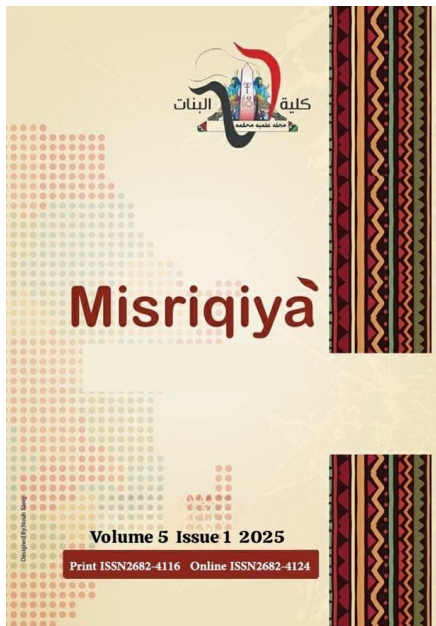




Negotiating Integration in the Arab Diaspora: A Study of Leila Aboulela's "The Boy from the Kebab Shop"

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Abstract

This paper examines integration as a psychological strategy employed by Arab immigrants to navigate their experiences of diaspora in Western societies. Using John W. Berry's fourfold acculturation model as a theoretical framework, the research explores the psychological implications of displacement and identity negotiation among Arab immigrants. It investigates how they balance the maintenance of their cultural heritage with adaptation to a foreign environment, highlighting the emotional and cognitive struggles they face. Through an analysis of Leila Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop," this study explores the psychological conflicts faced by diasporic protagonists, focusing on themes of cultural alienation, displacement, homesickness, nostalgia, and multicultural identity formation. The research examines the integration process as a complex and individualized experience, revealing how each character employs distinct coping mechanisms to reconcile their ethnic identity with their host culture. The findings illustrate how integration emerges as a multifaceted and dynamic psychological process, shaped by the historical, emotional, and sociocultural backgrounds of the individuals involved.

Keywords: integration, acculturation, John W. Berry, homesickness, nostalgia, Leila Aboulela

Introduction

Immigration and Diasporic Experiences of Arab Immigrants in Western Communities

Immigration is a global phenomenon that involves populations and countries with diverse backgrounds. It has been portrayed as both a source of problems and opportunities for individuals and societies. Interactions and contact between people of different origins have long been occurring and cannot be considered a recent phenomenon. Throughout the history of humankind, people have journeyed across the globe for several reasons, such as seeking better opportunities and lifestyle, escaping persecution and disasters, engaging in trade, pursuing conquest and colonization, or simply pursuing adventure and enjoyment. The result of these previously mentioned endeavors was bringing together people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Blending such differences has brought about transformations in the traditional lifestyles and cultures of the groups involved, often giving rise to new societies (Sam & Berry, 2006, p. 2).

In *The Arab Diaspora: Voices of an Anguished Scream*, Zahia Smail Salhi (2006) states that the term 'Diaspora' signifies dispersal, scattering, or *al-shatat* in Arabic. Arab Diaspora encapsulates all Arabs living permanently in countries other than their country of origin (P. 2). At this point, a clear distinction should be established between the various categories of members of Arab Diaspora. Even though any individual prevented from returning home is an exile, there are distinctions among exiles, refugees, and expatriates. That is why it is essential to point out the various causes of becoming exile.

While it is a commonly shared conviction that exiles are stereotypically referred to as being forced out of, evicted from, or displaced from their country of origin, other exiles choose willingly to flee their homeland for various reasons. For instance, political activists fear political prosecution, so they leave their country seeking protection in another country and usually fall into the category of asylum seekers. Other exiles, like labor migrants who depart from their country for economic reasons, such as seeking better employment opportunities and pursuing better standards of living. Others seeking a better academic career or higher education choose to be self-implemented exiles for intellectual reasons (Salhi, 2006, p. 2).

However, notwithstanding the reasons that compelled exiles dislocated from their homelands, they all keep an idealized image of home as a lost paradise and rarely manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. Hence, they share this

common feeling of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing, and cannot eschew nostalgia and pain. To surmount these feelings, they reconstruct a new world that somehow echoes the old one they left behind. Items they brought with them from their home country will be given a pivotal position in their new land. Their traditional attire will be displayed during special occasions. Other Arab restaurants that carry the name of an Arab city or well-known monuments, Arab stores, mosques, and cultural centers will be implemented in the host community. In that way, they build for themselves a micro community that brings together other compatriots and a world akin to their homeland (Salhi, 2006, p. 2).

This attempt to create a world that resembles the original home within the host community leads to two significant outcomes. On one hand, it creates an unnatural world, which eases the pain of being cut off from one's own culture. On the other hand, it creates a new landscape in the host country, as new cultural elements are being added to inform the host society about other cultures. *In Reflections on Exile: and other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Edward Said (2013) states, "The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction" (p.187).

This is further consolidated in the literary works of Arab writers living in exile. Those Arab authors who live in the Western World write in English; thus, a new podium of Diasporic creativity has been created. Although they write in the language of the host country, their literature is by no means similar to that of the host country, nor is it like that of their country of origin. This genre of Diasporic literature stands as "a space where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates itself in a third space which is that of the Diaspora" (Salhi, 2006, p.15).

