IDENTITY CRISIS IN LEILA ABOULELA'S THE KINDNESS OF ENEMIES: A SOCIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

أزمة الهوية في لطف الأعداء لليلى أبو العلا :منظور اجتماعي وثقافي

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Abstract

Recently, identity became a noteworthy notion to be considered by numerous academics in disciplines such as social science and humanities. This paper focuses on the nature of *cultural identity* which has been the preoccupation of sociologists and Cultural Studies' scholars like Stuart Hall, Held, Hubert and Thompson. Identity, for them, is in a constant development and is molded and changed due to many elements like race, language, origin, affiliations, relationships, and belonging. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the concept of identity and its crisis from a sociological and cultural perspective in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015). Natasha, as the main protagonist of this narrative is one of the interesting characters to depict identity crisis along her journey for a self-definition. The diaspora community specifically, witnesses issues of identity with its instability, its crisis and its

influence on the individuals' life. At the end of this paper, we hope to present the most important elements that contribute to the character's identity crisis.

Key words: cultural identity, diasporas, identity crisis, language, origin, relationships, sociological and cultural perspective.

مـلخــص

أصبحت الهوية في الآونة الأخيرة فكرة جديرة بالملاحظة ينظر فيها العديد من الأكاديميين في تخصصات مثل العلوم الاجتماعية والعلوم الإنسانية. تركز هذه الورقة على طبيعة الهوية الثقافية التي كانت شغل الشاغل لعلماء الاجتماع والدراسات الثقافية مثل ستيوارت هول، هلد، هيوبرت وطومسون. الهوية، بالنسبة لهم، هي في تطور مستمر ومصبوب ويتغير بسبب العديد من العناصر مثل العرق واللغة، الأصل، العلاقات والانتماء. الغرض من هذه الورقة هو دراسة مفهوم الهوية وأزمتها من منظور اجتماعي وثقافي في كتاب لطف الأعداء لليلى أبو العلا 2015. ناتاشا، باعتبارها بطلة الرواية الرئيسية لهذا السرد هي واحدة من الشخصيات المناسبة لتصوير أزمة الهوية على طول رحلتها من أجل تعريف الذات. حياة الأفراد، الشتات على وجه التحديد، يشهد قضايا الهوية مع عدم استقرارها، أزمتها وتأثيرها على حياتهم. نأمل أن نقدم أهم العناصر التي تسهم في أزمة هوية الشخصية في نهاية هذه الورقة .

الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمة الهوية، الهوية الثقافية، المنظور الاجتماعي والثقافي، الشتات، اللغة، الأصل، العلاقات.

Introduction

Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) is a novel that combines fiction with history and autobiography. It voices the diaspora's search for a stable identity through the depiction of the life of three main characters from the twenty-first century. The author's aim is to investigate their selves and attempt to represent their dilemma as diasporic individuals and immigrants who suffer in the *West*, Britain, to balance their Arabness with Britishness. Narrated with Aboulela's unique style and from the standpoint of both Natasha and the historical characters she is exploring, *The Kindness of Enemies* is both a fascinating re-telling of the past and an important examination of the Muslims' experience and identity in a post-9/11 world. This paper focuses on

the character of Natasha Wilson in her powerful journey of self-definition that goes beyond time and continents.

The story of Natasha Wilson, born Natasha Hussein in Khartoum, a Half-Russian, half-Sudanese professor of History at a Scottish university, begins in 2010 when she is inspecting the life of the Muslim leader of the anti-Russian Resistance Imam Shamil and the nineteenth-century Caucasian War. In her mid-thirties, Natasha is overweight. She lost her mother, failed in her relationships with men, and she has recently had an abortion. Natasha visits Oz, her student, and Malak, his mother, to see Shamil's sword and is requested to stay for two nights because of the record-breaking snow. However, when Oz is unpredictably detained as a suspect of terror-related activities at his house, Natasha understands that all she values is endangered. Later, Natasha is forced to confront issues she had long struggled to avoid- that of her Muslim heritage because of her deepened connection with both. Natasha is then interrogated and has her office searched by police because of the e-mails Oz had exchanged with her about his research project. Natasha learns that her estranged father, who lives in Khartoum and who abandoned her after his divorce with her mother, is seriously ailing. After ignoring him, Natasha decides to return to Khartoum for the first time in twenty years. Upon her return to Scotland, Natasha plans to write a conference paper on Imam Shamil's peace struggle which ended in his "defeat and surrender" (Aboulela 310). The contemporary story ends with Natasha meeting Malak at Dunnottar Castle near Aberdeen.

