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Muslim Arab Women: The Sense of In-betweenness in Leila Aboulela's Novel *Minaret*

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family and my friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my precious parents who taught me the language of love. My lovely siblings Hakim, Hanene, Khaoula, Amina, and Yousra who believe in me even when I doubt myself. My nephew and niece Ahmed Idriss and Mariem who bring joy to my life.

I also dedicate this dissertation to Fatima, Salima, Soumia, Selma, Fada, Nihed, and Basma who have supported me throughout the whole research. I will always be in debted for their ultimate love and support.

Dedication

I dedicate my humble work to my sweet and loving parents: Massouad and Samouna.

To my special siblings: Maissa, Amel, Mimi, Mohamed, and Akram

To my beautiful nieces: Rassil and Amira.

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Abstract:

This dissertation explores how Arab women experience a sense of in-betweenness in their postcolonial societies and in western Diasporas. It aims to analyze the struggle of Arab women in realizing a stable sense of identity in the novel *Minaret*, written by the Sudanese female writer Leila Aboulela. It also analyze the multiple identities of immigrant Muslim women in multicultural context and how they negotiate and prioritize Islamic identity. This research deeply highlights how the veil becomes a source of empowerment, stability, security, peace, and belonging for women in western environment where Arabness, Islam, patriarchy, and feminism are blended together. It adopts an analytical approach relying more on postcolonial theory and Islamic feminism. Accordingly, this research is divided into three chapters. The first one provides a theoretical framework of postcolonialism, Arab Anglophone literature and Islamic feminism. It also provides definitions of the main concepts such as Hybridity, multiculturalism and Islamophobia they are the basis in the analysis of Leila Aboulela's selected work *Minaret*. Furthermore, the second chapter analyses Najwa's sense of in-betweenness in both her homeland Sudan and London. Moreover, it sheds light on how the protagonist Najwa succeeds in creating a new religious sense of identity, in Diaspora, after a long time of confusion and struggle. Finally, the third chapter provides an analysis on how the veil can be a source of both prejudice and empowerment for Arab women in Multicultural patriarchal societies. It also shows how the choice of veiling can be an end of the female protagonist's painful journey towards her newly composed religious self. This dissertation then provides a deep understanding of Arab women experience in Diaspora in order to achieve a modern yet religious identity.

Résumé:

Cette thèse explore la manière dont les femmes arabes ressentent un sentiment d'entre-deux dans leurs sociétés postcoloniales et dans les diasporas occidentales. Il vise à dépeindre la lutte des femmes arabes pour réaliser un sentiment d'identité stable dans le roman Minaret, écrit par l'écrivain soudanaise Leila Aboulela. Il représente également les identités multiples des femmes musulmanes immigrées dans un contexte multiculturel et la façon dont elles négocient et donnent la priorité à l'identité islamique. Cette humble recherche souligne profondément comment le voile devient une source d'autonomisation, de stabilité, de sécurité, de paix et d'appartenance pour les femmes dans un environnement occidental où l'arabe, l'islam, le patriarcat et le féminisme se mélangent. Il adopte une approche analytique reposant davantage sur la théorie postcoloniale et le féminisme islamique. Par conséquent, cette recherche est divisée en trois chapitres. Le premier représente un cadre théorique du postcolonialisme, de la littérature arabe anglophone et du féminisme islamique. Il fournit également des définitions des principaux concepts tels que l'hybridité, le multiculturalisme et l'islamophobie, nécessaires à l'analyse de l'œuvre sélectionnée par Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*. Cependant, le deuxième chapitre analyse, la protagoniste féminine d'Aboulela, le sentiment d'interdépendance de Najwa d'abord dans son pays natal, le Soudan, puis à Londres. De plus, il met en lumière la manière dont le protagoniste Najwa réussit à créer un nouveau sentiment d'identité religieuse, en diaspora, après une longue période de confusion et de lutte. Enfin, le troisième chapitre fournit une analyse sur la manière dont le voile peut être une source à la fois de préjugés et d'autonomisation pour les femmes arabes dans les sociétés patriarcales multiculturelles. En outre, il montre comment le choix du voile peut être la fin du douloureux voyage de la protagoniste féminine vers son moi religieux nouvellement composé. Cette thèse fournit ensuite une compréhension approfondie de l'expérience des femmes arabes en diaspora afin de parvenir à une identité à la fois moderne et religieuse.

ملخص :

تدرس هذه الاطروحة كيف تختبر المرأة العربية إحساسًا بالوسط في مجتمعات ما بعد الاستعمار وفي الشتات الغربي وتهدف إلى تصوير نضال المرأة العربية في تحقيق إحساس ثابت بالهوية في رواية المئذنة التي كتبها الكاتبة السودانية ليلى أبو العلا. كما أنه يمثل الهويات المتعددة للنساء المسلمات المهاجرات في سياق متعدد الثقافات وكيف يتفاوضن ويعطون الأولوية للهوية الإسلامية. يبرز هذا البحث بعمق كيف أصبح الحجاب مصدرًا للتمكين والاستقرار والأمن والسلام والانتماء للمرأة في البيئة الغربية حيث تمتزج العروبة والإسلام والنظام الأبوي والنسوية معًا بحيث تتبنى منهجًا تحليليًا يعتمد أكثر على نظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية والنسوية الإسلامية. وعليه فقد تم تقسيم هذا البحث إلى ثلاثة فصول. يمثل الفصل الأول إطارًا نظريًا لما بعد الاستعمار والأدب العربي الناطق بالإنجليزية والنسوية الإسلامية كما يقدم تعريفات للمفاهيم الرئيسية مثل الهجينة والتعددية الثقافية والإسلاموفوبيا التي كانت مطلوبة في تحليل رواية "المئذنة" لليلى أبو العلا. اما الفصل الثاني يدرس إحساس نجوى بالوسط أولاً في وطنها السودان ثم في لندن لاحقًا كما يسلط الضوء على كيفية نجاح بطلة الرواية نجوى في خلق هوية دينية ، في الشتات ، بعد فترة طويلة من الارتباك والصراع. أخيرًا، يقدم الفصل الثالث تحليلًا حول كيف يمكن للحجاب أن يكون مصدرًا للتحيز والتمكين في ان واحد للمرأة العربية في المجتمعات الأبوية متعددة الثقافات. علاوة على ذلك ، فإنه يوضح كيف يمكن أن يكون اختيار الحجاب نهاية لرحلة البطلة الأنثوية المؤلمة نحو شخصيتها الدينية الجديدة.

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Introduction

Since the twentieth century, a captivating literary body known as "Anglophone Arab Literature" has come to light and has ever been a pivotal point in many interesting literary reviews and works of criticism. This literary body has gained a significant attention especially after 9/11 attack. However, a great number of literary works that have been produced by Arab writers effectively overrun Western bookshelves. Anglophone Arab Literature has recently attracted a significant number of Western critics, researchers and readers due to its provocative themes that simulate reality.

Due to the movements of migration, globalization and cultural exchange, literary productions have marked a great shift of attention especially migrant literature. This latter consists of representing and depicting immigrant's life in western society where Arab issues cannot be denied or excluded. Accordingly, Arab women writers have shown a great commitment to voice their experiences as migrants in Diaspora. The reflection of 9/11 attacks in literature has marked a turning point in contemporary British fiction. It shows a great concern in discussing themes related to multiculturalism, diaspora, exile, and identity formation… etc, as well as issues related to Islamic image in Western context. In that respect, British Muslim writers take it upon their shoulders to challenge the stereotypical image and the negative misconceptions and misrepresentations of Muslim women in the West and all around the world. Additionally, Arab Anglophone female writers have succeeded in conceptualizing a new understanding and creating a positive image of Muslims in Western society; Leila Aboulela, for instance, is one of the best examples. Aboulela's writings are considered as rock-stones that have paved the way for a better understanding of Islam and Muslims through contemporary British fiction.

In her novel *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela has succeeded in bringing East and West together, as she perfectly depicts the experience of Arab Muslim women in Diaspora. Her work is published in 2005 in a time of Islamophobia, when Muslims' image is packed with negative connotations that have greatly shaped the daily lives of Muslim women living in the West. During the postcolonial era, a large number of immigrants have experienced a sense of in-betweenness, which is a position where the individual is constantly torn between two cultures, as they do not fully belong to neither their homelands nor to the host nations and that tremendously affect their identities. For that reason, Leila Aboulela has clearly discussed the theme of 'In-betweenness' in *Minaret*, where the author puts her female protagonist in a constant struggle with her sense of alienation and displacement both in her homeland Sudan and the host nation London. Aboulela's female protagonist suffer from loss of identity because of her sense of uprootedness and non-belonging to any given place.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to show how Arab Muslim women immigrants experience a sense of in-betweenness in their postcolonial patriarchal societies and in Diasporas and their struggle to build a stable transformational identity. This work also seeks to show how Arab female writers challenge the misconceptions and stereotypes associated with Arab Muslim women and Islam in western context and produce a literature that glorify and represent Arabs in a very positive image. It examines how Leila Aboulela tackles the issue of Arab Muslim Women's sense of in-betweenness in her novel *Minaret*. Aboulela depicted how her female protagonist Najwa goes through various stages in her both homeland and diaspora, in order to achieve a religious stable sense of identity. Yet, she breaks the old misconceptions about Islam by showing how the veil can be a source of empowerment, belonging, protection and stability rather than a prejudice for Arab women in multicultural western nations. This research also highlights the importance of hybridity and multiculturalism and their effects on identity formation of Arab Muslim women.

However, as the research attempts to cover the enigmatic process that Arab Muslim Women go through to identify themselves in Postcolonial Arab and western contexts, it leads us to raise many questions: To what extent do Arab Muslim women feel with a sense of in-betweenness in their postcolonial patriarchal societies and in Diaspora? How are Arab Muslim women identities formed and negotiated in a context which is exclusively Christian, secular or fully indifferent to faith? How does Leila Aboulela subvert the western misconceptions, stereotyping and misrepresentation of Arab women and Islam in her novel *Minaret*? How does the sense of in-betweenness urge and promote Najwa to search for her own identity? Finally, is the veil considered a source of prejudice or an empowerment for Arab Women in Diaspora? In an attempt to answer the above questions, many approaches are used. Though the predominating approach is analytical, it, nonetheless, recourses to other approaches such as postcolonialism and Islamic feminism.

In order to achieve the goals of this study, this work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, which is entitled “Definitions and Theoretical Framework”, provides a theoretical background about the main theories and definitions of the main concepts that are indispensable to analyze Leila Aboulela’s novel *Minaret*. It is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview of postcolonialism and a general understanding of postcolonial literature and its characteristics, besides the importance of hybridity and its relation to identity formation. While, the second section of the chapter gives an overview of Arab Anglophone Literature and a general understanding of both multiculturalism and Islamic feminism. It also reveals the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in Britain after 9/11 attacks.

