

Modernization and Resistance: Healing the Social Ills in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*

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Following the postcolonial Sudanese writer, Tayeb Salih's perspective in his famous novel, *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), Leila Aboulela exposes the binary identity that her characters gain it through migration and transportation. This paper examines the traditional resistance to modernity in Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* (2011). It investigates how Sudanese parochial norms resist the Western modernity and how to rejuvenate and modernize such tradition. As she attempts to create a real image of the Sudanese postcolonial situation, Aboulela shows out the deep-rooted norms of Sudan that set up a barrier between Sudanese tradition and Western modernity. Sudanese think of education as a shame for women and a waste of time for men. Education is considered "as being a great evil that come to them with the armies of occupation" (Tayeb Salih 1969: 19). The novel points out the feminist voice which strives to get her moral choice, her privacy and her personal freedom. It brings out the importance of education to narrow the gap between Sudan and the West that may help Sudanese cope with modern world. The paper critically questions women's position in the conservative Sudanese family and the fragmented identity that fails to stand in front of the patriarchal hegemony. Through postcolonial perspective, the paper critically sheds light on the Islamic Scripture, Holy Qur'an and its patriarchal misinterpretation that takes women for granted and makes them alienated from the world. The patriarchal interpretation of Islamic Scriptures has been examined through the modern feminist theories. The paper reveals the double marginalized world where Sudanese women live. The marginality shows out that Sudanese women fall into the trap of traditional norms that enforce women to live within four walls.

Key words: *Leila Aboulela, Lyrics Alley, Postcolonialism, Patriarchal Taboos, Feminist*

Introduction

Leila Aboulela is a Sudanese novelist living in diaspora. She has written many short stories [and] semi-autobiographical essays. She has published more than six novels, *The Translator* in 1999, *Minaret* in 2005, *Lyrics Alley* in 2011, *Kindness of Enemies* (2015), and *Bird Summons* (2019). Her novels have created a literary revolutionary voice in (Sudanese) Arabic society as she “promotes the importance of an Islamic framework to provide resilience through the ruptures of forced migration” (Rashid 2012: 416). Aboulela won some international prizes for her novels. She won Fiction Winner Prize for her *Lyrics Alley* (2011). Aboulela also won the Caine Prize for African Writings in 2000 for her short story, “Museum” which was later published as one of her short story collection, “Coloured Lights” in 2005. She also won the 2018 Saltire Book for her short-story collection, *Elsewhere, Home* which was published in 2018.

Social Ills

Social ills are meant to be some man-made norms which have been constituted to restrict the space of woman. Aboulela opens her, *Lyrics Alley* (2011), with a survey on Sudanese social habits and customs that narrow the space of freedom of Sudanese women. The novel represents not only the voice of Aboulela, but also all the Sudanese women who fall in trap of parochial trap. *Lyrics Alley* unveils the Sudanese traditional norms that enforce woman to stop her education and get married as early as she can. However, Aboulela urges women to fight for their right to education. This message can be seen in Soraya speech.

I would have insisted on finishing school and persuaded Sister Josephine to come home and speak to Father long before the engagement was public . . . I would have spoken to Nassir himself and told him I did not want him and challenged that a gentleman would not marry a girl against her will. . . . I would have threatened to commit suicide. (Lyrics Alley 2011: 7)

The strong relationships among not only the Sudanese family, but also amidst the Sudanese society are appreciated. Aboulela appreciates the strong connections among family members and how they respect their elders. In her interview with Peter Cherry, Aboulela says, “the father is a positive figure . . . he does live up to protecting the women or trying to make their lives a little bit better.” (6) Aboulela, here, adopts the Islamic view of men’s duties toward women. They have to protect women and support them financially.

Through the postcolonial lens, *Lyrics Alley* (2011) is meant to historicize the two Sudanese eras which are during and after the British occupation. It reveals the implicit impacts of the British colonizer who enlarges the social gap between the rich and the poor families. The middle class had been destroyed. It also compares between the neighbouring countries,

Egyptian and Sudanese societies socially and economically. The novel is but a real picture of the Sudanese society. It reveals the humble life and Sudanese commitment to their cultural norms.

