

## The Performative Diasporic Subjectivity Randa Abdel-Fattah's *Ten Things I Hate about Me*

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### Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study Randa Abdel-Fattah's novel, *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (2006) from Judith Butler's performative perspective. The main question of the research is whether the diasporic subjectivity of the Muslim protagonist of the novel is innate, static, and finalized or rather performatively constructed. It is argued that Jamilah, as a diasporic Muslim woman, is not a being with an essentialized identity; rather she is a becoming whose identity is constructed in diaspora. It is contended that Jamilah is a discursive subject, hailed by the dominant Lebanese, Australian, and Islamic discourses. Butler's attestation of the infelicity of some performances leaves space for the resignification and reappropriation of the discourses, which attempt to interpellate the subject. The study seeks to demonstrate that Jamilah as the diasporic doer, who is constituted as a result of the performative linguistic, corporal, culinary, and artistic deeds, is not determined by any of the discourses she is immersed in, and thus becomes a hybridized liminal subject who negotiates the discourses of home and host cultures through evading the dualistic logic.

### Keywords

Randa Abdel-Fattah; Diaspora; Performativity; Costume; Being/Becoming.

### 1. Introduction

Randa Abdlel-Fattah "is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University where she is researching the generational impact of the war on terror on Muslim and non-Muslim youth born into a post 9/11 world" (Abdel-Fattah and Saleh 5). Her diasporic novel, *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (2006) reflects the tumults the life of a teenage immigrant Muslim Lebanese girl in Australia. Jamilah Towfeek, the protagonist, is deeply frustrated about her ethnic origin, as she calls it, and does her best to conceal it from her classmates. By the intervention of her Lebanese teacher, Miss Sajda, she manages to come to terms with her disparate identity.

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The present article tries to find out whether the identity of the protagonist of the novel is intrinsic or performative studies. It studies Abdel-Fattah's novel from Judith Butler's performative perspective. The performativity of Jamilah's proper name, dress code, culinary practices, and musical orientation are studied against Islamic, Lebanese, and Australian backgrounds. The effect of the diasporic life on her performances is also taken into consideration. In fact, Abdel-Fattah's diasporic discourse is an attempt to rewrite "'home' in terms of 'away'" (Kaplan 166). The deconstruction of home/way binary opposition, along with a myriad of others, which is an inevitable ramification of diasporic sojourn, paves the way for the study of innateness/ performativity of subjectivity in Abdel-Fattah's novel.

## 2. Literature Review

*Ten Thing I Hate About Me*, despite being a very insightful novel, has received very little attention. Saadi Nikro in the book chapter, "The Arab Australian Novel: Situating Diasporic and Multicultural Literature" (2013) has a brief reference to Abdel-Fattah in his list of "Arab Australians living and writing in Australia in English" (299). He believes that the Arab Australian Literature "carries a *dispositioning* tenor" (301) and especially refers to the infusion of vernacular in the mainstream English. He accentuates the "multicultural" (301) nature of such diasporic novels and emphasizes the "variability" (302) of Arabness and Englishness in these novels.

Firouzeh Ameri submitted her Ph.D. dissertation to Murdoch University in 2012. The dissertation is titled "Veiled Experiences: Re-writing Women's Identities and Experiences in Contemporary Muslim Fiction in English". Ameri writes about the stereotypical depiction of Muslims and especially Muslim women in the Western media which is intensified after 9/11 attacks. She has studied another novel by Abdel-Fattah, *Does My Head Look Big In This?* Along with several other novels written by diasporic Muslim women. She believes that "the stereotype of the Muslim woman as a miserable victim is still firmly entrenched in many Western representations, a predicament that undermines the complexities of Muslim women's identities and experiences" (232). The writer through the post-positivist realist approach has argued that representations, identities and experiences are partly discursively constructed and partly real. They are real in the sense that representations can be based on some experiential reality; identities are rooted in specific contexts; and experiences are real to those who experience them (233).