This kind of Literature is Diasporic, resembling the writers who produced it. It occupies a third space as it is not entirely Arab nor is it entirely English, just like its creators occupy a third space in the host society. Diasporic literature, nevertheless, obtains its originality in this difference. Moreover, it is this quality of being Diasporic or Exilic that makes it appealing to both parties; while the eastern readers use it as a medium to better understand the West, the Western readers also use it as a window to understand the East better, especially when it is written in their original language (Salhi, 2006, p.16).

‘Integration’ as a Psychological Adaptation Strategy for Arab Immigrants

In *Oxford Textbook of Migrant Psychiatry*, John Berry (2021) holds that “All peoples are now engaged in relations with people of other cultures. This engagement often takes place in culturally diverse societies” (p.311). To better understand these intercultural relationships, Berry employs the concepts of *acculturation* and *adaptation* and explores the conceptual links between them. Berry’s most substantial objective is to explore whether a specific approach to intercultural engagement exists for migrants and other acculturating groups that correlates with improved psychological and sociocultural adaptation. On that account, an identification distinction between both concepts has been laid out by Berry as he identifies acculturation as “the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2021, p. 311). On the other hand, he identified the concept of adaptation as a central element in his acculturation model theory, framing it as the approaches by which immigrants and acculturating groups adjust to new cultural contexts. Berry’s model categorizes individual adaptation strategies according to two core dimensions: first is the degree to which individuals maintain their heritage culture, and second is the extent to which they engage with the host society. These dimensions yield four acculturation strategies- integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization- each representing a different form of adaptation to intercultural contact (Berry, 1992, p. 3).

This paper examines the concept of ‘*integration*’ and how it is being adapted by Arab immigrants to function properly in the host societies through balancing their traditional values with the demands of the host culture. Due to globalization, Arab immigration movements have expanded, rendering integration as one of the psychological strategies that Arab immigrants use as a coping mechanism within Western communities. Arab immigrants, specifically, confront unique hardships and challenges in adapting to Western societies, and this is because of the cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that stand as a gap between their ethnic background and the new norms that need to be embraced. According to John Berry, integration, as a psychological strategy, is not merely the process of becoming a part of a new society but also a coping mechanism that facilitates identity stability and mental health for immigrants (Berry, 1997, p. 9).

Berry’s primary focus and basic issue of his research in the field of acculturation psychology is to find out whether there are factors that lead to more

positive adaptation for immigrants in the host societies. Concerning the psychological adaptation of immigrants, ‘integration’ has been announced by Berry to be the most positive adaptation strategy; thus, he coined the term ‘integration hypothesis’. This hypothesis proposes that when immigrants are ‘doubly engaged’ (i.e., by engaging both their heritage cultures and with others in larger society), they will be more successful in their lives, including having a sense of personal well-being, and achieving greater sociocultural competence (Berry, 2021, p. 314). Berry states that “integration strategy has been shown to lead to better adaptation than the other three forms of adaptation, those who pursue and accomplish integration appear to be better adapted, while those who are marginalized are least well adapted” (Berry, 2021, p. 314). Angela Nguyen and Benet-Martínez are psychology professors who are influential scholars in the specialization of acculturation and integration, particularly known for their work on ‘biculturalism’. They carried out a meta-analysis of Berry’s hypothesis across 83 studies and over 20.000 participants; they concluded that integration (‘biculturalism,’ in their terms) is associated with better adaptation. They found that integration has a significant and positive relationship with psychological adaptation, for instance, life satisfaction, positive effect, self-esteem, and sociocultural adaptation, for instance, academic achievement, career success, social skills, and lack of behavioral problems “With this meta-analysis, biculturalism is positively related to adjustment, and this relationship is stronger than those between adjustment and either dominant or heritage cultural orientation” (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez, 2013, p.137). Berry lays out a possible explanation for their influential conclusion, which correlates integration with positive adaptation, that those who are engaged with both cultures receive support and resources from both cultures and are competent in dealing with both cultures (Berry, 2021, p. 314).

The Theoretical Framework

Berry’s Acculturation Model Theory: An Overview

David L. Sam is a professor of cross-cultural psychology in the schools of psychology and medicine at the University of Bergen, and John W. Berry is an emeritus professor in the Department of Psychology, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. Both are important leading theorists in the field of acculturation. In their collective book, *The Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology*, Sam and Berry (2006) outline the various contexts surrounding acculturation, examining the key theories and concepts related to

groups and individuals undergoing cultural transitions, including immigrants, refugees, expatriates, indigenous peoples, foreign students, and tourists. Based on the theoretical and methodological framework of cross-cultural psychology, they shed light mainly and specifically on the issues and challenges that arise when people from one culture move to another culture, in which reciprocal adjustment and tension benefits are involved. While acculturation has been part of human history since it was first recorded, it is only in recent decades that psychology has witnessed a significant increase in research focused on the topic. They attribute this increased interest in the scope of acculturation to numeral reasons; however, they gave exclusive attention to two main issues. Firstly, the increase in worldwide migration, due to natural or man-made disasters like war, political conflicts, poverty, and famine, as well as improved means of travelling over larger distances. Secondly, the increasing importance of understanding the link between culture and human behavior has been advanced by those working in the field of cross-cultural psychology (Sam and Berry, 2006, p.1).

