

## Writing from the Margins of the Nation: Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Arab British novelist Leila Aboulela represents a number of marginalized characters in a way that enables them to express their opinions about Sudan's imminent independence in her historical novel *Lyrics Alley* (2010). The novel, which is set in 1950s Sudan, focuses on mini narratives rather than on the grand narrative of independence and shows how the aspirations and disillusionments of these characters intertwine with debates and discussions about the future of the emergent nation. The voices of these characters vibrantly resonate throughout the novel in a way that draws attention to Fredric Jameson's provocative statement that third-world cultural productions are "national allegories". In a novel populated by heterogeneous characters whose differences in opinions and thoughts are tremendously influenced by their diverse socio-political backgrounds, the nation is defined, delineated and configured in infinite ways. In this sense, *Lyrics Alley* can be perceived as Aboulela's attempt to investigate, from the perspective of the less privileged, the history of Sudan and explore how the colonial era has tremendously influenced Sudan in the post-colonial era culturally, politically, economically, ideologically and socially. By giving a space for characters of different backgrounds to express their views and feelings on such a thorny topic, the novelist creates a platform for discussing, from varied angles, a topic that is almost always monopolized by politicians and upper class elites.

**Keywords:** Arab writers in diaspora, Fredric Jameson, Leila Aboulela, national allegory, Sudan