

Psychogeography, Nostalgia and Heroic Metamorphosis in Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons*

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Abstract: Literary psychogeography is one of the concepts that deals with the impact of certain geographical places on the human psyche. It is an interdisciplinary approach that connects psychology, geography, and literature. The aim of this research paper is to examine the theory of literary psychogeography on Leila Aboulela's fifth novel, *Bird Summons* (2019) within the theoretical framework of Catherina Loffler. It deals with three female heroines who have decided to go on a road trip to the Scottish Highlands to visit the grave of Lady Evelyn Cobbold. Aboulela explores the three women's struggle with their personal choices and commitments in life. She skilfully deals with their psychologies, their lost dreams, nostalgia, and their heroic metamorphosis. The women's psychogeographical voyages at the forest along with their nostalgia lead to their physical metamorphosis to experience heroic transformation of their souls to achieve self-actualization in life.

Keywords: Aboulela, bird summons, derive, heroic metamorphosis, nostalgia, psychogeography

1. Introduction

Psychogeography is one of the theories that deals with the impact of places and geography on the human psyche. It is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the nexus between psychology, geographical environment, and literature. As a term, it combines psychology and geography in a way that describes spatial experiences in accordance with social, physical, historical, psychological, and geographical dimensions of everyday life (Loffler 2017: 6).

The aim of this research paper is to explore the genre of literary psychogeography in Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019) using Catherina Loffler's theory of psychogeography. Furthermore, the textual analysis of the novel reveals the psychological impact of the forest voyage on the characters and their spiritual transformation to achieve self-actualization. Their nostalgia will lead to their heroic metamorphosis to reach spiritual development. The novel deals with three female heroines who have decided to go on a road trip to the Scottish Highlands to visit the grave of Lady Evelyn Cobbold. Aboulela explores the three women's struggle with their personal choices and commitments in life. She skilfully deals with these three women's psychologies and their lost dreams in diaspora.

The characteristics of literary psychogeography according to Catherina Loffler are examined from a psychological point of view namely blending of fact and fiction, the rhetoric of walking, and the engagement of multi-sensory experiences. Certain conditions must be fulfilled in this context like the

psychogeographical voyage, nostalgia, and heroic metamorphosis of the characters to achieve self-realization.

To read *Bird Summons* from a psychogeographical perspective necessitates a detailed look at the origin of this literary concept, its definition, and its different features. The origin of the term 'psychogeography' goes back to the disciples of classical psychogeography such as J. Walter Fewkes in 1905. He links the term with 'anthro-geography' that is closely related to humanities. However, the term gained attention with the Parisian Situationist International in 1950 who believed in psychogeography as a spatial practice. Guy Debord states: "psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals" (2006: 24). Debord's definition stresses that the core of psychogeography lies in the effect of being in or at a place intentionally or unintentionally chosen. In addition, Coverley asserts that psychogeography is "at the point at which psychology and geography collide, as a means of exploring the behavioural impact of a space" (2010: 10). Psychogeography depends on subjectivity of the emotional and psychological dimensions of different experiences.

Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography* is regarded as the initial attempt connecting psychogeography with literary studies. As a result, psychogeographical ideas have primarily been conveyed in literary situations, and are therefore being studied within literary studies of certain locations. Tina Richardson claims "psychogeography is about crossing established boundaries, whether metaphorically or physically, locally or globally" (2015: 2). She thinks that psychogeography can depend only on a mere planned journey (2015:1). Psychological conditions can be provoked by certain places and every location has its own mark on the psyche of individuals.

Similarly, Van Tijen (1991) has used the concept of literary psychogeography to refer to its usage in literature. He perceives psychogeography as the art that seeks to record and comprehend the influence of the outer environment on the human psyche. Literary psychogeography refers to any writing that captures the influence of a particular landscape on the inner feeling and moods of people. Well written literary texts can have passages that capture these "psycho-geographic moments" (n. page).

According to O'Rourke the word "geography" includes the word stem "graphy", which originates from the Greek "graphein" that means "to write" (2013: 6-7). As writing is the expression of one's thoughts and ideas, literary psychogeography allows the reader to comprehend the psychogeographical experiences of the writer as if he is going on a 'mental journey' with an individual exploring certain place and recognizing it from his own perspective. Coverley (2012: 42) confirms: "Just as the act of writing expresses a journey through the terrain of the imagination, so too does the act of reading itself mirror the journey, as the reader is conducted on a journey with the author as a guide". Therefore, both the author and the texts' protagonists are considered guides to the reader in literary psychogeography which has multi-sensory records of walking experiences.

