

Dismantling the Stereotype of *Jihad*: A Reading of Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*

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Abstract:

The present paper aims at exploring the concept of *Jihad* as represented by the Muslim woman writer Leila Aboulela in relation to the interpretation of the term by Islamist political parties such as Isis and Taliban, and the stereotypes assigned to it in Western media and Western thinking. Unfortunately, Islam's position concerning *Jihad* has been distorted, misrepresented, and misappropriated for political and economic aims. *Jihad* has come to be equated with terrorism, barbarism, and violence. This paper attempts to deconstruct these stereotypes and unveil the real facade of this obligation in Islam; its meaning, rules, and aims as stated clearly in the teachings in the Quran and Sunna. The methodology of this paper is to apply the concept of hybridity as a positive stance which helps Aboulela to deconstruct the false representations allotted to *Jihad* and establish reconciliation between cultural disparities and present a counter image of Muslims to restore balance to their representation.

Keywords: *Jihad*, Hybridity, stereotypes, dismantling

The present paper aims at exploring the concept of *Jihad* as represented by the Muslim woman writer Leila Aboulela in relation to the interpretation of the term by Islamist political parties such as Isis and Taliban, and the stereotypes assigned to it in Western media and Western thinking. Unfortunately, Islam's position concerning *Jihad* has been distorted, misrepresented, and misappropriated for political and economic aims. *Jihad* has come to be equated with terrorism, barbarism, and violence. "Western popular media – particularly news media and mainstream film – reduces jihad to a one-dimensional caricature of terrorism as religious martyrdom" (Tagg 319). Allie Kirchner states that "By focusing on the narrow concept of jihad used by terrorists, the U.S. media has inadvertently reinforced the link between terrorism and Islam within the American consciousness" (Kirchner). This paper attempts to deconstruct these stereotypes and unveil the real facade of this obligation in

Islam; its meaning, rules, and aims as stated clearly in the teachings in the Quran and Sunna. The methodology of this paper is to apply the concept of hybridity as a positive stance which helps Aboulela to deconstruct the false representations allotted to *Jihad* and establish reconciliation between cultural disparities and present a counter image of Muslims to restore balance to their representation.

Migration from the Middle East and encounter with the west, in addition to the history of colonization, has had a strong impact on the identity of emigrants from the region. Cultural diffusion is thus produced; for example a person from one culture can acquire some characteristics from another culture. This cultural diffusion results in a hybridity, which indicates a mixing or merging of two or more cultures, traits, concepts, values or ideas.

In post-colonial discourse, hybridity has become a central concern. The term had negative connotations in biological science where it was used to refer to the offspring of two animals or plants of different races (Merriam Webster). In the twentieth century the term travelled from biology to embrace linguistic and cultural domains¹. The first to use the term hybridity in a positive sense was Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) who established a linguistic version of hybridity to describe the combination of two languages to undermine a single authoritative language. He believes that bringing different languages and perspectives in contact with one another opens a space for negotiation. Bakhtin also differentiated between two kinds of hybridity: intentional hybridity and unintentional hybridity. The former is a conscious and a deliberate strategy which subverts and undermines the single authorial voice. As for unintentional hybridity, Bakhtin believes it to be unconscious. It is the result of the historical evolution of language and natural result of the contact of languages (358-360).

Moreover, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) express the idea that the "crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the center and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (38). Therefore, writers could use various strategies to refashion and subvert the colonial language such as:

¹ The idea of travelling was explored by the renowned critic Edward Said. It refers to the ability of ideas and theories to survive over time or bear traces of their historical condition of production.

[I]nserting untranslatable words into their texts; by glossing seemingly obscure terms; by refusing to follow standard English syntax and using structures derived from other languages. (McLeod 29)

Homi K. Bhabha (1949-) also applied the term hybridity in post-colonial discourse to refer to ways in which colonized people have resisted the power and authority of the colonizer. Bhabha invented the term "the third space", which is another level of resistance between colliding cultures; a liminal space which "provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative signs of collaboration, and contestation"(The Location 1,2). In this "in-between" space, new cultural identities are formed, transformed, and are constantly in a state of becoming. This third space deconstructs the colonial binary thinking and opens a liminal road for re-articulation and negotiation.

