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Displaced belonging: Poetics and politics of belonging in Leila Aboulela's 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out'

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Abstract

This paper offers a political analysis of belonging in postcolonial and migrant literature, focusing on Leila Aboulela's short stories 'The Ostrich' (2018) and 'Missing Out' (2010). As a British Sudanese writer widely acknowledged for her 'authentic' portrayal of Muslim experiences in non-Muslim societies, this paper explores how the politics of belonging are reflected in the poetics of these literary narratives, including the structures, settings, and character portrayals. It employs Nira Yuval-Davis's analytical framework of belonging (2006) to emphasise the role of politics and political projects in the construction and deployment of belonging in the United Kingdom and Sudan. Conducting a comparative analysis of Muslims' experiences of belonging in the diaspora, this paper unfolds the contestation of belonging in the aftermath of migration and provides the concept of displaced belonging. Displaced belonging is characterised by navigating through multiple political landscapes of belonging, as demonstrated in the experiences of Muslim migrants. The conclusion highlights the impact of the politics of belonging on domestic dynamics and daily experiences of belonging at home, as well as the way homemaking in the diaspora challenges these politics. This paper sheds light on the intersectionality of Muslims' experiences in non-Muslim societies through the poetics and politics of belonging. Doing so encourages the consideration

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of Aboulela's works as revered interlocutors of Muslim experiences across various disciplines and provides an interpretive-theoretical framework to enhance the analytical repertoire of literary studies.

Keywords
Belonging, politics of belonging, intersectionality, identity, literary studies, Leila Aboulela

Introduction

This paper examines the application of the sociological concept of politics of belonging in the literary narratives of Leila Aboulela, a renowned British Sudanese writer. It will analyse Aboulela's short stories 'The Ostrich' (2018) and 'Missing Out' (2010), utilising poetics, succinctly defined as 'the study of literature as literature' (Hrushovski, 1976: xv). The analysis will explore how narrative structures, settings, and character portrayals depict Muslims' experiences of belonging and the politics shaping them. Ultimately, the paper unveils the intersectionality of Muslims' belonging in non-Muslim societies, reflecting on the politics thereof.

Aboulela's significance emerges from her adept navigation of contested literary and cultural landscapes. At one level, her writings challenge the historical and political legacies of Orientalism (Said, 1978; Werbner, 2000). More importantly, her representations diverge from those of the 'native informants' (Spivak, 1999), who lend their insider voices to the orientalist tropes, confirming the racist hegemonies in neoliberal societies and global imperial agendas (Nash, 2012).

Hence, the significance of Aboulela's narrative unfolds on various levels. She portrays 'ordinary Muslims navigating faith in challenging situations and unsympathetic societies', deliberately avoiding the depictions of 'good Muslims' and rejecting framing Islam as a rigid identity (Hassan, 2008: 310). In her work, Muslimhood is not predetermined but a perspective through which individuals navigate life. Simultaneously, Aboulela provides a nuanced perspective on Sharia, extending beyond cultural or legal dimensions. Her narrative sees Islam as a dynamic pathway to belonging, emphasising the adaptability of Sharia, which 'blur[s the lines] between personal and public affairs' (Chambers, 2011: 111). Aboulela challenges the conventional view of Islam as solely a societal norm, reintroducing it as intricately tied to individuals' beliefs and aspirations, free from being perceived either as a personal possession or cultural property. This unique approach has established Aboulela as a significant figure in migrant literature, representing Muslims in the West and Anglophone literatures, and her works as distinct from predominantly secular Arab fictions (Hassan, 2008; Malak, 2004; Newns, 2020).

While gender, migration, postcoloniality, and religion have been thoroughly examined in Aboulela's works, the politics of belonging have received comparatively less attention (Ball, 2010; Hasan, 2015; Taha Al-Karawi and Bahar, 2014). Critics, specifically Waïl Hassan (2008), assert that Aboulela's inclination towards the spirituality of Islam, rather than its politics, positions her writing as ideological. Nonetheless, her works

have sparked political inquiries into ideology, faith, and culture (Abbas, 2011; Edwin, 2013; Morey, 2018; Phillips, 2012), offering insightful analyses of (collective) identity, agency, and affiliative feelings and performances. However, in her scholarship, belonging remains a self-explanatory and apolitical notion—a mere sense of at-homeness, sometimes inadvertently relegated to identity (Butt, 2009; Canpolat, 2016; Chaoui, 2023; Osei-Nyame, 2009; Steenkamp, 2022). Efforts to disentangle belonging from these co-implications are infrequent and conclude prematurely, often lacking precision in delineating its dynamic nature (Englund, 2020).

This paper addresses the identified gap by exploring belonging as an analytical category in Aboulela's writing. It aims to discern identity from belonging, where the former encompasses myths and stories about self and others while the latter involves experiences of being part of communities of 'us' and 'them.' Furthermore, the paper seeks to illustrate the politics of belonging, explicitly addressing the boundaries within and between political communities, demarcating the distinctions 'that separate the world between "us" and "them"' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204). This signifies an understanding of how communities of belonging are shaped by political boundaries of belonging, which, in turn, are influenced by their respective political projects. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the intersectionality of Muslims' belonging in non-Muslim societies.

Intersectionality primarily accounts for the invisible experiences of difference as the pervasive relations of power operate and converge (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill Collins, 1990). It challenges the severability of social and analytical categories, advocating for their intertwined ontologies, aiming to 'reformulate the analysis itself' (Combahee River Collective, 1977: 13). Intersectionality's project is twofold: unveiling the obscured experiences of difference and restructuring the analytical categories of race, gender, class, etc., emphasising their co-constitution (Hancock, 2016). Exploring belonging within the framework of intersectionality then involves recognising diverse positionalities across a spectrum, moving away from the monolithic binaries of belonging versus unbelonging into differential belongings.

Therefore, this paper provides a comparative analysis of 'The Ostrich', first published in 1997, and 'Missing Out'. These are two interlinked narratives about a heteronormative Muslim Arab Sudanese couple named Samra and Majdy residing in the United Kingdom. Although 'The Ostrich' was written before 'Missing Out', its narrative timeline succeeds that of 'Missing Out', offering a look into the year Majdy spent alone before marrying Samra. In the aftermath of their migration, they struggle with belonging separately and together. While 'The Ostrich' centres on Samra's viewpoint, 'Missing Out' portrays Majdy's perspective, comparing and connecting their experiences.

