

Reclaiming Identity through Communal Voice: Narrating Self-Recognition in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*

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Abstract

This study provides a postcolonial narratological analysis of *The Kindness of Enemies* to explore different layers of identity formation for Muslim immigrants. The novel chronicles the dilemmas Natasha, a Muslim professor of history that teaches at a Scottish university and studies Imam Shamil's jihad, experiences in maintaining an independent sense of identity far from a Westernized mindset. A stylistic axis whereby the author mirrors this complexity is the simultaneous utilization of the first-person verbatim narrative of Natasha and the third-person omniscient historical narrative of Shamil with three distinct focalizers. Such structure highlights the significance of spatiotemporality, narrator, focalizer, and communal voice. The study pinpoints that both parts of the novel are narrated by a single narrator (Natasha). As her supposedly assimilated identity of an exemplary university lecturer is tarnished, she realizes the futility of hybridity that has left her in state of adrift-ness. Narrating historical events through the focalization of three imperialized characters, she becomes the communal voice of those whose identity is besmeared by imperialism and those who attempt to resist, which in turn allows her to exercise agency.

Keywords: The Kindness of Enemies, Postcolonial Narratology, Communal Voice, Narrator, Identity

1. Introduction

Leila Aboulela, the highly appreciated Muslim diaspora author, mainly addresses the notions of faith and alienation in her works. Her oeuvre is filled with women whose diasporic lives are inscribed with stereotypical narratives of fundamentalism, suppression, ignorance and terrorism. What distinguishes her approach to these common themes among peer authors, however, is the reinvigorated Islamic consciousness (Morey, 2018) that gives her characters impetus to pursue an alternative perception of oneself. Characteristically, Aboulela portrays devout believers who defend their unwavering faith in the face of Western areligious worldview (e.g., Translator), those who find solace and faith together after starting to practice Islam rigorously (e.g., Minaret), or women who have accepted faith as a defining identity, for better or worse, (e.g., Bird Summons). This novel, on the contrary, is centered on a woman who denies her religiosity all through her life till the very last pages of the narrative, and even then, she does not turn into a steadfast practicing Muslim, but a green pilgrim. Living in a community that constantly chastises Muslims, notwithstanding their percepts, Natasha is pushed to question and subsequently give up on her individual, independent identity.

The Kindness of Enemies, which narrates desperate struggles for defining oneself under the increasing demand for hybridity both in the post-colonial era and at the height of colonialism, traces the root of the loss back in history and distinctively tracks down the regaining process in history as well. Noteworthy is Aboulela's conferring voice to not only those who have actively resisted colonialism but also those who have given in and shied away from who they are. The narrative, however, goes beyond lamentation; it is the story of overcoming forced hybridity and reclaiming Muslim identity. It is argued in this paper that the narrator plays the role of both the first-person memory writer and the omniscient historian who as an agnostic, non-practicing Muslim feels unsecured despite her prestigious job- a lecturer of history- and her constant cooperation with anti-terrorist squad by reporting suspicious Muslim students. Her social status is shattered when her favorite student, Oz, becomes accused of radicalism whereby her Muslim identity turns into a threat. Her going back to Sudan, to take part in her father's funeral, and her struggles to come into terms with her roots prompt her to redefine who she is. Moving back and forth, the rest of the novel narrates the last fifteen years of Shamil's fight against Russian imperialism in the 19th century. Focalizing the narrative through Shamil (the leader of Caucasian resistance against Russian imperialism); princess Anna (robbed of her title as the queen of Georgia because of her country being annexed to Russia); and Jamaladdin (Shamil's son, brought up by the Tsar Nicholas I and mostly Westernized), provides a unique look into the disparate experiences of three characters under the degrading impact of imperialism.

The main question this study aims at clarifying is how readers are guided to make judgments about the individual identity a diasporic Muslim can forge for themselves through the rhetoric weaved through the historical and contemporary chapters. To answer this question, a postcolonial narratological approach is adopted to study narrative components such as space, time, narrator and focalizer from postcolonial perspective. The paper focuses specifically on the two narrators' exercising power over their literary world, both in the first- and omniscient third-person voice, and their interrelation. It also addresses the process of overcoming adrift-ness, which the protagonist feels due to the failure of her attempts at complete assimilation, through re-narration of history in a realistic tone. Finally, it is argued that the narrator gains the highest status of authority by developing a communal voice through deploying several oppressed focalizers in the historical sections and by being the insider voice of one of the most stereotyped communities in the world in the cotemporary chapters. The protagonist-narrator bridges the gap between fiction and reality by playing the direct voice of the author who resembles her in more than one respect. This paper presents a different perspective on both the concept of communal voice and Muslim identity. The interconnectedness between the protagonist in the contemporary chapters and the three focalizers in the historical ones has not been addressed in prior studies. Despite critics' tendency to concentrate mainly on "we" narratives for finding traces of communal voice (Gymnich, 2018), this study shows how the interplay between the third-person narrator with different focalizers and the first-person narrator-protagonist can also create a communal voice. Furthermore, negating the merits of total assimilation and hybridity, this paper focuses on the essentiality of identity through the lens of Islamic postcolonialism. It should be noted that both the questions of retelling history and identity have been addressed by diverse scholars, as referred to in this paper, but they mainly employ a thematic study of the main topics presented in the novel. It is through narrative theory, however, that this paper presents a less deployed ideologically situated reading of the narrative constituents that in a structured way develop the postcolonial rhetoric of the work. The interdisciplinary approach of postcolonial narratology provides a unique rhetorical reading of narrator, focalizer, adrift-ness and its solution in re-narrating history, authorial agency and communicative act, which are all at the service of forging an individual identity for diasporic Muslims.

