

Manifesting Fluidity: Negotiating Borders and Rethinking Identity in Leila Aboulela's Novel *Lyrics Alley* (2010)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes Leila Aboulela's novel, *Lyrics Alley* (2010) to explore the effects of fluid processes of change on identity, borders, and subjectivity across various spatial and temporal boundaries. It demonstrates that fluidity is an inevitable condition through which various transformations occur. Thereby, it falsifies notions of fixity, totality, and specificity, which characterize truths. By exploring the concept and the scope of fluidity, the article investigates the intrinsic nature of borders and identity, proving their negotiability and cognitive flexibility. To realize this endeavor, the article relies on a qualitative approach with a mixed theoretical framework, invoking Zygmunt Bauman's theory of fluidity to understand how identity and subjectivity become constantly constructed and reconstructed in the postmodern era. The article uses Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe's insights on the two poetic and aesthetic levels of borders, highlighting how borders can be experienced, not only geographically, but also culturally, linguistically, and cognitively. The article concludes that fluidity prevents a unified and fixed definition of a range of concepts, namely identity, borders, and subjectivity.

KEYWORDS: border, fluidity, cultural identity, subjectivity

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most celebrated Sudanese writers, Leila Aboulela published her novel *Lyrics Alley* (2010) highlighting the cultural intricacies that cover the Sudanese society after the British colonialism. The novel recounts the story of Nur, from his early childhood to his traveling to England to becoming a recognized poet in his country, Sudan. While tracing the mental and cognitive development of Nur throughout his childhood, Aboulela sheds light on the impact of colonialism in altering a multitude of cultural conventions and principles, affecting the intrinsic nature of Sudanese cultural identity.

As celebrated and towering as this author, various publications have already explored Leila Aboulela's commitment of unravelling the cultural contractions that govern the Sudanese society during colonialism and its aftermath. For instance, Yousef Awad in his article *Writing from the Margins of the Nation: Leila Aboulela's Lyrics Alley* focuses on how the mini narratives of the novel is meant to centralize the marginalized individuals, their cultural transformations, and different attitudes during the British occupation of Sudan (Awad, 2015). Voicing marginality: disability in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* by Ken Junior Lipenga tackles the able-bodiedness issue in Sudan, a sociological term that entails aspects of exclusion of different categories of subjects. Lipenga shows that the ideology of able-bodied, in Aboulela's novel *Lyrics Alleys*, demarcates the role of women in their society for that the able-bodied refers to the male. Thus, the able-bodied reference to the male indicates the same preferences between genders and races.

Ahmed Gamal Abdel Wahab writes his article "Counter-Orientalism: Retranslating the "Invisible Arab" in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*" to unravel how Aboulela dismantles a number of deeply-grained stereotypes about Arabs, especially after the 9/11 attack on United States in 2001. The attack underpins the same old image in the which Arabs and Muslims are seen. Aboulela considers these issues, states Abdel Wahab, "to destabilize cultural stereotypes of Arab women at homeland and abroad" (Gamal, 2016, p. 3). Aboulela undertakes this endeavor through what Abdel Wahab sees as "relocation and retranslation across different cultural zones" (Gamal, 2016, p. 2). Such an accomplishment requires breaking apart the outdated exclusive modes of intellect, which Abdel Wahab does, underscoring the importance of revising the Western imposed stereotypical discourses on the self -Arabs- and the necessity of knowing the other -the West. It is the creation of new spaces where Arabs and the West can communication, and it is the reason why Abdel Wahad summons retranslation as a genuine reference "a literary subgenre that pieces together the dialogic potential of translation and postcolonial writing" (Gamal, 2016, p. 2). Translation in this regard reflects the possible ways in which culture can be translated.

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This article furthers the discussion on the western and eastern relational aspects, culminating in blurring the founding elements of the Sudanese culture. It tackles the understanding of identity within the contexts of transculturality and postcoloniality through the lenses of border theory. In other words, the article focuses on the pivotal role of border crossing experiences in challenging the traditional understanding of identity under the continuous, changeable process of fluidity. Focusing on borders, in this sense, means that the article invokes the configurations of experiencing borders through geography, referring to the basic and traditional understanding of borders, as well as cultural, linguistic, and cognitive borders, which lie under the symbolic meaning of borders.

2. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The article maintains a qualitative methodology with a close reading method and a mixed theoretical framework, aiming to evince the role of borders in altering subjectivity and several cultural, social, economic, cognitive domains.

The article uses *fluidity* to demonstrate that society and culture should not be considered as static, determined, or specific, especially within the postmodern context. Bauman's book *Liquid Modernity* (2000) gives a profound understanding of the postmodern era, to which he refers as liquid modernity. His use of "fluidity" or "modernity" exhibits the drastic changes occurred within vast arrays of culture and society, affecting other domains, fields, and sectors. He states that "these are reasons to consider 'fluidity' or 'liquidity' as fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity" (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). Bauman explains his metaphor showing how liquidity or fluidity is not a determined or static object. Rather, liquids "cannot easily hold their shape [...] fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it" (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). Accordingly, fluidity can be seen as a constant movement across different temporal and spatial boundaries.

Bauman's theory of fluidity becomes more potent in his article "From Pilgrim to Tourist – A short history of Identity" (1996) in which he clarifies how identity has gone through drastic changes across time. Referring to his metaphor, solids stand for the traditional understanding of identity, a fixed, static, and limited concept that signifies early modern subjects. By contrast, late modernity – liquid modernity – represents the state of liberation from the shackles agreed upon within the realm of solids. In other words, what characterizes identity during the liquid modernity era is that it escapes those states of fixity, openness, complexity, and indeterminacy. Bauman uses another genuine metaphor for identities' evolution from being 'solid' to 'liquid', invoking the different characteristics between 'pilgrim' and 'tourist' (Bauman, 2000). Thus, Bauman's article alludes to the ways in which the tourist goes through different types of borders, creating new meanings, and demonstrating the fluid state of the postmodern era.

In this context, various scholars provide profound analysis of a border, showing its intrinsic nature, its conceptual characteristics, as well as the manifold ways of how it functions. *Border Peotics De-Limited* edited by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe demonstrates a perceptive understanding of borders, showing how the notion of borders should be drastically revised for the traditional imprudence the concept has been labeled with throughout the history of critical thinking. Border theory, which they adhere to, pinpoints this limited – if not shallow – understanding of borders. Introducing the book, Schimanski and Wolfe state that "there is a tendency in border studies to see borders everywhere, a tendency which is in itself of great interest to border studies, telling us as it does something significant about the border and its metaphorical applicability in any number of cultural formations" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2007, p. 11).

Advancing the discussion, Svend Larsen sheds light on the ways in which borders form new meanings within the "interdependent zones" of borders. In this sense, borders are spaces where various encounters, negotiations, and clashes occur, and, consequently, pave the ground for new orders and meanings. This blurs what can be considered, at least traditionally, as the two independent entities. The absence of these two entities is not solely a consequence of interaction. Rather, what has been considered as independent is actually interdependent. Larsen's idea of meaning demonstrates various existing motives to alter subjectivity across borders. It is the nexus of borders that alter the conception of subjectivity and identity alike.

Another book that painstakingly addresses the nature of border is that of *Borderscapes: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making* (Brambilla et al. 2015). The book states that "the border also involves a focus on the way in which the very location of borders is constantly displaced, negotiated and represented as well as the plurality of processes that cause its multiplication at different points within a society" (Brambilla et al. 2015, p. 2). By emphasizing the multifaceted aspect of borders in its definition, the book affirms the necessity of considering the 'processual ontology' of borders, meaning that borders should be observed, understood, and analyzed within the evolving context of society, which "both markers of belonging and places of becoming" (Brambilla, 2015, p. 24). Stating that borders can be seen on an accumulative scale while leading to diverse cultural and social transformations is intriguing. Jopi Nyman (2015) confirms this argument in his chapter from the same book while analyzing how identity is personally, culturally, and nationally transformed. Henceforth, what is traditionally considered as static and specific has become an ongoing process of cultural and social construction.

