

**Women in Transit: Hybridity in Selected Short Stories from
Leila Aboulela's Collection *Elsewhere, Home****by***Abeer Mostafa Elgamal**

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University**Abstract**

Leila Aboulela's Short Story collection, *Elsewhere, Home* unveils a rich tapestry of narratives where, characters-primarily immigrants from Arab countries to the West- grapple with the complexities of cultural hybridity amidst displacement. Aboulela's own experiences as a migrant are detected in the nuanced portrayals of hybridity in some female protagonists, as they negotiate their identities in transnational spaces and confront the challenges of reconciling their roots with the allure of new opportunities and societal expectations. Against the backdrop of prevailing Western stereotypes about Africa and Islam, Aboulela's characters resist reductionist portrayals, asserting their agency and dignity. They reflect the author's own quest to articulate the richness of her Sudanese heritage amid cultural misconceptions and anti-Islamic sentiments. Through the lens of postcolonial theory, this study examines how the characters navigate the liminal spaces of hybridity, negotiating between Eastern and Western cultures. The paper starts with a brief exploration of the term "hybridity" and its development into a key term in Homi Bhabha's post-colonial theory. Central to the analysis is whether Aboulela's female characters assimilate fully into the dominant culture or choose to uphold their cultural distinctiveness, embracing the in-betweenness of their existence "Elsewhere." Echoing Bhabha's notion of the post-colonial immigrants' dilemma, the narratives embody moments of transit where space and time intersect, giving rise to complex identities and negotiations of inclusion and exclusion and offering glimpses into the fluidity of cultural boundaries inviting readers to contemplate the intricacies of migration, belonging, and the perpetual negotiation of self in a globalized world.

Keywords: Cultural Hybridity; Arab female Immigrant Experience; Postcolonial Identity; Negotiating Hybrid Identities; Liminal Spaces.

نساء في حالة عبور: الهجين في قصص قصيرة مختارة من مجموعة ليلي أبو العلا
مكان آخر، الوطن (إلس وير، هوم)

المستخلص

تكشف مجموعة القصص القصيرة ليلي أبو العلا مكان آخر، الوطن عن نسيج غني من الحكايات حيث تتصارع شخصيات المهاجرين من الدول العربية إلى الغرب، مع تعقيدات التهجين الثقافي والاندماج. تظهر تجارب أبو العلا الخاصة كمهاجرة في التصوير الدقيق للتهجين لدى بعض البطلات أثناء تفاوضهن على هوياتهن في المساحات العابرة لحدود أوطانهم، ومواجهة تحديات التوفيق بين جذورهن والفرص الجديدة والتوقعات المجتمعية وعلى خلفية الصور النمطية السائدة عن أفريقيا والإسلام في الغرب، تقاوم بطلات أبو العلا التصوير الاختزالي لأنفسهن، وتؤكدن قوتهم وفرادتهن. القصص تعكس سعي المؤلفة إلى التعبير عن ثراء تراثها السوداني وسط المفاهيم الثقافية الخاطئة والمشاعر المعادية للإسلام. ومن خلال عدسة نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية تنقلهن في المساحات الحدية للتهجين، والتفاوض بين الثقافات الشرقية والغربية. تبدأ الورقة باستكشاف موجز لمصطلح "الهجين" وتطوره إلى مصطلح رئيسي في نظرية هومي بابا ما بعد الاستعمار. من الأمور المركزية في التحليل ما إذا كانت الشخصيات النسائية في أعمال أبو العلا تندمج بشكل كامل في الثقافة الجديدة السائدة أو تختار الحفاظ على تميزها الثقافي، واحتضان وجودها "في مكان آخر". انسجاماً مع فكرة بابا عن معضلة مهاجري ما بعد الاستعمار، تجسد القصص لحظات العبور حيث يتقاطع المكان والزمان، مما يؤدي إلى ظهور هويات معقدة ومفاوضات حول الإدماج والإقصاء وتقديم لمحات عن تدفق الحدود الثقافية بين الشرق والغرب مما يدعو القراء إلى التفكير في تعقيدات الهجرة والانتماء والتفاوض الدائم مع الذات في عالم تسوده العولمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجين الثقافي؛ تجربة المهاجرات العربيات؛ الهوية ما بعد الاستعمارية؛ التفاوض على الهويات الهجينة؛ الفضاءات الحدية.

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This paper attempts a reading of selected short stories from Leila Aboulela's collection, *Elsewhere, Home* (2018) in relation to post-colonial theory. Homi Bhabha left no stone unturned when discussing theory of cultural differences, post-colonialism and the inevitable interdependence between colonizer and colonized. He is the one who came up with the conceptual vocabulary of "hybridity" and the "third space" at the core of post-colonial theory. (Rutherford 1990; Bhabha 1994; Bhabha 1996) These twin concepts serve as the theoretical background to the discussion of some Arab female characters in Aboulela's collection to showcase how they negotiate their identities between the West and East or as Aboulela puts it in her eloquent title *Elsewhere, Home*.

Theoretical Framework

Hybridity, a term that is still subject to heated debates, is invoked here to denote the emergence of transcultural identities within the "third space" or "contact zone" shaped by colonization. Though hybridity has many forms such as the political, racial, cultural and linguistic etc., the focus here is on exploring the process of negotiation that might or might not lead to the formation of the hybrid. To use Bhabha's words: "Hybridity refers to the mixture of cultural elements that results from colonialism and the interactions between colonized and colonizer" (Bhabha 94). According to Young "Postcolonial hybridity represents a departure from the binary constructions of colonizer and colonized and instead embraces the complexities and contradictions of cultural identity" (Young 333). Ashcroft, and Tiffin stress that "Hybridity challenges the idea of cultural purity and instead argues that cultural identity is shaped by a multitude of experiences and influences." (Ashcroft et al 4)

The term hybridity, which originated in biology and horticulture as the process of crossbreeding of two species to produce a third "hybrid"

was previously used in colonial discourse with a notorious connotation to refer to people of mixed races. It was a term of abuse for those who are the product of miscegenation. In post-colonial discourse, on the other hand, the term “hybrid” itself has gone into a process of hybridization which subverted the loaded meaning of the racial connotations into a whole different concept.