1. Sociological and Cultural Conceptualization of Identity

The usage of diverse theories and approaches by various critics has impacted the scholars' conceptualization of self-definition, thus engendering the simultaneous utilization of dissimilar terms that define identity as a socio-cultural construct. Based on the objectives of this study, we opt for the notion of *cultural identity*, which is defined as

> an individual's realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behavior directed on his or her enrollment and acceptance into a particular group, as well as certain characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual's group membership. (Sysoev 37-38)

In this respect, peoples' *cultural identity* as a structure contains a limitless number of facets. Most universally discussed and defined in texts are the subsequent types of one's cultural identity: racial, ethnic, social, economic, geopolitical, gender, religious, ability/disability, language, professional, etc.

Each of these features symbolizes a particular category which an individual has certain affiliation(s) with.

Following the notion of *cultural identity*, Stuart Hall insists in "The Questions of Cultural Identity" that we should view identity as an unfinished 'production', yet, always in process, and always established within, not outside, representation (Hall 145-167). In addition, he highlights that identity is not founded on the rediscovery but the construction of self-identification, not an identity constructed in the archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past (423). This implicates that identifying is an "*act of imaginative rediscovery*" (425) that engages requiring an invented "coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (425) which is the story of all enforced diasporas." (428).

The other pattern of *cultural identity* recognizes the nature of our being and what we have become'. From this point of view, *cultural identity* is a matter of 'being' as well as 'becoming'. It is not something which "already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (Hall 394). *Cultural identities* come from somewhere, have histories and they undergo endless transformation. They are unfixed and they are subject to the constant 'play' of history, culture and power. *Cultural identity* is not grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which wishes to be discovered and as a result will secure our sense of ourselves all time. Identities are the names we give to the diverse manners we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the accounts of the past (394)[1].

Hall provides two types of identities in his "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". The first type is the identity as *being* (self-subjectivity) which offers a sense in terms of "one people" of unity and commonality (225). It makes the structure of individuals or community sharing the same origin as *one*, even if their surrounding is different. They usually have some likenesses comprising the similar culture, history, and physical traits (223). The second type is the identity as *becoming* (or as the identification process). As a collision to the conception of *being*, it echoes the identity of man or woman from their environments. It shares the culture of an individual and operates to refer to the word *us* as one person. This notion of identity can be classified into some constituents like social features, physical appearance, personality, nationality, religion and other supporting aspects (393).

The production of identity as a mechanism is perhaps influenced by some characteristics since it also displays how individuals locate themselves in their

contexts and how they place others. In his *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Hall argues that identity is unsteadily laid or positioned in a culture or even in a language or history, permanent or unalterable opposition (138). Besides, identity is a fluid development that can be built or transformed based on the past and the present which connects to the "who we are" and "what we have become". In the mechanism of *becoming*, there is a process of negotiation and it leads the person to either change into their new identity or preserve the old one (138).

Today, individuals are acquainted with the skirmishes in which disagreeing self-definitions of difference in the world as nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender problematize and fragment their identities. Therefore, Hall argues in his "The Questions of Cultural Identity" that individuals may possibly change their identity as they live their life since "identity is formed in the "interaction" between self and society" (597). This denotes that self-definition is produced in connection to another, from how the subject is pointed out. This perception of identity is associated with the issue of how one attempts to locate or be located in a society or an environment. Religion, ethnicity, and gender provide individuals an essential sense of belonging.

2. Identity Crisis

The problem of identity is being vigorously discussed in social theory. The testimony is that the ancient identities, which steadied the social world for so long, are degenerating, and as a result they increased the appearance of fresh identities and fragmented the contemporary individuals as a unified subject. The seemingly identified "crisis of identity" is perceived as sharing a broader mechanism of contemporary societies and undermining the frameworks which bequeathed to people a stable shelter in the social world. In their *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Hall, Held, Hubert, and Thompson have made some inquiries about *cultural identity* in the late modernity and evaluated the existence of a "crisis of identities", its components, its movement, its development, and its significance. They have also investigated the influence and participation of the recent developments in contemporary societies, its forms and consequences (594).