The second chapter of the work is entitled “A Sense of In-betweenness in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret*". It analyzes how the female protagonist’s sense of in-betweenness affected her identity in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret*. The main aim behind this chapter is to show

how the female protagonist goes through liminal stages in order to achieve a stable sense of identity. It includes two parts, the first one deals with the experience of Najwa's sense of in-betweenness on her homeland Sudan and her struggle to identify herself, while the second part deals with her identity formation in Multicultural London. Finally, the third chapter, which is entitled "The Representation of The Veil in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*", deals with the effects of the veil on Arab Muslim women in London. It reveals how the veil could be both a source of prejudice and empowerment for Arab women in western nations.

In conclusion, this research will illuminate some obscure points in the previous researches and studies, such as discussing the issue of identity in relation to Arab women's sense of in-betweenness in diaspora. It will hopefully pave the way for other researchers to explore and study Anglophone Arab literature, which is so provocative, innovative, and full of interesting themes to be discussed.

Chapter One: Definitions and Theoretical Framework

The first chapter is an account of the post 9/11 Anglophone Arab literature. It presents a theoretical framework of the upcoming study. The first section of the chapter provides a general background of postcolonialism, an overview, and the main characteristics of postcolonial literature. It also deals with the notion of 'hybridity' in postcolonial literature. However, the second section is dedicated to provide a general overview about Anglophone Arab literature, multiculturalism, Islamic feminism, and the impact of islamophobia on Muslim women in Britain after 9/11 attack. All those mentioned theories and concepts will be applied to analyze the chosen case study *Minaret* by the Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela.

1. Introduction to Postcolonialism and postcolonial Literature

During the beginning of the twentieth century, the British Empire covered a large number of regions on the earth. The British imperialism greatly expanded its power by taking control over many colonies like: India, Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, and Caribbean. However, by the mid of the twentieth century, many countries gained their independence after the decline of the British Empire. After that, the world has witnessed a period of decolonization, an era that inspired many prominent writers to write about it. Accordingly, these writers successfully produced what is called postcolonial literature to depict their own experiences during and after the period of colonization. The field of postcolonial literature is regarded as an area of interest during the last decades. Hence, it is a very wide field and at the same time, a controversial one as it has been subjected to extensive criticism. Postcolonial literature comes from the broadest term 'postcolonialism' and it deals with the social and cultural change that took place after colonialism, i.e., after the conquest of other people's lands and goods. Thus, in order to understand what is meant by postcolonial literature, it is necessary to know first what is meant by postcolonialism.

1.1. An Overview of Postcolonialism:

The critic, Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioglu, in her article "The Development of Postcolonial Theory" defined the term post-colonial as a term that "has come to stand for both the material effects of colonization and the huge diversity of everyday and sometimes hidden responses to it. This word then, represents the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout this diverse range of societies, in their institutions and practices" (2). So postcolonialism, as a term, refers to the effects of colonialism in postcolonial societies and to the response of postcolonial people to such effects. In the same vein, the critic Simhachalam Thamarana stated in his article "Significance of Studying Postcolonial Literature and Its Relevance" that the term 'Postcolonialism' is widely referred to "the representation of race, ethnicity, culture and human identity in the modern era, mostly after many colonized countries got their independence. It is connected with imperialism from the moment of colonization until 21st century" (537). Therefore, postcolonialism has been widely used by many critics to indicate the depiction of race, ethnicity and human identity in postcolonial contexts. It is also tended to consist on the struggle of native colonized people in the face of poverty, social, and political instability as well as the deteriorate position that the country went through during and after colonization.

Many Postcolonial theorists produce critical works to analyze the literature of the countries that were once colonized, or the literature of the colonizing countries that takes the colonized people as its subject matter. These critics focus on the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized and they deal with issues such as national identity, language, and representation. One of those notable theorists is Frantz Fanon who is a Martinique critic. He is considered as a greater contributor in the creation of postcolonial theory, through his prominent published works as: *The Wretched of The Earth* (1961), *The Black Skin and White Masks* (1952). In most of his works, Fanon analyzed the psychological effects of colonialism on both the

colonizer and the colonized. His writings inspired many individuals to struggle for freedom, as he used to write about his personal experience in order to show the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

By the publication of his book *Orientalism* in 1979, the famous critic Edward Said is considered as the founding father of postcolonial theory. In this book, he depicts the inequality between the binary opposition and the imbalanced relationship between the West and the East by using the terms "Orient or the other" and "occident". With the publication of Orientalism, Said gives a new perspective to a new literature and the postcolonial theory has reached the climax. As it is stated by Naifa Almtairi in her article "Edward Said: Post-Colonial Discourse and its Impact on Literature that "since the publication of *Orientalism*, Said's critique has become the hegemonic discourse which opens a new window and paves the way for a different outlook through which we can approach literature" (2). Therefore, Lutfi Hamadi in his article "Edward Said: The Postcolonial Theory and The Literature of Decolonization" asserts that: "Said theory of post-colonialism is mainly based on what he considers the false image of the Orient or the east that has been fabricated by western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economist, and imperial administrator" (40). According to Said, this will always show the East "the other" as inferior, uncivilized, and barbarian in comparison with "the West" which is superior, advanced, and civilized.

Another influential cultural thinker and an important contributor in postcolonial period is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. She comes up with the concept of subaltern, which means people who have a lower or inferior status in society. In her highly influential article *Can The Subaltern Speak,* the main focus was on defending people who used to be voiceless, as it is mentioned by Praveen V Ambesange in his article "Postcolonialism: Edward Said & Gayatri Spivak" that the purpose behind her studies is that "she denounces the harm done to women /

third world women and non-Europeans. She seeks to give voice to the subalterns who can not speak or who are silent" (48). So Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and without forgetting Homi Bhabha are the main critics and contributors in shaping and designing the principle perspectives of postcolonial theory.

1.2. Towards Understanding Postcolonial literature:

The most important literary works that characterize postcolonial literature are *One Hundred years of Solitude, Midnight's Children* , and *Things Fall Apart* in addition to many others. Thus, postcolonial literature is a broad and debatable term that encompasses a literature expressed by writers who are brutalized and oppressed for years by colonial rulers. During the decolonization process, many writers start to write about their own experience to show the consequences of decolonization, as Cheriet Asma mentioned it in her dissertation entitled "Postcolonial African Literature and The Identity Question" that Postcolonial literature is a category devised to replace and expand upon what was one called Common wealth literature. As a label, it thus covers a very wide range of writing from countries that were once colonies or dependencies of the European powers (33). In other words "Commonwealth literature, emerged in 1940s, as the cultural wings of the British common wealth and focused at first on literatures from white settlers' colonies, but later began to include literatures in English from decolonized African and Asia nations" (Wail S. Hassan 310). This literature is renamed later as "postcolonial literature". It include novels, poetry and drama that were written during and after the imperial rule, as it tackled different themes such as: cultural dominance, racism, quest for identity, inequality, hybridity, racial discrimination...etc.

1.3. Main Characteristics of Postcolonial Literature:

Postcolonial literature has many features and characteristics that distinguish it from any other types of literature. The first characteristic of postcolonial literature is the writer' attitudes towards his native nation. As Feroza Jussawalla described it as "an attitude of its distinctness and difference from that of the European colonizer" (98). In the same vein, Sarah Harrison in her paper entitled "What is Postcolonial Literature" argued that "postcolonial writers used a detailed descriptions of indigenous people, places, and practices, to counteract or "resist" the stereotypes, inaccuracies, and generalization which the colonizers circulated in educational, legal, political, and social texts and settings" (1). In parallel, Feroza Jussawalla stated that Postcolonial Bildungsroman, is considered a favored narrative for the postcolonial writer, this attitude is reflected in the hero or heroine's developing affirmation of his or her native culture and history. In such novels, the process of the Bildugsheld's personal growth and development almost always reflects his or her growing sense of national and ethnic belonging (98). So the growth of a young protagonist into nationalist creates a sense of national awareness and belonging in a postcolonial writing.

The second characteristic of postcolonial literature is the appropriation of the colonizer's language. Jussawalla argued that many postcolonial authors, whether they write in English or in French, appropriate the colonizers' language and make it their own (100). In other words, this means the efforts of taking the colonizer's language and express it by the colonized sentiments. During the colonization process, the colonizers had harshly tried to remove and delete the colonized mother tongues and impose their own native languages. So, the English language used to be the dominant one in that time; yet, after the independence took place, many writers choose to take another direction about the languages of their writings. They mixed the colonizers' languages with their native ones and they start to use their native terms and expressions in their novels and works, which are mainly written in English or French.

Among those writers are Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Salman Rushdie and many others. Achebe, for instance used to Africanize the English language in his first novel Things Fall Apart, as his purpose is to create a new African English. So he used African (Igbo) words, phrases, idioms, and proverbs in order to protect his native language. As Debaleena Dutta mentioned, in her article "Bearing The Burden of Native Experience: A Stylistic Analysis of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God" when she said that "Achebe has successfully harnessed the colonizer's language to make it bear the burden of his native experience" (162). Therefore, the Arab Muslim Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela, in her novel Minaret mixed the English language with her native Arabic language, as she used Arabic words and expressions such as: Hijab, Burka, Azan…etc in order to empower and preserve her native culture. Accordingly, Muhammed Abdullah, in his article "*Minaret:* Islam and Feminism at Crossroad" states that Aboulela used to "deploy Arabic phrases, and un-translated-expressions and Islamic symbolism to strengthen Islamic cultural appeal" (159).

The third characteristic is hybridity within postcolonial writings. Hybridity is a term associated with the Indian English scholar and critical theorist Homi Bhabha who is, in return, considered one of the most important figures in contemporary postcolonial studies. The term 'hybridity' gained a significant attention by many scholars and critics. For instance, Bill Ashcrofet defined hybridity as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (qtd. in P.Prayer Elmo Raj 125). In the same vein, Esmaeil Zohdi, in his article "Lost-Identity; A Result of 'Hybridity' and 'Ambivalance' in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to The North*" stated that "Hybridity happens when a person is caught between two different things, often two different cultures, which leads him/her a "double vision" or "double consciousness" and finally a merged or even a lost identity" (146). In other words, the term 'hybridity' was defined as a mixture of two separate cultures, genders, identities,…etc, as it takes different sub-categories such as racial, linguistic, cultural

and religious ones. Accordingly, hybridity is an inevitable outcome of colonialism and it is highly connected to postcolonialism, as well as to postcolonial literature.Therefore, Homi Bhabha claims that “Hybridity provides an alternative kind of identity that is neither completely defined by the colonizer nor fully under the control of the colonized” (qtd. in Al-Karawi and Bahar 260). So according to Bhabha, hybridity is the process adopted by the colonial authorities to transform the colonized national identity and to state another form of identity similar to their own. However, the colonizer’s rejection of the imposed national identity creates a new in-between identity that is neither “self “nor “other”, and this is what Bhabha called “Third Space”.

Hybridity has a devastating effect on the migrant or diasporic identity formation, as it leads to what has been called ‘in-betweenness’. During postcolonial era, the majority of people had chosen to assimilate with colonizers’ cultures. They got rid of everything related to the original cultures. Consequently, they went through identity crisis, which led them to question their true identities. Many writers experience a sense of rootlessness, displacement, no belonging and evenly in-betweenness. This latter is a state of alienation, in which the individual neither fully belongs to the homeland nor to the host nations. The lack of affiliation neither to the homeland nor to the host country leads to the loss of identity. During the twentieth century, many Anglophone Arab writers, including Leila Aboulela, underscored the theme of in-betweenness innovatively through their literary products.