Hence, borders are fluid, a factual statement that demonstrates how border theory and fluidity start from one basic premise of negating the inadequate constitutive elements of each concept. Negating the traditional understanding of borders, identity, and

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subjectivity is attributed to the condition of fluidity that characterizes the postmodern era, what Bauman refers to as 'liquid modernity'.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The novel's events open in Sudan at a time when the country was still under the British colonial rule. The first aspect of border crossing appears in the first word "Alhamdulillah" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 9). The word signifies the insertion of an Arabic linguistic code that entails multiple religion dimensions. Although the word 'Alhamdulillah' may simply be translated to 'praise be to God', the narrator deliberately keeps the Arabic with Latin letters to assert her Islamic religion background.

Through the conversation between Soraya and Fatma, the potential for transcending the limiting boundaries of the Sudanese cultural identity emerges. The narrator reveals Soraya's hope to cross the various borders of her geography and culture, stating that she "gazed at maps and dreamt of the freshness and adventure of new cities. She loved travelling to Egypt, and how she didn't have to wear a robe in Cairo. She wore modern dresses and skirts and so did Fatma, and they went shopping in the evenings for sandals" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 12). Soraya's passion for reading books introduces her to English novels, which Nur "brought from Alexandria and Cairo" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 15). These incidents pave the ground for Soraya's experiences of different types of borders, and thereby demonstrating how "fluids, fluids, so to speak, neither fix space nor bind time" (Bauman, 2000, p. 2). The characters' aspirations to overcome the cultural and national boundaries prove not only the inadequacy of cultural identity, but the essential and drastic reconsideration of identity from a static, limited, and determined conception of subjectivity to a different spectrum where possibility, multiplicity and openness become the founding elements.

As Sudan undergoes profound transformations under the pressure of colonialism, it is crucial to pinpoint the ways in which colonialism, apart from its exploitative side, compels a reconsideration of 'solid' identity. Despite the attempts to eradicate the remnants of colonialism, the Sudanese society embeds various tenets of the Western civilization. At this point, ambivalence plays a vital role in constructing the Sudanese 'liquid modern' subjectivity, a predictable consequence of cultural encounters across the two geographies. The fact is that the inevitable zone of interchange that appeared within the frame of colonialism fundamentally reshapes the conceptualization of identity and subjectivity. The cultural paradigm of identity is reformulated to fit the new conditions of constant displacement and its generated and generative complexities. In other words, Sudanese subjectivity holds aspects of complexity that cultural transformations impose, and other aspects of complexity that fuel the continuous navigation through the open and undetermined 'smooth space'.

The novel gradually reveals the configurations of fluidity through the character of Nabilah, the "Egyptian city lady" who embodies modernity through her attitudes and inclinations (Aboulela, 2010, p. 16). The narrator recounts that "Nabilah's elegant clothes were modelled on the latest European fashions, and the way she held herself was like a cinema star, with her sweeping hair and formal manners" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 16). Because of her cosmopolitan vision, Nabilah exerts a profound influence on Soraya, who dreams of a modern marriage similar Nabilah's. Since such a form of marriage is beyond the Sudanese cultural norms, Soraya hopes that her marriage to Nur will be "the first white wedding evening Umdurman had ever seen" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 16). Her desire for a white wedding reflects the multiple cultural intersections between the British colonial culture and Sudan, leading to an ambivalent postmodern subjectivity. Therefore, Soraya's aspiration demonstrates how fluidity functions across cultural space, a deduction that Bauman's statement "fluids do not keep to any shape for long and are constantly ready (and prone) to change it" underpins (Bauman, 2000, p. 2).