Closely related to the genre of psychogeography is the concept of space and its importance in the field of humanities. Space exists in everyday life. As a concept, it is connected to cultural and literary studies. According to Tally, from 1960s onwards, space ceased to be treated as a mere backdrop or a “location where historical events unfolded” (2013: 30). Hence space was considered a container, a stable setting to historical or temporal events, implied space as something “dead, fixed, undialectical, immobile” (Foucault 1980: 70). On the contrary, Jameson states that our daily life, our psychic experiences, and our cultural languages are dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time (1991: 16). Space is considered “a social product, a lived space” (Loffler 2017: 23). It is placed “within the frameworks of literature and human perception, stressing the subject-oriented interrelations of space and spatial representations” (cf. Jahn and Buchholz 2005: 553). When certain places are represented in a literary text, they become a world “in-between”. The fictional world is composed of real and imaginary dimensions; therefore, it is obvious that the individual and his experiences of the place are the focus of psychogeography which link “the objective- the laws of the geographical environment- with the subjective- the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Loffler 2017: 46).

Catharina Loffler is inspired by Edward Soja, ‘a social theorist and urban geographer’, who calls for placing space at the centre of social theory. Soja believes in “a new form of spatialized thinking based on a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being” (1989: 12). Soja introduces the concept of “Thirdspace” which deconstruct polarisations such as subjective vs objective, real vs fictional or material vs mental (2009: 49). He asserts:

In ‘Thirdspace’ everything comes together: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (1996: 56-57).

Looking at ‘Thirdspace’ from a literary perspective enhances the notion that it creates “‘in-between’ spaces where reality and its literary representation merge forming a new space” (Tally 2013: 160). As a result, reality is saturated with fiction and, in return, fiction contains more reality than what we think. Texts create “new real and imagined spaces, where factual descriptions of reality are enriched with subjective interpretations of the latter, creating spaces in-between” (Loffler 2017: 35).

Among the contemporary writers who deal with literary psychogeography is the British Sudanese novelist, Leila Aboulela (1964-) whose fiction has been translated into many languages. Her novel, *Bird Summons* (2019), is considered a perfect example of literary psychogeography in which walking is at the centre of the narrative. The theory describes the space which merges the real and the imagined in a way that helps in understanding the novel from a psychogeographical perspective. Hence, Aboulela encourages the readers to see the experiences of the female characters and illustrate how they develop into postmodern female stalkers,

reporters, and space observers, who are able to reconstruct their identities through a physical and metaphorical voyage in contemporary Scotland.

Bird Summons depicts the psychogeographical experiences of three Arab immigrant female friends of different nationalities during their journey to the Scottish Highlands to visit the grave of Lady Evelyn Cobbold, “the first British woman to perform pilgrimage to Mecca” (*Bird* 1). Aboulela delves deeply into the lives of these female Muslim characters namely Salma, Iman, and Moni during their stay for a week in a resort, The Loch, on a converted monastery before visiting the grave of Lady Evelyn (1867-1963). This Scottish Muslim woman was the daughter of the seventh Earl of Dunmore who later called herself Zainab. She spent her childhood years in Egypt and North Africa where she knew about Islam. For the three female characters, the purpose of the journey is to “educate themselves about the history of Islam in Britain, to integrate better by following the example of those who were of this soil and of their faith, those for whom this island was an inherited rather than adopted home” (*Bird* 1). Although Lady Evelyn is a Muslim, “she kept her own culture, wore Edwardian fashion, and left instructions for bagpipes to be played at her funeral” (*Bird* 2). She is considered the mother of Scottish Islam. She did not wear hijab and did not communicate with other Muslims in Scotland. The three female friends take her as a role model. As a Scottish Anglophone Arab writer, Aboulela chooses contemporary Scotland as the setting of her novel to put the Islamic identity on the map of the British Arab literature. This psychogeographical text records the characters’ spiritual voyage across space and time to reconstruct their conflicted identities. Kouta (2022) asserts that the narrative of the text is made polyphonic in the form of an omniscient third-person narrator (2022: 27) to facilitate for the reader to delve deeply into the characters’ inner thoughts and feelings.

The leader of the trip is Salma, the head of the Arabic Speaking Muslim Women’s Group in Dundee, Scotland. She is an Egyptian physician in her forties who works as a massage therapist although she graduated from Cairo Medical School in Egypt. Unfortunately, when Salma went to Scotland after her marriage, she realized that her medical degree must be equated by qualifying exams to be certified. She is married to a Scottish convert, David, who is a good husband and treats her well. Salma states: “David was a Scottish convert and that meant she was treated better by him than her friends were who were married to Arab, African, or Asian men. David gave her all the freedom she wanted. He respected her opinions” (*Bird* 10). The problem with Salma is that she is the one who must always be making the effort to belong to the Scottish society. Sometimes she could not understand her children’s conversation. She feels that her four children are David’s and not hers. She feels she could not totally assimilate into the Scottish culture. She believes that she is the outsider, and the children constitute one unit with their father. “She had believed foolishly that they would be born with a hard drive of her memories. That they would know Egypt as she had known it” (*Bird* 42). Salma’s children are brilliant and good at everything: school, sports, and hobbies. Before going on the trip, Salma has a quarrel with her daughter who turned down an offer to medical school and prefers to study Sports Science. She is determined to choose

freely what she wants to study. Salma is infuriated by David's 'laissez-faire' attitude towards this issue. Salma believes: "Just thinking about the whole thing made her feel betrayed" (*Bird* 8). As David was supporting his daughter in her decision, Salma was the one left in pain. She was very angry and decided to take a holiday and go on a road trip to visit Lady Evelyn's grave to offer her respects. Unfortunately, Salma is secretly corresponding online with one of her old colleagues, Amir, who was her ex-fiancé in Egypt. He always reminds her of being a medical doctor and not a massage therapist via his text messages. He was happily married in Egypt and tied down by children.