Though narrative theory had for long been under attack from new historians and poststructuralist theorists for its purposeless formalistic analyses, its turn to contextualized/historical readings and emphasizing rhetorical effects of works nourished ideologically situated studies. As argued by Gymnich (2002), postclassical narratologists have defended context-oriented readings in the light of the role narrative techniques of a text play in conveying ideology- sustaining gender, race and class clichés or subverting them. As one of the offsprings of this new wave narrative theory, postcolonial narratology, which is an interdisciplinary field, delves into components of narratives to mirror cultural, political, and ideological hegemony in them (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Drawing on premises of postcolonial narratologists, specifically Monika Fludernik and Gerald Prince, and Baynham's interdisciplinary study of sociolinguistic narratology with regard to life stories narrated by migrants, this paper analyzes spatiotemporality and the ideological ramifications of the interplay between space and time, as culminated in re-narration of a momentous historical episode in Imam Shamil's resistance against Russian imperialism. Furthermore, the study explores the rhetorical role that the four distinct focalizers in the novel play in developing the postcolonial message of the work based on Mieke Bal and Fludernik's narratological discussion of the focalization and narrator. Also, following the lead of the acclaimed feminist narrative theorist, Lanser, who has contributed to the theorization of narrator's authority, based on which postcolonial narratology has developed its own premise, the ideological implication of authoritative first-person narrator, authorial omniscient narrator and communal voice is explored. Ultimately, incorporating arguments of postcolonial narratologists like Dawson who attributes rhetorical choices to the author, instead of an implied version (with regard to authorial intention mentioned above), the question of identity in *The kindness of Enemies* is discussed. In investigating the question of identity, the paper moves beyond poststructuralist framework of postcolonialism and its endorsement of hybridity to analyze the subject from Islamic postcolonial perspective. Hasan Majed (2015), who has developed the term in response to postcolonialism's secular nature that fails to address principles embedded in religiously oriented cultures, maintains that while postcolonial critics actively engage in detecting colonial discourse that still prevails, they fail to notice the same when it comes to Islam and Muslims. As a result, Majed puts forth Islamic postcolonialism that weds anti-colonial insight of postcolonialism with Islam which is a "major component of identity" (p. 4) for lots of migrants around the world. He argues that hybridity is a

celebrated concept among Muslims more inclined to secularism, while for those like Aboulela that “Islam is her first identity” (p. 156) a new understanding of identity crisis and identity formation is needed. In her introduction to *Islam and Postcolonial Discourse*, Santesso (2017) also acknowledges that postcolonial discourse has been dismissive of religion and its role in subject formation partly due to its being deeply invested in hybridity. She calls for a postcolonial reading that takes Muslim subjectivity into account. This paper, in line with Nash’s (2012) argument that Muslim identity should be studied in its own terms rather than within the mainstream postcolonial framework, traces the process of identity reclamation in this narrative.

2. Decolonizing History to Escape Adrift-ness

The interplay between time and space is an intriguing aspect in narratological readings of fiction. As Prince (2005) and Fludernik (2012) specify, in politically informed narratives such as postcolonial works, there is a subtle connection between space, time and character. Approximately half of the chapters in *The Kindness of Enemies* recount the memories of Natasha, as she reminisces a turning point in her life: her personal view of a winter when she stood on the verge of losing everything, but eventually found elsewhere home. The other half of the novel presents historical events in the last fifteen years of Shamil’s life from the perspective of Natasha who employs third-person omniscient voice to recount her understanding of events that had been already narrated, many times, by diverse Western historians. Awad (2018) maintains that the historical part in this narrative rectifies the image of Muslim jihadists, and Alkodimi (2021) states that by narrating Shamil’s resistance, Aboulela criticizes militant groups that violate the true nature of jihad, which in turn helps her glorify her Islamic identity, opposite of her protagonist who denies it. However, in our viewpoint, the juxtaposition of the two timelines goes beyond redefinition of jihad. It is argued that time and space become entangled in the narrative to turn into a tool at the hand of the author for narrating the formation of an independent, individual identity for Natasha, who shrugs off imposed hybridity, as a representative of Muslims in diaspora.