Berry explains that the fundamental goal of cross-cultural psychology has been to demonstrate the influence that cultural factors have on the development and display of individual human behavior (Berry, 1997, p.1). Central to understanding such cultural influences is the concept of acculturation. Building on the foundational definition by anthropologist Robert Redfield, acculturation describes "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p.149). This foundational sociological and anthropological definition of the concept laid the groundwork for later anthropologists, psychological models, and studies of acculturation, and Berry stands as a prime example. Redfield's early studies on acculturation have significantly influenced his acculturation model theory. Berry confirmed Redfield's identification of acculturation and developed it into a theoretical framework that focuses on individual and group adaptation strategies in intercultural communities.

Berry's acculturation model represents four distinct adaptation strategies of how individuals cope and adjust in plural societies. According to Berry, these four adaptation strategies are based on two key dimensions. The first dimension is 'preference for maintaining one's heritage culture and identity,' and by this, Berry means the extent to which an individual appreciates their culture, traditions, and

identity and is keen on preserving them. This dimension reflects whether individuals wish to retain their original cultural attributes or erase them. The second dimension is ‘preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society,’ hence, this indicates whether individuals obtain the willingness to function properly in the host society and embrace its culture or attempt to avoid it (Berry, 2021, p. 312).

According to Berry’s theory, the previously mentioned dimensions function as an intrinsic measurement tool that indicates the adaptation strategy carried out by individuals in the host societies. Berry’s four adaptation strategies carry different names, from the point of view of non-dominant groups ‘immigrants.’ When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interactions with other cultures, the **assimilation** strategy is defined. In contrast, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, then the **separation** strategy is in action. When there is an interest in maintaining one’s original culture while participating in daily interactions with other groups, then **integration** is the strategy that is embraced. When Integration is being embraced as a coping mechanism by immigrant individuals, this means that there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. Finally, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance and little interest in having relations with others, often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination, then **marginalization** as a strategy is defined (Berry, 2021, p. 313).

The concept of **acculturative Stress**, according to Berry, is proposed as one of the most fundamental outcomes of the acculturation process (Berry, 2006, p. 292) and it refers to the psychological stress and difficulties that immigrants experience as a result of adapting to a new cultural environment as it arises from the challenges and conflicts encountered when navigating between one’s own heritage culture and the host culture, he defines it as “a number of stressful psychological phenomena that involve conflict and often result in new forms of behavior that interfere with smooth day-to-day functioning” (Berry, 1992, p. 6). Lowered mental health, particularly anxiety and depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, identity confusion, and longing for home are identified by Berry as a particular set of stress manifestations which occur during acculturation (Berry, 1992, p. 8). Identity confusion arises during acculturation when immigrant individuals struggle to reconcile their heritage with the new host

culture, and Berry's model identifies this as a 'stressor', particularly resulting in a reduction of immigrants' mental health (Berry, 1987, p. 492). Kalervo Oberg (1960) is a foundational figure in the study of the acculturation process, particularly known for his work on 'culture shock.' He states that the increasing feeling of homesickness while emerging into a new culture builds a sense of rejection (of the new cultural norms) and being rejected (from the host society), and this is a critical part of the acculturation process because how the immigrant responds to that overwhelming stressor will decide which acculturation strategy to be adopted and will lead to very different results (Oberg, 1960, P.143). Berry states that acculturation strategies are known to affect acculturative stress: "integration strategy is the least stressful, while marginalization is associated with the most stress, assimilation and separation are known to fall in between" (Berry, 1992, p.10).

Berry's Concept of Integration

As outlined previously, integration is one of Berry's proposed four adaptation strategies by which immigrants attempt to function properly in the host society. Berry defines adaptation as "the changes that take place in an individual in response to the experience of acculturation" (Berry, 2021, p. 313). Berry elaborates on two distinct dimensions of adaptation, namely, psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological adaptation mainly refers to mental and emotional well-being as it encompasses aspects like self-esteem, life satisfaction, and mental health. Psychological adaptation is often stressed through indicators like stress levels, anxiety, and depression. A positive psychological adaptation is predicted when the individual can maintain positive mental health while adjusting to the challenges of the new community. Sociocultural adaptation centers around the immigrant's ability to function actively and engage effectively in the new environment. This dimension involves absorbing and adhering to the host society's new norms, behaviors, customs, skills, and language required to interact with the dominant group. A successful sociocultural adaptation is demonstrated through the immigrant's development of social competence together with efficient communication in social situations, which consequently provides productive relationships in the new cultural environment (Berry, 2021, p. 314).