The second female character is Iman, a Syrian refugee woman who is very beautiful and charming. She is in her twenties but on her third marriage. Once widowed, and once divorced. "Even with her hijab, men smell [Iman] from afar, looked longer at her, exerted themselves to make her smile" (*Bird* 4). Iman is always sheltered by everyone around her. She is Salma's best friend who never thwarts nor challenges her. Salma didn't need to justify herself to Iman or feel self-conscious about her accent. She is easy to talk to and easy to understand. Iman's dream is to be a queen of her own household, to bring her mother over from Syria, to walk in expensive shoes and to have a child. Unfortunately, all her husbands are possessive. "She was surrounded by others. She was sought after because she was decorative and enhancing....Whenever she turned, there would be someone to guide her, adopt and sponsor her" (*Bird* 13). In return, they own her totally. Her life has been a series of disappointments. Iman has been first married off at the age of fifteen to a political activist who is killed by the Syrian government forces in the first revolution against Assad after one year of their hasty marriage. She gets married for the second time to the man who brought her to Britain. He ends up in prison "for grievous bodily harm after losing his temper with a fellow Syrian" (*Bird* 34). Finally, he divorces her as a courtesy. When the novel starts, Iman is married for the third time to Ibrahim who is a young student from a conservative family. His home country's government pays for his reliable scholarship. Ibrahim has suffered from homesickness and culture shock when he first came to Britain. Consequently, the Imam of the Islamic centre advises him to marry. Ibrahim's family disagrees, so he decides to marry Iman unofficially for she is, "the most beautiful divorcee in the local Muslim community" (*Bird* 33). Iman is his saviour because she can meet all his needs so that he could settle and study. Ibrahim is her saviour too because she could not go back to Syria because of the civil war there. Ibrahim rescues Iman from homelessness. He is very close to her age than her previous husbands to an extent they can play games with each other on the PlayStation. Iman asserts that "every morsel she put in her mouth, every piece of clothing, was provided for her by Ibrahim. The rent, the gas, the internet. She was pampered as a racehorse." (*Bird* 34). Nevertheless, Iman thinks of marriage as religiously approved prostitution. Their marriage is solely religious but not recognized under the British law. Mosques are forbidden to carry out marriage ceremonies without a civil marriage certificate. Hence, they are married privately. Unfortunately, Ibrahim does not want to have any children during their marriage which lasts only for six months. During the road trip to visit Lady Evelyn's grave,

Iman is distracted by many text messages from Ibrahim asking her to stop and wait for him at the castle. Ibrahim's parents come to Britain when they knew about his paperless marriage. As a result, they force him to divorce Iman. So, he takes all her clothes and belongings and transfers them to Salma's car. Iman accuses him of being coward and submissive. Iman's predicament is so great that Salma asks her husband, David, to be supportive and to agree to bring Iman with her to their home after the trip.

The third female character in the novel is Moni, a Sudanese Muslim woman in her thirties, who lives in Scotland with her son, Adam. Moni has been active and successful in her job as a high-powered banker. She meets Murtada, her husband and Adam's father, when he is securing a loan through her bank. He is a chartered accountant specialising in corporate finance. Moni is first attracted to "his dedication to his career and perseverance; his efforts at improving himself touched her, his ambitions for gaining international experience captured her imagination" (*Bird* 15). He loves her and promises to make her happy. However, after the birth of their disabled son, Adam, they dislike each other. Murtada could not accept the fact that Adam is a disabled son who suffers from severe 'Cerebral Palsy'. He insists on having another child but Moni refuses. As a result, he travels to Saudi Arabia to work there without Moni's consent. Murtada keeps asking Moni to join him, but she refuses believing that Scotland is the best place for Adam.

Those three female heroines, Salma, Iman and Moni, decide to go together on a trip to the Scottish Highlands to visit Lady Evelyn's grave. "Instead of an overnight visit to the grave they would stay at a resort of a converted monastery then make their leisurely way to visit the grave" (*Bird* 3). They have started this psychogeographical voyage leaving behind their familial commitments and the crowded life of the city.