### 3. Performative Diasporic Subjectivity

Like any other poststructuralist thinker, Judith Butler aspires to deconstruct some binary opposition. "Essentialism versus constructionism" (Jagger 2) can be a too short summary of Butler's intellectual ambition. Following the Derridean approach toward J. L. Austin's 'speech act theory', she transcends her predecessors by claiming that not only language is performative and "to say something is to do something" (Austin 12), but also gender and identity in general are performative and whatever one does, one takes a step in constructing her/his identity. The whole dictum that 'identity is performative' can be taken equivalent with James Loxley's succinct remark: "we 'act' our identities" (3). In *Gender Trouble* (1999) Butler asserts that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (181). It is noteworthy to emphasize that for Butler neither the doer nor the deed is an autonomous being, independent of the discourse; the deed and the doer are both discursive constructs. Besides the crucial role of discourse in Butler's performative theory, iterability, citability or what she addresses as the "reiterative power of discourse" (*Bodies* 2) are of utmost importance. Butler believes the doer gets constructed as an aftermath of the 'reiteration' of the norms put forward by the dominant discourse (2). She observes that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (2). The subject constructed performatively is a discursive one and as each reiteration might vary from the previous ones, the reiteration can lead to "rearticulation" of the "regulatory law" and turn it against itself (2).

Butler's significant divergence from her predecessors, like Austin and John Searle, is her poststructuralist defiance of any finality and closure. Austin introduces three aspects of language as "locutionary act" (the utterance), "illocutionary act" (94) (the intention of the utterer) (98), and "perlocutionary act" (the unintended consequences) (102) and considers an utterance which fails to fulfill the intention of the utterer as "unhappy" or "infelicitous" (14). Whereas, Butler opens her book, *The Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), with a much cited quotation from J. L. Austin, "[i]nfelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts" (1). Her point of beginning attests her acquiescence with Derridean reading of Austin and the claim that all speech is infelicitous and there is no possibility of a final determined meaning.

Owing to the inextricable ties between Butler's performative theory and discourse, the examination of any literary work from a Butlerian perspective necessitates due attention to the discourses in which the work is entrenched.

Applying the performative theory in reading a diasporic novel, like *Ten Things I Hate about Me*, cannot ignore the Lebanese Islamic Ideology and the Western Australian worldview which serve as two 'regulatory laws.' The protagonist of the novel, Jamilah Towfeek, reiterates the norms put forward by these regulatory systems to construct her performative subjectivity. The process of performative subject formation in Abdel-Fattah's novel will be explored as an embodiment of the performativity of language, exemplified in proper names, corporal performativity, manifested in finding expression in bodily measures and clothes, and performativity of cultural practices like culinary preferences, and artistic activities. It will further illustrate that although the Muslim woman does her subjectivity, she cannot determine it.

### 3.1. Performativity of Proper Names

Butler contends that language is performative and to say is the same as to do. She narrows down the discussion to the performative potential of proper names. She observes that "[t]he naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (*Bodies* 8). For her calling a person by a name is "to construct a social positionality"; for this reason, she appraises this form of "interpellation" as "inaugurative" rather than "descriptive," meaning "it seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one" (*Excitable* 33). The conundrum that opens up here is about the supremacy of address over the addressee: "the question as to whether there is an addressee prior to the address, or whether the act of naming brings the subject into being" (Salih 129). Salih maintains that Butler "argues the latter" (129) and the subject gets constructed as the aftermath of the name s/he is hailed with.

Jamilah's father is very attentive to his family's ethnic identity. Jamilah is called such to maintain her Lebanese personality. By being named Jamilah she is intended to be interpellated as a Muslim Lebanese girl. However, the performative use of language can lead to its never-ending construction. As Butler observes,

After having received the proper name, one is subject to being named again. In this sense, the vulnerability to being named constitutes a constant condition of the speaking subject. And what if one were to compile all the names that one has ever been called? Would they not present a quandary for identity? Would some of them cancel the effect of others? Would one find oneself fundamentally dependent upon a competing array of names to derive a sense of oneself? Would one find oneself alienated in language, finding oneself, as it were, in the names addressed from elsewhere? [...] The more one seeks oneself in language, the more one loses oneself precisely there where one is sought. (*Excitable* 30)

In her proceeding toward an Australian identity Jamilah manages to make several measures. One exigent step is to christen herself as Jamie: "You see,

neither Peter nor anybody else in my class has any idea about my Lebanese-Muslim background. In fact, my real name is Jamilah Towfeek, but I'm known as Jamie when I'm at school because I'm on a mission to de-wog myself" (*Ten* 11). Taking into consideration that 'wog' is a slang used by Australians to humiliate the ethnic minorities, the significance of renaming in the process of diasporic subjectivity is more clarified. However, according to James Clifford the ambivalence between the desire to get assimilated in diaspora and resist dissolution in it are inseparable from the diasporic experience (251). Jamilah experiences the painful oscillation between the two names: "Sometimes the Jamie in me aches to be a blue-eyed, blonde girl of Caucasian appearance. The yardstick against which all Australians are measured. The Jamilah in me longs to be respected for who she is, not tolerated and put up with like some bad odor or annoying houseguest" (*Ten* 9). As she admits, "it takes guts" to proclaim her Arabic name at school.