Displaced belonging, as used here, refers to the contestation of belonging in the aftermath of migration both at macro and micro levels, serving as the overarching theme in these narratives. This concept draws upon Nira Yuval-Davis's analytical framework of belonging (2006), which proves pertinent for distinguishing belonging from the politics of belonging through the lens of intersectionality. Applying Yuval-Davis's framework, the complexities of displaced belonging are similarly navigated from an intersectional perspective, highlighting how the migratory process triggers a redefinition, confrontation,

or invocation of the subject's belonging. This concept accounts for the dynamics and diverse experiences of belonging as migrants navigate different communities.

In what follows, the imperative of intersectionality is discussed, emphasising moving beyond identity politics, which often renders inter-community differences invisible and becomes a source of tension between communities (Crenshaw, 1991: 1242). The paper then explores the development of belonging as an analytical concept and conceptualises displaced belonging. It subsequently employs Yuval-Davis' theoretical framework for a comparative analysis of 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out'. Considering elements such as narrative structure, characters, and setting, the paper finally delves into their poetics' reflections on the broader political landscape of belonging, depicting displaced belonging in the intersectionality of Muslim migrants' experiences as public and private realms converge.

This interdisciplinary research spans literary and cultural studies, sociology, migration studies, and political history, intending to extend the consideration of Aboulela's works as revered interlocutors of Muslim experiences beyond the confines of literary studies. Literary texts serve as exemplary vehicles for sociological explorations, encapsulating subjective experiences and reflecting structural dimensions. This paper brings forth an interpretive-theoretical framework for scrutinising poetic representations of belonging, thereby enriching the analytical repertoire of literary studies. Moreover, it facilitates political engagement with the intersectionality of Muslims, transcending identity politics by mobilising the concept of displaced belonging.

Intersectionality of Muslims' experiences

Intersectionality, primarily developed through the works of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990), challenges assumptions of inherent homogeneity and normative inclusionary approaches. It resists the reproduction of homogenised categories and identity-based (re)construction of communities, diverging from identity politics (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 1997). By embracing the contingency and multidirectionality of visibility (Hancock, 2016), intersectionality resides in difference (Lorde, 2005). Moreover, it stresses that everyday experiences of power, oppression, and violence do not submit to mathematical calculations or additive approaches (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality, thus, ensures that no one category is a priori, akin to prioritising religion in the experiences of Muslims or gender and race in equality projects of feminism and anti-racism (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020). These traits of intersectionality hold significant relevance for Muslims' experiences of belonging.

Islam operates in particular ways within Muslim communities, where individuals identify with Islam in varying degrees and multiple ways, leading to distinct experiences of Muslimhood. Gender-based, racial and class structures as well as the political project of nation-states play a more significant role in shaping the type of Muslim one is and their sense of belonging than religion itself. Whether living a Muslim life within a society that shares the same faith or navigating it in a non-binary body, the experiences of power, violence, and belonging differ significantly. This underscores the pertinence of

intersectionality, prompting a shift from identity politics towards the structures and apparatuses of belonging.

The prioritisation of religion proved instrumental in the rebuilding of nations, including within the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region, as exemplified by post-revolution Iran (1979) and post-independence Sudan (1958) (Assa, 2023; Fábos, 2011; Hale, 2003). Benedict Anderson (1983) famously argues that categories such as ethnicity operate as imaginary boundaries, dividing individuals between the communities of 'us' and 'them.' Analogously, religion performs as a boundary of belonging, shaping the hegemonies of the nation or groups exclusively by imposing a specific identity narrative.

Similar to ethnicity, the invocation of religious belonging transcends the confines of the nation-state, a phenomenon advocated by the transnational concept of Ummah (McLouglin, 1996). A noteworthy manifestation of this transnational religious identity was witnessed after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1989), particularly in the United Kingdom. The global reaction in the Islamic world and among Muslims, known as the Rushdie affair, underscored a perceived offence and threat to Islam, catalysing the construction of a unifying identity based on religious affiliation. The invocation of religious identity effectively brought together various marginalised communities in the United Kingdom, organising them along the vector of Muslimhood. As a collective narrative, Muslim identity empowered marginalised groups of South Asians in Western societies, providing them with political visibility and addressing the perceived threat. However, the simultaneous dismissal of internal differences, including gender, ethnicity, nationality, and class, and the imposition of homogenous Muslim identity on these communities, as observed in the experiences of Sikhs in the United Kingdom, revealed a dual function with the rise of Islamophobia, fostering an imagined community of 'them' within and beyond the United Kingdom (Birt, 2009).

Challenging nationalist boundaries, 'diasporas as scattered, uncontained and uncontainable minorities have historically been the target of racialised and xenophobic nationalist imaginings' (Werbner, 2000: 308). The homogenisation of the multi-ethnic demographics with different religions as Arabs and Muslims both within SWANA region and its diasporas reflects the conflation of religion, ethnicity, language, and nationality (Naber, 2000). This oversimplification overlooks significant historical communities, such as the longstanding Jewish population in the region, and non-Arabic-speaking like Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, not to mention rendering other ethnicities, such as Kurdish people, invisible. The conflation further extends to the problematic merger of belonging with identity, contributing to the racialisation of these diverse groups (Modood and Werbner, 1997; Volpp, 2003).

While scholars lack consensus on categorising Muslims within the framework of race, as discussed extensively by Andrew Shryock (2008), there is a substantial exploration of the material and political consequences of this essentialisation. The implications include the criminalisation of Muslims, legal bans, and emergence of hostile political discourses such as 'clash of civilisation' and 'war on terror,' stereotypical representations in Western media, state-sponsored sanctions, and imperialist military interventions in Muslim countries—most notably observed in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars

(Abu-Lughod, 2015; Ahmed and Matthes, 2017; Jamal and Naber, 2008). Post-9/11, these consequences have come to light, underscoring the material and political impacts of anti-Muslim racism on the lives of Muslims (Alsultany, 2013; Cooke, 2007; Puar, 2007).