Hall, Held, Hubert and Thompson consider the alterations in the notions of identity and the subject and elaborate their argument with respect to *cultural identity*. They argue that "those aspects of our identities arise from our "belonging" to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and above all, national cultures" (594). In part three of their text, they address contemporary

societies as being "*de-centered*"; that is, dislocated or fragmented. For those thinkers who reckon that contemporary identities are declining, they insist that a distinctive type of structural transformation is changing these societies in the late twentieth century. It is the destruction of the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which furnished us with a firm position as social individuals. They argue that these changes are altering individuals' personal identities, undermining their sense of themselves as integrated subjects. This loss of an unchanging "sense of self" is sometimes termed "the dislocation or de-centering" of individuals. This set of "double displacements-de-centering" dislocates individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves, thus, generating a "crisis of identity" for the individual (594-595).

Hall and his colleagues proposed three very different conceptions of identity. The first conception is of the Enlightenment subject. It was founded on the idea of the human person as a wholly centered, unified individual, gifted with the abilities of logic, consciousness, and performance. This subject's "center" comprised an inner core which first appeared when the individual was born and unfolded with it (597).

The second conception is of the sociological subject. It reveals the increasing complication of the contemporary life and the consciousness that this profound core of the individual was not autonomous and self-sufficient, yet it was molded in connection to "significant others", who mediated to the subject values, meanings, and symbols- the culture- of the world he/she inhabited" (Hall et al 597). Accordingly, identity is designed in the "interaction" between self and society. The subject still has an internal core or essence that is "the real me". Yet, this is shaped and reformed in an endless interchange with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities which they offer (597).

Self-definition in the sociological notion bridges the gap between the "inside" and the "outside", between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural self-definitions and internalize their senses and principles, make them "part of us", aid to "alien our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world" (Hall et al 597-598). Identity, consequently, sutures the subject into structure. It settles down both the individuals and the cultural worlds they occupy, making both commonly more cohesive and expectable (597-598). However, these are precisely what are now said to be "shifting". What the individual witnessed as a previously unified and stable identity is changing to be fragmented; composed not of a one but of numerous, occasionally opposing or unsettled,

identities. Thus, the identities which constituted the social settings "out there", and which guaranteed our subjective conformity with the objective "needs" of the culture, are declining as an outcome of structural and institutional transformation. The very mechanism of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has altered to be more tolerant, flexible, and problematic (597-598).

The third conception is of the post-modern subject. It is conceptualized as obtaining no static, vital, or enduring self-definition. In his "The Questions of Cultural Identity" Hall argues that "[i]dentity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (277). It is historically, not biologically, described. The individual adopts diverse identities at different times; identities that are not unified around a coherent "self". In the inner self, there are conflicting self-definitions, each dragging to different directions, with the purpose that our identifications are constantly being shifted. Hall states in his "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" that if we sense we have a unified self-definition from cradle to grave, it is only due to our construction of a reassuring tale or "narrative of the self" about ourselves (598). The entirely unified, finished, secure and coherent identity is a fiction. As an alternative, as the structures of the significance and cultural representation multiply, individuals are challenged by the bewildering, fleeing diversity of possible self-definitions, temporary one we could identify with (Hall et al 598).

3. Identity Crisis in *The Kindness of Enemies*

Affiliations and characteristics of Natasha's cultural identity contribute in the crisis of her own identity. Natasha is born in Khartoum and she is half Muslim Arab and half Christian Russian. In the novel, western views about the Muslims are portrayed by her story. The novel provides comprehensive examples of this issue that undoubtedly disturb Natasha's image of herself and the British society's view of her, by accentuating the attention on the behaviors and opinions that she has faced in her life in this context as a Muslim Arab immigrant. Along Natasha's journey, and the people around her, the course of cross-cultural encounter is hindered by the antagonistic and damaging Orientalist discourse which imprisons her in her predetermined status and leaves her with identity issues.

