



Borders and Cultural Identification in Leila Aboulela's Novel *The Translator*

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Abstract

Article Information

Article History:

Received: 22-07-2024

Accepted: 17-10-2024

Published: 20-10-2024

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*This paper examines the reversed aspects of borders as constructed and constructing discourses in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* while tracing the configurations of Stuart Hall's concept of 'cultural identification' and numerous 'border' experiences as pinpointed by Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe. The paper demonstrates that practicing cultural identification depends on experiencing borders. It unravels the recurring alterations of postcolonial subjectivity to demonstrate both the invalidity of cultural identity in addressing the postcolonial subject and the necessity of cultural identification as a continuous transforming process of subjectivity. By focusing on symbolic borders, the paper goes throughout Aboulela's novel of *The Translator* to map how these borders are manifested and deployed within the experiences of exile, displacement, and ambivalence. Since the novel dramatizes the postcolonial era, the paper brings to view Bill Ashcroft's concept of 'the transnation' to underpin the certainty of openness, complexity, potentiality, and multiplicity, which constitute, not only 'the transnation', but also Hall's cultural identification and Schimanski and Wolfe's theory of borders.*

Keywords: borders, identity, cultural identification, postcolonial subjectivity, transnation

The Achievers Journal: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Culture (2024), 10(3), 15-27

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This paper scrutinizes the multiple aspects of borders as constructed and constructing discourses in Aboulela's *The Translator*, which reflects the penetrating aspects of cultural identification to the emergence of border. It focuses primarily on the intricate processes through which various constructed symbolic borders reshape postcolonial subjectivity, processes that recall the inevitable condition of becoming. Within this critical examination, the chapter unravels the recurring alterations of postcolonial subjectivity to demonstrate both the invalidity of cultural identity in addressing the postcolonial subject and the necessity of cultural identification as a continuous transforming process of subjectivity, particularly within the postcolonial condition. By focusing on symbolic borders, the paper goes throughout Aboulela's novel of *The Translator* to map how these borders are manifested and practiced. These manifestations and practices of borders come within a whole range of borders' multidimensional configurations. Surely, an attempt will be undertaken to look into the profound functionality of borders in constructing subjectivity under the premises that borders cannot be seen as 'given, fixed, linear or stable' (Houtum 7). Quite strikingly then, borders and cultural identification share at least the aspect of refuting fixity, linearity, and stagnancy.

The traditional and simplistic understanding of a 'border' evokes the separating points, lines, or spaces between a series of defined and demarcated entities. This definition neglects the in-between space through which various encounters, negotiations, and clashes between different backgrounds, attitudes and beliefs occur. A border cannot be reduced to a mere typological or geographical definition for its inadequacy in lensing other forms of borders. In fact, the reductionist paradigm in underscoring the solely physical borders requires this revision of investigating other

forms of borders, namely symbolic borders. Both physical and symbolic borders are constructed by several discourses of nationalism, cultural identity, affiliation, history, and manifold other formations. To experience these different forms of borders is to navigate through new spaces, thereby, to generate new spaces of intersections and transformations. Borders bring to view gateways from spaces to others, a genuine mark of cultural identification.

Cultural identification is a genuine alternative to cultural identity in the ways it overcomes fixity, totality, complexity, and specificity. Opposing cultural identity, cultural identification celebrates complexity, potentiality, and openness. It offers an ongoing and changeable process for the navigation of subjects through cultures. This paradigm shifting from identity to identification is attributed to Hall's affirmation that "what we require here is 'not a theory of the knowing subject, but rather a theory of discursive practice'" (Hall 2). He emphasizes that the recognized perpetual movement of identity comes within a whole 'reconceptualization - thinking it in its new, displaced or decentred position within the paradigm' (2). Cultural identification, thus, is a continuous practice that the subject reflects through different spaces. It is nutritious to note that cultural identification can be seen through several conditions that mark the contemporary conditions of cultures and societies. Summoning globalization and cosmopolitanism are sufficient to demonstrate that cultural identification reflects the ongoing processes in which subjects can practice endless processes of changeability. One perfect example that dramatizes these processes is Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator*.

