of forms "homosexuality" has taken in specific African cultures and the ways in which these engage the strong pro-life ethic captured in the prime importance placed on procreation in most African cultures. Salif intuitively connects Bella's openness as foundational moral ideal with her transnational experience—"Did living in Europe change your views?"—Bella in turn connects her global mobility, more explicitly charted above, with constitutive hybridity. She has learned to appreciate difference from her mother Hurdo, a Bologna-educated Professor of International Law, whose transgression of the boundary of marriage conventionally defined results in the conception of the half-Somali, half-Italian Bella. Bella cultivates difference also through preferring her Italian first name, Bella, when among Somalis and her Somali middle name, Barni, when with non-Somalis.

The fluid, sophisticated, border-crossing ideal of postnational cosmopolitanism is entrenched in the novel in a variety of other ways. For example, when Padmini and Valerie dine at an Indian restaurant in Nairobi, the English-American

Valerie wears the garb that symbolizes Indian femininity and culture, namely, the sari; and the ethnically Indian, Ugandan by birth Padmini wears a pair of jeans, the androgynous attire of globalized modernity. Earlier, reference was made to the effect of globalization on foodways. But food is prominent in the novel also through cosmopolitan cuisine as a concept and through the combined national dishes served up at the dinner party that brings the novel to closure. Where in *Links*, an earlier novel, Farah presents characters eating collectively from a *mayida* or tray in traditional Somali fashion, anchoring a new kind of public “on a traditional practice from the past” (Garuba 193), in *Hiding in Plain Sight*, the minor character Mahdi is used as a mouthpiece for the notion of the ameliorating effects of the combining and fusion of national cuisines. Mahdi contrasts a sophisticated cosmopolitan cooking that is the gastronomic expression of postnational cosmopolitanism with peasant cooking, “where the main purpose is to satiate hunger” (332). This attitude may very interestingly be contrasted with North Atlantic bioregional approaches to food that, in some ways, return to the peasant model.

Postnational cosmopolitanism thus represents a literally and symbolically unbound community contrasted in the novel with the straitened, one-eyed monster of nationalism. Coming in on the plane to Nairobi, Bella sits next to a garishly coiffured German woman, whose scanty t-shirt proclaims the virtue of love in all forms in both German and English. Bella hopes that she is not en route to Somalia or any other Muslim country “where she would surely be stoned on sight” (31). The religious and traditionalist boundedness of a nation like Uganda that outlaws homosexuality and a principality like Dubai for outlawing public displays of intimacy are the backdrop for Bella’s musing about Valerie and Padmini’s incarceration in Kampala. The horrors of Uganda are reinforced by the linking of the country almost exclusively with the brutal authoritarianism of Idi Amin, interestingly also a Scottish-Ugandan cultural hybrid and the “blood thirsty Lord’s Resistance Army sect led by Joseph Kony” (61). The novel presents Bella as “long being of the belief that there are no people on earth more narrow-minded or chauvinistic than Somalis” (48), a view reinforced by her Italian biological father being concerned about the impression his Dogon sculptures would have on “such an unlearned lot” (49). Almost without exception, thus, oppressive practices in the novel are linked with an Enlightenment view of tradition and religion, which is reflected, unreconstructed, in the outlook of the postcolonial cosmopolitan.

The paradoxical *postnational* cosmopolitanism presented in *Hiding in Plain Sight*, where a postcolonial “priviligentsia” critiques the obscurantism of the Somali or the Ugandan in the name of a universal dedication to freedom in the floating detachment from local histories, cultures, and economic pressures, somewhat counterintuitively replicates the cosmopolitanism associated with the *formative* period of nationalism, as Amanda Anderson makes clear. Anderson observes about early European conceptions of the world citizen that:

