



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

«THE AFRICAN NOVEL: NURUDDIN FARAH'S *MAPS*. BLOODY IDENTITIES»

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ABSTRACT

We all know what a map is. We all know that its aim is to capture certain land territories. From the fifth century onwards, maps have been present in history and their importance arises due to their graphic representations and descriptions. In contemporary postcolonial literary texts, the predominance of maps implies a revisioning of the history of European colonialism. Maps intend to implicate those lands with their constituents, their fundamental parts. They detail the internal life that emanates from those illustrations. Therefore, could this conception of maps be applied to the definition of oneself? I truly believe so. Maps here do not only delimit the boundaries of the region in question, the Horn of Africa, but also their innate elements such as Askar and Misra, the protagonists of *Maps* (1986). This project studies the magic connection that lies between the material, real map of the character's motherland and the fictitious, imaginary one of their lives.

Keywords: Cartography, Map, Imagined Community, Identity, Gender and Sex, Postcolonialism, National Identity, Nuruddin Farah.

RESUMEN

Todos sabemos qué es un mapa. Todos sabemos que su objetivo es plasmar ciertos territorios terrestres. Desde el siglo quinto en adelante, los mapas han estado presente en la historia y su importancia surge a partir de sus representaciones y descripciones gráficas. En los textos literarios contemporáneos y poscoloniales, el predominio de los mapas implica una mejora en la historia del colonialismo Europeo. Los mapas intentan relacionar esas tierras con sus componentes, con sus partes básicas. Detallan la vida interna que emana de esas ilustraciones. Por lo tanto, ¿podría esta concepción de los mapas aplicarse a la definición de uno mismo? Verdaderamente así lo creo. Los mapas aquí no solo definen los límites de la región en cuestión, el Cuerno de África, sino también sus elementos internos como Askar y Misra, los protagonistas de *Maps* (1986). Este proyecto estudia la mágica conexión que existe entre el mapa material, real de la patria de los personajes y el ficticio, imaginario de sus vidas.

Palabras clave: Cartografía, Mapa, Comunidad Imaginaria, Identidad, Género y Sexo, Poscolonialismo, Identidad Nacional, Nuruddin Farah.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entitled ‘The African Novel: Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps*. Bloody Identities’, this project aims to present the solid consequences European postcolonialism offered to the African nation. Centring on the Somali writer Nuruddin Farah, a twentieth-century writer, we will be shown how the context of the Horn of Africa is worthy of mention to understand today who and how its inhabitants are.

Farah’s novel *Maps* (1986) is the one chosen for that purpose. Together with *Gifts* (1993) and *Secrets* (1998), they form his *Blood in The Sun* trilogy. In the three of them politics are present. The originality of Farah’s work was the manner in which he wrote about his country and his people, about strong women, sex, blood, nationalism; in general terms about families within the setting of war. However, those subjects differ in an in-depth analysis; they are not mere reproductions and copies from one novel to the others. This is the reason why we have just focused our attention on *Maps*; it is the first born in the trilogy and its story embraces such a powerful call on the bonds of mother to son, and on his way, son to mother/land.

The child, who is orphan, is raised by his *imagined* mother, an unreal motherhood of which he is aware. Despite the fact that they do not share biological ties, and here resides Farah’s authenticity, blood unites mother and son –blood from the mother’s cycles, from the son’s dreams. Blood from the war that lies behind them. Blood which is tangible, not like the borders European colonizers imposed over them, not like the maps that apparently defined Somalis.

Benedict Anderson’s idea of *Imagined Communities* (1983) gives strength and consistency to my composition. He defines what makes people kill and die for nations. He also examines how these ‘imagined communities’ of nationality were created and then globally spread. Among the causes of this process it was found, for instance, the decline of ancient kinships or the development of vernacular languages-of-state. What undoubtedly, however, produced this fictitious notion of the nation was the changing conceptions that accompanied time. More concretely, it was the unstable and uncertain minds that postcolonialism and its imperialist powers tried to instil on African –and also Asian-- societies.

And as colonized, bodies suffer; they are marked by damaged experiences. Framed in the shock of colonial occupation, *Maps* 'represents, in a fragmented postmodern narrative style, the traumatic nature of daily life for colonized male and female bodies during a post-independence regional liberation struggle under a despotic regime' (Lynn 1). The protagonists' testimonies are harmed in terms of identity –personal firstly and national secondly.

On the one hand, we intend to define the personality of our little protagonist's mother with the ideas critic Ifeanyi A. Menkiti supports in his article "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought" (1984). Furthermore, in terms of gender and sex we base our opinions in David Buchbinder's book *Studying Men and Masculinities* (2013). With the aim of trying to decipher the son's mental turmoil we develop a series of factors that cope with the 'accepted' definition of identity.

On the other hand, with our same goal we reach the national or political identity. In that section, the historical context is explicitly analysed thanks to the contributions of Martin Meredith in his book *The State of Africa* (2006). The importance of maps arises in this part playing an essential role in delimiting the son and his mother/land. That is, we present, apart from the internal causes, the external ones that do --or do not-- establish the child's individuality; readers will have to go through the following lines to know about him.

2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Somalia, officially known as the Federal Republic of Somalia, is the true essence of my development but it would be little or nothing without the voice of one of its writers, Nuruddin Farah. His novels and his country go hand in hand, one influencing the other, one reflecting the other. His critical eye needs to be understood in context, where the country's past and present lie. With this aim, I will make use of one of his novels, *Maps* (1986), written after going into exile in 1976. *Maps* belongs to his *Blood in The Sun* trilogy (1986-1998); the story it is home to will be my guide to offer a deep and analytical viewpoint and this way, see how blind we are in terms of global communities.

Somalia's position in the world will be the starting point for this contextualization. Together with mainly Eritrea, Djibouti, and Ethiopia, they constitute the Horn of Africa, a region of East Africa. It is this location the one that provides Somalia with a strategic importance regarding commerce in that the country is widely consolidated as the opening door to the maritime traffic between the Occidental Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

Bearing in mind the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869, which is nowadays used by a 20 per cent of the commercial maritime traffic¹, the situation of the region took a higher value because a required route was presented for the global maritime commerce. In fact, in the 1960s the route reached its peak holding the 10 per cent of the worldwide petroleum supply. For Europe, and more concretely for Spain, this route is vital because we depend on petroleum.

The previously mentioned countries in the region are not treated individually but rather as a whole. Including also Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and Southern Sudan, the European Union gets to consider the eight of them as part of the region so most of us, as members of the institution, do the same. There is a hidden logic behind this thinking and it lies in the interconnection between the countries. What affects one can and does impact another, despite being apparently different. Besides, in sight of the whole world it is better for the global powers not to centre on each particular damaged African country because it does not convey economically. It is 'preferable' to avoid reality, group them and take advantage of it so that the inversion of bigger states could be said to be worth it. This fact

¹ Martín-Peralta, Carlos. '2013: Somalia y el Cuerno de África en la Encrucijada', Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2013.

plus the effects of colonization, which will be developed later on, clearly distorts and disfigures the sense of nationhood.

Concerning religion, the one that has dominated the country from the Middle Ages on is Islam. This will mark the apparition of an insurgent movement called *Harakat Al-Shabaab Mujahedin*, or shorter *Al-Shabaab*², in 2006. I will return to this group just a bit later.

Regarding society, Somalia is among the countries integrating the Horn of Africa that suffer a quite perceptible social, economic and political instability. Since decades ago, this country is immersed in absolute turmoil. As a matter of fact, it led in 2012 the worldwide list of fragile states³ and from my point of view the main reason was power –whether global, that is external, or internal.

On the one hand, I will approach global power. I will extend myself a little bit more concerning colonialism in the country due to its great significance. European colonialism in Africa has a long history. The climax was reached however during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 at which European and also world powers dominated the continent: ‘Africa was, in effect, (re)mapped’ (Kazan par. 1). Somalia sadly suffered the harsh consequences of this Berlin Conference because it was therefore occupied at the end of the nineteenth-century, then divided among four different nations such as Italy, Britain, France and even its African neighbour Ethiopia, and finally turned at the beginning of the twentieth into --the poorest-- Italian colony⁴.

Benedict Anderson reinforces this idea in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983). He states that ‘official nationalism in the colonized world of ... Africa was modelled directly on that of the dynasty states of nineteenth-century Europe’ (163). This can be translated into the emergence of the ‘map-as-logo’, that is, ‘the practice of the imperial states of coloring their colonies on maps with an imperial dye’, removing ‘lines of longitude and latitude, place names, sign for rivers, seas, ... mountains [and even]

² Its Arabic meaning is ‘*the youth*’. En.wikipedia.org. (2018). *Al-Shabab*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Shabab> Accessed 28 Mar. 2018.

³ Staff, Garrett, Walt and Simpson (2018). *The 2012 Failed States Index - Interactive Map and Rankings*. Foreign Policy. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/failed_states_index_2012_interactive Accessed 28 Mar. 2018.

⁴ The British acquired northern Somaliland. At the moment of the independence, this region joined the Southern in a peaceful way, preserving its conventional political structures and forming the Somali Republic.

neighbours' (175). We shall discuss in the following sections the results of this act while analyzing the novel *per se*.

Before, I will briefly introduce the most severe of them. Somalia was and still is undoubtedly and unfavourably affected by this situation. Somalia is nowadays fragile because there was no –there could not be-- any possible sense of community in the country; boundaries were not respected. Rather, as Anderson assures, it was perceived a sense of ‘imagined community’ or nation. For instance, there was and there is a Somali population in Djibouti, in the north of Kenya and in the Ogaden, land of Ethiopia. The latter was the origin of a bloody war that truly marks the essence of *Maps* and that will as well be paid more attention to in the course of my development.

The sense of nationhood Somalis had was forgotten, left behind; the interests of the colonized were secondary, they were yet nonexistent. This understanding of ‘map’ was, in fact, fictitious and that is what Farah writes about. He chronicles the effects occasioned by nationalism when playing with the word that gives title to his story, which finally becomes a symbol of identity. Nevertheless, Somalis did not lose faith in their people and embarked on independence in 1960⁵. Their shared language and culture provided them with strength enough so as to claim their presence in the country.

On the other hand, it is presented in these lines the internal power just mentioned above that deals with the current situation Somalia is in. Only nine years after the independence from European colonisation, when Somalis had no time to appreciate how free and real life tastes, the authoritative leader Siyad Barre seized the power, stole their liberties and remained there until 1991 under a long totalitarian regime.

During those years, politics gained such influence in Somalia that global economic powers penetrated the country. Communism and capitalism were present; each one was headed by rival, opposite world powers like the Soviet Union and the USA, respectively. Barre switched sides as if his people’s ideology was a ball at the states’ feet. His position was not clearly defined because at first, he declared his country a Marxist state to please the Soviet Union but then, he formed an alliance with the United States.