In the bulk of his work, Homi Bhabha stresses the mutual construction and interdependence of colonizer/colonized subjectivities. To him, there is nothing such as a pure culture. He upgraded the term used in literary theories and broadened its meaning to include the construction of new culture and identity forms where colonial antagonism and inequity are present. Hybridity is the antidote of essentialism; it eliminates the colonial practice of interpreting the identity of both colonized/colonizer or self and other within a singular universal framework or stereotype. Bhabha believes that the interaction between them within the “third space” produces a new hybrid identity resulting from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and colonized. The hybrid challenges the validity and authenticity of essentialist cultural identity; it is neither one nor the other; it is a new entity, namely, a hybrid.

Bhabha names the locale that incites the creation of the hybrid identity the “third space” which is a form of an in-between, liminal space which is critical of essentiality. In an interview with Rutherford, Bhabha states that “For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘Third Space’, which enables other positions to emerge”. (Rutherford 1990: 211)

So, to Bhabha, the process of hybridity and the third space are interchangeable and inseparable at the same time. The presence of one is a condition for the other to be present. Third Space to him is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” one. (Location 238) . It is a space that questions the established norms of categorizations of culture and identity; a site that invites new forms of cultural meaning; one of ambivalence that has no ‘primordial unity or fixity’. (Bhabha 98) In a nice metaphor, Papastergiadis in *Tracing Hybridity in Theory*, likens hybrid identity to a “lubricant” (258) combining different cultures. The hybrid identity is based upon inclusion, not exclusion, negotiation, not negation. Its potential springs from the innate ability to mediate, traverse, rearticulate across cultures and tolerate affinities and differences creating the Third Space of which Bhabha says:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. (Location 38)

The concept of hybridity, to Bhabha, is an in-between third space that synthesizes cultural differences within the postcolonial condition. The ever-changing location of culture is at the core of the notion of hybridization and the process itself makes it possible to reposition and empower the peripheral voice within mainstream discourse. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha attempts to reach an all-inclusive definition of the concept of hybridity within the wider scheme of post-colonial theory. It is important to notice that, for him, the very act of writing postcolonial literature is a hybrid act of negotiation that paved the way for the emergence of fruitful theoretical discussion of hybridity: "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities...the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal". (Location 159) Of all the limitless definitions of hybridity that Bhabha and other post-colonial theory critics give to the term, the following is more intriguing yet telling in relation to this collection: "colonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures...[it] is that the difference of cultures can no longer be identified or evaluated as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation". (114)

It is within this context that Bhabha's hybrid space can be explored, not as a fixed or static construction, but as an "interstitial passage" that entertains "difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy". (4) One of Bhabha's most important examples is articulated in the colonial stereotype. The notion of the stereotype manifests itself within the complex dynamics and relations between colonial identities and cultural difference; between colonizer and colonized; self and other. It is this fixed construction of the Other and its otherness that not only provides the foundations for the stereotype, but also its eventual inversion into Bhabha's hybrid mimic.

Mimicry, a pivotal concept in Bhabha's theory, encapsulates the imitation or adoption of the cultural practices of the colonizer by the colonized, marked by subtle subversion. Ambivalence, entailing the simultaneous presence of contradictory feelings, is inherent in mimicry, encapsulating the dualities arising from this imitation (Location 85-90). Bhabha emphasizes the ambivalence inherent in mimicry, as it involves

both identification with the colonizer and a simultaneous resistance or subversion. It is a complex negotiation of power dynamics: "Almost the same but not quite – this is the hallmark of mimicry" (Bhabha 86).

Ambivalence is also a component in Bhabha's theory which refers to the simultaneous presence of contradictory feelings or attitudes within an individual or community; it might also involve a sense of uncertainty, oscillating between identification and resistance. Ambivalence is closely tied to mimicry. While mimicry involves imitating the colonizer, ambivalence captures the contradictory feelings and dualities that arise from this imitation: "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (location 37).

The fixed identity of the Other is explored in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* and in psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's notion of the 'dual Other'. For Bhabha, the title of Fanon's work is in itself indicative of the "doubling, dissembling image" that forms the 'fixity' of the colonial identity. (location 44) In Fanon's work, the colonizer's identity is only fulfilled through its relation to the otherness of the colonized.

Aboulela as a hybrid

Aboulela herself is the daughter of dual parentage: a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother. She was born in Cairo in 1964 and grew up in Khartoum before she moved to England. She got a master's degree in Statistics at the London School of Economics and then settled in Aberdeen where much of her writing is set. Khartoum, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, and other places she lived in find their way to her fiction as well. Like her fiction, her life is shaped by the in betweenness and the ability to negotiate rather than negate other cultures. In an early essay, "And My Fate Was Scotland" (2000), she writes, anticipating many of the themes in her writing,

I moved from heat to cold, from the Third World to the First – I adjusted, got used to the change over time. But in coming to Scotland, I also moved from a religious Muslim culture to a secular one and that move was the most disturbing of all, the trauma that no amount of time could cure, an eternal culture shock" (189)

When asked "Do you see your readership as mostly Western, then?", she answers:

Well, yes, in terms of numbers. My books are published here, and they are marketed for the general reader, so if I count most of the people who read me, they are Western and non-Muslim. But the warmest response comes from Muslims, and over the years I'm being increasingly well received by young, second-generation Muslims who grew up in the West. (Claire 112)

Interviewed by Daniel Musiitwa, Aboulela asserted that her experience of traveling and staying in different places played a significant role in shaping her identity as a writer. Her writing career started when she left Sudan in 1992 and relocated to Scotland where she experienced a strong sense of homesickness for Khartoum, her hometown. Like most Europeans, people in Aboulela's immediate surroundings showed a limited if any understanding of Africa, Sudan and Islam which constitute crucial ingredients of her personal identity and how she perceives herself in relation to the world. These circumstances intensified her feelings of alienation and the need to be seen as she really is. Moreover, the rise of anti-Islamic sentiments in Western media during the 1980s marked a period in her residency in Scotland when she felt compelled to defensively respond to all the negative discourse about Arabs and Muslim by writing back to the stereotypes perpetuated about her culture and origin. She sensed the need to articulate the positive aspects of life in the part of the world to which she originally belongs Khartoum, emphasizing the inherent goodness of its inhabitants and attributing their collective departure to the west to external circumstances rather than personal choice.