In his seminal sociolinguistic contribution to narrative studies, Baynham (2015) studies space-time orientation in language used by migrants. He explores the orientation of narratives in time and space, believing that they both express social conflicts. In this regard, he refers to the state of “in-between-ness” that some migrants, especially refugees, experience- their being neither one thing nor the other. Borrowing from this spatial term, this study pinpoints the in-between-ness Natasha experiences as being a Sudanese born, British resident with an Arab father, who has given his daughter her religion, a Georgian mother who has failed to give her daughter the “right”, European complexion, and a Scottish stepfather whose surname she has borrowed. This woman is simultaneously a member of the Western society and an outsider, and hybridity, the natural state of the space she is trapped in, terrifies her. She calls herself a failed hybrid as she remembers an episode in her childhood when she hysterically reacted to a boy wearing a wolf head in a costume party: “...the shock of the half-human, half-beast, the lack of fusion between the two...I was seeing in these awkward composites my own liminal self. The two sides of me that were slammed together against their will, that refused to mix.” (Aboulela, 2015, p. 40). She admits that the two sides in her are too apart, too distinct to be bridged. This state is reinforced as she becomes accused of cooperation with, or at least neglect of, potential fundamentalism at school. She is suddenly deprived of the image she has for long created by clinging to her European mother instead of the Arab father, and by being loyal to Western norms. In-between-ness hunts her from every corner as her dark skin becomes the most accentuated part of her identity, while she intended her assimilation to be pronounced more.

It is in this chaotic situation that home summons her. She passes the ocean, to go to the unknown world of her forgotten father to say the last goodbye to the dying man. As her ties to the discourse she defined herself within are already loosen, she goes through adrift-ness: carried away in the ocean of insecurity, losing navigation as different parties call her to succumb to them. The term “disorientation”, as the main motif found in narratives of undocumented Mexican immigrants to the US, is used to describe their venturing into an unfamiliar territory where they are at the mercy of others (Baynham, 2015). Drawing on this concept, this study defines Natasha’s status as “adrift-ness” because she suffers from the same lack of control over her life and loss of sense of belonging both in Scotland and in Sudan. In fact, she suddenly finds herself deprived of her supposedly firm stand in society because of her Islamic background. Her travel to Sudan only confuses her more as she does not feel any belonging to the country she had forgotten for long. In an exacerbating episode, she is even asked to prove her identity as a Muslim. She desperately seeks a place to belong to, a shore where she can exercise who she really is without constantly being questioned to prove her association. Adrift and full of questions, she, as a historian, chooses history as the safest shore whereby she can find a firm stand to redefine who she is. If, ironically for the post-colonial age, it is the colonial gaze and wrong assumptions about jihad that cut her ties to her society and makes her go adrift, by decolonizing history she shows the true meaning jihad had when it was practiced against colonialism. That is how time and space integrate to convey ideology- history turns into a shore she decolonizes by re-narrating a part of Muslim’s past.

2.1. Retold History, Reclaimed Identity

To save herself from adrift-ness, Natasha attempt to decolonize history to redefine herself. The latest research paper she is working on is Shamil’s jihad against Russian imperialism. During her research, she becomes a suspect of jihadism. Her favorite student, Oz, is accused of terrorist inclinations and is arrested while Natasha has stayed at his house for an interview with his mother, Malak, a direct grandchild of Shamil. In a series of events, her research area, jihad, turns into an Achilles heel that shatters her academic status. Natasha is well-versed on Shamil’s history, and her jeopardized status is due to studying his jihad, so the flow of the narrative itself implies that the historical chapters are Natasha’s recount of Shamil’s resistance from a Muslim perspective. Amin Malak (2005), who has worked on Islamic postcolonialism for years, believes that history has a liberating

power that gives authors the opportunity to challenge the dominant version of historical events by selecting specific elements and reconstructing discourse. Natasha picks up the most controversial moment of Shamil's fight against Russian imperialism- kidnapping a European princess- that marked his fall from grace in the eyes of Western Europe as a liberating fighter. To narrate this historical moment, the narrative is focalized through Shamil, Jamaleldin and Anna.

To present a reliable retelling of history, the narrative adopts realistic tone against the convention of most postcolonial works that usually violate boundaries of realism (Williams, 2005). This narrative, with its chronological order, competes with most historical novels produced at the height of colonialism in the 19th century. To better illustrate the case, this study draws on feminist narratology that has contributed significantly to the types of strategies and extensions of the classical models that can be of use in postcolonial readings (Alber and Fludernik, 2010). Diverse feminist critics regard linear plot of realist narratives as accomplice in maintaining patriarchal norms. However, as Alber (2017) clarifies, there are feminists who negate the idea and put forth the fact that the same technique could be utilized for subverting the message as there is no inherent relation between the two (p. 4). Following the same line of argument, it can be stated that the linear, realist novel subverts the discourse of Western realist historical novels in order to script a newly narrated history in which Muslim resistance is redefined as Muslims understand it. Such true-to-conventions of history writing in the fashion of the 19th century literary realism serves a subversive purpose at the hands of the omniscient narrator in the novel to create an Islamic narrative of Shamil's history that is designed to replace the Western versions that have colonized history to shape the past, as well as the contemporary identity of Muslims. Malak (2005) maintains that history has the key to individuals' fates and it is through re-narrating history that Muslim subjects can gain a better understanding of their present status as well as questioning the well-established Western version of history. Muslim voice, under the destructive impact of imperialism, has been silenced and its story is distorted by imperialists, be it in the past or in our contemporary world. History, then, is the first space Natasha should decolonize in order to practice agency- to not only present a new, Islamic historical voice, but also to save herself from adrift-ness.