In the context of the monolithic conceptualisation of Muslim diasporas, often portrayed in identitarian terms as a homogeneous bloc and reduced to the paradigm of 'us' versus 'them,' there is a tendency to override the nuances of identity and the complexities of belonging. To address this limitation, understanding Muslim diasporas' histories and the intricate interplay of power in their experiences becomes crucial. Before engaging with Aboulela's nuanced representation of Muslim diasporas and the intersectionality of belonging, it is necessary to lay out the theoretical framework of belonging.

Belonging: An analytical category

Addressing 'the tightly groupist and the more loosely affiliative forms of self-understanding—as well as the transitional forms between these polar types' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 20) necessitates moving beyond identity, as the conceptual category lacks analytical purchase. Floya Anthias (2008) notes a 'symbiotic' connection between identity and belonging in contemporary discussion of migration, often addressed together, with an undue focus on identity and neglect of its structural dimensions. She offers a foundational distinction between the two concepts:

> Identity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and myths of destiny with associated strategies and identifications. Belonging, on the other hand, is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric and the ways in which social bonds and ties are manifested in practices, experiences, and emotions of inclusion (2008: 8).

While identity revolves around stories, representations, performances, and institutions that shape one's sense of self, belonging is fundamentally concerned with the dynamics of 'exclusion, inclusion, access, and participation' (Anthias, 2008: 8).

Recent migration studies have introduced new perspectives on belonging, marking a shift from prior conceptualisation as represented by Anderson (1983), Barth (1998), and Elwert (1989). The discourse of belonging in the aftermath of migration has sparked a focus on the spatial dimension of belonging (Anthias, 2002, 2006; Valentine and Skelton, 2003) and its intersectionality (Anthias, 2008; Christensen, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2007).

Yuval-Davis notably advances the understanding of belonging by deconstructing it as an analytical category and emphasising its intersectionality. Premised upon belonging as feeling at home and safe (Ignatieff, 2001), Yuval-Davis (2006) identifies three different yet interconnected components: (1) social locations as positionalities along multiple power axes; (2) identifications and emotional attachments representing the personal aspect of belonging, encompassing the cognitive and affective dimensions; and (3) ethical and political values that undergird belonging, assessing and evaluating one's and other's belongings. She unfolds the politics of belonging, stating that 'the politics

of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways' (2006: 197). Yuval-Davis highlights the multidimensionality of belonging by exploring how individuals and groups create bonds through social processes, practices, political pursuits, and personal compliance. Her work expands the understanding of belonging beyond mere identification and collective association, transcending the questions of rights and duties, entitlement and status, and delving into the dynamic nature of boundaries that determine belonging and hierarchies within and across them. Referencing John Crowley's (1999) description of the politics of belonging as 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance', Yuval-Davis (2006) emphasises the role of belonging in determining the degree of explicit or exclusive allocation of resources, access to power and conditioning the feelings of safety and at-homeness.

While politics of belonging regulate and replicate collective affiliations within a community, displaced belonging emerges as an alternative that involves the dissociation of belonging from its meaning-making context and the political projects that shaped it. Displaced belonging is characterised by navigating through multiple political landscapes of belonging, as demonstrated in the experiences of migrants. In the light of intersectionality, it acknowledges shifts and relationality in social power dynamics, values, positionalities, and performances, attributing new meanings to personal and collective affiliations. Moreover, displaced belonging recognises the translatability of belonging; oftentimes, these affiliations are translated into experiences of unbelonging. However, as migrants traverse and transcend the political landscapes of belonging across different communities, boundaries of belonging between communities shapeshift or illustrate a continuum, despite being erected by different, even opposing, political projects. In this context, one's gender performances, which once signified belonging within a distinct political landscape, fail to retain significance as markers of gender belonging and instead undergo a translation into racialised (un)belonging within a new community. Similarly, while religious affiliation may suggest affiliation with opposing communities, social class maintains its translatability and transitions from boundaries of belonging to a connecting bridge, ensuring that class belonging preserves its enduring significance. Building on this conceptual and theoretical clarification of displaced belonging, the following argument will analyse the poetics of belonging at multiple narrative levels—examining narrative structures, settings, and character portrayals—through a comparative reading of 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out'.

The poetics of belonging

In 'The Ostrich', Samra returns to London after a short trip to Khartoum, concealing the news of her pregnancy and having doubts about her sense of belonging in the life she shares with Majdy. Despite a romantic subplot with a former admirer, Samra's feeling of unbelonging in London triggers deep reflections on and emotional attachments to Islamic practices in Khartoum. Her religious performances, constrained by Majdy due to concerns about societal integration, prompt Samra to question the authenticity of

their life in London. The narrative unfolds through Samra's memories, traversing borders between Sudan and the United Kingdom, ultimately creating a circular narrative where belonging and unbelonging become 'inextricably linked' (Christensen, 2009).

In contrast, 'Missing Out' begins with Majdy's recollections of his migration to London before and after Samra entered his life. The story concludes with her absence as Samra leaves to visit Khartoum. From Majdy's perspective, there is a straightforward trajectory to belonging in London, involving the right to enter the country, reside, work, and plan a future. However, this pursuit, promising English belonging and a secure future, uproots his belonging to his faith. Ironically, the journey depletes Majdy's faith in London, leaving him uncertain, alone, and distanced from the people, things, and places he loves. Far from the anticipated future, Majdy immerses himself in past memories. Together, these narratives present personal experiences of displaced belonging and collectively stage the intricate politics of belonging.

A social location called the third world

In both narratives, there are explicit references to the concept of the Third World, shedding light on its implication in the United Kingdom. Majdy's opening remark in 'The Ostrich', as Samra arrives at Heathrow Airport, sets the tone: '"You look like something from the Third World"' (85). Historically, the term 'Third World' denoted societies not aligned with the Western bloc in the latter part of the twentieth century. However, in 'The Ostrich', the characterisation of Samra as a 'third-worlder' extends to fellow passengers who, despite merely sharing a northward journey, food, and smiles on board, come to share a social location as they arrive in London. Their belonging, disrupted by the border crossing, is displaced. Their dislocation is symbolised by their 'clothes that seemed natural a few hours back, now crumpled and out of place' (85). The narrative subtly uses linguistic allegory to portray their subsequent de-contextualisation, with Samra saying that in the terminal, they were: 'chastened by the perfect announcement, one after another, words we could understand, meanings we could not' (86). The concept of the Third World is reified by race, ethnicity, and nationality, further invoking gendered implications of 'backward' Arab men and their 'oppressed' women.