In this Western cultural context, the dominant beliefs often emphasized the supposed superiority of the Western world, portraying Africa as a region beset by several challenges like poverty, famine, and disease. Additionally, there existed a perception that Islam encourages the oppression of women, with suggestions that she should be grateful for escaping such a repressive environment and having a chance in the first world. Powered by youthful enthusiasm and a strong sense of self-esteem, Aboulela resisted this characterization. She declares that this resistance became the incentive for her entry into the realm of writing (Musiitwa, 2011), marking the discovery of her literary voice through fiction. Thus, her own journey into the West and venturing into her literary career is laden with elements of resistance, negotiation and ambivalence and her success and readership proves that she is the product of hybridity on more than one level.

Like their creator, Aboulela's female characters- mostly immigrants from Arab countries in the west- invite a reading that explores

cultural hybridity in a global society. Through them, Aboulela explores how displacement, exile, diaspora, transnationalism within a third space may or may not result in hybridity, depending on the individual circumstances and temperaments of the character. Her characters, mainly women in the context of this paper, come from previously colonized African countries, mostly Sudan and Egypt. They come to the land of the colonizer seeking new opportunities, better living conditions or education. The struggles they go through to adjust, the gap between the colliding cultures, between East and West, colonized and colonizer are the components of the formula which usually allows her to examine all the nuances of hybridity. This, however, should not suggest that her characters are stereotypes or that they follow a fixed process that leads to hybridization. On the contrary, each one of them is an individual that faces the calamities of the new world in her own way. The major question here is whether Aboulela's female characters become fully assimilated in the new culture, or do they choose to uphold cultural distinction, and to what extent they can be comfortable with the in-betweenness of their existence "Elsewhere". The deeper we delve into the stories the more we approve of Bahaba's words appropriating colonial identities as "neither the One...nor the Other...but something else besides" (Location 219)

"Summer Maze"

In the opening story of the collection "Summer Maze," Aboulela strikes two birds with one stone portraying two female characters, Lateefa and Nadia, mother and daughter who provide perfect examples of the different attitude towards hybridity that immigrants may adopt, how individual their journeys can be and the various elements that shape their choices.

On moving countries, people bring with them values and traditions in the culture of their native country. They start mixing and matching this with the new countries' culture, reshaping and molding their lives, but this is not what happens in the case of Lateefa in "Summer Maze". Lateefa, first generation immigrant, is an Egyptian who has travelled with her family to London in pursuit of bettering their financial conditions and seeking good education for her children. However, while there, Lateefa neither merges into the life of London, nor does she make peace with its culture, or daily practices. On the contrary, she resists and labels all that is western as unfit for her children. Lateefa is a simple, anti-hybrid, patriotic character who favors entering Egypt with her Egyptian passport rather than her British one (in addition to other reasons). In the West,

Lateefa has always struggled bringing up her daughter Nadia, not because Nadia is an abnormal child, but because Lateefa wants to have a cake and eat it too. She wants all the benefits of living in London but at the same time wants her daughter to be as detached from London's culture, people, beliefs, practices, and behaviors at any cost. Even when it comes to language, Lateefa suffered immensely, for the more Nadia grew up, the more she forgot Arabic and as soon as she entered the nursery "the language had started to evade her" (2) which hurt her mother as Nadia started to gradually lose the "complete closeness" she used to have with Lateefa (3). Lateefa blames it all on the new culture that snatched her daughter away from her and she feverishly attempts to get her back even if that meant she forces her to spend all her holidays in Cairo which leads Nadia to resist her culture of origin. As she proceeds into her teens, this is how Nadia feels about her country of origin:

In Cairo she was a stranger...she could not really think of herself as Egyptian nor does she want to...On every trip she would long for London and promise herself she would not come again. She would tell herself that she was not a child anymore...but perhaps it was her mother's anger that she feared, the hot reckless works like sandpaper on skin. (3)

The rupture that happens in mother/daughter relationship mainly stems from how each of them approaches the cultures of east and west. Aboulela deftly expresses this through their reaction to everyday details in London. While Nadia views making Christmas or Valentine cards and dressing up for Halloween as "normal" practices that other kids do with their mothers, Lateefa keeps on condemning them, labelling the English as "silly beoble" (4) who tell their children lies. Lateefa's anxiety and insistence to fiercely fight not to lose her child to that society, entails a great deal of struggle within Nadia herself:

Lateefa's words would stay in Nadia's mind, echoing though she tried hard to push them away. She could see things in the "normal" way, the same way that her friends did, untainted by Lateefa's judgments. But she could also change the lens and see what her mother saw. It was as if Lateefa's values were a subtle, throttled part of her. She had sucked them down with her mother's milk. (4)

Lateefa is a clear example of characters who engage in mimicry, while resisting hybridity. Though she has consciously decided to leave Egypt where she has lived and got her children and immigrate to England so that they will get better chances, she adamantly resists western lifestyles and attempts to control how her daughter interacts with their new home, renouncing anything that is foreign to Egyptians no matter

how trivial it is. She even believes that her daughter's tendency to harmonize in the western culture is some kind of heavenly punishment for her and she lashes herself with guilt for committing this sin:

Her father and I took the decision to make London our home and now we will reap what we sowed. I feed on my fear as if it will protect me from what I dread most. In London I pass laments back and forth with other mothers. Flailing around in a maze, we swap stories of dead ends. (19)

The "maze," in the title of the story turns out to be a metaphor of displacement and bewilderment, whether to Lateefa or Nadia, each in her attempts to navigate through the culture of the other. As Lateefa finds it hard to adapt throughout her stay in London, her anti-hybridity is emphasized through her continuous criticism of western culture and societal values of independence and freedom of choice guaranteed for kids as they grow up. Instead, she is obsessed with the idea that her daughter must set roots in Egypt at any expense. She constantly thinks of marrying her daughter- who is still a teenager- off to her sister's son, Khalid. When she finds that he is engaged, she goes as far as crying, feeling betrayed by both her sister and Khalid, though neither of them has ever introduced or even considered the match. Nadia, on the other hand, cannot care less about the whole issue, she cannot see Khalid as anyone but an older brother; she even finds the idea of marrying her cousin "gross" and feels resentment and indignation towards her mother who believes that "[t]his aversion to cousins marrying", Lateefa claims "is something the English taught her, something a girl brought up in Egypt would not feel" (18).

In London, Lateefa surrounds herself with friends who share the same views about living in the West. Her friends, also Arab Muslim mothers, constantly warn her saying things like: "Someone's son converted to Christianity, another's daughter works in a bar and even that studious boy turned out to belong to a terrorist group. Bad friends are the roots... Marry her off." (19) Though all these causalities can happen anywhere around the world whether in the east or the west country, as her sister assures her, she still blames it all to the West. Her sister goes further telling her that "being away, time stood still for you" and that she has become "more old-fashioned." (18)

The more Lateefa pushes Nadia away from western culture, the stronger her resistance to accept the Egyptian part of herself gets:

She could not think of herself as Egyptian, nor did she want to. . . .
In Cairo she was a stranger, but a stranger who went unnoticed"

because simply her features told everyone that she was, at least genetically, Egyptian. While in Egypt, Nadia constantly feels homesick for London since Cairo with its “strange” details always overwhelmed her and made her nervous (3).

This attitude of resistance shifts dramatically when Nadia meets her cousin’s fiancée Reem and they become friends. Reem has undergone the same dilemma of living between two different cultures until she has adjusted to living in Cairo and she is able to show Nadia that Lateefa’s attitude is typical of what first generation immigrants do to immerse their children, second generation immigrants, in their native culture:

My parents brought me back here to Cairo because they were anxious too. I was thirteen and I hated moving. It was difficult at first but now I think I’m better for having come here. Cairo teaches you every day. It makes you sharp because it’s real and in your face. (15)

Reem also helps Nadia sympathize with her mother’s motives, suggesting that Lateefa sounds like “a real worrier” stressing that an immigrant mother “is a parent who finds out too late that she’s given up her child for adoption” (14). Reem plays a very important role in turning Nadia from resisting and being ashamed of and renouncing her Egyptian part to a hybrid character who is eager to explore Egypt, learn Arabic and read Egyptian literature. Reem accompanies her to the library of AUC where she sees “Arabic Literature, translated into clear, familiar English”; she also encourages her to pick up books and spend the rest of her vacation in Khalid’s room reading these books which will of course have a great impact on her later. With Reem and Khalid, Nadia starts seeing her stay in Egypt differently; she finally confesses that she “used” to hate Egypt; the use of the past simple here emphasizes the fact that she can fully embrace her Egyptian half and integrate it into her self-image of a hybrid identity.

Nadia who mocks her mother’s behaviors in London when she goes shopping in her slippers as well as her accent that always manages to turn any /p/ sound to a /b/ sound, tells her mother towards the end of the story “I am going to spend my gap year in Cairo learning Arabic. Properly. Well enough to read a book” (P.19). Lateefa’s comment “maybe, after all, there is hope” (20) seems to be Aboulela’s way of reconciling mother and daughter, which in itself is act towards hybridity and acceptance of the status quo. The cultural gap between mother and daughter, which is rooted in their different inclinations towards eastern and western cultures seem to be on the way to be bridged through understanding and acceptance of one another just as they are.

"The Ostrich"

In "The Ostrich," Aboulela promptly establishes the narrative tone through Majdy's initial utterance upon reuniting with his wife Samra after a visit to her family in Sudan: "You look like something from the third world" (85). This opening remark by Majdy, a Sudanese PhD student in England, sets the stage for a narrative that starkly exemplifies the profound clashes between cultures, manifesting either in a contemptuous rejection of one's own heritage or a resolute adherence to it alongside a disdain for the other culture.

Majdy's marriage to Samra is orchestrated before his departure to the West, a strategic move by his family to ensure the preservation of his Sudanese roots. However, Samra harbors doubts about her ability to anchor Majdy to his cultural origins, reflecting her apprehension that she may lack the strength to counteract the allure of a foreign lifestyle. Despite being married to him, she cannot guarantee shielding him from marrying a foreigner or remaining permanently abroad, as feared by his family: "perhaps I am not strong enough to hold him to his roots" (88). Samra approaches the new culture with a huge weight of expectations from their families in Sudan and with a great deal of self-doubt that Majdy intensifies in her through his haughty and unfair treatment. Thus, Samra's venture into the new culture and her experience in marriage are more complicated and prone to failure.

Aboulela introduces a new perspective on immigration in this story portraying individuals like Majdy whose newfound "home" begets a self-loathing that extends to their native land, culture, and people. Majdy undergoes internalized racism during his stay in the supposedly superior "good life of the West." (87) Throughout the narrative, he unveils his resentment towards his own country and religion, projecting this malice onto his wife. He not only announces his fascination about the western culture but progresses to condemn his native home, a departure from the typical immigrant narrative that often involves alienation or a yearning for the homeland.