According to Berry's well-known 'integration hypothesis.' (Berry, 2021, p. 314), immigrants who practice integration as their adaptation strategy are exposed to experiencing the most positive psychological and sociocultural

adaptation. More precisely, the most favorable psychological and sociocultural adaptation emerges when immigrants manage to embrace the new culture alongside maintenance of their heritage (Berry, 2013, p. 1130). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) aimed to examine the previously highlighted hypothesis in their collective book *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts*. The book is an extensive project that studies the cases of over seven thousand immigrants in thirteen countries. It investigates the navigation of adolescent immigrants at the convergence of their original culture and the culture of the host society, focusing on the patterns of acculturation and its impact on the psychological and sociocultural adaptation. The study demonstrates that participants who employed integration as their adaptation coping mechanism managed to adjust to the host communities more effectively. This was compared alongside the participants who focused only on their original culture (i.e., separation), or who were thoroughly immersed in the new culture (i.e., assimilation), or who developed cultural and identity confusion, causing renunciation of both cultural ties (i.e., marginalization). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder emphasized this conclusion as follows:

The main conclusion was that the largest proportion of youth seek to maintain a connection to their heritage culture after migrating, and at the same time, they also become involved in the daily life of the larger society. We termed this combination ‘integration’. Many fewer seek to live by either giving up their heritage culture (‘assimilation’) or avoiding participation in the larger society (‘separation’), or, when they do neither (‘marginalization’). The other main conclusion was that immigrant youth adapt better psychologically and socioculturally when they seek integration than any of the other three ways of living following migration. (John W. Berry et al, 2006, p. 11)

Although the integration process is theoretically appealing, it faces significant challenges. Numerous immigrants were forced to leave their homes and settle in foreign countries, only to achieve integration within their host societies. That does not exclude the fact that there are serious conflicts and challenges that they had to confront through their journey towards integration. These challenges can be represented in structural barriers such as discrimination, racism, and unequal access to resources, which consequently hinder integration efforts. Accordingly, Berry asserts that integration, to be achieved, requires

‘mutual accommodation,’ which means that integration is not merely an individual choice but additionally depends on the acceptance and openness of the host society. A society that fails to embrace multiculturalism creates barriers that make achieving integration challenging and unfeasible, thus driving immigrants to adopt less effective coping mechanisms (Berry, 2011, p. 216).

In conclusion, John W. Berry’s framework provides the theoretical and conceptual tools to analyze the acculturation experiences depicted in the works of the Anglophone Arab writer Leila Aboulela. His concept of integration provides a balanced and constructive approach for addressing the challenges and opportunities of multicultural living experiences in her story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop".

Leila Aboulela: an Anglophone Arab Writer

Geoffrey Nash (2007), in his analytical book devoted to Anglophone Arab literature, *The Anglo-Arab encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab writers in English*, defines Anglophone literature as a kind of literature conceived and executed in English by writers of Arabic background, and in that sense, it is qualitatively different from Arabic literature and Arabic literature translated into English (p. 11). What makes that genre of literature stand out is the fact that it is written by Arab writers who have the experience of being immigrants to Western societies, portraying the complexities of displacement. The description implied by this adjective ‘anglophone’ does not simply provide a linguistic ‘shelter’ for Arab writers in English. What the label also achieves is a much wider umbrella under which certain themes of identity crisis, the struggle for belonging, and cultural hybridity are discussed (Al-Maleh, 2009, p. x). Those Anglophone Arab writers are equipped with first-hand knowledge of both cultures, and they carry out the role of mediators, interpreters, double-sight observers of the two cultural entities, or cultural translators (Sarnou, 2014, p. 68). This very much applies specifically to Anglophone Arab women writers, as their literary works brought more recognition and visibility to the Arab woman whose identity is perceived by Western readership as being different, peculiar, and complex because of her portrayal in the media and in the books of early orientalist. One of those outstanding Anglophone female contemporary writers is Leila Aboulela.

Leila Aboulela is a well-known and acclaimed Sudanese writer as well. She was born in Cairo to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother but grew up in Khartoum. In 1990, Aboulela migrated to Scotland to join her husband, an oil engineer. When she relocated to Aberdeen, she started her writing career while

looking after her children. Aboulela lives and relates to two different cultures and constantly travels from East to West. Through navigating Aboulela's socio-historical background, the exposure to the migration process from the Eastern community to the Western one, along with all the cultural differences and difficulties that result from this process, plays a great role in influencing and reshaping her works. This proves to be evident when her novels and short stories continue to focus on the conflicts, challenges, and dilemmas that Muslim immigrants grapple with during their residence in Western communities.

In her short story collection *Elsewhere, Home*, Aboulela (2018) deftly evokes mainly very different locations: the snowy, remote cities and multiculturalism of Scotland, particularly Aberdeen, and the heat and conviviality of Khartoum and Egypt. Aboulela realized that three fundamental countries make up her identity, which are: Sudan, Egypt, and Britain. Accordingly, Sudan, Egypt, and Aberdeen are the settings for much of her works because mainly, these are the countries where she lived throughout her life, playing a vital role in contributing to the reconstruction of her identity as an Anglophone writer.