Cosmopolitanism also typically manifests a complex tension between elitism and egalitarianism. It frequently advances itself as a specifically intellectual ideal, or depends on a mobility that is the luxury of social, economic, or cultural privilege. In the eighteenth century, the cultivation of international communication and travel among scholars was often embraced as the symbolic or even actual enactment of cosmopolitan ideals. Here, privileged mobility among the elites synecdochally masquerades as global community, or the coming

together of humanity, bespeaking a profound investment in the exceptional individualism of the intellectual class, their enabling but anomalous detachment from ordinary provincial loyalties. At the same time, the cosmopolitan identification with the larger sphere of the world, or with humanity, or with standards assumed to transcend any locale, is ostensibly inspired by the deep-seated belief in the humanity of all, wherever positioned. (268)

Thus, far from representing a transformed inclusionary universalism, the new cosmopolitanism presented by Farah seems to replicate the inherent tensions and contradictions of the double growth of Enlightenment nationalism and the world citizen-ideal in the early period of development of nation-statism. In her overview of the tension between cosmopolitanism and universalism in early European modernity, Anderson also adds that valorization of cosmopolitanism “emerge[s] at times when the world has suddenly seemed to expand in unassimilable ways: it is at these moments that universalism needs the rhetoric of worldliness that cosmopolitanism provides” (272).

While Farah’s novels at the level of writerly craft often leave something to be desired as the mechanical “he says,” “she says” management of the dialogue above attests, at the level of ideas, the novels present a compelling narrativization of historical and cultural transformations. Cosmopolitanism, whether in its early or late nationalist forms is, almost without exception, presented as extraterritorial as a consequence of its transnationality. But *Knots*, a novel from the preceding “Past Imperfect” trilogy, presents a fascinating instance of an attempt at a locally territorially bound postnational cosmopolitanism. *Knots*, like *Hiding in Plain Sight*, features a central female character who returns to eastern Africa to restore to order an unsettled situation: while Cambara in *Knots* returns from Canada to civil war Mogadiscio to claim back her family home, Bella in *Hiding in Plain Sight* returns to Nairobi to act as a parent to her brother’s children. But while the cosmopolitan community in *Hiding in Plain Sight* exerts its civilizing influence extraterritorially, where key actors may be physically separated in space, but not in time as a consequence of communication technologies, *Knots*, by contrast, experiments with a very located cosmopolitan social intervention. This novel addresses the question of the “development of a form of post-national community” where the protagonist’s repossessed family home “acts as the symbolic locale for the reconstruction of Somali civil society” (Moolla 166), but through the agency of a homecoming Somali cosmopolitan elite. In *Hiding in Plain Sight*, Farah is able to envision an idea of a privileged Somali community located outside of the Somali nation, regardless of whether the borders in question are colonially imposed or determined by nomadic pastoralist routes. Somali *community* in this conception is constituted counterintuitively out of hybridity and mobility. What, on the face of it, looks like a contradictory commitment both to transnationalism and Somali nationalism will be scrutinized later.

However, there is nothing inherently utopian in the hybridity and mobility of transnationalism, a fact impressed on the reader of Farah’s earlier novels, where the texts less consciously and obviously reveal global terror and criminal groups operating in networked and cross-nationally dynamic ways, as does the idealized cosmopolitan. The novel most pertinent to this consideration is *Crossbones*, the final novel of the “Past Imperfect” trilogy. The novel is set toward the end of 2006 in the brief interregnum of relative stability in Mogadiscio before the US-backed

Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, which consolidated the power of Al-Shabaab, hitherto a minor radical offshoot of the Union of Islamic Courts. This novel introduces two new cosmopolitan characters, Malik and Ahl, who are connected to other cosmopolitan characters that variously populate the novels of the trilogy. The two characters are half-Somali, half-Chinese Malaysian brothers, living in the US. Malik is a journalist who comes to the Horn of Africa for a story on the Union of Islamic Courts, the first institution in fifteen years of anarchy following the 1991 flight of the dictator Siyad Barre to establish a working order in Mogadiscio and its environs. The other brother, Ahl, comes to Somalia to look for his stepson, who has left his family in Minnesota to join Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