As observed by Alun Munslow (2007), a prominent contributor to the interdisciplinary discussion of history and narratology, narrative is a means of knowing, and therefore, history, which he regards as a form of narrative, is a creator of meaning. Munslow borrows from Genette's concept of story-discourse to highlight the fact that every historical recount of the same event generates a different meaning as a result of writers' diverse choices of focus on characters, events, settings. Considering the points, it becomes evident that a new meaning of failure and success in resistance from Islamic perspective is presented in the historical chapters of the novel: Shamil's battle is defined as resistance blessed by Allah, successful till the last moment its leader fought only for Allah, and lost when he was defeated in his jihad al-nafs (self-restriction). In explaining for Shamil why his efforts failed, sheikh Jamaleldin, his spiritual guru, says: "You changed...you began to think you're invincible...you became arrogant, so I raised up my palms to Allah almighty and read Al-Fatiha" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 305). The initial mistake, as the guru clarifies, was the kidnap that was the desperate act of a father who started to fight for his son, not God, and that is when his pure intention got stained by personal whims, and his jihad crumbled down. In an earlier episode, the sheikh tries to convince him to return the princess to her husband, and warns him of his self-centeredness. "You did not consult me on the kidnapping of the princess... If you had asked my permission, I would not have given it. You want your son back? You want. Weakness lies in desire" (p. 158-159). What happened to the princess was not in accordance with Islamic teachings, and that sparked the beginning of the end for Shamil's resistance. In this way, the historical recount creates a new meaning of resistance against imperialism and puts forth an Islamic explanation for the failure of Shamil's jihad.

Princess Anna, the victim, is ironically the first observer and interpreter for this signifying system. She grows to understand Shamil, to admire him and to wish for his jihad to succeed, so that it becomes some sort of a revenge on Russian colonialism that had devoured her country. Back home, months after the exchange, she ponders: "Queen of Georgia- Shamil had won her with these words...These days she was imagining what would have been preposterous months ago. She would join Shamil's resistance. She would fight...to free Georgia" (p. 228). Through her perspective, this new signified underpins a new understanding of a signifying system based on which Muslims start their jihad primarily within themselves, and then against oppression. At the beginning of the novel, Natasha and Oz strike a conversation about the image of Shamil as a noble savage in the West. That his picture is reminiscent of a Native American chief and the attached image in colonial discourse is quite natural for Natasha as she emphasizes his being a merely successful "rebel" (p. 20) in colonial age. Oz, on the contrary, highlights the Islamic root of his fight and explains "What I like best about his days is the certainty. Shamil and his people were the goodies; the Russians were the baddies. The Caucasus belonged to the Muslims, the tsar's army were the invaders" (p. 14). Natasha is baffled, but what happens in the historical chapters is precisely the elaboration on goodies and baddies from Islamic perspective. Indeed, Shamil is neither a monster nor a noble savage. Rather, he is a devout Muslim who resists in the name of God but makes a mistake and pays for it. As he becomes arrogant and fails in self-restriction, he is defeated by imperialism. Natasha's re-narrating Shamil's history creates the signifying system that redefines goodies and baddies, and explains the reason behind Imam Shamil's defeat in his jihad. Through this new perspective, Natasha finds agency to distinguish Islam and its jihad from terrorism whose dark shadow has besmirched her identity, not due to any cooperation, but because of the wrong connotation of terrorism the West imposes on jihad in general. Decolonizing a part of the history of jihad against imperialism, Natasha, the narrator-protagonist, goes beyond providing an Islamic definition for jihad in order to bridge history with cotemporary Muslims' concern about reclaiming their individual identity.

3. I/We have suffered- The Communal Voice

As mentioned earlier, typical protagonists of Aboulela's novels are religious women who commonly demonstrate steadfast faith. Her favorite technique of narrowly focalized first- (e.g., in *Minaret*) or third- (e.g., in *Translator*) person narrator has been regarded as the author's "discomfort with polyphony" and a clever design for reinforcing the main theme that God is the authority and determiner of the outcome (Morey, 2018). It has also been the launch pad for criticizing the ever-present image of self-subordinating Muslim woman in her narratives, which prerequisites close identification with the protagonist-focalizer throughout the text- she should be the sole voice so that full conformity and self-subordination seem desirable (Abbas, 2011). The *Kindness of Enemies* does not abide by these lines of interpretations. First, this narrative deals with a non-believer who does not commit herself to an Islamic mode of life due to her secular upbringing and desperate attempts to assimilate into the Western society, and when she finally exposes herself to religion, she takes the trembling steps of a green pilgrim. Besides, it is only the contemporary chapters that present the narrowly focalized first-person narrator. The historical chapters, on the contrary, have an omniscient narrator with three distinct focalizers (Jamaleldin, Shamil, Anna).