In Aboulela's fictional works to date, she is concerned with probing the ethical and identity dilemmas faced by Muslim immigrants in the Western world. In most of her short story collection, *Elsewhere*, Aboulela pertained to the Sudanese characters in the diaspora. Her main characters, whether males or females, are habitually Arab migrants who are forced to leave their homelands, attempting to get a better lifestyle in Western societies, or to escape a desperate reality at home. In this journey, they live in a constant state of exile as the new abode fails to become home, and they are left in a state of suspension between the new reality and a past they are emotionally and spiritually stuck in. Her short stories discuss mixed-race relationships, halal food requirements, abortion among non-Muslims, and the position of white Muslim converts as well.

Aboulela uses her writing as a means of returning home or drawing nearer to home as a cure for the agony of longing. As she notes in an interview:

What children see, hear, and experience sears itself into their psyche. My memories of the Sudan of my childhood are vivid, and it was homesickness that made me want to hold on to these images and put them down into words. When I returned to Sudan after being away, I continued to look for what was familiar, and it was still there, in patches, among the modernity and changes that had taken place over time. (Sulieman and Al-Samani, 2014, para. 4)

Consequently, to deliver her experience and her longing for her home, Sudan, to the reader, she portrays vivid pictures of Sudanese culture and traditions such as Sudanese family gatherings, Sudanese wedding traditions and ceremonies, and even the traditional Islamic burials and funerals. She purposely uses the English language instead of the Arabic language in her writing with a total awareness that most of her readers are Westerners. In that way, she takes the responsibility of bringing Eastern culture into the hands of Western readers. Aboulela is also known for using Arabic vocabulary, terms, and expressions along with English, slang of the Scottish streets, and colonial discourse in her linguistically hybrid novels. In addition, she is a highly intertextual writer, and her texts allude to the Qur'an, Sudanese writers such as Tayeb Salih, Western romance fiction, and Arab poets.

"The Boy from the Kebab Shop": Exploring Migrants' Struggles and Their Quest for Integration

Notably, Leila Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop" is a narrative that demonstrates multiple non-stereotypical portrayals of the Arab immigrants' dilemmas within European societies. The core of immigration complexity starts to show itself when the immigrants find themselves torn between two different worlds: the one they have left behind and the one they are trying to adapt to. Each character, in her short story, represents a particular struggle anchored in the diasporic tensions of cultural dislocation, fractured identity, and the clash between traditional heritage and the demands of fitting into a new society. The short story's setting is in a Western urban environment where the Arab characters attempt to reconcile their Muslim heritage with the secular lifestyle they find in England.

The narrative revolves around the complicated and entangled relationship between a young Muslim girl living in London and a boy working at a local Kebab shop. Dina is a seventeen-year-old girl who was born to a Scottish father and an Egyptian mother. Dina's Scottish father proposed to her mother during a visit to Egypt, and when they got married, they left Egypt and moved to Dina's father's country, Scotland. Accordingly, Dina was born and raised in the secular environment of England, which made her connection to her Muslim Arab-Egyptian heritage blurred and almost nonexistent. Dina's father passed away years ago, and she lives with her mother alone. Shushu, Dina's mother, lives in a constant state of regret about her marriage to a Scottish man and leaving her home country for his sake. Shushu is homesick and indulges in this state of nostalgia for Egypt. That's why she tries to fill this void inside her by creating an Egyptian

atmosphere at home by always watching black and white Egyptian films and listening to Egyptian songs.

Kassim is a young man working at a local kebab shop. He was born to a Moroccan father and a Scottish mother. Kassim's character is portrayed as the opposite of Dina's. Although he was born to a Scottish mother and has been raised in England, he has embraced his Muslim identity. Dina's encounter with Kassim forms a turning point in her life. Through their connection, she starts to unfold and discover all about her Arabic heritage and her religion, Islam. Kassim's relationship with Dina stands as an invitation to his inner world and his faith. Dina finds herself and her identity are torn between two different worlds, the world of her Arab culture and Islam that she has been ignorant of all her life, and the world of England's secular life.

Displacement and Alienation

Leila Aboulela portrays the struggles of 'displacement' and 'alienation' through the character of Kassim, a Scottish boy with a Moroccan background who is working in a Kebab shop owned by a Muslim family, Basheer, Samia, and their toddler. Kassim has converted to Islam, and that's the main reason why he finds self-reassurance and peace working with Muslims rather than trying to work at any other place. Kassim is introduced in the short story as a second-generation immigrant who has a Scottish mother and a Moroccan father. Even though he has an Arab father, Kassim had a European upbringing that made him far from Arab or Islamic practices. For instance, as the narrator describes:

Kassim had not had a religious upbringing. His Moroccan father had given him a Muslim name, circumcised him at the age of eight months, and took him to the children's mosque school only five times. After that, secular life had taken over. Kassim's Scottish mother had no interest in religion and no Muslim friends. She was close to her large Aberdeenshire family, and Kassim grew up with Christmas and Hogmanay (Aboulela, 2018, p. 94).