In the investigations of both brothers, the novel reveals a wide and interconnected network joining global terrorism with global piracy. Al-Shabaab is reported to have links with the Al-Qaeda franchise, itself attracting jihadists from all over the world. Somali piracy is presented as a response to the dumping of toxic wastes and the prior piracy of marine resources by rogue nations acting extraterritorially in Somali waters. The symbolic markers that explicitly index cosmopolitanism in *Hiding in Plain Sight* find a less overt mirror image in *Crossbones*. Where ethnic attire, like the sari worn by Valerie, may be worn and swapped quite lightly by the world citizens of *Hiding in Plain Sight* without any cultural or religious commitment, in *Crossbones* a different kind of cosmopolitanism seems to be evident in a Mogadiscio “awash in styles imported from as far away as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan” (19), where in the mid-nineties, “three-quarters of the men wore [Somali] sarongs” (19). Likewise, the multiple and mixed cosmopolitan identities highlighted in *Hiding in Plain Sight* are reflected when Ahl tries to find clues about his stepson’s whereabouts in Djibouti, “a region more varied in hyphenated identities than even the United States” (58). Cosmopolitan networks are reflected in the “business” of piracy, which brings together actors in London, Abu Dhabi, Mogadiscio, and Mombasa. Similarly, the mobility of the new cosmopolitan is reflected in the rapid and relatively easy transnational movement of “Yemini and Pakistan [sic] operatives” (181) brought by Al-Shabaab into Somalia.

Farah’s representation of the informal economy and politics of Somalia in this period is quite accurate, based on substantial newspaper and film documentary research indicated in the acknowledgments. Farah’s findings are supported by the scholarly research of, for example, Afyare A. Elmi et al., who identify the modern causes of piracy in the Horn of Africa in geographical contexts that extend much further than the Somali nation-state and its territorial waters. Christopher L. Daniels, furthermore, identifies the interlinked networks that connect piracy and terrorism, while the transnational connections of local Somali actors with world terrorists are made clear by Daniel E Agbiboa. Stewart Bertram and Keith Ellison, in addition, foreground in a way that Farah’s novels do not the use by terror groupings of social media and other forms of digital mass communication that usually are associated with a more affirmative globalization. Thus, while Farah’s novels quite explicitly link the positive cosmopolitanism of some characters and networks with a postnational hybridity and mobility, it presents but does not consider the paradox that hybridity and mobility likewise create the negative cosmopolitanisms of crime and terrorism that also operate postnationally. In this sense then, the pirate and the jihadist are the monsters in the mirror of the new cosmopolitan. *Crossbones* and *Hiding in Plain Sight* are novels written one after the

other, the former presenting a negative transnationalism and the latter a positive transnationalism. The novels do not, however, appear to be conscious of the structural similarities between these two forms of postnational networks since there is no evident reflection on them. Instead, in *Hiding in Plain Sight*, postnational networks are presented as constitutively formative of the new cosmopolitan outside of individual agency. Postnationalism is presented almost as a “technology” that in its elision of boundaries automatically produces the ideal citizen.

There has been a spate of works of fiction and nonfiction on terrorism, but an autobiography that stands out as the alternative of the new postcolonial cosmopolitanisms, as the title itself makes clear, is Omar Nasiri’s *Inside the Global Jihad*. Writing under a pseudonym to protect his identity as a Western intelligence spy currently living in Germany, Nasiri’s life narrative bears startling resemblance to that of the postnational world citizen, revealing the dark side of the valorization of hybridity and mobility as ethical ideals. Born in Morocco, but raised in Brussels, Nasiri’s account of his adult life reads like a travelogue of European, African, and Asian regions and cities, including Tangier, Istanbul, Karachi, Peshawar, Chechnya, Paris, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, to name just a few. The global reach of jihadism is cleverly captured in the section titled “Londonistan,” an appellation apparently first used by a French intelligence officer, highlighting a countercurrent to dominant Western globalization through the countercurrent of oriental globalization. The cosmopolitan mix of nations at Nasiri’s Afghan training camp includes Algerians, Eritreans, Somalis, Chechens, Saudi Arabs, Tajiks, and Kurds, to name just a few. The world families that are a hallmark of the new cosmopolitanism are a hallmark also of jihadist world families, many of whom are married to Europeans. But while mobility and hybridity are the source of “cosmopolitanism as an ideal project and style of practical consciousness that overcomes nationalist particularism” (Cheah 20), the hybridity and mobility of *Inside the Global Jihad* are debilitating, if not disturbingly toxic. Throughout the autobiography Nasiri comes back to the idea of a destructive cultural detachment that is a monstrous mirror image of a romanticized free-floating cosmopolitanism unbound from the commitments often embodied by the nation. Again and again he says he comes across men like the 9/11 hijackers who have “no home” (2). They are “reviled in the West because they [are] not white and Christian, and reviled at home because they no longer spoke and dressed like Muslims” (2). Rage is the only thing that connects these men “to their faith, to their family, to the earth” (2). About himself Nasiri suggests: “But if my heart lies in Morocco, my head is in Europe, where I was educated, where I grew up, where I’ve spent most of my life. I read *Le Monde*, books from America and England. My mind has been shaped by the West, by its patterns of thought, by its agitated, arrogant, thrilling individualism” (9).