2. Introduction to Anglophone Arab Literature:

2.1. An overview

Anglophone Arab literature refers to the literary corpus that is produced in English by writers of Arab decent in different parts of the world like America, Britain, Canada, and Australia. It first appeared in the start of the twentieth century with the emergence of literary products of Arab authors in America like: Abraham Mitrie Rihbany’s *A Far Journey* (1914),

Gibran Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet,* Ameen Rihani, and Mikhail Naimy (Al Maleh 2-3). This is known as the first trend of Anglophone Arab literature, which is called 'the Mahjar'.

British Anglophone Arab literature is the Skeleton of the Anglophone Arab literature. It became apparent in the mid of the twentieth century due to the rise of immigration of the elite from the middle East countries to Britain where they sought to pursue their education or to find jobs (Al Maleh 6). The critic Layla Al Maleh defined it as: "mostly female, feminist, diasporic in awareness, and political in character" (13). Relying on this quote, one can understand that British Anglophone Arab literature has many dimensions: feminist dimension, hybrid dimension, and transcultural dimension. In this literature, two trends can be identified: the first trend starting from 1950s to 1970s, while the second trend started from 1970 until today. The first trend of British Anglophone writers are, as Al Maleh described them, the "Europeanized aspirants". They were impressed by all what is Western (6). They were eager for acceptance and integration in the British society and that was obviously noticeable in their works. They produced a literature, which is identical to the British literary heritage stylistically speaking and it is not innovative at all. Their literature has no Arabic imprint, as Al Maleh puts it:

> The literature written could hardly be said to constitute a distinctive literary corpus meriting a place on the map of world literature in English or bearing comparison with the more established Anglophone writings from Africa, India or the Caribbean. It was more or less the product of cultural and historical accidents that took the authors in the direction of one culture rather than another (7).

The most prominent authors of that trend are Edward Atiyah, Waguish Ghalli, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and Rima Alamuddin. They tackled themes related to psychological and social isolation, hybridity, identity, and politics (Al Maleh 8).

The second trend of British Anglophone writers, which is the main focus of this study, is depicted as a trend with "the more recent hybrids, hyphenated, transcultural, exilic/diasporic writers" (11). For instance, the writers of this trend are mainly women, such as Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela, Zeina Ghandour, and Ghada Karmi, in addition to Jamal Mahjoub and Hisham Matar (11). Unlike the writers of the first trend, these writers had no intention to settle in Britain, they are there only for the pursuit of their education. They found in Diaspora a space where they can express themselves freely, raise their own voices and discuss all what is forbidden to be discussed back home (14). This literary corpus is innovative thematically and stylistically speaking. For instance, Aboulela used Arabic phrases, expressions and Islamic symbolism in her novels to boost Islamic cultural adjuration (Abdullah 159). They used their diasporic experiences as a ground for their literature, as they portrayed the daily life struggles of diasporic Arab Muslims. More importantly, they challenged the misconceptions and stereotypical images made about Islam and Muslims, especially women. In her article "Hybrid and Hyphenated Arab Women's English Narratives as a New Coming-of Age Literature", Dalal Sarnou states that: "literary works written by Arab Anglophone women writers –mainly novels and short stories –brought more recognition and visibility to the Arab Woman and defy the orientalist representation that was promoted since the nineteenth century in Western literature, media and art" (52). This literary body gained a huge recognition; it attracted a wide range of audience as well as literary critics and scholars especially after the 9/11 attack which can be regarded as a turning point for Anglophone Arab literature in general and more specifically British Anglophone Arab literature.

2.2. Muticulturalism:

Due to globalization and mass immigration, the world is reconstructed into a large number of intertwined cultural zones. Since no culture is pure anymore, they all mixed and hybrid. In

this light, multiculturalism came into existence. The term multiculturalism has range of meanings as it is used in different contexts. In general, multiculturalism means the existence of different and multiple cultures and ethnicities within one society, as it is defined by Max Farrar when he states that "multiculturalism means the existence and recognition of different identities in a shared political space within a frame work of human rights" (5). It dated back to the mid eighteenth century and emerged as a movement first in Canada and Australia and then in USA, UK, Germany and elsewhere. It came into a wider public use during the early 1980s in the public school curriculum in America and become mostly important in such fields like history, literature, and social studies….etc.

Multicultural literature is one of the most important fields that writers and critics has tended to deal with and analyze. Although there are various definitions of the term, the broadest one is that: "multicultural literature includes literature about people who are considered outside of the mainstream of society and have been in some manner marginalized". This definition would include people from diverse cultures, linguistic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds, in addition, it encompasses issues on gender, sexual orientation and disabilities" (Rachel G.Salas, et al 3). Moreover, Multiculturalism focuses on describing people who come from different cultures that have been marginalized due to their race, gender, language, social class…etc. Furthermore, the critic L. A. Sanders defines multicultural literature as "a body of literature that spans all literary genres but generally focuses on primary characters who are members underrepresented groups whose racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, or culture historically has been marginalized or misrepresented by the dominant culture (qtd. in Michell Lawson 3).

After the Second World War, multiculturalism has turned out to be a huge issue, due to the notable eligibility of cultural diversity, multi-ethnic and racial groups in Western nations. As a matter of fact, the majority, if not all, Arab Anglophone writers are immigrants. They

live in western multicultural societies. Inevitably, their experiences as a minority in those societies are reflected through their literary products. For instance, the Sudanese Leila Aboulela used either Britain or Scotland as settings to all her novels. In her writings, she depicted Arabs and Muslims as being in the margin of multicultural societies. In her second novel *Minaret*, Aboulela offered a new image of London, which is viewed by Arab Muslim women.

2.3. Islamic Feminism:

In patriarchal societies, Men have always dominated women whom their roles are merely limited to look after their houses and give birth to children. Two centuries ago, women of the West took the task to fight against the oppressive patriarchal norms and to be equal to men in every aspect of life, by creating what is called the feminist movement. This movement regarded religions as oppressive to women, especially Islam, that what led feminism to marginalize women from different religious backgrounds including Muslim women. Although Islam has ensured women's rights centuries ago, Islamic governments have robbed them from those rights. Many Muslim women scholars in addition to some men like Ziba Mir-Hosseini, ShahlaSherkat, Omaima Abu Bakr, Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud took the responsibility to defend their own rights by creating Islamic feminist movement.

Islamic feminism is a novel concept. It is coined in the late of the last century. More specifically, it started to appear in 1990 in different parts of the world. It is embodied in the diverse literary works produced by Muslim writers. For instance, Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as a "feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm" (qtd. in Liv Tønnessen 2). In other words, Islamic feminism is about the re-interpretation of the Quran texts, used once by Islamists to marginalize Muslim women, from a feminist perspective. It is based on the notion that patriarchy is the production of the

masculine, biased reading of the Quranic text rather than Islam (Dun and Danielle Zimmerma 146).

Islamic feminism has been a topic of debates and discussions. It was harshly discarded by feminists as well as Muslims because both Islam and feminism were always regarded as paradoxical concepts which are impossible to be matched together. Non-religious Feminists have discarded the concept of Islamic feminism because of their belief that faith, specifically Islam, deprived women from having their natural rights; while the main reason behind Muslims' rejection was their belief that non-religious feminism is a Western colonial project. Although Islamic feminism is hotly rejected, it was devilishly fostered by intellectuals and researchers (Tønnessen2). However, Muslim women in Diaspora took the challenge of matching the unmatchable; they brought Islam and feminism together under one single concept "Islamic feminism". Thus, Islamic feminism is a space where gender and Islam intersect. This given intersection has shaped the life of Muslim women in Diaspora, especially in Britain, because it opens for diversity of patterns to express identity, one Islamic and one feminist (Muhammad Abdullah 157).-

2.4. **The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in Britain after 9/11 attack**:

Islam and Muslims have always been misrepresented and misunderstood in the Western discourse. Both concepts are always regarded as connotations to barbarism, uncivilization, and oppression. This misrepresentation and misunderstanding have augmented significantly after the cataclysmic attack of 9/11 to take a shape of what is widely known as Islamophobia. For instance, Islamophobia is not a contemporary phenomenon as many critics think. Accordingly, the critic Todd H. Green affirms in his *book The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia* in the West that the term Islamophobia came into sight first in the French language as "Islamophobie" in 1918, exactly in a book entitled *The Life Of Mohammad*

written by Etienne Dinet and Sliman Ben Brahim. Islamophobia has many definitions and the most common one is the one suggested in the Runnymede Trust report, which is a "dread or hatred of Islam" or "unfounded hostility towards Islam" (qtd. in Green 9). In the same vein, Green defines Islamophobia as the "hatred, hostility, and fear of Islam and Muslims, and the discriminatory practices that result" (9). Simply put, Islamophobia includes both the feelings that the Westerns have towards Islam and Muslims: anxiety, revulsion, dislike, and the consequences of such feelings as humiliating and violent acts against Muslims who live in Diaspora.

According to Runnymede report, the first study about islamophobia, the term has eight features, which can be only described as offensive to Islam and Muslims in every way possible. Those features are: Islam as monolithic and rigid, Islam is separate from other religions and humanity values, Islam as inferior, Islam as the enemy, Islam as manipulative, Racial discrimination against Muslims justified, Muslim criticisms of the West invalidated, and Anti-Muslim discourse as natural (Green 12-19).

Islamophobia, without any doubt, has shaped the life of immigrant Muslims mischievously, especially women. Arab Muslim women represent the most victimized category from Islamophobia because of the veil, which makes them visible and indisputably recognizable. Accordingly, both Chakraborti and Zampi confirm that "Muslim women are perceived to be more threatening than Muslim men not least because they cannot be mistaken, denied or concealed" (qtd. in Chris Allen 141). This can be easily proved by taking a look at the data collected by the British service Tell MAMA (measuring anti-Muslim attacks). It claimed that around 58 percent of the reported incidents are related to hatred acts against Muslim women, 80 percent of them were visible Muslim due to the veil or Niqab they wear (Allen et al. 1). Responding to this, Chris Allen has conducted a British-based project under the University of Birmingham to explore the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women by

interviewing twenty veiled Muslim women. As a result of this project, Allen has extracted two major effects of Islamophobia on Muslim women from different races: Asian, Arab, or even white British. The first effect is the bad and instant feelings that the visible Muslim women are left with after being subjected to any form of Islamophobic incidents. Those instant Feelings vary from anger, anxiety, harassment, revulsion, sorrow, and shock, all of which were described as having undeniably damaging impact on those women's daily life and well-being (Allen 152). For instance, one of the interviewers claims that Islamophobia:

> made me feel very scared . . . I was scared to go out on the street or into the area on my own. It made me think continuously that I need some sort of self-defence class so I know how to defend myself and protect my children . . . you start to think that something is going to happen. It kind of makes you feel like somebody is ready to attack you in the street . . . it kind of makes you think people hate you because of the way you dress. And then you start linking everything as being anti-Muslim and that may well not be the case. For example, some people give you a look which maybe nothing . . . (qtd. in Allan 153).