It didn't embarrass Badr that he was perched on a donkey cart with his family and their motley possessions. He was busy noting that the land on which Mahmoud Bey had built his tall building had been purchased from a Christian, a cautious business man made insecure by the advent of Independence. Khartoum was, slowly but surely, becoming Islamic. Today the opening of the new mosque, and tomorrow, once the English left, there would be others. A city with a predominant and growing Muslim population had seven churches and only two mosque – only a colonizer would impose such an imbalance! The English would go and take their street names with them. . . . and the X signs they unashamedly set up to mark the red-light districts would be pulled down. (Lyrics Alley 2011: 295-6)

In *Lyrics Alley* (2011), Aboulela reveals the real situation of Sudan pre-independence. She evolves a hope of success by shedding light on the educated hero, Nur. The main character in *Lyrics Alley* is Nur, which means 'light' in Arabic. By adopting such name, Aboulela attempts to show that there is always hope, in spite of the darkness and ignorance. This light symbolizes the knowledge that enlightens one's mind and heart. For that, Nur is employed in this novel as a source of knowledge. His education is going to enlighten Sudanese society and may also deconstruct the backward norms which degrade the educated women. His hope to get high education, work and get married to his pretty cousin Soraya. His disability does not stop him to achieve his aspirations. His shattered back is metaphorically depicted as the light space that stands between 'the forward-contemplation' and 'the backward-looking.' His thinking of spineless back inspires him to challenge his disability.

The two periods of Nur's life—before and after his back was broken are exposed to bring to light the perspective of the Sudanese society towards a disabled person, who is socially considered useless person. The Sudanese society marginalizes and ignores those people with disability. However, Nur also challenges his disability which limits his own space. "It is not only being in a wheelchair and having useless arms, but the things that go wrong inside; infections and minor complications that keep him in and out of hospital" (*Lyrics Alley* 2011: 119). He uses his poetic talent to cross out his narrow space. He makes a poetic contact between him and the outer world, refusing to be a victim of his disability. He decides to shape his space of life through education. Consequently, he moves from his space of disability to the space of ability. He resists to be marginalized. In his article, *Voicing marginality: disability in Leila Aboulela's Lyrics Alley*, Ken Junior Lipenga argues that "The character of Nur is employed to display two seemingly contradictory models of masculinity in the novel, and therefore in Sudanese society. Prior to disablement, Nur is presented as the epitome of ableism, in his athletic able-bodied stature which parallels his academic

achievements” (5). Nur’s awareness of his disability helps him to diminish his sensitivity. Being disabled and submissive, his father forced him to cancel his engagement to Soraya. Father symbolizes not only the patriarchal dictator in the family, but also reflects the social perspective of Sudanese society which looks at the person with disability as an alien. Nur fails to resist his father’s decision. He has to succumb to the order of his family. His silence represents his fragile character which is deconstructed by the accident. In *The Disability Studies Reader*, Lennard J. Davis argues “the disabled body is limited in what it can do and what it can be trained to do. It experiences new situations as obstacles” (315). This means that Sudanese society looks at Nur as a useless body, but not as a human who can be trained to cope with his ability to succeed in his life.

The two wives of Mahmoud, Nabilah and Waheeba symbolize tradition and modernity. The names that have been given to them reveal the difference between both wives. It is a traditional awareness of such names which reflects the difference between modernity and tradition and which one is preferred by the Sudanese people.

