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From Inadequacy to Becoming in Leila Aboulela's *the Kindness of Enemies*

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Abstract

This article conducts an in-depth examination of the concept of "becoming" in Leila Aboulela's *The kindness of the Enemies*, focusing on the evolution of the main character, Natasha, from a state of insecurity to an enlightened understanding of her authentic self. Through a juxtaposition of modern Scotland after 9/11 and the Caucasus region during the 19th century, Aboulela accentuates the profound impact of historical and societal phenomena on personal identity. She critically addresses and subverts media stereotypical representation of Muslims, while intricately exploring the nuances of cultural and religious identity. The novel's protagonist, along other characters, exemplifies how contemporary diasporic Muslim identities are bound to their historical and cultural heritage and how they negotiate their identities in the modern world. Relying on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming", this article, through textual analysis, provides a nuanced understanding of Natasha's development of subjectivity and identity formation. The analysis reveals that her fluid passages between various spaciotemporalities as well as her nascent sympathies and alliances compel her to quest her selfhood beyond the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion.

Keywords; Becoming, Leila Aboulela, Minoritarian, Nomad, Striated and Smooth spaces

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Introduction

The world today is entirely different from any other time in history. The rapid developments of multidisciplinary fields, particularly in science and technology, have not only broadened but have necessitated changes in every aspect of life. Muslim writers, specifically those from former European colonies - e.g. Ramlee Awang Murshid, Nordin Hasan, and Fatimah Busu from the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia - write within contexts relevant to their domestic politics. In Europe, the socio-political and economic climate where authors like Leila Aboulela grew up is a far more complex site. Despite being educated, cosmopolitan, successful writers having access to international book fairs, scholarly scrutiny, and the world through the dissemination of their art, they remain inextricably Muslim while managing xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiments aimed at them, the domestic Muslim community, and international Islam. They are forever relatable to a precarious condition. It is due to the latter situation engendered by international public demands and the endurance of regular public Islamophobia that Muslim writers and intellectuals come to critique social assertions about Islamic requirement and anxiety towards the Muslim subject through their works. Arab immigrants, similar to other underprivileged ethnic groups in Western societies, often become compelled to negotiate their identities as hybrid individuals. Their narratives emphasize a transformative diasporic dialogue that goes beyond the ideas of assimilation and tolerance, focusing instead on self-growth and satisfaction.

Leila Abulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), as a novel belonging to Anglophone Arab literature, remains preoccupied with the concept of agency. It is through the negotiation of self-conscious dilemmas of standing as makers or brokers of Islamic identities, ultimately shepherding responses to Islam, that we come to recognize the weight writers like Leila Abulela impart in narrating the odds of racialization, marginalization, and social rejection. They command interest for the position they inhabit in narrating Muslim international life in the modern world, their challenge to available representations and understandings, and, finally, the extraordinary effort dedicated to transfiguring the pain of Muslim self-hood in favor of self-authority. They deny their society and nation the power of definitional authority and, importantly, fail in their bid to appease established cultural, moral, spiritual, and intellectual authority. Frequent disappointment experienced within metropolitan Muslim lives under consideration of otherness compels these writers to explore narrative connections to inter-cultural absolutes. They recognize the historical decay of self-imposed misfortunes and inadequacies at the intersection between citizenry, national belonging, faith, and Islamic heritage, taking cues from imagination employed by academic luminaries in the process

The novel challenges binary thinking and stereotypes of religion, culture, people, and the characters' internal conflicts. The story highlights the after-effects of post-colonialism and secularism, as well as the relationship between people, objects, and their belief system. Natasha, the narrator and protagonist in the novel, represents how contemporary diasporic Muslim identities remain ipso facto hypersensitive to political and cultural changing paradigms. She rejects the binary representation of Muslim identity as devout and liberal. By leaning on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming", outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), this paper will investigate the constructive role of reconciling one's perception of self, the other, and of historical assets to unfold new venues that transcend binary notions about inclusion and exclusion and celebrate diversity and fluidity. In the process of oscillating seamlessly between different spaciotemporalities, Natasha celebrates her existence as a nomad. It is argued that these spaces, both striated and smooth, compel her to reclaim her subjectivity and redeem herself from the Other role. It, also, enables her to heighten her sense of contagion, alliance, and sympathy. As such, the novel transcends portraying the lived experiences of Muslims within the post- 9/11 anti-Islamic aura, to focusing on the assertion of becomingness beyond multiple layers of repression.