The second and the major effect is that Islamophobic incidents made those Muslim women turn around themselves and question everything. They started to question their role and their position in the British society. More importantly, being targeted to anti-Muslim acts made those Muslim women consider themselves as outsiders in Britain since they don't feel that they belong to it anymore. As a result, their British identities have been threatened. As Naureen, one of the interviewers, said: "my husband does not want to stay in this country. He does not feel we belong here . . . we do not feel that we are welcomed . . . they see us as strangers who do not belong" (qtd. in Allen 154).

Islamophobia has been highlighted and tackled in many Anglophone Arab writings after the 9/11 attack as it becomes an undeniable truth of the daily life of Muslims living in

diasporas. Such works including *Minaret* by the Sudanese novelist Leila Aboulela in which the author openly portrayed Islamophobia in London after the 9/11 attack and that can be obviously seen in different passages in the novel.

In conclusion, this chapter is regarded as the backbone of this study since it provides the suitable theoretical background for it. It offers precise definitions of postcolonialism, multiculturalism, Islamic feminism, and Islamophobia, which will be used for the analysis of, one of the most provocative novel in Anglophone Arab literature, *Minaret* by Leila Aboulela.

Chapter Two: A Sense of In-betweenness in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

Identity is, with no doubt, a problematic concept. It is considered a prominent theme across several forms of literature especially postcolonial literature. Anglophone Arab writers from multicultural backgrounds engage with such theme differently. For instance, Leila Aboulela explores the theme of identity in *Minaret* in a way that brings east and west together. She challenges the stereotypical images made about Muslims and Islam by giving counter-arguments to the western discourse. The novel is divided into two parts: Najwa's life in Sudan and Najwa's life in London. In both cases, the female protagonist negotiates her identity. This chapter is dedicated to analyze such theme in both cases relying on postcolonial theory, multiculturalism, and Islamic feminism.

1. Biography of Leila Aboulela:

Leila Aboulela is a brilliant Sudanese novelist. She was born in 1964 in Cairo (Egypt) from a Sudanese father and Egyptian mother (Claire Chambers 97). She lived in Khartoum from birth until she turned 23, when she took the decision to move to London to pursue her education in statistics. At the London school of statistics, Aboulela, the ambitious Muslim young girl, obtained both her master and doctoral degrees in her field (LEILA-ABOULELA.com). In the 1992, her mission with literary writing had started whilst she was a professor in a Scottish college called "Aberdeen" (LEILA-ABOULELA.com). Leila Aboulela has experienced exile herself as she has lived in various countries: Scotland, Indonesia, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai (Chambers 98). Accordingly, such experience is innovatively mirrored through her writings in which exile, immigration, and Diaspora are the prominent shared themes as she said: "I have so far written close to my autobiographical situation" (qtd. in Abbas Hassan El-Nour329).

In relatively short period, Leila Aboulela gained a considerable fame, winning various literary prizes. In 2000, her short story entitled *The Museum* earned the first Caine prize for

African writing. This story was later collected in her first story collection *The Coloured Light* (2001) (Chambers 98). Aboulela's first novel *The Translator* (1999) was nominated for the IMPAC and Orange Prizes, and it is about a love story between a Sudanese translator named Sammar and her boss , a Scottish widowed professor, named Rae Isles. Sammar is a Muslim while Rae is not and that exactly what put their relationship to an end.

Aboulela's second novel *Minaret* (2004) is also nominated for the IMPAC and Orange Prizes. It is about the protagonist Najwa, whom her life shifted from being the daughter of a rich politician in Sudan to a housemaid in London due to an upheaval that removed her father from his position. In this particular novel, Aboulela stands out of many diasporic novels by picturing racism as rooted from religion preconception rather than color preconception; she also demonstrates explicitly Islamophobia in London after the 9/11 attack (Chambers 99). Leila aboulela's current novels are respectively: *Lyrics Alley* (2010), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), and *Elsewhere, Home* (2018), and *Bird Summons* (2019).

2. Synopsis of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*:

In 2005, Leila Aboulela publishes her second novel *Minaret*, which is regarded as a remarkable literary work in Anglophone Arab literature. *Minaret* follows Najwa's spiritual journey as she tries to make it through a life completely different to the one she used to have back in Sudan. She moved from being a privileged secular, elite, young girl to a completely devoted, mature, Muslim woman who finds peace and solace in Islam.

Najwa's story begins in 1984 in Khartoum. She is the daughter of a wealthy and westernized Sudanese upper class family. Her father is a government officer. She is young, shallow, modern girl whose life is completely influenced by the western values; she wears revealing cloths, goes to clubs and parties, and listens to western songs. Najwa studies business at Khartoum University but she doesn't take her studies seriously as she has a promising future. At Khartoum University, The daily encounter with ordinary Sudanese girls

at university makes Najwa feels anxious about herself as she notices how different she is from them; apparently, they are religious while she is not. Although she is Muslim, she neither prays regularly nor wears hijab and that is due to her secular upbringing. Later, Najwa meets Anwar, the political student, and falls in love with him despite his hatred speeches about her father. Suddenly, Najwa's life turns upside down. As the 1985 military coup starts, her father is arrested and later executed, while she, along with her family, finds herself forced to leave Sudan and move to London.

After coming to London, Najwa experiences series of unfortunate events; her father is executed, her mother dies, and Omar is arrested for 15 years for drugs' case. Consequently, Najwa finds herself all by her own without no money, no degree, and no family in her back. She starts to work as a maid to support herself. While working for Ant Eva, her mother's friend, Najwa meets Anwar who brought to London by another military coup. She initiates an intimate relationship with him despite his views about her father. Eventually, after realizing that Anwar is taking advantage of her and has no intention to marry her, her disillusionment becomes dreadful. She turns to religion as it gives her peace and solace. Accordingly, Najwa discovers the beauty of Islam, becomes a devoted Muslim woman, and ends her relationship with Anwar.

Finally, the devoted Najwa starts to work as housemaid for Lamya, the rich elite Arab woman. In this household, Najwa meets Lamya's brother, the religious young man, Tamer and she starts a love relationship with him. Tamer decides to marry Najwa even though she is older than he is. However, his family never approved of her. Doctora Zeineb, Tamar's mother, offers Najwa a meaningful sum of money to end up her love affair with her son. Surprisingly, Najwa accepts the money, does what Doctora zeineb asks for, and decides to go to hajj.

3. Najwa's Self of In-betweenness in Postcolonial Sudan:

Identity is the most controversial and essential theme in both postcolonial studies and literary works. During the twentieth century, many critics and theorists have given attention to the breakdown of postcolonial identity and to the importance of identity formation and its crisis as an aftermath of colonization. According to the professor Enas Subhi Amar, the word identity is defined as "the set of personal and behavioral characteristics which identify an individual as a member of a certain group" (2311). The question of "who I am" has risen to be the most important issue, because identity is never being that crucial in once life until it is lost. During that time, many novelists have highlighted the issue of identity in postcolonial societies where people struggle to maintain their own identities. Leila Aboulela's selected work *Minaret* is no exception. In *Minaret,* Aboulela succeeds in setting her protagonist in a constant struggle in searching for her true self and in experiencing the feeling of alienation in both her homeland Sudan and later in London.

The novel tackles a "sense of in-betweeness" as a prominent theme that has been discussed by many writers and critics among the world, which is a state that a diasporic or a migrant individual experienced it while he/ she torn between two different cultures, one of them is the homeland and the other is the host land . *In Minaret*, it is obvious that the protagonist experiences a sense of in-betweeness and cultural alienation. The unstable and deteriorate state that surrounding Najwa and the shaking identity that she experiences both in her native land (Sudan) and in the foreign land (London) influence her identity formation.

During the twentieth century, the process of colonization expended to encompass a large number of countries around the world. For instance, Sudan cannot be excluded from that process and it cannot ignore the terrible consequences, the violence, bloodshed that had witnessed before its independence from the imperial rule. Although, the colonization has some positive effects on Sudan such as advancements in technology, medicine and education

and, it has many negative consequences. Yet, the harsh effect on Sudanese people is the loss of culture as the country split up and it is no longer unified. Consequently, they live in a state of in-betweenness as they are not able to identify themselves because their culture, views, ideologies, and values are not pure anymore. In *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela sheds the light on the cultural and political effects of postcolonialism on Sudan. Culture is what distinguishes group of people from another, that's why it is considered as a fundamental element in the formation of identity and its loss means the loss of one's identity.

The novel highly depicts the postcolonial fragmented culture of Sudan; the distressing position of the nation and its people and how colonialism made the native Sudanese experience the sense of unhomeliness in their own lands. Accordingly, in his book Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha explains the term "unhomeliness" as the following: "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres"(9). The feeling of belonging is undoubtedly a crucial element of identity and the absence of such feeling threatens the stability of identity, which is the case of Najwa who finds herself displaced from the socio-cultural environment of Sudan. Even though she lives in her homeland Sudan, Najwa doesn't feel that she belongs to the Sudanese society and that affects her identity. Consequently, Najwa psychologically suffers from cultural identity crisis because of the resulted sense of 'unhomeliness', as L. Tayson, for instance, argues that "to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself; your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee"(qtd. in Alireza Farahbakhsh and Rezvaneh Ranjbar107).

The colonization has affected people's culture in different ways. In this context, Sara A. Al-Asmakh, in her article "Politics of Identity in Multicultural Settings: A Literary Analysis of Leila Aboulela's Novels, *The Translator* and *Minaret*" claims that "The clash between the colonizer and the native culture reflecting the clash between modernity and traditionalism has

led to two clashing responses: segregation or assimilation" (5). After the decolonization, a category of people chooses to retain their own cultures, traditions, values, beliefs, and reject everything western. While others choose modernity and they assimilate with the new culture; they start to relinquish everything related to their homelands. Accordingly, Al-Asmakh highlights that: "The postcolonial culture of Sudan as revealed in *Minaret* (2005) is characterized with admiration of the west, fragmentation of the native culture, creation of the western elite and thus sub-culture, and political instability. All of these factors contributed to the struggle, which the heroine went through in her identity formation" (6).

Najwa's life style is determined by her family's wealth. It could be perfectly described as westernized life style built on the admiration and the imitation of western culture. She doesn't follow what characterize Sudanese society. She is a fashionable girl, she wears short skirts and tight blouses, she goes to nightclubs…etc. She blindly follows western views and ideologies and this indicates the hybrid culture of Sudan where some of them adopt western lifestyle while others remain faithful to their culture. The detachment of Najwa from her native culture leads her to identity confusion and self-instability. As the critic Tina Chan puts it "the national identity that's formed in a postcolonial states is believed to be never fixed and is very changing according to environment and culture because of transfer and sovereignty which leads to a confusion in identity" (qtd. in SamanAbdulqadir Hussein Dizayi 1000).