Nabilah, for example, means beautiful and brilliant. Waheeba means anything comes without guarantee. Nabilah represents modernity. She has the ability to move forward the new civilization. She knows the benefit of education and how it raises the awareness of the society toward modernity. However, Waheeba represents Sudanese tradition that suppresses the people’s freedom and keeps them within strict norms. She symbolizes a blockheaded woman who is radically annexed to Sudanese social norms. She follows her old Sudanese tradition as well as a holy script that Sudanese must follow. They, Nabilah and Waheeba symbolize the political and her aggressive attitude reflects the traditional tension between the two neighbouring countries, Egypt and Sudan. “Anglo-Egyptian rule was over, the proposed union with Egypt had failed, and whatever losses his homeland would incur in the future were justified by its position as the silent partner of condominium, the nominal figure which mattered and didn’t matter” (296). Furthermore, the two wives also represent the two different lifestyles. Nabilah represents the European modernity and Waheeba is the traditional wife who conform the Sudanese norms and tradition.

Trying to bridge the social gap between Sudan and Egypt which was created by the colonizer, Mahmoud used his high connections in both countries to reconcile between the two societies. His marriage to Nabilah is depicted as a tool of modernizing his family. Based on this marriage, Mahmoud builds up his aspiration to modernize his society that still looks at West as an enemy and modernity as a Western instrument that comes to uproot their tradition and religion as well.

The contradiction, which is raised in the novel between the two women, is based on the woman’s role in the society. The woman is depicted as a revolutionary icon amidst the society. She has the power to get her society out of such restricted norms. Her role is greater



than man's role. She is the only one who can carry the candle to enlighten the dark thought of the society. Leila paints two inconsistent worlds giving the society members the choice. She tries to inspire them when making such comparison to think forward about future. She encourages them to challenge their backward tradition that pulls them back to the past. Aboulela brings out those two choices, tradition or modernity as to say there is no more choice that one can go through. There is no color between white and dark, between light and dark, between literacy and illiteracy.

Aboulela gives a wide picture of both Sudanese and Egyptian societies and compare between them. She shows how the Egyptian society has accepted modernity and tried to move forward the new civilization and think about future. However, the Sudanese society represents the past tradition and its refusal to accept modernity. It symbolizes darkness and backwardness. The uneducated (Sudanese) society is depicted as a paralyzed man. Education is shown as important as a backbone for human being. Nur, who lost his spinal, is given as an example. He becomes alien and secluded in his society as Sudanese society believes that a person who is disabled cannot stand for himself. In the same vein, a society cannot be developed if it is not educated.

The novel is a picture of a semi-modern Sudanese family of Abuzeid. It shows out the hybridity and their social struggle as they attempt to cope with political and domestic instability. This political and social instability appears as the Sudanese society try to mobilize from the colonial era to the postcolonial Sudan. In his article, Counter-Orientalism: Retranslating the "Invisible Arab" in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and *Lyrics Alley* (2011), Jamal Ahmed says, "The novel portrays the Sudanese setting of Umdurman and the saraya of rich national self-made businessman Mohamoud Bey Abuzeid in the 1950s" (7). However, the British occupation has influenced the Sudanese society. It breaks down the social fabric, not only of Abuzeid's family, but also the whole Sudanese community.

Breaking the Patriarchal Chains

As patriarchal hegemony chains the women within four walls, Sudanese women struggle through education to break the traditional norms which suppress their freedom. Aboulela shows that the postcolonial generation has a sacred duty towards its society. It should encourage Sudanese woman to pursue her education. For Aboulela, the educated generation is a savior that will break the overused tradition. By comparing the educated and uneducated societies, Aboulela wants to bring to light the benefits of women's education.

In her *Lyric Alley* (2011), Aboulela makes a cultural dialogue between West and East, modernity and tradition, Sudan and Egypt, past and future to raise the awareness of education among Sudanese people. She attempts to relocate not only the people, but also the social

norms in the right path of modernity. She attempts to reform the social system that can restore the identity of the Sudanese society.

