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What Is a Name? Identity and Diaspora in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*

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***Abstract*—What does it mean to be a Muslim carrying an Arabic name, such as Osama or Hussein along with existing as a part of a Western society today? This is one of the core questions that are explored by the Egyptian-Sudanese-Scottish novelist Leila Aboulela in her 2015 novel *The Kindness of Enemies.* In light of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's definition of identity as a "'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (Hall, 1996, p. 598), this paper investigates how the discovery of one's identity is indeed an intricate procedure, one that is unavoidably complicated. When an individual straddles the boundaries of two cultures, the mission becomes even more complex and problematic. Furthermore, this paper throws light on the significance of names for those of Muslim heritage trying to assimilate into the British social system after 7/7/2005 London bombings. As the novel highlights the effect of the "war on terror" on Arab British Muslims, the paper discusses why Aboulela's main protagonists have been anguished by taking off their first identify markers. Why Natasha legally changes her name? Why Osama prefers being named Oz or Ossie? Additionally, the paper aims at examining how the characters' identities are formed and reformed to produce themselves anew within their host cultures.**

***Index Terms*—Leila Aboulela, kindness of enemies, diaspora, identity, hybridity**

I. Introduction

> When I fell into slavery, I was forced to give up not just my freedom, but also the name that my mother and father had chosen for me. A name is precious; it carries inside it a language, a history, a set of traditions, a particular way of looking at the world. Losing it meant losing my ties to all those things too. (Lalami, 2014, p. 7)

What does it mean to be a Muslim carrying an Arabic name, such as Osama or Hussein along with being part of a Western society today? This is one of the core questions that are explored by Leila Aboulela in her 2015 novel *The Kindness of Enemies.* Aboulela is a novelist who was born in Egypt in 1964, was raised in Sudan, educated in England, and currently lives in Scotland. She uses English as an apparatus to write and speak her notions that have been deeply influenced by her diasporic experience. In an interview with Daniel Musiitwa, Aboulela accentuates that her yearning to "write herself into Britain" has instigated from her personal experience of migration and settlement in Scotland where she finds herself struggling with the contemporaneous discourse of privileging the West as superior while subjugating the East. She asserts that "to be a practicing person of any faith nowadays is to swim against the tide. But it also means having access to ancient wisdom and guidance that modern society devalues but is unable to replace" (Interview by Daniel Musiitwa, 2011).

Through her fiction, Aboulela is adamant to unsettle and overthrow the dogmatic entrenched stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims as primitive, backward, and radical terrorists. Conspicuously, she scrutinizes the underprivileged critical space that Arabs and Muslims are allowed to occupy in the West after a concatenation of events such as 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States of America, the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands, the 7/ 7/ 2005 London bombings, and the debate on the Prophet Mohammed cartoons, all of which have generated an atmosphere of insecurity for Muslim immigrants in the West. As Aboulela initiates her novel:

> Many Muslims in Britain wished that no one knew they were Muslim. 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, not enough to walk against the wall, to raise a glass of champagne, to eat in the light of Ramadan and never step into a mosque or say the shahada or touch the Qur'an. All this was not enough, though most people were too polite to say it. (Aboulela, 2015, p. 6)

This paper aims at examining how some of the novel's characters, such as Oz, Natasha, and Jamaleldin, first of all, have been hijacked from their Arabic culture and from their Muslim identities, in addition to the fact that they have

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been totally and utterly affected by the ensuing "war on terror", each character in its own time and place. The paper argues that when those characters have decided to change their names, they were having no clear-cut identities; yet, they have been entrapped into a new space and into a new identity. Since their real names are the first marker that bonds them to their true selves, to their roots, as well as to their homelands, deserting them means evacuating all of that.

In the light of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall's definition of identity as a "'moveable feast'": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (Hall, 1996, p. 598), this paper explores how the discovery of one's identity is indeed an intricate procedure, one that is unavoidably complicated. When an individual straddles the boundaries of two cultures, as do Oz, Natasha, and Jamaleldin, the mission becomes even more complex and problematic. Furthermore, this paper throws light on the significance of names for those of Muslim heritage trying to assimilate into the British social system after 7/7/2005 London bombings. As the novel highlights the effect of the "war on terror" on Arab British Muslims, the paper discusses why Aboulela' s main protagonists have been anguished by taking of their first identify markers. Why does Natasha legally change her name? Why does Osama prefer being called Oz or Ossie? Additionally, the paper aims at investigating how the characters' identities are formed and reformed to produce themselves afresh within their host cultures.