As Butler argues, "the subject is called a name, but 'who' the subject is depends as much on the names that he or she is never called: the possibilities for linguistic life are both inaugurated and foreclosed through the name" (*Excitable* 41). Although Jamilah is never called by her Arabic name, still it lurks in every corner of her life. She finds her counterfeit life intolerable. She invites her close friend Amy to her home, the first friend ever invited, and confesses the truth: "'Jamilah, not Jamie'. I slump down into my chair and groan, my face hidden by my hands. 'I've been hiding myself for a long time'" (*Ten* 130). By advancing in the process of self-revelation she discovers the merits of casting her false mask off. Her classmate, Timothy, appreciates her true self:

'Who am I talking to? Jamilah or Jamie?'

I smile and look into his eyes. 'Jamie's gone, Timothy.'

He suddenly steps forward, grabs both of my hands, and kisses me on the lips. Then he leans back, still holding my hands tightly in his. (*Ten* 142)

Despite her private confessions to Amy and Timothy, Jamilah is not brave enough yet to admit her Arab Muslim identity in public. She is a member of an Arabic music band which is invited to perform at the tenth grade formal of their school. She has great internal conflict about whether to expose her real personality or not. Several voices reverberate in her mind, which encourage or dishearten her about unveiling her true self. The second of them belongs to her alter ego, Jamie:

Voice 2 (Jamie loud and clear): Don't be such an idiot. How lame can you get? The darabuka? At your tenth grade formal? Run while you still have a chance to save your dignity. It's woggy beyond belief. You will never live it down. They'll know you're Arabic! And then what? Do you seriously want to open up the way for all the towelhead and terrorist and camel-jockey jokes? Run! (*Ten* 144)

The other voices are possessed by Timothy and Amy, Aunt Sowsan, and Miss Sajda, her teacher. These three voices embolden her to disclose her heritage. Subject formation is an ongoing process; thus, this compromise between the bearers of Arabic and English names is the incessant dilemma of success/failure of interpellation and consequently leads to the diasporic ambivalent subjectivity. In describing his notion of interpellation, Althusser uses the term "voice" and believes that the voice that hails a subject has "a creative power" which "brings about what it names"; in this sense, Butler challenges Althusser's assessment of the voice as "sovereign power," and instead suggests the identification of the voice with "discourse" (*Excitable* 32). The voices Jamilah hears in her mind stand for different discourses which wrestle over gaining the sovereignty. Each tries to constitute the subject, Jamilah, in its desired manner. She attests being swayed by the dictates of varying discourses by confessing her lack of agency and voicelessness: "I am not obsessed with the sound of my own voice because I don't have a voice. I'm stifling it beneath layers of deceit and shame" (*Ten* 32).

In her poststructuralist evasion of linguistic determinism, Butler emphasizes the "incommensurability between performativity and referentiality" (*Excitable* 108). She believes that appellations always exceed their referents and cannot exhaustively contain them, "the term gestures toward a referent it cannot capture. Moreover, that lack of capture constitutes the linguistic possibility of a radical democratic contestation, one that opens the term to future rearticulations" (108). Thus, none of the four voices succeed in hailing Jamilah wholly in the positions they desire. Instead of sticking to her Lebanese or Australian part, she carves a third way. Instead of shoving Jamie aside, Jamilah and Jamie bury the hatchet and embrace each other in a diasporic compromise. Her diasporic performative subjectivity exceeds the dictums of any of the discourses she is entangled in.