The disarray was so manifest that it triggered in 1992 a civil war dominated by clans and that extended to the dispute over territories in the Ogaden –a truly decisive

⁵ Together with Cameroon, Somalia becomes the first African country formed by territories that had belonged to two different colonial powers.

factor in Farah's novel. As a consequence, Barre escaped into exile leaving an unrecognized government, famine, refugees⁶ and countless deaths. Thus, the Somali environment became very dangerous to operate in. However, some plans and strategies were launched by the UN Security Council. It was born a United Nations Operation in Somalia –Unosom-- which would be followed by Unosom II and whose purposes were soothing the catastrophic situation the Somali people were in. It was sent, as well, a UN force called 'Unitaf' whose mission 'Operation Restore Hope' had the same aim.

Luck did not accompany the Americans; these risky operations were not successfully executed so they produced lots of deaths, among whom there were many American soldiers. The decision that President Clinton made was to terminate US involvement in Somalia, but perhaps not all the effects were taken into account. External militias and forces were withdrawn from the country when they were yet necessary. Once out, the Somali rebel leaders found no resistance to reinforce their positions while letting children and women suffer the worst part of a war. They witnessed cruelty, injustice and pain, as the main protagonists of our novel do.

It is true that Americans struggled for months to win but maybe the solution was not to give up; rather, to persevere with the cause because when they went away, the Somali community was left to its own fate, at the mercy of leaders' ideologies without any kind of foreign aid. The Somali setting was transformed into an ideological fight between their people, between extremists and pacifists.

The creation of the Transitional National Government in 2000 and the Transitional Federal Government in 2004 gave Somalia a central government but not solidity. Only two years later, in 2006, a militia group called the Islamic Courts Union took administration of the capital vowing to bring calm and set up an Islamic state although, what calm can be reached if thoughts are imposed by force?

Among the armed militia for these Islamic Courts Union the already mentioned movement *Al-Shabaab* was born as the youth branch of those Islamic Courts. In a draconian and tyrannical way, the new Islamic government imposed order in the capital. They declared a jihad against Ethiopia for supporting the interim government of Somalia.

⁶ Today, over 870,000 Somalis are registered as refugees in the Horn of Africa, while an estimated 2.1 million men, women and children are displaced within Somalia itself. Refugees, United. "Somalia". *UNHCR*, 2018, <http://www.unhcr.org/somalia.html> Accessed 21 May 2018.

So, war and more war. In this case, both external and internal power, which I described before as cause of Somalia's fragile nature, are mixed.

Again, the United Nations had to show its weight by approving the Security Council Resolution 1725⁷ by which the Transitional Federal Government was protected from those insurgent minds. From my point of view, what precisely made the threatening network the local and strong force that dominated, especially, in southern Somalia was the intervention of foreign powers. The group was seen by most of the people as safeguard from the outside economic powers that were only trying to solve social problems but in the end, reality was different. They were immersing the country in a deeply bloody hole which is very hard to get out of. Their expansion could be said to know no limits because in 2010 an alliance with Al-Qaida⁸ was formally declared.

In broad terms, I could affirm that 1991, the year in which Barre's regime collapsed, marks the beginning of an absolutely catastrophic life in Somalia. Since that year, the country lives an inner conflict that has resulted in more than 350,000 deaths and approximately a million and a half of inner displaced inhabitants. Since that year, the setting in Somalia has been dominated by strong confrontations between clans --endemic characteristic of the Somali society-- and militias hold by lords of the war in an attempt to gain control and power. Since that year up to now, chaos has ruled in Somalia.

I firmly believe that Somalia's stability is the key to obtain the region's and consequently, of an essential part of Africa, the second continent with more population in the world.

With the former knowledge about the reorganization the country suffered not only from European colonialism, but also from the wars over the Ogaden territories, the narrative in *Maps* acquires specific cultural value. Given the colonial context in which the story is going to be placed in, my next objective is to briefly introduce some aspects of the writer's life and style of writing that will also be reflected upon my analysis later and which will help us to understand the main protagonists' adventures.

⁷ They authorized the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and African Union.

⁸ Founded by Osama bin Laden in 1988, it is a radical Sunni Muslim organization with the aim of eliminating the Western presence in Arab countries. *Dictionary.com*, www.dictionary.com/browse/al-qaeda Accessed 28 Mar 2018.

Likewise, a succinct summary of *Maps* is introduced so that readers start to get in contact with the main characters and some hidden messages they hold; I establish a connection between their names and the most important ideas they give life to.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Nuruddin Farah's Style of Writing

Nuruddin Farah developed from childhood such an interest in literature due to the mixture in ethnics and linguistics his home area held. Born in 1945, he was not well known until 1987⁹, a year following *Maps*' publication in London, having already at that time novels with a considerable cultural value. He spoke Somali as native language and, as proof of his country division into nations, at school he learnt Arabic, Italian, Amharic¹⁰ --a language strongly presented in the novel as we shall see--, and English. The latter is like a vehicle used in his novels to reimagine the nation with different eyes, to bring together multinational discourses. He began writing precisely in English because Somali had no standardized orthography until 1972.

In a superficial sense, the novel describes the tight situation of an orphaned Somali boy called Askar. He comes from and represents the Ogaden --and the entire warlike background beneath its conflict. He is found in isolation and taken care of by Misra, whose inclusion symbolizes his surrogate mother. She will be his universe, his bond to life. He will be, on his own, her secure identity as she is not an ethnic Somali. Blood will be the mayor link between them, in all possible senses.

At this moment, in a more in-depth way, we enter in the novel's chapters to see how Farah's style of writing is. In terms of his habits in the novel-writing, some of them are going to be highlighted because they help me develop my main point of analysis.

⁹ In 1998, he was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

¹⁰ Language from Ethiopia.

Regarding the main protagonist's individuality, we perceive a lost sense of identity which is seen through different perspectives. *Maps*, which reflects a subtle sense of self and identity, starts with a second-person narrator that only lasts one chapter:

You sit, in contemplative posture, your features agonized and your expressions pained; you sit for hours and hours and hours, sleepless, looking into darkness, hearing a small snore coming from the room next to yours. And you conjure a past. (Farah 3)

In the second one, unexpectedly, the narrative acquires a first-person narrator; 'Misra never said to me that I existed for her only in my look' (Farah 23). In this succinct sentence, there are three different pronouns arising from the first-person narrator -- 'me', 'I', 'my'-- that reinforce the idea of this 'I' narrator who is replacing 'you'. This 'I' will be then named as Askar and will tell us from a very subjective view how the world is run. And, to even emphasize more this wide variety of voices, it is presented in chapter three, surprisingly, a third-person narrator; 'And he was running and running, he was breathing hard and running' (Farah 43).

All combined from the beginning up to the end, they give birth to such a judicious analysis in that readers are able to know what is going on in Askar's mind while they perceive an external viewpoint different from his. We get to become at the same time judge, witness and mere spectators thanks to Farah's personal and unique style of writing. In fact, some reviewers 'have admired ... his ability to explore in great psychological detail the inner workings of his character's minds through a stream consciousness style' (Kelly 26).

As Eruvbetine and Omatsola assure in their article "Melancholia and the Search for the Lost Object in Farah's *Maps*" (2017), Askar's ego is definitely split into parts, which 'become ego-selves that [here have metamorphosed] into the three voices that tell the story' (146). Therefore, from the very first lines of the novel, I perceive a sense of incoherence in terms of the identity the person narrating has; I was even disorientated not knowing the reason why those changes in the voices were being taken. Now I understand. They want to show us how fragile Askar is; he has no identity and this is the early proof we get.

Not leaving Farah's style, there is a confusing progress of time in that we find a shifting narrative. Askar seems to possess the magic of travelling in time, of going backward and forward, living in the present, strongly remembering the past and imagining

the future all at the same time. For readers, it is sometimes inconsistent because it makes us feel uneasy although also curious and interested in the development of facts. Indeed, the author admits he is consciously doing a timeless narrative; ‘Since we’ve been going backwards and forwards in time, let’s continue so’ (Farah 144).

Just in the first chapter, one of all that we are told in second-person narrator, it is presented two steps in time because it accounts for a recapitulation of Askar’s whole life. Its aim is to present readers with what later we are going to find in the novel, which is developed through Askar’s eyes or through a third-person’s eyes. However, it also has the contrary effect on the readers since we do not know at first glance how the story unfolds. These shifting narratives deconstruct the image of a fixed identity, as the changing in voices do.

We are progressively embarking on *Maps*’ true analysis. My aim is at this time to present the themes that will cover my development; themes that will certainly be linked with the historical and theoretical frame of Somalia. I will cover the causes –personal and national, internal and external to Askar’s being-- by which he finds himself without a real and pure identity. That is, since I have so far given some hints of the sense of identity found in the main protagonists of *Maps*, in the following lines I will explain why Askar feels he has no place in the world. His characterization will always be accompanied by Misra’s because ‘a story has to be about someone else even if it is about the one telling it’ (Farah 148).

3.2. Identity

3.2.1. Personal Identity

The sense of identity, as I stated above, is not in this novel and this context clearly constructed. Thus, it will be one of my real focus of study. As a simple term it is defined, among other meanings, by the knowledge of who one is¹¹. It can also be nowadays conceived as being the combination of multiple and variable factors such as personality,

¹¹Dictionary, identity. "Identity Meaning In The Cambridge English Dictionary". *Dictionary.Cambridge.Org*, 2018. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/identity> Accessed 21 May 2018.

status, age, gender, sexuality, religion, education, etc.¹² I will cover the relationships between identity and the majority of those elements in order to determine what physical and psychological processes the main protagonist is suffering, but before, I would like to introduce him regarding his personal being, his knowledge of who he himself is.

3.2.1.1. Individuality

You are a question to yourself. It is true. You've become a question to all those who meet you, those who know you, those who have any dealings with you. You doubt, at times, if you exist outside your own thoughts, outside your own head, or Misra's. It appears as though you were a creature given birth to by notions formulated in heads, a creature brought into being by ideas. (Farah 3)

With this first representation of Askar we start to build an image of a boy who has no clear idea of who he is or where he belongs to. He questions his existence since the moment he is born as an orphan. And 'as an orphan, one is obliged to take responsibility for defining one's self, for choosing one's ties' (Alden and Tremaine par. 3). Due to his condition as parentless child, Askar must inquire into his relationship with both Misra and Somalia so that he could answer this question he is to himself, it means, so that he could determine his identity.

In Farah's portrait of Askar, he bears in mind Somalia's or even other countries' laws –me, you, everyone in general is nothing without specific documents. 'You did not exist as far as many were concerned; nor did you have any identity as the country's bureaucracy required' (Farah 8). As an orphan, Askar did not own the birth certificate the state delivers and on which there appears his parent's names; on which he depends for his own growth. Since the moment he comes to life, he is alone without a mother, a father or any other relative that could tell him who he is, how he is called, where he lives, when he was born. He lives one full day without identity, one day without any tie or bond until Misra finds him.