Natasha is put under suspicion since she is Oz's teacher who exchanged emails with him about his enquiry's interest, a person who was in his house when

arrested, and a Muslim. The e-mails that Oz had exchanged with her contain his surname "Sword of Shamil" (Aboulela 100), and his research subject on the "Weapons used for jihad" (100). She is interrogated and has her office examined by police (101). In addition, while being at Oz's, her phone and laptop have been seized. In the afternoon, following Oz's arrest, the police had come to the university and checked her computer. They searched her office and questioned her for a long time, precisely "[o]n the titles of [her] papers, *Royal Support for Jihad and Jihad as Resistance*; on [her] political opinions, on [her] other nationalities and, of course on Oz" (167). Natasha feels mortified and distressed and all her efforts to fit in fail (167-168).

As an immigrant who worked toughly to be integrated and recognized to ensure an unchanging identity founded on her accomplishments and not on her religious affiliations, her colour and origin, she feels that her image is distorted. Natasha is once more interrogated by Iain, her head of the department. He informs her that the police "wanted to know whether he had always worn a beard" (Aboulela 140) and that "'[t]hey wanted to know why in the reports [they] submitted about the students vulnerable to radicalization, Osama Raja's name never showed up?'" (140). Besides, Iain blames her for not reporting about Oz's support for the "websites that recruit Chechen Jihadist fighters who are linked to al-Qaeda?" (142). He also asked her about the reason that took her to their house (142).

Natasha's academic scrutiny and individual sensitivity is instigated by her skirmish with her mixed racial origin, which she identifies as a struggle of two "unalloyed selves" (Aboulela 40). Besides, the connection of Muslim individuals to terrorism leads Natasha to contest her weakness by accepting a part of the identifier in this equation in her department's surveillance program for students susceptible to radicalization as a token of faithfulness (141). During her contribution in this program, she detects two of her students as potential terrorists (141). Revealing the way in which terrorism is linked with Islam leaves Muslim individuals with a sense of apprehension that encourages many of them to cut their bond with the religion utterly.

In addition, Natasha, the Westernized Russian-Sudanese historian, becomes aware of what she sees as her disgraceful difference from the fair complexion of her mother. Born to a white mother and a black father, she develops a phobia of contrasting "composites" such as "half-human, half-beast" characters (Aboulela 39-40). Thus, she is powerless to defend herself when confronted with Gayanor; the student who accused her of breaking her finger, or with Iain (99-100), or even reveal her thoughts about Oz's intelligence (309). Even

though Natasha is innocent, she feels disappointed. As Muslims are seen as terrorists, she is supposed to be careful of any step she makes and anything she gets involved in, even research about jihad may open the door for suspicion and accusations.

Consequently, her identity is affected. Natasha reflects how these incidents have damaged her identity after her endless efforts to shape it when she has moved to England as a child, when she says:

> Natasha Wilson denoted a person who was smeared by suspicion, tainted by crime. I might as well have stayed Natasha Hussein! [. . .] My voice became softer, my opinions muted, my actions tentative (e. I thought before I spoke, became wary of my students and, often, bowed my head down. (Aboulela 310)

This is the sad and humiliated Natasha whose profession and future are not as stunning as she perceived and worked hard to have. She is pushed to the fringes of the nation, she is isolated, de-centered and alienated and therefore suffers from identity crisis.

Identity enquiries and investigations were mainly based on two momentous criteria '*unity*' over time or '*continuity*' and '*differentiation*'[2] (Baumeister 18-19). Natasha struggles in vain for distinctiveness from the other Muslims living in Britain since their uniqueness and difference will later put them on the margins of the society. Natasha's determination to win an appropriate status and an ideal image in her job is futile. As a Muslim intellectual, she tries to do her best to represent the image of an intellectual who is like the others in her discipline. Yet, her curiosity of the "Jihad as Resistance- Russian Imperial Expansion and Insurrection in the Caucasus" (Aboulela 5) allows doubt and suspicion. At first, she is stirred and proud about her research. Nevertheless, her self-confidence and image are destructed by the interrogation of the police and her boss in his office. All of this shapes her identity in this multicultural context. She feels that she failed because the people around her change their views about her. Her colleagues start avoiding her. She evokes She evokes "[her] colleagues ……[oscillating] between sincere shows of solidarity against last week's police search of [her] office and the natural instinct to keep their distance" (205). She realizes that she is different, othered and rejected.