The Translator narrates the story of Sammar, a Sudanese widowed woman who lives in Scotland, working as an Arabic-English translator in the office of Mr. Rae at Aberdeen University. Her

regular meetings with Mr. Ray unravel the latter's attractive demeanor and incomparable benevolence. Sammar falls in love with Mr. Rae and asks him to convert to Islam so she can marry him. As a man of full commitment to science and experimentation, Mr. Rae refuses Sammar's idea because it contradicts his principles. However, the border of faith is crossed by Mr. Rae by the end of the novel, demonstrating the effects of cultural identification in creating spaces of negotiations for subjects. The first aspect of border crossing lies in the title of the novel *the Translator* because it evokes a series of defining elements of this profession, translation. The translator brings to view the ability of going beyond the demarcations of one's language and culture, and demonstrates the fact that the process of translation is a genuine penetration into the space of cultural encounters and negotiations. Concretely, the novel frequently shows how Sammar practices borders while translating different types of texts from Arabic to English. It is this system of bordering that permits Sammar to encounter and negotiate new horizons within the canal of translation.

Sammar's task brings to view a metaphoric interpretation of a whole culture, which results in cultural identification. Her strategic interplay between two languages and two cultures as a translator demonstrates that translation is a genuine movement within and between languages and cultures. Jacques Derrida's idea of 'translations as transaction' explicates Sammar's aim as a translator (Derrida 185). 'Translation as a transaction' stands for the extent to which the translator can move from one language, one culture to another language and another culture. It can be seen that for Derrida, Sammar as a translator, seeks to transfer a whole culture and its identity to another. This transference occurs in a relative way because, following Derrida,

the translator aspires to the most 'relevant translation'. A relevant translation is a translation that seeks to the most possible one. Strikingly, 'translation as transaction' generates a space where the original text is no longer present, a space where the targeted text will never be fully attainable. This space of interchangeability and negotiation supersedes the cultural identity within which a text is produced to an open space, that of cultural identification. Surely, Sammar's profession as a translator reinforces a space of cultural identification, a space where borders can be crossed.

The Translator dramatizes processes in which the institutionally constructed borders can be broken apart among cultures, and through this process, the translator undergoes the governing regularities of numerous discursive practices, which reshape the identity of translator. The novel shows how different institutions of religion, family, and tradition are culturally revised by the translator to culminate in new underpinning postmodern redefinitions of subjectivity, identity, and culture. Genuinely, by evoking the pivotal role of the transnation, the idea of border crossing becomes clearer because, on the one hand, border-crossing aims, as Ashcroft advances, to go beyond the boundaries of the nation without necessarily crossing the borders of the state. On the other hand, the whole conceptualization of the transnation is constituted upon the practicing of borders. This intertwinement between different concepts is meant to renew the cultural momentum within conditions where subjectivity, identity, and culture are drastically altered. Indeed, the translator is a postmodern and/or postcolonial subject that practices different types of borders, symbolic and physical, and demonstrates the inevitable condition of the transnation in the recent postcolonial context. This inevitability of changing from a fixed and stagnant paradigm to a

flexible and continuous one lies in the fact that cultural identity is no longer sufficient to define the postmodern and/or the postcolonial subject. Therefore, the presence of cultural identification is essential not only because it uncovers a series of cultural intricacies and ambiguities that problematize the modernist definition of subjectivity, but also because it contains numerous founding elements of border crossing theories. To practice cultural identification is to practice borders.

The novel opens up with the omniscient narrator describing Sammar's dreaming of a terrible weather and a planned meeting with Mr. Rae Isles. The dream unravels the first configuration of geographical borders through Sammar's feelings of anxiety and fear because she is "afraid of rain, afraid of the fog and the snow which came to this country, afraid of the wind even" (3). Johan Schimanski and Stephen Wolfe suggest in their theory of physical borders the issue of border aestheticization within the contexts of nature and thereby affirm the reshape of "the subjectivity of those subjects who encounter borders in their everyday life" (*Border Poetics Delimited*, 1). These geographically and topographically defined physical borders reflected in Sammar's dream are genuinely constructed within the subject's profound identification with space. It is the subject perception of nature that imposes differentiations and borders between different types of natures. Mireille Rosello and Timothy Saunders emphasize that "there is no such thing as a natural border without an aesthetic regime that organizes our representation of the relationship between nature and borders. Nature and borders are always imagined and therefore represented, aestheticized" (Schimanski and Wolfe, *Border Aesthetics* 25). What this statement expresses is that Sammar's geographical displacement brings to view the extent to which borders of nature can be natural. The fact is that borders of

nature are constructed within discourses of bordering nature through numerous representations and aestheticization.

