

Lyrics Alley: Leila Aboulela's New 'Lyrics' on Hybridity

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Abstract

It is hard to overlook the global multicultural nature of the world in which we live. In such a context the concept, the thinking and the strategy of hybridity have a prominent place. In fact, over the last two decades, the concept of hybridity has been the subject of many debates and has given birth to many literary works that contribute to these debates. Leila Aboulela, the Sudanese–Egyptian writer, is one of the writers who joins in the ongoing discussions on hybridity. In her latest novel *Lyrics Alley* Aboulela offers not only her compatriots but all postcolonial citizens different modes of hybridity to choose from in order to cope with a world in which it is difficult to denounce its multicultural nature.

Key Words: Egyptian-Sudanese ties, Hybridity, Leila Aboulela, Postcolonialism, and Sudanese Literature.

***Lyrics Alley*: Leila Aboulela's New 'Lyrics' on Hybridity**

I am a citizen of two countries, a member of multiple communities, and a stubborn practitioner of many disciplines. (*Gómez Peña, 1996, p. 80*)

I do not believe that East is East and West is West, at the same time I think it is simplistic and unrealistic to claim that there are no differences at all between people. (*Leila Aboulela, Interview by Kamal, 2010, Appendix, p.6*)

It is hard to overlook the global multicultural nature of the world in which we live. This condition leads to the consequence that "terms like 'Nation', 'national identity', 'national culture' have to be thought and understood in a new way in order to develop a peaceful co-existence," and in such a context "the concept, the thinking and the strategy of hybridity have a prominent place" (Toro, 2006, p. 20). In fact, over the last two decades, the concept of hybridity has been the subject of many debates and has given birth to many literary works that contribute to these debates. Leila Aboulela is one of the writers who joins in the ongoing discussions on hybridity.

In her recent novel *Lyrics Alley* written in 2010 Leila Aboulela, the Sudanese-Egyptian writer, is explaining to her compatriots who belong to the post- independence generation in Sudan what it means to have a hybrid identity. The experience of growing up with hyphenated identity and the way she sees her two countries, Sudan and Egypt, are reflected in her novel:

Belonging to the post-Independence generation, I had to grow up within the disappointments and compromises of Independence. It was my father's generation which witnessed the exhilaration of Independence and the subsequent crush of coups, military regimes and dysfunctional states. Although *Lyrics Alley* was inspired by my uncle, the novel was capturing my father's times, the heady days of the 1950s when Sudan was actually a prosperous country before it became, a few decades later, one of the poorest in the world. (Interview by Daniel Musiitwa 2011)

She leaves Sudan in 1985 after graduating from Khartoum University, with a degree in Economics and an award to study an MSc and an MPhil degree from the London School of Economics, to return back after 17 years of absence when her father was seriously ill:

I hadn't returned to Khartoum in so long. I hadn't even taken a holiday back. My [Egyptian] mother had moved to Cairo to encourage the rest of the family to go there too. It was really like I was saying goodbye to my father. It felt like his life in Sudan was coming to an end. Even if he had not passed away, he would have moved to Egypt to join my mother. I was saying goodbye to the life he was clinging to. (Interview by Arifa Akbar 2010)

Even the Sudan of her childhood years was "a space of multiple allegiances" (Marrouchi 1998, 209):

When I was growing up, we spoke Egyptian, we ate Egyptian food, we had other Egyptian friends. It was my father's preference. I think he saw marrying an Egyptian as being liberating from the customs of his day. He had left [the Sudanese city of] Umdurman to go to Victoria College in Egypt [which is described as the "Eton of

Africa" in her book] and then Trinity College, Dublin. A lot of his friends married English and Irish ladies. I think marrying an Egyptian was a compromise. My mum and dad were speaking all the time about 'in Sudan we do this' and 'in Egypt we do that' so I was very aware of cultural differences. (Interview by Arifa Akhbar 2010)

In 1990 Aboulela moves to Aberdeen, where she starts her writing career. Between 2000 and 2012, she experiences living in different countries as Jakarta and Dubai, as well as occasional visits to Cairo.

What is evident from these interviews is the hybrid nature of Aboulela's identity. This hybridity is reflected in the host of characters she presents in her novel, and who like herself, try to come to terms with their own hybridity sometimes with ease and comfort and sometimes with inner strife and conflicts. Hers is what Michael Bakhtin (1981) wrote of as "intentional hybridity" that sets different voices against one another without denying their irreconcilable differences (pp.358-359) in an attempt to reconcile the conflicts within.

Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* gains further significance as a statement on hybridity as it is announced at a crucial moment in the history of the development of the concept. Hybridity thinking has been criticized for being a 'dependent' thinking that makes sense only on the assumption of purity (Young 1995). Recently, moreover, there has been a polemical backlash against hybridity thinking as Nederveen Pieterse (2001) explains: "Hybridity it is argued is inauthentic, without roots, for the elite only, does not reflect social realities on the ground. It is multiculturalism lite, highlights superficial confetti culture and glosses over deep cleavages that exist on the ground (p. 221). The question that these attacks miss to take into account is what about the actual hybrids and their experiences?"