Within this construct, Western nations hierarchically position themselves as 'first-world,' complementing their self-image as 'modern' and 'civilised' (Said, 1978, 1994). London, as one of the settings in 'The Ostrich', embodies 'first-world' ideals which Majdy enumerates for Samra as gender equality, the insignificance of disabilities, and inconsequential class differences in shaping the future. Majdy explicitly acknowledges the hierarchical divide, declaring, '[e]very one of them is better than us', while pointing out derogatory graffiti on the mosque wall: 'Paki go home' and 'Black bastards' (92–93). Samra reflects on the ubiquity of whiteness, questioning her visibility: 'How would I recognise them while they can so easily recognise me?' (93). The narrative represents English belonging as nearly invisible, selectively utilising features such as blue eyes and yellow hair to capture the centrality of whiteness in the hegemonic formulation of English belonging. Although these features are perceived as markers of English belonging from Samra's perspective, they do not represent the inherent complexity and diversity

of 'Englishness'. Instead, they serve to construct the hierarchies shaping Samra's experiences as a non-white person in London. In parallel, specific differences such as Samra's name, skin colour, lips, and hair become hyper-visible and 'de-naturalised' in the context of the United Kingdom (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Harding, 1991), contributing to the differential power of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In contrast, 'Missing Out' offers insights into the distinct politics of belonging in the United Kingdom. Majdy characterises London's beggars as having a 'Third World style'. In his view, '[it] did not look right or feel right that white people should be poor […]. It was unnatural that he was better off than them'. This positionality becomes inscrutable to him, instantiating Anthias' concept of 'translocational positionality.' 'A translocational positionality is one structured by the interplay of different locations relating to gender, ethnicity, race and class (amongst others), and their at times *contradictory* effects' (Anthias, 2008: 15). Majdy's position on the class power axis clashes with his situatedness along the axes of ethnicity, nationality, gender, etc., showcasing the inherent nuances within imagined communities of the Third and First World.

Both stories delve into the multiplicity and sometimes contradictory interplay of power axes within these categories, i.e., intersectionality thereof, portraying the Third World as a social location. They demonstrate that social locations are power locations since they are defined based on 'the grids of power' within society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In 'The Ostrich', belonging is contingent and context-specific, while 'Missing Out' frames its differential and relational nature. Belonging is depicted as a spectrum, a multifaceted continuum of relational dynamics involving inclusion and exclusion.

Yuval-Davis cautions against the conflation of social locations with identity, stating that this conflation is 'often essentialist and racialised' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 202). Remaining vigilant against the tendency of social locations to homogenise collective attributes, enforcing one-directional affiliations is crucial. Belonging cannot be exclusively confined to social locations. The performative, experiential, and narrational dimensions of belonging are pivotal in its construction. Attributing belonging requires compliance and enactment from individuals. Yuval-Davis's framework facilitates the recognition of agency, thereby complicating the operation of belonging. This framework elucidates how characters navigate, reject, subvert, or comply with their social locations, providing insight into the imposition of belonging within the broader socio-political context. Moving to the next section, the focus shifts to identification and emotional attachment.

'I' not 'we': Identification and emotional 'pegs'

Identities are selective narratives, according to Yuval-Davis (2006), which are crafted by and about individuals or communities to articulate who they are, demarcate distinctions, and clarify who they are not. These narratives involve strategic identifications and are relational, contextual, and recursive. The recursive aspect underscores broader sociological complexities. Identification with a specific narrative, no matter how strong, may encounter restrictions imposed by external factors—objective measures like social

categories, societal power structures, and/or racial hierarchies—a dynamic unfolding in the narratives to be explored.

'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out' centre around a middle-class, cis-heteronormative Arab Muslim Sudanese couple navigating life in London. Each narrative is filtered through the perspectives, thoughts, and emotions of Samra and Majdy, respectively. The lens of character focalisation provides direct access to their personal identifications and (non-verbal) experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Samra and Majdy's viewpoints illustrate the ways they navigate their identity towards and away from their multiple, shifting, and contradictory social locations.

In 'The Ostrich', an unexpected encounter with her former admirer, whom she had nicknamed Ostrich back in university, and his bride during the plane journey introduces a romantic subplot. This narrative layer interweaves stories about Samra's past in Khartoum and who she was. In London, she describes herself as '[a] stranger suddenly appearing on the stage with no part to play, no lines to read' (93). However, memories resurface of her vibrant university days when she was cheerful and confident, a desirable and sociable woman, even exhibiting a playful and somewhat cruel attitude towards Ostrich. She reminisces:

> Jangly earrings, teeth smacking chewing gum, and kohl in our eyes. The tobes slipping off our carefully combed hair, lifting our hands, putting them back on again. Tightening the material, holding it under our left arm. I miss these gestures, already left behind. Majdy says, "If you cover your hair in London they'll think I am forcing you to do that. They won't believe it is what you want." So I must walk unclothed, imagining cotton on my hair, lifting my hand to adjust an imaginary tobe. (94–95)

Here, Samra identifies with a group of educated Muslim Sudanese women leisurely walking in public. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's argument (2006) that emotions coalesce around social objects, the veil becomes a significant emotional peg for Samra, a belonging deprived of her in London. Yuval-Davis contends: 'As a rule, the emotional component of people's constructions of themselves and their identities becomes more central the more threatened and less secure they feel' (2006: 202).

Samra's narrative of her and the group of girls thus takes a new turn, portraying a collective narrative, where Samra incorporates a gamut of sensory perceptions to vividly evoke what stands out as the most elaborate scene in 'The Ostrich'. Samra recalls: 'The sunset prayers […] I will always see the grass, patches of dry yellow, the rugs of palm fibre laid out. They curl at edges, and when I put my forehead on the ground I can smell the grass underneath […] we must hurry, for it is as if the birds have heard the azan and started to pray before us' (95). She recollects the ritual of congregational prayer at the university—a gathering of students, professors, girls, boys, birds, and the surrounding natural world in unison. Whether praying or not, Samra says: 'I would know that I was part of this harmony, that I needed no permission to belong' (95). However, in London, where 'the birds pray discreetly', Samra prays alone, and Majdy does not pray (96). This stark contrast prompts Samra to question her sense of belonging to London and Majdy, symbolised by her confusion regarding her pregnancy.