In his article "The Question of Cultural Identity", Hall (1996) argues that identity is in fact a process where "[t]he subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self". Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about" (p. 598). Hence, Aboulela' s representation of her hybrid immigrant characters ratifies Hall's definition of identities as a process which is constructed within representations. Hall (1996) adds in his article that:

> The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. Correspondingly, the identities which composed the social landscapes "out there," and which ensured our subjective conformity with the objective "needs" of the culture, are breaking up as a result of structural and institutional change. The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic. This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity. (Hall, 1996, p.598)

Bringing Oz, Natasha, and Jamaleldin into the central stage of the novel, Aboulela crafts a narrative that shows how those characters encounter not only geographical and physical, but also religious and cultural detachment. Their cultural identities proved to be fractured and shattered rather than being coalesced or anchored. They are caught in an in-between space, grappling with which parts of themselves to accept and display, and which parts they must conceal and keep out of sight.

II. The Intertwined Narratives

The Kindness of Enemies is based on a plot of two intertwined narratives, the first is set in 2010 Scotland where the global war on terror pixilates the lives of the history professor Natasha, her student Oz as well his mother, who is an Iraqi-born actress, Malak Raja. Natasha Wilson, who acts "as a bridge connecting us to the past," is a Sudanese Russian Scottish history professor at a Scottish university whose research interests in the history of a real-life nineteenth century Sufi jihadist Caucasian leader, Imam Shamil, the leader of the Caucasus war against the Russian Empire in the Caucasus in the mid-nineteenth century. Imam Shamil galvanizes her curiosity to visit two of his descendants, Oz, who is one of her students, and his mother Malak Raja who is "perhaps the female equivalent of Yul Brynner or Ben Kingsley" (Aboulela, 2015, p.12), but away less popular. During her first visit to Malak's home, Natasha witnesses Oz's arrest by the British anti-terrorism squad due to a suspicion of radicalism and terrorism. After few days, Oz was released with no allegation but presaged not to visit any websites set up by radical Islamist groups. Oz's arrest and release were a turning point not only in his own life, but also for Malak and Natasha who were dragged into the investigations where their lives and careers have been affected negatively.

Gradually, the narrative begins to shift focus to the historical plot which evinces Imam Shamil's Sufism and jihad against the Russians from 1839 to 1859. Imam Shamil is an Avar Guerrilla leader who puts his life at the stake to maintain his people's freedom. His young son, Jamaleldin, is taken as a hostage by the Russians while Shamil has spent years and years trying to free him. Meanwhile, Jamaleldin becomes the Tsar's "godson" and is raised as a Russian soldier and when finally, he is home and among his tribe he has never been able to wash away or get rid of that feeling of estrangement and aloofness. Fearlessly, Imam Shamil has resisted and mutinied against the Russian incursion for many years; unfortunately, he ends up a defeated captive and is taken to Russia where he has spent the rest of his life in exile till the Tsar permits him to perform the Hajj to the holy city of Mecca in 1870, after which he dies in 1871 in Al Madinah Al Munawara. Following the two intertwined narratives, one can observe the fact that "Natasha is the historian who puts the pieces together. Simultaneously, Malak and Oz's lineage, which is traced back to Imam Shamil, further connects the two narratives" (Awad, 2018, p. 73).

In a Western environment where Islam confronts many unprecedented challenges and is cast away as the leper of all religions, Aboulela travels throughout the past to bring it back into life. She tends to counter that Western orthodox exclusivist portrayal and misrepresentation of Islam, Arabs, and Muslims as terrorists and extremists. She holds the

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mirror up to reflect the real image of Islam as a religion of lenience and self-endurance and to demonstrate how "Sufism delves into the hidden truth behind the disguise" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 314). The novel has been examined from various angles. For instance, Awad's (2018) "Fiction in CONTEST with History? Faith, Resilience and the War on Terror in Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*", scrutinizes Aboulela' s technique of recalling an incident from the past to reflect on current modern issues through sewing two analogous plots (Awad, 2018, p. 73). Other studies, including Alkodimi's (2021) "Islamophobia, Othering and the Sense of Loss: Leila Aboulela' s *The Kindness of Enemies*" in addition to Büyükgebiz' s (2021) article "Political Islam/Ophobia in *The Kindness of Enemies*" examine Aboulela's depiction of the radicalized perception of Islam and Muslims in Western Cultures after the 9/11 attacks. As emphasized by Büyükgebiz (2021) "The Kindness of Enemies is one of the novels that stand out as a guide in terms of handling the problem in this context and making a distinction between Islam and political Islam" (p. 231). However, this current study will examine Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* from the previously clarified perspectives.