Hybridity is also viewed with suspicion by

certain commentators who have seen hybridity as the cultural effect of globalization (a concept which in itself protean). It seems necessary to reflect on the meaning of the word "hybridity" that tends to erase and homogenise differences and local inscriptions, but in which particularisms and parochialism are insidiously gaining headway, notably through a return to essentialized identities, communitarian attitudes and/or religious fundamentalisms that insist on the unicity, the purity and the integrity of identities and cultivate endogamy and the rejection of the Other."(Guignery, 2011, p. 5)

So it becomes an imperative to reflect on the meanings of the word 'hybridity' in a globalized multicultural world. In such a context, hybridity as a way of living holds a prominent place. As such the present research paper aims to analyze Aboulela's views concerning how hybridity could be adopted as a positive strategy of living and co-existence in a multicultural world. It will also highlight the conditions Aboulela holds as essential for the adoption of such a strategy. The analysis will also underline the role of the art in globalized world. The analysis will make use of Homi Bhabha's concept of The Third Space and Gomez Pena's concept of the border as well as Rosi Braidotti's notion of the nomadic subjectivity to foreground the different forms of the hybrid identities presented by Aboulela.

Sudanese-Egyptian Relations: A History of Hybridity

"Rather than a single idea, hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts and themes that at once reinforce and contradict one another" (Kraidy, 2005, p. IV). Therefore, it is important as Nederveen Pieterse (2001) argues to put each analysis of hybridity in its specific context where

the conditions that form hybrid identities are discussed. Thus, a brief account of Sudan's history is essential to understand the hybrid nature of the pre/ post-independence Sudanese society.

A major factor that has affected Sudan's evolution is the country's relationship with Egypt. As early as the eighth millennium B.C., there was contact between Sudan and Egypt. Throughout the centuries, ties between Egyptians and Sudanese took various forms. Fabos (2008) explains how these ties began as commercial ties as male traders-jallaba- from the succession of kingdoms in present-day Sudan's north and west actively pursued commerce and intermarried with Egyptians. In fact, camel trade between Egypt and Sudan has ancient roots and was part of a network of caravan routes connecting Sudan with Africa and Arabia.

In the nineteenth century and during the Turco Egyptian rule in Sudan (in 1820 an Egyptian army under Ottoman command invaded Sudan) these ties became political. The Turco Egyptian administration, although opposed by many Sudanese, "found supporters among certain tribal groups in the Merowe-Dongola region of northern central Sudan, who worked as tax collectors, soldiers and low-level bureaucrats" (Holt and Daly, 2000, p. 96). Meanwhile, economic relations continued uninterrupted as Jallaba "developed a working relationship with the administration and were able to use ties to forge business relations with Egyptian middlemen" (Fabos, 2008, p. 29).

Ties between Egypt and Sudan did not flow one way during that period. A large number of Egyptians settled in Sudan for different reasons. As a result "intermarriage among Egyptians and Sudanese was so common that a word had already come into use in the nineteenth century to describe the offspring of such unions: mwalladin" (Sharkey, 2003, pp. 34-5). This testifies to the fact that Egyptians and Sudanese lived during that period unconscious of any difference between their two countries. It was the British administrators in Sudan under the Anglo-Egyptian continuum, who were increasingly concerned with making distinctions between Egyptians and Sudanese "due to uncertainty about the political loyalties of Egyptians or even the mwalladin, fearing that they might become 'conduits for Egyptian nationalist agitation'" (Sharkey, 2003, p. 35).

Another equally important phase in the Egyptian-Sudanese history is that of slavery. Sudanese slaves were brought to Egypt during the centuries of the Ottoman rule. They were sold to Egyptians most extensively in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. However, "in the decades after the 1877 abolition of slavery, manumitted Sudanese slaves and slave-soldiers settled down in various Cairo neighborhoods as well as the children and wives of former male slave owners" (Fabos, 2008, p. 29). This led to strengthening the Egyptians-Sudanese bonding more than ever before. These ties, unfortunately, were ultimately disturbed by the effect of politics.

Colonization/Condominium

In 1881 Muhammad Ahmed Ibn Abdallah proclaimed himself the Mahdi, who would purify and guide believers and uproot the corrupt oppressive Turks. Mahdist forces defeated the Egyptian army. Although the Mahdi died in the summer of 1885, his successor Khalifa Abdallah institutionalized the Mahdist state that controlled the north until the British conquest in 1898. Lesch (1998) postulates that Britain sought control over the Sudan "for imperial strategic reasons that were largely related to preventing other European powers from seizing the sources of the Nile and gaining footholds along the Red Sea from which they could threaten the sea route to

India" (p. 29). But the official justification presented by London which had been the de facto ruler of Egypt since 1882 was the restoration of Turku-Egyptian sovereignty. Therefore, when it defeated the Mahdiyya in 1898, Britain established a joint regime known as Anglo-Egyptian condominium. The emergence of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium in 1899 reinforced the links between the two countries that lasted till Sudan gained independence in 1956.

Throughout the condominium, the Sudanese maintained a divided stance towards Egypt as a colonizer. Whereas some educated Northerners sympathized with the cause of Nile Valley unity implying solidarity with Egypt in the face of British colonialism, others took a strong separatist line under the motto "Sudan for the Sudanese." "Some, however, maintained an abstract attachment to the cause of Nile valley solidarity while asserting an abstract Sudanese distinction all the same" (Sharkey, 2003, p. 128). In fact Sudanese nationalism throughout the twentieth century maintained the same ambivalent attitude towards Egypt. This situation led some critics to "believe that the Sudanese nationalist movement achieved a semblance of mass participation only on the eve of independence" (Daly, 1989, p. 185).

Lyrics of hybridity

In *Lyrics Alley* Aboulela presents characters who are trying to elaborate a strategy to live by in a postcolonial globalized world. The Sudan that Aboulela represents in her novel is the 1950s Anglo-Egyptian Sudan that is on the threshold of independence. The three main characters namely Mahmoud Abuzeid, Sorraya his nephew and Nur his son are in a way doubly colonized and consequently are culturally hybrid. Each will negotiate his/her hybridity by different means and for different reasons until each makes it a strategy for living.