Furthermore, one's social rules and personal status are two key constituents of identity. The 'social identity' or 'persona'[3] and the relationships and interactions with the others are the core of the functional notion of identity (Beaumeister 19). Natasha feels conflicting inner skirmishes against her unfortunate relationship with her father and unhappy childhood affected by the

unfaithfulness of her mother and the hatred of her father that resulted in her
parents' divorce and the abandonment of her father. The other fact of growing
up away from him and from her home results in a refusal to care for her father
(Aboulela 171). Living between blame, rejection and later regret, she feels the
necessity to break away from them and build her life again. She struggles to
generate a new identity by being British instead of fusing the African Arab
Muslim identity with the Christian Georgian one in order to fit in.

Natasha's relationship with her family makes her feel different and estranged.
She thinks that her African father and her mixed-race, speaking Russian on a
Scottish ground, make them different from each other. She also feels detached
from the rest of her family and friends and she finds it unnecessary to ask her
father about them when she says: "but I did not even ask about my
grandmother or my old friends" (Aboulela 73). She rejects her father's
attendance in her graduation (137-138). She also feels detached from her
childhood since "[s]he could not remember the picnic trip with her parents: "I
could not remember being such a happy child" (287-288). Her feelings of
dislike towards her father was there since her childhood (137-138). As an adult,
she feels alienated from her mother when she tries to express how "pressure
rose in [her] chest but also a glow as if [she] was wearing a golden necklace
that weighed too much." (138). She described her estrangement, detachment,
isolation from her mother when she says: "[e]ven though I was with her, even
though I could move towards her for a cuddle and a kiss, I was not like her and
might never be, I was in another place, lonely because she would never join
me" (138). Her loneliness, isolation, estrangement and detachment from her
parents, family and friends all cause her alienation and therefore identity crisis.

Before the allegations and accusations, Natasha believed that she had achieved
her self-identification and lastly found her belonging to the British society.
Owning her own flat, having a full-time job, a brilliant career and two cars,
made her gratified and more content with her life. All this grants her with the
identity of a successful, attractive and worthy independent woman and person
away from being an immigrant Arab Muslim who is expected to be a terrorist.
By amassing different items, she will attain a self-definition. To reassure
herself, she opens her staff profile page at the university website to find her
photo, her name as Dr. Natasha Wilson lecturer in history, the modules she
taught, and her office phone number, email address, her research grants which
have been awarded to her, and a list of her publications (Aboulela 220).

To depict the way Muslims experience with the outside world, Aboulela
demonstrates that "many Muslims in Britain wished that no one knew they

were Muslims. They would change their names if they could and dissolve into the mainstream, for it was not enough for them to openly condemn 9/11 and 7/7" (6). Natasha Hussein changes her name to Natasha Wilson to avoid comparison to the deceased Iraqi president Saddam Hussein (4). As names refer to origin, race and religion it may be an assigned component[4] of identity which is stable and passive. The longing to change the name in this case means excluding one of our identity constituents. Names are not a source of problem for identity pursuers, except for those who want a change if they live in a society that does not tolerate Arab or Muslim names. In this case, names generate identity issues.

Since some names are affiliated to religion, Natasha attempts to discard hers. For instance, to avoid being secluded, distinguished, and alienated, Natasha changes her name. She cares about how her name connects her to her religion more than her personal achievements; consequently, she prefers to modify it to camouflage her origin that shapes her identity. She is persuaded at a younger age that her name mirrors an affiliation and an identity that she declines and is embarrassed with (Aboulela 4-5). This persuasion persisted until her adulthood. When Natasha tries to renew her passport, she reflects: "I actually didn't even know where it was. Lost over the years. In one move or the other. In it my name was Natasha Hussein. But on everything else- my British passport, my Russian passport, my driving license, PHD- I had a different surname" (212). When she first meets Malak, Natasha thinks that if she keeps her name Hussein, she will not be asked whether she is a Muslim or not. But still her first name opens the door for questions and explanations about "the non-Muslim Natasha" (6-7).