Despite the incompatibility of Sammar's dream with the real world, the narrative reveals the distinctive aspects of the Scottish weather. In reality, Sammar's agency starts with an actual planned meeting with Rae in one "grey October sky, Scottish grey with mist from the North Sea" (3). Nature in this regard can be seen to play the first pivotal role in transforming the subject, Sammar, the Sudanese translator. Certainly, nature "functions as the border of an all-encompassing, multiple and hybrid culture" (Schimanski and Wolfe, *Border Aesthetics* 32). In other words, nature reflects the space through which subjectivity can be reconstituted while reconsidering several deeply grained and normalized perceptions about nature. Being largely tantamount to the translator, nature is a simultaneously constructed and constructing discourse, which cannot be limited to the obsolete dualistic approaches about nature and culture. In this sense, nature and culture are intertwined, and it is within this context that Sammar takes her coat and goes out with her finished "translation of *Al-Nidaa's* manifesto" (3). The configurations of crossing cultural borders appear in Sammar's translated document of *Al-Nidaa* manifesto, which maintains the original language of the word *Al-Nidaa*, but written in English letters. Actually, language is one of the symbolic borders through which multifarious transformations can float to the surface. For instance, *Al-Nidaa* can be translated to *The Call* as the accurate equivalence. However, Sammar's knowledge that *Al-Nidaa* is a proper noun leads her to maintain the same word but with different letters. Indeed, Language functions as a border through which endless aspects of cultural encounters and negotiations occur.

The various intersections between the subject and nature contribute to the alteration of subjectivity. Once borders of nature are experienced, subjectivity creates new meanings that change the most founding elements of cultural identity. The effect of becoming in reconstructing subjectivity cannot be examined aloof from the pivotal role of border crossings. In fact, it is the experience of borders that permit the changeable and the continuous attitude of subjectivity. This precise point evokes a variety of common denominators between Hall's theory of identification and the theory of borders. One compelling reason is that identification is meant to transcend series of demarcations within which cultural identity is established. Clearly, practicing borders requires eliminating the defining constructions of cultural identity such as fixity, locality, specificity, and totality. Akin to identification, border crossing is a process that postmodern and/or postcolonial subjectivity experiences. Another reason lies in the role that displacement has in altering the whole conceptualization of subjectivity. In other words, displacement is an actual process of border crossing that subjectivity experiences, and thereby generates a multitude of reconstructing potentialities for subjectivity. Border crossings take subjectivity from the limitedness of cultural identity to the openness of cultural identification. This intriguing deduction brings to fore Ashcroft's concept of the transnation, which describes the navigation of the postcolonial subject through the unlimited smooth space, and which deconstructs the dichotomous paradigms of cultural identity and state. In short, it can be demonstrated that the experience of borders precedes 'identification' and 'the transnation' in the ways that they inaugurate new spaces and positions for subjectivity.

The novel dramatizes these abovementioned intricacies altogether through Sammar, the translator. Sammar

was born in Scotland from Sudanese parents, and at the age of seven, she moved to Sudan. This event marks the first aspect of crossing topographical borders in Sammar's life labeling her with several configurations of the postcolonial subject. Her experience of displacement from one geographical position to another in an early age leads to the fatal death of her husband, Tariq. Sammar was born with a name that "means conversations with friends, late at night. It's what the desert nomads liked to do, talk leisurely by the light of the moon, when it was no longer so hot and the day's work was over" (5). The meaning of "Sammar" is brought after Rae's, the Middle-East historian and lecturer, questions about the origin of her name. Rae has accumulated considerable knowledge about the Sahara, and he knows "that most Arabic names had familiar meanings" (p.5). Rae's knowledge alludes to his experience of cultural borders while referring to the meaning of Sammar's name.

Rae's practicing physical and symbolic borders is a fulcrum to his diverse discussions with Sammar. He was "a Middle-East historian and a lecturer in Third World Politics" before committing himself solely to research (p.5). Being "an Islamic expert" indicates the epistemological borders he constantly practices throughout his academic research at the university (5). It is through the bordercrossing event that Mr. Ray crosses the border of the unknown to the known. The "epistemological plane splits the known and the unknown" (Schimanski and Wolfe, *Border Aesthetics* 23). Mr. Ray, thanks to his expertise in the fields of history, oriental and Islamic studies, exemplifies one way in which the medium is not actually a line between two entities, nor is it an ending point and the beginning of another. What Mr. Rae reveals is the capacity of exploring the space between his culture and that of the *Other*. His demeanor in approaching Islam and

endeavor to explore more about the Orient, namely the Islamic world, appears in his disagreement with the statement of “an Islamic expert”. The refusal through stating that “there could be no such monolith” evokes the continuous process of discovering new possible facts about Islam (5). This constant research leads Mr. Ray to internalize Islam as an individual experience of spirituality.