The critic Susan Taha Al- Karawi and Ida Baizura Bahar in their article "Negotiation the Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela *Minaret*" reveal that Najwa went through different phases before she finally had a stabilized self:

> Najwa goes through individual, emotional and spiritual journeys while attempting to find a stable sense of identity in England or Sudan. Aboulela's *Minaret* has two distinguishing parts: Najwa's life before she wears the veil and after she chooses to wear the veil. In each part, Najwa is depicted struggling with feeling liminal,

> struggling to know and be who she really is. As a result, the inner dialogues depicted in the novel are strong and maybe considered negotiations of the self with the self. These negotiations and efforts to overcome the sense of isolation, rejection, and uncertainty by forging a clear personal sense of identity occurs in both her homeland of Sudan and in London after becoming a political refugee (261).

Najwa experiences a sense of alienation and a sense of isolation in her both detaching life in Sudan and in London too, which leads her to look for the deeper and significant part in her life. Her identity is disturbed, troubled, and puzzled. That what pushes her to find a stable sense of identity.

In *Minaret*, the female protagonist Najwa is the production of an English education. She belongs to the upper class of Sudanese society. Her father is a prominent Sudanese bureaucrat, the advisor of the president. Her luxurious life keeps her away from revising her own attitudes. More importantly, it makes her ignorant about the emptiness within her soul. Najwa is a dependent girl as she doesn't rely on herself. Yet, she relies on her family to define her identity, so her family and her friends are used as the reference to her identity. She has a lower self-esteem and she doesn't believe on her own capacities. As Al-Asmakh states that: "Anwar tells Najwa that she is not intellectual, as a result she believed him. This shows that Najwa doesn't have enough confidence to believe in her own abilities" (Aboulela11). In addition, her brother Omar, who is a great supporter of colonialism, thinks that Sudan was better under the British colonization and Najwa makes that clear when she stated "Omar believed we had been better off under the British and it was a shame that they left" (11-12). He has no relation with democratic and political affairs. He glorifies all what is western including parties, haircuts, clothing, and Bob Marley's music, as it is mentioned in the novel: "Omar did not have time for the likes of Anwar, he had his own friends. They lent each other videos of top of the pops, and they all intended to go Britain one day" (11); "the party at the

American club was in full swing when Omar and I arrived. We walked into the tease of red and blue disco lights and the Gap Band's Say Oops Upside Your Head" (23). The three mentioned passages show to what extent Najwa, Omar, and her friend Randa are drawn to western culture; they love American singers and songs. Not only this, they also dream to immigrate to Britain.

The cultural dimension between her native culture and the western one always makes Najwa quest for her identity. Her life seems perfect, everything available, her father offers her a luxurious life, cars, big house…etc, yet, she is spirtually empty and that makes her sad. and This is clear when she said:

> I had a happy life. My father and mother loved me and were always generous. In the summer we went for holidays in Alexandria, Geneva and London. There was nothing that I didn't have, couldn't have, no dreams corroded in rust, no buried desires. And yet, sometimes, I would remember pain like a wound that had healed sadness like a forgetting dream (14-15).

The critic Agnieszka Stanecka, in her article "Veiling and Unveiling Fears in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*", affirms that although Najwa is a Muslim by tradition, she "had never paid attention to religion when in Khartoum. Hardly ever did she pray or visit a mosque" (77). Najwa's distance from the religious traditions that characterize her county makes her feel as a foreigner in her own country. She is totally far from Islamic values; she did not even pray and this fills her with guilt and that was evident in one of her conversations with her friend Randa: "what do we know? We don't even pray. Sometimes I was struck with guilt" (29). This shows that there is a missing gap in her life, although she doesn't pray regularly, she still wants to apply one of the most important pillars of Islam which is "Fasting". Najwa wishes from Allah to accept her fasting; she said: "when I fast in Ramadan, I pray. A girl in school told me that

fasting doesn't account unless you pray" (29). Furthermore, she enjoys listening to Azan, calling for pray, as it makes her spiritually comfortable:

> We heard that dawn azan as we turned into our house. The guard got up from where he was sleeping on the ground and opened the gate for us. The sound of that azan, the words and the way the words sounded went inside me, it passed through the smell in the car , it passed through the fun I had at disco and it went to place I didn't know existed. A hallow place. A darkness that would suck me in and finish me I could hear another mosque echoing the words, tapping at the sluggishness in me , nudging at a hidden numbness, like when my feet went to sleep and I touched them" (31).

Najwa also admires Sudanese girls who wear 'tobe' and she feels more self-conscious about her clothes whenever she comes across them in the university:

> I took my wallet, notebook, and pencil… two girls of my class living the library and we smiled to each other. I was not sure of their names. They both wore white tobes and one of them was very cute with deep dimples and sparkling eyes … with them I felt, for the first time in my life, self-conscious of my clothes, my too short skirts and too tight blouses. Many girls dressed like me. So I was not unusual, yet these two provincial girls made me feel awkward. I was conscious of their modest grace, of the tobes that covered their slimness-pure white cotton covering their arms and hair (14).

Najwa shows respect and admiration to Sudanese covered girls, as well as she loves doing charity, helping poor people…etc. This indicates that Najwa has a hybrid culture as she has westernized habits mixed with Islamic tradition like charity, fasting, el 3id, and Ramadan. Yet, her western life style makes her categorized as a western citizen in her own country. Her unbelonging to one single cultural stance affects her identity formation. Therefore, Najwa is a betwixt individual since she is ripped between two different cultures to none of them she fully belongs. She is far from her native culture, at the same time, she is not purely Western. Even

when she displaces to London she keeps feeling in-between. She found herself disconnected from western culture as she feels like an outsider in her homeland and in London too. Being shattered between two cultures, leads the female protagonist to experience a sense of alienation and a sense of in-betweenness. As it is suggested by Esmail Zohdi in his article "Lost-Identity; A Result of Hybridity and Ambivalence in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to The North" when he said that: "anybody who lives in-between spaces, between two different cultures, lives a dual life which doubles his/her identity" (147).

4. Najwa's Quest for Identity in Multicultural London:

Leila Aboulela is one of the few Arab Anglophone writers who takes the responsibility to shed the light on Arab Muslim women's struggle in diaspora through her writings in which religion is described as a tool of liberation for immigrant Muslim women rather than a tool of oppression to them. According to Hasan Md. Mahmudul, immigrant Muslim women are subjected to triple colonization: migration, patriarchy, and islamophobia, as religion becomes their only refuge and shelter (11). They abide to Islam to overcome their sense of being dislocated, alienated, rootless, and in-between which are inevitable outcomes of immigration from homelands to host countries. For instance, Salman Rushdie, the inimitable British Indian novelist, summarized the suffering of immigrants in this short quote: "Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between two stools" (qtd. in Liana Aghajanian). In the light of this quote, one can understand that immigrants experience a sense of in-betweenness as they don't feel a full belonging to neither their homelands nor to their host countries and that tremendously affected their identities.

Quest for Identity is an inevitable struggle for all immigrant Muslim women. Such struggle, which is considered a fundamental theme in the novel, is successfully portrayed in *Minaret* through the female protagonist Najwa. Thus, Aboulela genuinely articulates such theme through both space and movement and she made that clear from the opening of the

novel, which specifically represents the limitation of space that the protagonist experiences in London: “I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move. Most of the time I'm used to it. Most of the time I'm good. I accept my sentence and do not brood or look back. But sometimes a shift makes me remember” (Aboulela 1).

After the coup of 1985, Najwa’s previous life falls apart as it is totally replaced by a completely new one. Her luxurious, privileged, westernized life in Sudan is replaced by a humble, modest one in London as it is confirmed by Najwa: “I have come down in the world” (1). In the same context, the critic Marta Cariello states that ”Aboulela’s narrative marks the traumatic interruption of time – one life literally stops, replaced by a completely different one – and a physical and spatial dislocation – Sudan replaced by England” (340). After facing many tragic events: the execution of her father, the death of her mother, and the imprisonment of her twin Omar. Najwa finds herself all by her own, struggling to adjust and to adapt to her completely new life in London. She experiences a sense of in-betweenness which is an inevitable result of displacement from her former life in the sense that follows, the British cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner: “liminality includes few or none of the attributes of the previous or future states, and that the features of liminality are ambiguous; that is, they are outside of all society’s standard classification” (qtd. in Taha Al-Karawi and Bahar 259). Najwa’s source of identity comes from materialistic things, which are subjected to change: her family, her friends, her social status, her profession, and of course her country. She is bound to feel lost. Her identity is shattered and fractured since she is unwillingly separated from all those materialistic things. This marks the start of her journey for self-quest.
Najwa passes through different phases of liminality before she finally creates a religious, yet modern identity as the critics Susan Taha Al-Karawi and Ida Baizura Bahar put it: “Najwa, goes through stages and transitions characteristic of liminality in order to achieve a hybrid

identity that is modern in Western terms, but firmly Muslim through the wearing of the veil" (255). At first, Najwa is locked down into the pain of her past, which she seems unable to overcome. She struggles to accept her new and unprivileged life. She is left with no qualifications or a family to rely on and the only option she is left with is to work as a maid. Working for Aunt Eva, her mother's friend, gives Najwa a temporary space to reconnect with her past and to overcome her sense of in-betweenness, uprootedness, loss, and disillusionment. Her eagerness for belonging for a "home" surpassed her pride. Becoming a maid rewards Najwa emotionally more than financially. Since it gives her a space to feel at home again and that was clear in a conversation that occurred between her and her uncle Salah: "What do you mean you're helping her? Help. Waiting upon. Servant's work. He didn't understand that I needed her company, needed to hear her gossip about Khartoum, needed to sit within range of her nostalgia" (143).

While working for Aunt Eva, Najwa meets her past lover, Anwar, which could be seen as a metaphorical meeting with her past. Anwar provides Najwa with a sense of belonging: "I belonged to him more now" (174). That's what made her initiate a love-relationship with him despite their differences: "He gave me hope that I would not be in limbo for long, that I would not be without a family for long" (156). Najwa is a dependent girl. She used to get her value and self-worth from outside entities. Hence, her identity is built on how others perceive her not on how she perceives herself. Anwar, for instance, perceives her as a westernized girl, so she believes that and she starts to act upon such belief: "She has a longing to identify with Anwar's encouragement of the Western lifestyle and professing that he likes her because of her modernity and independence" (Taha Al-Karawi and Bahar 264). With the support of Anwar, Najwa does her best to become a true westernized girl as a way to gather her shattered identity. Unsurprisingly, this sort of becoming could not heal her wounded soul or fill the hole within her inner self because it is built from outside entity and not from within. Najwa

becomes more confused and frustrated about herself since there is no consistency between her inner self and her outer reality. By being with Anwar, Najwa keeps ignoring the inner voices within her, which call for religion: “this prevents Najwa from seriously engaging her liminal status and striving to create a Muslim identity that tugs at her conscience” (Taha Al-Karawi and Bahar 264). Once she figures out that her lover, Anwar, is taking advantage of her love, naivety, and freedom and he has no intention to marry her. Her disappointment becomes unbearable. For Najwa, this disappointment is seen as an awakening for the self. For the first time in her life, she listens to her inner voices, which she kept ignoring for so long. Accordingly, she gives herself a space to discover the source of emptiness in her soul that keeps tugging at her whenever she hears azan, the Islamic call to prayer, or the Quran as mentioned in the novel:

> Whenever I heard the azan in Khartoum, whenever I heard the Qur'an recited I would feel a bleakness in me and a depth and space would open up, hollow and numb. I usually didn't notice it, wasn't aware that it existed. Then the Qur'an heard by chance on the radio of a taxi would tap at this inner sluggishness, nudge it like when my feet went to sleep and I touched them. They felt fat and for them to get back to normal, for me to be able to move my toes again, they would have to first crunch with pins and needles (134-135).