Again, when having breakfast with Oz, he asked her about her old name and she replies: "Natasha Hussein explained my frizzy hair and the flat disc of my face, my skin that was darker than one paten's and lighter than the other" (Aboulela 41). Even if her real self is hidden behind her name, her skin colour and complexion refers to her foreignness and hybridity. Natasha makes an effort to formulate this summary to Oz. She tries to explain herself. She insists on her hybridity[5] and the feeling of *in-betweenness* (41). She always feels the need to justify her identity "…[h]ere [she] was conscious of being African in the Scottish countryside, of the need to justify presence" (15).

Once more, after changing her name, Natasha is nearly unable to remember her old name when she hears Grusha says to Yasha that "'Natasha Hussein, calling from Scotland.' It felt strange to hear [her] old name, to realise that no matter what, they would only know [her]as such" (Aboulela 106). Indeed, even if she

changes her name, Natasha will always be identified as what she really is. After all that she did to remain undistinguished, her real name failed her. As names designate affiliations, Natasha at the mention of her name feels that all that she opted for, all her attainments withered away.

In addition, Aboulela reveals a dilemma of identity that embraces religious inference in the Western culture, where Natasha, portraying reality, agonizes due to the British society's misconceptions about the Muslims. This fact encourages her to reject her religious affiliation. As the other Muslims living in Britain, Natasha attempts to dissolve into the mainstream and "walk against the wall" (6-7), drink and raise a glass of champagne, no longer pray in the mosque, fast in Ramadan, say the Shahada, read the Qur'an or eat halal food and be loyal to her origin's cultural practices and values (6-7). By endeavouring to mask their origins, their colour, their accents, and their religious values with their integration and acculturation, both the immigrants and the second generation, to whom Natasha belongs, will constantly feel excluded. Therefore, their self-identification fails since they are of neither side. Their identity issues and crises will never be resolved, and their struggle for a one stable identity will never be attained.

In her journey to establish an identity without issues, Natasha does not know where she belongs even if she is identified as an Arab Muslim. She reveals that "the two sides of [her] that were slammed together against their will, [that] refused to mix. [she] was a failed hybrid, made up of unalloyed selves" (Aboulela 40). Her Russian mother who regretted her marriage with her Sudanese father, her African father who hated her white mother, her atheist mother who blotted out Natasha's Muslim heritage, and her Arab father who left her to Europe without a fight, all make her feel a freak (40). Accordingly, Natasha's identity is formed into two axes: the axe of rootlessness, unsteadiness and absence of horizon, and the axe of difference in religion, origin and culture. These distressing skirmishes affect her psychology and consciousness and view of the self. She utters: "I was not brought up Muslim even though we lived in a Muslim country… Those were the years when I had hope of fitting in. Then, awkwardness became my home" (42). Consequently, Natasha lived a secular liberal life in Sudan. She endured a sense of not belonging, dislocation and fragmentation.

Natasha's life is a crossroad of spaces. She cannot decide where to go, to Malak, to Sudan; that is why she decides to remain isolated or

> to go to town. But where to go? To go back to Malak and see the
> vacuum Oz left behind. To fly to Sudan and sit at [her] father's

deathbed? Instead [she] went into town because [she] needed to be
surrounded by people, by normal life. (134)

After wandering from one place to another in the host land, she decides to go to
Sudan to create a space of belonging. She reveals: "I came so that I would not
be an outcast, so that I would, even in a small way, faintly, marginally,
tentatively, belong" (290). "remembering other homecomings" (168). She
continues remembering her homecoming bleeding, and other memories at the
house of her Mom and Tony.