However, regardless of his Westernized upbringing, Kassim embraced his ethnic heritage as an adult when he converted to Islam and found self-reassurance by doing Islamic practices like prayers. He sought the friendship of Basheer by working in his kebab shop, motivated by Basheer's Muslim identity and the solace it offered: "it was the daily contact with Basheer, day-in day-out, through the mundane and the significant that had made Islam a rhythmic reality, a feasible way of living" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 94). Kassim's Western cultural alienation in Scotland is represented through surrounding himself with Islamic and Arab

culture and through working in the kebab shop where he practices cooking and serving Arab food like ‘doner kebab’, ‘doner pizza’, ‘samosa’, ‘onion bhaji’, and ‘tahini’. Kassim used to go to a judo class when he was a teenager, which, according to Aboulela, “awakened his dominant Muslim Identity” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95). Attending Judo classes allowed him to connect with Arab boys to reclaim his Arab-Islamic heritage. Kassim’s clinging to this opportunity to strengthen his bond with his traditional roots is solid proof of his tendency to choose his ethnic culture over the European one.

Kassim’s psychological behavioral patterns align directly with Berry’s identification of ‘separation’ as an adaptation strategy. Following Berry’s theoretical construct, the two dominant factors that influence immigrants’ adaptation mechanisms are: the extent to which immigrants maintain their heritage culture and the extent to which they seek interactions with the host—dominant— culture. The intersection of these two dimensions within the immigrants’ psyche yields one of Berry’s four adaptation strategies (Berry, 1992, p. 4). The adaptation strategy of ‘separation’ occurs when immigrant individuals place a high value on maintaining their original cultural identity and traditions, while intentionally minimizing or even avoiding any form of mutual interactions with the dominant culture, “adopts the receiving culture and retains the heritage culture” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 238). This coping mechanism is observed in immigrant communities that form ‘ethnic enclaves’—areas where the residents are from the same ethnic group— by that means cultural practices, language, and religious observances are openly preserved, manifested, and conducted without restrictions, while simultaneously interacting with the host society is limited. For instance, those kinds of immigrants tend to establish their own educational centers, religious institutions, and businesses, thus reducing the necessity of engaging or intercommunicating with the culture of the host society (Szapocznik, 2010, p. 243).

The sense of Kassim’s cultural separation is shown through the way he communicates with the customers in the kebab shop. Although his job in the kebab shop requires high communication skills to deal with the foreign culture, he lacks deep communication with the locals, which highlights his sense of being an outsider. Aboulela tries to shed light on one of the most common dilemmas of second-generational Arab immigrants in Western communities, like Kassim, who is being culturally alienated and displaced. Being born or raised in Western societies, he is educated and socialized in Western systems but grew up in a

household shaped by Arab values. This duality often leads to internal identity conflict as he feels insufficiently Arab at home neither does he feel sufficiently western in society. As a result of this inner conflict, Kassim struggles to fully define himself within the culture of the host country. Thus, he chooses to embrace his original culture and to get separated from the culture of the host country.

Berry's concept is reflected in Kassim's struggle to fully define himself within the Western community, which makes him culturally separated. This is shown through his choice to embrace his Islamic faith and his deliberate choice to work in a kebab shop rather than any other place. For Kassim, the 'Kebab Shop' functions as a space of a cultural and spiritual microcosm of his identity, and the fact that the shop is run by a devout Muslim couple that share the same values, traditions, and Islamic practices creates a world that resembles his ethnic culture, where his faith and ethnicity are normalized and affirmed.

Identity Crisis

The struggle of 'identity ambiguity' is represented by Aboulela through Dina's character. Although she has an Arab and Islamic background, she turns to be completely ignorant of any Arab culture or Islamic practices. Dina is portrayed as a Westernized immigrant; Aboulela describes her Westernized appearance saying: "Many of the girls were wearing headscarves, some were wearing shalwar kameez- others like Dina wore the student outfit of Jeans, a sweatshirt, and outrageous shoes" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 88). Dina's father passed away and she lives with her mother only and even at home there are not a single sign of any Islamic practices, and this is revealed by Aboulela through the description "Dina walked into the setting room... there was a bottle of gin on the coffee table." (Aboulela, 2018, p. 92). Although Dina's mother is an Egyptian with an Islamic background, she turns out to be an alcoholic, which opposes Islamic traditions and principles. Dina neither knows anything about Arabic nor tried to learn the language from her mother. When they sat together to watch Egyptian films, she only watched because the channel had English subtitles "Nile TV was good for Dina because it had English subtitles on most of the films and so she could follow them. Sometimes, but not often, Shushu would make comments about the actors or the plot, give Dina snippets of information about Egyptian culture" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93).

Aboulela's portrayal of this environment aligns with Berry's concept of 'assimilation' as an adaptation strategy practiced by Dina in the host society, highlighting the absence of ethnic, cultural, and religious signs that affect her

identity. Sam and Berry define ‘assimilation’ as “the strategy used when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek close interaction with other cultures” (Sam and Berry, 2010, p. 476). Immigrants who employ ‘assimilation’ as their adaptation tactic adopt the cultural norms, values, and behaviors of the host or dominant culture while relinquishing those of their heritage culture.