The concept of hybridity is of prominent importance in postcolonial discourse. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) argue that "hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth" (p.183). They, therefore, view hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation" (p. 118). Some critics claim, however, that the term is overloaded with nineteenth century derogatory ideas of race. Robert Young (1995) in *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* believes that "[t]oday, therefore, in re-invoking this concept we are utilizing the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right as much as the notion of an organic process of the grafting of diversity into singularity" (p. 10). Owing to Bhabha's discussion of cultural hybridity, the term is "celebrated and privileged to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the conquest ability to negotiate the difference" (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158).

For Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), hybridity is a powerful category which destabilizes the colonial discourse, rendering it as fractured, and consequently leads to its subversion:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities, it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity... displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (p. 112)

As such the colonial discourse is revealed to be contradictory and double voiced.

For Bhabha, culture is located in the “Third Space of enunciation” (1994, p. 37), a zone of exchange and negotiation. This space is a space of disavowal of polarization and unitary identities, and at the same time, a space of negotiation, and articulation of new meanings that challenge colonial hegemony:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. (Bhabha, 1995, p. 208)

This Third Space of enunciation is also an in-between space or a border area:

It is in this sense that the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing in a movement not dissimilar to the ambulant, ambivalent articulation of the beyond that I have drawn out: 'Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and fro, so that they may get to other banks....The bridge gathers as a passage that crosses.' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5)

Bhabha (1990) emphasizes the fact that what is created in this Third Space or this liminal space is something new altogether and not just conglomerates of new and old elements (p. 210).

The concept of hybridity is a cornerstone in identity formation of multi-cultural individuals. At the moment of treading the Third Space of enunciation, hybrid identities are also created, for those who “are caught in the discontinuous time of translation and negotiation” are “themselves the bearers of a hybrid identity” (Bhabha, 1995, p, 208). It should be underlined that some people of hyphenated or multiple identities experience their hybridity with ease and comfort. This does not, however, negate the fact that it could also be a discomfort zone to others as it creates a sense of fragmentation and dislocation.

Although Bhabha is most often associated with the celebratory approaches to hybridity it is important to note that he is also aware of the split inherent to all hybrid identities, so he sets it up as “a position of negotiation, of fragmentation and fractures” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 50). Bhabha (1994) believes that the hybrid is formed out of the process of displacement and correspondence in the act of translation: “hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements- the stubborn chunks- as the basis of cultural identifications” (p. 219). These stubborn chunks are processed differently by different individuals. Mahmoud Abuzeid is one of the characters presented by Aboulela in *Lyrics Alley*, who is successfully capable of translating the stubborn chunks into positive spaces of cultural hybridity.

The head of the Abuzeid family, a rich family of merchants, Mahmoud Abuzeid is the director of the Abuzeid Trading, a private limited Liability Company and one of the leading firms in the Sudanese private sector. Abuzeid is fully aware of his identity; he is “indigenous. Let no one call *him* an immigrant! The immigrants came fifty-five years ago with the Anglo-Egyptian force ...those newcomers were adventurers and opportunists... (40). Being a proud Sudanese does not halt him from having a strong business ties with the British officials in order to “steer his family firm through the uncertainties of self-determination and stake a place in the new independent country whenever and whatever form this independence took” (40). In order to maintain business connections with the British, Mahmoud embraces hybridity as a strategy of living.

Mahmoud displays what Godiwala calls “performative mimicry in terms of speech utterance and non-verbal cultural codes” (2007, p. 66). Going to meet the English bank manager Abuzeid is wearing “his best suit, purchased from Bond Street, and his bally shoes” (49), he can speak English well and is always “eager to show off his English. He liked the roll of the words in his mouth...” (50). He contrasts himself to his brother Idris who goes to the meeting with him in a jellabiya and is wearing slippers. In fact Mahmoud thinks of his brother as a “backward element in his life” (48). He has “an office, just like a British company with secretaries, filling cabinets, qualified accountants, telegram operators and everything was written down, filled in order” (40). This performative mimicry points to an ability to engage with the complexities which govern the colonized situation. It also implies a respect for the performatives of others, “indicating an appreciation for those aspects of cultural production which are not marked by the values we need to confront and destabilise” (Godiwala, 2007, p. 67).

This does not mean, however, being subservient to the English, for “unlike the other families who were supported by the British in order to distract them from politics and play them one against the other, the Abuzeids were independent. Mahmoud was proud of that” (40). In other words, the performative aspect of mimicry does not imply an underlying adherence to colonial ideologies. In fact he conceives of himself as equal to any Englishman. His creed is that “Money and goods are what makes men equal” and he has both. He also believes that “true righteousness is not in taking political stance or on serving slogans. It is in fair trade” (196). Being an honest merchant is what takes precedence in his conceptualization of his identity:

I consider commerce to be a noble profession, whatever anyone else might say. While other men fight and hate, we give and take. We negotiate with everyone, Christian, Jew and pagan...I am not a religious man by any means, but there is one saying of the Prophet Muhammad that I cling to. He said: “The truthful and honest merchant will be with the prophets, affirmers of truth and martyrs.” (149)

Being that “truthful and honest merchant” is what allows for Mahmoud Abuzeid’s hybridity. His is what Paul Sharrad (2007) describes as “strategic hybridity which answers to the needs of its different users according to their socio-political contexts” (p. 106). Through Mahmoud Abuzeid Aboulela agrees with Sharrad (2007) that hybridity takes different forms and achieves different ends in different case instances and in different periods. His successful business is his space of utterance of his hybrid identity. In fact, Aboulela is of opinion that work places could be alternative spaces where people can come close: “Often work or the work location is a place which brings together people from different cultures and backgrounds. They work together and respect each other because of their skills and work ethics” (Interview by Kamal, 2010, App. p. 9). Mahmoud’s business is such a place. It is Mahmoud’s Third Space where he redefines the contours of his identity.