It is the description of Misra that requires our attention. 'For Misra, and therefore for me too, everything had a past, a present, and a future' (Farah 36). I quote this to illustrate what these three periods of time mean in Misra's life. Her past was tragic

¹² Longhurst, Brian, et al. *Introducing Cultural Studies*. England: Prentice Hall Europe. 1999.

because she had a fatherless childhood –she was not loved by him—, she was then kidnapped, forced to marry and once pregnant and mother of a boy, he lived only eighteen months dying just a few months before Askar was born. Her present is strongly conditioned by this past; she is not accepted in the community as she is the result of a union between an Amhara¹³ man and an Oromo¹⁴ mistress, actually not a full-blooded Ethiopian. She is seen as a foreigner, as someone who does not really fit in the community. Her future is heartbreaking.

There is a worth-mentioning reciprocity between them, a mutual relationship that knows no geographical boundaries. ‘She sought her childhood in you [because] she saw, in that look of yours, her father, whom she saw last when she was barely five’ (Farah 7). At other times, ‘she saw [in you a look] which she identified as her son’s ... With you, young as you were, needy and self-sufficient as an infant, she could choose to be herself’ (Farah 10). All this emanates from Misra’s inside the first moment she is acquainted with Askar. Thanks to him, in their night’s intimacy, she could keep speaking and cursing people in her native language, Amharic, one of the languages Farah learnt at school. She felt free with him, finding no political or social limitations due to his condition in the country as outsider.

What he receives from her, on the other hand, is a reduction of life’s discomforts, the certainty of discovering himself when touching her.

If you touched someone other than Misra, you burst instantly into the wildest and more furious convulsive cry. But if Misra was there, you fell silent, you would touch her and then touch yourself. It seemed to her that you could discover yourself only in her. “By touching me, he knows he is there”, she once confided in a man you were later to refer to as Aw-Adan. (Farah 6)

Thanks to her, he did not die of the chill he was exposed to the day of his birth. They develop a sort of mystical connection; she was his universe and he was her man. She had the power of bringing with her the identity Askar was not born with since he admits, in first-person narrator, that from the moment she takes him, ‘[he] was a living being and [he] began to exist’ (Farah 25), denying the day he had already lived. It locates that second day as the day of his birth, not the actual day the mother brought him to this universe. ‘I was dirty, yes; I was nameless, yes; but I existed the second she touched me ... Can I simply say that she brought me into existence?’ (Farah 25). ‘For me, life began in her

¹³ Region in the North of Ethiopia.

¹⁴ Ethnic group inhabiting mainly Ethiopia.

hands and it was in her touch that I began to exist' (Farah 40). With this declaration, Askar identifies her as his true mother, as the representation of his identity. But not all is as simple as this. His identity is not as clear as this.

3.2.1.2. Status

Returning to those factors I previously cited as the combination of identity, I continue with status connecting it with personhood, that is, the state of being a person. The second reason why Askar possesses no identity resides accurately here. Personhood, which predominates among African nations, is limited to specific communities¹⁵ that are constrained by tribes, race, class, culture in general. But what are those nations and communities?

Seton-Watson argues that a nation exists 'when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one' (qtd. in Anderson 6). Bearing in mind the political context that I described earlier, Africa suffered in the nineteenth-century from European colonialism and its practice of colouring and dividing countries at its whim. Therefore, what emerged from African inhabitants was a sense of *imagined* political community because only in their minds there was union and community, only in their minds they thought of them as nation. Geographical and real boundaries were inexistent, yet in people's imagination resided a sense of community, of belonging to the same place, same nature. This is the community Misra is admitted into, with ethnic discrimination however.

Connecting that community with personhood and hence, with identity, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti in his essay 'Person and Community in African Traditional Thought' (1984) suggests that 'the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focusing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather, man is defined by reference to the environing community' (171), in this case to the environing of the 'imagined' community as I have just explained. This passage is really significant for my analysis of the discovery of identity. As he states, the community is the one that defines the person as such through a process of incorporation. 'Without incorporation into

¹⁵ The community in this context as a formation of cultural processes, as a moral landscape (Tiyambe, 1997).

this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply' (172).

Askar realizes his identity comes with Misra's contact so she is the one who must hold the weight of defining him. However, before identifying someone else she must identify herself as a person and about this I will try to sound convincing. 'She was sure, for instance, that you saw her the way she was: a miserable woman, with no child and no friends' (Farah 7). This is the way she sees herself, clearly a consequence of her unfortunate origins and her rejection by the community.

Misra, as I commented above, is not an ethnic Somali because she comes from and stands for Ethiopia. Considering the great historical background that lies behind those two countries and the 1977 war in the Ogaden, enmity and rivalry dominated their inhabitants, as the Somali landscape did not accept her.

She finally managed to enter the Kallafo¹⁶ community, which, according to critics Eruvbetine and Omatsola in their essay "Melancholia and the Search for the Lost Object In Farah's *Maps*, 'enables her to escape justice for the murder of the man who sought to marry her against her will' (150). Once inside, by virtue of her foreignness, many members of that community 'treated her despicably, looking down upon her and calling her all sorts of things. It was said that her name wasn't even Misra' (Farah 11). Their denial illustrated how her identity was also lost in her path, how the rumour that her name was different meant at the same time a stealing of her identity, of her being.

And there appears Askar accidentally; his birth and the tragedy that follows him provide her with an opportunity to strengthen her position in the community (Eruvbetine and Omatsola 150). It was indeed the community of relations the one deciding that she would be his 'mother', despite her condition as servant. Whether finding him was bad or good luck, she is taken into consideration and thought of as an individual human after taking and protecting him. Since 'personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed' (Menkiti 172), by this occurrence she does achieve so. By looking after Askar and being his safeguard she does achieve the condition of person regardless of the sacrifices she is obliged to do.

¹⁶ The Somali-speaking Ogaden region of Ethiopia where Farah in fact grew up.

Now being considered a person within the community, she owns the power to construct and define the image of Askar as child, to give him a secure home and shield since '[his] presence here in this universe was not at all celebrated' (Farah 8). She is entrusted the teaching of Askar in terms of his body while Aw-Adan, a priest who daily guided Misra in the readings of suras from the Koran, had the task of developing his mind.

She taught you how best you should make use of your own body. She helped you learn to wash it ... She familiarized you with the limitations of your own body. When it came to you soul, when it came to how to help your brain develop, she said she couldn't trust herself to deal with that satisfactorily. Not then, anyway. Was this why she went and sought Aw-Adan's help? (Farah 11)

Nevertheless, 'as far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse' (Mentiki 173). Misra, as the progress of the novel shows readers, fails in maintaining her personhood; she was later considered as a traitor because, again as rumour, she had supposedly 'betrayed a trust and set a trap in which a hundred Kallafo warriors lost their lives' (Farah 50) during the Ogaden war.

Askar's dependence upon her is broken because of this war in the Ogaden --which is also separated from the Somali motherland and which will acquire a more solid power when approaching the external or national causes that made Askar feel no identity. Her power over him finishes that moment she is charged, leaving himself alienated because he needed her to be complete. Once she was accused of treason, he felt without identity again, as an exile in his community, as an outsider; perhaps a Farah's majestic way of reflecting his own status as an exile.

Following this path of understanding Askar and his empty sense of identity, we have seen how he needs Misra in an attempt to feel alive, to feel himself authentic, real. He needs her because she brought him to existence, because she provides him with calm. However, the personal identity she constructed on him had some gaps and failed, as I have stated, in the moment she betrayed the community. But that happens long after they met and were mother and son; before, she little by little aims to make of him a good adult.

3.2.1.3. Age

This is the third reason why he finds himself lost in fulfilling his requirement in life; he is a child of seven years but treated as an adult. ““And why is it that they don’t like me?” you said. She answered, “Because you are no child”” (Farah 15), despite obviously being so.

According to Longhurst et al. (1999), ‘age and the ageing process are, like gender and the body, apparently natural processes’ (84). However, I do not really agree with it just because when it comes to Askar, age in him seems something imposed on, something fictional created by Misra. ‘Age has different meanings among different peoples not only for the individual but for all those with whom the individual is associated’ (85). Perhaps as her attempt to recover the lost father, husband and son, Misra creates a man in Askar from the moment he is born; she understands age as an obstacle to fulfil her desire of having a man at her side. But she did not mind, she treated him as a man, as a ‘little man’ (Farah 23).

She forgot about how old he was and always attended him as an adult. She did not hide anything from him, she told all secrets nobody wanted to tell him about, she made him aware of his surroundings, his environment. And in so, he even thought of himself as an adult man; ‘she looked at you, not yet seven, you, who stood as men do’ (Farah 70). ‘The anxiety to become a fully-grown man’ (Farah 109) makes him deceive when he is taken to his maternal Uncle Hilaal and his wife Salaado. ““How old are you?” she said. You lied; you said, “I am nine.”” (Farah 143). Also, it makes him cut himself when shaving since he was desperately expecting to ‘shave [his] chain, grow a beard, be a man, like any other’ (Farah 108).

As a child, his behaviour was clearly that of an adult, perhaps as I have stated because he was influenced by Misra and her attempt to find the man she once had. Since she was his universe, his bond to life, her desires were easily transmitted to him. And once he decided to become that man for her, he found that in nights her company was sought by either Aw-Adan or his paternal Uncle Qorrax. Something happened in their intimacy, he was sure; something Misra did not tell him about, the only secrets she held because in fact, she knew he was a child. He, who was empty from inside, who had no personality, no identity. He, who could be shaped as anyone wished, was determined to live as men and please Misra. With her, he ‘could afford to allow the adult in [him] to

emerge and express adult thoughts, just as Misra could permit the child in her to express its mind' (Farah 14). Acting as an adult with and because of her, there existed a complete union between them.

But there is something that emanates from his own mind, an idea that does not hold so much weight as the previous one, although I shall highlight it as well. 'For whatever it was worth, you believed you were present at your birth' (Farah 14). He blames himself and feels guilty for his mother's death the day he was born. He thinks he was salvaged from the corpse of his mother, although she lived long enough to breast-feed him, dying therefore after he was born. However, he believes he killed her with his birth but that was not proved since he stared at Misra when she found him, and sight does not open instantly in the newly born. It takes at least a day, a day he was alone waiting for Misra. So, when she appears, he thinks he is being reborn, positioning this second day as his true day of birth, as I stated in previous lines. This thinking of being present at his own birth contributes to his seeing as an adult man.

A man, indeed. Are you a "man"? One day, I would like you to define what or who is a "man". Can one describe oneself as a man when one cannot make a viable contribution to the struggle of one's people; when one is not as educated and as aware of the world's politics as one's enemy is; when one is not yet fifteen; when all the evidence of one's being a man comprises of one's height and a few hairs grown on the chin? Who will kill you, your enemy or yourself? (Farah 20)

This powerful statement is declared by Uncle Hilaal in a letter to Askar himself. As Uncle manifests, he is barely fifteen and yet he feels as an adult. Why could it be so? Another reason of his questionable condition of age lies in his rite of passage. 'In some societies, the transition to the new status roles based upon age is highly ritualised ... The best-known ceremonies of status change are to be found in African societies (Longhurst et al. 86). That means, for Askar to become a true, pure and acceptable adult man, he was circumcised when being a child.