Bauman (2000) asserts that fluidity functions through the dissolution of stable structures, thereby new possibilities for subjects to explore new cultural horizons. Identity in its traditional paradigm lies in the heart of this discussion. Its inability to accommodate the new conditions is challenged by Bauman's theory of fluidity as illustrated through the entangled experiences of Nabilah, Nur, and Soraya. From these experiences, fluidity appears not merely as a choice but as an inevitable condition of border crossing experiences. In other words, to practice cultural identification is to engage in the processes of bordering. Stuart Hall's critique of cultural identity inadequacy in containing the needs of the postmodern subject is articulated through the concept of 'cultural identification', through which subjectivity reaches the "reconceptualization - thinking it in its new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm" (Hall, 1996, p. 11). By rethinking subjectivity, Hall alludes to the necessity of reconsidering "the relationship between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs" (Hall, 1996, p. 11). This paradigm shift towards cultural identification within the driving forces of power and discourse entails features of border crossing experiences. Hall affirms: "since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process" (Hall, 1996, p. 12). These symbolic boundaries are of central importance to deepen the understanding of the theory of borders and bordering in the novel. Accordingly, Hall and Bauman agree on the fact that constant change and movement are two blows to the traditional understanding of cultural identity.

The novel provides concrete examples of how fluidity characterizes the postmodern subject. For instance, Nabilah's eating habits contrast with customary eating practices in Sudanese culture. Egypt's influence on Nabilah reflects her determination to be

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free from the constraints of cultural identity, and thereby to be free to engage in a world of new possibilities. The possibilities for change and openness inherent in fluidity are patent in Nabilah's transformation from a woman who maintains a traditional lifestyle to a woman of modern characteristics. The narrator depicts Nabilah's eating habits while stating that meals "were served in the dining room, around a proper dining table, with knives, forks and serviettes, not clusters of people gathering with extended fingers around a large round tray, while sitting on those very same beds she had so many objections to" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 30). Nabilah objects many aspects of her Sudanese traditions, and this rejection becomes even clearer with narrator characterization of her house, stating that "her household staff, too, was all from Egypt – Chef Gaber, whose Turkish dishes inspired so much envy from her co-wife, as well as the children's nanny. Nabilah surrounded herself with the sights, accents and cooking smells of Egypt, closing the door on the heat, dust and sunlight of her husband's untamed land" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 30). Thus, Nabilah exemplifies the postmodern subject who embodies the principles of fluidity.

Aspects of change, continuity, openness, and possibility are collectively shaped to form Nabilah's vision. The attributions to the profound differences between her and many other Sudanese people, whom she criticizes, is directly linked to her practicing of bordering. To be a fluid subject is to engage in the process of bordering and vice versa. Borders are simultaneously constructed and constructive as is evident in the example of Nabilah. To clarify this statement, it is necessary to consider the processes of bordering, which "influence everyone's way of being in the world" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017, p. 3). Following the analytical framework of border aesthetics reveals the vital role of the symbolic borders, which contribute to Nabilah's profound transformation in her perception of the Sudanese society. For her, this "untamed land" – meaning Sudan – entails aspects of primitiveness and backwardness. The symbolic level of border aesthetics "distinguishes between values (right and wrong, good and bad)" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017, p. 3). Nabilah's rejection of all Sudanese lifestyle from her is a clear indication of regarding the Sudanese cultural identity through the lenses of wrong and bad. These conclusions emerge within her ceaseless criticism of Sudan and Sudanese people as the narrator reveals on different occasions. By crossing the symbolic borders, Nabilah traces new borders that separate her from other people in Sudan, while remaining attached to them through the previously discussed 'zones of interchange'. Clearly, the process of bordering fuels fluidity in the sense that it paves the way for new trajectories, positions, and spaces.

Another important character is Nur who reveals his talent of writing poetry to his family, an incident that causes two contradictory narratives. On the one hand, Nabilah supports Nur's interest in writing poetry while affirming that it is "civilized and modern to allow young people to express their feelings through poetry, music or art" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 41). Idris, on the other hand, Mahmoud's younger brother, reproaches Nur's habit for writing poetry and asserts that he is "wasting his time on this rubbish" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 39). Nabilah does not like Idris because she considers him to be "too Sudanese for her and, unlike his brother, rarely travelled abroad" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 38). For her, to be too Sudanese means to contradict the tenets of modernity and civilization. Her acceptance of Nur's talent as a way of expressing his feelings and ideas is considered civilized and modern. Idris, opposing her ideas, considers it shameful. This juxtaposition asserts two opposite facts: the limitations that cultural identity can impose on subjects and the wider scale that fluidity provides subjects with. The narrator refers to this opposition while mentioning Nabilah's activities during the evening, stating that Nabilah feels "far away from Cairo, and somewhat excluded. Was it her fate to be always in the periphery?" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 41). For Nabilah, Cairo symbolizes modernity and civilization while Sudan maintains various anachronistic aspects of her Sudanese cultural identity.