Does Mahmoud embrace the same hybridity when reacting towards Sudan’s second colonizer Egypt? His attitude towards Egypt is best exemplified in his views concerning his two wives. Mahmoud Abuzeid is married to two women; his first wife is the Sudanese Waheeba, and his second wife is young Egyptian Nabilah. According to Abuzeid, Waheeba is a “stupid woman” (45), and “[n]ot only was she ugly and ignorant, she was chock full of venom, too” (113). Nabilah on the other hand “always said the right things. She was refined and polite and her wording was pleasing too” (113). Mahmoud justifies these sentiments as follows: “In his mind

he associated her (Waheeba) with decay and ignorance. He would never regret marrying Nabilah. It was not a difficult choice between the stagnant past and the glitter of the future, between crudeness and sophistication" (45).

Mahmoud Abuzeid is a progressive man, he wants to modernize Sudan and according to him Egypt symbolizes modernity, Egypt is Mahmoud Abuzeid's gate to modernity. Consequently he wouldn't mind a unity with Egypt for after all Egypt and Sudan are "historically, geographically and culturally tied" (195). He, moreover, accuses the Mahdists or those who were calling for total independence from Egypt as causing chaos in the country. Mahmoud's cultural hybridity is once again exemplified in his appearance and his linguistic ability. When Quadriah, his mother in law, first sees him she sees "an Egyptian man wearing a suit and a fez, speaking as we do" (183). Mahmoud's linguistic ability should be underlined. He speaks English as well as Egyptian Arabic and Sudanese Arabic. This linguistic ability symbolizes his ability in enunciating his cultural hybridity. In another illuminating incident that underlines the fact that his hybridity is cultural as well as linguistic, occurs when Waheeba circumcises Nabilah's daughter, Ferial, without her knowledge knowing that Nabilah does not believe in circumcision, Mahmoud becomes furious and threatens to divorce Waheeba because it is such a barbaric action. He, moreover, promises Soraya, Idris's daughter, to persuade her father to let her complete her education.

Mahmoud Abuzeid is the true hybrid who is "the only one to negotiate between [Waheeba's world and Nabilah's world], to glide between them, to come back and forth at will. It was his prerogative" (43). Actually Mahmoud spends the summer months in Egypt as he promises Nabilah when they got married and the rest of the year in Sudan in Umdurman. In Sudan he lives with Nabilah in her own Egyptian-styled apartment with her Egyptian maid and Egyptian cook. He simultaneously lives with Waheeba in her part of the saraya next to Nabilah's apartment but he makes sure that each "belonged to different side of the saraya" (43). He never divorces Waheeba and when Nabilah asks for divorce he never divorces her as well. It is his hybridity that enables him to glide successfully between the two worlds. Thinking of Nabilah's demand to be divorced, Mahmoud thinks that:

She had shared his life and not understood him. Not understood that he could not leave Umdurman, not understood that Waheeba, for all her faults, was Nur's mother and always would be. Umdurman was where Mahmoud belonged. Here on this bed was where he would one day die and down these alleys his funeral procession would proceed. (268)

He is aware of the misery and backwardness in Sudan, but "this misery was *his* misery, and this backwardness his duty" and he was filled with satisfaction "that he was contributing to his country's progress" (268) empowered by his hybrid identity. In Abuzeid's hybrid identity there is no dismissal of his indigenous culture, symbolized in Waheeba, nor is there an adoption of the colonized culture, represented in Nabila, there is no mixing of the two either, but there is a continuous negotiation for the sake of his as well as his country's survival.

Mahmoud's hybridity is foregrounded in architectural activities he is involved in. The 'saraya' he lives in is similar to the one he saw in Heliopolis in Cairo and "[t]he materials, too, from the marble tiles to the garden lamps, were shipped from Italy via Egypt" (22). It comprises Nabilah's Egyptian apartment on one side and Waheeba's Sudanese hoash on the other. He, furthermore, is also building an apartment block in the middle of Khartoum. It is the first high-rise in a city,

where “everyone lived in houses-villas for the rich and mud houses for the poor...” (19). Describing this building to his Egyptian teacher who aspires to have an apartment in it, Nur says: ‘My father has great plans for this building. He wants Egyptian taste and expertise-itself borrowed from Europe-to be firmly placed in Sudan’ (22). The ground floor will be for shops and the upper floors residential. It is designed to be “a symbol of modernity and prosperity” (203). These two sites become Mahmoud’s third space and form zones of exchange and negotiation. In this way the hybridity that Mahmoud embraces, a hybridity that creates a successful business and helps in Sudan’s progress.

Soraya is another successful hybrid character. Her hybridity is not as pragmatic as that of Mahmoud Abuzeid but because of her personal circumstances. Aboulela describes Soraya as being “a nomad” (6). In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari use the concept of nomads and nomadology to resist centralization since nomadism is existence outside the organizational “State.” The nomadic way of life is characterized by a continuous movement across space. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) expostulates on the definition of the nomad:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. (p. 380)

The nomad, lives thus, in the middle or between points. The goal of the nomad is to continue to move within the "intermezzo." According to Papastergiadas (1997), Bhabha sees Deleuze and Guattari’s tracking of nomadology is, among others, a parallel metaphor for naming the forms of identity which emerges in a context of difference and displacement or the hybrid identity (p. 278).