Aboulela illustrates the patriarchal misinterpretation of religion which radicalizes its followers. Such interpretation is taken as a pretext to critique Islam. The Western media deliberately creates a devilish picture of Islam to blackmail the Arab countries. The Arab Spring¹ is interpreted as a political Islamic movement that threatens Western democracy. Moreover, the West has taken such movement for granted to intervene in the Arabs' interior affairs. Thus, Western media began broadcasting and shedding light on some Islamic discourses, capturing the minds of terms such as jihad, political radicalism, Islamism and fundamentalism. The West is an attempt to create Islam-phobia amidst Western peoples. In his book, *Will-To-Power: A Search in the Shadows of Colonialism* (2019), Hatem Mohammed Al-Shamea says

The word jihad is mentioned many times in different positions in Qur'an to mean striving and doing some efforts achieve duties. For example, a student strives to understand his study. He puts efforts to analyze and answer the questions of his homework. Such action is called jihad. [. . .] in fact jihad is an emphasis on the work of the person to make a self-improvement. It is an effort to devote one's self to be an idealist. (55-56)

As a reformist voice, Aboulela illustrates that Islam should be interpreted and understood properly as well as other religions. Islam is a faith that comes to make a compromise between the self and the other. It endorses peace and coexistence among peoples. For that, Aboulela urges to re-scrutinize the Islamic Scripture, Holy Qur'an as it says

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. (Qur'an 49:13)

The verse clearly calls for coexistence not for war. It emphasizes on peace and piety. "We could have spread Islam further, we could have squashed the seeds of religious deviations with more vigour, we could have nurtured and taught Arabic and enlightened" (Lyrics Alley 2010: 296).

In her article, "(Un)Holy Alliances: Marriage, Faith, and Politics in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*", Shirin Edwin says, "to examine the presence of Islam in the lives of Muslims, Aboulela also broadens the discussion on the religion to include aspects beyond the political

¹ The 2010 Arab uprisings that hits most of the Arab countries starting from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Syria, and ending in Yemen.

and doctrinal, and throws much needed light on the personal palpable aspects of the lives of Muslims as Islam translates into their day-to-day lives” (76). Thus, we observe that Aboulela always critiques the terroristic attitudes of those who try to connect their terrorist actions with Islam. She condemns the wrong interpretation of Jihad. The call for fighting civilians in the name of Islam is a big crime that violates religion. Aboulela creates a character, Badr to transfer people from the political space to the spiritual space. “Badr did what was expected of him” (*Lyric Alley* 2011: 55). As Badr was thinking of inspiring people to move to spiritual space, he thinks of increasing the number of the sacred places. “There should be more mosques, Badr thought” (58). He sees Sudan as a place of spirituality. It is the place he likes to practice prayers and worships. “Badr liked praying in Sudan. There was something spacious and welcoming about these prayers in the open air and it seemed to him as if they accommodated more of Allah’s creatures” (58). Aboulela points out the spaces that Badr comes from and how he overcomes the doubts and fears of reaching first time to Sudan. She shows that spirituality helps him accustoms and copes with the new place. In Sudan he begins experiencing more benign spirits. Feeling transferring to another world, “Badr felt himself slide into another dimension. It was unexpected and unasked for. A dip into an alternative state, where he was weightless and free, and his concerns, valid and pressing only minutes ago, slackened and moved away” (*Lyric Alley* 2011: 59). Badr finds Sufism as a shelter to move out from his fear. For him, Sufism is a peaceful phenomenon a person should approach when he is lost in fear. Reciting some words of the Holy Qur’an helps him to spiritually transfer his lonely soul to reach the peace and mercy of Allah. As a Sufi, he separates himself from the outer world where politics plays a dirty game. He finds himself in a spiritual place where he can feel free from everything around him. He exceeds the barriers of life to reach heaven. He feels that he is detached from the day-to-day life as he prays maghrib² and feels by some inhuman creatures joining the prayer.