Wherever there is a border, symbolic or physical, there is an order. Subjects construct borders according to their perceptions and backgrounds (Brambilla & Pötzsch, 2017). The novel shows how Nabilah and Mahmoud seek to go beyond the limiting discourses of their cultural identity. Mahmoud's awareness of the necessity to modernize Sudan through economic developments contradicts the fixed traditional beliefs. A vision in this regard is the willingness to cross the temporal boundaries within which becoming has the pivotal role in guiding subjectivity. The vision is that in which Soraya imagines being Nur's wife in the future, a future husband with whom she can transcend the boundaries of her cultural identity. Strikingly, perception and background trigger the subject's awareness to change. Vision becomes the vanishing point, which cannot be attained but it nevertheless remains ahead of the subject. It is a mere trajectory to another vision, a constant change and an ongoing process.

Events unfold in the novel to reveal other cultural intricacies that the Sudanese people maintain throughout history, especially those related to female circumcision. This deeply ingrained practice becomes very debatable after Sudan witnesses the age of cultural transformations. The circumcision of Nassir's daughter, Zainab, sheds light on the cultural practices that Sudanese maintain as part of their cultural identity. However, controversy results from this incident. Waheeba, Nassir's mother, who is keen on seeing her granddaughter circumcised, has engaged in arguments with her husband Mahmoud because the latter considers circumcision barbaric. This confrontation between tradition and modernity shows the profound effect on Mahmoud after crossing the symbolic borders of his Sudanese culture. Two reasons support his argument against the idea of circumcision. First, this practice has no basis in the Islamic religion. Second, it is against the law in Sudan. Thinking as a citizen, Mahmoud reflects that "the individual *de jure* cannot turn into the individual *de facto* without first becoming the citizen" (Bauman, 2000, p. 40). Mahmoud contributes to liberating his environment from the shackles of tradition. The two arguments entail various dimensions of the necessity to transcend cultural

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identity because of its diminishing relevance in the new Sudanese society. Mahmoud, as discussed earlier, exemplifies a variety of cultural transformations thanks to his vision, which influences Nabilah.

The importance of fluidity lies in its ability to encompass both 'zones of interchange'. It offers an open space where cultural encounters and negotiations can take place. The binary of outside versus inside is no longer divided by the principles of cultural identity, which reinforces configurations of specificity, totality, and fixity. The world is constantly moving through the processes of changeability. The central argument in the inevitable emergence of fluidity as a human event and a cultural paradigm lies in the condition of becoming, the impetus that drives these changes through time and space. Mahmoud, Nabilah, as well as Nur manifest fluidity through which new potentialities appear. The three characters have the same vision of living according to the norms of modernity because traditional discourses cannot cope with the conditions of the postmodern era. The potentialities, which emerge throughout the trajectories of subjects, are the expected outcomes of practicing borders. What characterizes borders in relation to the fluidity is their constitutive element of ambivalence. These common threads demonstrate the interconnectedness of the conceptualizations of the postmodern subject.