When Dina went to the kebab shop to give Kassim her father’s suits as a donation for the Syrian refugees, she went to the back of the shop at a ‘staff only’ area and found Kassim in the position of prayer. Dina didn’t even recognize that what Kassim was doing was Islamic prayer “Why was he like that, his forehead, nose and hands pressed onto the floor, Why?” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 99). Regardless of her Arab cultural background, Dina is completely unaware of any Islamic practices, as Aboulela expresses, “though Dina was from generations of Muslims, she had never seen anyone praying. On television, yes, or a photo in a schoolbook, but not within arm’s reach, not in the same room, not someone she knew, someone she loved” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 100). Aboulela represents the character of Dina as an example of the second-generation immigrants’ assimilation into the Western lifestyle. Dina's complete immersion in the secular life of England, coupled with her lack of awareness of her ethnic culture, exemplifies the ‘assimilation’ strategy.

Berry laid out the psychological and social implications of ‘assimilation,’ which can facilitate achieving better social outcomes for immigrants, consequently, leading to greater acceptance by the host community. As Berry indicates ‘assimilation’ is often associated with lower levels of acculturative stress compared to ‘separation’ or ‘marginalization,’ “those pursuing assimilation experience intermediate levels of acculturative stress” (Berry, 2005, p. 1). However, it may also include psychological costs exemplified in the loss of cultural identity, feelings of alienation from one’s ethnic community, and internal identity conflict. Immigrants who assimilate often experience a solid adaptation to the host culture but report identity confusion and weaker ties to their ethnic community compared to integrated peers (Berry et al., 2006, p. 11). This applies to Dina’s character, who fully immersed herself in the secular life of England, unaware of her ethnic culture.

Homesickness and Nostalgia versus Integration

The sense of ‘homesickness’ and ‘nostalgia’ are normal symptoms and dilemmas that confront immigrants when they settle away from their home. These issues are portrayed through the character of Shushu, Dina’s mother. Shushu is an

Egyptian woman who got married to an English man and had to leave her hometown to be with her husband. Notwithstanding that this serves as a dream for so many Arab women, Shushu despises life in Scotland as she tells her daughter, “Everything shrank when your father brought me here” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93). As she grew older, Shushu came to the realization that marrying a foreign man was not an actual blessing, but an affliction in disguise, as Aboulela utters, “She had despised him and despised him until he shriveled into his grave. The good-looking *khawagah*, who had pursued and enchanted her in the Gezira Club, had whisked her off her feet and away from her family, had brought her to drab life, in a drab place” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 93). Knowing the fact that she had spent most of her life away from her home and how her family cut her off because she married a Scottish man, got her into a deep depression, and a sense of indifference. Shushu turns this depression and homesickness into being an alcoholic. Shushu attempts to embrace this sense of homesickness and nostalgia through the long hours she spends watching Egyptian black and white films on television.

‘Marginalization’ is one of John Berry’s strategies of acculturation. Marginalization strategy indicates little possibility or interest in any cultural maintenance, neither the culture of origin nor the culture of the host community. Immigrants who embrace marginalization as their coping mechanism tend to have little interest in building relations with others, often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 1997, p. 5). The narrative portrays the character of Shushu as not being attached to any culture, neither her ethnic Islamic culture nor the Western culture. She is nostalgic for Egypt, but she is detached from any Islamic practices to the extent that she didn’t pass on any of the Islamic principles to her daughter. That affected Dina’s identity later on and made her ignorant of her own ethnic identity. Simultaneously, Shushu resents her life in England and has no interest in embracing its culture. Aboulela perfectly managed to represent the character of Shushu as a first-generation Arab immigrant who got lost between two different cultures.

Basheer and his wife Samia stand as an example of first-generational Arab immigrants who managed to perfectly balance between two different cultures and to adapt to the norms of the Western community through their business ‘kebab shop’. Aboulela tries to convey a positive message to the readers through the characters of Basheer and his wife Samia, who managed to apply the concepts of ‘integration and ‘positive adaptation’ appropriately. Samia takes pride in her Muslim identity and Arab cultural practices, and this is reflected through her act

of breastfeeding her baby in front of Dina, which contrasts with Western norms. When Samia breastfeeds her baby during the fund-raising dinner, she does so naturally and confidently, despite Dina's discomfort and the Westernized cultural tendency to view such acts as private or shameful. Aboulela ironically describes Dina's behavior, symbolizing Western contradictions, as she says, "as an average British girl of eighteen, Dina had seen plenty of nudity but she had never seen a woman breastfeed a baby" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). When Dina witnesses Samia immediately breastfeeding her crying baby as a natural reflex of a typical Arab mother, she feels repulsed because, in that situation, Samia is far from being the idealized mother figure in Western culture "She definitely did not look like an antiseptic mum in television ad for pampers. Dina looked away" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). Samia's ease stands as a representation of healthy integration where cultural traditions are preserved and expressed openly without shame or concealment.