In her work on nomadic subjectivity, Rosi Braidotti (1994) uses the concept of nomadism that is “inspired by the experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic” in a totally different way, since “the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (p.5). She further explains that “not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that defined the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling” (p. 5). Braidotti (2002) finds the metaphor of or the “figuration” of the nomadic subjectivity an apt one for her theories of contemporary subjectivity and more specifically of “a situated, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject” which can also “be described as post-modern/industrial/colonial, depending on one’s locations”:

The nomad ... stands for the relinquishing and the deconstruction of any sense of fixed identity. The nomadic is akin to what Foucault called counter-memory, it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self. The feminists - or other critical intellectuals as nomadic subjects - are those

who have a peripheral consciousness; they forgot to forget injustice and symbolic poverty: their memory is activated against the stream; they enact a rebellion of subjugated knowledges. The nomadic style is about transitions and passages without pre-determined destinations or lost homelands. (p. 10)

Braidotti's "[n]omadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities" (2002, p. 11).

Soraya is that nomad. She is a motherless child. Her father is the miserly, backward Idris Abuzeid. She is brought up by her older sister Halima who is married with children of her own. Her second sister Fatima is forced to leave school to get married to her cousin and leaves home to live in a distance city with her husband. "The result was a dry and hollow home, a house Soraya did not particularly like to spend time in" (6). As such "she became a nomad. At every family occasion: wedding, birth, illness or funeral. She would pack up and move to where the company was" (6) leaving one territory to reterritorialize another one:

The nomad is literally a "space" traveller, successively constructing and demolishing her/his living spaces before moving on. S/he functions in a pattern of repetitions which is not without order, though it has no ultimate destination. The opposite of the tourist, the antithesis of the migrant, the nomadic traveller is uniquely bent upon the act of going, the passing through. (Braidotti, *Difference, Diversity and Nomadic Subjectivity*)

So Soraya spends so much time at Halima's house that her children grow jealous of her. She also floats in unannounced to her uncle's house in a way that disturbs his wife Nabilah, borrowing books that she never returns.

Being a nomad entails two things. First, "the nomad stands for the relinquishing and the deconstruction of any sense of fixed identity...it is a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self" (Braidotti *Difference, Diversity and Nomadic Subjectivity*) which allows her to embrace hybridity as a way of living. In fact, Soraya grows up different from the other women in her family. Her mother had never read the newspaper. Her elder sister Halima has never been to school and could read a little. She is not "silly like Fatma [her second sister] who let them snatch her out of school and into the arms of the no-good Nassir, to be banished to Medani" (7) although she was good at school. Soraya loves books and "when everybody was asleep, she would creep indoors, into stifling, badly lit rooms, with cockroaches clicking, to open a page she had marked and step into its pulsating pool of words" (8). Soraya loves school and she is an excellent student. Her favorite subjects are biology and chemistry and she loves reading romantic novels as well. She is going to be one of the few girls to enroll at Kitchener's School of Medicine in spite of her father's beating and constant threatening attitude.

Second, nomadism entails a constant state of "in-process" or "becoming", which Braidotti (1994) refers to as "as-if". The practice of "as-if", for Braidotti, is a "technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now"(p. 6). Braidotti also understands "as-if" as "the affirmation of fluid boundaries, a practice of the intervals, of the interfaces, and the interstices" (p. 7). Soraya's nomadic life style

allows her not only to float in in different houses but in different cultures as well which paves the way for Soraya's hybridity.

Soraya is a cultural hybrid par excellence. She goes to the Sisters' school run by the nuns where she is exposed to Western culture. She has English friends whom she communicates with and visits in different occasions. She sits next to Helena at the back of the classroom because both of them are too tall for the front-row desks. She always spends Christmas in her friend Nancy's family in Khartoum. Nancy's mother was Armenian and her father was Irish. In Nancy's home she sees Santa, eats cakes with white icing, and enjoys the tree with golden baubles and silver fairy dust and exchange gifts with the family. She feels at home:

Standing back, watching Nancy's younger brothers and their friends, aware of her cosmopolitan surroundings, being in the same room as boys her age, animated and happy to be in a party, as if this was what she was born for, she lost her Umdurman bashfulness and was drawn out by a phrase or a smile, to be her real self in public-witty, generous and with a capacity for enjoyment that generated the equivalent in others and drew them towards her. (140)

Soraya is well adapted to the English culture to the extent that her uncle Mahmoud Abuzeid invites her to go with him to Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Christmas party which would be a proper grown-up party, not one for children:

'Can you speak English well and impress these people?'

She answered him in English.

'Of course, Uncle, of course, I can.' She tried to sound as proper as she could. 'I graciously accept this invitation.'

Pleased with her reaction Mahmoud switched to English.

'You are not only my niece, Soraya, you are like a daughter to me.'(159)

Books are another means of exposure to the Western culture. In fact books are her passion, "she couldn't help it when she found words written down, taking them in, following them as if they were moving and she was in a trance tagging along" (8). Although books are scarce and precious but she gets English novels from her cousin Nur, novels that he buys from Alexandria and Cairo, and she buys them as well from the fair held every year during Christmas time where "she would be almost breathless as she surveyed the tables where the books were laid out, and choosing absorbed her to the extent that she forgot her surroundings" (140). She read Lorna Doone, Rebecca, Liza of Lambeth, Emma and The Woman in White.