Jihad as a concept can best be dismantled by hybrid individuals and communities who are capable of challenging misrepresentation and the invention of a remote and exotic others. Edward Said's pioneering book *Orientalism*, demonstrates how the Western cultural canon has misrepresented the orient. The book starts with a quotation by Karl Marx: "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented". Said argues "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (1).Hence the dire need for works by Leila Aboulela and other hybrid writers to redefine the orient and to dismantle the stereotypes created by its machinery.

Also, as John McLeod states in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism (2010)*:

[C]olonialism establishes ways of thinking. It operates by persuading people to internalize its logic and speak its language, to perpetuate the values and assumptions of the colonizers as regards the ways they perceive and represent the world. (20)

So, colonialism could not function without these values and beliefs that they assign to the East which in turn justify the domination of its peoples. The continuity of these representations until present shows that the "machinery of

colonialism does not quickly disappear as soon as once-colonized lands achieve independence and can indeed endure in refreshed forms" (McLeod 48).

In fact, this "machinery of colonialism" produces assumptions about the racial and cultural traits of the Occident and the Orient. On the one hand, people from the Occident are "rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; [whereas those from the orient] are none of these things" (Said 49). These assumptions summed up what an oriental is likely to be despite their individual qualities. These assumptions then are reduced to negative generalizations; "all Arabs were violent, all Indians were lazy" (McLeod 45) and by the same token, all Muslims are terrorists. This in turn consolidates the sense of superiority in the west.

Homi Bhabha believes that the colonial authority tends to translate the identity of the colonized in a singular framework. The colonizer creates a holistic and pure image of the colonized and believes that this image is not open to negotiation. Hence, Bhabha clearly departs from this practice and adopts the stance of hybridity whereby he challenges these racial and cultural divisions by "interrogating the constructions of difference that contribute to them" (Childs and Williams 124).

Bhabha believes that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and the colonized challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity (Meredith 2). Rufel Ramos (2000) claims that within the third space, the colonizer and the colonized negotiate their cultural difference and create a culture that is hybrid (3). Hybridity results in what Bhabha calls the "reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity" (Bhabha 112). This process of "reevaluation" has the potential to negotiate the identity of both colonizer and colonized. Thus, "the third space" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility (Meredith 2). It is an 'interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative' space (Bhabha 103).

Hybridity therefore, bridges the gap between the colonizer and the colonized and paves the ground for a reciprocal relationship based on compromise and co-dependence; whereby each of the two parties needs the other for the articulation of their identity. Thus, hybridity does not mean a

conflict or struggle between two racial identities but, a continuous movement between spaces "passing through and between identity itself without origin or arrival" (Ahmed 88). Such a movement is what helps the hybrid to defy stereotypes and to challenge dogmas. Said believes that what gives these stereotypes the chance to persist and develop, is the silence of the orient, "we must not forget that the orientalist's presence is enabled by the orient's effective absence"(Said 208). He incites the eastern scholars to challenge "the dogmas of orientalism"(301) by taking control of their own culture. Said writes:

My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, so that "our" east, "our" orient becomes "ours" to possess and direct. And I have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the peoples of that region to struggle on for their vision of what they are and want to be. (Said)

In order to express their multicultural experiences writers (refugees/bi-cultural) have integrated hybrid narrative strategies in their works to represent two or more cultural points of view within a single narrative space. Those writers create an edge for their writings by reclaiming aspects of their languages and cultures and incorporating them in their works. They express attributes of being both western and members of their indigenous cultures at the same time. Their narratives illustrate how two or more cultures can co-exist and straddle the space of in-betweenness. Thus, works of fiction provide a means for the writer to resist the oppressive stereotypes and the silence imposed upon the East by the Western literary tradition. These writers introduce narratives of real life people in action rather stereotypical figures outside history and civilization. This invites the reader to deconstruct fixed notions of the other construed through biased media representations and political propaganda. According to Said:

[N]arrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision (241).

At the end of *Orientalism*, Said poses a question regarding the role of the writer in demolishing and subverting the stereotypes:

What is the role of the intellectual? Is he there to validate the culture and state of which he is a part? What importance must he give to an independent critical consciousness, an oppositional critical consciousness? (326)

Bhabha believes that the hybrid subject more than anyone else is empowered to intervene actively in both cultures (the home and the host land). He can change and subvert received knowledge. He believes that hybrid identities are never complete in themselves; rather, they are in a constant movement, open to change and transformation. Macleod (2010) argues that the hybrid subject "seems in a better position than others to realize that all systems of knowledge, all views of the world, are never totalizing, whole or pure, but incomplete, muddled and hybrid (248). Hybrid individuals are described by Caryl Philips as: "People who are able to synthesise different worlds in one body and to live comfortably with these different worlds (279). John McLeod argues for the value of this dynamic process of hybridization in the postcolonial subject.