I will return to this point of analysis a bit later, when dealing with gender and sexuality, the last causes that justify Askar's lost sense of personal identity. Just declaring here that, regarding age, rites of passage often involve bodily mutilation so that there is a firm and stable change in status. This way the boy is no longer considered as a boy but rather as a man. After the bloody act, we face him saying that 'I was like a man with an arm in plaster' (Farah 93) but a man, in the end, so the aim was reached. Later, it is perceived a change in his way of thinking, he suddenly rejects Misra:

If I could I would've said that I wanted Misra taken away from me, sent away somewhere else, away from me anyway for a week, a month or two. If she were away, I said to myself, perhaps the act of weaning would occur less painfully and I would be able to bear the loss well. (Farah 95)

He does not want to continue being the protective and kind son of his mother, a mother so devoted to him that she could be said to find a reason for living the moment God provided her with him. In the moment of his circumcision, he is going to start thinking and mentally planning as a man, as an adult person. He will internally be a childish boy, though.

This refusal takes place after they two develop a sexual relationship that lasts until the moment they are separated. He needs to understand what gender is because as a female mother and as a male boy, he sometimes sees their relation as one of instincts and fetish. Thus, one must ask if gender roles are important in the development of sexuality, and consequently, in the identity's. He wonders what sex means.

3.2.1.4. Sex and Gender

It is precisely the association between gender and sexuality, as explaining identity, what requires my study in the following lines. Although gender and sex are terms used in an interchangeable way, they can be attached some different meanings in order to distinguish them.

Sex refers to biological differences between males and females while gender refers to the culturally specific ways of thinking, acting and feeling. Femininity and masculinity are thus gender terms, referring to the ways of thinking, acting and feeling considered appropriate in a society for females or males. (Longhurst et al. 218)

These definitions are going to help us in understanding the protagonist as person. At this time, we already know how the relationship between Askar and Misra is; how Misra is indispensable in his development in life. We know what they mean to each other, what they have learnt by sharing their lives. We know that, in simple terms, she is a woman and he is a boy, later a man. Also, we know that she acknowledges and confirms that man who lies inside Askar's body; 'you could see how self-conscious she was ... how womanly aware of the man in you' (Farah 218). But, does he agree with her? Does he always see himself as only a male? Not really.

It is true that he, as a male child, sometimes feels and acts in accordance with his biological sex. For instance, 'he was a member of a small body of young men who trained together as guerrillas' (Farah 114), immersing this way in a masculine gender and showing the power and strength society has acquired men with, supposedly. This could perfectly construct the image of Askar as a boy who believes in his male gender, in the tasks men are attached to. One day he even took a girl home; she was called Riyo, and 'she was the kind of girl you could trust, the kind that you could have as a companion and as a wife' (Farah 222).

Moreover, he was surrounded by Uncle Qorrax's children, who

behaved as children always do, no more, no less: they insisted on owning boys if they were boys, or on making dolls and dressing them if they were girls. His sons enjoyed being rough with one another, they took sadistic pleasure in annoying or hurting one another, whereas his daughters busied themselves nursing or breast-feeding dolls or clothing bones, not as though they were women caring for infants with broken hearts but as they were little girls. (Farah 13)

In terms of 'normality', the attitudes and practices Askar is surrounded by are at first sight shared by most members of the community (Buchbinder 27). The standard he is born in concerns men as hard and forceful whereas women as damaged and submissive, as victims in a simple term. He indeed sees Misra 'on her knees, scrubbing the floor' (Farah 70) and then at Uncle Hilaal's house, the maid acted that same way, 'on her knees, scrubbing the floor clean, dusting the table and chair, making the bed and beating the dust out of the pillow-cases' (Farah 142). However, there are inconsistencies within his soul as he himself confesses.

I was once a young man -but I lost my identity. I metamorphosed into an old man in his seventies, then a young woman. I am a septuagenarian wearing the face, and thinking with the brain, of a young woman, although the rest of my body, my misplaced memory if you like, partly belongs to yet a third person, namely a seventeen-year-old- youth. (Farah 63)

His own speech has the key to his dual mind. He here makes reference to his biological condition of male, which remains primarily throughout the novel, and his female internal gender, which seems to rise after some experiences with Misra. I will explain those experiences and contacts they had together and that marked Askar's perception of himself.

Concerning her sex, Misra, as a woman, had her monthly seasons in which she bled. 'She had started her period at the very instant you looked at her' (Farah 210); just

at the very first moment they met, he made her bleed. Continuously, she tried to breast-feed him because ‘she probably had some milk of motherhood in her [hence] she would bare her breasts and make you suck them’ (Farah 9). He refused her, though, making her feel miserable –bearing in mind that she had just lost her own baby so she was, in a reasonable manner, suffering those bodily changes in her body from which milk emanated.

That body of her provided him with a zone of comfort, of security, although the sexual approach moulds his personality as well; ‘she kept you warm by tucking you between her breasts’ (Farah 10). Indeed, when Farah describes in the first chapters Askar’s life, he mentions a photograph taken when he was very small, probably at Askar’s first days of existence. In it, ‘there is a hand of a woman –Misra’s most likely—a hand reaching out to make contact with yours but which accidentally “hovers”, like a hawk, over your private parts’ (Farah 10). From that moment on, readers start to develop an inquisitive behaviour regarding her sexual desire towards him. Curiously enough, the hand doesn’t touch his private parts but the desire to know more is imposed over us.

They both used to share the same bed; ‘she smelled of your urine ... in the same way you smelled of her sweat: upon your body were printed impressions of her fingerprints, the previous night’s moisture: yours and hers’ (Farah 10). We can perceive how, just in the first chapter, the sexual thread is lying between the two. When we are given her past background, we understand why she behaves that way. Perhaps she yearns for her dead child, her father who did not show to her any proof of love, or her forced husband who showed to her excessive evidence of love. The fact that she treats him as a ‘man’ when being a child complicates his future comprehension of sex and gender.

They were not two but just one. Two selves composing one same body, as he considered himself ‘her third leg or her third breast’ (Farah 148). Misra ‘engulfed [him] in the same wrapping as her breasts –a wrapping as cosily couched as a brassiere ... and [then he] would find [himself] somewhere between her opened legs ... as though [he] was a third leg’ (Farah 24). This way, her body is extending his, and in so doing, it creates a tangible and physical space between them. This same way, ‘Askar is sited both in the mother/land and in the world beyond’ (Kazan par. 21) because when he thinks he is a part of her, he identifies himself as someone in the world. When their bodies forge a union, he knows where and whom he belongs to.

We should again consider their bodies' relationship, how one influences the other and what one takes from the other. Thus, returning to those periods of her, it is quite obvious that they will affect Askar somehow. He admitted he was

the first to know if she was in pain or no; the first to notice if she had her period. Which I could tell from the odour her body emitted, from the way she shuffled about, from the constant washing she undertook and from the fact that I would get spanked for the slightest noise and she would shout at me more often. (Farah 78)

And when this occurred, her appearance completely changed. 'She was fierce to look at, she was ugly, her hair uncombed, her spirit low, and she was short-tempered, beating him often, losing her temper with him. She was depressive' (Farah 50), losing her femininity. Hillarie Kelly (1988) links this treatment of menstruation by the author with 'destructive femininity, frustrated motherhood' (31). Truly is that women usually suffer from those alterations in our emotional state during the days that menstruation lasts. Truly is that people around us also suffer with us because sometimes the pain is unbearable, only known and shared by women. But I wonder if we, women, are born to feel pain when reaching the adult age –menstruation and its blood opens us as sexual object, we are no longer girls but women able to sexual encounters and to give birth then, with its again bloody agony.

Our sex conditions us so we as women are the ones responsible for creating life. And it is actually a very treasured gift. In the case of Misra, however, it seems as if she rejects her condition of woman, of her own sex and in so, all the aches that the sex imposes over her. She rejects the inferior condition of her sex as well. Could she pass that denial of sex to Askar, who also at certain times rejects his? It seems that he wants to be like her, a woman, or at least his subconscious dreams speak about it.

The following morning, he awoke and was confronted with an inexplicable mystery: there was blood on the sheet he had covered with, blood under him too. Most specifically, there was blood on his groin. He sought Misra's response. "You've begun to menstruate", she said ... "But I am a man. How can I menstruate?". (Farah 110)

It was for me a terrible and great astonishment the first time I read it. As I stated back at the first pages of my analysis, blood became the mayor link between them –when she found him recently born, she found him within blood; here he is again within blood, whether fictitious or real, but blood. Their love and connection is so mighty that, in an attempt to be hers or be in her skin, to suffer as she did, he thought he had menstruated,

‘just like women do. Just like Misra used to’ (Farah 158). Because ‘it was something he envied her: the fact that she had periods whose monthly occurrences, he thought, had cleansing aspects about them. “You get rid of the bad blood”, she told him once’ (Farah 102).

Despite ‘gender ... is an instance of interpellation, [that is], we are “hailed as men or women, and we respond by engaging in the behaviour appropriate to the nature of that “hailing”’ (Buchbinder 36), right in this case that does not happen. Askar knows he is a man so his biological sex is clearly constructed upon him. When it comes to his gender, however, there are times in which, as exemplified with his menstruation, tell us he feels as a woman.

[His] fixation on menstruation ... is an example of how the author fetishizes women. Menstruation here is a metaphor for control over the forces of life and death, something that is made explicit in Askar’s fantasies and dreams. It is also a universal metaphor for the “otherness” of women. Askar wavers between the negative and positive connotations of menstruation, sometimes envying Misra, sometimes despising her for it ... Interestingly, her customary pain ceases after Askar leaves, suggesting her willingness to accept their inevitable separation. (Kelly 31)

The fact that his ways of thinking and acting are occasionally feminine deconstructs his identity. The reason is found in Misra, as I have mentioned, because their relationship is absolutely unique, their bodies fuse together to form just one. She can be said to have two sides of power over him; she unconsciously has influence over his idea of womanhood but she considers himself her man. There is ambivalence towards her and that reflects upon him, who is ‘at times torn between the masculine and the feminine, an interesting psychological theme not often found in African novels’ (Kelly 32). He identifies with women’s travail until ‘he himself is no longer a victim of patriarchal brutality, i.e. when he becomes an adult man’ (Kelly 32) at his circumcision, as we shall see.

As regards her sex, again, she is a woman –a woman not accepted in the community the first moment she appeared. Her beginning was disgraceful, entering households as servant and promoted, in less than a year, ‘to the rank of a mistress and eventually as a wife’ (Farah 73). Buchbinder in his book *Studying Men and Masculinities* (2013) asserts that

gender may also be understood as ideological in that anatomical, sexual difference is transformed into a system of values that are then presented to us as inevitable and natural. Our complicity with that system is engineered in different ways: for instance, for men, through the offer of sexual and social power; for women, in the promise of support, security, and protection via love and marriage (39).

