

The Transcultural Identities Found in Leila Aboulela's Elsewhere, Home

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Abstract:

This study specifically examines the transformation of the concepts of identity, belonging, and faith within the context of postmigration narratives with a particular emphasis on the work of Leila Aboulela. Moreover, it explores the shifting meanings and approaches to these concepts within the postmigrant framework found in Aboulela's Elsewhere, Home. In this work, Aboulela has shifted away from focusing on the displacement of individual characters and has instead embraced a perspective that views migration as a process of engagement and participation rather than integration. Furthermore, this perspective considers migration a transcultural phenomenon rather than solely a transnational one. Moreover, this study places significant emphasis on the transforming role played by postmigrant characters who possess the ability to cultivate coherent forms of belonging that extend beyond essentialized conceptions of ethnicity, nationality, and collective identities as they contribute to the transcultural ethics.

keywords: identity, belonging, faith, postmigration, transculturality.

الهويات العابرة للثقافات في المجموعة القصصية "في مكان آخر، وطن" للكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا

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ملخص الدراسة:

تتناول هذه الدراسة بشكل خاص تحول مفاهيم الهوية والانتماء والإيمان داخل سرديات ما بعد الهجرة، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على أعمال الكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا. كما كشفت عن التحولات في المعاني والنهج لهذه المفاهيم ضمن الإطار السردي لما بعد الهجرة في المجموعة القصصية "في مكان آخر، وطن" لأبو العلا. في هذا العمل، انتقلت أبو العلا بعيدًا عن التركيز على نزوح الأفراد، واعتمدت منظورًا يعتبر الهجرة عملية انخراط ومشاركة لا عملية اندماج فقط. وعلاوة على ذلك، يعتبر هذا المنظور الهجرة ظاهرة عابرة للثقافات بدلاً من أن تكون فقط عابرة للحدود الوطنية. وتولي هذه الدراسة تأكيدًا كبيرًا للدور المتحول الذي تلعبه شخصيات ما بعد الهجرة والذين يمتلكون القدرة على تنمية أشكال متينة من الانتماء تتجاوز التصورات المثبتة للعرق والجنسية والهويات الجماعية، حيث يسهمون في تطوير أخلاقيات عابرة للثقافات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هوية، انتماء، إيمان، ما بعد الهجرة، عبر الثقافات.

1. Introduction

Leila Aboulela is a Sudanese writer who was born in Sudan in 1964 but presently resides in Scotland where she produces literary works in the English language. Aboulela's latest literary contributions include the novel Bird Summons (2019) and the collection of short stories titled *Elsewhere*. Home which was published in 2018 and received the esteemed recognition of being awarded the 2018 Saltire Scottish Fiction Book of the Year Award. Aboulela is also a highly esteemed author of several other notable novels including The Translator (1999), which was recognized as one of the New York Times' 100 Notable Books of the Year. Minaret (2005), Lyrics Alley (2011), and The Kindness of Enemies (2015). The novel Lyrics Alley has been recognized for its literary merit as well. Not only was it the recipient of the prestigious Scottish Book Awards, but it also made it to the shortlist for the Regional Commonwealth Writers Prize. Furthermore, Leila is recognized as the inaugural recipient of the esteemed Caine Prize for African Writing. The novels *The Kindness of Enemies, Minaret*, and *Lyrics* Alley were included on the long lists for both the Orange Prize and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

The fictional characters in Leila Aboulela's works exhibit traces of influence from her personal experiences traveling through various cultural and geographical landscapes including Sudan, Egypt, Britain, Indonesia, Scotland, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, migration and transculturalism have played a significant role in Aboulela's life as she is the daughter of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother. In fact, in an interview with Daniel Musiitwa, Aboulela herself claimed that her experience of traveling played a significant role in shaping her identity as a writer. More specifically, her writing journey began in 1992 after she departed Sudan and relocated to Scotland where she experienced a profound sense of homesickness for Khartoum, her hometown.

The individuals in her immediate vicinity possessed limited knowledge regarding Sudan or Islam, both of which constituted integral components of her personal identity. This experience heightened her sense of estrangement. What is more, the onset of anti-Islam sentiments in Western media that began in the 1980s became a period during which her residency in Scotland engendered

a defensive response within her. Abruptly, she found herself compelled to articulate the favorable aspects of life in Khartoum emphasizing the inherent goodness of its inhabitants while attributing the collective departure to external circumstances rather than personal volition.

During her time in that particular cultural setting, there was a prevalent belief that consistently emphasized the superiority of the Western world while portraying Africa as a region plagued by various challenges. Additionally, there was a perception that Islam perpetuates the oppression of women, and it was even suggested that she should express gratitude for having managed to leave that environment. The presence of youthful exuberance and a strong sense of personal dignity compelled her to oppose the characterization at hand. This, she contends, was the catalyst that prompted her to start writing (Musiitwa, 2011) and led to the discovery of her literary voice occurring within that realm of fiction.