The Sudanese case, through the lenses of Mahmoud, Nabilah, and Nur, shows the extent to which cultural identity is destabilized in the postmodern era. By crossing manifold physical and symbolic borders, subjectivity becomes very increasingly difficult to understand and to situate. These difficulties and obscurities are mainly due to the foundations upon which the postmodern era is established. Potentiality, complexity, multiplicity, and openness are the constituting elements of subjectivity. Within this framework, Hall meticulously explains the conditions for the transformation from cultural identity that perpetuate the anachronistic paradigm through the discourses of tradition, history, and other factors, to an ongoing process of identification that liberates subjects from all forms of fixity and claims of specificity. Cultural identification allows subjects to engage with all types of borders, physical and symbolic, including their "topographical, symbolic, temporal, epistemological and textual" levels (Schimanski and Wolfe, 2017, p. 14). Sudan, thus, with such cultural transformations, produces new cultural and social forms across various levels. The pathways that cultural encounters and negotiations offer to the Sudanese subject are immense. Accordingly, these cultural transformations are better understood within the concept of fluidity.

Nevertheless, transformations are still debatable, reckoning with the conditions of colonialism and its aftermath. Two opposite views of Idris and Mahmoud reveal the multiplicity that the Sudanese society has during the postcolonial era. Aspects of transculturality and postcoloniality generate ambivalent subjects who question their roots while seeking new routes. These routes inevitably lead to complexity, multiplicity, and potentiality, the fundamental elements of fluidity, cultural identification, and the profound conceptualization of borders, in this context. The postmodern subject, specifically the postcolonial, is thus proven to experience the ongoing processes of changeability and continuity. Vision, as demonstrated earlier, has a pivotal role in guiding the postcolonial subject. Mahmoud considers taking his son, Nur, to be hospitalized in England while the deeply ingrained aspects of cultural identity in Hajjah Waheeba's character show her determination to take Nur to a *faqirs*. She tells her husband Mahmoud that "Nur's neck and his limbs. This is black magic, believe me, I know it when I see it. And no one can lift this curse except certain *faqirs* in Umdurman!" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 104). The closed-mindedness of Waheeba, as Mahmoud's reaction reveals, springs from her adherence to the discourses of superstition and irrationality, two signs of backwardness according to her husband Mahmoud.

The novel reveals that Mahmoud aspires to trigger a huge transformation in Sudan from agriculture to industry. This vision reflects Mahmoud's awareness that "an independent Sudan will need its industries" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 172). The postcolonial hope that Ashcroft affirms in his utopian vision, is not only a gateway to the world where multiplicity and possibility emerge – if not occupying a central place – of the postcolonial experience. Indeed, the postcolonial hope is realized through a range of borders that subjects cross to experience conscious and unconscious changes. One compelling example is Mahmoud's enterprise in cotton production. The narrator recounts that "cotton prices had raised to unprecedented heights – prosperous times for the man whose name was synonymous with the private sector. With the backing of the bank, Mahmoud had established almost all of the private cotton schemes" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 171). The historical transformations, which characterize the Sudanese culture and subjectivity, underpin the inevitable process of constant change and movement. Based on this fact, fluidity is tantamount to cultural identification. In other words, both function through a discourse of continuity and change.

The idea of identification's discursive work is essential for a deeper understanding of the functionality of borders. For Hall, identification operates within different modalities of power, the motive force of discourses, which govern the cultural, social, and economic levels of the subject's everyday life. Likewise, borders in this context because identification and borders have the same defining elements of changeability, continuity, ambivalence that lead to a constant reconstruction of subjectivity. To demonstrate that discourse is at the core of these concepts, an attempt must be undertaken to expound on the nature of borders through the lens of Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe. They assert that "borders exist both within and outside of discourse, but also have shaped the subjectivity of those subjects who encounter borders in their everyday life" (Rosello & Wolfe, 2017, p. 2). This statement shows that borders are genuinely underscored as being constructed and constructive. They constitute a space of ambivalence where two forces of constructing new meaning overlap. Borders, thus, operate across diverse social formations and applications that subjects use daily.