[A writer's] subjectivity is deemed to be composed from variable sources, different materials, many locations-demolishing forever the idea of subjectivity as stable, single, or 'pure'....They are border subjectivities, no longer reliant on fixed notions of home and identity to anchor them to a singular sense of self. Rather the loss of these fixed ideas has been transformed into a hopeful new paradigm where motion, multiplicity...hybridity are gleefully welcomed. (253-254)

Thus, it becomes the duty of hybrid writers such as Leila Aboulela (1964-) to dismantle these stereotypes and reach to a common ground between polarized parties. Through her writings, Aboulela proves how being hybrid allows a writer to "synthesise different worlds in one body" and to negotiate cultural differences in a multicultural world. Being brought up at a westernized environment of a private American school, Aboulela has always adjusted and adapted to cultural negotiations across different places in Cairo, Sudan, Dubai, London and Aberdeen. She manages to accommodate several world views, and

to reconcile binary oppositions of east and west. Aboulela is a British Arab Muslim novelist. She grew up in Khartoum where she attended a Catholic school, which must have given her insights into other cultures and beliefs (Cooper 324). She pursued her university education at the University of Khartoum where she graduated with a degree in economics and then moved to London School of Economics where she got her post-graduate degrees in statistics. Wail S. Hassan (2011) highlighted the privileged position of Arab immigrant writers as hybrid cultural negotiators who can identify with both cultures:

Arab immigrant writers have found themselves placed in that position often expected to interpret their culture for their readers. However, they do not stand outside the "orient" like the European or American Orientalist, since they are of the "orient" by virtue of their background; but they are also of the "occident" by reason of immigration and acculturation. Therefore, their position represents a merger of the two classic stances of the native informant and the foreign expert. (28-29)

This state of moving freely between different cultures is a characteristic feature of Leila Aboulela's life and background. On the very first lines of Peter Cherry's introduction of an interview with her, he expresses this idea of Aboulela's transcultural mobility:

Much like her fictional creations, Aboulela's life has been characterized by movement between a number of different cultures – Sudan, Egypt, Britain, Indonesia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Movement is inscribed within her own background as Aboulela is the daughter of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother. (1)

Tamar Steinitz defines Aboulela as a transnational, postcolonial, and bilingual writer who is

[L]ike the translator, a mediator, using her freedom to move 'back and forth' to promote understanding

between the cultures she straddles. This imagery of movement and mediation places the translator in a space between two languages and cultures. (366)

Aboulela's hybridity is what Bakhtin (1981) terms as "intentional hybridity" that sets different voices against one another without negating their opposing differences. She attempts to avoid "un-resistant English-language texts which make an Islamic worldview intelligible to an English-speaking readership, both Muslim and non-Muslim" (Hassan 309). Thus, Aboulela uses language as a medium of power to refashion and subvert the colonial language by: "inserting untranslatable words into [her] texts (McLeod 29)". By doing this, she shocks/ shakes the reader into doing further research to examine the culture she represents.

Although the novel is written in English, *the Kindness of Enemies* (2015), henceforth (*TKE*), contains words from other languages such as Arabic, Russian, Avar, and French. Aboulela's linguistic hybridity is "reflected through many linguistic shifts from English into classical Arabic as shown in the multiple Arabic references to both religious sources such as the Quran, the authentic Hadiths, and Sufi teachings and non-religious sources such as literary quotes and into colloquial Arabic as reflected in common sayings and proverbs" (Abdel Wahab 230). Moreover, Aboulela inserts some religious idioms in her narrative such as "bismillah" (134), "astaghfir Allah" (228) and, "insh'Allah".

Aboulela's novel *The Kindness of Enemies* runs in two parallel plots: the first plot develops in a contemporary Scotland where the half Sudanese half Russian Natasha Hussein, a Professor of history, studies 19th century Muslim leader Imam Shamil and his fighting for the freedom of Caucasus. The other plot is historic; as it narrates Imam Shamil's resistance against the Russian invasion in the Caucasus.