Natasha narrates her memories of a challenging time in her life. Narrating a personal journey that emphasizes personal observations, emotions and epiphanies requisites first-person narration that emphasizes the subjective experiences of the protagonist. That is to say the very act of articulating her story gives her agency. As Lanser (1992) underlines, first-person narration asserts the narrator's right to explain "her personal experiences" (p. 19). Hence, as a woman, who had always tried her best to hide her insecurities and lack of belonging, Natasha recognizes her right to articulate her true emotions, which in turn endows subjectivity to her. It is the authenticity of this image of first-hand experiences that targets readers; the genuine representation of the threat a Muslim immigrant, despite doing her best to assimilate, faces in the seemingly post-colonization era. According to Bal (2009), the privilege of first-person narration lies in the opportunity it creates for practicing the rhetoric of veracity, which the case of Natasha epitomizes: she first narrates her own memories, which asserts her right, as a Muslim, to express herself and marks her agency and subsequently takes a step further and narrates a significant historical event during colonization era.

At the outset, Natasha explains her deep interest in history and her awareness that "it could be milked for this cause or that" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 46). Her historical narration of Imam Shamil's life also exemplifies her interest. The clues are provided in the bridging sections between the contemporary and historical chapters: the first chapter ends in a brief narration of antiterrorist squad arresting Oz on charges of jihadist inclinations while Natasha is also accused of cooperation, so her laptop and cellphone are confiscated; and the next chapter depicts Russian troop's taking Jamaleldin as a hostage to stop his father's jihad- a common scene of violated space and terror. The same pattern is followed in the next section, when in a contemporary chapter Natasha briefly reports that Shamil's demonized image is the result of his meddling with a Princess Anna while the next chapter, a historical one, introduces the princess to readers. A parallel is drawn between Natasha and Anna's terror when in subsequent chapters invaders storm their houses. First, Oz's house is ravaged by the police in front of Natasha. She goes home, to put the horror behind, but finds the house robbed. The next chapter depicts Anna's fear as her house is stormed by highlanders- an action condemned and marked as an important reason for Shamil's fall by Sheikh Jamaleldin. Again, the terror and insecurity Natasha and Anna feel connect the contemporary and historical chapters as Natasha starts to feel being the stranger among her colleagues and friends, and Anna starts her life in captivity among strangers. The alienation Natasha feels at first when she travels to Sudan is paralleled with the discomfort Jamaleldin feels among highlanders as he turns back home, in successive chapters. Finally, the guru's prominent presence in the last section of the novel that helps Shamil comprehend and accept his defeat, and his going on a pilgrimage to Mecca is linked to Natasha's recognizing Malak as her guru in joining Islamic zikr circles. Arguably, it is Natasha's internal struggles and emotions that determine the focalizer of the historical chapters, as Anna, Jamaleldin and Shamil share Natasha's misery in the age of post-colonialism.

Such sympathetic link is depicted through the omniscient third-person narration. Her omniscience that exercises authority over the story world is evident in diverse components. She presents inner thoughts of three different focalizers, as well as narrating big scale events. The very presence of several focalizers at command of the narrator is what Dawson (2013) calls the "rhetorical assertion of narrative authority" (p. 49). As another common feature of an omniscient narrator, she provides extra information, independent of focalizers. For instance, she summarizes the whole succession of wars in a paragraph. The reason behind Natasha's adopting third-person omniscient narrator in the historical section can be attributed to what narratologists consider the "reliability of the histor" that leads writers to employ third-person voice in historical narratives (Scholes, et al., 2006, pp. 243). Natasha has to sound reliable, like Western historians, if her narrative is to replace that of the imperialists. There are numerous narratologists who acknowledge the aura of verity around the third-person narrator that exercises authority either through description or explicit commentary. Dawson (2013), for instance, states that being in possession of full knowledge about the story and providing information about inner thoughts of characters render a third-person omniscient narrator authoritative. This argument accords with Bal's (2009) concept of non-narrative comments that third-person narrators make independent of the focalizer (if any) and state their opinions. Non-narrative comments are usually put forth in form of hidden comments, descriptions, etc., and explicitly convey works' ideology. Such non-narrative comments that testify to the authoritative presence of an omniscient narrator in command of her story world are abundantly scattered throughout the narrative. They are exemplified in sympathetically narrating the hardships highlanders went through (e.g., in p. 21). Another sample is narrator's non-narrative comments about Jamaleldin's religious state after years of living in Russia, not filtered through his focalization: "Sins were like dirt; they could be washed off. More serious was the core submission, the foundations

of belief. But spiritually, he had atrophied...without the nourishment of practice, Jamaleldin's faith had become insubstantial" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 259). Natasha, therefore, is an omniscient narrator who exercises full authority over her re-narration of history and uses Anna's focalizations to shatter European clichés of a monstrous Shamil, like the ones Ms. Drancy refers to: "They say Shamil is a monster who eats Russian" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 48). Protected by a realistic aura, the narrative retells history from the vantage point of a Muslim, imperialized victim who as Fludernik (2012) states "writes back to the empire with vengeance" possible only to a once colonized person who has regained their voice and now narrate in their own words (p. 913).