Although it acknowledges that a considerable amount of critical attention has been directed to the analysis of Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), this study seeks to provide a richer understanding of subjectivity construction through leaning on a different theoretical framework that disregards the novel as merely a response to the image of Arab Muslims as transgressors, perpetrators or victims in the Western culture. Most critical readings have positioned the novel within the body of burgeoning Arab literature in diaspora and have focused on Aboulela's concern with Islam and Muslims in the Western world. While Awad (2018), for instance, analyses the narrative technique in the novel employing the past to analogically understand the present, Alkodimi (2021) examines its depiction of the post-9/11 radicalized vision of Muslims in the west. Hasan (2005) extensively examines Aboulela's effort to revision and recontextualise Islam in connection with women's experiences and challenges. Through his attempts to describe Muslim women's realities, Hasan pertinently describes the restrictive and limiting impact of Islam on their lives and identities. In "What Is a Name? Identity and Diaspora in Leila Aboulela's The Kindness of Enemies", Al Dwakiat and Maani (2023) give special attention to the names of characters as markers of their roots and homelands and as a primary source of their identity crisis in the western society. In due course, the present article articulates narrative structures that open up interesting avenues about the sense of alienation of the characters of the novel, in general, and Natasha, in particular. It attempts to capture Natasha's self-reflexive and elaborate levels of awareness acknowledging the complexities of the coercive dynamics of the striated and smooth place resulting in a remarkable status of becoming.

1. Theoretical framework

In order to understand becoming, one has to refer back to the nomad as quint essentially related to minority as well as majority. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) maintain that, contrary to minority, majority implies a condition of dominance and power (p. 291). This state of affairs leads the man to be "major-itarian par excellence" since it is his own "pregiven" "right" (p.291). Contrary to man being majoritarian, "women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian" (p.291).

The outcome of resisting categorization as a minoritarian as well as the shift between the striated and smooth space result in a state of experimentation. This process according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is meant to designate "becoming" which is "minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian" (P. 291). More importantly, becoming is never limited or ending, but rather infinite with no real origin. For that, it is important to focus on the process of becoming rather than its cause or result. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, becoming is by no means about imitation, nor it is about regression and progression. Instead, it presents an exceptional process with a distinct "consistency" trespassing concepts such as "appearing", "equating", or "producing" (1987, p.239).

Unlike the migrant who has a starting point and a well-defined destination, only a nomad is able to engage in becoming. Accordingly, the nomad is an individual who destabilizes, deconstructs, and mobilizes the striated space; and constructs, resides in, as well as fosters the smooth space on the other hand (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 382- 421). The distinction between the smooth and striated spaces marks not only the type of individual as sedentary or nomad, but does also crystalize the essence of becoming. Being limited and limiting in nature, the striated space prevents and blocks any sort of mobility, growth, or alteration. Contrary to that, the smooth one celebrates multiplicity, variability, and polyvocality. In such a space, measures and limits fade away giving way to "nonlimited locality […] in an infinite succession of local operations" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 422-383). In accordance with the essence of becoming, the smooth space can never be conceptualized as an entity with well-defined limits nor as a reified object, but rather as a space for experimentation.

2. Natasha as a "failed hybrid" and Minoritarian

The Kindness presents two interwoven stories set in both contemporary Scotland, and the Caucasus region during the Russian War. Contemporary Scotland meets with 19th centuryCaucasus in the stories of Natasha, who was born to a Russian mother and a Sudanese father in Khartoum, and Imam Shamil, the Sufi leader who resists the Russian occupation. Both narratives interface in characters' self-exploration and introspection. As a displaced subject straddling between her father's Muslimness and Arabness and her mother's atheism and Russianness, Natasha has had early conspicuous symptoms of anxiety but has endeavored to strategically develop her identity in accordance with "half and half" status (Aboulela, 2017, p.30). Since it was difficult to realize reconciliation, she was continuously struggling to favor one of her nationalities over the other, one language instead of the other, and nurturing one identity while neglecting the other (Aboulela, 2017, p. 110). Natasha further explains:

> The two sides of me that were slammed together against their will, that refused to mix. I was 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. There was no merging. It was a clobbering together, abnormal and clumsy, the head of one species and the body of the other. The two sides of me that were slammed together against their will, that refused to mix. (Aboulela, 2017, p40)

Her constant concern was about her hybrid status and liminal positionality — one that renders her in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms a minoritarian. Natasha's hybrid status equates with " 'minority', as an aggregate or a state" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987,p. 291). She goes on to explain that she would have had many embarrassing and stigmatizing questions regarding her Arab identity and Muslim faith, if she had not abandoned her father's family name emphasizing that it is "better like this, not even Muslim by name" (Aboulela, 2017, p.6). Her attempt of changing her name trying to fit into one category not only "reterritorializes" or allows Natasha to "be reterritorialized"(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291), but does also foreground her as minoritarian. Her mounting fears about her Muslimness and origins indicate her awareness about the power of the majority implying "a state of domination" and a "pregiven" "right and power" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 291).

While seeking assimilation through adopting a western name, Büyükgebiz (2021) explains that Natasha's conduct is the outcome of the manipulation of religion and her fear to be banished from the Western society. In fact, her decision to discard the name Hussein is intentionally driven by her concern about any potential relationship with the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein (Azman & Bagar, 2020, p. 581) __ a name bearing connotations of the orient as saturated with violence, and terrorism. In the process of reforming a new cultural identity to conceal her Muslim origins, Natasha brings back Stuart Hall's (1993) idea about diasporic individuals who refashion themselves through the array of transformation and changes they purposely go through. More specifically, however, the name Hussein makes of her, From a Deleuzian perspective, an "anomalous" or "abnormal" individual (1987, p. 245). The latter is not simply defined in terms of traits or characteristics, be it acquired or genetic, but also in terms of position and status in the community. The anomalous is also constantly in tension with the shifting boundaries and the "borderline" of the "band" or the "pack" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 245). Interestingly enough, recognizing the difference between herself as a minoritarian or anomalous while the other as majoritarian representing the pack marks the beginning of her journey towards becoming_a one that can be initiated only when being minoritarian (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). While Campbell maintains that Natasha is a victim of her "captivity" in the Western world, it is maintained that this very incarceration is the triggering force leading towards her quest for becoming.

3. Towards the Change: Significance of Contagion, Banding, and Affect

Awad (2018) maintains that the novel's narrative demonstrates the value of history as an insightful source of knowledge, wisdom, and "inspiration" (p.71). It is no coincidence, then, that the novel's focus on history is remarkable. By alternating between the present of Scotland and the very past of Caucasus during the Russian War, Aboulela highlights not only her concern about correcting the myopic image about Sufism and jihad, but most significantly the importance of understanding these two elements together for modern Muslims living in the West. More interestingly, the concern with spaciotemporality has more polyvalent directions. The latter is best seen in the way reappropriating history contributes in becoming through contagion.

In her quest for becoming, Natasha resolves to connect with other marginalized Muslims in her surrounding. Such a type of connection, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is the outcome of the contagion process. As a grouping and uniting mechanism, contagion, they maintain, spreads in hard times such as in "epidemics" and "disasters" (p.241). Though seemingly different, Natasha sympathizes with and identifies herself with Malak, Oz and Imam Shamil—an act that represents the essence of contagion. While Imam Shamil is a heroic figure, Malak and Oz are victims of the ongoing war against terrorism. To describe their commonality, Natasha states, "Here we were, the three of us, fascinated by a common past -faithful to it even. I at least to the history, they to an ancestor they were proud of" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 47). By shifting from narrating the traumatic repercussions of Oz's capture to focusing on Natasha's relationship with both Malak and Oz, Aboulela turns this experience into a tool serving Natasha's becoming in the way of identifying herself with them.