Aboulela's personal encounter with migration and self-imposed exile has instilled within her a profound aspiration to craft a counternarrative that challenges the predominant Western discourse surrounding Islam. She gained an understanding of the ongoing conflict between the East and West and finds herself, today, in a position to advocate for the marginalized East within the Western narrative. Moreover, residing in Britain has also heightened her exposure to the unfavorable portrayals associated with her racial and religious background which constitute the prominent elements shaping her identity, and Aboulela often finds herself perceived as an oppressed oriental female in Western society.

Aboulela's literary works have been categorized as African narratives, British Muslim literature, and Halal Fiction. Sadia Abbas regards the term "Halal Fiction" as a perplexing concept, arguing that Aboulela's novels do not primarily revolve around religious themes. Further, Abbas asserts that the absence of divine representation is evident in Aboulela's novels (Abbas, 2014). The perspective presented by Abbas possesses a degree of validity, albeit with certain limitations in its comprehensiveness. Aboulela's works do not explicitly engage with religious matters concerning the divine, theological inquiries, the afterlife, or metaphysical concepts. In

contrast, the author presents a concise depiction of religion and how individuals encounter faith in their daily lives.

On a similar note, Ferial Ghazoul highlights the fact that the Islamic nature of her writing does not stem from religious correctness or didacticism. Instead, it exhibits a distinct narrative logic in which faith and its rituals assume dynamic forms of existence (Ghazoul, 2001).

According to Abbas, the portrayal of Islam in Aboulela's fiction serves as a psychological remedy that provides solace to individuals of the Muslim faith who find themselves in a state of exile, thus allowing them to alleviate the distress caused by displacement and various forms of deprivation (Abbas, 2014). Aboulela's novels depict characters whose lives are guided by faith and rituals, facilitating their assimilation into a state of exile. Consequently, in these narratives, Muslims can experience a sense of belonging regardless of their physical location, as their true home is found within their faith. Aboulela expresses her aspiration to incorporate practicing Muslims into the realm of English literary fiction and create novels that embody Muslim aesthetics akin to how numerous Western classics were shaped by a Christian ethos.

According to Wail Hassan, Aboulela's literary narratives, which incorporate practicing Muslims into the Western literary landscape, establish her as a prominent figure among other Sudanese writers. Hassan posits that Aboulela's fiction serves as a culmination of Tayeb Salih's project. In contrast to his narratives that depict various forms of failure, such as the failure of the national project, the colonial bourgeoisie, postcolonial intellectuals, and secular Arab ideologies of modernity, her fiction revolves around narratives of redemption and fulfillment achieved through the lens of Islam. indicative of Salih's literary contributions are disappointments experienced during the 1960s, whereas Aboulela's writings encapsulate the essence of the Islamist movement that gained prominence in the mid-1970s, emphasizing the belief that "Islam is the solution" (Hassan, 2011, p. 183). It is undeniable that Aboulela's earlier narratives exhibit a heightened emphasis on the religious aspect.

Aboulela's earlier literary works predominantly revolve around the concept of "going back" which does not exclusively pertain to a physical return to one's original country or presumed homeland. While numerous characters in her narratives grapple with issues of identity and the quest for a sense of belonging, the primary focus lies in the journey back to the Islamic faith. This exaggeration of dichotomized cultural differences is prevalent in discussions surrounding ethnicity and migrant discourse (Baumann, 1995), which appears in Aboulela's earlier works, and it is obvious that she is aware of this fact. Aboulela realizes the need for a newly emergent literary trajectory - the postmigrant narrative. This approach involves breaking down the assigned identities to allow her characters to coexist and interact with various cultures.

One of the key aspects in the theoretical analysis of postmigration is the process of de-essentializing the perceived coherences and homogeneities of individuals labeled as migrants, as well as dismantling the assigned identities (Bromley, 2017). In an interview conducted by Keija Parssinen, Aboulela revealed that gradually throughout her writing career, she recognized a gradual transformation in her characters as they began to exhibit a greater sense of comfort and familiarity within the British context (Parssinen, 2020). Over time, their homesickness diminished and they began to exhibit a sense of global citizenship. This can clearly be seen in *Elsewhere*, *Home* (2018), one of Aboulela's more recent literary works as will be presented through the subsequent analysis.

In *Elsewhere, Home*, the focus of the narratives has shifted away from solely depicting the displacement of individuals. Instead, there is a growing emphasis on portraying postmigration as a process of communication and interaction, rather than mere integration. Furthermore, this portrayal highlights the transcultural nature of postmigrant identity, rather than solely emphasizing its transnational aspects.