Colonial literature used to bestow focalization to white colonizers to win readers' sympathy. In reverse, postcolonial works encourage empathetic understanding of colonized people's experiences by making them the focalizers of texts (Fludernik, 2012). Jamaleldin, Anna, and Shamil, who are traumatized by the destructive power of colonization, are granted the opportunity of focalization to depict what they have been through from their own perspective. Through Anna's story, readers taste the bitter humiliation that a citizen of an annexed country feels, while they gain first-hand knowledge of the never-ending fight that resisting people have to participate in if they do not wish to yield, like Shamil. Interestingly, Natasha's choice of focalizers leads readers to greater sympathy with Shamil and his cause precisely because of how he and his enemies are characterized through Anna's focalization, as explained above, and how his son, an almost non-believer, comes to finally admit his father's spiritual power. As he lay dying, he saw his father as a larger-than-life man: "There were colors in the room now and his father growing taller so that his head touched the roof... His father was large, very large, but his voice was soft and [as Shamil was praying] he felt the room swell up with angels" (Aboulela, 2015, pp. 274-5). By revealing their thoughts and emotions as three focalizers, Natasha, herself a suffering post-colonial subject, becomes the representative of three faces of imperialized victims-the dweller among imperialists, the surrendered, and the resister-states she herself goes through in different stages of the novel.

3.1. *The Communal Voice of Resisters*

Natasha's colonial heritage is a peculiar one. On her father's side she comes from Sudan, once a colony of Britain while her mother is from Georgia, once annexed to Russia. For Natasha, retelling history in third-person voice is an excuse to relay whatever historical insight she has gained from her studying history, seasoned with her personal experiences of being an imperialized subject. As a Muslim grown up among Westerners and separated from her father's land, part of her experiences is mirrored by Jamaleldin's focalized emotions as he grew up among Russians and when he returned home as a stranger. As half Georgian-half Muslim, a portion of the pain she felt from humiliation of hiding her roots is reflected in Anna's focalization that shows her discomfort with being a Russian citizen, and her motivation to fight back to regain independence, which parallels Natasha's disposing of imposed hybridity. Finally, her choice to accept Malak as her guru, guiding her to Islamic theology is reminiscent of what Shamil's focalization clarifies as the wisdom of Sheikh, his guru, and the final path he chose. This reciprocal relation between Natasha's first-person narration of a post-colonial subject's affairs and her third-person narration of three focalizers' similar experiences at the height of colonialism resonates the commonality of the four characters' experiences. This is what Gymnich (2018) calls the articulation of "collective experience and shared attitude" (p. 147) that a communal voice, in a postcolonial work, represents, either in form of "we" narrator or by a single individual authorized by a group. This is author's rhetorical choice to empower marginalized voices. Lanser (1992) maintains that such a narrator speaks as a representative of a community and may or may not adopt "we" pronoun. The play with conventions of narrator in this novel is not limited to the blurred and interchangeable relation between the first- and the third-person narrator. It passes the boundaries to reach the high authority of the communal voice. It is Lanser's (1992) conviction that the more the I narrator is exposed to class stereotyping, the more it represents the entire class it belongs to as well as its author. Aboulela uses a first-person narrator that first realizes her right to voice her worldviews and then becomes the narrator of historical characters' affairs in the face of imperialism, in disguise of an omniscient narrator that provokes sympathy for characters through clever use of multiple focalization. As such, she becomes a communal voice that represents the same agony in its diverse painful tastes throughout centuries of imperialism. Focalized exposure of three distinct characters to a single shared trauma is bridged to Natasha's personal narrative of the same trauma in post-colonization era. This communal voice is the result of the communal understanding that roots in shared oppression (Lanser, 1992, p. 233). Natasha, however, is not just the communal voice of sufferers; she refuses to linger among the victims and joins another group in her personal narrative.