Najwa decides to end her relationship with Anwar and embrace Islam. Through the interaction with the women in the regent park mosque, she discovers the beauty of her fate like she had never been exposed to it since she was brought up in a westernized, faithless family: “We weren’t brought up in a religious way, neither of us. We weren’t even friends in Khartoum with people who were religious [...] our house was a house where only the servants prayed” (96). Furthermore, in the Regent park mosque, Najwa finds a community that can replace the community she has lost once she left Sudan: “In the mosque I feel like I’m in

Khartoum again" (Aboulela 244). In *minaret*, Islam becomes a place for identity formation for immigrant Muslim women, as it is stated by the British Marxist David Harvey:

> Places are constructed and experienced as material artifacts. Specifically, religion is – where possible – a non-fixed, 'displaced' place: in world progressively pervaded by a sense of global interconnectedness between economic, political, social, and cultural formations, the notion of 'place' is, somewhat surprisingly, becoming more important. Religion is, in this sense, dispersed, transnational, interconnected, and global, and yet constitutes a local, always rooted and specifically – if not individually – constructed and experienced place (qtd. in Cariello 341).

More significantly, Islam becomes a place for belonging, affiliation, and negotiation of identity. It redeems Najwa from her pain of displacement, alienation, and loss and it gives her consolation and comfort. As time goes by, Najwa becomes more attached to her faith and that what makes her decide to be a true devoted Muslima in London after being barely Muslima in Sudan. It is worth to mention here, that Aboulela represents a different definition of freedom through the female protagonist Najwa who uses her total freedom in London to adhere to Islam not to escape from it (Hasan 10). She gives a counter discourse to the western discourse, which depicts Islam as oppressive religion to women who can't wait to get rid of, as the critic Firouzeh Ameri puts it: "Muslim identity as imposed on Muslim women and a Muslim life as one from which women from Muslim backgrounds wish to escape" (qtd. in Hasan 8).

According to Samir El Mouti, Religion is a critical element for examining culture and identity for immigrants in diasporas. Immigrants, who create Islamic identity, choose a performative identity (7), which means that religion is embedded in their daily behaviors, their looks, and their lifestyles. Accordingly, religion manifested in everything they do. Najwa is no exception; she decides to be a true devoted Muslima with all its outcomes and

manifestations (Hasan 10). More notably, she decides to wear the veil. Wearing the veil is a thoughtful and well-studied decision that Najwa makes without any interference or any pressure from any male. Similarly, Leila aboulela's decision to wear the veil is her own decision, which comes after a long-lasting process of hesitation as she said: "I took this step with no pressure from my parents or my husband. It came after years of hesitation, years during which I held back out of fear that I would look ugly in a head scarf and that my progressive friends would make fun of me" (qtd. in Sufian 401). According to the critic Abu Sufian, wearing the veil along with socializing with Muslim women in the mosque can be viewed as tools for self-healing from the vexatious experiences, which are gender- related or immigration- related in diaspora (400). Although the head-scarf protects Najwa from male gazing by making her invisible, it makes her visible for Islamophobic-hatred acts as it is statedby SedaCanpolat in her article "Scopic Dilemmas: Gazing the Muslim Woman in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*" when she said that "Aboulela, like Faqir, produces a binarized model of gazing in which veiling affords Najwa protection from the sexist gaze but subjects her to the racist or, more precisely, Islamophobic gaze" (12).

Although Najwa has created a religious identity which is "transcendental and does not deny gender, nationality, class and race" (Hasan 12), she faces what is known as "Islamic identity crisis" where there is a part of her that has always been nostalgic to the former, westernized life (El Mouti 8); as it is the only way to reconnect with her homeland and that could be seen through the dreams she keeps seeing about herself being a child again surrounded by her family in Sudan: "I close my eyes. I can smell the smells of the mosque, tired incense, carpet and coats. I doze and in my dream I am small and back in Khartoum, ill and fretful, wanting clean, crisp sheets, a quiet room to rest in, wanting my parents' room, wanting to get up and go to my parents' room" (Aboulela74-75). This shows that Najwa experiences a sense of in-betweenness, where neither of her previous, westernized lifestyle is

a choice for her anymore but still she keeps attaching to anything that can remind her of Sudan (El Mouti 8-9). Nostalgia is a keynote in diasporic literary works produced by female immigrant writers like Leila Aboulela. In the same context, Mariam Cooke, the American academic in Middle East and Arab world studies states that: “while men, like the Sudanese Tayib Salih, who spent several years in the West, could describe their alienation or their anger that might erupt into vengeful action, women generally wrote nostalgically about their places of birth” (qtd. in El Mouti 9). In the same vein, Samir El Mouti claims that the identity of immigrants in diaspora and its progression is constructed and deconstructed on the basis of nostalgic experiences, remembering the lost home, and the emotional yearning for the past (9).

The devouted Najwa starts working as a maid and babysitter for Lamya. This workplace is regarded as the final station in Najwa’s self-discovery journey. In this household, she finds a space to negotiate her sense of “home” and to reconnect with her past. In the same context, Lidia Curti claims that:

> The workplace offers a space for nostalgia, for what [migrant women] have left behind, a sort of involuntary substitution: the other woman’s child and home [. . .] become their own, they replace what was left behind. The new home becomes memory, in more than one sense, inscribing not only the past in the present and vice versa, but also that which is far away and that which is close by, the same and the different (qtd. in Cariello 344).

Working for Lamya rewards Najwa more emotionally than financially as it gives her hints about her past (El Mouti 7). Although Lamya treats Najwa in a hostile way; she “creates a representation of Najwa that reflects Lamya’s superiority in socio-cultural terms. Najwa is stereotyped and fixed by her veil, career and skin color and Lamya cannot see her without these frames” (qtd. in Hasan 13). Tamer, lamya’s brother, treats her in a friendly way due to

the shared religious identity the two have, they both see themselves as Muslims and that could be easily proved through a conversation that takes place between them:

> My education is Western and that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So I guess, no, I don't feel very Sudanese, though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity. What about you? I talk slowly. I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I've changed. And now like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim (Aboulela 110).

Identity is defined by socio-cultural status and profession in Lamya's house, where as in the Regent Park mosque identity is determined by the desire to be a better Muslim (Hasan 13). For lamya, Najwa is just a servant, she couldn't see her out of this limited picture, and this hinders Najwa's power, which could only be retrieved through both Tamer and the women in the mosque who see her beyond this ill-framed picture. Later, Najwa establishes a romantic relationship with Tamer, who in return disappoints her by being immature. Every male in Najwa's life disappoints her: her father, her twin Omar, her lover Anwar, and finally the devoted Tamer and she overcomes such disappointments by returning to God and that made Minaret classified into Islamic feminist fiction as it is claimed by Leila Aboulela:

> When I was writing *Minaret,* I was thinking it would be a Muslim feminist novel. The female protagonist of *Minaret* is disappointed in the men in her life: her father disappoints her, then her brother lets her down, she becomes very disillusioned with her boyfriend Anwar, and even Tamer - who is represented sympathetically because he's religious like Najwa- even he disappoints her because of his immaturity. At the end, Najwa relies on god and on her faith That's how my logic went. And I thought that if this were a secular feminist novel, then at the end she would rely on her career and maybe her friends after her disappointment with men. In *Minaret*, on the other

> hand, I wanted it to be that at the end she's relying on her faith rather than a career (qtd. in Chamber 113).

Najwa finally creates a hybrid identity, which is both modern and religious at the same time. For instance, Homi Bhabha defined hybridity as it "provides an alternative kind of identity that is neither completely defined by the authority of the colonizer nor fully under the control of the colonized" (qtd. in Al-Karawi and Bahar 260). She decides to go to pilgrimage in order continue her studies, and help her twin Omar who will be released from jail soon and this marks the end of her journey of self-discovery. By creating hybrid identity, Najwa bonds two opposed elements: modernity and Islam.

As a conclusion, Najwa experienced a sense of in-betweenness, which in return affects her identity in both: Sudan and London. She passes through stages of liminality before she finally creates a religious, yet modern identity. She moves from being the secular girl in Khartoum to the devoted, veiled Muslim in London.

Chapter Three: The Representation of the veil in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

The veil has fueled debates in western and non-western discourses for decades. It is without doubt the most controversial issue in human history. It has different meanings and connotations and the most common one is that the veil is considered as a symbol for women's oppression in Islam. However, in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, the veil has been loaded with series of negative connotations. Accordingly, the veil has become a prominent theme not only in politics and Media but also in literature. In her novel *Minaret*, the British-Sudanese novelist Leila Aboulela discusses the issue of veiling in postcolonial Sudan and post-9/11attacks London. She doesn't only challenge the negative connotations attached to the veil but she also offers new positive meanings to it. Hence, this chapter is dedicated to discuss the veil as an Islamic symbol in *Minaret*. It highlights how the veil can be both a source of prejudice and a source of empowerment for Muslim women in diaspora in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks.

1. An Overview of the Veil:

The veil is the most debatable piece of clothing. It is old as a human history. It has carried different meanings and shapes throughout the time. It is worn by people from various religious and cultural backgrounds. Today, the veil is uniquely attached to Islam. The critic Sahar Amer in her book *What Is Veiling?* defines the veil as "an item of clothing, made of cloth, that covers a woman's hair, and at times most of her face" (10). It has many different shapes and forms that vary from one country to another such as Burqa, Chador, Niqab, Tobe, and Turban.

The veil has a strong history behind it, which is totally neglected by Muslims and non-Muslims equally. Many people mistakenly think that the veiling is an Islamic product. Apparently, veiling is a social and cultural custom that had existed in various parts of the world for centuries before Islam came into existence in the seventh century. Islam inherited the veil along with other customs related to the position of women in society (Amer 1). In

fact, the veil is a Jewish legacy, as Jewish women were obliged to cover their heads with a veil in times of worshiping (Stephen M. Croucher 201). For centuries, Christians, Jewish, and Muslims wore the veil equally. However, the question that exposed itself here is how does the veil become a unique symbol of Islamic identity in the first place? and how does it become a symbol of women's oppression and backwardness in Islam?