English books are not the only books that she reads, she also reads Arabic novels as well. That is why she "relished the times she visited Uncle Mahmoud's second wife, Nabilah, because of the shelf of books in her living room (9). In fact, Nabilah's Egyptian house is another "interface" or "interstices" that empowers Soraya's fluid subjectivity. Politically Soraya as a member of the young generation is against unity with Egypt. Yet like her Uncle she believes that Egypt is the symbol of modernity and Nabilah represents "everything that Soraya considered modern" (9). In Egypt "husbands and wives linked arms, whereas back home they did not even walk side by side. This was what Soraya wanted for them [herself and her cousin Nur] to be a modern couple, not to be like Fatma and Nassir each in their separate world" (72). Unable to marry her cousin Nur

because of an accident that renders him paralyzed, she marries his best friend who lets her complete her education and pursue her dreams. So she “is realizing her dreams of modernity, discarding her tobe and cutting her hair short, moving away from Umdurman’s conventions, wearing her glasses freely and carrying her degree like a trophy, gliding through the fashionable salons and parties of the capital” (306). Soraya that visits Nabilah in Cairo during her honeymoon is the modern wife that she always dreamt of becoming:

Nabilah was distracted by the elegant, obviously expensive, clothes and instead of searching the stranger’s face, her eyes lingered on the silk of the dress, the collar that folded wide almost over the breasts; such exquisite jewelry, such stylish shoes. (283)

She still retains however the same “sloppy way” of carrying herself that she had as a young girl, but she succeeds in “re-inventing” herself as well as finishing Braidotti’s “transformative project” which “begins with relinquishing the historically-established, habits of thought which, until now, have provided the 'standard' view of human subjectivity” (Braidotti, *Difference, Diversity and Nomadic Subjectivity*) using hybridity as a tool and a way of living.

Soraya’s articulation of her hybrid/nomadic subjectivity is represented in her cosmopolitan wedding party that is organized by herself, her two sisters as well as their Egyptian and European friends in Khartoum Describing her wedding party to Nabilah who did not attend Soraya says

I wore a white dress on one of the evenings, the first girl in the family to do so, maybe even the first girl in Umdurman! Both of my sisters only wore Sudanese traditional clothes and the gold. I did all that too, but I also added on the European evening and we followed the Egyptian custom of giving every guest a little goblet full of sugared almonds as they were leaving. (284)

As is evidenced Soraya’s wedding reflects her culturally hybrid subjectivity mixing Sudanese, Egyptian and European traditions, producing a one of a kind wedding party. As she floats in different houses, Soraya floats among different cultures making her nomadic subjectivity a site not for struggle and discomfort but a space of mixing that neither assimilate everything nor deny her Sudanese identity. The wedding becomes a space that is fluid, shifting and political, a space of negotiation, and articulation of new meanings. Like Mahmoud’s, Soraya’s hybridity will enable her to become a doctor and helps in Sudan’s progress.

In the cases of both Mahmoud Abuzeid and his niece Soraya, hybridity is adopted with understanding. Each is able to tread the ‘third space of enunciation’ and adopts the hybrid/nomadic way of life. The one who is frozen in the liminal /intermezzo space is Nur Abuzeid, Mahmoud Abuzeid’s son. His ‘arrested development’ results from his inability to accept his hybrid identity and admit the advantage of inhabiting the border which he does because of his different circumstances. The border often forces the border crossers to renegotiate their own sense of identity, so he/she becomes a “border Sisyphus” (Gomez Pena, 1996, p. 1) a state of being that Nur is unable to recognize.

Nur is the pride and hope of the Abuzeid’s family. He is the natural heir to the Abuzeid family business as his elder brother Nassir is an irresponsible lazy man. After spending his early years of education in Sudan, where he was tutored by the Egyptian teacher Ustaz Badr, his father sends him to Victoria College School in Alexandria, Egypt. It is a prestigious school that a few people could afford (35), the Eton of the Middle East (109). Nur is “brilliant in his studies, outstanding

in sports, especially football. An all-rounder, the English headmaster said, and how proud Mahmoud felt that his son was excelling at Victoria College” (42). In fact, Nur has always been an excellent student. Ustaz Badr, who tutored him as a child, loves him as a pupil because of his “genuine desire to learn, not just for the sake of school marks, nor just out of fear of examinations” (20). Nur loves his school and thinks that it is the best school in the world; there he learns to read Shakespeare and how to play football and to swim. He finishes his school and is about to go to Cambridge to complete his education, having excelled in the entrance exam, when he is paralyzed while diving in the Mediterranean in Alexandria during the summer vacation.

However, Nur is paralyzed long before the accident. Nur has always been interested in poetry, when he hears a poem that he likes; he writes it down before he forgets it and memorizes it later. He always wishes that he the poems that he hears are his. When he was younger and before going to Victoria College, he had loved to sing. He would sing at every family occasion, memorizing poems and popular tunes, his voice sweet and hopeful (13). But when he sang in a wedding outside the family, his father punished him and forbade him from going out because he was shaming the Abuzeid family, standing in front of strangers like a common singer. He also tried to write poetry and his Egyptian teacher used to encourage and praise his efforts. He continues to write poetry while he is in Victoria College but “nothing [he] consider[s] to be strong or indeed special” (20) but these trials are kept as a secret from his family who considers writing poetry a waste of time.

Family traditions are not the only obstacle in his writing career, cultural alienation because of his Western education is another hindrance. It is manifested in his inability to express himself in Arabic. This is crystalized in a nightmare that he has after the accident when he is in the London hospital. He dreams of being a new boy in Victoria College:

It is grey night in the dormitory. Someone is weeping; it must be the new boy. The new boy is homesick, he doesn't understand the rules of this new school and his English is rudimentary. He thinks he can leave. Well, home is a long way away, in another country. Nur can explain all this to him, patronize him, enjoying the feeling that he is older and knows more. Here are your new friends. Here are the masters who will teach you. Here are the prefects; you have to obey them and address them as Captain. You are a boarder; you are not a day boy. You will be called by your last name, everyone is...