The only group Natasha manifests a genuine sense of belonging to, from the outset till the end of the narrative, and uses "we" pronoun to refer to it is Malak and her family. As she is spending a night with them to talk more about Shamil, she thinks "I was captivated by the combination of Oz, Malak and the isolated sandstone house... it could have been the awareness that we (emphasis added) were under siege, randomly brought together, an unexpected gift of freshness" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 11). Later on, she states "Here we (emphasis added) were, the three of us, fascinated by a common past – faithful to it, even. I at least to the history, they to an ancestor they were proud of" (p. 44). Then again, after the police storm the house, she bounds with Malak and Oz, opposite of "them": "I could not bear the chaos surrounding us (emphasis added), the way the house had been violated...I wanted everything to look and smell and feel like it had before they came" (p. 75). She decides to join Malak in zikr circles; the path she takes as a seeker of Islamic faith. Morey (2018), believes showing a "communalist decision" (p. 243) is Aboulela's trademark: her narratives lead to her protagonists' final act of associating themselves with groups of Muslim devotes. The final part of this novel, too, shows her joining a spiritual group. She is still not a complete believer in religion with all its miracles and supernatural essence, but she is now open to spiritual experiences. There is a postscript at the end of the novel in Ghazi's first-person voice narrating wonders associated with Shamil. Natasha, as the omniscient narrator who controls her story world is still not ready to narrate, even through other characters' focalizations, spiritual miracles attributed to Shamil, but she lends voice to his son, Ghazi, to directly report what is said about Imam's wonders. Natasha culminates her narrative in

stories of miracles, but more importantly of solace that absolute faith can bring about, like the one Shamil reached at the end of his path. Reaching communal stance is the result of the first-person narrator's exercising power through narrating her own life story as a member of the Islamic community, which is one of the most stereotyped minorities in the West, and the third-person omniscient narrator whose deployment of three imperialized focalizers grants her the legitimacy of being the representative of sufferers at the hand of imperialism. Like a writer, she narrativizes her life story and a historical fiction and in that, she resembles her author, Aboulela.

Not only in its first-person narration but also in its third-person voice, Natasha is connected to her author. Dawson (2013) asserts that there is an equation between omniscient narrator and author, as if authors' statements are conveyed through omniscient narrator. The Author controls readers' interpretation in a more direct way as well. Paratextual elements add another layer to the interrelationship between flesh-and-blood authors and their readers through "appropriation, resistance, and reinforcement" (Dwivedi, 2018, p. 26). Lanser (1992) believes that epigraphs, in an authorized voice, convey author's direct commentary on the subject matter. In the same line of argument, Dawson (2013) also maintains that in their minds, readers infer the message in a literary work to be that of an author, the public figure whom they assume is the creator of what they are reading, and they shape an image of them not only from the narrative text, but from paratextual features like prefaces, acknowledgments, and afterword and from extratextual elements. As such, the nexus between the epigraph at the beginning of the novel and the communal voice of Natasha finds exceptional importance in discussion of author's ideology. In the initial quotation in the epigraph, Aboulela quotes Hesse that addresses "we", the group of home seekers who have no guide but homesickness. The second quotation from Lings is about the divine light that finds its way through even the smallest opening in the heart of the "majority". Through these two quotes, Aboulela draws on Islamic emphasis on the community to inform the message of her narrator's communal voice for spiritual seekers who learn to cherish their Islamic heritage.

4. The Author's Call for Embracing Roots

The ideological reading that distinguishes rhetorical concerns of postclassical narratology from its structuralist ancestor has provoked diverse debates as there is no unanimity among narratologists whether the agreed-upon message in literary works should be attributed to the flesh-and-blood or to the implied author. Though many theorists felt uncomfortable with the concept, the call for regarding authors, and not their implied versions, as the origin of meaning and ideology has gained a foothold in recent years. In his "The Rebirth of the Author", Richardson (2021) refers to postclassical narratologists' inclination to explore real authors' ideologies in narratives. In a similar line of argument, Dawson (2013) states public statements such as interviews, opinion articles and reading sessions reaffirm author's literary authority, which encourages readers to attribute especially third-person omniscient voice of narrator to author themselves. In such a heavily political novel as *The Kindness of Enemies* that manifests clear postcolonial themes and is also in the same line as almost all other of Aboulela's novels and short stories in exploring internal conflicts of a Muslim woman for determining her relationship with the question of religion, it is natural for readers to attribute the ideology to Leila Aboulela rather than to an abstract implied author. As discussed above, Lanser (1992) also confirms that in readers' minds, the narrator belonging to a stereotyped group and narrativizing experiences of such a class is directly connected to the author, as if conveying their direct voice. Natasha is an image of Aboulela, herself: she is a Sudanese born lecturer in Scotland, adopting third-person voice for recounting a historical narrative, like Aboulela, the Sudanese born author and lecturer at a Scottish university who is famous for exploring historical events and figures in her novels. Through Natasha's narrative of faith, Aboulela relays her idea that clinging to hybridity is of no avail and at the end it is through embracing Islamic roots that Muslims who live in diaspora can enjoy individual identity.