Positive adaptation is strongly reflected by Basheer, who owns the Kebab shop, and knows that integration is the ideal solution to survive in a foreign community. Basheer has accepted the circumstances and the role that has been imposed on him in the host society, and by doing this, he is embodying the reality that many immigrants face; survival comes first, often at the cost of deeper integration. Basheer and Samia organize fundraising dinners and community gatherings at their workplace that bring together people from different cultural backgrounds. This involvement reflects a willingness to engage with the host society while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness by serving Arab food, aligning with Berry's concept of 'Integration'—maintaining one's original culture, while participating in daily interactions with other groups (Berry, 2005, p. 705). 'Integration' involves the selective adoption of new behaviors from the larger society, for instance, Basheer's and Samia's ability to communicate with the foreign customers in English, and retention of valued features of one's heritage culture and which is represented through Basheer's commitment to prayers and Samia's retention of Islamic woman's appearance "the white scarf that covered her hair" (Aboulela, 2018, p. 91). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder studied over 5000 immigrant youth who have settled in 13 countries to examine the four acculturation strategies, and they concluded that the most preferred acculturation strategy is 'integration' (Berry et al., 2006, p. 11). Additionally, Berry defines integrated individuals as having positive ethnic and national identities, efficiency in both languages, and a friendship network that includes people from both

cultures (Berry, 2005, p. 707). Regarding acculturative stress, Berry states that “there is a clear picture that the pursuit of integration is the least stressful but marginalization is the most stressful; in between are the assimilation and separation strategies” (Berry, 2005, p. 708).

Aboulela's Power of Language and Imagery

Regarding Aboulela's language in the narrative, she uses simplicity over complexity. Her sentences are short and simple yet deeply reflective and thought-provoking, mirroring to the reader the emotional tension within the immigrant character's psyche. For instance, when it comes to the character of Kassim, her use of concise phrases and succinct narration mirrors his inner psychological sense of cultural isolation and detachment. Although Kassim had a European upbringing, he willingly chose to convert to Islam. When he converted to Islam and found self-reassurance in Islamic practices, he tended to get detached from the Western culture around him. Kassim's use of Islamic traditional greeting with Dina, who is represented by Aboulela as a more assimilated individual, highlights Kassim's barrier to full acceptance or integration into the Western society “He opened the door for her and said, *salamu alleikum*” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95).

Concerning Dina's characterization, her use of the English language as a way of communication and being completely unaware of the Arabic language and Islamic greeting mirrors her assimilation into Western culture. Kassim was the first person to introduce her to Islamic greeting and practices “It was the first time for Dina to say ‘*salamu alleikum*’” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 99). Regarding Basheer and his wife Samia, who are considered an older migrant generation, although they deal with customers in English, they use the Arabic language when they are off work. Aboulela sets an example of full adaptation and balanced integration through Basheer and Samia's use of the Arabic language during their daily communication “Samia and Basheer spoke in loud Arabic, which Dina couldn't understand” (Aboulela, 2018, p. 95-96).

Vivid imagery is a significant tool used by Aboulela to depict the physical landscape of migration. “The kebab shop” stands out as a two-dimensional and vibrant symbol. It symbolizes societal integration and economic hardships. The idea of introducing and serving Arab food to English citizens plays a crucial role in cultural exchange. Aboulela's precise choice of ‘kebab’, which is a famous Middle Eastern cuisine, yet is being served in a Western setting, is a portrayal of integration on a societal level. Moving to the other dimensional symbolism, the shop itself symbolizes the economic limitations imposed on migrants who often

find themselves in low-status jobs regardless of their abilities and ambitions. This is directly applied to Kassim, who is confined to working long-hour job with a low income despite his young age and available opportunities. The heat environment of the kebab shop and repetitive nature of Kassim's work portray this image of the opportunities' limitations that he draws for himself. For Kassim, the kebab shop symbolizes his heritage and a home that he clings to over Western society. Aboulela represents Basheer's kebab shop not only as a business, but a symbol of economic survival and how immigrants carve out economic spaces for themselves in Western societies because they may not have available or easy access to mainstream collar-job opportunities. Basheer's ability to sustain the business of the kebab shop suggests an accomplished level of success and societal integration in the Western community.

Conclusion

The study deals with the concept of integration as one of the four strategies of the acculturation model theory proposed by John W. Berry, applied to the Arab immigrants' experience in Western societies. The paper tackles different psychological coping mechanisms employed by the Arab immigrants, taking into consideration the change of their historical background. Through analyzing Liela Aboulela's short story "The Boy from the Kebab Shop," The study follows the psychological conflicts that the Arab protagonists face during their displacement in Western communities.

Based on the study's analysis, what makes the short story stand out as an actual Arab migration experience and a unique narrative are two pivotal factors. Firstly, Aboulela's ability to give each character the function of representing a specific theme. Each theme is an examination of a crucial migration diasporic struggle for Arab immigrants. To exemplify, the themes of displacement and alienation are represented through Kassim's constant overwhelming feeling of not belonging to Western culture. Dina's dilemma of not knowing to which culture she belongs portrays the theme of identity ambiguity. Shushu's continuous longing for her homeland—Egypt—sheds light on the themes of homesickness and nostalgia. Basheer's and his wife Samia's capability to integrate positively in Western society depicts the theme of biculturalism. Secondly, Aboulela's ability to create enduring vividness for the reader through her deliberate and crafted use of language, imagery, and symbolism, by which she conveyed the previously discussed themes.

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