Thus, Misra is undoubtedly conditioned by her gender. She is a woman whose sacrifices regarding her sex led her to be with Askar. Those sacrifices implied that she was visited at nights by either Uncle Qorrax, Askar's paternal Uncle, or Aw-Adan, both men not liked by Askar because he was obliged to share the small bed with them when they made love with Misra. Men there offer their sexual power to her but do not receive too much love from her. At those times when they were not alone but there was one more person sharing their same air, Askar started to loudly yell, which can be interpreted as 'a protest against Misra's mortgaging of their shared privacy or ... as resulting from his Oedipal anxiety' (Eruvbetine and Omatsola 153).

According to Sigmund Freud and his theory of psychosexual stages of development, the Oedipal complex describes a child's feelings of desire for his opposite sex parent and anger towards his same sex parent¹⁷. Askar seems to be competing with Uncle Qorrax or Aw-Adan for possession of Misra, being small as he is. This anxiety is clearly an important point in the development of his sexual identity.

The psychosexual development is usually accompanied by incestuous desires towards the opposite sex parent, in this case Askar towards Misra. 'To her, the fabric of Somali society was basically incestuous and you had a glimpse into the mind of a Somali if you knew to whom he or she was related by blood or by marriage' (Farah 26). To her, everything depended on blood relations. This is why when Askar asks her what her relationship with Aw-Adan was, she wondered what this person's relationship was to her, 'which in turn meant, "Is he an uncle or an aunt or a cousin?"' (Farah 26).

I will not go into deeper details about Askar's psychological treatment towards his Oedipal anxiety. I will focus mainly in his painful physical transformation into manhood; his circumcision.

If I were circumcised, I thought to myself, and I became a man, yes, if ...! What would become of our bodies' relationship? Surely, I wouldn't remain an obvious

¹⁷ Verywell Mind. (2018). *The Oedipal Complex: One of Freud's Most Controversial Ideas*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-an-oedipal-complex-2795403> Accessed 11 May 2018.

extension of Misra's physicality? Surely, I could no longer be her third breast or her third leg? (Farah 78)

Male circumcision consists of the removal of some part of the foreskin of the penis. Its meaning can vary but the cultural and religious reasons prevail. More concretely, the performance is that of 'a coming-of-age ritual'. It is one of the oldest and most widespread surgical procedures in the world, focussing specifically in Africa, where it is estimated that more of the 80 per cent of all males are circumcised¹⁸.

According to Eruvbetine and Omatsola (2017), 'Askar's circumcision symbolically thrusts on him the assertiveness of manhood' (154), it is, this ritual meant to him the absolute certainty that he was a man, as much as physically or psychologically. Even though he is aware of what he would lose if circumcised, he has no possibility of avoiding the act. He knows he 'would live in a territory of pain for a fortnight or a month following the circumcision and then in a land of loneliness – forever separated from Misra' (Farah 89), a detachment symbolizing rebirth.

Just as I acknowledged before in terms of my personal understanding of menstruation and its pain, when it comes to this bloody performance, I have no such experience. Anyway, I dare say its depiction produced in me a great sympathy for him together with an even greater terror for the pain Farah majestically describes.

The man who was brought to circumcise me, when my turn came, made me sit alone, insisting that I read a few Koranic verses of my choice – and that I wait for him as he honed the knife he was going to use against a sharp stone he had come along with. I was overcome by fear – fear of pain, fear of being lonely, fear of being separated forever from Misra. (She wasn't there anyway; she wasn't allowed to come. In her place, there came a man, one of my many uncles.) The sticky saliva in my mouth, the drumming of fright beating in my ears, the numbness of my body wherever I touched, felt: my legs, my hands, my thighs, my sex, what pain! (Farah 92)

Askar suffers from his state of male, from his biological sex. Likewise, Misra suffers from and is conditioned by her female natural sex and her gender. They two seem to be living parallel lives, not just in the positive side as their mutual complement or foundation, but also in the negative space of agony and distress.

¹⁸ *Traditional male circumcision among young people: a public health perspective in the context of HIV prevention. Apps.Who.Int*, 2018, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44247/9789241598910_eng.pdf?sequence=1 Accessed 21 May 2018.

I recall thinking that ... the man pulled at the foreskin of my manhood, producing, first my groin, then in the remaining parts of my body, a pain so acute my ears were set ablaze with dolorous flames. These flames spread gradually –then my feet felt frozen, my eyes warm with tears, my cheeks moist with crying and my throat dry as the desert. It was only then that I looked and I saw blood –a pool of blood in whose waters I swam and which helped me cross to the other side so I would be a man—once and for all. (Farah 93)

And he in fact becomes a man, as I have specified. But the pain it brought lasted almost a month. During this period, he could barely stand, he could not come into bodily contact with anybody, not even his Misra –she slept on the floor, letting him the entire bed. Now that he is a complete man in harmony with his gender, he suddenly starts to reject his mother, Misra, as if his mind would have suffered a turn of 360 degrees. What he achieves by avoiding her and her caresses is to define his identity, that means, he understands what sex and gender mean, what relation there exists between them. He therefore starts to realize that being born as boy implies certain ways of acting that are not the same if born as girl. A man as he is, he knows he must accept his destiny in terms of his rite of passage, as well as women must monthly bleed up to an age. He sees and comprehends the world around him; men must fight and show his powerful nature while women, according to their apparently feminine inferior gender, must be soft and disposed for the house and the sexual encounters. He starts to perceive that gender is the result of society's development.

Nevertheless, once his identity can be considered defined –taking into account his only seven years old--, once he can distinguish between which gender acts do or do not follow from the accepted tradition, he is moved from Kallafo to Mogadiscio, to Uncle Hilaal's house, and all his progress fades away. Hilaal, Askar's maternal Uncle, lives there with his wife Salaado. 'Physically, you thought, Hilaal was the exact replica of Misra, only he was a man' (Farah 141). Askar liked immensely the couple. They had Cusmaan, a tutor to help him with his studies and his readings of maps.

In Mogadiscio Askar faces a very different situation from the one he was used to in Kallafo. On the one hand, Cusmaan's role had its importance. He was a student at the National University of Somalia in an area related to sociolinguistics. 'His long essay was titled something like, "The *Mispronouncing* of Non-native Speakers of Somali". Although the title might or could've been "The *Misgendering* of Non-Native Speakers"' (Farah 168) in that his tutor was himself apparently a "Misgenderer", Salaado said, 'a term indicating where the genders are confounded, the masculine third-person singular

wrongly replaced or displaced by the female third-person singular' (Farah 169). The fact that the person in charge of teaching and educating Askar was having his doctoral subject on misgendering was significant enough. Uncle Hilaal tells him straightaway that in Wolof¹⁹

there is hardly any indicator of gender. A man who otherwise speaks faultless French might, when speaking about his wife who is in front of you, and whom you can see display all her gender's paraphernalia, refer to her as "he". Likewise, the wife might refer to her husband as "she". (Farah 169)

Rhonda Cobham (1991) assures in her article 'Boundaries of the Nation: Boundaries of the Self: African Nationalist Fictions and Nuruddin Farah's "Maps" that 'this grammatical conflation of the words for "he" and "she" is most common in the speech of non-Somalis. But it is also a feature of the speech of ethnic Somalis like Askar' (92) and his tutor Cusmaan, author of the misgendering thesis. Actually, she claims that the term "misgenderer" 'seems to apply equally to Askar's unstable gender identity as well as his growing sense in the months following the outbreak of war in the Ogaden (93).

On the other hand, his Uncle disorders everything Askar has on mind. He tells him, for instance, that he loves cooking but Salaado does not.

We have no children ... or rather, we didn't have any before you joined us. That's right. We're not bothered by the fact that we didn't have any of our own. We love each other the way we are. The trouble is, other talk, they say terrible things about a woman who can't have children. There were complications. And Salaado had to undergo a serious operation in Europe. It was most painful and she suffered greatly ... A most obligatory, painful operation for Salaado. (Farah 150)

The operation was about the removal of her ovaries, the female reproductive organs, this way making her unable to give birth to children. Doctors suggested Uncle to search for another wife but he remained, even sacrificing himself for her having an unnecessary operation called vasectomy, which renders men sterile. So, both stay together, surrounded by pure love. Society, however,

doesn't approve of a man who loves a woman who doesn't bear him children, a woman who doesn't cook his food, mind his home, wash his underthings. A woman who sits behind the wheel of a car driving when the man is a passenger –to our society, this is unpardonable. It is sex, sooner or later ... This is why you don't see many people coming to, and going away from, our house. (Farah 151)

¹⁹ Language of Senegal, the Gambia and Mauritania.

According to Buchbinder, ‘there is no necessary connection between the morphology of sex (male or female) and the combination of behaviour and attitude that we call gender (masculinity or femininity)’ (25). Yet culture teaches that its members believe in that connection, as Askar’s surroundings. Uncle Hilaal admits his neighbours and friends do not attend his house as usual because they firmly believe in that connection, in that relation between sex and gender. They confront this disruption and react with horror, revulsion. Why? Because they think the woman is the one responsible for the housework as her sex conditions her for so. They believe there is an unbreakable line between those two concepts so when someone does not in fact follow it, chaos and rumours rule.

Buchbinder asserts that it is possible for a man to impersonate the feminine, just as a woman can impersonate the masculine (25). Uncle Hilaal and Salaado exemplify this mixing of genders; Askar once ‘heard footsteps approaching but didn’t turn to see who it was. Two faces entered the mirror’s background –Salaado in Hilaal’s jellaba, he in her caftan’ (Farah 256). However, in agreement with everybody’s eyes, they seem to follow what is correct and adequate since they ‘changed into decent clothes to go out in’ (Farah 257). This undoubtedly created a confusing impact on Askar, who was near to understand what men and women should do due to their genders. Uncle and Salaado distort his conception; they have inverted their roles in terms of gender, he did what Salaado was supposed to and vice versa so little Askar wonders, again, what does gender depend on?

For Askar, ‘the feminine and the masculine co-exist’ (Kazan par.17). His other self resides within him; it seems to be the complementary gender he needs to be fulfilled. In Farah’s own words, the woman is a symbol of the subjugated self in all of us. He thinks that in every man there is a woman, and that in every woman there is a man and that society as a whole cannot be described as ‘democratic’ until every man, woman and child is liberated from the constraints of male-stipulated system of subjugation²⁰.

Askar ends up as he began, being and feeling as an ambiguously gendered character. In midst of the narration of his life he is truly balanced, as I commented on, but he finally does not know what he internally is, which his identity is. In this sense, ‘*Maps*’ represents the postcolonial national body as a multi-gendered terrain containing elements

²⁰ A *Conversation with Nuruddin Farah*, A Penguin Readers Guide to *Blood in The Sun*. Nuruddin Farah (8), 2000.

of both masculinity and femininity, both genders enjoined in one body to form a whole' (Lynn 138).

Askar's personal identity is yet analysed, or, in other words, Askar's lost sense of personal identity. Lastly, we have seen how he fails in his definition of sex and gender and approaching in this moment his national identity, we will observe in the same way how he fails in his external perception of identity. Thus, my intention is to face another loss, setting him up as a very vulnerable, fragile boy.