### 3.2 Performativity of Clothes

The performative motto 'to say is to do' can be extended to, 'to wear is to do.' The main theoretical premise behind this claim is Butler's study of the 'drag'. Butler argues that in a given society where the dominant discourse is "obligatory heterosexuality," sex and gender identities are essentialized and there is an original model to be emulated by each gender (*Gender* 93, 121, and 175). She contends that in such a community reversing the dress code, set by the dominant discourse, is a means of resistance and gaining agency (174). "Drags" are the subjects who parody the dominant norms in the process of reciting rather than imitating them (Salih 60); cross-dressing becomes a means of insurgence and hence gaining subjectivity against the interpellation of the dominant power

structure. Accordingly, it can be claimed that clothes have the potential to mold subjectivity.

Besides renaming herself to get integrated in diaspora, Jamilah tries to do her diasporic subjectivity by manipulating her appearance as well. She observes: "I've anglicized my name. And dyed my hair blonde. And I sometimes wear blue contact lenses. [...] when you have brown hair and brown eyes, avoiding a 'Middle Eastern appearance' tag at my school is made easier when you're hiding behind bleached hair and optical aids" (*Ten* 8). Jamilah's father is aware of the relation between body and subjectivity and has foreboding about the kind of person she will be as a result of this alteration in her appearance. Jamilah has to reassure him about her moral ethics: "I managed to convince him that the sudden change in my hair color would not mean I'd end up nightclubbing or on the arm of a boyfriend" (*Ten* 8).

Although Jamilah succeeded in hiding her background by changing her appearance, "the blonde locks have probably helped me in my mission to stay incognito. Nobody at school knows about my background" (*Ten* 8), Butler does not affirm this assimilatory measure. By being the exact "replication" or "copy" (*Gender* 39) of the norms of the Australian discourse Jamilah reinforces the discourse and its polar relation with others. Jamilah imitates the norms of the Western discourse rather than reciting them. She does not resignify either discourse. This is what Butler, borrowing from Austin, tags as an "infelicitous" (*Excitable*, 16) performative because it does not carry out the illocutionary intention (16) of constructing a diasporic subject who is capable of inserting rupture in the hegemonic discourses by "reiteration" (*Bodies* 2) rather than imitation or copy of the norms.

Jamilah's infelicitous performative act to construct her diasporic subjectivity through her appearance takes place in her dress code. She has to negotiate warring discourses to appear in her school's tenth grade formal; the conservative Islamic Eastern discourse, represented by his father, and the Western Australian discourse, represented by her classmates. While his father warns her about wearing revealing clothes, she feels obliged to dress herself in a scanty way to fit in at school. Her father dictates: "[the dress can't] be sleeveless, short, transparent, slinky, low-cut, or too revealing" (*Ten* 136). Jamilah is so enraged that she retorts, "'So basically I've got two options!' I tell my dad, my hands on my hips, my nostrils flaring. 'A pair of pajamas or a full-length leotard!'" (*Ten* 136). Jamilah, still in her either/or logic, regards it as an impossibility to find a way to satisfy both discourses. Miss Sajda, as the representative of diasporic compromise, intervenes and reassures Jamilah's father that she will amend the dress by adding a shawl that will cover the arms and the chest (*Ten* 136).

Jamilah's formal dress is prepared as an "in-between" (Bhabha 2) diasporic deed to recite both the Western and Islamic norms: "[This dress is] different shades of lime and turquoise and teal. It's long and elegant. It's sleeveless but it isn't low-cut and snuggles comfortably against my body. I found a matching shawl and Miss Sajda has draped it over my shoulders and around my arms, just above my elbows" (*Ten* 138). Jamilah by wearing a dress that negotiates the demands of the home and host discourses resignifies and reappropriates these discourses and constructs a hybrid diasporic performative subjectivity for herself. Saba Mahmood's study of the mosque movement can be applied to Jamilah's dress code:

[F]or the women I worked with this relationship between interiority and exteriority was almost reversed: a modest bodily form (the veiled body) did not simply express the self's interiority but was the means by which it was acquired. Since the mosque participants regarded outward bodily markers to be ineluctable means to the virtue of modesty, the body's precise movements, behaviors, and gestures were all made the object of their efforts to live by the code of modesty. (199)

Jamilah's "exteriority," the clothes she wears, her hair color and contact lenses, do not reflect her "interiority," her inner self. They are means toward the construction of a diasporic subjectivity.