The obsession with the veil is not a new phenomenon. It dated back to the 19th century. More specifically, it went back to the period of the imperial expansion over the Middle East and Mediterranean territories. Colonial powers come up with the notion of saving and liberating Muslim women as a justification to their colonialism; they wanted to unveil women in those territories to take control over both the colonized and their lands. In the same context, Franz Fanon, the well- known psychiatrist and postcolonial thinker, acknowledged that the French colonization wanted to destroy the Algerian society and take control over it by first unveiling the Algerian women: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight" (57-58). In the same vein, Neil Chakraborti and Irene Zempi stated that "the removal of the veil signified the ultimate form of colonization" (08). Accordingly, the notion that the veil symbolizes women's oppression and subjugation in Islam is just a disguise used to cover the real imperial reasons behind colonization. Unfortunately, this notion is implanted in the minds of both the westerners and non-westerners and becomes the mirror through which the veil is seen. So, all the negative connotations associated with the veil are originated from a colonial discourse.

2. Najwa's Veiling Experience in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

In *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela challenges the negative meanings and connotations associated to the veil by presenting a positive hijab experience similar to hers, through the characterization of Najwa who moves from being faithless westernized girl in Sudan to a religious veiled woman in London. In diaspora, Najwa re-discovers the beauty of her faith through her frequent visits to the Regent Park mosque where she has interacted with devout Muslim women from different backgrounds. As she becomes so attached to Islam, Najwa takes the decision to wear the veil. It is a deliberate and thoughtful decision that has come after a long process of unsureness, indecisiveness and hesitation. The very thought of veiling has evoked Najwa's fears for so long. According to the researcher Agnieszka Stanecka, the main reason behind Najwa's hesitation to wear hijab is stemmed from fear. She has not been only afraid of being rejected by the British society, which is hostile towards the veiled Muslim women, but she has been more afraid of her new self-image. Najwa is intimidated by the idea that she might look ugly in a headscarf (80). Similarly, Leila Aboulela acknowledges that she herself hesitated for so long before she wore the veil because she was afraid of looking hideous on it: "It came after years of hesitation, years during which I held back out of fear that I would look ugly in a head scarf" (qtd. in Stanecka 81). After many attempts, Najwa is finally able to get over her own fears and accept her new image in the mirror; she is not the girl with the latest revealing fashionable clothes anymore. Instead, she becomes the girl with the modest large clothes and a headscarf around her hair as she said in the novel:

> I took out one of her old robes - yards of brown, silky material. I tied my hair hack with an elastic band, patted the curls down with pins. I wrapped the tobe around me and covered my hair. In the full-length mirror, I was another version of myself, regal like my mother, almost mysterious. Perhaps this was attractive in itself, the skill of concealing rather than emphasizing, to restrain rather than to offer (Aboulela 246).

Wearing the veil in public for the first time, Najwa feels happy, proud, and wholly satisfied with her new look: “When I went home, I walked smiling, self-conscious of the new material around my face. I passed the window of a shop, winced at my reflection, but then thought `not bad, not so bad'. Around me was a new gentleness” (247). In the same vein, Seda Canpolat states that: “Najwa finds her Islamic attire beautiful exactly because it is an expression of her Muslim identity, and she refuses to let white beauty ideals supersede what she believes would suit a devout Muslima” (12). Indeed, the veiled Najwa starts to see beauty from Islamic perspective, which is based on modesty and not glamour.

Through Najwa’s positive experience of veiling, Aboulela proves that the veil is a tool for liberation and empowerment as it gives Muslim women power and agency that has been denied by orientalists as well as Westerners.

2.1. The veil as a Source of Prejudice

In the twentieth century, the act of veiling has come under intense scrutiny, especially as more and more Muslims started to emigrate and begin to populate non-Muslim nations. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attack, more negative connotations are attached to the veil; it becomes as concrete signifier for both Islamic fundamentalism and the lack of assimilation in multicultural, Western societies. In this context, the critics Neil Chakraborti and Irene Zempi claims that “the wearing of the veil is not only synonymous with gender oppression but also with Islamist terrorism and the lack of integration” (2). Accordingly, the veiled Muslim women who live in the West have to endure the weight of the hijab around their heads by being directly vulnerable to Islamophobic incidents, as it is stated by Md. Mahmudul Hassan: “Women in hijab are more susceptible to the negative stereotypes and discrimination against Muslims in the West, as it evidently differentiates its wearer from looking like a non-Muslim” (151).

In post 9/11 period, wearing the veil publicly in Western societies is stereotypically perceived as a marker of Islamic extremism or terrorism. Consequently, the veil becomes a threat to public safety as it prevents individual's recognition. More importantly, it could be utilized as a disguise for terrorists (Chakraborti and Zempi 12). Although men carry the terrorist operations, veiled Muslim women are the ones who endure the painful consequences of those terrorist events. As Shelina Janmohamed, the British Muslim woman writer, puts it: "Despite the fact that all the terrorist acts were carried out by men, it was the Muslim woman's headscarf that turned into one of the targets for attack, both verbal and physical" (qtd. in "Seeking Freedom" 8). Inevitably, veiled Muslim women in diaspora become vulnerable to Islamophobic violent acts, which stem from the negative connotations linked to both Islam and the veil. Those Islamophobic acts are legitimatized by making them look like the only possible procedures to deal with the various threats of the veil as a mark of oppression, terrorism, and lack of assimilation (Chakraborti and Zempi 2).

Western, multicultural societies are not all bright and fascinating. They are full of prejudices with all sorts: racism, sexism, homophobia…etc. In her novels, Leila Aboulela unfolds the dark side of those Western multicultural societies by picturing them as unsympathetic and hostile towards Muslim minority. In *Minaret,* for instance, Aboulela openly discusses the religious prejudice as it is clarified by the critic Claire Chambers: "Unlike many diasporic novels, where racism tends to be depicted as stemming from color prejudice, Aboulela portrays overt Islamophobia in post-9/11 London" (99). Thus, she gives prominence to Islamophobia and its impact on the daily life of Muslim women who live in diaspora. Through her novel, Aboulela gives voice to Muslim women who by any means were and are targeted to Islamophobic incidents. Those tragic painful experiences, which are mainly unreported, are retold through Najwa, the protagonist, who herself was subjected to such incidents. Once after finishing her "tajwid" class at the mosque, Najwa takes the bus

home as usual. At the bus, three men who kept gazing at her then one of them said “You Muslim scum” and throw a liquid over her head (Aboulela 81). Being victim to Islamophobia, Najwa is emotionally affected; she feels a range of bad feelings: humiliation, anger, fear, and hurt as it is mentioned in the novel: “they are laughing. My chest hurts and I wipe my eyes and I breathe in and out to make the anger go away, to let it out through my nose” (81). What made her feel even worse, the driver, who is a witness to what happened, doesn’t intervene to help her out. Per contra, he is completely ignorant and indifferent like this kind of assaults is nothing then normal: “I look up at the bus driver’s face in the mirror. His eyes flicker and he looks away” (80).

In addition to the instant bad feelings she experiences, Najwa doesn’t feel safe and secure anymore in London because of the hostility towards Islam and the veil and that could be clearly understood when she said: “There are other places in London that aren’t safe, where our very presence irks people”. Leila Aboulela sheds the light on Muslim women particularly, because they are the first directed victims to Islamopobia. However, she is not ignorant about Muslim men who mainly have not subjected to physical or verbal Islamophobic acts but have been, definitely, targeted to non-verbal acts, which are more bitter and mischievous than verbal and physical ones. As a witness, the protagonist Najwa delivers the way British people look to the devoted Tamer and how his sight makes them uncomfortable: “as we walk towards St John’s Wood, I sense the slight unease he inspires in the people around us. I turn and look at him through their eyes. Tall, young, Arab-looking, Dark eyes and the beard, just like a terrorist” (100).

Being victim to Islamophobic hatred acts doesn’t hold Najwa back from being the devoted Muslim woman she is. This event doesn’t make her take her hijab off as Hassan puts it:” hostility to hijab prompts neither Najwa nor Shelina to take off the Islamic dress” (“Oppression versus Liberation” 153). In contrary, it makes her more attached to the veil.

2.2. The Veil as a Source of Empowerment

Muslim women have been in the spotlight of the western and non-western discourses for decades. They are regarded as one of the most heated debates of all the time. Muslim women are often depicted as submissive, oppressed, and helpless and need to be saved. They are victims of patriarchal laws and unjust religion as they are forced to wear the veil. Unfortunately, many Anglophone writers from Muslim backgrounds such as Monica Ali, Salman Rushdie, and Fadia Fakir embrace this negative view about Muslim women. These writers who "write extensively and stereotypically about Islam" (qtd. in "Seeking Freedom" 3) have given a negative depiction of Islam and Muslim women in Arab countries through their writings in a way that support Western discourse. In the aftermath of 9/11 attack, the veil as well as Muslim women are loaded with more of unfavorable labels. Accordingly, many Arab Anglophone female writers including Leila Aboulela demur against those negative labels. Aboulela makes this point clear by stating that:

> I still have lots and lots to say about the lives and dilemmas of ordinary Muslims. There are still very few examples of Muslims in contemporary literature and most of these examples are those of the 'Islamic terrorist', the 'oppressed Muslim woman' or on the other side of the spectrum examples of liberal Muslims whose lifestyles and ways of thinking are not different from non-Muslims. I agree whole-heartedly that all these variations do exist in Muslim society and should be represented in fiction. And I do admire the many deep, complex and insightful novels that have tackled these subjects. But what about the thousands of men who crowd mosques, the thousands of women who go on Haj, the teenage girls who wear hijab? They are the ones who fascinate and compel me and they are the ones whose stories I am motivated to write (qtd. in "Seeking Freedom" 5).

Indeed, through her writings, Aboulela gives a counter-argument to western and orientalist discourses by picturing the veil as a source of empowerment. In *Minaret*, she provides new, positive, and empowering connotations to the veil: the veil as a choice, the veil as sign to religious identity, and the veil as protection from male gazing. All these will be discussed in those upcoming pages.

2.2.1. The Veil as a Choice

For centuries, Muslim women are attached to series of negative labels. They are described as oppressive, powerless, backward, and subjugated. The veil is the concrete signifier of their disempowerment in Islam as it is stated by the critic Md. Mahmudul Hasan: "since hijab is considered a strange, alien object and worn by women under coercion, it carries loaded meanings for the host community and readily gives its wearers a migrant identity with all its racial overtones, attendant negative assumptions, judgmental attitudes" ("Oppression versus Liberation" 151). In a similar context, Katherine Bullock, in her book *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*, states that feminists from Muslim background as well as westerners are very skeptical about women's choice to wear the veil. They believe that women who choose to cover themselves, they either are oppressed or brainwashed (22). Unfortunately, this view can be still applicable in some Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, where women are obliged to wear the veil. However, this cannot be generalized to include all veiled Muslim women in the world. Moreover, Anti-hijab scholars use freedom of a choice as the ground for their main argument against the veil. Ironically, the same argument is used by Muslim women, who willingly choose to wear the veil to support their choice ("Oppression versus Liberation" 156).