Aboulela's linguistic hybridity is clear in her novel *The Kindness of Enemies*, where Natasha, the academic scholar, was recalling her memories with her old friend Yasha saying "We would talk our own mix of Russian, Arabic and the English we learnt at school" (113). Indeed, Aboulela's frequent use of the transliterated word '*Jihad*' is a clear example of this strategy as she intends to familiarize the reader with it.

Moreover, in the historical narrative, Aboulela uses language and attach it to power and authority. Despite being an Avar, Imam Shamil shows his ability to speak Russian. After Princess Anna's kidnap by Imam Shamil in exchange for his kidnapped son, Anna is furious against her captor. She fiercely blames him for the adversity that had befallen her because of him:

'I have been dragged here against my will. I lost my daughter'. She paused but the translator did not translate. So the imam could understand her. He was deliberately choosing not to use her language. (TKE² 130)

Later on at the end of their conversation when Shamil tore the letter of madam Drancy's mother believing it a coded message, Anna is angry again and accused his staff of their limited linguistic ability because they cannot differentiate between French and a secret language. Shamil's anger seemed to be roused and "When he spoke, he spoke in her own language, the interpreter made redundant" (TKE 132). In this incident Aboulela touches on Homi Bhabha's "strategic reversal" of power. She also applies Bakhtin's concept of the authoritative discourse that attaches language to power and authority. The dialogue between Anna and Shamil is full of power struggle. Each one of them speaks his own language. Later on in the conversation, the reader comes to know that Shamil knows Russian and speaks it very well. Nevertheless, Shamil's insistence on speaking his language in the beginning reflects his power and authority. Thus, Aboulela made her characters speak more than one language as she inserts words from different languages in her narrative as a way to disrupt the colonizer's language.

In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Aboulela as a hybrid writer brings the enemies together and makes them share similar experiences to highlight a wider humanistic space and to shed light on the meaning of the novel's title. She tries to reconcile the polarized parties by forging an alternative space away from political context. In the historical part of the novel, Aboulela's two main protagonists Anna and Shamil share the experience of losing a child and both understand very well what the loss feels like. During Anna's forced journey to Shamil's territory, she encountered severe hardships and lost her baby daughter. Shamil too was betrayed by the Russian army who kidnapped his son.

² Abbreviation of *The Kindness of Enemies*.

Moreover, both Shamil and Anna share the experience of conquest by the Russians; Anna, whose Georgian homeland was conquered by the Russians, and Shamil who was defending his land against the Russian invasion.

In her novel *The Kindness of Enemies*, Aboulela deconstructs the stereotype of Islam as the religion of hatred and terrorism through her exploration of the concept of *Jihad* and how it has been manipulated for political gains. This is voiced in a conversation between Natasha, the protagonist, and Malak, where the latter said that “Ever Since 9/11, jihad has become synonymous with terrorism” (TKE 9). In order to help the reader see an alternative image of *Jihad*, Aboulela goes back to the indigenous meaning of the term as elucidated in the original Islamic tradition. In Arabic, and in a purely linguistic sense, *Jihad* means struggling or striving for a noble cause with determination (Knapp 82). It is a very comprehensive term; it refers to the struggle against all forms of evil and injustice within one's own self as well as outside. The internal *Jihad* concerns the efforts of Muslims to live by their faith as best as possible. This means to live according to the Islamic dictates and strive to be good Muslims. *Jihad* is thus not limited to the use of military force, which is only one form of it. As a matter of fact, the internal *Jihad* is described by the prophet Muhammad peace be upon him (henceforth PBH) as the greater *Jihad*. When the Prophet came back from the battle of Badr he stated: “We are finished with the lesser jihad; now we are starting the greater jihad” (Al-Bayhaqi). He explained to his followers that fighting against an outer enemy is the lesser *Jihad* and fighting against one's prejudices and temptations is the greater *Jihad*.