While the jihadist longs for connection even if it is only through rage, the new postcolonial cosmopolitan presented by Farah in *Hiding in Plain Sight* also appears to need affiliation of some sort. In this novel affiliation is forged through a reformulated notion of ethnicity and religion, and identity is sought also through the imagined communities of nation and Africanness. Although Bella is Somali-Italian, at no point does she identify with her Italian heritage. Instead, she performs a rarefied version of Somali-ness that is defined not by common cultural and historical memory, not by belonging and birth within a territory, not by language, dress, or cuisine, nor by the “blood-and bones” concept

of clan. When interviewed by a journalist on her work, Bella identifies herself rather too emphatically as a woman and “a Somali one at that” (53). She reiterates again, “I am Somali,” in reply to a Kenyan waiter who expresses surprise at the knowledge that she is Somali since, unusually, she dines alone in an upmarket part of town. Ironically Bella claims a full Somaliness that rests on no shared cultural code or value system, which she denies to the tailor in Rome who makes her “power suits” since, for her, he is only “half-Somali” (76). While there is a great diversity in interpretation of scripture, particularities of ritual, and culture among world Muslims sometimes coexisting with old cosmopolitan acceptance and sometimes not, what unites all Muslims is the declarative profession of faith. Bella shares neither the profession of faith, nor the ritual devotion, nor the varying cultural accretions, nor the superficial markers with which the non-Muslim identifies the Muslim—people who do not drink alcohol and do not eat pork. The novel quite studiously makes clear that Bella performs none of the obligations and violates some of the prohibitions of a faith with which nevertheless she needs to identify. Bella, her nephew, and niece raise quite high the flag of what is termed “cultural Islam.” Bella also feels “connected” in quite mystical ways with “the soul of the [African] continent,” where she is “happiest” (77). National affiliations creep in the back door, as it were, when Bella commits unexpectedly to Kenya: “Her mind races with plans to explore the country with the children and learn to love it with them and think of it as her own. She will organize camping trips, visits to places of interest in the suburbs of Nairobi. She’ll encourage them to improve their Swahili and think of themselves as citizens of Kenya” (229). *Hiding in Plain Sight* thus presents a version of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “rooted cosmopolitanism,” without the pride in the liberalism of the home culture that Appiah identifies in Asante lifeways.

Bella is a citizen of the world who strategically shapes her own affiliations, a commitment that identifies her as a purveyor of the most powerful universalism. In this respect she is fundamentally different from the central Somali persona of a biographer who through his range of non-cosmopolitan affiliations becomes a citizen of the world. Jonny Steinberg’s biography, *A Man of Good Hope*, narrates the story of Asad Abdullahi, a Somali man to whom he is introduced by a journalist in the Cape Town shantytown of Blikkiesdorp in 2010. Blikkiesdorp is one of a number of camps to which Asad and his family flee following repeated sporadic attacks on anyone deemed foreign mainly in black townships, where people from Asia and the African diaspora live and own small businesses. There are a number of parallels in the life presented in this narrative nonfictional work and the life of Bella in *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