3.2.2. National Identity

The relationship between geography and identity is a key concern for the rise of culture. Nationalism can be considered a matter of cultural politics because the nation we belong to, which is primary the national political identity, is defined in cultural terms (Longhurst 118). Nationality thus, as well as individuality, is a social construction that plays its decisive role in the development of one's identity.

Askar's identity, particularly, is built upon his relation to places. He is said to represent the Ogaden because he actually comes from that region in the Horn of Africa. In terms of its contextualization, the war that lies behind it marks a true starting point to identify Askar's story, that is, *Maps*' story, as a tragedy of separation –Askar from Misra, as known by now, and the Ogaden from its Somali motherland, as I present in this last section. My voice this time will appear when reaching the interpretation of the novel. I will support it with a solid perspective on historical facts so that all could be understood.

The territory of Somalia was divided into five separate parts at the last decades of the nineteenth-century. In *Maps*, Farah exemplifies it with Misra's metaphorical voice.

“You know the poem in which the poet sees Somalia as a beautiful woman dressed in silk, perfumed with the most exotic scents, and this woman accepts all the advances made by the other men –to be precise, the five men who propose to her. She goes, sleeps with them, bears each a child named after its progenitor and has a number of miscarriages”. (Farah 102)

Regardless of the point that women are again considered promiscuous, only attributed the responsibility of pleasing men and bearing children, here the comparison lends no confusion; Somalia suffered from colonization and was split into 'five men'.

Somalia's flag²¹ corroborates this notion. 'The sky is blue and heavenly and so is the Somali flag; a flag whose colour matches that of God's abode. It has, right in its middle, a five-pointed star and, for each point, a Somali-speaking territory' (Farah 131).

As Meredith describes in his book *The State of Africa* (2006), part of West Europe played its role in that France occupied French Somaliland at the southern entrance to the Red Sea, which is a border territory of the country. Britain, on the other hand, acquired northern Somaliland and finally, Italy's settlement was in the Italian colony of Somalia, with a capital at Mogadiscio. Further south, 'Somali communities were incorporated within the boundaries of the British colony of Kenya' and to the west, on the Ogaden land, Emperor Menelik²² extended his borders and subordinated those communities under Ethiopian authority²³ (465).

As a result, Somali people were separated and mistreated by the colonizers. They imposed their force and ideals; they partook of one large cake, colouring their portions to separate the different belongings –not to mix them up after all. In *Maps* that is illustrated with another metaphor, in this case about 'hundreds of men and women partaking of the meal in which slices of the heavens were being served as the first course and the clouds as dessert' (Farah 225).

As Anderson claims (1983), 'in London's imperial maps, British colonies were usually pink-red, French purple-blue²⁴ ... Dyed this way, each colony appeared like a detachable piece of a jigsaw puzzle' (175). In that act of colouring, they devastated everything in their ways, they flattened the lands, the rivers, the houses. They removed, as Anderson assures, 'lines of longitude and latitude', that is, they disconnected those pieces of the 'jigsaw' effect –those colonies-- from their geographical contexts, imposing new lines where they were not before, new limits separating people from their own relatives, limits that were in essence unreal.

Among the consequences of this practice, what emerged from this colonial expansion was the perception of the imagined community and the fictitious sense of maps. Firstly, life in communion was only conceived in their own souls and minds because, as remarked, authentic boundaries were dreamlike, inexistent; 'inexistent because Somalis

²¹ See appendix I.

²² Ethiopian Emperor from 1889 until 1909.

²³ See appendix II.

²⁴ See appendix II.

never admitted it, neither did they allow it to enter into the logic' (Farah 132). The Somalis did not exactly know which part of the country they were born in. Divisions were made without any logical order --what was part of Somalia one day, it became part of Ethiopia the following day. The same happened with French, Italian and British domains; their nationalisms invented nations where they did not exist previously (qtd. in Anderson 6), making this way the largest nations hide other nations.

Despite this tragic situation, the Somalis embarked on independence from that major European colonialism in 1960, as I already mentioned at the very first lines of my "Contextual Background" part. Independence brought a strong sense of national identity for Somalis. Unlike most African states, they possessed a common language and a common culture based on clan-families, as well as a shared desire to form a 'Greater Somalia', this way communities in Kenya's Northern Frontier District, in Djibouti and in the Ogaden, indeed Somali communities 'where one-third of the 4 million Somalis lived' (Meredith 465), were going to be reunited.

One must at this time wonder who the Somali people are, what their ties are. Does the Somali identity mean its people can speak or read the same language, or be born in the homeland --the imagining of a nation as community also imagines it in relation to the homeland, a particular meaningful part of the world²⁵-- or in one of its spread territories? 'Is it to be a patriot in the cause of the Ogaden?' (Wright par. 9). I think their conception of nationhood comprises the affirmative answers to all these questions.

Frantz Fanon (1995) in his essay 'National Culture'²⁶ states that colonialism 'turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it' (154). Fortunately, the native intellectuals find dignity and glory in that past so they yearn for a national culture that could rehabilitate and liberate the oppressed nation from the oppressor. Therefore, we seem to face two sides of one same coin. We can assert that Somalia's relationship with colonialism in Africa, or more concretely, postcolonialism in Africa, is imbalanced. On the one hand, the Somali society was homogenous and in contrast with the majority of independent African countries, Somalia is considered a nationality state. In spite of the borders dividing them, they used to share a cultural

²⁵ Longhurst, Brian, et al. 'National Identity', *Introducing Cultural Studies*. England: Prentice Hall Europe, 1999.

²⁶ From 'On National Culture' and 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. Constance Farrington) New York: Grove Press, 1968 (original French edition 1961).

identity speaking the same language; despite European colonialism, they maintained their identity. Uncle Hilaal answers our previous question about what a Somali is.

“A Somali ... is a man, woman or child whose mother tongue is Somali ... The Somali are a homogeneous people; they are homogeneous culturally speaking and speak the same language wherever they may be found. Now this is not true of the people who call themselves ‘Ethiopians’, or ‘Sudanese’ or ‘Eritreans’, or Nigerians or Senegalese”. (Farah 174)

But on the other hand, ‘they [did] not exist in anything like a one-to-one relationship’ (Dasenbrock par. 9); Italian and British Somaliland joined as Somalia but French Somaliland remained the neighbour country Djibouti, while Kenya and Ethiopia owned great Somali-speaking populations in their areas. Sadly, the Somalis were forced to accept their combined destiny and viewed themselves as an imagined community.

Anderson’s definition of a nation is a political and *imagined community* (1983). He attaches the adjective *imagined* –which I do make use of-- because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (6). According to him, the nation must determine its own fate and to do so it must have its own state. Thus, he asserts that the world should be made up of a patchwork of nation-states, just like Askar sees his own country, ‘a country made up of patchworks –like a poor man’s mantle’ (Farah 99).

Secondly, among those consequences of the colouring, it may lie that sense of maps which entered into the popular imagination, ‘forming a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalisms being born’ (Anderson 175). According to Hillarie Kelly (1988), ‘maps can be destructive when they are drawn by those bent on unprincipled exploitation, just as identities imposed by a self-serving power or “other” can be destructive’ (35). Maps become that sign in Askar’s life and surroundings; they are in the novel the most salient symbol for identity. Likewise, they represent the bloody price paid for maintaining them.

The first time we are presented them is at chapter one, although that was not in fact the first time in Askar’s real life –we are facing a shifting narrative, does my reader remember? There in chapter one, Askar describes to Misra in first-person narrator his new room in Uncle Hilaal’s house –one that is ‘all mine and on whose walls I have mirrors

and maps ... maps which give me the distance in scales of kilometrage –the distance that is between you and me’ (Farah 19).

The actual first time Askar is acquainted with maps is one single day, in company of Uncle Qorrax. ‘As a present for the Ciid festivities, he didn’t buy for me a pair of shoes with bright colours and patterns as he had intended –instead, he got me maps’ (Farah 31). On her own, Misra also incited him to that world of maps. After the boy’s circumcision, ‘Uncle [Qorrax], gentle and playful, took a peek at it and was visibly satisfied’ (Farah 95). As a kind of reward, he asked Askar if he would like something, answering ‘a pen and a sheet of paper’ (Farah 95). In that, Misra, who was present too, was the one who said:

“I can think of something he’s always wanted ... A globe ... or an atlas. He loves the blue of the sea ... Please get him a globe and a map of the seas and the oceans”, she appealed. I was surprised as my uncle. I didn’t know I loved the blue of the sea –not then anyway—nor the world of the oceans ... But I was grateful to Misra –grateful that she chose to introduce me to a world in which I have felt happiest since then. (Farah 96)

Maps were and are created by cartography. The repercussions of this discipline are nowhere more evident than in Africa. Bearing in mind the visual image of the continent, after the period of *mappae mundi* --fifth to fifteenth centuries--, the first representations emerged in the sixteenth century, ‘the most popular of which was a map printed from a woodcut in 1540, Munster’s *Cosmographia*²⁷’ (Kazan par. 1). The map of Africa we see today is that based on ‘Mercator’s map, in existence since the middle of the sixteenth century’ (Farah 256), a map ‘where Europe’s 9.7 sq. million kilometres appears larger than South Africa’s 17.8 million’ (Kazan par. 1), probably because political implications were behind. Mercator’s map projection²⁸ visibly distorted the size and proportion of countries and continents. Precisely, this allusion is made on the novel, being Askar already familiarized with maps. One day, when Uncle Hilaal was explaining

something about the deliberate distortion of the sizes of the continents (a distortion which made an essential difference to the size of Europe and Africa) ... you said, “The reason why the continent of Africa is smaller is because the adult ... eat[s] its earth –which obviously makes it

²⁷ It is the earliest German-language description of the world, including analysis of Astronomy, Mathematics, Physical Geography, Cartography, as well as a great amount of countries. En.wikipedia.org. (2018). *Cosmographia (Sebastian Münster)*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmographia_\(Sebastian_M%C3%BCnster\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmographia_(Sebastian_M%C3%BCnster)) Accessed 16 May 2018.

²⁸ Today the Mercator projection is used as a template at Google Maps. Sophie Morlin-Yron, f. (2018). *Why do Western maps shrink Africa?*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/18/africa/real-size-of-africa/index.html> Accessed 16 May 2018.

shrink in size. Could that be it?" ... Uncle Hilaal explained the reasons to you, giving you the political implications as well as the imperialist intentions of the cartographers. (Farah 157)

Why do not maps then follow reality? Why do not they conform to it? I wonder if there is any truth in them. Uncle Hilaal seems to answer my rhetorical question --again²⁹. 'The Ogaden, as Somali, is truth. To the Ethiopian map-maker, the Ogaden, as Somali, is untruth' (Farah 229). I will dare declare in the end there is not --depending on the viewpoint and the circumstances truth would be valid or not. There is never one single pure and true truth. Regarding maps, their veracity will depend on their makers.