2. Aspects of literary psychogeography

Concerning the aspects of literary psychogeography that have been tackled in *Bird Summons* are the blending of fact and fiction, the rhetoric of walking, and the engagement of the multi-sensory experiences of the three heroines (Loffler 2017: 95-96). The first aspect is the blending of fact and fiction which is very clear when the three female characters stop at Dunnottar Castle on their way to the resort. It is considered one of the most fantastic and touristic sites in Scotland. It is a historical fortress in a rocky cliff on the north-eastern coast of Aberdeen near the harbour of Stonehaven. From the psychogeographical perspective, the castle has a very strange impact on Salma when she visits it. She meets many tourists from various countries who speak different languages. She imagines that she hears Lady Evelyn's voice who is dead, talking to her in Arabic. Salma is certain that it was "Lady Evelyn's voice speaking to her in Arabic she learnt from her nannies when she was a child growing up in Cairo and the Algiers" (*Bird* 41). Therefore, "The topography of the city [Dunnottar Castle] is refashioned through the imaginative force of the writer" (Coverley 2010: 16). The narrative text becomes a space that alternates between the real world and the world as it is observed by the reader. Aboulela constructs the narrative text according to a 'wandering viewpoint'; she is not only a neutral

recorder but a participant whose distinct experience shapes the writing in a passionate fusion of subjectivity and objectivity. Salma feels connected to Lady Evelyn because the latter must have come to the castle as a girl in the late nineteenth century. “Salma felt a closeness to her, an awareness that was more than curiosity” (*Bird* 40). Salma also imagines that Lady Evelyn would be happy because the chapel in the Dunnottar Castle is directed towards the south-east, in the direction of Mecca in which Lady Evelyn left instructions to be buried facing it. In “Faith, Identity and Magical Realism in Leila Aboulela’s *Bird Summons*” Arkhagha and Awad assert that “although connections between the living and the dead are realistically impossible, the narrator places this supernatural event in a state of equivalence with the natural” (2021: 119) when Salma imagines that she hears Lady Evelyn’s voice speaking to her in Arabic. They also confirm: “it also resembles merging realms because it introduces the voice of the dead among ordinary occurrences” (2021: 119). Therefore, the purpose of this blending of fact and fiction reveals the interrelation between the walker and his surroundings. The sense of place is very crucial because it is shaped by the walker’s mood and mindset. While gripping with literary psychogeography, a sense of place that permeates the text and establishes the intended mood provokes the reader. It becomes a form in which “individual knowledge, memories, perception and interpretation fuse to become a subjective interpretation of a place” (Loffler 2017: 100).

Another important example of blending fact and fiction in *Bird Summons* is obvious when Iman imagines that she hears a distinct sound of a creature through the window which asks permission to come in and speak to her. It is a hoopoe, a bird which speaks a language she could understand. Leila Aboulela asserts in the author’s note that the hoopoe signifies King Solomon’s intimate, a scout and an explorer, a fearless traveller, and a trustworthy source (*Bird* 285). The Hoopoe refers to King Solomon’s messenger from the Islamic culture. It plays the role of the guide as in Attar’s Sufi fable “The Conference of Birds”. During his first visit to Iman, he advises her not to stay long in the cottage with its magical attic. He also informs her that she is not going to visit Lady Evelyn’s grave; but only one of them will go. “The one who is least distracted. The one who has learnt that to keep going it’s best not to look right or left” (*Bird* 83). Arkhagha and Awad confirm that “the Hoopoe’s stories are all ‘embedded narratives’ that occur within the ‘frame narrative’ which is the novel itself. It is a postmodern metafictional narrative technique that disturbs the linearity of time and space” (2021: 119).

Iman is the only one of them who can see the bird and understand its language. She is the youngest and the most traumatized of them all. After her three unsuccessful marriages, she is childless. She feels alienated and estranged. Hence all the stories of the hoopoe are meant to guide her through life. She must be independent and assert her self-autonomy. He keeps on giving her many examples of human suffering and tolerance. She must overcome all the obstacles of displacement and estrangement as an ethnic minority in Scotland. After that he engages her in a very informative story about a man called Nathan, who lived in the Loch near the monastery years ago. He was a charitable rich man but highly arrogant. After many years of famine, he got so angry when the harvest of his

farmlands was devastated by a flash flood. “Nathan was distraught. He lost his composure and his good sense. He did the worst thing ever. He raised his fist up in anger against Heaven. He spoke words he would spend the rest of his life regretting” (*Bird* 84). Consequently, he asked a blacksmith to make heavy chains to wrap them around his ankles, over his shoulders and tight around his waist. After that he threw the key to his chains in the river. He decided to walk to Jerusalem to ask God’s forgiveness and to repent for his sins. The journey was very hectic and tiresome. When he bought a fish to eat, he found the key to his chains inside it. It was a sign of his forgiveness. This story is very didactic and impressive. It refers to the lives of three women who could not accept their fates. They feel oppressed by their destinies and their choices in life. Their psychogeographical voyage to the Loch gives them the chance to delve deeply into their lives and their personal choices. Their physical journey turns into a mental and spiritual one. The impact of this place is clear in the transformation of their identities. They transform from being traditional married women into individual beings whose aspirations threaten to consume them in this materialistic world devoid of any spirituality. Like Nathen, they must accept their fates and destinies. Ebtehal Alouzi states: “In a journey of self-actualization and self-reliance, these women felt othered by a society that perceived them only in terms of their marginality and gender (2021: 38). Hence they should overcome their miseries to reshape their Islamic identities. Through *Bird Summons* Aboulela creates a text that weaves fragments of each character’s life and the stories of the hoopoe in a unique and subjective way. She instructs the reader to delve deeply into humanity to gain knowledge and wisdom.