With the special operations forces incursion into the house to detain Oz for downloading al-Qaeda training manual to be used for a research paper and after the process of being investigated; Natasha understands that, more than appreciation for the personality of Imam Shamil, her shared sense of affinity with Malak and Oz is due to their otherness. Despite Natasha's Englished name and her academic achievements, the arrest incident and her relationship with both Malak and Oz enable her to revision her identity as a mongrel- especially because of her Arab descent. She recognizes that working on herself to satisfy her surrounding will not redeem her and will always be subject to continuous scrutiny and verification. She further explains:

> 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, 2017,p. 310)

Though the psychological repercussions of the arrest incident were grave for Natasha augmenting her vulnerability, the incident itself deepened her empathy towards Malak and Oz in particular. The growing sense of helplessness and shame for not being able to help, often lead Natasha to secretly cry with anger even at the work place (Aboulela, 2017). Her growing sympathy towards Oz echoes Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) focus on becoming, "affect", and "alliance" (p. 258-239). The use of the pronouns "us" and "them" in different situations is very significant creating a sense of "pack [ing]" and "band[ing]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 239). The latter, according to Amjad and Farahni (2022), marks Natasha's genuine feeling of belonging and alliance when using "us" to refer to herself, Oz, and Malak (p.24). "Them", however, is used to refer to the police standing for the other majoritarian force (Amjad and Farahni, 2022, p. 24). Furthermore, her newly formed yet solid relationship helped her welcome and fully embrace her role as a minor. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), abandoning the wish to become majoritarian while accepting to be minoritarian is what constitutes becoming.

4. Sufism: A Departure from Rigidification

Interestingly, while Natasha's relationship with Malak and Oz opens her eyes towards the Westerns' derogatory perception about Muslims, getting to know Imam Shamil, a legendary figure renowned for his struggle against Russia during the 19th century, altered her vision about the essence of Islam. Malak's response about what Imam Shamil would have done to face the war on terror showcases his reconciliation, tolerance, and rejection of hate discourse as a Muslim. She explains: "He would have seen through these militants- that they 'fulfill neither a contract nor a covenant. That they call to the truth but they are not its people'. He would have gone after the hate preachers who say to the young men of this day and age, 'go out and make jihad'" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 215). She further adds that the modern radical groups "are acting in the name of Islam and at the same time don't follow the principles of submission and restraints" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 185). As such, the novel challenges the West's exotification of Shamil as concurrently representing ferocity and mysterious power. Knowing about him deepened Natasha's understanding of spiritual Sufism venerating inner devotion as a form of Jihad- an alternative form of Jihad that she embraces as spurring her constant self-exploration and celebration of her rhizomatic identity.

Natasha's embraced Sufism represents Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the necessity of defying the rigid normative classifications as a primary manifestation of becoming. The latter necessitates moving away from rigidification, categorization, and molarity in general. Through such a measure, something new and different emerges, and it is this newness that opens avenues towards becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). It is this same newness, incarnated in Natasha's adopted Sufi philosophy, that Geaves (2015) describes as a "cultural and religious space" seizing the diasporic diversity with its cultural and historical polyvalence to create a new space in the British society (254).

Natasha's journey towards becoming is noticeably nourished by her departure from the rigid classifications in general and the one of Muslimness in particular. She starts to revision and focalize on the essence of Islam –that Muslimness is a spiritual status regardless of geographical or ethnic ties. Her newly embraced stance is strengthened by contagion by Imam Shamil who ponders, "reciting the Qu'ran" during sessions of zikr[2] "in a place where it had not been heard before, kneeling down on a piece of earth that had never been pressed by the forehead of a believer" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 316) revives one's faith and beliefs. As such, Natasha's eventual vision encapsulates newness, accentuated by Deleuze and Guattari, mainly through her vision about Sufism and Jihad as arduous internal processes to make meaning of self.

The zikr circles organized by Malak that Natasha subsequently joined confirm her departure from rigidity to newness and from alienation to connection as well as societal integration. These meetings that gathered Asian stay-at-home mothers, young men with Nigerian origins, and New Ager fellows, among other categories, confirm that Sufism is a philosophy that transcends ethnic boundaries, and above all contributes to Natasha's becoming (Abulela, 2017). While Morey (2018) maintains that Natasha's act is a "communalist decision" (p. 243), it is asserted that her decision to join zikr circles confirm her commitment to becoming manifested in her changed vision about the rigid conceptualization of Islam, her contagion by Imam Shamil and Malak, as well as the sense of banding and packing with all the Muslim devouts.