The theory of border aesthetics can be seen as one configuration of cultural identification. In fact, without the continuous and changeable process of becoming, through which subjectivity repositions itself constantly, borders will never be crossed, meaning through boundaries will never be created, and most important, borders would not even exist. It is sufficient to assert that the celebrated fixity and specificity of cultural identity hinder any attempt to explore new horizons of meaning, and to create spaces of interactions and negotiations with other different categories and entities. Schimanski and Wolfe, in their edited book, decipher such entanglements in their profound analysis of border aesthetics. As mentioned earlier, they meticulously investigate the intertwined levels of borders from the perspective of aesthetics. Borders are aestheticized for two main reasons; one is that borders cannot be limited to the traditional understanding, which considers borders to be mere lines between separate entities. They entities are usually topographic. Another reason is attributed to their diverse fields they occupy, knowing that Schimanski and Wolfe differentiate between several types of aesthetic borders. Regardless of their manifold different definitions and conceptualization, these borders serve the cultural encounters, negotiations, and even clashes between subjects.

In the novel, Sammar’s conversation with Mr. Rae about Tariq, her dead husband and her aunt’s Mahasen’s son, evokes the symbolic epistemological level

of borders that Mr. Ray crosses. It appears that Mr. Rae is aware of the differences between Arabic alphabetic letters together with their pronunciation and, obviously, English letters and morphemes. His stressing on the “Q” while pronouncing the name Tariq reveals his cultural encounters with the Arab society and culture. Approving his knowledge, Sammar mentions that Tariq is “written with a *qaf* but we pronounce the *qaf* as a *g* back home” (6). This addendum brings to view other aspects of experiencing borders by Mr. Rae. His nodding of his head showing his agreement with Sammar is a genuine manifested well-versed of his persona. The narrator states that “he knew the letters of the Arabic alphabet; he had lived in her part of the world” (6). Mr. Rae’s living in Sammar’s part of the world manifests the amount of interactions that have reshuffled his attitudes. His disagreements with the mainstream in his country are actually attributed to the spaces of encountering the Other that he experiences through travelling and through academic research. In addition, Mr. Rae resembles peoples of other nations and culture. The fact is that he can easily “pass for a Turk or a Persian. He was dark enough” (6). For instance, Mr. Rae journey to Morocco evinces how he could “walk as if disguise, none suspected he was Scottish as long as he did not speak and let his pronunciation give him away” (6). This resemblance is attributed to the ecological borders that differentiate between different people from different parts of the world.

Indeed, Mr. Rae’s cultural identification defines his subjectivity to be in a constant flow towards new potentialities. Strikingly, his skin creates aspects of ambivalence that deepens his identification with other cultures such as Turkish, Persians, and Moroccans. The ecological borders that he trespasses generate ambivalence because people will never be able to recognize his origins unless he speaks to them. In fact, it can be argued

that Mr. Rae reflects a genuine fluctuation between Scottish nationality and global citizenship. The role of the nation state in constructing his subjectivity is degraded through the cultural spaces he constantly explores. The ambivalence as Mr. Rae's manifestation of border-crossing experience does not come out only outside of his country. 'Ambivalence' is actually a part of his subjectivity that is constructed through the inevitable functions of cultural identification while practicing borders. The narrator mentions how he looks "out of place" in Scotland, "not only because of his looks but his manners" (6). Ambivalence in this sense is not a created third space through which subjectivity experiences loss and uncertainty as Homi Bhabha suggests in his illuminating book *The Location of Culture*. The fact is that ambivalence fuels subjectivity to navigate through the open and unlimited smooth space. It is this notion that Ashcroft underscores stating that "border crossing is not just a function of migration but is endemic to any community" (*Borders, Bordering, and the Transnation* 13). Accordingly, ambivalence collides with the boundary-penetrating aspect of the smooth space to re/construct subjectivity.