Elsewhere, Home is a collection of thirteen short stories encompassing Leila Aboulela's initial works from the 1990s to her most recent fictional pieces. The short stories titled "The Museum", "Majed", "Coloured Lights", "The Ostrich", "Souvenirs", "The Boy from the Kebab Shop", and "Something Old, Something New" were initially released between 1999 and 2003, thereby classifying them as part of Aboulela's earlier body of work. The characters in these narratives express doubts about their sense of belonging in their new

locations, particularly when it comes to religion. This serves to emphasize the contrasting dynamics between the dominant society and the marginalized spaces they perceive themselves to inhabit. Later narratives such as "Farida's Eyes," "Summer Maze," "The Circle Line," and "Pages of Fruit" were published between 2012 and 2017, and these narratives exhibit a notable absence of overt religious connotations. The temporal gap existing among the different narratives facilitates a chronological examination of the prevailing theme - belonging - allowing for the identification of potential shifts and alterations in terms of how they are addressed. This entails the observation and exploration of interconnections, disconnections, generational interactions, geographical locations, cultural variations, and traditional and spiritual practices within diverse cultures and boundaries.

1.1. Rational of the study

The formation of national identities is notably shaped by the impact of national cultures and literature. The aforementioned formation has increased our understanding of the substantial impact of literature in the ongoing endeavor to deconstruct and redefine cultural and national boundaries in the current era of globalization. Contrary to national identity, transcultural identity refers to the phenomenon in which identities undergo a fluid and dynamic transformation as a result of engaging in several cultural contacts (Nordin, Hansen & Llena, 2013).

It is worth mentioning Lena Englund (2023), who argues that religious identification is the lens from which the stories of Aboulela are conveyed, not the subject. This is in accordance with Römhild's (2017) proposal for migration being the vantage point instead of always being the focal point for inspection. In Englund's study, an analysis of *Elsewhere*, *Home* from the viewpoints of gender, generation, and religion can provide insights into the modern postmigrant society in selected short stories and be contrasted to the personal growth experienced by Sammar and Najwa in *The Translator* and *Minaret*, respectively. Englund asserts that the concept of post-migration involves the challenging and potentially conflicting process of navigating cultural and political divides. This phenomenon is evident in the stories examined in her research. Therefore, her primary finding is that postmigrant identities and

societies arise via interactions between individuals as well as from their self-perceptions and definitions, which ultimately shape their interactions with others. However, this study examines the transcultural identity which refers to the process of identities undergoing a fluid and dynamic alteration due to engaging with multiple cultures. The present study takes a different course by emphasizing the importance of characters' convivial ethics in promoting their harmonious coexistence within a globalized society and shaping their transcultural identities.

First, this study, far from being exhaustive in covering this research area, aims to contribute to the elimination of a gap in the literature. The concepts of transnationalism and transculturality are widely recognized as significant in current migration and postmigration studies; however, they have not received comparable attention in the realms of postmigratory fiction and transcultural literary works. Despite the extensive studies on postmigration (Pries & Sezgin 2012; D'Angelo 2015; Amelina, Horvath & Meeus 2016; Keskiner, Eve & Ryan 2022) there has been a tendency to see this movement solely as either a cultural or a political phenomenon with little rigorous analysis of its politics of belonging. Secondly, these studies tend to ignore the extent to which ideological shifts are reflected in literary works. So, the objective of the current study is to provide a scholarly contribution to ongoing discussions regarding migratory processes by examining self-organizations in a fictional work by the author Leila Aboulela as platforms for settlement and inclusion that go beyond the simplistic dichotomies often portrayed in earlier literary and fictional migratory discourse. This study will demonstrate through a close reading of Leila Aboulela's Elsewhere, Home how the author offers her characters a new site of belonging through developing literary narratives. The connections between postmigrant identities and the transcultural values linked to them within the context of the evolving communicative world will be examined as well. This means to investigate how postmigrant individuals can engage and communicate with diverse cultures while simultaneously maintaining their distinct values and identities. Thus, this analysis will explore Aboulela's approach to the subject of transcultural values by considering her distinctive narrative and philosophical trajectories.

2. Method

Belonging and faith — the concepts of identity that have always been central to the narratives of migration in general and to Aboulela's recent works in particular — change in their meaning and in the way they are addressed from a postmigrant perspective. The utilization of the postmigrant perspective as a categorical framework for answering this study's questions can prove to be advantageous. The objective of adopting a postmigrant approach is to highlight the prominence of marginalized artistic and literary practices, as well as the voices and discussions about belonging, transcultural values, and ethical challenges that arise in the context of postmigration.

As articulated by Edward Said, the concept of recounting narratives through the lens of migration to highlight previously marginalized and overlooked forms of knowledge signifies a form of practice that resists and challenges dominant ideologies. This practice is integral to postmigrant thinking, which involves a critical examination of social and societal circumstances through a contrapuntal approach (Said, 1993, p. 32).

The postmigrant lens, akin to the postcolonial perspective, is employed to examine social structures and power dynamics. That is to say, Aboulela's narrative bears a counter-hegemonic culture, the emerging paradigm of belonging characterized by convivial ethics, that might hold significant pertinence for fostering harmonious coexistence within the context of a globalized society.