III. What Is a Name?

In the light of the ensuing "war on terror" that is epitomized in the realm of *The Kindness of Enemies*, Arabic names such as Osama and Hussein acquire negative connotations within Western societies that often bind the name Osama with the form of extremist Salafi jihadist thought represented by Usama bin Laden, who is the founder of Al Qaeda, the organization that claimed responsibility for the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States of America (Post, 2002, p. 15). Besides, the name Hussein which is often a reminder of Saddam Hussein the fifth president of Iraq who was deposed in 2003 by military forces led by the United States president George W. Bush and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair who accused him of possessing weapons of mass destruction and of having ties to Al Qaeda (Pipe & Vickers, 2007). With this unwholesome, loaded background, having such an Arabic Muslim name while living within a Western society is a sort of unfortunate incident.

Growing up as an insider/outsider is problematic. And when you are carrying a name that sounds unlike everyone else's it would be a greater burden. Anglicizing or adopting a Western name is the precursory step both Osama and Natasha have taken on their journey of assimilation; changing their names is part of the process of "forming and reforming" their new identities to camouflage within the British culture. Oz is a second-generation immigrant who is "born in Britain and so his expectations are based on that" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 285). He considers himself a British citizen who has all the rights that this citizenship might grant. Conscious of his being a Muslim from an African roots, Osama favors anglicizing his name. As Natasha narrates Osama's mother "called him Ossie. His friends and teachers called him Oz. We were all eager to avoid his true name, Osama" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 4). According to Büyükgebiz (2021), the novel depicts moments where islamophobia not only affects non-Muslim cultures but also Muslims themselves and that the widespread "fear of Islam" has both external and internal bases. To be more specific, he argues that "the politicization of the religion" does not affect Islam as much as it does to its followers because it associates Muslims with terrorists (p. 227). Accordingly, it is natural for any person to fear a religion if they are harmed by its "politicized" doctrine that stigmatizes them as terrorists, which normally explains their avoidance of their "cultural identity". Thus, Oz intends to shed his real name as a way of avoiding conjectures and suspicions in Scotland. Howbeit, his arrest and sequestration have verified the actual uselessness of swapping his name from Osama to Oz or Ossie.

Unlike Natasha or Jamaleldin, Oz never separates his British from his Muslim identity; he has never held that sense of being ashamed of his African heritage, or of his being the descendent of the Sufi jihadists legendary leader Imam Shamil. For him, Islam and jihad are parts and parcels of his Muslim culture. Oz perceives jihad as "not something we should be ashamed of." Islam and jihad as well as "the types of weapons used in jihad" were milestones of his history research where "[his] thesis is that they reflect the technology of their time and are often the same as those used by the enemy" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 12). However, Oz's studies are deemed as taboos in the Western culture which indorses a bigoted image of Islam and Muslims. Such research done by an Arab who is living in a Western society proves things to be more problematic than Oz has imagined. Few days after doing his online academic research on the types of weapons utilized by jihadists, Osama is arrested and dragged into prison under suspension of being vulnerable to radicalization. The way he is investigated and treated by the police in addition to the biased way the media reports his arrest brought him into identity crisis. As Awad (2018) remarks that:

> Oz is demonised, tainted and otherised. His sense of citizenship is washed away by being pushed to the margins of the nation. Overall, this incident has made Oz re-think and re-position his identity as a British Muslim, and it even made him feel isolated and alienated from the greater society. As a young British Muslim, Oz has come to realise the liminality, precariousness, and tenuousness of the position he occupies within the nation. He is disgruntled because he is otherised in the very country in which he was born and grew up. In a way, Oz's case parallels those of many young British Muslims who feel estranged in their own country because of their religious beliefs and outlooks. (p. 80)

After ten days of non-stop interrogation and relentless investigations, Oz has been released with no charges; howbeit, he finds himself completely "out of place"; perceiving himself as a social misfit. Besides, no single newspaper has reported his release or forecasts anything related to how he has been impudently investigated. Thereby, Oz alters into a shaken and a traumatized person who is impuissant to revive that "sense of self". His incarceration and the way he has

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been dragged and investigated alters him into a person who is "fragmented; composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities" (Hall, 1996, p. 598).