Both the person and the character are forced to flee Mogadiscio in 1991 when Somalia collapses into outright civil war. Both appear to be driven to keep on the move. Both have an international network of family relations and in both narratives the African global cities of Nairobi and Cape Town feature prominently. But this is where the similarity stops. Asad flees Mogadiscio as a child in the company of family relations first to Nairobi and then to various towns in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, a disputed region, and one of the points on Somalia’s white, five-pointed star on the blue background of its flag. As a teenager, Asad begins to fend for himself after differences with his relations and finally is surprised to find himself married to a Somali woman named Foosiya, more mature and more

sophisticated than himself. With her he moves to a Somali district in Addis Ababa, from which he makes the overland extremely perilous journey to South Africa, where, after a period, his wife joins him.

Asad moves around extensively in South Africa, driven out of home and livelihood by random and very brutal acts of criminality that finally crystallize into full-blown xenophobia. In Cape Town Asad and his network of kin are repeatedly attacked, moving from one refugee camp to another, finally leaving South Africa for Kansas City. While in South Africa Asad's mobility is forced, Steinberg constructs a central ambiguity in the narrative that suggests that his Somali subject, like the new cosmopolitan, is impelled into a mobility that is *desired*, not obliged. The narrative is structured to show that Asad might have located and stayed with his father and his family in the Ogaden, among whom he would have found roots, but that a subconscious nomadic desire keeps him moving on.

Steinberg questions Asad's rationale for leaving a fairly comfortable existence in Addis since his investigations and interviews of people living in the Somali district of the city suggest that the Ethiopian government crackdown Asad presents as the reason for his flight, in fact, did not oblige him to leave. This is the central mystery of Asad's existence that Steinberg solves at the end: "If I look at the course his life has taken, it is not simply adequate to say that he has been kicked around like a stone. His trajectory has been shaped by his propensity to plunge, again and again, into the unknown" (313). Asad's life thus also seems to embody the virtue ethic that emerges out of mobility on an international scale, though Asad's is a grounded (literally and figuratively) rather than high-flying transnational movement. But situated in broader patterns in the narrative, a different conception of ethical ideals emerge. Asad's world family is the clan family writ globally. Clannism, of course, is what has been held to be the downfall of Somali postcolonial politics and efforts at nation-building.

Clan is a complex, highly fluid concept that is variously constructed in different contexts but that does appear to have a lived reality. As a child, Asad is cared for by clan kin, even if, on one occasion, he feels betrayed through the breaking of a promise by an aunt to take him over to the United States. Wherever Asad finds himself in Africa, in South Africa, and in the United States, he can rely on diasporic members of the Ali Yusuf clan family to provide him with food, shelter, interest free loans, and other forms of assistance. Asad distinguishes himself on the basis of Somali practices and approaches from the varied people he finds himself among. He identifies through the use of the personal pronoun "we" with Somaliness as a group identity. Far from the patriarchal nativist Somali that Farah contrasts with the postcolonial world citizen, Asad is presented, in incidental ways, since this is not Steinberg's central lens for narrative construction, as being a tender, somewhat henpecked husband to his first wife. Instead of affirming the need for the traditional Somali female rite of passage, Asad empathizes with his first wife and regrets the pain caused by her clitoridectomy and infibulation. He is a strikingly loving father to his daughters and encourages his second wife to learn English when they are in the United States, taking over the household chores when she is away at school. "I have become a housewife," he tells Steinberg, "giggling" (312).

He wholly apprehends himself as Somali, but also transforms Somali practices and beliefs as contexts change. When his pregnant first wife leaves him,

taking their son, to stay with family in Somaliland since she believes they will find an untimely and violent death in South Africa, he marries a second wife from one of the Somali traditionally outcast groups. (His first marriage dissolves since his wife gives him an ultimatum that if he does not join her within a specified period, she will find herself another husband.) His second wife, marriage to whom would be anathema in terms of traditional Somali caste conceptions, is not sophisticated and beautiful like his first. He finds her abandoned and alone with her child in one of the Cape Town refugee camps set up after another spate of xenophobic violence. He marries her, and mother and child accompany him to the United States. In the early part of his sojourn in South Africa he connects with South Africans through mutual acts of kindness, which harden into cynical horror when the discourse of the "*makwerekwere*," or foreigner out to steal the South African out of a newly acquired birthright in a democratic South Africa, takes hold. He is able to face the day-to-day brutality of his life in South Africa since, as he tells Steinberg, he gathers strength from facing his God five times a day in prayer.