The present study will approach the subject matter by exploring pertinent theories and concepts developed by Roger Bromley (2017) and Florian Ohnmacht and Erol Yıldız (2021) that are germane to the question under consideration. Postmigration not only serves as a subject of examination but also serves as a lens through which to analyze the narratives of Aboulela in *Elsewhere, Home* and to reinterpret the processes of social transformation, as well as global and local power dynamics. Concerning this, this study intends to pose a couple of questions about what might constitute a postmigrant or the condition of post-migration in Aboulela's work. These questions are:

1. Does the developing paradigm of belonging, namely postmigration which is characterized by transculturality, contribute to the preservation or deconstruction of the distinct Muslim identity? 2. Does the author's new counter-hegemonic narrative which is accompanied by a convivial ethics hold any significant pertinence for fostering her characters' harmonious coexistence within the context of a globalized society?

3. Post-migration as the New Belonging

The concept of the "cogent existential reality" serves as a means to articulate the experiences of individuals who are marginalized or excluded due to power dynamics. These individuals are often subjected to rigid categorizations and essentialized ethnic identities which, in turn, perpetuate social inequities, discriminatory practices, and racism (Bromley, 2017). One of the key challenges in the theoretical exploration of postmigration is the need to deconstruct and challenge the notion of fixed and uniform identities among migrants. This involves critically examining and dismantling the assigned labels and categories that are often imposed on migrant communities. It is important to consider the insights of Bauman who argues that ethnic discourse tends to exaggerate and oversimplify cultural differences by creating rigid dichotomies (Bromley, 2017). Roger Bromley examines the strategies employed by individuals and communities in their efforts to transcend restrictive oversimplified categorizations that perpetuate a sense of alienation and marginalization (Bromley, 2017). He finds that "the transformation of cultures into new combinations' is another possible way of thinking about postmigration" (Bromley, 2017, p. 37).

In line with the above insights, Florian Ohnmacht and Erol Yıldız examine the subsequent generations that are commonly attributed to a migratory history in public discourse. These individuals who are young and encounter discrimination and racism in society engage with and navigate these challenges, ultimately positioning themselves within this context of conflict.

The authors argue that as a result of this phenomenon, a new counter-hegemonic culture emerged accompanied by a convivial ethics that holds significant pertinence for societal coexistence within the context of globalization (Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). Bromley suggests that this emerging new culture is reflected in the literary work of Aboulela where she subverts the old views of the existing discourse on migration and dismantles the fixed diasporic

identities. The dichotomies presented in the context such as Western versus non-Western and locals versus outsiders which have traditionally established dominant norms are now being critically examined. Ohnmacht and Yıldız assert that, from the point of view of a postmigrant, new differences become apparent that make the usual way of attributing differences debatable. The postmigrant viewpoint uses the experience of migration as a paradigm. It brings to the fore ways of knowing that were previously ignored, breaking down the ideological discourses about migration and integration (Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). This means that postmigrant rhetoric challenges the prevailing differences between us versus them and emphasizes the acceptance of diverse affiliations, fluidity, and ambiguous positionalities. This entails a new representation of what is referred to as transcultural identities. Transculturalism can be viewed as the act of perceiving one's own identity within the context of another individual or group, thus fostering a sense of interconnectedness across diverse human civilizations. Furthermore. it entails the incorporation, integration, or amalgamation of several cultural components, thereby transcending the boundaries of a single culture (Cuccioletta, 2002). A transcultural society refers to a collective of individuals residing inside a community where diverse cultures, religions, and languages coexist harmoniously via mutual comprehension and cooperation. The concept being discussed encompasses all human cultures and embodies the notion of freedom encompassing the many populations across the globe. From this particular standpoint, Aboulela offers a new concept of home and belonging that might be defined as personal encounters and interactions with a specific locality.

4. From Fixed to Transcultural Identities in Elsewhere, Home

Later dialogue of Aboulela surrounding new narratives and senses of belonging and their articulation through the specific emblematic acts of her characters can be described as postmigrant. While this concept shares some similarities with the notion of diaspora, it also diverges from it by placing greater emphasis on a trajectory towards the present and future rather than being rooted in the original culture. They may initially originate from a position of minority or marginality but gradually evolve within emerging frameworks to the extent of becoming integrated into established

entities such as British culture or the broader discourse of national and global cultures. In this regard, this study will examine data from the collection to investigate the changes in the author's literary representation and the evolution of her characters within a postmigrant setting.