Ambivalence creates the space through which Mr. Rae and Sammar pave the ground to the appealing project of marriage, the main idea around which the novel circles. It is because of this ambivalence of Mr. Rae that Sammar transforms her attitudes. Love has a vital role in the creation of events in the novel. As it is shown, Mr. Ray is not authentically Scottish nor does he abandon his origins. Mr. Rae is both and none at the same time. This ambivalence finds its attributions in foreshadowing the relationship between Sammar and him. His differences from other people in his country in terms of conduct and respect are the factors that enable Sammar "to talk to him", it actually makes "the world vivid for the first time in years" (6). The

practiced space is a common ground where Sammar and Mr. Rae will build their relationship and reach the novel's focal point of marriage. However, a series of borders are yet to come out before realizing this endeavor. The novel foreshows the idea of love through picturing Sammar's attitude towards her meetings with Mr. Rae.

Sammar's frequent meetings with Mr. Rae reveal the story of her dead husband, Tariq, and its aftermath. The Sudanese couple moved to Scotland after their marriage. Tariq was a medical student before a car accident caused his death, and enters Sammar into series of bewilderment and confusion. Sammar unravels the importance of the cosmopolitan space where women "whom she kept calling by the wrong names", regularly visit her at that time to express their sincere condolences and to help her with cooking food and washing clothes and dishes (8). As Sammar states, these stranger women "prayed, recited the Qur'an, spent the night on the couch and on the floor" to manifest the abovementioned harmonious cosmopolitan space (8). These women are not Arab because Sammar keeps mispronouncing their names, an indication of the different cultural backgrounds that faith unites. Practicing the Islamic rituals in Scotland alludes to the possibility of merging locality to globality and thereby to constitute open and unfixed configurations of glocal subjectivity. In addition, the narrator shows that these women "were not doing this for her or for Tariq, but only because they believed it was the right thing to do" (9). The creation of a cosmopolitan space that is encapsulated within spirituality empowers Sammar's attitude after the death of her husband despite her reconsidered relationship with her homeland.

Sammar's feelings of exile appear in her attire, covering "her hair with Italian silk, her arms with tropical colors" (9). The Narrator states that Sammar intends

“to look as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerizing as the Afghan princess she had once seen on TV wearing hijab, the daughter of an exiled leader of the mujahedeen” (8). The sense of loss through the experience of exile that Sammar reflects is not a demonstration of limited potentialities and an absence of multiplicity. The fact is that the car accident marks a significant turning point in her life to blaze new trails. It is for this reason that she goes back to Africa with her son, and it is also for this reason that she chooses to leave her son with Mahasen and go back to Scotland. In this country, Sammar continues her journey of reconstructing her personality. Her interactions with other people like Mr. Ray and his secretary reveals numerous aspects of cultural identification. For Mr. Rae, signs of admiration and love are manifested in larger scales. It is not an admiration of his conduct and devotion to his research, and it is not his objective writings on Islam that stimulates Sammar’s feelings. The fact is that the latter reflects several **hidden** aspects that demonstrate her love for Mr. Ray, a state of mind that will be confronted by her faith. This personal identification is actually attributed to cultural identification because both Sammar and Mr. Rae circle within the orbit of potentiality and openness. The limited and limiting paradigm of cultural identity is trespassed while crossing the boundaries of each other. In other words, both Sammar and Mr. Rae are a genuine demonstration of continuity and changeability within the open and undetermined space of borders.

The importance of evoking the imaginary level of a border is attributed to the strikingly multidimensional and multifaceted roles it plays in constructing subjectivity. It refers to the processes in which “communities think of themselves collectively, or to communal, epistemological spheres presumably anchored in imaginations’ invocations”

(*Border Aesthetics* 62). To reconsider the traditional map through revising its flaws and inaccuracies produces an “equal-area map, Africa was a massive elongated yellow, Britain a rosy insignificance” (Aboulela 16). Borders are a creation of the dominant discourses of the imperial powers. Yellow can connote desert, heat, primitiveness and savagery. The term “rosy” can be seen as a genuine reference to brightness and modernity. It is true that borders without ideological and historical dimensions are mere fences in the way that they are mainly meant to create groups of inside and outside. The emerging in-between space within the temporary era designates the necessity of questioning these dimensions. Questioning the negotiated spaces through subjects’ interactions and intersections, from the inclusive perspective of cultural studies, summons how cultural identification functions in altering subjects’ paradigms. Actually, cultural identification is a huge contribution to terminating the traditional thinking about borders. In fact, cultural identification is a continuous process of crossing different types and different levels of borders, both poetically and aesthetically.