In 'Missing Out', the romantic conflict centres around Majdy's different identification as Muslim Arab Sudanese, beginning with his inconsistent prayer practices. The initial clash occurs when Samra arrives at his student flat to find out he does not have a prayer mat and has not prayed during his solitary year in London. This revelation disappoints Samra, leading to their first disagreement. To mend the situation, Majdy takes her to the central mosque to purchase a prayer mat and compass to Mecca. By embracing the possibility of praying again, Samra uses '"I" not "we"' when discussing prayer, differentiating their religious identities, a detail Majdy perceives as 'proper and respectful'. However, the conflict resurfaces when Samra asks: 'Was he not a believer?' In response, Majdy confirms, albeit half-heartedly. He also thinks he is 'lazy and disinterested' in his religious commitment, which is a distraction and inconvenience in London.

Despite the honeymoon days ending and the ongoing struggle, Majdy values Samra's caring, supportive, and generous presence, describing her as holding his days up 'with pegs. Five prayers, five pegs'. In the closing lines of 'Missing Out', the absence of Samra's prayer mat brings forth a profound reflection, leading Majdy to recognise his emotional anchor of belonging—metaphorically in the prayer mat, but in fact, to Samra, his faith and the community encompassing them. As such, Samra's characterisation transcends the confines of her role as a romantic partner, defying traditional heterosexual relations into an anchor of belonging in the aftermath of displacement.

In 'The Ostrich', Samra rarely describes her togetherness with Majdy in terms of 'we/us'. Only when she remembers the happy moments of their marriage or mainly when upon her return home, Majdy lays his fears and feelings bare before her:

> I was afraid you wouldn't come back […] When I saw you in the airport today, you brought back many memories to me. Of people I love and left behind, of what I once was years ago. I envy you, and you find that funny, don't you, but it's true. I envy you because you are displaced, yet intact, unchanged, while I question everything and I am not sure of anything anymore. (102)

Samra continues to remember: 'And it was only then […] that I told him about *our* baby' (emphasis added 102). These instances highlight the dynamic and ever-changing nature of identity narratives, oscillating between being and becoming (Fortier, 2000; Hall, 2007; Probyn, 1996).

Samra's self-characterisation is deeply grounded in her faith, manifested by her frequent remembrance and the gender enactment of Muslimhood, notably veiling and daily prayers. While Samra is selective about her religious identification, where her faith serves as the wellspring of her belonging, Majdy's character evolves with the realisation of his lack of faith. In 'Missing Out', he acknowledges that 'this country chips away at one's faith […], even faith in itself,' unveiling a fresh exploration of belonging that problematises the centrality of religious category in the identification of Muslims. Identifications and emotional attachments are dynamic and diverse, depending on the participatory and performative aspects thereof (Butler, 2006). The extent of belonging relates to how individuals engage with, enact, or resist collective identifications. As discussed in

the following section, these constituents of belonging, as well as desires for future belongings, are shaped by ethical and political values.

Values of belonging

In addition to social networks, identifications, and practices, the shared values among individuals constitute a pivotal element of belonging, influencing belonging in both public and private domains. Specifically, it is the ethical and political values that serve as the foundation for social locations, identities, and emotional connections. In the previous section, Samra and Majdy's emotions and psychological dispositions were communicated through character focalisation. The character focalisation is a narrative vessel that also provides access to characters' norms and values, as well as their knowledge and judgement systems.

In 'The Ostrich', Samra sees the 'essence' of her country as 'the poise between normality and chaos. The awe and the breathtaking gratitude for simple things' (98), as '[a] place where people say, "Allah alone is eternal"' (98). Aligning with Samra's core values, she admires people who exhibit a culture of generosity, piety, and intimacy despite economic poverty and a corrupted system. Conversely, Majdy perceives these behaviours as a 'primitive tribal mentality and so inefficient' (98). Majdy is critical of Khartoum's economic deprivation, injustice, and political suppression.

In 'Missing Out', he shares his disappointment with Khartoum and his reasons for leaving, including the lack of infrastructure, ideological favouritism, and a tight net of community. Majdy's desires for an uninterrupted daily life, for people to be supported, encouraged, and equal, and for the future to be based on hard work and accomplishment rather than mere speculation point to a new direction—London. He enumerates his reasons for remaining in London and building a future. The abundance of opportunities and resources, for example, advanced living conditions, efficient educational system and well-functioning transportation centre his desire for English belonging.

Yuval-Davis's insight is pertinent for understanding Majdy's value judgements as the politics of belonging in effect. She emphasises that '[e]mancipatory ethical and political values can, under certain conditions, be assimilated into inherent personal attributes of members belonging to specific national and regional collectives. In practice, these values can become exclusionary rather than inclusive markers of identity' (2006: 212–213). In the early scenes of 'The Ostrich', Majdy overtly expresses disapproval of what he perceives as regressive gender practices among Arabs and Africans, particularly citing the use of black abayas and the practice of women walking behind men. Conversely, he proudly extols the equitable treatment of women in London, asserting moral superiority over other Arabs and Africans due to his embrace of these emancipatory values of feminism. In this context, the portrayal of London as a 'civilised' and 'modern' society becomes intertwined with attributing these characteristics to its residents.

As residents of the United Kingdom, Samra and Majdy are implicitly expected to align with these values, thereby distancing themselves from other religious and ethnic gender practices that indicate different values. Majdy's perception of Sudan as backwards in

nature prompts his process of disidentification with it. Simultaneously, Samra's commitment to the values of Sudan creates a contradiction that possibly hinders their belonging and potentially is perceived as a threat to the liberal values of Western societies. The transformation of the emancipatory values associated with feminism and gender equality as the inherent traits of Western societies, therefore, translates them into exclusionary and racialised markers for non-Western identities.

Having observed the centralisation of certain ideologies and political values within communities and the consequential impact on individuals' inclusion or exclusion, the subsequent section delivers analysis of the discussed components of belonging as they form the boundaries of belonging. This dynamic encapsulates the intricate interplay known as the politics of belonging.