Nur is the new boy. He speaks Arabic and the prefect has gone to report him. Nur is bewildered by the new rules. (121)

The nightmare ends up by Nur being punished at the end of the term and has to sit in an empty classroom alone copying out five hundred lines from the telephone directory.

The same inability to use the Arabic language is revealed prior to the accident when Nur is in Alexandria with his cousin Soraya. Nur is in love with Soraya and they are to be married when they finish their education. “The theme of this summer, its signature tune, were the lyrics: I love you Soraya... I love you too. ‘Will you marry me?’ This he said in English”(70). Nur's failure in expressing himself in his mother language is his constant alienation from his own culture because of his continuous traveling from Sudan to Egypt. Nur's mother, Waheeba, though “ignorant and stupid” is able to sense it and confronts Mahmoud Abuzeid by her thoughts:

'Travel hurt my son,' she said. 'If he had stayed in Sudan, none of this would have happened, he would have been well.'

Did she want to blame him for the accident? His fault for insisting that Nur studies at Victoria College. (110)

Waheeba's insinuations and Mahmoud's fear are validated because it is his father's views and inclinations that isolated him from Sudan and from his true identity as a Sudanese poet.

Nur maintains an ambivalent attitude towards Egypt and Egyptian culture as well. This is reflected in his attitude towards Nabilah, his father's wife. He believes that she married his father although he is married with children because of his money, but Soraya knows better:

He was blaming Nabilah to avoid blaming his father, but Soraya understood why her uncle had married Nabilah. She could imagine clearly his desperation to move from the hoash to a salon with a pretty cultured wife by his side. (75)

A more illuminating incident occurs when Nur is playing football on the beach in Alexandria with two English soldiers on the day he is injured. When some young Egyptians challenge Nur and the soldiers, Nur teams with the soldiers "raising his arms up in the air every time there is a goal and when the other team has the ball he makes kicking gestures with his feet, tossing up gusts of sand" (81). Nur represents the younger generation of Sudan. This generation who although is aware that "the ties of the family to Egypt were strong" yet they "carried a strong sense of their Sudanese belonging. Their glittering future was here, here in the Southern land where the potential was as huge and as mysterious as the darkness of its nights" (12). So it is difficult for Nur to accept his cultural hybridity.

Unlike Mahmoud Abuzeid himself as well as Soraya, Nur can never feel "indigenous" nor "can he pack and move to where company was." Nur is unable to hold his differences, or process the "stubborn chunks." Although he is polylinguist and multicontextual he is unable to interconnect or bridge the gaps of his fractured identity. Although Nur crosses geographical borders, he fails to cross them culturally.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is one of the major theorist of the border poetics. Gómez-Peña is a performance artist, writer, activist, and director of the performance troupe La Pocha Nostra. Born in Mexico City, he moved to the US in 1978. His performance work and 10 books have contributed to the debates on cultural diversity and border culture. In his *The New World Border. Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century* he proposes a "conceptual World Border" of a "Fourth World" which he sees as an alternative to "the old colonial dichotomy of First world/Third World" as a cartography of plurality built by "Micro-republics" which represent a "utopian cartography" in which hybridity is the dominant culture (1996, pp. 5,7). In the "New World Border," that provides a new model of hybridity, Bhabha's third space becomes "a great trans and intercontinental border zone" (p. 5) and border crossing becomes a key factor in the formation of the hybrid identity. In this New World Border hybridity is not charged by a pejorative semantics, where the one who opposes hybridity is "the other," the "marginated": "there are no 'others' or better said, the true 'others' are those who resist fusion, mestizaje and cross-cultural dialogue" (Gomez-Pena, 1996, p. 7). The hybrid- "a cultural, political, aesthetic and sexual hybrid- is cross-racial, polylinguistic and multicontextual. From a disadvantaged

position, the hybrid expropriates elements from all sides to create more open and fluid systems" (Gomez Pena, 1996, p. 12). Border is, in this context, "no longer a separating or excluding but a 'transversal' or rather 'hybrid' category," "it gets a semiotic status of 'edge' as a locus of enunciation and cultural production" (Toro, 2006, p. 30). The border is no longer at any fixed geopolitical site: "I carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go" (Gomez Pena, 1996, p. 64). For Gomez Pena 'border' represents a place for the negotiation of different cultural identities. It becomes a privileged space of experiment and reinvention: "The border became my home, my base of operation and my laboratory for social and artistic experimentation" (1996, p. 63).

Paralyzed from neck under, Nur is literally on the border. With "broken spine, broken engagement, broken heart" (161) he inhabits too many borders: the border between life and death, the border between ability and disability, between hope and despair. He becomes aware of his situation when his mother forces him physically to live on the border. After feeling depressed for some times, his mother decides to move him to the hoash that represents the border of the house. In that hoash he listens to "the sounds of the alley": men walking to the mosque, women visiting each other and dawdling, the scuffle and thud of a football game" (300). He listens to women gossiping, and sipping their coffee, he watches them cooking and he becomes a natural part of the gathering. In that hoash he inhales the smells of the cardamom with coffee, insence with sandalwood, cumin with cooking, luxuriated in the sounds of water being poured on the ground, a donkey braying, the birds riotous, knowing, hopeful and small; loud and fragile. In that hoash, his senses are sharpened, as if by not walking or touching with his hands, his skin has become more and more sensitive, his vision, hearing and sense of smell sharper than ever before (163). In other words he becomes in touch with his own culture, with his sudanization.