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Returning to the novel, Nur seems to sharpen his poetic skills, an artistic way of expressing his thoughts and experiences, which Nabilah tells to his father, Mahmoud, to be a true work of art that distinguishes civilized and educated people. Notable, poetry serves as a bridge that takes Nur from the physical state of disability into the symbolic realm where he can navigate "the smooth space". Poetry displaces from his limited space and provides him with the tools to go beyond the *hoash* where he spends his days lying on his bed. His poem's title indicates his experience has devastating consequences following paralysis. Entitled *Travel Is the Cause*, the poem evokes moments of displacement, exile, migration, a succession of experiences that necessitate border crossing. Poetry becomes a space that takes Nur from the reality of everyday life to that of the imaginary. Lene M. Johannessen and Ruben Mo discuss the idea of the "physical and cognitive borders in aesthetic works of art" (Johannessen & Mo, 2017, p. 50). The novel reveals that Nur has gone beyond multiple aspects of cognitive borders, and his education at Victoria College in Egypt helps to explain the reasons behind crossing the cognitive boundaries in his poem. As for the physical border of geography and state, Nur has proven these experiences through his traveling to Egypt and London.

The events unfold to disclose other forms of border-crossing experiences, through Nur's best friend Tuf Tuf, who comes back from Dublin. In a cordial and spontaneous conversation between Nur and his friend appear a series of aspects that indicate the *borders of nature* that create spaces of recognition, cultural encounters, and negotiations between Sudan and Northern Ireland. The conversation brings into view Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders's insightful thoughts on ecology as overlooked through border theory. What Rosello and Saunders assert in their approach to ecology and borders demonstrates the entanglements that shape the relationship between the two elements. They state that "nature and borders are always imagined and therefore represented, aestheticized" (Rosello & Saunders, 2017, p. 26). This statement suggests is that nature is not detached from human experience. Indeed, nature is linked to everyday human life in the sense that it creates borders and thereby produces certain discourses. These discourses govern the culture of people. As previously discussed, nature is the point of departure for any discourse to emerge, develop, and crystallizes into new patterns and meanings. In other words, Rosello and Saunders astutely confirm that "throughout history, borders of all kinds – national, social, conceptual, cultural and aesthetic – have been established, institutionalized and sedimented in daily practice through reference to nature" (Rosello & Saunders, 2017, p. 27). The underlying question in this argument is whether nature governs the whole range of cultural, national, social, conceptual, and aesthetic borders or not.

The inevitability of fluidity is manifested through Soraya, whose experience of symbolic borders is deepened by crossing the physical borders of Sudan. Her determination to further her studies away from her family triggers two opposing standpoints. On the one hand, her father Idris asserts that a girl should stay with her family, abiding by the established conventions of tradition. On the other hand, Sister Josephine and Mahmoud, because of their awareness of the evolving world, affirm that Soraya's best option is to further her studies. Josephine and Mahmoud reflect the postmodern subject that crosses the boundaries of traditionalism, which keeps the girls' ambitions in check. Soraya makes the decision to study at "Kitchener's School of Medicine" where she negotiates borders and thereby creates new meanings (Aboulela, 2010, p. 271). The narrator states that "at first [Soraya] was in awe of her surroundings, of the lush, spacious lawns of the campus with their tall palm trees, and the young men who stared at her and gave her shy smiles" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 271). The postmodern subject embarks on exploring beyond the boundaries of cultural identity to create new spaces of negotiation. This dynamic attitude brings into view Bauman's assertion that the postmodern subject is committed to the process of change and continuity, which eventually cannot exist without practicing borders.

Hence, fluidity reflects the process of borders. Through the ongoing process of change, new forms and meanings emerge to reconstruct postmodern subjectivity. The transition from a traditional paradigm to a modern one occurs within time and space. Both are experienced by the postmodern subject. The paradigm of cultural identity weakens while the process of fluidity alters subjectivity. Soraya is at the core of this theoretical framework for two main reasons. First, she starts her experience of crossing the cultural boundaries of Sudan through Nur's stories about Victoria College, a decisive factor in reconstructing Soraya's subjectivity. Second, Soraya crosses the geographical boundaries of Sudan. For her, Egypt, the destination, is the space in which her subjectivity can free itself from the impositions of her culture. A demonstration of the willingness to escape the limitedness and fixity of her culture lies in her hope that "one day, when she escaped the alleys and conventions of Omdurman, she would cut her hair short like Leslie Caron's. Paris, with its exhilaration and appreciation of beauty – Soraya would go there, too, and on the Champs-Élysées they would approve of her tall slim figure" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 213). This is the vision of the postmodern subject, the desire to go beyond the cultural and social boundaries of its nation, Sudan.