In Aboulela's earlier works such as "The Museum," "Majed," "Coloured Lights," "The Ostrich," "Souvenirs," "The Boy From the Kebab Shop" and "Something Old, Something New" the experience of immigration evokes a deep longing for specific elements of their religious or cultural heritage for several protagonists. Consequently, the categorization of these narratives as migrant narratives is appropriate. Within the context of "The Museum" (1999), for example, Shadia, a Sudanese graduate student, expresses her longing for some aspects of her native country to her Scottish classmate Surprisingly, Shadia reveals that she experiences Bryan. homesickness for elements she did not anticipate missing like the Muslim call to prayer. The central theme of the narrative revolves around the challenges associated with communication among distinct groups shaped by colonialism. Although Bryan and Shadia make progress in bridging this communication gap, their efforts are abruptly interrupted during their visit to a nearby museum, ultimately leading to Shadia declaring, "I shouldn't be here with you. You shouldn't talk to me..." (p. 181). Aboulela's work prompts inquiries on the dynamics between formerly colonized nations and their colonizers; however, it refrains from providing definitive solutions.

In essence, postmigration pertains to the politics and culture of acknowledging and validating one's own identity, as well as the identities of others, particularly those who are perceived as different or marginalized. The action being described can be characterized as an act of appropriation where individuals take ownership of and modify the political culture of storytelling. This act serves as a means of challenging and responding to the stereotypes perpetuated by colonialism (Bromley, 2017). However, Shadia demonstrates a process of internalization in response to the story presented within the museum which is substantiated by her own anxieties and the presence of a conflicted self-identity. This is attributable to Shadia's possession of a migrant identity and her current situation as not

having yet attained postmigrant status. Thus, Aboulela's narratives explore not only the concept of postmigration but also the difficulties encountered in developing a postmigrant perspective and transcending the isolation and displacement experienced by individuals marginalized and racialized by the dominant society.

In "Majed" (2000), Aboulela employs the framework of interracial relationships as a means to portray complexities associated with race, religion, and culture. The narrative in "Majed" revolves around the intersection of religious practices, as it portrays the experiences of a Sudanese Muslim immigrant who is married to a Scottish Muslim convert. Hamid, a doctoral candidate, is employed at an Asda supermarket so he can provide financial support for his spouse, Ruqiyyah, and their children. Ruqiyyah demonstrates a strong enthusiasm for acquiring proficiency in the Arabic language, but Hamid, in a concealed manner, seeks solace from the challenges of his everyday existence in the consumption of whiskey. He lacks comprehension regarding his spouse's religious commitment as seen by her adherence to wearing a hijab while venturing outside and her observance of early morning prayers. His absence of this level of commitment perplexes him.

In "Coloured Lights" (2001), the diasporic identity is abiding long-lasting emotional and psychological wounds as a result of displacement and the experience of loss. Aboulela's literary work is imbued with a pervasive sentiment of sorrow, an emotion that invariably accompanies the state of being uprooted and displaced within the diasporic encounter. The protagonist states: "I was homesick, not only for my daughters or family, but sick with longing for the heat, the sweat and the water of the Nile" (147). The short story consistently explores the topic of yearning for one's nation of origin.

In "The Ostrich" (2001), the short story illuminates the perspectives of the main character, Sumra and her Sudanese spouse, Majdy, about their own distinct cultural backgrounds, as well as their perceptions of the British culture. The short story critically explores the impact of anti-Islamic, anti-Muslim, and racial discourses and attitudes on the author's portrayal of an identity crisis. Aboulela effectively depicts the main character, Samra, who experiences psychological and physical distress, abuse, and a sense of alienation

within the context of the exile. Within the narrative, Samra frequently reminisces about her fond memories with "The Ostrich", a fellow student at the university, alongside her recollections of the profound sense of affiliation, esteem, elegance, safety, and cohesion that her homeland bestowed upon her. The process of memory serves to facilitate the healing of Samra's wounded psyche, enabling her to maintain her existence and integrity amidst the turmoil of her identity crisis.

However, the migrant character fosters feelings of self-loathing. Majdy undergoes a process of internalized racism wherein he perceives Sudan through a lens of self-deprecation. This perspective is subsequently imparted to his wife, Samra, as he conveys to her that Western people are somehow superior. Majdy's reasoning for this belief includes attributing superiority to a Western garbage collector due to his apparent freedom from afflictions such as malaria, anemia, and bilharzia. Additionally, Majdy highlights the collector's ability to engage in activities such as reading newspapers. writing letters, and possessing a television in his household. The challenges faced by the second generation in navigating new forms of relationships cannot be solely attributed to familial or cultural factors. This is because their experiences extend beyond the confines of migration, as they are constantly situated within the broader context of colonial power dynamics, particularly for individuals who are non-white. This pertains to the ongoing perpetuation, replication, and re-composition of the colonial condition in contemporary times (Bromley, 2017).

Similarly, in "Souvenirs" (2001), Aboulela demonstrates that individuals engaged in interracial partnerships may still harbor biased attitudes. Yassir undertakes a journey back to his place of origin, Khartoum, to reunite with his family. When he asks his Scottish spouse, Emma, to accompany him on a visit to his maternal residence to introduce her to his mother and familiarize her with his upbringing, she declines by stating, "I've never heard anything good about that place" (68). Emma displays a preference for embracing the refined aspects of Yassir that align with her personal preferences while disregarding the elements that appear unappealing to her. Emma asks him to get photographs or artwork that would provide her with a sense of the local lifestyle and scenery there, something

exotic. This statement can be interpreted as a critique of the Orientalist perspective that assumes a sense of entitlement to intrude upon the personal lives of individuals from other cultures to acquire anything perceived as "exotic" for personal consumption or display.