On the other hand, Samra adopts the opposite of Majdy's attitude, yearning for all that is Sudanese and resisting all that is western. She is subjected to continuous harassment in London by her own husband who endeavors to fully assimilate into Western norms and to compel her to do the same against her desire. Majdy's attempt to westernize and modernize his wife comes as the opposite of free will and freedom of choice that characterize the very culture he thinks he now embraces. He forces her to shed her veil with the justification that covering her hair would suggest

that he had forced her to wear the hijab and run the risk of being perceived as “backward” and “barbaric” (86) according to the western stereotype some westerners hold of Muslim, Arab men. Despite Samra's comfort in her traditional attire, Majdy dictates her actions in the pursuit of what he believes a more modern and civilized appearance that suits his status in the west. Furthermore, he imposes control over her gait, mandating that she matches his pace to avoid being perceived as "something from the Third World" (85), a woman who follows her husband. In Majdy's pursuit of modernity, he forces Samra to conform, illustrating an inferiority complex wherein he believes that mimicking Western gestures, even those perceived as random and casual, can erase the markers of his Arab, Muslim, and African identity (86).

Conversely, Samra feels alienated in London and struggles to please him. She longs for the authenticity and warmth of her life in Khartoum, rejecting the emptiness of her married life abroad. Samra's dissatisfaction extends beyond her personal life to her dissatisfaction with the community and environment in London, which she perceives as less suitable and comfortable compared to those in Sudan. Her persistent longing for the normality and spontaneity of Khartoum highlights the cultural dissonance and yearning for the familiar in the face of assimilation:

The bus came at last, and we sat upstairs while the green countryside around Heathrow drifted past. The green leaves in Khartoum are a different green, sharper, drier, arrogant in the desert heat. I know this bus, I know this route; it is as familiar as a film one sees several times. Two years in London and when I come back after two months in Khartoum I feel like I am starting all over again. Two months wiped out two years, and I am a stranger once again (89).

Majdy's attempts to align with the modernized West extend beyond superficial impositions; he regulates Samra's conversation topics around strangers, fearing she may appear oppressed or stupid. However, when Samra raises the subject of polygamy on one occasion in the presence of friends, Majdy reacts violently, resorting to physical abuse slapping her after they leave. His vehement response stems from an internalized aversion to his own faith, which he perceives as a marker of backwardness. He even blames Samra for her features and pressures her to adopt a more “modern” mindset, accusing her of being antiquated due to the Islamic faith, suggesting that she should be apologetic about the way she is to be accepted by westerners:

‘They can forgive you for your ugly colour, your thick lips and rough hair, but you must think modern thoughts, be like them on the inside if you can’t be from outside’ he said...I would stand in front of the mirror and, Allah forgive me, hate my face (94).

Majdy's harshness stands in stark contrast to the “Ostrich's” kindness towards Samra and his appreciation of the heritage of Sudan even though he currently resides in England. The “Ostrich” is the nickname that Samra and her colleagues back in university had given to a student with a long nick and dim eyesight, whom she accidentally meets in the airport on her return flight to London. Unlike Majdy, the Ostrich appreciates the beauty of his own culture, language and poetry; he also used to admire Samra’s features and way of dress that Majdy deems ugly and backward. The Ostrich, characterized by his compliments and acceptance of Samra's appearance, embodies appreciation for Sudanese culture, highlighting a stark contrast to Majdy's rejection of all of that is Sudanese, including the features of his wife. Samra craves the familiar and finds happiness in finding it and that is why she compares her husband to the Ostrich after she accidentally ran into him and his bride in the airport. To her, these moments of recognizing the familiar define pure happiness:

Is this happiness then, the sudden rush of recognition, the warmth, the shy laughter? Swapping news of others that we mutually knew. Could I have ever believed that the word happiness can be cramped in a few minutes, a few unexpected minutes in the aisle of an airport? (103)

Despite Majdy's severity, Aboulela preserves his humanity by occasionally revealing a softer side, underscoring his suppressed love for Sudan and its people which he painstakingly attempts to hide to fit into England. He seems to be tormented by ambivalence. Despite his harsh mockery of his homeland, Majdy acknowledges his apprehensions about Samra's return and expresses his contentment when she is by his side. Aboulela thus subtly reveals Majdy's internal conflict and bewilderment, questioning everything and being uncertain, while Samra remains displaced yet unchanged.

The complex and vast spectrum of the dynamics of cultural hybridity and assimilation is explored through Majdy and Samra which go to the extremes on both ends of the spectrum. They embody the bewilderment immigrants experience when they cannot decide what they need to align with as a result of their failure to decide their most cherished personal values. Majdy embodies internalized racism and

disdain for his own culture that can accompany the desire to be fully immersed and accepted in the allegedly superior Western lifestyle. His coercive attempts to force Samra to change into a modern version of herself, according to his desire and against hers, underscore his internal struggle with hybridity, as he simultaneously embraces and loathes aspects of his Arab, Muslim, and African identity. In contrast, Samra, feeling estranged in London, resists such assimilation, cherishing her Sudanese roots and finding comfort only in the familiar. Their differing responses to the clash of cultures within their marriage illustrates the multifaceted nature of cultural hybridity and its impact on identity formation.

“The Boy from the Kebab Shop”

In "The Boy from the Kebab Shop," Aboulela crafts a narrative featuring two intriguing hybrid characters, Dina and Kassim, whose identities are shaped by the intersection of different cultures and religious backgrounds. Like Nadia in “Summer Maze”, both are second generation immigrants. Dina’s mother Shusho is an Egyptian who was infatuated with her Scot father and Kassim’s father is Moroccan who married a Scottish woman.