The second aspect of literary psychogeography is the rhetoric of walking which can be found in the story level and in the discourse level of the text. In other words, the activity of walking is repeated in the narrative structure of the text which reveal a terminology of walking that focuses on the importance of understanding the place from the perspective of the walker. Certeau in “Walking in the City” maintains that walking resembles speech acts in which the walker writes his own story. He shows how walking offers a series of turns and detours that can be compared to ‘turns of phrase’ or ‘stylistic figures’. It is like composing a path. Like ordinary language, this art unites styles and uses (1984: 100). Therefore, the psychogeographical voyage is like an ‘obstacle race’ for the reader whose journey through the narrative is not easy. The activity of walking is distinguished by a perpetual change of directions that is reflected in the text. The narrative is presented in a panoramic view that the reader can imagine. As the walker’s path is constantly broken off, the narrator jumps back and forth between present, past, and personal memories. The three heroines keep moving between their lives in the present and in the past. During their walk in the forest, they feel nostalgic of the past. This act triggers them to the feeling of dissatisfaction. Salma keeps recalling her personal memories with Amir during their college years before marrying David. Moni keeps remembering her unpleasant memories in Sudan before having a disabled son whose disease is incurable. As for Iman she keeps remembering her family in Syria before getting married to her first husband. Each one of them is tormented by her nostalgia.

Psychogeographical texts keep the influence of the physical environment on the behaviour and identity of the characters. As a result, literary psychogeography can be considered a form of mapping in which the author produces specific imaginaries. Tally compares the author to a mapmaker who must “survey territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, to emphasize, or to diminish” (2013: 45). In an interview with Kevin Jackson, Will Self and Iain Sinclair state that walks are actual narratives and the act of walking becomes the means of reading a landscape (2008). Walking is one of the essential modes of perceiving people’s relationship to their environmental surroundings. It is a “corporeal movement of individuals in space and time” (Loffler 2017: 36). It is crucial for experiencing specific spaces and for creating effective imaginaries (narrative texts). Walking strengthens the subjective point of view of an individual experience. The walkers create a text by uniting fragments of the place together in a unique and subjective way. During walking the Ego walkers perceive that the barriers between space and body are collapsed. Therefore, walking is considered an embodied practice in which there is an interaction between the brain, the body and the physical environment. In *The Production of Space* Lefebvre asserts:

When “Ego” [walkers] arrives in an unknown country or city, he first experiences it through every part of his body—through his senses of smell and taste, as through ...his legs and feet. His hearing picks up the noises, and the quality of the voices; his eyes are assailed by new impressions. For it is by the means of the body that space is perceived, lived, and produced (1991: 162).

In *Bird Summons*, Salma can be considered an Ego walker who loves walking. Upon her arrival at the Loch, she goes for a walk in the forest to search for the strongest phone signal. Salma’s body is inherently athletic. She remembers playing tennis with her ex-fiancé, Amir, in Egypt. She remembers their relationship and how she deliberately missed shots and slowed down her reflexes to keep his company. She knows that “Amir’s Ego always needed massaging, and she must have been good at massage, even then. Now it was her bread and butter” (*Bird* 65). While remembering Amir, she smiles to herself and walks faster enjoying how her body warmed up. The impact of walking on Salma is great; the more she walks, the healthier and the stronger she feels. She walks towards the sound of running water. There she decides to make wudu and pray. “The grass was her prayer mat, the wind a protector, her knees felt grounded to this particular piece of earth” (*ibid* 69-70). Salma’s decision to pray in the forest asserts her Islamic identity. She feels that religion is a liberating and dynamic force that helps Muslims to maintain their Islamic spirituality.

Solnit, one of the psychogeographer critics, asserts that walking “has a chosen mode of being, because within a walk [one] is able to live in thought and reverie, to be self-sufficient” (2002: 21). In fact, moving on foot inside the forest provokes Salma’s mind with comfort and peace. She feels connected to nature. This psychogeographical journey is turned into a spiritual one where Salma connects her mind and body. Walking is a conscious decision of letting oneself not to be limited by space and instead taking the personal freedom to walk whenever one wants.

When the walkers arrive at an unknown place, they first experience it with every part of their bodies. Hence it is by means of the body that the space is perceived. As a result, walking as an embodied practice is considered the dynamical interaction between the brain, the body, and the physical/cultural environment (Gibbs 2005: 66-67). This embodiment is closely connected to psychogeography, where the physical movement through space hits the walkers' minds.