In the short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop" (2001), Aboulela demonstrates the potential of reflective nostalgia in facilitating a sense of reconnection for individuals or characters within the diaspora who have experienced displacement. The narrative is replete with depictions of delectable cuisine from North Africa, serving as a metaphor for spiritual sustenance and the process of reconnecting with one's identity through Islam. The female protagonist, Dina, experiences a transformative journey through her newfound friendship with "the boy from the kebab shop". This relationship allows her to reconnect with the cultural traditions, including culinary practices, of her homeland which she had abandoned due to immigration. This reconnection offers her the chance to rediscover the richness and depth of the spiritual aspects of life when the boy "was inviting her to his faith, her faith really, because she had been born into it" (132). Their focus has been directed towards cultural and spiritual activities that pertain to the preservation of ethnic identities and the establishment of transnational connections.

"Something Old, Something New" (2003) depicts explicit instances of racism, as a white Scottish individual who has converted to Islam travels to Sudan to marry his lover. However, his embrace of the Islamic faith does not diminish his orientalist perspectives. The initial statement "Her country disturbed him" expeditiously devolves into the perpetuation of clichés regarding perceived threats posed by numerous regions in the developing world (21). He believes that anyone among these Sudanese pedestrians possesses the capability to swiftly strike him through the window, forcibly remove his wristwatch and sunglasses and seize his cash (23).

In sum, Aboulela's body of earlier works exhibits a notable focus on religion which holds significant relevance in the lives of numerous individuals, particularly those who undergo various forms of displacement and bereavement. As a result, a restricted comprehension of the concept of home is presented where characters depend on their retained memories of the original country and the

past to fill the gaps and establish a sense of belonging. Also, Aboulela's earlier works constitute counter-narratives that challenge the predominant Western discourse surrounding Islam. In this manner, the author reinforces the notion cautioned by Baumann (1995) on the amplification of polarized cultural distinctions, a phenomenon that is evidently prominent in her discussion of ethnicity and discourse about migrants. Yet, the author engages in a different literary representation to address belonging and transcultural identities in her later works.

The following narratives in question exhibit a notable absence of overt religious connotations. In "Farida's Eyes" (2012), the central character in the narrative has a preoccupation with her physical form, namely grappling with a visual impairment. She has an outward conflict with her parents who deny her need for glasses and an internal conflict as she grapples with the apprehension of potential vision loss. The issue of education holds significant importance. The topic of familial ties and the absence of familial support are also examined. Moreover, Farida's parents adhere to conventional perspectives on gender dynamics within the domestic sphere. Because of the lack of family support, Farida seeks outside inspiration for role models beyond her own family. She expresses admiration for Sister Carlotta, who helps her.

Given that Farida's name is of Arabic origin, it is reasonable to infer that she comes from Arab ancestry. She refrains from expressing dissatisfaction to her parents regarding her poor vision necessitating the use of corrective eyewear. When Sister Carlotta urges her to seek professional assistance in obtaining appropriate eyewear, Farida experiences feelings of shame: "'My father said no need'" (52). This implies that she possesses an understanding of her father's reluctance to allocate funds toward addressing her visual impairment, yet she chooses to remain discreet on the matter. This suggests that Farida has been socialized within a familial context that emphasizes respect towards her father as the primary figure of authority discouraging any form of contradiction. Bromley argues that the second generation is faced with the challenge of navigating both familial expectations and the power dynamics that arise from being perceived as "other" (Bromley, 2017). If the concept of postmigration pertains to the act of severing ties and bonds, it is

contingent upon specific circumstances and does not encompass all links and ties, this includes familial ones. Postmigration refers to the act of resisting the exertion of power that aims to contain, classify, and restrict individuals who belong to a non-dominant ethnic group inside the confines of "otherness." In this manner, Farida is considered to be a part of a newly rising cultural trend. She is striving to construct postmigrant identity that encompasses both her religious traditional beliefs and modern values.

Thus, on the one hand, despite initially dismissing Farida's behavior as nonsensical, Sister Carlotta eventually comprehends its underlying significance and resolves to engage in a conversation with Farida's parents in an attempt to persuade them. On the other hand, Farida's identification with sister Carlotta stems from the teacher's cleverness, benevolence, and authoritative demeanor. Farida aspires to pursue a career in education, drawing inspiration from Sister Carlotta; still, this is soon followed by a desire to become a medical professional subsequent to her encounter with the doctor who provides her with corrective eyewear.