Politics of belonging

Beyond being a mere relic, a possessive attribute, or individual performance, the malleability of belonging implies intricate political dynamics shaping its formation. Yuval-Davis clarifies that 'the politics of belonging is all about potentially meeting other people and deciding […] whether they are "us" or "them"' (2006: 204). In other words, politics of belonging reflect not only the political pursuits of these communities or shape them but also encompass the establishment and maintenance of their identities, delineating value systems, structuring the power grid in the community, and determining community boundaries and their permeability.

The United Kingdom and Sudan represent distinct communities of belonging in 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out'. Exploring the spatial setting enables readers to understand the juxtaposition of Khartoum and London, comparing their socio-political and cultural contexts. More significantly, attention is drawn to the boundaries between these geopolitical settings and the crossing of these boundaries. Therefore, this section investigates the politics of belonging in Khartoum and London, highlighting each nation-state's distinct political agendas. However, given that the characters' actions primarily unfold in their flat in London, the attention veers towards the politics of belonging's permeability in the diaspora home, their interconnections across time, space and communities, and the intersectionality of belonging in domestic spaces.

The narratives of 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out' unfold against the backdrop of Khartoum in 1985, extending to early 1990s London. Samra's revelation in 'Missing Out' coincides with the 1985 student protests, a pivotal period in Sudanese history marked by widespread civil protests and demonstrations. These events were triggered by economic hardships, political discontent, and the implementation of traditional Sharia law in September 1983, aiming to fortify the government by appealing to the powerful Muslim population in Sudan and building an Islamic state (Scott, 1985; Woodward, 1985). This legislative change impacted family law, criminal law, and public morality. It had profound and enduring effects on Sudanese society, including non-Muslim demographics, ultimately leading to the ousting of Jafaar Nimeiry's government (1969–1985) and ushering in a transitional period followed by military coups and civil wars.

'Missing Out' implicitly alludes to the execution of Islamic political figure Mahmoud Mohammed Taha (1908–1985), symbolising broader opposition by Muslims. A democratic approach to Islam and its separation from state politics brought many Sudanese, including Samra, to the mass protests in the spring of 1986. While trying to get a scholarship and leave Khartoum, Majdy's attempt to leave the country foreshadows an upward swing in migration since independence. In 'The Ostrich', Samra's recent visit to Khartoum confirms that life is normal, yet society is grappling with economic challenges. In Khartoum, she observes that the desire to emigrate and feelings of depression are pervasive (90).

According to Anita Fábos (2011), the construction of the hegemonic post-independent Sudanese identity can be traced back to 20th-century Anglo-Egyptian colonialism. Sudan's independence aligned with the surge of nationalism, during which the Muslim Arab community centralised their religious and ethnic identity, shaping Sudan's hegemonic boundaries of belonging (Fábos, 2011). This hegemony, intertwined with elements of nationalism and colonialism, underscores specific social locations along hierarchies of ethnicity, religion, class, and gender. Fábos (2011) sheds light on the racial tensions in Sudan, highlighting the divergent circumstances faced by Muslims and Arabs compared to Africans, blacks, and Christians.

'The Ostrich' addresses the racial landscape of Sudan, mainly through Majdy's observations, which unveil the distressing racism exhibited by northerners towards southerners (88–89). This racial tension, involving the Muslim and Arab demographics predominantly located in the north of Sudan, contrasts starkly with the impoverished and deprived black and Christian populations residing mainly in the oil-rich regions of South Sudan. This racial divide played a pivotal role in bringing about South Sudan's secession in 2011.

Compliance with Islamic practices and identification as Arab, expressed through performances of Muslimhood and embodiment of Arab whiteness, particularly bestows privileges upon those who adhere to these practices, as outlined by Fábos (2011). Women, in particular, receive these privileges through their gender performances, playing an integral role in Sudan as bearers of responsibility for upholding the boundaries of an Islamic nation (Hale, 1995). The national belonging in Sudan equates Arabness with whiteness and female Muslimhood with propriety (Fábos, 2011). Racialised and gendered boundaries consequently shape Sudanese belonging, and, as Samra exemplifies, women's inclusion in Sudan is regulated through their religious performances and ethnic identification.

As a heteronormative Muslim Arab woman, Samra is educated, independent, politically active, socially mobile and sexually desirable in the urban spaces of Khartoum, epitomising belonging to the middle class. In contrast, Ostrich, a Muslim Arab heteronormative man who belongs to a lower social status, implied by his clothes, and who could not finish his education due to his visual impairment, becomes a less desirable prospect for Samra. In 'The Ostrich', Samra recalls a significant moment of decision, where she chose Majdy over Ostrich: 'a big wedding, a good-looking bridegroom and the chance to go abroad. No reason for me to refuse' (88). Samra's migration to London as part of the student diaspora is compared to Ostrich and his bride's migration to Egypt as labour migrants, revealing the continuum of the axis of class transnationally.

The scrutinisation of the setting in 'The Ostrich' highlights class-based, racial and ethnic struggles that disrupt the idealised portrayal of belonging that Samra paints based on her social location.

Heathrow Airport, serving as the immediate spatial setting in 'The Ostrich', symbolises not only borders but also their permeability. During the bus ride between the airport and home, Samra contrasts the landscapes of London and Khartoum, measuring her familiarity and strangeness with the environment and the weather. Upon returning to their student flat, the perforated computer printouts at home and racial slurs on the wall of the mosque set the context for early 1990s English society. This period coincides with debates surrounding the inclusion of a burgeoning Muslim diasporic community in Europe. It signals a more extensive transformation in the migration policies of the United Kingdom, moving away from the politics of multiculturalism towards neoliberal agendas and assimilationist strategies for the years to come.

Multiculturalism and integrationist policies, historically linked with the Labour government in the United Kingdom, served as strategic measures designed to tackle labour shortage in the post-World War II and constituted an integral part of Britain's reconstruction. The British Nationality Act of 1948 granted citizenship to the British Empire and Commonwealth people based on their economic contributions, giving rise to a generation of migrants from the West Indies and South Asia, including Muslims (Modood and Werbner, 1997). However, the infamous speech by Enoch Powell (1912–1998), a Tory politician, underscores that English belonging in the post-imperial era continued to be determined by 'skin colour and descent' (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 210). Samra's consideration of the overt attributes such as yellow hair and blue eyes in 'The Ostrich' underscores the persistent role of whiteness in shaping the hegemonic belonging in the United Kingdom. Similarly, Majdy's realisation that attaining English belonging after building a future in London would forever lack that ancestral connection to London faces a bitter realisation in 'Missing Out'.