The reason why we come to the Ogaden and Ethiopia at this time has its relevance. As I announced, the Ogaden was separated from its Somali motherland after the war in the Horn in 1977-1978 between Ethiopia and Somalia, the most direct consequence of the division in pieces. After the partition, the territory that was before in Somali hands was now in Ethiopia's so, like every mother unfairly distanced from his child, Somalia fought for recovering it --I imagine myself being mother and being taken my child away from someone; I do not really know where my limits would be so as to recover him. I think I will devote my whole life in that, regardless of the aftermath that it could bring about, a war even. I think I will run the risk. These two countries shared similarities such as their African origins, though their people differed a bit.

Ethiopia is the generic name of an unclassified mass of different peoples, professing different religions, claiming to have descended from different ancestors. Therefore, 'Ethiopia' becomes that generic notion, expansive, inclusive. Somali, if we come to, is specific. That is, you are either a Somali or you aren't. Not so with 'Ethiopian', or for that matter not so with 'Nigerian', 'Kenyan', 'Sudanese', or 'Zaireoise'³⁰. (Farah 155)

Concerning their identities, it seems that Ethiopia, for the mere fact that its people were different, praying to different Gods, does not possess such feature --Misra then has no identity. On the contrary, Somalia is unique because its people 'share a common ancestor and ... speak the same language --Somali' (Farah 155). Somalia acquires the classification of 'specific' because of its seeds; the Somalis speak their own language which provides them with a strong sense of identity --there are exceptions as we saw;

²⁹ He is a very intelligent and philosophical man. He works giving lectures at the Somali National University.

³⁰ The Democratic Republic of the Congo had this name between 1971 and 1997.

Askar is not provided with it. Mother and son experience in the end the same internal loss in terms of national identity.

However, being considered ‘specific’ as opposed to ‘generic’ does not bring too many benefits. In terms of the war in the Horn –what concerns us—, ‘the Soviet Union, the USA [and] the African countries who are members of the OAU³¹ support the generic’ (Farah 155) but not the specific. Why so? Uncle Hilaal explains to Askar that ‘they themselves belong to the generic kind’ (Farah 155). The inclusion of these worldwide powers will tip the scales in favour of Ethiopia.

As a mother to her child, the Somali people found themselves with the responsibility to struggle against the outsider. Somalis men were disposed for the war, they enlisted in the Western Somali Liberation Movement³² and wore arms –they were the ones who started the war but we would have to be under their skins to be able to judge them. Askar’s father was among those courageous people that did not mind the repercussions of the war –although it lasted one year, a war is always a war. He belonged to the Movement ‘until his last second, [dying] brave as the stories narrated about him’ (Farah 9). Because precisely

death-as-topic-for-discussion was taboo in [Askar’s] house ... Not until I came to Mogadiscio during the 1977 war in the Horn of Africa, not until then was the discretion about death completely disregarded and only then could “death” occur in my vocabulary in the manner it occurs in the thoughts of a spinster³³ who’s been robbed by it. (Farah 31)

Sorrowfully, death always follows war. ‘I asked Misra to explain what it is that happens when death visits its victims. “The heart stops functioning”, she said. “Nothing else happens?” I inquired. “That is death. The heart’s stopping”, she explained’ (Farah 32). Askar seems to mature realizing what his surroundings are, what outcomes those surroundings bring. His father was the living example of death for a national cause. “My father had a job to do, did he?” “That’s correct.” “And he died doing it? “That’s correct.” (Farah 77). ‘A job to do’, implicating combat and perhaps farewells. He went “somewhere”, having “a job to perform” (Farah 74). As his fellowmen did, as Karin’s³⁴

³¹ Acronym for Organization of African Unity, established in 1963 to promote unity and solidarity among the African states. South African History Online. (2018). *Organisation of African Unity (OAU)*. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/organisation-african-unity-oau> Accessed 17 May 2018.

³² WSLF, a rebel group that assisted Somali Army in ‘fighting for the liberation of the Ogaden from Ethiopian domination’ (Farah 100). Its basic aim was to make Eastern Ethiopia an independent state.

³³ Even in his saddest moments, there appears his duality in mind as regards gender.

³⁴ A secondary character, she takes care of Askar when Misra is having her periods.

husband did, ‘popularly nicknamed “Armadio”’ (Farah 74). Both men were being taken away from their homes by death. They were possibly aware of that but they did not pay excessive attention to it. Their beliefs and attitudes were stronger; they were focused in getting back what was theirs, at any cost. They were ‘two patriotic martyrs who give their lives for the cause of [the Ogaden] liberation from Ethiopian occupation’, as critic Derek Wright assures in his article ‘Parenting the Nation: Some Observations in Nuruddin Farah’s *Maps*’ (1992-1993).

Askar is covered with the same ideals. He decides to join the same Movement his father was a member of so that his hands could be of great help. He wants to cope with his people’s unhappy fate and misfortunes –and also answer the question he is to himself. ‘*I had a job to do*, as Armadio used to say. I had a home to return to and re-liberate, a mother to be reunited with’ (Farah 165). A mother who is both visible and invisible. A double mother who makes reference to Misra and Somalia.

Perhaps the second reason that lies behind Askar’s desire to join the Western Somali Liberation Front, ‘to return to the Ogaden as a recruited member of the Front’ (Farah 21) lies in his tangible mother, Misra. When he tells Salaado his wish, he is already separated from Misra; he is with his paternal Uncle in the capital Mogadiscio --right in the East of Somalia³⁵, located in a seaside region on the Indian Ocean, far away from the battle-- but she stayed in Kallafo, where he was born --a city inside the Ogaden region³⁶, this is way he is said to represent the Ogaden. When she left her in Kallafo, ‘he was trying to escape the complex and confused landscape of identity’ in which he lived³⁷. Back to his first years of existence in his Kallafo region, he could not distinguish himself as male or female, as child or adult. Perhaps life was giving him the opportunity to dwell in the proper Somalia and this way, to totally understand himself and his identity.

Askar’s name is symbolically chosen, it means ‘bearer of arms’ (Kazan par. 26). Askar is born with a predetermined and fixed destiny as names are among the first representations of identities. ‘Askar, you are armed by name, aren’t you?’ (Farah 22). Although I have positioned the death of Askar’s father and of Karin’s husband as the first encounters the little boy experiences with the war, it is tutor Cusmaan who firmly imposes

³⁵ See appendix III.

³⁶ See appendix III.

³⁷ Dasenbrock, par. 15 in his essay “Nuruddin Farah: a tale of two trilogies”, *World Literature Today*.

on him the idea of fighting for the Ogaden. ‘He came to the house daily, taking upon himself to remind me that unless people like myself returned to the Ogaden to fight for its liberation, the province would remain colonially subjected to foreign rule’ (Farah 175). Just like Misra was the one who introduced him in the world of maps, Cusmaan was the one who introduced him in the world of struggling for the Ogaden war. ‘You must remember who you are and, when you grow up, you must return to the Ogaden as a fighter, as a liberator’ (Farah 173).

His Uncle Hilaal does not approve Askar’s idea of leaving for the Ogaden. He bases his opinion in his experiences as adult, he certainly knows what a war is.

Forgive me, but I’ve never held the view –nor has Salado— that, since there are many able-bodied men and women in the Ogaden who can shoot a gun, kill ... in a scuffle and, if need be, confront the lion in the den; a youngster like you mustn’t go. No. “Somebody” must go. But who is this “somebody”? (Farah 21)

The logic of Uncle Hilaal lies obviously in those he knew who had not come back from the war front despite the prayers made or those who were exiles in his town. ‘Mogadiscio’s seams broke with the influx of refugees a few months later [the war started]. You couldn’t go anywhere without seeing them in the streets, dusty and famished-looking as the earth they left behind’ (Farah 168). Uncle Hilaal treats him like he is, an adolescent, not yet fifteen. Askar’s mind is not clearly constructed upon that time, he only sees his yearning for returning to his own mother; the place where he was born as well as the mother who took care of him. Poor Askar, who is separated from his origins and from his true identity.

The war started the thirteenth of July. At first women, mostly, talked about it as being a terrible disaster. But it provoked a different reaction in men in that for them, it was the best opportunity to show off their masculinity. Askar was among those men. ‘What mattered to [him] was that it ... predicted a future in which he would be provided with opportunities to prove that he was a man’ (Farah 100). He was now at last a man, or teenager better, because he was totally detached from his mother Misra and he was proud of it –after his circumcision he suffered a great change in mind and did not yearn for her presence. He felt he could run the world or become, ‘at such a tender age, the movement’s flag-bearer’ (Farah 100). In his superficial spirit, he wanted to return just to recover his invisible mother, his mother country. But in the deepest part of his soul, he wanted to reunite himself with his surrogate mother, Misra.

Before his circumcision, the agitation for becoming a full man was present in his life. I commented in my section “Sex and Gender” that Askar immersed himself in a small body of young men who trained as guerrillas –a practice for his presaged future. The boys ‘imbibed an ideology embodied in the dream they saw as their own, the dream they envisioned as their common future: warriors of a people fighting to liberate their country from colonial oppression’ (Farah 114). Among them, he equipped himself because he wanted to be ‘a man ready for a conscription into the liberation army, ready to die and kill for his mother country, ready to avenge his father’ (Farah 109). He even converted the room he shared with Misra into a war office in which he adjusted the map to reflect the Somali’s new captured territories.

Related to that male adult power imposed by society, men just focused on doing what other men did and what they indeed were supposed to be called to; the war. ‘Boys, because of this chaotic situation, ha[d] suddenly become men and refused to be mothered’ (Farah 113), as what happened to little Askar, who refused Misra but who in the end needed her. “I can kill; and not only can I kill but I can also defend myself against my enemy”. The fierceness with which he spoke the words “I can kill” alarmed [Misra]’ (Farah 113) and even myself. How can those words come out from a child’s mouth? Children are not prepared for war, sometimes men either.

The standpoint Askar acquires towards the war is reinforced in his journey from Kallafo to Mogadiscio.

From the first time in your life, you would cross a border that has never been well spoken of among Somalis, for such borders deny the Somali people who live on either side of it, yes, such borders deny these people their very existence as a nation. Uncle Hilaal would say of this that “Somalis went to war in order that the ethnic origin of the people of the Ogaden would match their national identity. That’s what gives the Somalis their psychical energy, a type no other African people have, only Somalis. Imagine, Askar. A nation with a split personality, Askar. How tragic!” (Farah 126).