### 3.3. Performativity of Cuisine

Butler, in her *Bodies that Matter*, criticizes the invariable missing of the body or even writing against it (ix) in theories. She, conversely, focuses on the "materiality of the body" (199) and tries to pinpoint how bodies come to matter in given discourses. Her main focus is on the gender identity and sexual practices. She suggests that only bodies that fit in the sexual blueprints of the dominant discourse matter. Nevertheless her theory can be extended to incorporate other bodily features. Eating as a significant bodily act can be presumed as a performative act which can make the body of the eater, cook, seller of the ingredient, etc. a body that matters/ does not matter in a specified regulatory system.

The food issues can gain greater significance in diaspora as diasporic women "claim subjectivity through the cultural politics of food" (Mehta 89). Leda Cooks claims that one of the alternatives that "Marginalized people" can apply to exhort power and counter the prevailing power is "resistance to and through food." One most conspicuous aspect of "resistance to" food can be public "starvation"; whereas, "resistance through" food can be seen in allowing oneself "(un)authorized" and "(un)appropriate" foods that do not "quite fit" in what is allowed by the predominant power structure (94).



In Abdel-Fattah's diasporic novel, food, as an ingredient of culture, plays a performative role. The relation between food, identity and diasporic sojourn can be traced in the comic rejoinder Jamilah gives her teacher to answer a historical question: "'Muslims have been in Australia from as early as...?' She stands over my desk and I look up at her. 'Um...since the time you could buy a kebab from a van at a gas station?' The class laughs and Miss Sajda raises her eyebrows" (*Ten* 20-21). This funny retort reveals the connection between culinary penchant and group identity especially in a transcultural cite like diaspora. Jamilah's gaining agency through food takes place through three women, her aunt Sowsan, her mother, and Miss Sajda.

Jamilah's aunt Sowsan is a woman who avails herself of the ethnic food as an empowering practice. She is represented as an adept cook who loves preparing Lebanese dishes and throwing parties. Kitchen is a room of her own (Dalessio 12) and she assumes authority by keeping her culinary roots. Jamila notes:

When I open the front door my face is immediately flooded with the warmth of a house alive with the spicy smells of a home-cooked feast. I step into the kitchen and find Aunt Sowsan at the counter, rolling pastries and filling them with spinach and cheese. I can smell lamb and potato roasting in the oven and mujadara, brown rice, and lentils cooking on the stove. My stomach starts rumbling and I rush over and hug Aunt Sowsan in excitement. (*Ten* 95)

William Dalessio's assessment of food as a medium for female resistance against erasure in the multicultural atmosphere of the United States can be applied to any displaced woman who dwells away from home: "the traditionally feminine act of food preparation becomes a subversive act of resistance that facilitates the preservation of ethnicity in mainstream America, a place often hostile to ethnic Otherness" (12). Through cooking ethnic food and nourishing her loved ones, aunt Sowsan finds voice in an atmosphere where any dissident voice might be subdued.

Jamilah's mother, unlike aunt Sowsan, comes out of her own room and starts to communicate through cooking. Jamilah recalls her experience in elementary school and how identification with local food was a source of humiliation and embarrassment. She was teased by other kids for the Lebanese bread and *labne* her mother packed for her for lunch (*Ten* 85). As Anita Mannur puts it: "the use of food is more than an a priori affirmation of palatable difference; it is also a way to undermine the racialized ideologies that culinary discourse is so often seen to buttress" (7). Butler states that the "constitutive constrains" of a given "regulatory schema" enjoy the potential to "produce the domain of intelligible bodies" as well as an "illegible domain" (*Bodies* xi). Jamilah remembers how her early diasporic experience and the foods she consumes, though legible in her

native regulatory system, make her illegible in the Australian one. Her initial confrontation with the Western culture, through food, is so tart that she wards off any suggestion of hybridization and prefers to lead a polar split life:

I remember my mom trying to fit in with the other mothers at my elementary school. [...] My mom slaved in the kitchen for a day, making trays of traditional Lebanese food. I brought it along to share with the class and the kids just laughed at me. They had their Vegemite and cheese sandwiches and chocolate wafers and white bread. I had kebabs and kofta and tabouli and pastries. Some of the other mothers laughed. I could smell their condescension. It smacked my nose like milk gone sour. [...] I've learned that the safest thing is to leave the kebabs at home and stick to white bread and Vegemite. (*Ten* 85)