Inevitably, as a voluntary veiled Muslim woman, Leila Aboulela uses the freedom of choice to challenge both Western and orientalist discourses. She seeks to prove that the veil is a choice for the majority of Muslim women. In *Minaret*, diaspora has guaranteed for Najwa a

total freedom, which Najwa described as “empty space” (Aboulela 175). At her first years in London, Najwa finds herself alone and free from any social, cultural, or religious boundaries. Eventually, she has done what she couldn’t do back in Sudan; she initiates a sexual relationship with her former lover Anwar that filled her with guilt. In the same vein, Saba Idris and Sadia Zulfiqar state that Najwa’s freedom:

> turns to sexual freedom and becomes a tool for exploitation, as Anwar makes Najwa aware of her freedom to have sex with him, calling it the broadminded thing to do, and uses this relationship to get Najwa’s money to do his PhD. Being in a relationship with Anwar defines being "Western" as allowing yourself to have sex outside of marriage – which is not allowed in Islam. Najwa finds temporary solace from guilt by thinking that she was closer to being a Londoner because she was having sex with Anwar (32).

However, after a long time of struggling, Najwa finally can make a sense of this “empty space” by adhering to Islam and embracing it with all its manifestations and outcomes. Without doubt, Najwa’s decision comes out without any pressure, coercion or force from anyone as her life is free from any male dominance: no father, no brother and no husband. In this literary work, Aboulela gives a new definition of freedom, which is the right to choose one’s lifestyle based on Islam, to create religious identity and to foster Islamic rules (“Seeking Freedom” 10). She believes that Islam lights Muslims’ lives and guide them as she said: “Islam restrains me, but restraint is not oppression, and boundaries can be comforting and nurturing. Freedom does not necessarily bring happiness, nor does an abundance of choices automatically mean that we will make the right one. I need guidance and wisdom; I need grace and forgiveness” (qtd. in Abbas Hassan El-Nour 332).

Leila Aboulela’s veiling experience is reflected through the character of Najwa, Aboulela’s “alter ego”, (Stanecka 78). Similarly, like Najwa, Aboulela wore the veil when she travelled to Britain to pursue her studies and it was her own decision. London offered

Aboulela a great space of freedom unlike Sudan and she used that freedom to become more devouted and wear the veil:

> I started to wear the hijab when I came to Britain; I didn't wear it in Sudan. In Sudan, all my friends at university were liberal and left-leaning, and they would have been just shocked if I had started to wear the hijab; they would have talked me out of it in a couple of hours [laughs]. Like Najwa in the novel, I used to look with a kind of admiration at the girls in university who wore the hijab, but it was only when I came to Britain that I felt free, that I wasn't surrounded by my friends or my family, and I could do what I wanted. And ironically, when I first came, and when I started to wear the hijab in 1987, nobody even understood what it meant. In London it just had no connotations whatsoever, so it was really a very good time to begin covering my head, without it having any repercussions (qtd. in Chamber 106).

Inspiring by her own experience, Aboulela articulates the untold positive stories of the immigrant veiled Muslim women who freely choose to dress themselves in an Islamic way. In her literary works, she voices what media and books neglected.

2.2.2. The veil as a Religious Affiliation

Leila Aboulela presents the veil as a religious obligation and not as a cultural or a social task. She aims to show that Muslim women's decision to don the veil has come as a commitment and obedience to God's commands only. This view is reflected in all Aboulela's writings including her second novel *Minaret*. For instance, the concept of modesty is a cornerstone in Islam. It is the main reason behind many Islamic rules. It is always linked with "awra," an Arabic term, which means as the researcher Aisha Wood Boulanouar explained: "what must be covered and consisting of the private body parts of a human being" (135). Accordingly, Muslim women are ordered to cover their 'awra,' which includes their entire

body except for their hands and face to maintain modesty and that could only be achieved through the veil (135).

In *Minaret*, Najwa's decision to wear the veil comes as a sign to her devotion to God. Her hijab is regarded as "an articulation of faith and an embodiment of divinely-prescribe frameworks for modesty" (qtd. in Suzanne Kanso 22); she veils out of commitment and adherence to God's commands and nothing else. In the same vein, Hassan states that Aboulela gives prominence to the religious dimension of the veil and represents it as a part from being Islamic, as it binds its wearers with god. She shows that veiling for Muslim women is like fasting and praying. It is practiced for the accomplishment of their obedience to god ("Oppression versus Liberation" 158).

Back in Khartoum, Najwa and her friend Randa believe that religion is like national and ethnic identities, that is, limited to certain geographical boundaries and it can't be practiced beyond those borders. For instance, they couldn't imagine that fasting existed in London as it is mentioned in the novel: "How can anyone fast in London? It would spoil all the fun" (Aboulela 30). The same can be said about veiling. Although Najwa admired the veiled looking girls at Khartoum University, she had never considered wearing it. Since she was not the "religious type" (135). When she moved to London where her life took a completely new shape, she finally becomes a religious woman and only at that stage, she decides to wear the veil. So Aboulela makes it evident that the veil is a sign for religious affiliation and nothing more.

2.2.3. The Veil as a Protection for Male-Gazing:

The veil is a liberating force for Muslim women as it sets them free from the burdens of patriarchal oppression and social pressure. It protects them from any gender-related assaults, which are stimulated by the visibility of the female bodies, since it renders them

"invisible" in the public sphere. In *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela portrays the veil as a protection from male gazing. According to Seda Canpolat, Aboulela represents Najwa's decision to don the veil and to put on a large coat as a technique to protect herself from sexist male gazing, and she makes certain that she provides proofs of the success of this technique (13). For that aim, Leila Aboulela brings together the different male responses to Najwa's unveiled and veiled body respectively (13).

The first situation took place during Najwa's first period in London; her exposed body attracts the attention of group of builders who consequently starts to whistle at her sight:

> "I walked past an ice-cream van, a building covered in scaffolding, workmen sitting out in the sun. A whistle and a laugh as one of them shouted out something I didn't catch, though I understood the tone. I flushed, aware that all the weight I had gained had settled on my hips. But still it was a compliment, and my hair was long on my shoulders like Diana Ross's" (Aboulela 130).

Here, it is easy to extract a contradicted consciousness. Being targeted to male gazing, Najwa feels uncomfortable but she is discretely flattered by the compliment. Her pride remains from her ex-privileged life in Sudan. She longs for attractiveness in Western terms and that was clear when she identified herself with the American singer Diana Ross (Canpolat 13). While in the second situation, which occurred after Najwa's devotion to Islam, the same builders doesn't bother her as if she is unseen and that due to her veil: "The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn't see me anymore. I was invisible and they were quiet. All the frissons, all the sparks died away. Everything went soft and I thought, `Oh, so this is what it was all about; how I looked, just how I looked, nothing else, nothing non-visual" (247). In this given stance, one can tell that the hijab shows to the builders that Najwa's body is out of their reach and they don't have any access to it. So the veil works as a shield that covers Muslim women from male gazing.

Although the term “invisible” has a really positive meaning as the author herself clarifies, it was negatively interpreted by many critics and is harshly criticized to the extent that Aboulela questions her own word choice:

> There’s a word I use in the novel that seems to have been misinterpreted, because Najwa says that she becomes 'invisible' when she wears the hijab, and men don’t look at her any more. I think people read it as being invisible in a very negative way. However, I meant it in an entirely positive way, that she was no longer having to put up with the way men were looking at her, and all that. I don't know, afterwards I wondered whether I should have used the word 'invisible' (qtd. in Chambers 107).

According to the professor Esra Mirze Santesso, those critics interpret Najwa’s veiling as a self-imposed mechanism to become socially invisible and it renders her a ghostly image in society (qtd. in Canpolat 14). Quite the opposite, by visibility Leila Aboulela does not mean absence of women in public life but she means more freedom for them as it is stated Ashraf Ibrahim Zidan: “*Minaret* revolts against the racial stereotypes and the deep-rooted conventions about the concept of hijab and harem. The West thinks that both of these concepts mean invisibility and periphery. However, invisibility does not mean absence, but more freedom” (37). The veil protects Najwa from lustful male eyes and sexual harassment by rendering her invisible. However, it makes her more visible to Islamophobic assaults.

As a conclusion, the image of the veil today is loaded with contradictions. This image has shaped the reality of veiled Muslim women especially those in Western countries. In *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela confronts the negative connotations associated with the veil by presenting a very positive veiling experience. She depicts the veil as a source of prejudice since it makes Muslim women more vulnerable to Islamophobic hatred acts in post 9/11 climate. That doesn’t make the veil any less empowering. For Aboulela, the veil is a tool of liberation, empowerment and agency for Muslim women.

Conclusion

Literature is the mirror of society. It simulates the outer world and discusses its major issues. Anglophone Arab literature is no exception. It depicts the everyday life of Arabs and Muslims who live in the west. In terms of themes, this thriving literature is prolific as it tackles vivid, captivating, and timely themes like Diaspora, hybridity, the sense of in-betweenness, displacement, identity, cultural clash, and stereotypes.

Many critics and researchers could not see *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela second novel, beyond the image of postcolonialism or Islamic feminism. Yet, it offers a detailed exploration of how Arab Muslim women experience a sense of in-betweenness in postcolonial and multicultural western societies. It also highlights the struggle of immigrants in defining themselves and search for a stable identity.

The sense of in-betweenness is inevitable outcome of postcolonialism, patriarchal society, immigration and globalization. It affects postcolonial and immigrant individuals' identity as it makes them shattered between two worlds. In this context, the sense of in-betweenness is a state where the individual torn between two different cultures to none of them is truly belonging. In *Minaret*, it is clear that the female protagonist experiences a sense of in-betweenness, which leads her to search for the deeper and meaningful part in her life. She considered her identity as disturbed, unstable, shattered, confused and this is what pushes her to question her true self identity. The essence behind the second chapter is to show how Najwa experience a sense of in-betweenness in her homeland Sudan, and the struggle that she goes through in order to achieve a religious stable sense of identity in Multicultural London.

After the 9/11 attacks, the representation of Islam and Muslims' image in secular context get a great attention. After going through the details of this dissertation one can understand that Leila Aboulela succeeds in challenging the misconception, misrepresentations and the stereotypes attached to Islam and Muslims. She effectively creates a new understanding and

draws a positive image of Muslims in general and of Arab women in particular in western context. In her novel, Aboulela also reveals how the veil could be a source of empowerment and protection, rather than a source of disempowerment, by providing a religious stable sense of identity and belonging for Arab Muslim immigrants.

This dissertation is crowned by the applicability of postcolonialism and Islamic feminist theories in analyzing the issue of identity in relation to Arab women's sense of in-betweeness in diaspora. However, the sense of in-betweeness is considered the center of our analysis, as it is a crucial result of decolonization.

The conclusion of this dissertation will be around Arab Muslims' feelings of the sense of in-betweeness in their postcolonial society and in the west and how their identities are formed and negotiated in a context, which is fully indifferent in faith. It also sheds light on the struggle of Arab Muslim women to create a stable sense of identity and how they find solace and peace in Islam in Diaspora. Finally, this dissertation paves the way for other researchers to explore more interesting, vivid, bright and absorbing themes in Leila Aboulela novel *Minaret* in relation to Muslims in western societies.

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