Along her journey, Natasha moves from one place to another to show the
influence and contribution of the spaces and geographical places on identity
formation and the identity crisis. Places like Malak's is for her a family space
where she enjoyed being gathered with both Malak and Oz and which signifies
the relationship between a parent and son/daughter that she missed. Natasha
confides "I was grateful for those moments inside the house, to wander around
and recharge myself" (Aboulela 176). This space is where Natasha could find a
refuge from all the depressing problems she faced. Tony's, however, after
being a space for belonging, where her partial childhood memories were
collected and stored, is no longer a safe space for her. University, as well, is for
her a place for self-identification, cross-cultural interactions and identity
recognition. Natasha views university as a place where she could prove herself
for the host community, confirm integration and assimilation as she attempts to
blend in. With her academic and intellectual publications and scientific
involvement at her university, Natasha is persuaded that she can belong to the
British society and hide her real origin. However, after all the incidents stated
above, she unceasingly looks for a place to feel safe and not dislocated, a place
where the desired identity is attained.

The character of change in setting and language affects Natasha's identity.
When she is back home, Natasha also feels estranged from language, places,
and people. Since she forgot her Arabic, she finds herself unable to
communicate with people in Khartoum. Natasha finds language as the crux of
her marginalization. For instance, when she stops to ask for directions her
"rudimentary Arabic makes the girl snigger" (Aboulela 250) and her English
made the girl shrug. In addition, when meeting her stepmother, she expresses
her estrangement since she is incapable to comprehend what she is saying[6].

More strangeness is brought to the setting when an "army truck lumbered past
full of uniformed soldiers" and "a pickup truck with a gun aiming at the traffic"
(Aboulela 250). These habitual settings for the Sudanese living in Khartoum
sound strange and unfamiliar to her to the extent that she thinks that "it was as

if another civil war was about to erupt" (250). Also, the street and the house where she lived are transformed and this makes her feel estranged (250).

Besides, she is uncomfortable with the switching from the three languages that she masters or hardly remembers when meeting Grusha's friends. She questions, "how easily their words wormed their way through me! I was vulnerable, away from home and instead of resenting their interference in my private life, a sadness would wash over me, a sense that their words were too little, too late" (Aboulela 287). In an active social life, Natasha is familiar with some of Grusha and Yasha's friends and hybrids. She feels alien among these people who knew her and her childhood.

Both Khartoum and London are spaces of the loss of identity and home, spaces of the *inbetweeness* of diasporic identities. In London, Natasha expresses:

> [t]hough I appreciated the peace and fresh air, this lifestyle was not for me. I needed the anonymity of the city. Here I was conscious of being African in the Scottish countryside, of the need to justify presence. (Aboulela 15)

It is also a metropolitan place where cultures and origins are questioned. In Khartoum, the Court is a place that provides her with an identity issue. Natasha's identity and belonging have been suspected, checked, and confirmed. She has to reassess her allegiance to Islam when accused of apostasy by Safia, her stepmother (279). The court is the place where she is interrogated about her faith, her old name and whether she was ever married to a non-Muslim (289-290). However, she does not assert her allegiance to Islam in the court but reclaims a place in her birth religion and society. Natasha claims: "I did not come here to fight for money or for the share of a house. I came so that I would not be an outcast, so that I would, even in a small way, faintly, marginally, tentatively, belong" (290). Natasha defends herself diplomatically: "I said I was not a good Muslim, but I was not a bad person either" (290). Being in a place where Islam is the only religion of its residents, Natasha feels enthused to defend one component of her identity as a Muslim, even if only in name, so that she does not become "an outcast" (290) even in her birthplace. To belong to this group and preserve her religion as a constituent of her identity she has to adapt to collective moral judgment in Sudan, which is linked to social traditions.

Undeniably, Natasha is ultimately estranged from both societies. She is a foreigner whose endless endeavors to assimilate have been futile. To recover from this isolation and estrangement that result in her identity crisis, Natasha feels the requisite to reinforce her connections with people from her homeland

like her younger brother Mekki, her childhood lover Yasha and her mother's friend Grusha. She says: "I valued the sense of belonging they gave me, the certainty that I was not an isolated member of a species" (Aboulela 310). Founding relations with Sudanese people offers Natasha joy and gratification: "I relaxed without the need to prove, explain or distinguish myself. Nor squeeze to fit in" (310).