Closely related to the concept of walking in literary psychogeography is the image of the stalker and the flaneur. The stalker is a reporter and an examiner of walking space (Sinclair 2015: 149), while the flaneur is a stroller and an aimless wanderer (Hart 2004: 2). Both Iman and Moni are flaneurs, romantic strollers who wander about the forest with no clear purpose other than to wander; while Salma is a stalker whose walking is having 'a ritual purpose' which is to visit Lady Evelyn's grave.

The third aspect of literary psychogeography is the engagement of multi-sensory experiences that are linked to the psychogeographical journey. The three female heroines surrender themselves to what Bachelard has termed "alert reverie". It is a state of a "double presence that is both in the here and now and in the imagination" (O'Rourke 2013: 25). It belongs to the oneiric activity as a mode in which imaginary is created in literary psychogeography. It is like a state of daydreaming in which certain places play freely upon the walker's imagination. This mood puts the walker in a particular state of mind and triggers a form of amorphous, associative thinking "a drift from the rational to the extraordinary and revolutionary" (Sadler 1998: 76). It is connected to the undetermined, improvisational quality of walking which encourages the mind to experience the place. Solnit confirms that "this kind of unstructured, associative thinking is the kind most often connected to walking, and it suggests walking...as an improvisational act" (2002: 21). Hence the walker has a double presence; one in the present and the other in his imagination (Sinclair 2003: 4).

Within this context, the three heroines undergo heroic metamorphosis with all their senses. This state is preceded by the feeling of nostalgia and homesickness. The term nostalgia derives from the Greek words *nostos* (return) and *algos* (pain). Hence the literal meaning of nostalgia is the suffering and pain evoked by the desire to return to one's place of origin. It is a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past (Oxford Dictionary 2020). In the twentieth century, nostalgia was considered a neurological disease. It was perceived as a psychiatric and psychosomatic disorder (McCann 1941: 165). It is known that nostalgic people are usually depressed, showing a "regressive manifestation closely related to the issue of loss, grief, incomplete mourning and finally depression" (Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1980: 110). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, psychological researchers have confirmed the positive impact of nostalgia in transforming people from being weak and depressed into strong and self-confident. They must go on a journey of self-realization to motivate their spirits into survival and success. In fact, 'nostalgic reverie' has a liberating and effective impact, moving from negative and painful life circumstances to successful and cheerful ones, and overcoming life challenges. Important events are considered nostalgic recollections. Negative

events activate nostalgic reminiscences suggesting that nostalgia can be used as a self-regulatory mechanism (Routledge 2015). Similarly, in “Nostalgia and Heroism” Allison and Green (2020: 5) assert that nostalgia has many psychological purposes; it activates inspiration and motivation. It plays a role in motivating and guiding courageous feelings and intentions.

In *Bird Summons* the three heroines keep on regretting their choices in life during their walking in the forest. They couldn't accept their destinies. They are perplexed by their suffering from their marital lives and their familial responsibilities. Even Iman who is divorced and childless regrets leaving her mother and her family in Syria. They have begun to think of their lives as a chain of mistakes. Although they are religious characters, they start losing faith. They resemble Nathan, the protagonist in one of the hoopoe's stories, who was ungrateful to God. As a result, he had to be punished severely for his sin and to repent and ask God's forgiveness. Hence it becomes obligatory to undergo heroic metamorphosis to develop their personalities to tolerate life as Muslim immigrants in Scotland.

Heroic metamorphosis is defined as a change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means; for example, the metamorphosis of humans into animals (Merriam Webster). On the contrary, the hero's transformation plays a crucial role in achieving his goals in life. Campbell stresses that the hero's outer journey is a representation of an inner, psychological journey that involves “leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition” (1988: 152). The purpose of the hero's journey is to provide a context or blueprint for human metamorphoses (Allison 2019: 4). People are born psychologically incomplete until they face challenges that create suffering. Overcoming such suffering enables the hero to undergo heroic transformation and to perceive life differently.

In “The Metamorphosis of the Hero” Allison et al. state that “metamorphosis must be accompanied by any one of these activities; namely training regimens, spiritual practices, and the hero's journey” (2019: 1). Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* states the concept of the hero's journey as “a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (1949: 30). Thus, it is a common narrative archetype that involves a hero who goes on an adventure, learns a lesson, wins a victory with that newfound knowledge, and then returns home transformed. It is considered a test to his character, his capabilities, and his skills. There are many “types of transformation of the hero: mental, moral, emotional, spiritual, physical, and motivational” (Allison 2019: 606). Heroic metamorphosis leads to maturity and self-satisfaction. Therefore, nostalgic experiences instigate heroic metamorphosis to promote wisdom towards spiritual transformation. Accordingly, the three heroines in *Bird Summons* undergo heroic metamorphosis to “foster their developmental growth, promote healing, cultivate social unity and deepen their self-actualization” (Allison 2019: 1).