Once he is released, Oz latches himself into his private room and withholds socializing with anyone. Though this is not the path that he envisions his life to take, he drops out of college and decides to leave Britain to South Africa where his father lives as if he attempts to recollect the shattered bits and pieces of his tumbledown self. Oz's decision might be seen as an act of relocating his displaced self within its biological rather than its social roots. Undergoing such an excruciating experience has shaken Oz's self-assurance and this triggers again Hall's argument where he contends that:

> This loss of a stable "sense of self" is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements - de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves - constitutes a "crisis of identity" for the individual. As the cultural critic, Kobena Mercer, observes, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (Mercer, 1990, p. 43). (Hall, 1996, p. 597)

Similar loss of a stable "sense of self" can be observed as well in Natasha's character that endures the same sense of un-belonging and up-rootedness. As a Sudanese-Russian-Scottish immigrant, Natasha feels as an outsider who never fits in. She considers herself as having,

> an unfortunate name; my surname. One that I nagged my mother and stepfather to change. It was good that I did that; had I waited for marriage, I would have waited in vain. 'Imagine,' I said, 'arriving in London in the summer of 1990, fourteen years old, just as Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Imagine an unfamiliar school, a teacher saying to the class, "We have a new student from Sudan. Her name is Natasha Hussein."' From the safe distance of the future, I joined my classmates in laughing out loud. (Aboulela, 2015, pp. 4-5).

In this respect, one can refer to Azman and Bahar's (2020) article "Discerning Cultural Homegenisation: Crisis of Identity and Sense of Unbelonging in The Kindness of Enemies by Leila Aboulela" where they examine Aboulela's novel in light of Hall's concept of cultural homogenization. One of the central targets of Azman and Bahar (2020) is to scrutinize Aboulela's portrayal of Natasha's crisis of identity and that clamorous sense of unbelonging and uprootedness that drove her to not only to change her name, but also to change the whole course of her life and to abandon her ethics and morals when she agreed to inspect and report college students who might show signs of radicalization. Natasha, in her cultivation of the western culture, erases her sense of belonging to her inherited identity (Azman & Bahar, 2020, p. 584). To be more specific, she changes her name out of "fear" [of not belonging] and shame [of any possible association with] the former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (Azman & Bahar, 2020, p. 581). As if her name becomes the troubled border between what she is and what she aspires to become.

In "The Captivity Narrative and East-West Understanding in Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*", Campbell (2019) provides an analysis of Aboulela's novel as a narrative of captivity. Campbell (2019) contends that Natasha herself, along with the plot, suffers from "captivity". He presumes that Natasha is incarceration to the British culture becomes evident when she decides to change her middle name as an attempt to conceal her Eastern origins. Her academic persona represents the paths she chooses towards "success" in Western society and her research becomes her solace to her past (p. 61).

Wholeheartedly, Natasha grows up as an aficionado scholar; a knowledge seeker who works day and night to establish herself as a dedicated and prolific researcher. It is thought-provoking to observe the way she strives to prove herself as "topical, relevant, and despite [her] research interest, inhabiting the present" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 6). As a teenager, Natasha chooses to leave Khartoum with her mother, who is a former Olympic gymnast from the Soviet Union, after her parent's divorce heading to Britain where her mother marries a rich Scotsman. Willingly, Natasha detaches herself from all past connections; her roots, her Islamic religion, and above all her Hussein name and adopts her stepfather's last name; to become Dr. Wilson who is not even "Muslim by name". She washes away all ties to her past self and that previous precarious identity. Abiding to no ethical stand, Dr. Wilson succumbed to the British legislations and "volunteered to enroll on a course to inspect radicalization signs among students" (Awad, 2008, p. 82). She tends to assimilate to the culture and to the power politics by all means possible. Even so, within the British environment, the only thing that can jiggle her confidence is when anybody brings her skin color or her Hussein name during a conversation. To her, that Hussein name is a burden, a disfigurement, or in other words, an unpleasant reminder of the incongruity evident between her and her pure British peers. This might delineate her urge to assume a British persona that might aid her assimilation and blending into mainstream British society and culture. Natasha's attempt to change her identity by swapping her surname from Hussein to Wilson brings us back to Hall's discussion of diasporic people those who "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 1993, p. 402).