Fundamentally, the theory of borders lies at the heart of the process of fluidity that societies undergo. Borders play an essential role in negotiating boundaries and generating new meanings. Toward the end of the novel, sovereignty appears as another aspect of border aesthetics. This level of borders affirms that "sovereignty has become associated both with a nation's right to self-determination and with the violent defense and transgression of borders" (Schimanski & Wolfe, 2017, p. 18). Sovereignty may signify the total independence of a nation state from another. It may negate subservience and surveillance of a nation-state over another. The novel reveals these aspects of sovereignty through Soraya's experiences in Egypt. At the university, she encounters a rally of "Sudan for the Sudanese" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 217). The rally emphasizes the necessity to liberate Sudan from the Egyptian domination through the rejection of "any kind of Egyptian influence over a future, independent Sudan" (Aboulela, 2010, p. 217).

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From this perspective, borders create spaces of negotiation and conflict. The cultural and historical interconnections between Sudan and Egypt contribute to the Egyptian dominance over Sudan. However, the rally shows that “the sovereign keeps the border under surveillance, the border of the state as well as the border of the house. He decides who pertains to the community and who is alien; he identifies the subjects and the objects, gives names to subjects and objects” (Göring, 2007, p. 111). Of course, the protesters’ awareness of this border of sovereignty is what sparks the debate on the importance of ending subordination. Thus, another argument concerning borders as spaces of negotiations, encounters, and clashes is manifested as an attempt to exhibit its productive role in reconstructing subjectivity.

Soraya marries a Sudanese well-educated man in Britain. Soraya states that “he is progressive and open-minded” (Aboulela, 2010, p. 251). In her marriage, Soraya follows the western tradition reflected in her white dress, resembling Nabilah’s wedding, French perfume, and the progressive husband with whom she goes on her honeymoon. Soraya invites her “Egyptian and European friends in Khartoum” to affirm her constantly changing identity, performing fluidity and practicing borders. Borders, on the various topographical, symbolic, temporal, and epistemological levels, are experienced by Soraya. Emphasizing these levels as configurations of border experience, which bring into view the fluid identity of subjects within the postmodern context, is the royal road to demonstrating the continuity and changeability of subjects. From this angle, the tremendous influence of cultural identification appears to fuel various features of changeability, continuity, complexity, and multiplicity, thereby eradicating the obsolete features of fixity, totality, locality, specificity, and limitedness. Based on Soraya’s experience, the transformation from cultural identity to fluidity begins with crossing the boundaries of cultural identity, which are embodied in all the conventions and discourses that underpin her society.

4. CONCLUSION

Lyrics Alley’s depiction of the cultural and social transformations signifies the fluid process of subjectivity across spatial and temporal boundaries. The novel dramatizes how cultural encounters and negotiations can contribute to drastic changes across various domains of society, economy, attitude, and politics. These changes demonstrate the failure of some traditional conventions in coping with new meaning and social orders.

As discussed before, evincing the inadequacy of cultural identity in the contemporary era comes as a result from crossing various types of borders. Crossing borders is essentially an attempt to go beyond the limited and fixed discourses of cultural identity. In fact, a border is not a mere barrier between entities, nor is it a dead end to a unified or limited form. Rather, a border is a process that is simultaneously constructed and constructive, a discursive work through which subjectivity can change on various cultural, social, cognitive, and economic levels.

To sum up, *Lyrics Alley* (2010) is a novel through which Leila Aboulela sheds light on the cultural changes that occurred in Sudan during the postcolonial era. These changes lie in overcoming – if not challenging – various deeply ingrained discourses of tradition while negotiating Western modernity. Within this orbit, identity becomes a process of change and continuity across spatial and temporal boundaries, a conscious and unconscious operation in which subjects engage. It is a twofold practice that manifests fluidity.

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