In the hero's journey, tales of wisdom and heroism are inspiring for spiritual growth. According to Allison et al., hero stories reveal three targets of heroic

transformation: setting, self, and society. These three targets coincide with the three major stages of the hero's journey: departure, initiation, and return (2019: 608). They also add that the departure stage occurs when the hero is separated from his normal and safe environment. The initiation stage occurs when he faces challenges and suffering. As for the return stage, it occurs when he is ready to use his newfound gifts to accept the world and transform it (2013: 608).

Consequently, the three female heroines undergo heroic metamorphosis that fosters their developmental growth, promotes their healing process, cultivates their social unity as hybrid Muslims in Scotland, advances the marginalized Islamic community and deepens their cosmic understanding. This transformation contributes to the heroines' spiritual growth and understanding of themselves and of the universe around them. They die spiritually and then are reborn to more mature and more tolerant characters. Their metamorphosis and their suffering led to their spiritual awakening and self-actualization.

According to Arkhagha and Awad (2021), it is crucial to delve deeply into "the 'localized experiences' of the three characters which formulate their personal burdens in their diasporic context" (123). Salma's 'localized experience' is clear after marrying a Scottish convert to Islam, David. She always feels as an outsider who tries to be fully assimilated. Leaving Egypt after her marriage makes her unhappy and unsatisfied because she becomes a massage therapist and not a medical doctor. In her 'alert reverie' in the forest, Salma goes off track to follow a man with a red shirt who looks like Amir in her imagination. She stops by a Victorian mansion, like a museum, where she sees a tapestry of a Scottish queen with her only child. This recalls the image of her mother-in-law Norma and her husband David. Meanwhile, nostalgic memories towards her ex-fiancée, Amir, are revived by his online messages. Thus her heroic journey, that is fuelled and motivated by nostalgia, drags her into heroic metamorphosis where she finds herself in Amir's clinic in Egypt. She is on the operating table and her body is full of surgical stitches and scars and devoid of any muscles. Norma appears and helps her to go back to the edge of the forest where she transforms into 'a flat doormat'.

Moni's 'localized experience' is apparent in her attachment to her disabled son, Adam. Moni's life has changed completely after marrying Murtada and after coming to Scotland. The existence of Adam makes Murtada look for a job to pursue a career in Saudi Arabia leaving them behind. Moni's dedication to her son makes her neglect herself and her surroundings. She refuses to leave Scotland because the National Health Service for Adam is better in Scotland. During her stay in the Loch, she encounters a little boy who resembles her son but couldn't speak, she keeps attached to him. "He was the Loch and the Loch was him, and all these past days were about him" (*Bird* 212). In her 'alert reverie', this boy also undergoes metamorphosis and keeps growing to an extent that Moni fits into his palm. During her heroic journey in the forest, she transforms into 'a Swiss ball'.

Iman's 'localized experience' occurs due to her lack of self-autonomy and for being suppressed by the male characters who try to overprotect her throughout her life. She feels the burden of her outstanding beauty that makes her dependent on others. Iman is the only one whose wardrobe in the attic room in the Loch

‘continues to yield costumes’ (*Bird* 191). Her occupation with changing costumes every day during her stay in the Loch gives her the chance to practise self-autonomy and achieve self-realization. Hence, she begins to look for her identity in Scotland. She decides to take off her Hijab because she is forced to imitate other Muslim women in wearing it. She begins to assert her identity by questioning her selfhood. Arkhagha and Awad confirm: “Iman’s experience with taking off the Hijab not only serves to reclaim her self-autonomy but also reconfigures Hijab as a personal choice of faith rather than a mere habitual performative form of expression” (2021: 122). During her walking in the forest, Iman recalls her memories in her hometown in Syria and feels nostalgic towards her family. She remembers being submissive all her life. She does not accept God’s will in being childless. Moreover, she refuses to listen to the Hoopoe because of his possessive attitude and prefers to be hollowed in the ground. During her heroic journey, she transforms into an “unidentified creature, a mix of mammal and reptile, horrific and yet beautiful, repulsive and yet compelling because of the sad dignity with which it carried itself” (*Bird* 221).

Finally, the three heroines reunite in their metamorphic shapes in the forest. They begin to regret with sorrow. “They murmured laments and whined in rhythm. They were freed from pride and convention” (*Bird* 246). They become ready for a physical return “to dignity, to humanity and strength” (*Bird* 247). They are saved by water when the landscape changes and leads to a path to the interior of a cave. They become their former selves. The water gives them hope and makes them stronger. They go through the valley of fear where they see “visions of their own future deaths, the ultimate agony and ugliness, the loneliness of the grave” (*Bird* 255). They cling to each other out of fear and horror. At dawn time, Salma remembers that they forget to pray in the Loch although they have their prayer mats and their copies of the Qur’an. After their heroic journeys and their metamorphosis, they understand their mistakes in not taking Allah’s worship seriously.

They did not realise that they were a continuation, needed to fill a vacuum....They misunderstood their role. They underestimated their own importance and exaggerated their shortcomings. They inflated their problems and followed their egos, counselled each other but rejected what was right (*Bird* 256).