In addressing the ever-present question of identity for Muslim immigrants, Aboulela opens up the path for her protagonist that she, as an author, has for long taken- expressing Muslim concerns, sufferings, and interpretations through narrative. Hence, Natasha narrated her first hand experiences and her version of what historical figures with the same predicaments went through as their identity was under attack. Her postcolonial resistance starts with narrating her own failed attempt to become an acceptable hybrid- she symbolically describes herself as half-beast: "the shock of the half-human, half-beast, the lack of fusion between the two" (Aboulela, 2015, p. 40). She finally admits not being accepted in the society she tried her best to assimilate into: "Natasha Wilson denoted a person who was smeared by suspicion, tainted by crime. I might as well have stayed Natasha Hussein!" (p. 310). She simultaneously delves into history to narrate a similar failed attempt of a Muslim (Jamaledin) who gave up on his religion, his language and his codes of conduct to become Russian, though it reduced him to a "freak": "While the toast was being drunk, Jamaledin felt queasy at the praise that was not praise, the compliments that were intended as compliments but settled inside him like stones. What a freak he was" (p. 197) (Natasha also calls herself a freak (p. 40)). As the narrator of the historical event, Natasha exercises the power to write and interpret historical events, which is what is regarded as the auto-sanctioned right of observation a postcolonial figure gains when they engage in narrating events (Fludernik, 2012). In the next step of her postcolonial resistance, Natasha puts forth what Aboulela had already presented as the way to salvation, i.e., choosing Islam. Through the historical chapters, Islam is depicted as the soul of resistance that beyond tribal and national identity gave Caucasians the spirit to fight and even the possibility to win against Russia. In an occasion where the omniscient narrator is narrating the history of resistance in Dagestan, independent of any of her focalizers, she explains: "It had been Shamil's predecessors, Ghazi Muhammad...and Hamza Bek, who had first urged the people of Dagestan to stop the blood feeds and obey the laws of Sharia. To draw strength from Allah's laws, to tap into His power and push away the Russians" (p. 24). For authors in favor of returning to Islam, religion has the anti-imperialist healing power (Abbas, 2014), and that is what

Aboulela shows as the power of Islam to help Shamil to overcome his defeat, to help Malak to find solace in the aftermath of her son's arrest, and to help Natasha to forge an individual identity.

Although in recent decades Bhabha's concept of hybridity has been zealously advocated, there are postcolonial scholars who denounce the premise. Tratner (2008), for instance, pinpoints the impotency of hybridity due to its concealed lust for inequality. Though the juxtaposition of the past and the contemporary narratives in *The Kindness of Enemies* has been interpreted as a call for hybridity (Aladylah, 2018), one is entitled to suggest that Aboulela herself makes it clear that for Muslims to find themselves a stance in Western societies, there is no way but going back to their roots. As Morey (2018) argues, Aboulela is a proponent of postsecularism that is a counterblast to the secular principles of Enlightenment. In the course of the narrative, Natasha and Jamaeldin realize that hybridity does not open up an equal space with Westerners for them, and though permanently influenced by their host cultures, they are ultimately defined by their roots. Roots grow not in a country, but in faith: Shamil does not try to go back to his motherland. As his final wish, he goes to Mecca, in full satisfaction with his fate as a man who lost his battle but found the right path to God instead. Natasha flies back to Scotland after a prolonged stay in Sudan. Through what is deemed as Aboulela's "Islamizing the process of writing back" (Nash, 2012, p. 46), *The Kindness of Enemies* depicts home as not a geographical territory but the religion. Shamil went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and Natasha joined zikr circles. Both Shamil in Russia and Natasha in Scotland find their way back home not to a specific county, but to Islam. Like Najwa, the protagonist of Aboulela's *Minaret* who committed herself to religion in what Majed (2015) calls the most individualistic moment of Najwa's life, Natasha forges an individual identity for herself by finally choosing religion as her defining identity.

5. Conclusion

Aboulela fuses the past and the present to allow her adrift protagonist to find her stance and practice agency. As her image of a blissful European citizen shatters and her position as an exemplary university professor is threatened, Natasha confronts the truth of her in-between-ness. She is exposed to a new meaning of hybridity- not belonging to any group- that pushes her to the state of adrift-ness. Such is the status of the one whose identity is questioned not only by the country she resides in but also the country she was born in. To foster agency in order to escape adrift-ness, Natasha clings to re-narrating history of people entangled in the same predicament. By decolonizing history through narrating the Muslim's version of a controversial moment in history of Imam Shamil's resistance against Russian imperialism, she turns into the communal voice of sufferers under the onslaught of imperialism. Natasha relays the ongoing trauma of imperialized subjects, from the height of colonialism until the present, in disguise of an omniscient narrator with three different focalizers. Through Shamil's narrative, Natasha retells the defeat of Imam of Caucasus from Islamic perspective to find its root in his divergence from the main jihad, defined by his spiritual guru as self-restriction and developing compassion for everyone. His arrogance and pursuit of personal whims instead of the collective interest of his people, who fought against Russians in the name of God, deprived his resistance of his spiritual guru's blessings and prompted the downfall of his battle. Natasha adopts the communal voice of resisters to the continued oppression in postcolonial age by joining zikr circles that lead her to her Islamic faith. Aboulela recognizes the limits of much advocated hybridity and theorizes the return to roots while living compassionately in the host culture as an alternative for assimilation.

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