Since Natasha belongs to an Arab-English race, she experiences an English-Arab Muslim journey that leads to a pursuit of stable identity. Her identity is merged with a British one, both by education and racial hybridity[7]. Natasha's hybridity and her sentiment of, opinions about and realization of her hybridization, difference and *otherness* provokes anxiety within her. As she grows older and becomes more educated, she comprehends the cause behind this dread. She recognizes her own "liminal self" and her two sides that fight each other and refuse to mix. As a result, she believes she is a "failed hybrid made of unalloyed selves" (Aboulela 40). She understands that she can never purge herself entirely from the 'disease' of being Natasha Hussein (40). Unquestionably, her hybridity disturbs her feelings and her search for an unchanging and singular identity. She thinks that a hybrid is like "the black-white contrast of a winter branch that was covered on one side with snow" (40). Regardless of her new name, her intellectuality, her new life and her position, her real identity will permanently be affected by her past and intermingled with her present and future unexpected incidents.

Conclusion

In her journey for self-definition, Natasha has many issues with several elements of her identity's formation process. To prove herself as a British intellectual and integrate in the British society she must go through many transformations such as changing her name, finding a decent job and always keeping a perfect image in front of the others, like her colleagues and Iain. Along this process, some elements of her identity have met a lot of modifications and redefinitions to fit in. However, she is all the time reminded that she does not belong to the place where she wishes to fulfill her goals and dreams, and she is constantly compared with others. She is all the time reminded that she belongs to both Muslim and non-Muslim origins and affiliations and is required to reassess her identity constituents. Even if she is involved in academic activities and she is recognized as being a strong hand, her relationship with Oz, being herself Muslim, her skin color, her language and her origins all make her different. Indeed, her affiliations and relationships both contribute in her failure to locate herself and maintain a sense of

belonging. This exacerbates her outsider position, othering, marginalization, dislocation and alienation. As a result, Natasha's identity formation is affected, and she is confronted with childhood, mid-life and adulthood identity crisis.

Aboulela demonstrates that all the efforts of Natasha are in vain since she has no stable and new identity. Natasha must accept a consensus between the existing identities that go through changes and transformations to live happy; otherwise, she will devote her whole life pursuing something that is impossible to attain. The novelist emphasized the character of Natasha, as contrasted to Jamaleldin who preferred to continue hoping and struggling until his death. Aboulela illustrates that this struggle will lead to nowhere. Eventually, Natasha continues living after being persuaded that her pursuit for an everlasting safe home and a stable identity is impossible. Natasha assessed the diverse possible identities and is, ultimately, incapable to absorb a final and a fixed commitment that guarantees her unified, accomplished secure and coherent identity.

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[1] To be precise, "[…] the uprooting of slavery and transportation and the insertion into the plantation economy (as well as the symbolic economy) of the Western world […] 'unified' these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past." (396).

[2] An effective identity is a well-defined one and its parts meet adequately the defining criteria. *Unity* means all the person's considerations and feelings that are attached to each other and are unchangeable (18). However, *differentiation* refers to the distinctiveness of one person over the others, like gender, or a name or an identity card or passport's number. Definitely, both broad and narrow distinction are essential for identity (19). A person with an identity crisis is not seeking *unity* but *differentiation* to distinguish himself from the others. Both *unity* and *differentiation* were crucial for psychologists' analysis since they denote dissimilar concerns and predicament for a person in his journey to build an identity.

[3] The term used by Jung.

[4] The assigned component may be characterized in family lineage and gender. One is accidently born a male or a female in a certain family. Excluding identity components, this type of identity does not cause a problematic for the individuals except for those who desire a sex-change. Indeed, if you are living in a society that has no problem with being born a male or a female you are not likely to have an identity crisis (Baumeister 22).

[5] To seize the ever-changing combination of cultural traits, identities; for those who see them as multiple, temporary and dynamic, the metaphor of 'hybridity' is favored as an alternative. In recognizing the notions of self-definition and integration, concepts as 'diaspora' and 'hybridity' are essential ways for analyzing its nature.

[6] "I could not understand what she was saying. The Arabic words bounced off me. I strained to distinguish them from one another, to pin them down to a meaning. I understood the phrase, 'her mother' and concluded that, perhaps, she was not talking to me directly but performing for her friends." (252)

[7] Bhabha argues: "The...hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented ... but is also double-languaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, consciousnesses, two epochs ... that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance ... It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms ... such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words." (Bhabha 58)