[2] The term zikr is used interchangeably with *dhikr* meaning "remembrance" or "recollection". It is one of the common practices in Islam, particularly by Sufis or Muslim mystics. It is a ritual prayer or litany with the purpose of glorifying God and achieving spiritual perfection. For further explanation. See Bavardi (2012). "The Investigation of 'Zikr'From the View of the Holy Quran and Narrations." for insightful explanations on the concept of Zikr.

5. Natasha the Nomad: Shifts between Striated and Smooth Spaces

In their *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari explain the notion of nomadism as closely related to space. They maintain that the nomad cannot occupy a restricted place. Contrary to the latter, as an oppressive milieu labeled a "striated space" or "sedentary", the nomad inhabits a "smooth space". The difference between these two types of spaces, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is that the sedentary space is characterized by divisions created by walls and barriers consolidated by pathways connecting these enclosures. Being highly fixed and homogenous, the striated space stands for the state which exerts absolute control and authority (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). On the other hand, the smooth space, the space of the nomad, is "heterogeneous without conduits or channels" characterized by obscured and blurred features (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 371). It is a space constructed by various and multiple directions and directed by unexpectedness and improvisation.

As a nomad, Natasha decides to leave Scotland as a striated place and turns towards Khartoum as a smooth one. There, she does not only experience freedom and overthrow hegemonic regulations; but she, most importantly, celebrates her culturally polyvalent identity. This identity has been overshadowed by her efforts to prove her exclusive belongingness to one country in order to adhere to the rules of the striated space. It is in Khartoum that she reinforces the sense of connection with people from her homeland. Interestingly enough, when expressing her gratification "I relaxed without the need to prove, explain or distinguish myself. Nor squeeze to fit in" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 310), Natasha echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of imperceptibility. The latter, they argue, "is the immanent end of becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari,1987, p. 279). Khartoum provides for Natasha what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) attribute to the smooth space as a one that an individual moves to, resides in, and leaves without limitations or regulations, unlike the striated space that imposes restrictions leading one to hesitate before occupying it. It is by becoming like all other Muslims that she becomes "everybody/everything" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987,p. 280).

At a certain point, however, Sudan starts to become a constraining environment mainly due to an unexpected family inheritance feud. Just like in Scotland where she is classified as an outsider, Natasha's stepmother, Saphia, contests Natasha's legitimacy to inherit her father's properties especially after her long absence and purposely drifting away from her Sudanese and Muslim identity (Aboulela 266). More than being a matter of money, Sophia's view demonstrates her perception of Natasha as an intruder and a foreigner who can by no means adhere or belong to the Islamic community. Though tempted to cease her fight, Yasha, Natasha's friend supports her maintaining: "You shouldn't have to prove that you are a Muslim, you are one by birth, by default. You have a right, to be a bad Muslim, a lapsed Muslim, a secular Mulism" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 293).

By staying in Khartoum to defend herself in court and explaining that she is neither "a good Muslim" nor "a bad person" (Abouela, 2017, p. 290), Natasha depicts her desire to explore her Muslimness and rhizomatic identity beyond any scriptularist confines. She could, finally, embrace her "multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 249). Rejecting the idea of unification or categorization asserts Natasha's understanding of herself. She is neither a "failed hybrid" nor "a freak", but a nomad with a heterogeneous nature accentuated by her shifts between the various striated and smooth spaces (Aboulela, 2017, p. 42). Her nature as well as the process she goes through reflect Deleuze and Guattari's idea of multiplicity as an entity: "composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors" (1987, p. 249).

For the very first time in Sudan, Natasha feels that she is in "an identifiable place" where she "could belong" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 302). She, further, explains that it ensured her that she was not "an isolated member of a species but simply one who has wandered far from the flock and still managed to survive" (Aboulela, 2017,p. 234). From this spectrum, Natasha's experience in Khartoum is assuring in the sense that it confirms that she was engaged in the optimal trajectory to achieve her pursuit. The latter can be noticed in the heightened sense of sympathy, affect, and packing, felt already with Malak and Oz and intensified in Sudan.