Diverging from the political project of multiculturalism, which had become an identifier for the Labour Party, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (1979–1990) pursued neoliberal agendas that similarly emphasised economic contribution, allowing for the integration of immigrants into society via their labour (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, following the Rushdie affair and the anti-war sentiment among British Muslim minorities in the months leading up to the Gulf War (1990), new debates surrounding immigrants and their belonging in the United Kingdom emerged (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). In the context of the perceived threat to national identity, Muslim migrants' outrage and solidarity were interpreted as disloyalty to the British nation. This interpretation gave rise to the controversial statement by Norman Tebbit, another Tory politician from Thatcher's government, famously known as the 'Cricket Test' (1990). The 'Cricket Test' was Tebbit's proposal for assessing the loyalty and assimilation of ethnic minority groups, particularly immigrants from South Asia, into British society. It was controversial for its nationalist undertones and oversimplification of belonging as merely performative, potentially exacerbating feelings of alienation among those who did not overtly perform these sentiments. As a result, migrants were

pressured to assimilate and express loyalty and emotional engagement with the United Kingdom and British values (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Performative politics of belonging: New and old gestures

In 'The Ostrich', Samra observes Majdy deliberately adopting new gestures, emulating specific gender performances to align with the 'modern' expectations in the English context, despite his Arab and African identity. This intentional effort to identify with English values and distance himself from stereotypes of being fanatical or non-modern is recurrently portrayed in the narrative to the extent that Majdy's gaze internalises the hegemonic norms, vocalising the boundaries of English society (Fanon, 2008). Majdy's internalised value system reflects the premise that Muslim Arab men, including himself, are inherently oppressive, and their wives are inevitably oppressed. Consequently, when he advises Samra not to wear a tobe, it not only reinforces racial bias but also compromises Samra's agency. This specific instance sheds light on the intricate politics of belonging, where racist, sexist, and Islamophobic hegemonies mutually reinforce each other.

Building on the earlier discussion, it becomes evident that Samra's social status in Sudan was intricately tied to gender dynamics, not derived from formal rights and a discourse of equality, as emphasised in English values. Her status was interwoven in her role within the broader social hierarchy, specifically among women like herself. In this context, she garnered honour and pleasure, as evidenced by her preferences in wearing tobe and Islamic practices. This example further underscores the politics of belonging, where racist, sexist, and nationalist hegemonies interlink. It prompts reflections on the complex interplay between gender and sexual freedom and their interaction with other forms of oppression. Additionally, it emphasises that an exclusive focus on gender equality or sexual liberation overlooks the intersectionality of belonging, particularly concerning the power dynamics of race and religion (Bilge, 2010; Puar, 2007).

Therefore, belonging in English society has been contingent on social location, emotional attachment, and identification with English values of gender equality, democracy, and performative patriotism. This political climate set the stage for the emergence of Samuel Huntington's political thesis of the 'clash of civilisations,' portraying Islam as irreconcilable with the West and inherently patriarchal and anti-democratic (Bilge, 2010; Werbner, 2000). These prevailing misconceptions perpetuating dichotomies of Muslim women as victims of oppressive Muslim men framed them in common but distinct ways as a threat and incompatible with the democratic values of Western societies (Moallem, 2001, 2008). The watershed moment of 9/11 instigated a paradigm shift, propelling Muslims from being invisible citizens to hypervisible subjects, casting them through a series of controlling images portraying them as potential terrorists, inherently violent, and culturally subservient (Alsultany, 2006; Cainkar, 2002). Controlling images 'are designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life' (Hill Collins, 1991: 68), thereby depoliticising the nuanced experiences of living. Subsequently, this period saw an increase in the United Kingdom's military intervention in the SWANA region in the name of democracy,

human rights, and liberal ideals of gender equality (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Jamal and Naber, 2008).

While discussions on the politics of belonging have predominantly unfolded in the public sphere at national and transnational levels, the subsequent section shifts focus to explore the impact of racist and Islamophobic politics of belonging within the private space. After all, the essence of belonging, encapsulating feelings of safety and being at home, becomes intricately interwoven with the dynamics of the domestic space.

Intersectionality of belonging: A domestic case

While the setting in these two narratives oscillates between Sudan and the United Kingdom, for the most part, it lingers at home, the domestic space. 'The Ostrich' vividly depicts Samra and Majdy's student flat, characterised by its claustrophobic and temporary nature, with thin walls. This space is portrayed as permeable, allowing elements from the outside world to enter, such as images, messages, and interactions through windows, memories, and sentiments from public spaces. 'Missing Out' demonstrates how Majdy's public life is directly influenced by their domestic life, which settles and unsettles him, refuting the divide between public and private spaces. 'The Ostrich' narrates how, in this flat, Samra often sits on the floor to make strings out of Majdy's computer printouts, unrolling her memories. She finds solace in the moments when Majdy forgets about the outside world and 'would whistle the tunes of Sudanese songs [they] knew long ago' (96). Therefore, their student flat in London resembles a diaspora space by superimposing sensory elements and experiences from Khartoum and London, and the influx of news and goods contributes to this merging and fusion.

On another front, the narratives challenge the conventional association of home as a female space and, more significantly, Samra as a Muslim woman confined within the domestic realm, lacking agency. Comparing Samra's engagement with the public sphere in Khartoum and London highlights how the politics of belonging influence her social presence. Samra's performance of her identity as a Muslim Sudanese woman allows her participation in public life in Khartoum, marked by her mobility, political involvement, and her appeal as a heterosexual, educated woman.

In stark contrast, Samra's alienation originates from daily interactions, whether with the librarian or the bus driver. The racial tensions she confronts in London drive her to retreat into the domestic sphere. An illuminating incident in 'Missing Out' highlights this tension when a teacher's condescending remark, upon discovering her origin from a war-torn region, causes Samra to recoil and seek refuge in her home. These experiences challenge the conventional notion of Muslim women as insular and resistant to integration, contradicting cultural essentialist views. Samra's presence in the public sphere of Khartoum often exceeds that of Muslim men. At the same time, her social participation in London is hindered by xenophobia and racism, confining her in domestic space. According to Avtar Brah, '[t]he question of home, therefore, is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances'. She continues: 'It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of "belonging"' (1996: 189).