Those men, women and children that travel with him were ‘leaving behind [them] unburied corpses ... “Whose are the unburied corpses?” ... Our memories, our collective or you like, or individual pasts’ (Farah 129). They were the refugees that Uncle Hilaal at another time described as fulling his city’s streets. They were trying to put an end to those noises of the war. Suddenly in the lorry, men began singing ‘beautifully’ nationalistic

songs ‘which were composed in the 1940s by the founders of the Somali Youth Club³⁸, (Farah 131) as they considered themselves ‘hope personified. After all, we are the dream of a nation’ (Farah 129). Their impulses to win the war were even strengthened when the lorry they were in came to a halt in

the town of Feer-Feer, formerly a border town ... You were being welcomed by the townspeople and Feer-Feer was in such a festive mood ... [that] while food was being prepared for you, some of the men prayed and you and a couple of others went to have a look at the Somali flag, flying in the heavens of your nationalistic dreams. (Farah 131)

They were winning partially the war so victory was possible, they thought. ‘We were proud and happy the Somalis were pushing on’ (Farah 162). By September, Ethiopia was forced to admit that it controlled only about 10 per cent of the Ogaden³⁹. Illusions we are made of. Soviet and Cuban artillery entered to help Ethiopians in October reversing the situation and in March, they got the final victory. In the

weekend [which] entered the annals of Somali history as The Tragic Weekend ... the Soviet, Cuban and Adenese generals (with a little help from the Ethiopians) masterminded the decisive blow which returned the destiny of the Ogaden and its people to Ethiopian hands. (Farah 162)

And how paradoxical life is as when this happened, Askar was ill in bed. ‘When the nation mourned the loss of the Ogaden, I was preoccupied with the state of my health, my body, my skin. I will never forget this’ (Farah 163). When the Ogaden was for the Somalis lost, the so desired dream of a complete motherland was as well lost.

Catastrophic were the consequences of the war, ‘of that mutilation of the colonized people by the colonial regime’ (Fanon 156). To those who did not flee the Ogaden, ‘the Ethiopians poison their wells, rape their women and conscript their children into the Ethiopian army or the police force. They compel them to learn Amharic, force them to adopt the ‘Amharic’ culture and dispossess them of their lands’ (Farah 164). Those who fought –in an indirect or direct way-- lost likely a leg, an eye, a husband or a son. And to those who could pass the borders and survive the fire of the enemy, memories would always be in their dreams –recalls from the times when ‘suddenly there was an explosion, and after a small pause, another, then a third and after that a fourth’ (Farah

³⁸ It was the first political party in Somalia, playing a key role in the way to independence in the 1960s.

³⁹ War-memorial.net. (2018). *Ethiopia vs Somalia (The Ogaden War) | the Polynational War Memorial*. <http://www.war-memorial.net/Ethiopia-vs-Somalia-3.160> Accessed 18 May 2018.

103). Terrifying. ‘Stories with fragmented bodies! Bodies which told fragmented stories! Tales about broken hearts and fractured souls!’ (Farah 161)

Equally disastrous and devastating is the external, national result occasioned by a war as it is the personal. Askar ‘could only view it as a personal loss so as to understand its dimensions’ (Farah 164). It was a war for personal in which he did not bear arms, in the end, but witness. It was personal because he did not only lose his motherland but also his mother figure; Misra was accused of betraying a freedom fighter’s camp in which six hundred men lost their lives. People alleged that she led her lover⁴⁰ ‘to the hiding-place of the martyred WSLF warriors’ in Kallafo (Farah 241).

The members of the Liberation Front were immediately convinced of her guilt. They considered her the ‘diseased part of the Somali heritage’ (Wright par. 7), a woman mistreated and marked by her origins. Coming from upper Ethiopia, she was thought of as traitor because of her ability to speak the enemy’s language and her more ‘natural affinity with the occupied zone than with the occupier’ (Wright par. 7). But, what validity has these charges? Wars disorientate people.

Poor Misra defended herself claiming that she was not so, that ‘she had not betrayed anyone, had hold no secrets, contacted no enemy’ (Farah 193). She swore upon Askar’s life that she was not guilty. But people did not trust her –I do. Poor helpless Misra; her house was burnt and she raped by a dozen young men. Unfortunate Misra; Askar ‘wasn’t at all moved’ (Farah 195) when he heard her heart-rending story. After more than ten years distanced from each other, once they reunite again, the weight of doubt falls over them.

Misra was kidnapped and killed by members of the Western Somali Liberation Front, to which Askar belonged –was he responsible for the murder? She died without Askar’s forgiveness or kindness. In his soul, I am sure there was much love and mercy than his acts and words showed. She died and he was again in bed, just like when the war began --proof that he was unwilling to deal with the real causes of his lost identity; his country’s postcolonial situation and his substitute foreign mother. ‘We suspect they performed a ritual murder on her body ... The removal of her heart took place before she

⁴⁰ After two years loving and living with an Ethiopian officer, she then found that he was her half-brother, sharing the same Amhara father. So, does she in the end commit incest?

was tossed into the ocean –already dead’ (Farah 252) Hilaal announced. Her heart was missing, how frightening!

Askar then realizes that the most important people in his life have made significant sacrifices, all but he himself. He thinks of Arla and Cali-Xamari⁴¹, his parents, who gave their lives, of Hilaal, who undergone a vasectomy operation, of Salaado and her removal of ovaries, and of the Somali people in general who gave their sons and daughters for the battle and in so, their lives with them. He thought that life was a sacrifice but he was not even aware of which his was. Readers do know –his sacrifice was being born into a warlike context in the Horn of Africa and bearing witness to his personal tragedy, that is, trying to define himself, without finally resolving his conflict of identity.

⁴¹ The hyphen links his father’s actual name and the bit he acquired from the city he came, Xamar, the locally known Mogadiscio.

4. CONCLUSION

Askar, as his own name epitomises, spends his life *asking* questions about all his surroundings. Throughout the novel, he interrogates Misra, his Uncles, his tutor Cusmaan and even the families he travels with from Kallafo to Mogadiscio. However, the most important person to whom he *asks* is he himself. The orphan child develops questions of identity because, for him, answers are not available. Farah said in an interview in 1989 that ‘the first and most important questions that all human beings ask themselves ... are “Who am I?” “Why am I who I am?”’ (Alden and Tremaine par. 3). And this is what actually Askar *asks* himself. The climax of the novel is reached precisely when he wonders “‘Who *is* Askar?’” (Farah 258).

Misra, on her own, embodies the ‘the foundation of the earth’ (Farah 185), a metaphor in harmony with her role as Askar’s mother. She stands for the basis, the grounds; Askar’s grounds from which emanates his being. I have consciously kept her name’s meaning until the very last section so that readers could conclude with the beautiful and fascinating merging between the –surrogate-- mother and son. Apart from being a story of real/fictitious maps and borders, *Maps* is also a story about Misra because she is the one who connects everything, despite in the end she is treated as scapegoat due to her non-Somali origins and her helpless characterization.

Set firstly in Kallafo and then in Mogadiscio, the capital city of Somalia, the narrative of *Maps* becomes a narrative of identities. More specifically, it becomes a story about what is being a Somali in and out the Somali Republic. Considering Farah’s condition of expatriate and his ability to write then in a foreign and different language from his native’s, we might easily state that he purposely steals those identities; that he has the intention of taking his characters’ individualities. However, if readers have been as inquisitive as our little protagonist Askar is, they have realized that *Kallafo* and *Mogadiscio* are not written in English as they should be *Kelafo* and *Mogadishu*. My intention was to maintain them because this is the indirect and hidden proof of the Somali identity. Together with some other examples as *baaf* (Farah 35), *cawra* and *uff* (Farah

36), *cuuds* (Farah 82), *maa shaa Allaahu kaana!*⁴² (Farah 134), etc., the Somali identity that seems to be lost or destroyed emerges.

A novel contextualized in the war over the Ogaden territories (1977-1988), it has showed us that Somalis fought –and who knows whether they will fight-- against Ethiopians for the realization of their nationalistic goals. They have lost not just their identities as humans, but also their lives in recovering their sense of nationhood. Somalis have been imposed unlawful laws by European postcolonialists and in so, they were outraged by their brutality and intrusion. That European postcolonialism in Africa was the one responsible for the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) *Maps* represents. In addition, of that illusion in terms of the correct, adequate maps. A dream that leads to a war, the war in the Ogaden.

This project has, in a simple way, offered a consistent analysis on the development and the loss of one’s identity. We have analysed how the personal and the national ones are the key to determine our own destinies. That is, we have learnt that we do not only depend upon our innate nature but also the external and political context plays its decisive role in ourselves. We are not free in composing our identities; these are conditioned by the surroundings. Focusing on Askar and Misra, we have seen how both need each other to complement themselves, how one identifies herself as his mother and how the other identifies himself as her male guard, how she was the ruler not of his land of innocent games but also of maps telling their past and future. We have witnessed how Askar’s dilemma is the representation of its author’s critical view of what Somali society was and is remembered by.

⁴² Although these words and expressions do not complicate the reading of *Maps* because they are occasional, I decided not to mention them in my analysis.

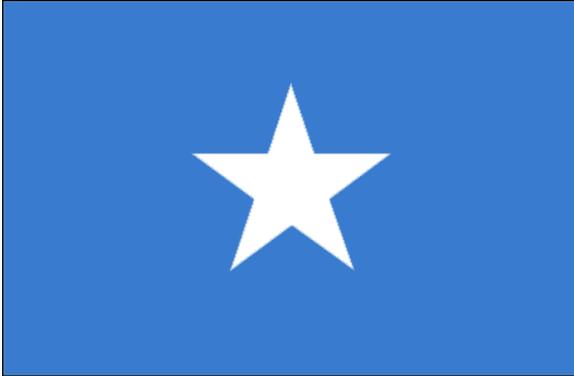
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6. APPENDIX

Appendix I: Somalia's flag.



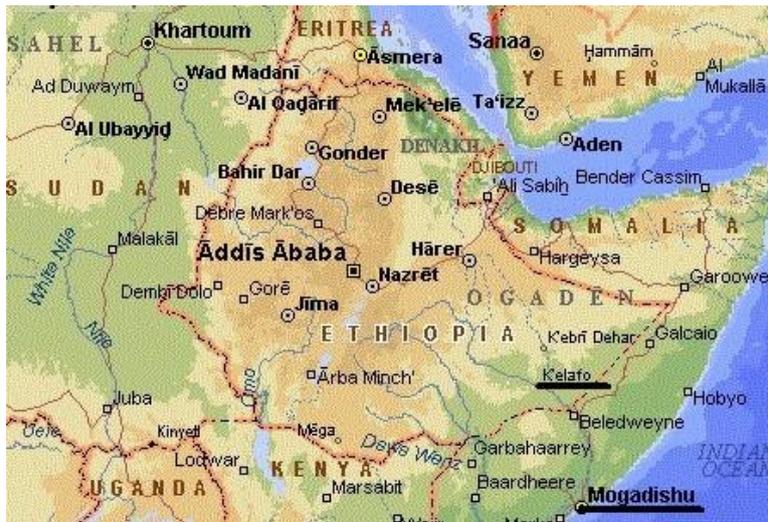
"Somalia Flags And Symbols And National Anthem". *Worldatlas.Com*, 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/somalia/soflags.htm>. Accessed 1 June 2018.

Appendix II: Somalia's postcolonial division.



"Italian Somalia 1957". *Deviantart*, 2018, <https://federalrepublic.deviantart.com/art/Italian-Somalia-1957-451843003>
Accessed 1 June 2018.

Appendix III: Separation between Kallafo (Ogaden) and Mogadiscio (Somalia).



"MAPS". *Pinterest*, 2018, <https://www.pinterest.es/pin/361132463842747264/?lp=true>. Accessed 2 June 2018.