From the Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective about the constant changes in the nature of spaces, Sudan was to become, just like London, a striated space. Natasha's eventual success in transforming Khartoum from a striated space into a smooth one by imposing her newly forged insight about her identity echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the mixture of the two spaces. Despite the pertinent disparities and opposing avenues of the striated and the smooth space, Deleuze and Guattari explain the necessity of their fusion. Due to their bound nature, the two spaces incessantly mutate; each one can shift into and take the form of the other. It is the fluctuating relationship between both spaces that forms the essence of individuals, in general, and the nomad, in particular. As an individual constantly dangling between the striated and smooth space, the nomad defies the state's imposed stifling striations. He or she, just like Natasha, challenges the state's authority through constructing a fluid liberating space.

It is no chance that the final chapter presents Natasha when she is back to Scotland_ the previously striated space. After all, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) maintain, "nothing completely coincided, and everything intermingles, or crosses over" (p. 484). The act of going back to Scotland confirms Natasha's pursuit of becoming simply because "voyaging smoothly" and going across varied directions is becoming (1987, p. 484). After returning to London, Natasha plans for a meeting with Malak at the Dunnottar Castle in Stonehaven, comprised today only of remains. The meeting in that particular site is very significant bearing spiritual and historical disparate trajectories. More importantly, choosing that site aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's perspective about transformation mechanisms of smooth and striated spaces:

> What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. Even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad, or as a cave dweller. Movements, speed and slowness, are sometimes enough to reconstruct a smooth space. Of course, smooth spaces are not in themselves liberatory. But the struggle is changed or displaced in them, and life reconstitutes its stakes, confronts new obstacles, invents new paces, switches adversaries. (1987, p. 500)

It is at the Dunnottar Castle in Stonehaven that Natasha settles the symbolic reconstruction of her polyvalent identity. In her final phase of becoming, Natasha's meeting exemplifies her desire of convergence across space and time. More precisely, her ability of making of Scotland a habitable space renders her, using Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the perfect epitome of an "urban nomad" or "a nomadic absolute" (1987, p. 482-494). They explain that, similar to Natasha, an urban nomad is someone who not only maintains a smooth existence in striated spaces, but also changes the striated into a smooth one by succeeding to create endless succession of connections, changes, and shifts in directions.

Natasha's final words are very illuminating in the sense that they articulate not only her perspective about spaces she occupies, but most importantly her growing understanding of becoming: "Perhaps it was time to acknowledge that what I was after was spiritual …. I was confident that there was a home, there, ahead of me. My homesickness wasn't cured but it was, I was sure, propelling me in the right direction" (Aboulela, 2017, p. 314). By stating so, Natasha

aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of "consistency" and "deterritorialization"(1987, p. 282)_ two notions that accord with the nature of the nomad and becoming. While the former concerns the continuation of shifting between the striated and smooth spaces, the latter refers to the overthrowing of established boundaries allowing the subject to move beyond territorial boundaries leading to further connections, deconstructions, and reconfigurations.

Conclusion

It should be admitted that the novel focuses on opposing the hegemonic Western discourse about Islam and Muslims, and asserts that history can be considered as a source for re-appropriating the present. Yet, a closer analysis of the character of Natasha reveals that the novel delineates her rites of passage and becoming through recalibrating her pluralistic subjectivity. As such, Natasha marks the break from the dichotomous renderings about minority and majority, and powerful as well as helpless through employing a nomadic logic. She valorizes constant pursuits and breakthroughs through rejecting homogeneity and moving across intersections. All along her subjectivity construction, Natasha seems to go beyond diasporic or post-colonial resistance in the way she is imbued with the Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy about the significance of spatiotemporality, alliances, unceasing shifts and alterations and the ideological ramifications of the interplay between these elements making of her a perfect nomad. The author's dual national identity is anchored in the Scottish mosque and Arabic food. However, in reality, Aboulela's writing, just like Natasha's character, has bound up Sudan, Scotland, and Islam with enduring humanistic narratives that subsist on religion, race, and hybridity.

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