The controversy and confusion which fuels the misconception of Islam has been concerned with the military aspect. There are two kinds of *Jihad* namely defensive *Jihad* and pursuing or offensive *Jihad* (Hakim 38). Muslims believe that armed struggle was prescribed in Islam for two reasons; to defend the Muslims, and the oppressed as well, even if they are not Muslims against oppression and the protection of people's right to the worship of god. The other reason is to secure the deliverance of Da'wah or the message of Islam to the entire world, by removing the obstacles preventing it such as the tyrants and their oppressive regimes. The latter kind of *Jihad* which is the pursuing *Jihad*

was a necessity in the past as it was the only way for people to know about the religion of Islam and it was under strict conditions.³

In our age, the deliverance of the message of Islam is possible through the *Jihad* of articulation via broadcasts, satellites and the social media. Furthermore, people now are capable of travelling to distant lands, intermixing with other people and explaining their cultural views with less censorship than before.

Aboulela attempts to compare this to the distortion of the concept in modern times. She delves in history to unveil the real meaning of *Jihad* and shows how the contemporary Western perception of it had a great and traumatic effect on Muslim's lives in the West. In her novel, Aboulela shows this traumatic effect through the character of Osama who is known by Oz, a Muslim British citizen. Oz is a university student in Scotland who is researching the types of weapons used in *Jihad*. He sent his work by e-mail under the title "The sword of imam Shamil" to his teacher Natasha. The incidents that follow are central to the contemporary plot of the novel as the police arrest him because of his research. This changes Oz's life radically and affects him psychologically. After his release, he entered a state of trauma, left his college and lost faith in the British government. This incident does not only affect Oz, but it affects the life of Natasha who finds herself under suspicion. Her academic career is threatened, she has been accused of being a terrorist, has undergone investigation and her apartment has been robbed. Despite her attempts to establish a secure and stable life, and despite her efforts to assimilate in the British society, Natasha finds herself pushed to the margins of the white society of which she will never be part. This incident shows that Any discussion of Jihad, even for research purposes is depicted by the writer as implicated in criminality by the authorities. The security mentality based on flagging persons who use specific words in their communication could be ruinous to people's lives – and at times this ruin is beyond repair.

³ These conditions were mentioned by the Khalif Abu Bakr and reveals the sensitivity of Muslims towards other minorities. When Abu Bakr (R.A.) sent Usamah's army to war he said to them: "Oh army, stop and I will order you (to do) ten (things); learn them from me by heart. You shall not engage in treachery; you shall not act unfaithfully; you shall not engage in deception; you shall not indulge in mutilation; you shall kill neither a young child nor an old man nor a woman; you shall not fell palm trees or burn them; you shall not cut down (any) fruit-bearing tree; you shall not slaughter a sheep or a cow or a camel except for food. You will pass people who occupy themselves in monks' cells; leave them alone (Al-Tabari, 1992).

The two plots of the novel run parallel in a manner that allows two worlds to coexist and two realities to unfold. The interchange between the contemporary Natasha- Osama story and the historic Imam Shamel story urges the reader to compare history with the contemporary context. These two stories are deeply connected even though they belong to different spaces and times. The reader becomes able to distinguish between the original meaning and practice of *Jihad* and the distorted image that is imposed by Western propaganda.

In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Aboulela juxtaposes between the *Jihad* perpetrated by al- Qaeda and the 19th-century Sufi *Jihad* in Russia. Although Imam Shamil's use of *jihad* involves military action, it is evident that he does so to defend his own community against Russian aggression and deception:

Every fight Shamil fought was on the defense. He was protecting his villages against Russian attack. And surrender to the Russians would have meant the end of their traditional way of life, the end of Islam in Dagestan...this type of jihad is different from the horrible crimes of al-Qaeda. (9-10)

Aboulela explains in an in-terview with *The Arab Weekly*: "I was interested in him fighting jihad from a Sufi aspect. This kind of jihad is different from what we see practiced by ISIS and al-Qaeda" (2016). The resistance of Imam Shamil was empowered by spirituality; "For Aboulela, the fact that his political actions were guided by spirituality, it resulted in disciplined politics and a strong sense of determination. It is an important portion that the novel seems to convey equally to contemporary jihadists, whose resistance is described as no more than terrorism" (Mezhoud 11). Aboulela also draws a perfect picture of *Jihad* as she casts it in the light of refugee suffering and martyrdom. Rather than being equated with terrorism, in the story of Shamil's wife Djawarat, *Jihad* is an escape from military aggression and colonialism. A week after his territory had fallen and taken over by the Russians, Shamil had been searching for his wife when an elderly man told him that his wife had fallen from top of the mountain and died. Shamil:

Knelt next to her and lifted up the stones that were crushing her...He cleaned the mud away from what he

was realizing was a miracle. Yes, there was no rigor mortis for the martyr, no putrefaction or decomposition. In this way they are rewarded...he lifted Djawarat and her body was as supple as he remembered it. He wiped her face and her skin felt alive under his fingers...she was living, living with Allah. (TKE 37)

In fact, Aboulela in her novel *The Kindness of Enemies* tries to dispel the negative image associated with the concept of *Jihad* through a conversation between Natasha, the protagonist, her student OZ, and OZ's mother Malak. Aboulela's point of view intersects with Oz' that "the word "*jihad*" then didn't have the same connotation it has now" (9). Aboulela resorts to history to differentiate between 21st century terrorism under the name of *Jihad* and 19th century Jihadist movement led by Imam Shamil who was fighting only for defensive reasons and who refused to resort to violence and terrorism. By drawing on history, Aboulela fights the stereotypes regarding Islam as a religion that spreads violence and terrorism and uses history to solidify her ideas. In a debate between her student Oz, and his mother Malak, Aboulela indicates that "jihad is not something we should be ashamed of. What we are ashamed of is what is done in its name. Not every Muslim war is a jihad. Not suicide bombers or attacking civilians" (10). Malak believes that if Imam Shamil was still alive "He would have seen through these militants- that they 'fulfil neither a contract nor a covenant. That they call to the truth, but they are not its people" (226). Thus, Aboulela exposes the falsity of the contemporary misunderstanding about the concept of *Jihad*. She does this by showing "a noble fighter for freedom and a devout Muslim whose understanding of jihad is very different from today's Islamist fanatics" (Massie). Majed Aladylah maintains that "Shamil represents the moderate Islam free of hatred, extremism, terrorism, fundamental and radical thoughts and movements, creates spaces of coexistence, tolerance and generates a mutual language between different religions and cultures based upon the divine love" (483).

Moreover, Aboulela states in her novel that Shamil's resistance was championed and supported by Queen Victoria "his picture was on the front page of the London Times... the generous defenders of liberty against the brutal forces of the Russian Empire" (8). In addition, it is evident that Shamil did not choose to spend his life fighting but this kind of life was imposed upon him as

he had to defend his own village and his own people against the Russian expansion. He preferred to live a peaceful life “if only they would leave us in peace” (21). In an interview, Aboulela states the following:

What interested me in particular was the difference in the concept of jihad between the two time periods. Shamil's jihad was disciplined and restrained by traditional spirituality and ottoman law (he regarded the Ottoman Sultan as his rightful ruler). Shamil did not endorse suicide attacks and he eventually accepted defeat...his open heart and learned mind make him completely different than present day jihadist (whether Al-Qaeda or otherwise). (Kalb 2016)

Aboulela takes Imam Shamil as a “prime example” of a moral, religious, and kind fighter who only wanted to defend his land and his people against the brutal forces of the Russian empire. On the personal level he is courageous, hates treachery, generous, loves children, kind and courteous to his wives, respectful to his teacher; even when he kidnapped the princess of Georgia Anna to exchange her by his son, he treated her as a guest instead of a hostage.

Thus, Aboulela's novel highlights the point that the definition of *Jihad* has been distorted by contemporary usage as stated by her protagonist Natasha at the end of the novel:

I wanted to compare Shamil's defeat and surrender, how he made peace with his enemies, with modern-day Islamic terrorism that promoted suicide bombings...how did historical change in the very definition of jihad come about?(325).

To conclude, the analysis of the novel shows that hybridity is a way of bridging different cultures and therefore, a way of tolerance and coexistence. The analysis also reveals Leila Aboulela's expertise as border subjectivity in implanting religious belief onto the novel without excluding her English-speaking reading public. She negotiates controversial issues related to her culture and religion as a Muslim with the aim to facilitate a better understanding of their real meaning and remove the misconceptions about them. Thus, she attempted to reeducate western readers of non-western cultures and to eliminate

the obstacles that might stand in the way of productive negotiations and cross-cultural interchange. From her position she is able to dismantle the concept of *Jihad* and show another face of it. Being hybrid both on the biological and cultural levels, Aboulela understands and appreciates the value of hybridity⁴. She also believes that "literature can play a part in helping people to navigate these new differences of culture"(Kamal 2010).

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⁴ Being the daughter of Sudanese father and Egyptian mother.

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