In "Summer Maze" (2017), Nadia develops transcultural identity while her mother straggles behind. Culture, by its very nature, is not characterized by a state of stability or immutability; rather, it exhibits a high degree of fluidity. According to Cristina Voicu, culture undergoes a process of evolution, adaptation, and adoption (2013, p. 172). Voicu's argument comprises a comprehensive process that involves both physical motion and transformation. To successfully adapt to a new environment, individuals must cultivate a positive attitude as it is crucial for their personal growth and integration into a group. This typically entails a shift in viewpoints. As described by Cathy Wilcock (2018, 376), Lateefa becomes a person who is driven by an emotional desire to be part of a national homeland that is changing without her. Consequently, she relies on her preserved memories to bridge the voids and establish that sense of belonging. This entails a problematic mother-daughter relationship. Lateefa is an old-fashioned mother who wants to control her daughter while Nadia is homesick for London. The postmigrant generation is focused on forging a future rather than dwelling on a mythical past. They are actively establishing their own social and cultural domain seeking alternative spaces that are distinct from those influenced by

the migrant experience (Bromley, 2017). Obviously, Nadia is in search of indications of connection, companionship, and environments reminiscent of a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, the intricate nature of Nadia's situation is further underscored after an encounter she had with an English couple near the Sphinx: "She moved towards the couple, drawn to their familiar tones, eager for a flicker of recognition, an encouragement to say hello. But when they looked up at her they saw someone different from them, an Egyptian girl at the foot of that large pyramid in Giza" (11). Nadia possesses an awareness of the divide that exists between herself and the English couple irrespective of her own desires (12). She is subjected to the process of othering, wherein she is automatically assumed to have a connection to Egypt.

The postmigrant generation is faced with the prevailing discourse on migration and integration that portrays individuals as lacking and in need of integration. In response, they develop alternative representations and adopt attitudes based on solidarity and conviviality. Conviviality is defined as the ability to coexist harmoniously and has demonstrated its value in generating fresh perspectives (Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). Within this particular framework, Ohnmacht and Yıldız point to Stuart Hall's discussion on the concept of "implicit racism," highlighting the phenomenon of certain practices becoming ingrained and accepted as routine aspects of daily existence (Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). Building on Ohnmacht and Yıldız reflections, the manifestation of a convivial culture can be observed through the implementation of emancipatory practices and the adoption of resistant attitudes towards racism in various aspects of everyday life (Ohnmacht & Yıldız, 2021). Nadia, as a transcultural subject, challenges this situation when she "forced herself to speak out because she needed this encounter now, needed to make this link" (11). Nadia with her convivial attitude towards the English couple makes the conversation refreshing.

Moreover, transculturality of the postmigrant situation is evident in the narrative through Nadia's comprehension of her cultural background and her mother's beliefs as she resolves their divergent viewpoints by opting to pursue a year-long study of Arabic. Nadia's decision serves to partially mitigate the acculturation gap. The second generation finds themselves entangled to some extent in the ongoing legacies that connect the previous generation to the past and homeland, as they simultaneously strive to establish their own identities and forge their own paths.

"Pages of Fruit" (2017), on the other hand, presents a distinct variation of the mother-daughter connection. The protagonist experiences maternal abandonment throughout her childhood and subsequently seeks validation and companionship from a writer who shares her ethnic heritage. One limitation of the mother's perspective is that her specific brand of feminism does not allow for the concept of sisterhood. The protagonist exhibits a strong affinity for the literary works of this specific author, finding resonance in their narratives that depict a privileged upbringing akin to her own. She diligently accumulates funds to attend the Edinburgh Book Festival expectation of encountering the author. protagonist firmly believes that a strong bond of sisterhood will be established upon meeting this author. She expends considerable effort to attend, yet she encounters rejection from the secular author due to the negative perception of her headscarf. So, her aspirations are met with a severe rejection. The protagonist who chooses to stay at home is viewed as a source of disappointment by her accomplished businesswoman mother, thereby reversing the acculturation difference. This stands in contrast to the dynamic between Lateefa and Nadia, where Lateefa, as the mother, embodies a more traditional role. However, the protagonist relocates with her family to Abu Dhabi where she establishes a successful professional career, ultimately garnering the validation of her mother who had nearly lost hope in her. Both the mother and the author demonstrate a sense of reverence towards the protagonist's newly formed autonomous identity. This newfound transcultural identity allows the protagonist to show her convivial attitude toward the author who despised her hijab earlier in Edinburgh: "Perhaps your disdain of the hijab, less obvious to me now than it had been that time in Edinburgh, extended to the Sheikha's flowing, black abaya" (212). The adoption of a postmigrant perspective in thinking, which emphasizes the experience of transcultural identities, enables individuals to gain aware and nuanced understandings that go beyond traditional divisions based on differences, while still acknowledging the existence of racist systems (Ohnmacht & Yıldız,

2021, 163). As Bromley describes it, postmigration is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by both a sense of discontinuity and an ongoing state of transformation. Thus, the protagonist represents this transformative process that not only affects but also engages with the larger population where she can exchange ideas and challenge the limitations imposed by outdated categorizations.