Sammar’s conversation with Yasmin and Mr. Rae at the latter’s home brings to view the argument that cultural identification and borders, certainly, overlap each other. Cultural identification supersedes cultural identity mainly because it has the ability to go beyond a range of limiting concepts such as fixity, locality, and authenticity. To go beyond these concepts is to penetrate to other spaces that cannot be defined within the orbit of cultural identity. The conversation reveals Mr. Rae’s story of being expelled from school after writing an essay under the title *Islam is better than Christianity*. This written essay, states Mr. Rae, comes as a consequence of his uncle David who joined the army to Egypt in the Second World War. According to Mr. Rae,

David's interactions with the Islamic culture led him to be "interested in Sufism, converted to Islam, and left the army" (17). David symbolizes potentiality, openness, and multiplicity. Crossing the physical and symbolic borders of geography and religion comes as a result of cultural identification. It is this inevitable condition of becoming that leads Mr. Rae to write his essay in direct style. David converts to Islam after his self-conviction that Islam "was a step on, in the way that Christianity followed Judaism. He said that the Prophet Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets that stretched from Adam, to Abraham through Moses and Jesus. They were all Muslims, Jesus was a Muslim, in a sense that he had surrendered to God" (18). David's self-realization proves the effects of borders in altering subjects.

The constituting elements of cultural identification are blatant in David's decision to convert to Islam. Not only does he accept the tenets of Islam to demonstrate his ability of going beyond the cultural and historical limiting principles of his nation. In Mr. Rae's words, David "changed his name, married an Egyptian woman and had children" (18). Thus, Mr. Rae has descendants, "Egyptian cousins, relatives in Africa" (18). The effect of David in paving the ground for Mr. Ray cannot be dismissed because of the indirect pivotal role he plays in transforming Mr. Rae's personality. Both of them embody the characteristics of a rhizomatic identity which liberates itself from all the binds of locality and fixity. Here, the rhizome refers to "the very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers" (Deleuze & Guattari 8). As the conversation flows, the narrator mentions how Sammar is increasingly astonished with the knowledge of Mr. Rae. On the wall, Sammar notices "a print of the Uleg-Beg Mosque in Samarkand, its exterior

designed with the interlacing, intricate patterns of Islamic art. It was built in 1418, the caption read, and was both a masjid and a school that taught not only religious sciences but astronomy, mathematics and philosophy" (18). Strikingly, the print designates a multitude of transcultural aspects of grasping the Islamic culture and heritage by Mr. Rae, cultural entanglement of multiplicity and ambivalence that the print reflects, and the smooth space the print creates inside Mr. Rae's house in Scotland.

Yasmin's thinking of Mr. Ray's conversion to Islam as "a professional suicide" is attributed to her awareness of the Western dominant discourse, which degrades non-western religious beliefs. Yasmin recognizes that crossing those western symbolic boundaries of the western culture will terminate in the allegedly negative replica of fanaticism and terrorism that Islam is labeled with. Sammar opposes this idea while asserting that nobody will be able to know whether he converts to Islam or not. Her statement takes Yasmin by surprise while replying: "Are you hoping he would convert so you could marry him?" (22). Indeed, Yasmin's question foresees the in-between space of potentiality that Sammar is going through while reflecting on Mr. Ray's conversion to Islam. Yasmin states that he despises the fact that "Muslims expect him to convert just because he knows so much about Islam" (22). Sammar's interest in Mr. Ray conversion to Islam is not only because of his deep knowledge about Islam. The fact is that she does expect him to convert so she can foster a relationship with him. Marriage is the central point in the whole conversation, though Sammar keeps secretive about her feeling towards him. It is clear from the conversation between Yasmin and Sammar that "bordering processes influence everyone's way of being in the world" (Schimanski & Wolfe, *Border Aesthetics* 12). This idea is actually one point of departure to

demonstrate that the conversation entails manifold aspects of border aesthetics.