Apparently, Natasha has a solid position as a scholar; nonetheless, when Oz is arrested, Natasha becomes a suspect too as the police confiscate her cellphone and laptop. Once she has left Malak's house, she gets tormented by a mist of troubles; a bizarre intimidation charge threatens her academic career; a terrorism investigation queries her ethics. Her apartment is ransacked; her distanced father in Sudan falls ill, and her stepmother litigates her in court. Patently, neither Natasha's anglicized surname nor her academic attainments have aided in securing that frangible space which she has been seeking to inhabit. As she expresses it:

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> Every step climbed, every achievement, every recognition – all that hard work – had not taken me far enough, not truly redeemed me, not landed me on the safest shore. The skin on my skull tensed so that I could not form a facial expression; even pushing my glasses up my nose felt strange, as if my skin was both numb and ultra-sensitive at the same time. To have your personal files examined, to reveal what is exceedingly intimate – a password and search engine history – felt a hundred times worse than having luggage examined at the airport. (Aboulela, 2015, p. 167)

That incident along with the process of being investigated has triggered Natasha's bygone sense of humiliation and marginalization. As she spells it distinctly:

> Natasha Wilson denoted a person who was smeared by suspicion, tainted by crime. I might as well have stayed Natasha Hussein! Even though my laptop and mobile phone were returned to me, even though no formal charges were ever levelled at me, still, it now took conscious effort to walk with my head held high. My voice became softer, my opinions muted, my actions tentative. I thought before I spoke, became wary of my students and, often, bowed my head down. (Aboulela, 2015, p. 310)

No matter how remarkable her scholarly achievements have been, Natasha resorts back to her uprooted and de-centered self who has been fruitlessly struggling to fit in. What the reader gets from Natasha's efforts to wear the persona of a Western is the definite imperfection of "assimilation" (Campbell, 2019, p. 62). Thus, the only place where she experiences the essence of belonging is when she is back to Sudan among her mother's friend Grusha, her ex-boyfriend Yasha, and her brother Mikki. There, in her homeland, Natasha:

> valued the sense of belonging they gave me, the certainty that I was not an isolated member of a species but simply one who had wandered far from the flock and still managed to survive, for better or for worse, in a different habitat. Chatting with them, we would skip from Russian to English to Arabic and I relaxed without the need to prove, explain, or distinguish myself. Nor squeeze to it in, nor watch out of the corner of my eye the threats that my very existence could provoke in the wrong place in the wrong time among the wrong crowd. (Aboulela, 2015, p. 310)

Back in Sudan, Natasha reunites with her biological roots as well as with her Hussain name; she has felt at ease with being called Natasha Hussein; even proud.

IV. Jamaleldin: The "Tsar's Godson"

Several binaries are at issue here; the struggle between "Western" and "Eastern" culture, Islam and Christianity, self and other, in addition to the identity crisis that has been communicated within the world of the novel, anguish not only Oz and Natasha, but also Jamaleldin, who, as a child, has been taken a captive to Russia and returned to Imam Shamil's mountains as a fully-fledged young man; nevertheless, spotted as a debilitated Caucasian who is incapable of fulfilling or meeting his tribe's or his father's great expectations. Named after "his father's teacher, Sheikh Jamal el-Din al Husayni, the gentle Sufi scholar who preferred books to war" (Aboulela, 2015, p.18), Jamaleldin never changes his name, but the only thing he shares with Sheikh Jamal el- Din is that they both believe in peace rather than war. His kidnapping and his diasporic experience in Russia carry him to a further distanced place that is isolated from the Avar's culture as well as from Sufism and its principles.

Decades before we get to know or to use the term "Stockholm syndrome"—that is a trope that has been first coined in 1973 after the name of the Norrmalmstrog robbery of Krefitbanken at Normalmstrog in Stockholm Sweden to "describe a pathological response on the part of individuals involved in kidnapping or hostage-taking situations" (Nair, 2015, p. 454) – Jamaleldin, in essence, experiences a bewildering feeling of compassion and emotional attachment towards his Russian captors, who abducted him not only physically, but also spiritually and mentally. Keeping the Stockholm Syndrome in mind while discussing Jamaleldin's identity crisis may help situating him as a sufferer of the syndrome. The Russians have treated him with as much kindness as his own cultures allow; he came to be known all over the world as the "Tsar's godson". Rather than developing an ingrained hatred for the imposed Christian Russian culture, Jamaleldin developed a kind of compassion and admiration for the culture and religion of his captors. This complements Nair's (2015) argument as he defines the Stockholm Syndrome as:

> A psychological phenomenon in which hostages express empathy, sympathy, and positive feelings towards their captors sometimes to the point of defending and identifying with their captors. These feelings are generally considered in light of the danger or risk endured by the victims who essentially mistake a lack of abuse from their captors for an act of kindness. (Nair, 2015, p. 385).