Dina, a Muslim by birth, has no commitment to her faith as her mother totally embraces consumerist and secular lifestyle and shies away of any spiritual or religious practice:

Descended though Dina was from generations of Muslims, she had never seen anyone praying. On television, yes, or a photo in a schoolbook, but not within arms’ reach, in in the same room, not someone she knew, someone that she loved. (131)

Kassim, too, despite being bestowed with a Muslim identity through circumcision and a Muslim name given by his Moroccan father, lacks a religious upbringing:

Kassim’s Scottish mother had no interest in religion and no Muslim friends. She was close to her large Aberdeenshire family and Kassim grew up with Christmas and Hogmany. Most times he felt he was just like his cousins, though he was conscious of his weird name and his father who spoke English with a funny accent. (125)

However, a “dormant Muslim identity” (125) awakens as he grows up. It is when he becomes friends with some Arab kids at the Judo class and then encounters Basheer, a Sudanese co-worker in the Kebab Shop, that Kassim's connection with Islam is rekindled and deepened and embraced as a part of his identity that he cherishes the most:

Although Kassim regularly attended the converts' class at the mosque and learned a lot, it was the daily contact with the Basheer that had made him live Islam. It was working with Basheer, day-in- day out, through the mundane and the significant that had made Islam a rhythmic reality, a feasible way of living. (125)

Dina's background unfolds as a complex interplay of cultures, with her Egyptian Muslim mother marrying a Scottish man, drawn to his foreign allure and the promise to live in England. However, post-marriage, the charisma of the husband fades, and he transforms into an ordinary figure, a phenomenon that Dina's mother despises even after his death. Despite her Muslim identity, Dina's mother's lifestyle leans more towards the Western, evident in her attitudes and behaviors. Dina's connection to Islam is further weakened by her Westernized diet, imposed upon her by her mother but adopted with indifference. This cultural dissonance underscores the notion that being labeled a Muslim does not necessarily define one's core identity.

The relationship between Dina and Kassim is marked by an intriguing blend of attraction and a sense of belonging to the same religion. Despite her initial discomfort with certain cultural practices Dina, finds solace and acceptance and a sense of connection in the kebab shop, symbolized by the Muslim greeting 'Salamu alleikum,' which, though unfamiliar, makes her feel a part of something new (126). The kebab shop becomes a space where Dina experiences a unique closeness, challenging her preconceived notions and drawing her into a sense of belonging. Witnessing Kassim's prayer becomes a moment of intimacy that invites her to reflect on her own faith and the choices she must make:

He was inviting her to his faith, her faith really, because she had been born into it. He was passing it on silently by osmosis, and how painful and how slow her awakening would be if she now waited long enough, he would he would come out looking for her. If she went home, he would know that she was not keen on his lifestyle, did not want to change her own. She paused on the pavement hesitating between the succulent Mystic life he promised, and the peckish unfulfillment of her parents' home (132).

Yet, the attraction between Dina and Kassim is tinged with pity, revealing the complexities of their hybrid identities. Dina's kiss, met with Kassim's awkwardness, accentuates a gap in their understanding of each other's expectations. When Kassim approaches the topic of marriage, Dina's bafflement and pity suggest a divergence in their perspectives,

reminiscent of pity reserved for the "crippled and the paralysed," hinting at a societal disparity that pulls them apart (127). The narrative skillfully navigates the nuances of hybrid identities, exploring the intersection of religion, cultural dissonance, and the intricacies of human connection. The novel ends with a subtle note that reveals the bewilderment that Dina goes through suggesting that she still needs more time to figure out her identity and whether or not she chooses to walk the path towards Kassim who has already integrated Islam as a way of life.

“Colored Lights”

In "Colored Lights," Aboulela intricately explores the themes of homesickness and alienation which hinder the way to hybridity through the lens of a Sudanese woman, the narrator, navigating the complexities of life on a one-year contract with the BBC World Service in London. The protagonist grapples with alienation as she is physically separated from her parents, her children in Sudan and her husband who works in Kuwait and emotionally mourns the death of her dear brother. The narrator interprets London through the prism of her memories, rendering her past a poignant touchstone in her attempt to make sense of her present.

Amidst feelings of alienation and solitude, the narrator resorts to idealizing details of her Sudanese past, portraying it as a source of cultural richness and the only foundation of joy and belonging to her. Aboulela's sophisticated descriptions capture vivid details of Sudan's customs and rituals, ranging from the intricacies of weddings and burials to profound Islamic concepts. The narrator delves into the spiritual realm, describing the moment after death when angels inquire about one's Lord and prophet, differentiating between the "believing" and the "ignorant", and detailing the significance of Eids and charitable acts for the deceased (154).

The narrator keeps remembering her deceased brother and the circumstances around his death on the day of his wedding and how the family came to accept what happened and found solace in charitable acts done for his soul:

In Taha's memory, my father built a small school in his home village on the Blue Nile...What my mother did for Taha was more simple. She bought a *zeer*, a large clay pot and had it fastened to a tree in front of our house. The *zeer* held water, keeping it cool and it was covered by a round piece of wood on which stood a tin mug for drinking. Early in the morning, I would fill it with water from

the fridge and throughout the day passers-by, hot and thirsty from the glaring sun could drink, resting in the shade of the tree.

Despite her idealization of Sudan's cultural tapestry, the narrator does not shy away from acknowledging the nation's challenges, emphasizing the "random, chaotic" (153) nature of Sudan's socio-economic landscape:

It was the lights that killed Taha, the haphazard worn strings of light that had been hired out for years to house after wedding house. A bare live wire carelessly touched. A rushed drive to the hospital where I watched a stray cat twist and rub its thin body around the legs of the bridegroom's death bed. And the crowded corridors, people squatted on the floor and the screams for Taha were absorbed by the dirty walls, the listless flies and the generous, who had space and tears of a stranger they had never met before (153-154).