He was almost certain that inhuman creatures, who could neither be seen nor touched, had prayed too. And the reasons for this attendance, he believed, were detached from ordinary day-to-day life. They were reasons and consequences of another realm that would not unsettle Badr’s life or anyone else’s. All that had happened was that two worlds, the spiritual and the material, had touched each other briefly before moving on, each faithful to its own orbit. (Lyric Alley 2011: 59)

Aboulela has used Badr to expose the two worlds to people to show that Islam has a spiritual moment of peace. It has nothing to do with terrorism. She reveals that Sudan is a place of spirituality and Sufist behavior. Sudanese do not like violence. Aboulela argues that Sudan

A place where reality [is] was slippery and fantasy could take over the mind, a place of wayward spirituality, a place where the impossible and the romantic pulsed within

² Maghrib is the Muslim prayer after sunset.

reach. A place where intangible, inhuman forces still prevailed, not yet tamed and restrained by the rules of religion and men” (Lyrics Alley 2011: 60-61).

Aboulela draws a clear picture of Sudan where one’s ambitions are still controlled and freedom is silenced whether by religious men or traditional norms.

In Aboulela’s *Lyrics Alley (2011)*, names are literary and accurately engineered and chosen. For instance, the name “Badr” means the moon and it symbolizes the reflection of light. Badr also indicates enlightenment and his mission is to enlighten his society. To educate people is to enlighten their minds and help them to take the right path. He was sent to Sudan for educating and enlightening people to get out from their backward thoughts. “The Sudanese needed rescuing from superstition and deviation – this was why the Shariah judges were Egyptian and why it was for Badr to be here, to teach Arabic and Religious Education” (60). Furthermore, Badr is depicted as a religious mentor who tries to adopt the Islamic vision of destiny to cope with the difficult life and its hard conditions such as his father’s senility, expatriation and the uncompleted social duties and demands of his family. As a strong believer of Allah, Badr attempts to bear his pains and misfortune without complaining to anyone. For Badr, bearing pains is considered as purification of sins that a person has committed in his life. “Such purification Badr knew from personal experience. When he was ill with a fever, he would feel as if he were being blasted by the fumes of hell. Then, afterwards, when the fever abated and left him weak, he would feel cleansed and grateful” (217). He explains that pain as a message of Allah to experience the flame of hell and then to avoid committing sins. It is a way of seeking refuge in Allah and to thank Him for mercy and gifts He gives human beings. By touching such sufferings and pains, Badr says

We can experience the power of Allah, catch a glimpse of Hell and fear it, so that we can practice seeking refuge in Him and, when relief comes give thanks for His mercy. Darkness was created so that, like plants, we could yearn and turn to the light” (Lyrics Alley 2011: 217).

Aboulela seems trying to show out the Sufis’ belief that spreads amidst Sudanese society. People are used to become believers of what is happening to them good or bad. The pains are to purify them from their previous sins. It is a punishment or a reminder that takes them back to their creator. This reminds us with George Herbert’s poem, *The Pulley* (1633) that metaphorically assumes that the blessings that a human being gets from his creator are to pull him back to his God. Those blessings work like a pulley or a lift connects the creature with his creator. The lenity and broad-mindedness that the people have is embodied in Mahmoud Abuzeid ‘s relationships with foreigners. Aboulela attempts to expose the lenity of religion and its plurality as a kind of coexistence between nations. It is an attempt to hybridize their identity and shape a new one that cope with their relations.

The characters in Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* are showed as travelers moving from space to another, crossing borders and open to public worlds. It points out the main themes here are mobility of the characters, their migration, and the philosophy of religion that is to say Sufism. Mohamoud Abuzeid is depicted as 'a cultural transporter' who moves from text to another, from culture to another, or from language to another. Aboulela makes attempts to compromise between cultural differences. This can be seen in Mahmoud's speech to the English man Mr Harrison when he says

While other men fight and hate, we give and take. We negotiate with everyone, Christian, Jew, pagan. Money and goods are what makes men equal. That is my creed. And true righteousness is not in taking a political stance or on serving slogans. It is in fair trade. I am not a religious man by any means, but there is one serving of the Prophet Mohammad that I cling to. He said: "The truthful and honest merchant will be with the prophets, affirmers of truth and martyrs. (Lyrics Alley 2011: 196)