Jamilah remembers the failure of her mother's deed, which is a culinary one, to "fit in" in the Australian diaspora. The feelings of "fear," "misunderstanding," and "condescension" Jamilah experiences when her ethnic origin gets revealed is the common feelings a stranger feels in an alien locus. Jamilah also reflects the deeply entrenched diasporic need to belong and assimilate by stating that nobody wants to "stand out." She prefers to keep on the impassable border between the two dissident cultures, represented by food items like "kebab" and "vegemite," and hide her local ethnic background, rather than having a "hybrid identity." Food can act as a strategy of accommodation in the new culture or resisting it. While trying to communicate through food, Jamilah's mother does not enter a dialogic negotiation between two cultures and cannot create a third space through cooking. The gastronomic deed performed by Jamilah's mother fails to accommodate them in the Australian society. Regarding it from Butlerian perspective, the performance, with the illocutionary intention of reinforcement of the self/other polarity is "infelicitous" (*Excitable* 18) and does not construct the diasporic subject in the contact zone.

Butler argues that performativity is not "free play" and regards "constraint" as a prerequisite in any performative act. In her overemphasis on "iterability," she defines it as "a regularized and constrained repetition of norms." Underscoring constraint, she introduces the term "ritual;" She contends performance is a "ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint" (*Bodies* 95). Interpreting culinary practices as a performative acts, which are reiterated in a given discourse, the rituals of preparation and consumption are the constraints that guarantee their survival. Miss Sajda describes the Lebanese family gatherings and the food consumed in a thick ritualized manner, with everything prepared after a native fashion:

'Big family dinners and a million conversations around the dinner table! Thick Arabic *ahwa* boiled on a coal barbecue and drunk with syrupy baklava and *konefa*. Drinking it over stories about back home when we played on snowcapped mountains after

school and spent our weekends swimming in the Mediterranean. Picking *warak ayneb* from the pot while nobody's looking and scooping hummus into fresh loaves of bread and letting it melt in your mouth! The darabuka and *oud* and *table* hypnotizing your hips into dancing around the living room with your cousins and aunts. A community of aunts and uncles and cousins, even when they're not blood relations.' (*Ten* 85)

Just after conjuring the memory of a Lebanese feast, by combining food and the ritual of its preparation and accompaniment with music and dance, Miss Sajda shatters the image by reminding Jamilah the difference such a gathering undergoes in diaspora. The whole reiterated ritual gets totally metamorphosed in diaspora; the food communicates in a liminal diasporic fashion: "But wait, Jamilah. Look closer. The family dinner is in the backyard of your suburban Sydney home. The Arabic coffee is being boiled over a barbecue you bought from Bunnings. The *warak ayneb* is homegrown and the hummus is from the local supermarket" (*Ten* 85). Besides the Westernization of the raw material and the cooking methods in diaspora, the ethnic music of the family dinners back home is replaced by the "Aussie TV shows" (*Ten* 85). In Miss Sajda's version, food becomes a diasporic deed to create a third space from which opposing discourses make a deal.

Nevertheless, besides the change in taste which takes place in diaspora due to these differences, diasporic life opens up a new interstice for "educating" its subjects with a hybrid, double taste. Jamilah finds her diasporic space by mediating between the local dish and the Australian one. She becomes independent by persuading his strict father into letting her work in a McDonald family restaurant (*Ten* 49). On the other hand, when she is deadly stressed before her musical performance which would reveal her non-Australian background and distinguish her as an 'other', Miss Sajda encourages her by reminding her gastronomic origin, "Darling, *habibi*, don't concern yourself with the creamy pasta. Years of garlic sauce on kebabs have given you a great constitution. Just have your fun! Be proud of who you are! Remove the disguise. And step out of the world of anonymity" (*Ten* 144). Through food Jamilah learns that elimination of the unhomeliness rests in the translation between two cultures. Kitchen, cooking, and food offer the diasporic subject a place halfway between home and host cultures and enable her/him an opportunity to dwell "beyond the binary dialectic of inside and outside" (Bhabha 222).