The story delves into the struggles faced by many Sudanese, including the narrator's husband Hamid, a veterinarian whose pursuit of better job opportunities abroad becomes a poignant commentary on the broader issues of education, deteriorating financial conditions, unemployment, and limited job prospects back in Sudan:

It seemed that the fate of our generation is separation, from our country or our family. We are ready to go anywhere in search of the work we cannot find at home. Hamid says that there are many Sudanese in Kuwait and he hopes that in the next year or so the girls and I will join him... he tells me amusing stories of the emirs whose horses he cures. In Sudan cattel die from starvation or disease all the time, cattle which are the livelihood of many people. But one of the country's few veterinary surgeons is away working with animals whose purpose is only to amuse. Why? So that his daughters can have a good education, so that he can keep up with the latest research in his field. So that he can justify the years of his life spent in education by earning the salary he deserves. (149)

Nostalgia emerges as a strategic tool in Aboulela's narrative, endowing her characters with an imaginary and often idealized memory of the past in their home country. This nostalgic lens becomes the foundation for their critique of their presence in the West. The story opens with a line that orchestrates the prevalent emotions that control the heroine's existence in the west: "I cried a little as the bus started to fill up with people...I was crying for Taha or maybe because I was homesick, not only for my daughters or my family but sick with longing for the heat,

the sweat and the water of the Nile” (147). She misses everything back home, even things she used to complain about like the sweat and dust and repeated power cuts every day. Aboulela’s cleverness shows when her protagonist compares even the languages accentuating the subtle differences in the vocabulary she uses to express her emotions which is a mix of homesickness and alienation:

The English word ‘homesick’ is a good one; we don’t have exactly the same word in Arabic; in Arabic my state would have been described as ‘yearning for the homeland’ or the ‘sorrow of alienation’ and there is also truth in this. I was alienated from this place where darkness descended unnaturally at 4pm and people went about their business as if nothing had happened (147-148).

Through this lens, the protagonist finds solace and familiarity in her memories, even the sad memory of losing her brother Taha on the day of his wedding due to an electricity accident. She seeks a sense of unity and belonging to provide her with the sensation of continuity with her cultural roots. However, Aboulela adeptly acknowledges the limitations of such a nostalgic outlook. While it serves as a coping mechanism for people of diaspora, it also impedes the migrants' integration and settlement in their new environment. The tension between the characters' yearning for their idealized past and the challenges of adapting to the Western present forms a crucial aspect of Aboulela's exploration of hybridity in the context of migration. “Coloured Lights,” prefigures the bereaved Sudanese protagonists of her novels *The Translator* and the postcolonial London location of *Minaret*. All three characters find communication hard in their “Elsewhere” residence, though each adopts a different attitude to hybridity. The unnamed protagonist of “Coloured Lights” believes that it is hard for westerners to understand the circumstances surrounding the death of her brother and that they might even see them as a silly “joke”:

I had been in London for nearly seven months, and I told no one about Taha. I felt that it would sound distasteful or like a bad joke, but electricity had killed others in Khartoum too, though I did not know them personally. (154)

The protagonist remains fixated in her idealized memories of the past which stand in the face of her mixing with the new culture; she is there for a mission, and she shows no concern in being part of the world she does not belong to.

“The Museum”

In “The Museum”, Aboulela continues her exploration of the diverse attitudes of her female characters from the East, notably through the character of Shadia, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of hybridity, assimilation, and resistance. Like the unnamed female protagonist of “Colored Lights”, she is deeply entrenched into her mother culture to be able to fit comfortably in her new environment, but unlike her, she is bolder and more outspoken about her opinions and attitudes, and she is tormented by the pull and push of her attitude towards both cultures.

Shadia’s dilemma is more intense as she oscillates between her yearning for her culture and her indignation and resentment of it. Her journey in the west is a journey of self-discovery and the realization of how false her life was; all her life she had to pretend to be someone other herself to please others; even her desire to get a degree is part of what society has planned for her, not out of her free will or passion for study. As she recollects her comfortable life back in Sudan she realizes that all she has ever done in her life was to maintain a social status that her mother sees fit for her. Away from home she can see that her life was fake; it is based on maintaining appearances to be accepted in the push society she seeks to be part of. What weighs more heavily on her soul is the mixed feelings she has for Brian, her Scot colleague:

She was made up of layers. Somewhere inside, deep under the crust of vanity, in the untampered-with essence, she would glow and feel humbled, thinking, this just for me, he cut his hair for me. But there were other layers, bolder, more to the surface.

Whether in Sudan or Aberdeen, Shadia cares more for appearances than for the reality; this is what she has always learned. She judges Brian, who helped her with her study and showed interest in learning more about her country, culture and religion, labeling him an “idiot” because of his looks (168):

She was giving him too much attention thinking about him. He was just an immature and closed-in sort of character. He probably came from a small town; his parents were probably poor, low class. In Khartoum, she never mixed with people like that. Her mother liked her to be friends with people who were higher up. How else were she and her sisters going to marry well? (165)

The narrative unfolds as Shadia's interactions with her wealthy fiancé, Fareed who lives in Sudan, and her white classmate Brian,

highlighting contrasting relationships that illuminate complex loyalty dynamics and reveal her deep inner conflict and perplexity. Aboulela deftly parallels Shadia's connections with her parents and fiancé, underscoring a delicate balance between loyalty and defiance. Despite her mother's dominant influence in Sudan, Shadia's secret visits to her father's clinic and her penchant for deception emphasize an underlying resistance to parental authority. Similarly, her engagement to Fareed, marked by his unwavering support and financial contributions, contrasts with her unexpected attraction to Brian, illustrating the intricacies of emotional conflict in the face of cultural expectations. Shadia is one of the most complicated female protagonists in the collection and indeed in Aboulela's bulk of work. She oscillates between her love for her father, and her dependency on her mother, between defiance and conformity to the rules of a hypocritical society that judges people according to their material positions and social status, between the financial privileges that her fiancé offers and her attraction to Brian. In her "Elsewhere" residence, she feels alienation and self-pity as she believes no one cares about her struggle:

There was no time to talk about her courses on the telephone, no space for her anxieties. Fareed was not interested in her studies. He had said, 'I am very broad-minded to allow you to study abroad. Other men would not have put up with this...' It was her mother who was keen for her to study, to get a postgraduate degree from Britain and then have a career after she got married. 'This way' her mother had said, 'you will have your in-laws respect. They have money but you will have a degree. Don't end up like me. I left my education to marry your father...' (164)

Shadia, then, emerges as a symbol of staunch anti-hybridity in Aberdeen, driven solely by academic pursuits to please her family, with little inclination to engage with the host culture. Her disdain for Western attributes, evident in her mockery and contempt of Brian's earring and straight hair, reflects a resistance to assimilation. Moreover, when she senses Brian's genuine interest to befriend her and know more about the part of the world she comes from, Shadia seizes the opportunity to express her displeasure with everything western, revealing a nuanced power dynamic and her evolving perception of Western ideals.