This means that the treatment with people is the criteria of being a good human being and based on the good deeds Allah accept you and show mercy to you. Aboulela here tries to show out how Islam is compatible with reality and modernity. However, Mahmoud has some political interests. He is a supporter of Sudanese nationalism to terminate colonialism. He calls for modernizing Sudanese industry, agriculture and the irrigation system. Modernity is shown as a part of one's belief. Aboulela celebrates modernity that respects one's faith. Before the term modernity had been existed, Islam came and endorsed ethics and values that respect individualism and pluralism. Aboulela shows that Islam has come to narrow the gap between individuals, groups, and nations. It is the modern way of coexistence and respecting others' beliefs. To coexist is to live peacefully and to be loved by others around you.

Conversely, Aboulela brings out some other characters who attempt to resist modernity. Such resistance is based on their submission to their Sudanese traditional norms which are deep rooted in their culture. For them, breaking such norms is like conceding their land to their enemy. They are bounded to their social norms as strongly as they are tied to their properties and lands. Their parochial traditional norms cannot be tamed to accommodate with modern life. For instance, the poem 'I am Umdurman' which was recited by Abdallah Zein symbolizes the patriotism and the strong belongings of Sudanese. The poem shows deep relations between Sudanese and their land.

In her, *Lyrics Alley*, Aboulela compares between the main characters to reveal the importance of education that will help Sudanese to get out of their parochial tradition. She believes that such tradition will keep a gap between Sudanese and modernity. Mahmoud's Sudanese family members, Hajjah Waheeba, Idris, and Nassir represent the Sudanese tradition. These three members attempt to resist modern awareness and norms. Idris, for example was furious when Nur wrote a love poem. He "sprang from his seat and snatched the paper from his [Nur]

hand. He scanned it and tore it down the middle. He tore it once, twice, the noise slick and decisive in silent room. . . . You are spending money on his education and what does he come back from Egypt with silly songs!” (*Lyrics Alley* 2011: 36). Idris sees poems and poetry as something silly and shameful. The same thing did Waheeba when she murmured in the same situation, “Did you go to school, ya Nur-alhuda so you can write down shameful things? (37).

Abuzeid is depicted as a bridge between two cultures, Sudanese and Egyptian as he is married to two women, Waheeba from Sudan and Nabilah from Egypt. He attempts to bring these two cultures closer to each other, making compromise between their traditional perspectives. “His two wives in the same room! . . . They belong to different sides of the saraya, to different sides of him. He was the only one to negotiate between these two worlds, to glide between them, to come back and forth at will” (43). Aboulela exposes the relations between the two wives as well as the relation between the two cultures. She juxtaposes the Sudanese tribal society which resists the modern Egyptian society. Sudanese *hoash* represents the traditional Sudanese place whereas *saraya* represents the modern Egyptian home. The Western liberalism stands between backwardness and modernity, i.e., the traditional *hoash* and *saraya*. Nabilah fails to narrow the gap between her modern view and her husband’s second wife, Waheeba. She can do some changes to modernize her “if she had thrived as a role model, as a champion of progress, as a good influence. She could have taken a younger person’s hand and guided them” (*Lyrics Alley* 2011: 286). However, she succumbs to the Sudanese traditional norms giving a space to Waheeba to control and make influence in the family. “She had not been able to rise and fill that leadership position. She had allowed Waheeba, the dust, the heat, the insects, the landscape and customs to defeat her. She had not fought back” (287). Nabilah fails to resist those unbearable norms in Sudanese society. She fails to fight back to make change in such conservative and backward society. Yet, she appreciates and encourages any initiative or effort by youths towards modernity.