What one sees in Asad by contrast with Bella is a cosmopolitan virtue ethic that emerges out of the range of affiliations that the new cosmopolitanism links with the nation. Even xenophobia, which would explode the value of nation-bound loyalties, is interpreted by Asad (as presented by Steinberg) not as a product of affiliation, but a consequence of the historical destruction of the moralities of affiliation. Thus, where in the popular media xenophobia is presented as the hatred of the South African for the othered foreigner, Asad presents the hatred as the outcome of generations of brutalized existence, unlinked from the connotations of nationalism. On an occasion where a poor woman loiterer whom he has frequently discreetly slipped a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk so as not to humiliate her walks over his body, where it has fallen after an armed robbery to loot his shop, he is presented as reflecting:

But this was something else. To watch the Somalis being tortured and then walk over them and steal their stock; to arrive the following morning and behave as if yesterday had not happened. He felt a surge of hatred. For Evelyn, for Bra Sam, for every single South African with a black skin. They were something less than human. He did not know much of the history of southern Africa, but he guessed that for generation upon generation, their ancestors had been slaves. Their masters had beaten them into a new shape, a subhuman shape. They had become submissive, treacherous slave-beings, beings without self-worth, without honour. And then the whites had come and made them slaves again. Now they had been freed, but such beings could not handle freedom. (252–53)

This view is expanded and explained in the context of, for Asad, the dishonorable treatment of women in public in black townships, where he says: "Even if you consider many different beliefs about the world ... nobody allows that. Christianity, whatever: it is in nobody's culture. ... But I tell you, they [black South Africans] do not get this from their religion. It is not their culture either. But they do it. They have lost what their ancestors once knew" (184). It is the loss of affiliation, rather than mindless affiliation that Asad regards as the source of violence in the South Africans he finds himself among. A fascinating further difference between Asad and Bella is that Asad does not regard himself as black. In fact, the narrative makes clear that it is only in South Africa that he discovers himself to be black in

the context of South Africa's highly racialized politics. He thus does not entertain Bella's romanticized notions about connections with a (black) African spirit, reflecting instead the observation articulated most clearly by Ali Mazrui in the seminal article "On the Concept of 'We Are All African'" that the idea of "Africa" was a concept constituted out of anticolonial nationalism that has, in different historical periods, had some strategic utility.

In conclusion, *Hiding in Plain Sight* presents itself as a postnational novel, cut loose from the commitments and affiliations of nationalism. But, like modern nationalism itself, postnationalism, as presented in Farah's novel, is ambiguous and ambivalent. Homi Bhabha, drawing on Tom Nairn, presents the modern nation-state as "Janus-faced" in its mutual constitution of public and private life, rationality and irrationality, a forward-looking commitment to modernity and a backward-looking identification of "origins in the myths of time" (1). In the reflections of Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan on "derivative" (Chatterjee) nationalisms and their links with questions of gender, the postcolonial nation-state, refracting the tensions identified by Bhabha, emerges as schizophrenically split between an outward-looking "masculine" discourse of scientific progress and development and an internal "feminine" discourse of local tradition and culture. Similarly, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, is a novel presenting a postnational narrative that is as radically ambivalent as the nationalism it is supposed to supplant. On the one hand, the novel valorizes the freedom from all local affiliations of its cosmopolitan characters; but, on the other, it tacitly reflects the negative cosmopolitanism of transnational crime and terrorism. Likewise, the novel rejects the forms of identity linked with the nation, but then reconfigures a version of national and continental affiliation and commitment through an individually conceptualized idea of Somali ethnic, Islamic, national, and African identity. *Hiding in Plain Sight* is a cosmopolitan, postnational novel that, paradoxically, creates a reconstructed version of national affiliation. The complex reasons for collapsing and reconstituting the allegiances linked with nationalism are the topic of another essay.

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