A pivotal scene unfolds when Shadia and Brian visit a museum featuring an exhibit on Africa. Shadia's frustration with the portrayal of Africa as primitive and archaic manifests, and she vehemently rejects the narrative presented, asserting, "[t]hey are telling you lies in this museum... Don't believe them. It's all wrong. It's not jungles and

antelopes, it's people. We have things like computers and cars. We have... I shouldn't be here with you. You shouldn't talk to me" (181).

This encounter becomes a symbolic battleground where Shadia's severe resistance to Western narratives clashes with Brian's willingness to question preconceptions about Arab Muslim culture. Despite his efforts to bridge the cultural gap, Shadia remains resolute in her unwillingness to communicate and integrate into Western life. Her admission at the end of the visit to the museum is telling of her self-sabotage and weakness that she shields under an armor of vanity and deceptive appearances:

If she was strong, she would have explained and not tired of explaining. She would have patiently taught him another language, letters curved like the epsilon and gamma he knew from mathematics. She would have shown him that the words could be read from the right from right to left. If she was not small in the museum, if she was really strong, she would have made his trip to Mecca real, not only in a book" (182),

The quote underscores her internal conflict and the barriers of assimilation she is aware of. The narrative unveils Shadia's profound homesickness, as she longs for familiar elements such as the call to prayer in Sudan, emphasizing her desire for a deeper connection with her cultural roots and a more profound understanding of herself.

Aboulela employs a stark dichotomy between Shadia's behavior in Sudan and Aberdeen, unraveling the complex interplay of hybridity and cultural identity amidst the backdrop of academic pursuits and migration. In Aberdeen, Shadia emerges as a vocal critic of Western norms, challenging societal expectations and subverting traditional roles. The tension between her resistance to assimilation and the evolving dynamics of her relationships serves as a microcosm for the broader discourse on cultural identity in the context of migration.

In delving into the analysis of Leila Aboulela's selected stories, the exploration centers on the nuanced examination of her characters, discerning whether they embody traits of hybridity or exhibit resistance to hybridization. Aboulela, herself, emerges as a master of navigating the complex terrain of post-colonial literature, presenting characters whose identities are intricately woven with the threads of multiple cultural influences.

It is noteworthy that Aboulela's exploration of hybridity in *Elsewhere, Home* transcends the characters' identity to the settings and the language itself. As we read the stories, we find that Bhabha's comments on the dilemma of the post-colonial immigrant in the first page

of *The Location of Culture* applies to them: “We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1).

Hybridity, then, stands as a defining characteristic of Leila Aboulela's literary mosaic, emblematic of her steadfast commitment to bridging the linguistic chasm between Arabic and English. Within her fiction, Arabic expressions seamlessly intertwine with the English narrative, interlinking with Scottish street slang and echoes of colonial discourse. This linguistic amalgamation not only enriches the fabric of her prose but also serves as a conduit through which readers can intimately engage with the essence of her cultural heritage. Aboulela's oeuvre emerges as a poignant testament to linguistic hybridity, wherein the convergence of languages mirrors the blending of diverse cultural elements within her narratives.

Moreover, Aboulela's mastery of linguistic hybridity extends beyond mere lexical selection. She adeptly employs an intertextual approach, interweaving references to the Qur'an, Sudanese literary luminaries such as Tayeb Salih, Western romantic literature, and Arab poets like Ibn Zaidoun. This intertextual tapestry enriches the layers of her narratives, resonating with cultural echoes from disparate sources and contributing to the depth and intricacy of her storytelling. However, the issue of language within her works merits further scholarly investigation and exploration.

Furthermore, Aboulela's adept portrayal of settings serves to deepen the exploration of hybridity in her narratives. From the wintry landscapes of remote Scottish cities like Aberdeen to the bustling multiculturalism of foggy and rainy London and the familial warmth of Khartoum, Aboulela deftly navigates diverse geographies that shape her characters' identities. These settings transcend mere backdrop status, becoming integral components in the construction of hybrid identities and offering readers a multifaceted perspective of cultural intersections. In the realm of academia, it invites further research of her works in the light of other literary theories like geocriticism.

The thematic juxtapositions present in Aboulela's narratives, such as the contrast between Sudan and England geographically and weather wise, between tradition and modernity, and the nuanced positioning of mixed-heritage characters, illuminate the complexities of hybrid existence. Characters straddle the dichotomies of 'tradition' and 'modernity,' embodying the intricate negotiations of identity in a post-colonial milieu. Aboulela's narratives serve as a lens through which

**Women in Transit: Hybridity in Selected Short Stories from Leila
Aboulela's Collection *Elsewhere, Home***

readers engage with all spectrums of hybridity, reflecting broader socio-cultural dynamics influenced by the historical backdrop of post-colonialism.

In essence, Aboulela's adept command of linguistic hybridity, coupled with her nuanced portrayal of diverse settings and thematic explorations, underscores the pivotal role of post-colonial literature in bridging the divide between East and West. Whether embracing hybridity or grappling with its implications, her characters become conduits for shared experiences, fostering a deeper understanding and connection among readers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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