Rae's celebration of Christmas with his family in Edinburgh brings to view the extent to which affection and love contribute to crossing certain symbolic borders. His phone call to Sammar while she prepares herself for "the *tasbeeh*" can be seen as a foreshadowing of the novel's ultimate end, love and marriage. At this particular time, Sammar sets for *tasbeeh*, which means to rely on "her thumb counting on each segment of her fingers, three for each finger, fifteen for a hand, *Astaghfir Allah, Astaghfir Allah, Astaghfir Allah, . . . I seek forgiveness from Allah . . . I seek forgiveness from Allah . . . I seek forgiveness . . . the twenty-ninth time, thirty*" (37). Before she finishes her *tasbeeh*, she receives a call from Mr. Rae towards who she feels "warm" because of his meekness and kindness towards her. The borders of religion are crossed at this precise point. Rae prioritizes calling Sammar while leaving his celebration of Christmas with his family, an incident that takes Sammar by storm not only because of the call in holiday but also his celebration at his ex-wife's parents' house. For Sammar, this is a "culture-shock" because "an old man in Edinburgh was allowing his daughter's ex-husband under his roof. This must be civilized behavior, an 'amicable divorce'" (38). In comparison to Sudan, an ex-husband is the "one who 'turned out to be a son of a dog' or 'she turned out to be mad' and were treated as such. No one 'stayed friends', no one stayed on talking terms" (38). This comparison unravels Sammar's acceptance of cultural difference which creates space of numerous negotiations and encounters.

Considering Rae's celebration of Christmas at his ex-wife's parents as a "civilized behavior" by Sammar, the Muslim, reveals the influential role cultural identification has upon subjectivity. Within the boundaries of cultural identity, which limits subjects to

certain exclusionary, fixed, and local paradigms, such behavior will not be allowed. This is the reason behind Sammar's comparison. The two subjects' conversation lasts for a long time. Sammar enjoys Rae's talking; "she changed the receiver from one hand to another and wiped her palm against her jumper. She wanted him to keep talking, keep talking until her ears were flattened and bruised" (40). Rae's neglect of the ceremony with his family and Sammar ending her Islamic rituals designate the extent to which their relationship is developed. Although their talks do not exceed the boundaries of professional shared lives at the university and Rae's office, signals of love and affection emerge now and again in the conversation. Rae's references, in this talk, to his family are striking for Sammar because he refers to them as "they" not "we". Such exclusionary statements serve the profundity of his ambivalent character.

The significance of Sammar's visit to Rae at the hospital manifests a series of personal and cultural aspects of identification. Her conversation with Yasmin after the visit reveals the profound entangled aspects of identification, aspects that assert the multifarious experiences of border crossing, and that the previous events constantly unravel. Sammar's visit is actually attributed to the drive of love, which stimulates her manners of dialogues with Rae. This appears in the monologue she prefers to keep secret. Hitherto, knowing that Rae is not a Muslim prevents her from announcing her love and her willingness to marry him. This symbolic border of faith has a vital role in shaping the personality of Sammar. This prevention can be seen as a subject limitation in navigating through the smooth space as the rhizomatic identity affirms through the condition of becoming. Yet, evoking the agency of Sammar, this prevention does not contradict the postmodern and postcolonial labels of potentiality and multiplicity, which are

ascertained throughout the novel. Her agency is what prevents her from exceeding the boundary of faith towards another paradigm. In other words, faith is a designation of potentiality and multiplicity that characterizes the postmodern subject. It is a personal conviction rather than an imposed cultural discourse on her, a manifestation of the manifold crossed borders of tradition and locality.

The governing condition of becoming in *The Translator* fuels the recurring cultural shifts of paradigms. Ambivalence, multiplicity, potentiality, and openness, all come to establish the postmodern and/ or the postcolonial subject. The concept of love is central and predominating in the novel. It is the common thread that stimulates the function of cultural identification. Based on Sammar's endeavors, love is actually a compelling drive within which cultural identification functions to re/construct her subjectivity. In fact, tradition demonstrates that love and identification have a series of commonalities. The earlier mentioned complexities of ambivalence and potentiality are two concepts that contribute to the constitution of love. It is for this reason that it has a vital role in altering Sammar's paradigm despite the inadequacy of considering love to be the sole factor within which Sammar becomes an example of postmodern subject. Since several attributions are already mentioned, the focus is on Love. Sigmund Freud, who represents the traditional standpoint of love within the frame of psychoanalysis, asserts that love stems from the fact that the ego ideal is superseded by the sexual object. Through this process emerges Freud's formula that asserts: "The object has taken the place of the ego ideal" (75). Love and identification, from a Freudian perspective, have a series of common denominators. First, the relation with the other is always ambivalent and it becomes entangled overtime. Second, the ego loses its own sovereignty due to the personal

and cultural entanglements through 'introjection', a reference to the possibility of an object to alter the ego (74).