Nevertheless, he has much time to rediscover reading, which is ironically done through his Egyptian teacher Ustaz Badr, who spends time with Nur reading literature and refuses to be paid:

Ustaz Badr walks in, carrying a wooden easel dislodge from an unwanted desk in his school. He props it up in front of Nur like a table and other books, not just school books are placed in it. Nur's old books to read again, and now that his appetite is whetted he wants more, more words, more stories, more poems. Hajjah Waheeba gives Ustaz Badr money and Nur dictates the titles he wants from the bookshop. Ustaz Badr recommends this author and reminds him of another. (169)

When he reads "he floats in a current of thoughts and images; he swims as if he is moving his arms and legs. This is a kind of movement, this is a momentum, a building up, starting, strolling, wandering, exploring" (169). While floating and swimming, he crosses cultural boundaries that he refuses to cross before.

Nur is unaware of the effects of these variables on his state of mind. He lapses into fits of despair, anger and food strike from time to time. These are not, however, the only fits that take hold of him. From time to time, poems come to him also like a "sneezing fit: expectation, tickle, build up, congestion, then burst, release, relief and afterwards, that good tingling feeling." He, then, writes his first poem, it sounds good and feels different "because of its mix of Sudanese colloquial and classic Arabic, a fusion of formal language and common everyday words." Nur is aware that his earlier poems were juvenilia, imitations of grand words striving awkwardly to

rhyme.” He realizes that this poem is different because it is written in his mother tongue. He is further aware of the fact that “[t]he colloquial words squeezing out of him,” are the result of “the accumulation of the past months, all that he knows so well and didn’t know before. The words are from inside him, his flesh and blood, his own peculiar situation” (221). Aptly his first poem is entitled ‘*Travel is the Cause*’ and the first line is ‘*In you Egypt, are the causes of my injury. And in Sudan my burden and solace.*’ Aptly enough also is the place of composition of this poem:

It is the dark hours before dawn. Everyone else in the hoash is asleep. Nur had been looking up at the clouds, watching the night sky pinned up with stars. He had been feeling sorry for himself, the tears rolling into his ears in the most irritating way, and then down to wet his hair. There is no need at that time of night to hold them back or blink them awasy. But when the poem comes out of him, they stop of their own accord. (221)

So the boarder becomes his “home, [his] base of operation, and [his] laboratory for social and artistic experimentation” (Gomez Pena, 1996, p. 63), while the indoors becomes the place “for the daily humiliation of diaper change, enema, botched attempts at shaving, water cascading his body for a bath” (223). In fact, Nur with “broken spine, broken engagement, broken heart” (161) straddles too many borders: the border between life and death, the border between ability and disability, between hope and despair. It is only through writing that he is able to “skid the surface of pain and flutters against sadness” (307). This poem becomes a hit lyrical song and establishes Nur’s reputation as a lyric poet. Opposing Nur’s new vocation at the beginning, Mahmoud Abuzed has to succumb realizing that writing poetry is Nur’s only way for comfort and satisfaction.

Nur’s poem serves two functions. First of all it forces Nur to recognize the advantages of inhabiting the border and his accepting of his Sisyphus like/hybrid identity and acknowledging his cultural hybridity. The injury that Nur refers to in his poem is not only the physical injury of the accident but also the psychological injury resulting from dealing with different cultures that are constantly contesting his identity. If Egypt for Mahmoud Abuzeid and Soraya is the seat of modernity, Egypt for Nur is an ambivalent place where although he is educated, it is a Western education and where he misses being in close contact with his own Sudanese culture. In fact Nur is not given the chance to be fully aware of his multicultural context until he is bedridden because of the accident. So Sudan becomes his solace but also his burden because he is still shackled by the backwardness of his society and the family traditions:

Mahmoud shared his generation’s contempt for popular music and viewed it with suspicion, disdaining the milieu of musicians, dancers and singers whom he and the rest of his class associated with debauchery and loose morals. (269)

The second role that Nur’s poem plays is underlining how art functions in resolving the paradoxes working inside the postcolonial intellectual. Nur’s poem is a hybrid poem “because of its mix of Sudanese colloquial and classic Arabic, a fusion of formal language and common everyday words.” By giving voice to, ‘reinterpreting’ and ‘remaping’ the elements of contestation working inside him, Nur is able to rearticulate for himself a new identity. He is no longer the heir to Abuzeid family business, but he is the poet of love and hope. Moreover, the

hoash acquires “an unexpected glow” with “others come and go and late at night songs are composed, where young poets come to recite their raw lyrics and leave saying, ‘I’ve attended a literary salon in Umdurman where they serve a good dinner, too’” (301). So the border becomes the center, a privileged place where Nur can negotiate his hybridity producing new artistic forms.

If Nur’s poem helps him in coming to terms with the paradoxes of his life, *Lyrics Alley* helps Leila Aboulela is negotiating her own hybridity, she is coming to terms with her own nomadic/hybrid reality through writing about characters who like herself suffers contradictions as a result of their hybrid position. It should be noted that the three representations of hybridity that she represents are successful in life. Moreover they carry lights within them: Nur and Soraya literally means light and chandelier respectively while Mahmoud means someone who is praiseworthy or commendable. Being a hybrid both biologically and culturally, Aboulela understands the value of hybridity in the present globalized world. She believes that “literature can play a part in helping people to navigate these new differences of culture” (Kamal, 2010, App. 6) Consequently she negotiates these cultural differences through her art opening what Bhabha has called a third space within which different elements encounter and transform each other. She crosses different cultural and geographical borders as well as the borders within only to emphasize what Gomez Pena underlines:

The role that artists and cultural organizations can perform in this paradigm shift is crucial. Artists can function as community brokers, citizen diplomats, ombudsmen and border translators. And our art spaces can perform the multiple roles of sanctuaries, demilitarized zones, centers for activism against xenophobia and informal think tanks for intercultural and transnational dialogue. (1996, p. 70)

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