As for Natasha, she has no sense of belonging to any land or culture; she defines herself as a:

> Failed hybrid, made up of unalloyed selves. My Russian mother who regretted marrying my Sudanese father. My African father who came to hate his white wife. My atheist mother who blotted out my Muslim heritage. My Arab father who gave me up to Europe without a fight. I was the freak. I had been told so and I had been taught so and I had chewed on this verdict to the extent that, no matter what, I could never purge myself of it entirely. My intellect could rebel, and I was well-read on the historical roots and taboos against miscegenation (the word itself hardly ever used now), but revulsion and self-loathing still slithered through my body in minute doses. The disease was in me despite the counselling and knowing better. Natasha Hussein would

> always be with me. I could glimpse her in the black-white contrast of a winter branch that was covered on one side with snow. (Aboulela, 2015, p. 46)

The same holds true for Jamaleldin, who ends up living almost his whole life among the Russians experiencing more kindness in hostage than he has ever expected. By the time he returns to his Chechen tribe, he has been feeling "like a crab… edging backwards to them" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 222). He has been completely displaced as he is floating between the Christian Russian culture that he has come to love and to adapt to its lifestyle and that clamorous sense of longing for; yet, not belonging to his Muslim origins. Jamaleldin grows up as a young man who has an alluring desire to join the dance for "really the very last time." He has been battling with that ecstasy he would sense when he joins his tribe and that state dejection he might slump in after saying goodbye to the people he grows up as one of them. As Aboulela remarks, "He believes he was going backwards from so-phistication to a harsh mountain climate" (Interview with Daniel Musiitwa, 2011).

Spending fifteen years among the Russian is enough to assimilate Jamaleldin's identity and ideas in accordance with the Russian Empire's cultural mindset and social taste. Notably, his way of behaving and thinking along with his assimilation to the culture that surrounds him all have gathered to disconnect him from his roots. In fact, one can argue that Jamaleldin's "sense of self" sways perfectly with Hall's argument of identity as a:

> "Moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" (Hall, 1987). It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self." Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (Hall, 1996, p. 598).

However, Jamaleldin's persona renders an example not only of cultural acclimatization, but also of its limits. When he requests the Tsar's permission to marry his Russian mistress—for political reasons—he is never permitted; yet, he has been officially obligated to marry "one of his own." "Think of the future", the Tsar warns Jamaleldin "you will be my mouthpiece in the Caucasus. You will bring enlightenment to your own people. For this I have fashioned you" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 65). Jamaledin's identity crisis reaches a crescendo when he has been released and brought back to his father. Before arriving to his homeland, he stopped for moments at a mountain to change his clothes; to take off his Russian clothes and to put on the Caucasian traditional dress. For a moment, he stands naked in the Caucasus freezing snowy weather thinking of himself as none of both "here he was between one dress and the other, neither Russian nor Chechen, just naked and human" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 240); howbeit, he ends up wearing that Chechenian dress but still not able to put on that new Caucasus identity. That proves true after his return to Chechen where he has never felt comfortable with the mountain's life; his mind never attuned to the Avars' traditions. He believes that "No living thing should walk backwards" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 222). While he is thinking of peace, the Avars are thinking of war; eventually, Jamaleldin - physically and spiritually- collapses and dies from tuberculosis.

V. Conclusion

Bearing in mind Hutcheon's argument in her book *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, where she states that "doubleness is the essence of migrant experience. Caught between two worlds, the immigrant negotiates a new social space; caught between two cultures" (Hutcheon, 1990, p.9), the paper has, in conclusion, tried to argue that Oz, Natasha, and Jamaleldin are diasporic characters who are caught in between, and who long for a more unified, stable existence and a place that is unambiguously home. They demonstrate strength and resourcefulness in their struggles to adapt, as though, the consolation for their outsider status is depth of insight and character. All took the "voyage in" to acclimate to the Western culture and to defeat that disturbing sense of un-belonging. Scattered and puzzled among two names, two cultures, and two identities, all have been haunted within representation flanked by who they really are and what they have become. Alienated from their true selves, Oz, Natasha, as well as Jamaleldin have experienced that exasperating struggle to create and maintain balance between their Arab Muslim identities and their Western ones, as they have been fully aware of their being part and parcel of both cultures.

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