Upon an examination of the latest narrative within the collection, "The Circle Line" (2017), it becomes evident that there is a discernible shift towards trajectories that are no longer primarily concerned with the othering or the sense of isolation stemming from religious identification. "The Circle Line" provides a more comprehensive portrayal compared to the other narratives, offering insights into the potential implications of a postmigrant society. The protagonist characterizes London as a metropolis that is defined by its capacity for inclusive assimilation (187). The narrative in question places less emphasis on migration and religion, treating them as marginal elements, while primarily focusing on the appreciation of "movement itself" (192) and the portrayal of a city that is friendly, multicultural, and inclusive. London embodies the emergence of a postmigrant society and transcultural subjectivities.

In contrast to the author's earlier narratives within the collection *Elsewhere*, *Home*, "The Circle Line" has adopted a new attitude that goes beyond conventional national practices. The theme of conservatism is no longer presented. The protagonist can freely meet her suitor without being chaperoned as she asserts "[H]ere we are allowed a more organic start" (184). This is an exemplification of transcultural identity among Muslims that can be seen in the amalgamation attained by Muslim women in Europe who adeptly incorporate concepts of emancipation alongside their religious convictions.

Consequently, the aforementioned portrayal contradicts the depictions shown in the initial portion of the collection which showcases the emerging empowerment. This transition revolves around a protagonist who exhibits creativity, assertiveness, and confidence, actively challenging the conventional perception associated with being a "migrant". By reclaiming agency, the necessary foundation is established for the subsequent phase of postmigration. As Bromley asserts, postmigration is presenting an

opposition to the concepts of fixity, objectification, and prescriptiveness. At the very least, Aboulela's approach serves as a means of acknowledging the problematic characteristics associated with the stereotype of Muslims being limited to a segregated community, lacking in knowledge and disconnected from contemporary modernity. Mainly, it implies dynamic narratives, circumstances of possession and free choice. In a certain manner, it is prefigurative in its endeavor to exemplify a potential postmigrant encounter.

5. Conclusion

The primary objective of this study is to highlight the postmigrant reading perspective through the analysis of a collection of short stories authored by Leila Aboulela. The texts have been placed within the framework of theoretical and critical discussions about diverse topics such as migration, postmigration, and diaspora. The present study utilizes a postmigrant theoretical framework to analyze how the characters' transcultural self-perception sheds light on particular aspects of their ethical principles and overall worldview. A significant portion of the earlier short stories' progression revolves around the central theme of belonging, specifically the yearning for a home that has been lost. This longing is reconstructed through the use of visual representations, physical items, and narratives, while also incorporating various tensions, conflicts and discrepancies of the homeland. Yet, the later narratives possess the credibility of an alternative perspective that is embraced and constructed to represent distinct methods of recounting a wellknown tale characterized by renewed vigor and originating from a transcultural standpoint that surpasses the confining label of "migrant".

Aboulela's collection of short stories evokes the concept articulated by Bromley wherein the postmigrant is characterized not as an outsider but rather as an individual whose narratives offer a fresh perspective, challenge established beliefs, and reshape our understanding of locations and trajectories via an alternative lens. It was also demonstrated that the practices and discourses formed by young characters serve as resistant and counter-hegemonic strategies in relation to Ohnmacht and Yıldız's conviviality (2017) which they have acquired through their engagement with their transitional

positioning. In other words, these transcultural characters may also be regarded as fundamental components of a counter-hegemonic ethical framework. This ethical position can be interpreted as a valuable contribution to the process of European self-decolonization, and consequently, this contribution is essential for fostering harmonious coexistence within society. According to Lindsey Zanchettin (2013), Aboulela's short stories depict an African reality and narratives that are characterized by familiarity rather than exoticism and otherness and relevance and centrality rather than being tokenized and marginal. The aforementioned characteristics are also applied in postmigrant writing. Aboulela said she hoped that her work "creates dialogue among peoples and generations" (Kushkush, 2014, p. 6). Western societies must, therefore, acquire knowledge, cultivate empathy, and wholeheartedly accept their newest citizens. The utilization of postmigrant forms of articulation as a means of empowerment enables individuals to adopt a subject stance that allows them to intervene as speakers within the prevailing discourse.

Based on the aforementioned argument, the postmigrant reading of *Elsewhere*, *Home* can be characterized as a form of knowledge production that resists dominant readings and creates new opportunities for alternative (political) ways of subject formation. Aboulela's narratives call for cultural and societal reflection and are gaining growing acknowledgment for their exploration of postmigrant identities, particularly as they pertain to concerns of interaction and transcultural ethics. However, the celebration or romanticization of post-migration as a "new belonging" must be approached with caution, as it is a complex and multifaceted process that involves various struggles, both generational and demographic.

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