They need guidance because they need salvation. At that time, the Hoopoe hovers over them and they accept his role as a guide and a storyteller. They follow the Hoopoe to a place where they find Nathan reading his prayers and building a monastery for worshipping God. Kouta asserts that the rebuilding of the monastery may be symbolic of reconstructing religious rapport (2022: 34). In this psychogeographic voyage, past and present, Muslims and Christians are linked together. Like Nathan, the three heroines achieve spiritual transformation after praying and after their suffering in the forest. They share with him “the knowledge of their Creator, the desire to seek forgiveness” (*Bird* 267). The real and the fantastical are interweaved to draw a portrait of evolving humanity and friendship in Aboulela’s novel.

Guy Deboard maintains that “one of the basic situationist practices is the derive [literally: drifting], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances

[situations]. *Derives* involve a playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll” (2006: 120). In a *Derive*, one or more people in a group abandon their relationships, their jobs, their hobbies, and all other regular causes for movement and action in favour of letting themselves be drawn by the terrain's allures and the encounters they come across. The derive is undertaking a psychogeographical exploration and when he returns home, he will have recorded the ways in which “the areas traversed resonate with particular moods and ambiances” (Coverley 2010: 96).

Based on this concept, the adventurous journey of the three heroines is considered a derive with a reverie and metamorphosis at its core. Salma's last destination in this journey is her visit to Lady Evelyn's grave in Glencarron. The walkers in a literary psychogeography act as focalisers through whose lenses the places visited are experienced. The focalization in these texts is internal. In other words, the presentation of events is restricted to the point of view and cognition of a focal character. As the narrative is polyphonic, the three voices of the Muslim women are mingled together to form an omniscient third-person narrator who delves deeply into the characters' inner thoughts. The Loch, The Dunnottar Castle, the monastery and Lady Evelyn's grave all are fleshed out from the perspective of the three characters, especially Salma.

According to the prophecy of the Hoopoe, Salma is the one who is going to reach her destination and visits the grave alone. After walking for twelve miles, she stands in front of the grave greeting Lady Evelyn by her Muslim name—Zainab saying: “Your state is my future, Zainab, one day I will follow to where you are, and I will know what you now know” (*Bird* 280). Salma takes Lady Evelyn as her role model. In this psychogeographical voyage, Salma again has an ‘alert reverie’ in which she sees herself in the future after so many years with her youngest son graduating from medical school, dancing in her daughter's wedding, carrying a grandchild and booking tickets for her and David to perform pilgrimage to Mecca. She also perceives Moni in the future as a mother to a little girl after Murtada comes back from Saudi Arabia. She sees Iman as an independent working woman who can support herself financially and can afford to bring her mother from Syria for a visit. She also sees Iman marry a widower and buy a house whose mortgage had been paid off. Finally, Salma states the purpose of visiting the grave as follows: “I came here for rejuvenation, a recipe for patience, a cure for disenchantment, the will to keep going without wandering astray” (*Bird* 282). As a stalker in this journey Salma aims to take guidance from Lady Evelyn's life, to be transformed spiritually into a more mature and patient person. Salma wants to accept being a hybrid character and an Arabic Muslim woman in diaspora and to reconcile all the conflicts and achieve self-actualization in life.

3. Conclusion

To conclude, Aboulela's novel is considered a psychogeographical voyage with all its aspects namely the blending of fact and fiction, the rhetorics of walking and the engagement of multi-sensory experiences. It is not a typical journey because any

emotions felt along the road have an impact. Numerous academics are interested in using literary psychogeography as a tool to investigate the connection between the human mind and the physical world. The characters' particular experiences are decoded, and their self-discovery is aided by the exterior physical world, which stirs up memories and emotions. This psychogeographical voyage seeks to break the traditional ways of being, hoping for the freshness of a new experience that will solidate the lives of the three women in their voluntary exile abroad. Hence, Aboulela can be considered a psychogeographer through her novel, *Bird Summons*.

This research paper highlights how psychogeography gives space to the psychological interpretation of the heroic metamorphosis of the three heroines in the forest. They enter a freezing time when they leave their bodies and transform spiritually to be able to continue their lives successfully. This voyage is motivated by nostalgia that promotes their self-worth and their heroic metamorphosis. It helps them to acquire wisdom and heroism as hybrid characters in diaspora. Going through this psychogeographical journey is the pathway to spiritual transformation. The former selves of the three female characters vanish and are replaced by new ones that perceive life from the angle of the Arab Muslim immigrants. Their heroic transformation transfers them from egocentricity to socio-centricity, from dependence to self-autonomy, from stagnation to mental growth. After going through heroic metamorphosis, the three heroines gain courage to face the challenges of the world around them. Aboulela as an Anglophone Arab novelist succeeds in linking two different realms by giving a space for the development of the self and for achieving heroic deeds. Psychogeography is useful because it exhibits walking as an important factor in understanding the relationship between psychology and geography in contemporary literary texts.

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