### **3.4. Performativity of Music**

Butler draws attention to "cultural intelligibility" (*Bodies* 2) that leads to the materiality of bodies. It can be used to claim that cultural practices like music serve as performances whose intelligibility in a specific discourse can lead to the

materialization of identity in that discourse. Musical performance is an important ingredient of Jamilah's diasporic life. The challenge to be tackled is to investigate whether music is a reflection of diasporic consciousness or a means of subject formation in diaspora. Nicholas Cook borrows from J.L. Austin's performative language and Judith Butler's performativity of gender to claim that 'performance' is a site where the meaning of a musical piece is generated. Contrary to the belief that there is an innate artistic core which gets represented when performed, Cook regards the very performance as the generator of artistry (185):

[C]ontemporary performance studies paradigm stresses the extent to which signification is constructed through the act of performance, and generally through acts of negotiation both between performers, and between them and audiences. In other words, performative meaning is understood as subsisting in process, and hence by definition is irreducible to product. (186)

"Signification" of a musical piece does not exist prior to its performance. Composing music, playing it, as well as listening to it are performative deeds that can construct the doer. Cook deems the signification of a musical piece "irreducible to product." Artistic works, especially music, are not finished, timeless "products"; they are "in process" and can vary significations in each "performance" (186).

As already mentioned, Jamilah, as a Muslim Lebanese teenager residing in Australia, feels embarrassed about her origin and tries to alter and hide it. She confesses that the question of "who am I" can keep her awake the whole night (*Ten* 129). Jamilah's father, along with her teacher and other family members, tries to induce her to embrace her multilayered hybrid diasporic identity. He coaxes, "You should be proud of who you are, Jamilah! You can be Australian and still have your heritage and religion. They are not at war with each other. Why is this life always like a battlefield for you? You are Australian and Lebanese and Muslim. They go together, Jamilah" (*Ten* 40). For Jamilah, before her final epiphany, identity is bound in the either/or logic of being Australian or Lebanese or Muslim. She ponders: "All I want is to fit in and be accepted as an Aussie. But I don't know how to do that when I'm juggling my Lebanese and Muslim background at the same time. [...] Completely and utterly incongruous. How can I be three identities in one? [...] They're always at war with one another" (*Ten* 94). Compromise is thus out of question for her.

One of the paths through which Jamilah's delivery from that essentialism to diasporic plurality takes place is music. Besides going to the regular Australian school, she attends 'madrasa' where she receives ethnic and religious lessons. Madrasa, with Miss Sajda as its tutor, is also a locus for indigenous artistic

activities. Jamilah is a member of a musical band in which she plays 'darabuka,' which is a drum shaped like a goblet and is mainly played in the Middle East: "The best part about madrasa is that I'm part of a band. Each of us plays an Arabic musical instrument and we practice every two weeks. I play the *darabuka*, which is a drum" (*Ten* 18). Regardless of the fact that Jamilah loves playing and listening to Arabic music, she winces at the idea of revealing this ethnic inclination to her Australian classmates. She refuses to take the Arabic music CDs to school to be burned, and is mortified by the assessment of other students who label the Arabic songs as woggy music (*Ten* 39). In fact Jamilah is "refused the possibility of cultural articulation" by the "exclusionary means" (*Bodies* 8) of the Australian discourse. She has to negotiate her predilection for Arabic music on the one hand and desire to assimilate in the Australian community (by denying her origin) on the other.

Butler maintains that the "reiteration of hegemonic norms" (*Bodies* 107) can have paradoxical effects. Although it can be conducive to the consolidation of the hegemonic norm and interpellation of the subject according to it, it can also have "productive" effects. The new norm does not emerge "ex nihilo," rather, it is an, perhaps unintentional, offshoot of the "reiteration" and "resignification" of the hegemonic norm (107). Thus Jamilah's attempt to ward off the exclusion of the Australian discourse results in new cultural, musical, norms. By supporting the theory of constructedness of identity, Timothy Rice inquires about the potential agent(s) behind this construction. He aligns himself with Foucault and affirms the theory that identity is the outcome of different regimes of power and discourses, rather than resultant from an autonomous innate selfhood. Rice places music in this complicated web of construction of identity. Viewed from his standpoint music is both a discourse that formulates identity and also a means of resistance to the dominant discourse for the marginalized groups: "Music can be understood in both ways: as a regime of self-creation (subjectification) and as a tool of resistance to those regimes" (Rice 28). Abdel-Fattah employs music as a discourse in which Jamilah's subjectivity is embedded and also a strategy for aligning herself with the marginalized ethnic and religious minority in diaspora and resisting the Western cultural hegemony accordingly: "In some instances, music can literally give voice to the powerless to label themselves and to express their existence as a group and their 'nature' in contexts where the powerful either do not acknowledge their existence or label and identify them in ways they find objectionable" (31). Jamilah locates herself in the beat of her alien musical instrument, though cannot bridge this alienated identity with that of the metropolis:

My darabuka is balanced under my arm and I drum down on the leather top with the palms of my hands, creating a deep, strong rhythm that echoes and reverberates in my chest. [...] I get lost in the beat of the drum as my palms move faster and then slower; one beat, then two, then four quick beats, then back to one. My palms coax the sounds from the leather, and beads of sweat line my forehead as our music becomes more intense. This is where I belong, I think to myself. This is who I am. (*Ten* 34)

Through music Jamilah succeeds in the path of her diasporic subject-formation; she reflects, “this is who I am,” and “this is where I belong.” Musical performance meddles between the Eastern and Western cultures and molds Jamilah as a diasporic subject.

Simon Frith, in his article “Music and Identity,” opens a discussion that can be used to explain Jamilah’s artistic condition. He challenges the idea that a piece of music reflects people’s predilection; he embarks on the idea that the musical piece constructs people. Music can engender both subjective and collective identity (Frith 109). He believes that “music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them” (111). Jamilah “lives” her diasporic subjectivity through music. Step by step she constructs a hybrid ongoing subjectivity. Unlike her initial disappointment about the possibility of mixing disparate identities and having a threshold subjectivity, music helps her to interweave these separate selves: “Tonight is about Aussie-Ethnic pride! We’re the OzWogs! And we’re gonna make you shake it!” (*Ten* 144). She reports her amazing performance as follows: “I can’t believe I’m here, at my formal [...] exposing myself like this. There’s no shame; there’s no embarrassment. With every drumming down on the darabuka I’m announcing who I am. For the first time in my life, knowing the answer has never felt so sweet” (*Ten* 145). Besides Jamilah’s coming out of the “cultural closet” (Raihanah et al 366) and constructing her diasporic subjectivity through playing ethnic music, the audience enjoys the opportunity for subject-formation as well. Jamilah’s classmate, Peter, who represents the cynical racist discourse in the novel, tries to criticize the ethnic music by claiming that “You can’t dance to Middle Eastern music” (*Ten* 108). The Lebanese, Greek, and Anglo audience, however, “decode” this “cultural message” (Rivkin and Ryan 1026) by ascending the dance floor, dancing to the beats of the ethnic music and thus constructing transcultural identity.

## **5. Conclusion**

“You just refuse to integrate. Your women wear that funny headgear and most of you don’t speak English” (*Ten* 7). This is the disparaging comment of an Australian boy against the “ethnics and Asians” (*Ten* 7) that Jamilah hears at school every day. What is implied by such remarks is the assumption that all minorities are a homogeneous pact with predetermined contours, impervious to

any alteration. This research challenged this presupposition by claiming that the identity of a Muslim Lebanese teenage girl is performatively constructed in the Australian diaspora. Jamilah displays several performances to negotiate the requirements of several discourses she is entangled in. Jamilah's first performance involves her linguistic deed to rename herself. She wants to fend off the Arabic 'Jamilah' and align herself with the Australian 'Jamie' to evade the interpellation of the Muslim-Lebanese discourse and integrate in the Western one. Nevertheless, in line with Butler's attestation of the openness of any linguistic interpellation and lack of commensurability between appellation and its referent, the end result of Jamilah's linguistic deed is a diasporic "liminal" (Bhabha 3) doer.

Likewise, Jamilah's corporeal performances concerning her dress codes cannot be the exact 'replication' of the Western models. Her 'infelicitous' reiteration of the cultural etiquette concerning clothes takes place in-between Eastern and Western discourses. Jamilah's third performative deed is culinary. Cooking and eating are performative rituals that mediate between the appeals of home and host discourses. Last but not least is Jamilah's musical performance. It is her final deed in construction a diasporic doer. Butler observes that "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender* 33). Accordingly, the linguistic, corporal, culinary, and artistic measures Jamilah takes, though at first glance seem to be the "results" of her diasporic sojourn, are in fact performances that construct her identity in the intersection of the diasporic contact zone.

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