'The Ostrich' challenges the association of home with feelings of safety and belonging. Instead, it depicts home as a space where belonging is not always granted and is negotiated along multiple axes of power. After a dinner party where Samra mentions the permissibility of polygamy in Islam, Majdy punishes her, necessitating her to conform and comply with Western values of belonging internally when she cannot belong externally. In Majdy's words: '"It's worse when you don't understand. […] At least have a feeling that you have said something wrong. They can forgive you for your ugly colour, your thick lips, and rough hair, but you must think modern thoughts, be like them on the inside if you can't be from the outside"' (94). This highlights how the politics of belonging in the public sphere continues in the relationship and at home. With racism and Islamophobia shaping the politics of belonging, the dynamics of othering rooted in power disparities give rise to gender-based oppressions at home. Samra's experiences of being othered at home are an extension of her unbelonging to London.

In parallel, Samra observes the cherished moments of their marriage in the same flat when memories of Khartoum bound them and their emotional attachment to one another protects them from the world outside. 'Missing Out' expands on Majdy's emotional attachment to Samra, challenging racialised perceptions of Muslim Arab households as inherently oppressive and violent, adding depth to his character. Brah (1996) offers a fresh perspective on 'home' in the diasporic context. She highlights its tangible sensory elements and everyday experiences, dispelling the notion of it as a purely mythical construct. Lucinda Newns (2020) further builds upon this idea, focusing on the concept of 'homemaking' and its connection to the material conditions and daily activities of migrants in a new and often precarious environment. She critiques James Clifford's 'roots' and 'routes' paradigm of diaspora (1999), arguing that it overlooks the importance of dwelling within the diaspora experience. Homemaking, therefore, re-establishes roots and anchors belonging. Home is a central point shaped by various spatial codes, mutually shaping daily life and carrying political implications, known as 'domestic intersections' (Newns, 2020).

Both narratives emphasise the importance of everyday activities involved in homemaking, including cleaning, cooking, dressing, decorating, and caring, which contribute significantly to Majdy's sense of belonging in the diaspora. In 'Missing Out', he understands the value of her presence and care work to maintain their home. When Samra is homesick and can no longer be the 'homemaker,' Majdy shares: 'It is frightening to come home at the end of the day and find your wife […] silent, look[ing] at you as if you don't exist …'.

In her absence, Majdy not only desires her romantically but also realises the value of Samra's labour, conduct, and ethics. Her practices and presence starkly contrast with the silence and loss he experiences without her. Whereas Majdy often refers to himself as the one building a life in London, his pursuit of belonging contrasts with Samra's creation of belonging. In fact, Samra's presence, her daily labour, and her adherence to Muslim identity contribute to his sense of belonging and feelings of being at home. Samra's performance disrupts the essentialist gendered social location and the imposed values on them within the U.K. society. Her transformation into a homemaker opens avenues for

agency and resistance in the face of denied belonging. 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out' stage the domestic sphere as a potential yet often overlooked site for anti-colonial and anti-racist resistance (Newns, 2020: 7).

Political projects within the United Kingdom, spanning colonial legacies, neoliberal approaches to human rights and democracy, and imperial feminism, significantly shape the dynamics of belonging, delineating its contours at different levels. In 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out', the narratives frame the implications of displaced belonging by simultaneously emphasising the centrality of home in the fabric of belonging and the challenges to belonging in the state of diaspora by politics of belonging. As illustrated, single-perspective feminist agendas not only establish racist and nationalist boundaries of belonging but also exacerbate gender inequalities and Islamophobia in public and private spheres. Nevertheless, it becomes evident how homemaking, as a foundational element of belonging, emerges as a potent force capable of challenging and subverting the political structures of belonging and their entrenched power hierarchies.

Conclusion

To summarise, this paper examines the poetics of 'The Ostrich' and 'Missing Out' in connection with the politics of belonging, drawing on the insights of Yuval-Davis. Her contribution is instrumental in deconstructing the category of belonging, shedding light on the politics of belonging and their entanglements with the political projects of communities. The discussion encompasses the reconstruction of hegemonic identity in Sudan and the shift towards Islamophobic policies of the United Kingdom, regulating the Muslim diaspora's belonging through racist boundaries of belonging. This underscores the contingency of belonging and unbelonging as the characters cross borders.

Navigating the political landscapes of both Sudan and the United Kingdom, the characters grapple with multifaceted factors such as social locations, identifications and identity narratives, emotional attachments, and ideological values, delineating the contours of these imagined communities of belonging. This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of narrative structures, characters, and settings in the two short stories to highlight the differential belongings both within and between communities. In the process, it unveils the distinct politics that shape belonging collectively and separately while also mapping the relational dynamics between Samra and Majdy's belonging.

Displaced belonging emerges as the overarching theme in these narratives. It refers to the multifaceted contestation of belonging that appears in post-migration, encompassing struggles at different social levels. It entails grappling with the complexities of identity, confronting racial biases, and engaging with political projects that interlink public and private spheres. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of homemaking within a diasporic context as a crucial avenue for cultivating belonging, serving as both a space for resistance and an opportunity to subvert intersectional politics of belonging. While the political project of belonging effaces differences both within and between communities, these narratives unfold the politics of belonging on two interconnected levels: (a) it involves confronting biased perceptions and racialisation and (b) it is constrained by identity politics, notably heightened within the pervasive context of Islamophobia. Moreover,

Leila Aboulela's narratives depict the nuanced relationship between the politics of belonging in the public sphere and the persistence of a feeling of at-homeness within private realms. As a homemaker in the diaspora, Samra resists the contestation of belonging imposed by external politics, making home a creative source of belonging.

This paper advocates for a shift beyond mere identity politics, endorsing the embrace of intersectionality to comprehensively account for Muslims' diverse experiences of belonging. By rendering invisibilities visible and scrutinising context-specific power dynamics, it challenges the essentialisation of the positions of the oppressed and oppressor and unravels the racist agendas behind their designation in Muslim cultures. By providing an interpretive-theoretical framework that integrates sociological concepts with ontological accounts, this study encourages a consideration of Aboulela's works across sociology and cultural studies as one of the critical interlocutors of Muslim experiences. This paper serves as a stepping stone towards a more comprehensive exploration of SWANA communities' diverse experiences of belonging, whether in their places of origin or the diaspora.

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