Soraya , Idris’ daughter is the focalizer of gender struggle. She is the young Sudanese female who attempts to strive for the Sudanese women’s right. She represents the new Sudanese generation. She is the open-minded woman who works hard to modernize Sudan. She is the feminist voice in the novel that keeps resisting the parochial norms. She refuses to succumb to Sudanese traditional norms. She revolts against this backward tradition. She takes her uncle’s second wife, Nabilah as a model for encouraging herself to be a modern girl. As Soraya strives to get out of her Sudanese parochial norms, there are some inner attachments pulling her back to her family and her tradition. Feeling self-pity with such conflict, Soraya succeeds to cross the cultural boundaries. Soraya takes advantage of her cousin’s love. She moves with him to Egypt and there she updates herself with modern world development. She also takes a step forward in the political world. Her Sudanese belonging has inspired her to think for the future of Sudan. “The young generation carried a strong sense of their Sudanese belonging. Their glittering future was here, here in this southern hand where potential was as huge and as mysterious as the darkness of its nights” (*Lyrics Alley* 2011: 12).

Ferial a six-year-old is a victim of the conflict between Nabilah and Waheeba, between modernity and tradition, between the Egyptian culture and the Sudanese parochial tradition. As her mother Nabilah attempts to save her from the harm of the Sudanese circumcision which is part of their tradition, Waheeba secretly takes Ferial to be circumcised as a challenge to modernity of Nabilah. However, Nabilah strongly condemns such barbaric attitude considering it a physical abuse. This barbaric action is also condemned by Mahmoud Abuzeid who tries to create a new peaceful environment for his big family. Aboulela shows out that this inhuman mutilation is because of the lack of education. It is inherited from the past violent eras when women were treated as animals. Aboulela here condemns this patriarchal violence which is considered as women's humiliation. Aboulela's condemnation is to reveal the Arab men's wrong conception that assumes Arab women are either unsexed reproduction or eroticism. She emphasizes that women should be taken by her psychological and intellectual maturity not by her sexual desires. She goes along with Gayatri Spivak that the language should be considered as "a clue to the workings of gendered agency. The writer is written by her language, of course. But the writings of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different from that of [. . .] woman" (170-80).

The linguistic dimension that Aboulela has taken can be seen in her characters' language. The voice of her characters is inspiring. It gives an echo to modernity as well as identity. For example, Soraya's intellectuality and her studies reflect her inner and self-struggle to survive in a society degrades women, assuming reading and writing as inappropriate and shameful for women. Soraya sees "words on a page were seductive, free, inviting everyone, without distinction. She could not 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 alone. A book was something to hide, the thick enchantment of it, the shame, almost. (*Lyrics Alley* 2011: 8)

Soraya's resistance through reading and writing is a feminist voice for women's private space. It is a gendered resistance that attempts to expose the patriarchal violence not only in the Sudanese society but also in the Arab world. Aboulela attempts to prove women's right through the true interpretation of religion. She agrees with the feminist writer, Amina Wadud that the holy text should be reinterpreted through a feminist perspective. They argue that the holy text is misunderstood and interpreted with patriarchal exegeses. "It was not the text which restricted women, but the interpretations of the text which have come to be held in greater importance than the text itself" (Wadud 1992: xxi- xxii).

In the same vein, Aboulela goes through the holy text to re-scrutinize it finding out the Qur'anic response for the patriarchal interpretation. Aboulela draws an image of Sudanese woman who strives through education to be a social active agent as well as a man. She brings out the invisible Arab violence against women. Trying to relocate women in the Arab society, Aboulela maps out the true path Arab women have to go through to be the real partner of men.



Conclusion

Aboulela shows the limited space of women that was designed by masculinity. The women are confined to what is so-called *hoash*. She cannot cross or walk through men's space. The only chance for women to step into men's space is when men are injured as the case of Nur or ill as in the case of Mahmoud Bay Abuzeid. *Lyrics Alley* (2011) brings to light the alienation that men feel when they get injured or ill is the same as the alienation of women. It is the same space that men are enforced to remain in by illness. However, need not to think humanly men do not care for women's sufferings of the alienation which is forced by them. As an Arab woman writer moves through space and time, Aboulela points out that Sudanese woman has to break down the parochial traditional norms and cross the space to achieve her aspiration in her life.

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