Introjection, argues Freud, occurs within the process of identification where the ego internalizes attitudes and beliefs of its object. It is within this orbit that the "object is being treated in the same way as our own ego, so that when we are in love a considerable amount of narcissistic libido overflows on to the object" (74). Ego alterations genuinely function under the conditions of ambivalence, multiplicity, complexity and openness because of the inevitable attachment to the object. These intricacies are concretely expressed through Sammar's conversation with Rae before she travels to Egypt. Her desire to marry Rae leads her to insisting on conversion to Islam, a decision that Rae refuses at the beginning due to his professional career, which requires him to maintain objectivity when addressing Islam. Sammar actually confesses her love to Rae by stating the allegedly unknown "kind of sickness it would be, to be away from you" (126). The state of ambivalence appears as a symptom of being in love, a state of identification through which Sammar's ego ideal is to be seen through the lenses of Rae. Surely, identification is a constant experience of ambivalence and complexity. It is a movement through the boundaries of otherness, an ongoing process of interacting and negotiating with otherness. Rae replies objectively to Sammar while revealing the reasons behind his inability to convert to Islam. However, Sammar considers his objective and rational reply as insufficient for her.

Religion represents the gateway through which Rae can become Sammar's husband, a border that must be practiced through his expected experience of spirituality and faith. By the end of the novel, the symbolic border of religion is the space of navigation within which Sammar and Rae reflect the genuine aspects of practicing identification.

Sammar reflects new understanding of faith and Islam to manifest the multifarious bordercrossing experiences that recur through border spaces. This pivotal role of overcoming the traditional implementing of the religious principles reinforces the emergences of new horizons for Sammar. By exhibiting the potentiality of practicing borders of secular and faith, Rae acknowledges the fluidity of postmodern subjects' identities in moving from one position to another. Schimanski and Wolfe assert that "the border has a performative dimension of border creation maintenance, as either deed or aesthetic act, which often has unpredictable or strange effects" (*Border Poetics* 12). The characteristic of unpredictability alludes to the openness and indeterminacy that define the postcolonial and/ or the postmodern subject. Moving from one paradigm to the other reflects the freedom of subjects to cross manifold boundaries, in this context religion.

Rae and Sammar meeting in the latter's homeland summons how subjects can shift their paradigm as a genuine manifestation of becoming and cultural identification. Rae describes crossing the manifold boundaries from Scotland to Sudan as the smoothest trip he has ever experienced. Akin to this spontaneously uttered statement, Rae's experience of the symbolic boundaries is definitely smooth. Indeed, the smooth space has a pivotal role in governing this postmodern subject while practicing the borders of nature and culture. From the gray sly of Scotland, as Sammar describes, to the hot and dusty weather of Sudan, Rae internalizes the duality of "freedom from" and "freedom to". The former is attributed to his ability to go beyond the dominating discourses of his society along with the political agendas that frame and conceptualize the West in comparison to the East. The latter is revealed through his conversion to Islam after realizing the strengths and opportunities this spiritual experience

entail, the realization of the fact that "knowledge is necessary, that's true. But faith, it comes direct from Allah" (198). Internalizing the tenets of Islam evokes the rhizomatic identity upon which the idea of the transnation is established. Not only does Rae cross the cultural symbolic boundaries but he genuinely forms new spaces and new possibilities of the postmodern paradigm, cultural identification.

The Translator demonstrates an ongoing interplay between tradition and modernity, religiosity and secularism, and East and West. It dramatizes the way in which several types of borders come together to create new understanding of subjectivity while superseding cultural identity. In this sense, *The Translator* crosses various borders to constitute a complex and flexible subjectivity, which dismantles the fixed and limited frame of cultural identity and embrace the fluid and continuous space of cultural identification. The interwoven events that pinpoint the contemporary subjectivity conditions of postmodernity and postcoloniality enforce a meticulous understanding of the postcolonial particularities, and it is for this reason 'the transnation' that is brought to view. The bottom line is that the theory of borders, being constructing and constructed discourses, along with the ongoing processes of cultural identification, mark a drastic change the constitution of subjectivity.

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