

**PEOPLE' S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA**  
**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**  
**UNIVERSITY OF 8 MAI 1945 GUELMA**  
**FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**



**Spiritual Quest and the Development of the Female Identity in  
Leila Aboulela's *Minaret***

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master in English Language and culture**

**OPTION: LITERATURE**

**Submitted by:**

**Manal HAOUALA  
Nessrine BECHICHE**

**Supervisor:**

**Ms.Khawla BENDJEMIL**

**Board of Examiners**

Chairman: Mr. Ali Mahfoud ZEOUI (MAA)

**University of 8 Mai 1945/ Guelma**

Supervisor: Ms.Khawla BENDJEMIL(MAA)

**University of 8 Mai 1945/ Guelma**

Examiner: Mrs. NadjibaBOUALLEGUE(MAA)

**University of 8 Mai 1945/ Guelma**

**2020-202**

## **Dedication**

To the big warrior inside me

To the one who scarified her life to be always by my side no matter what

To the beautiful soul that exists in my life

To the one who believed in me

To Nessrine the fighter and the gorgeous eagle

Nessrine

## **Dedication**

To my mother's beautiful and pure soul.

Manal

## AKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to our supervisor Ms. BENDJEMIL Khawla whose guidance, support and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this study. We would also like to thank all the members of the jury for dedicating their precious time to read and reflect on our work. Finally, I would like to thank our families for supporting us till the compilation of this dissertation.

## **Abstract**

Being a Muslim woman in a Muslim society might be challenging, and being a Muslim woman in a non-Muslim society can even be more. Najwa, the protagonist of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), is an immigrant Muslim woman living in a non-Muslim British society. For this reason; Najwa's journey throughout the novel seems to be difficult, complicated, and challenging since it was predictable to be after living such a confusing lifestyle and the changes that occur in Najwa's life. In addition to her attempt to establish a new identity as a Muslim woman, while confronting issues in the Western society. The key concept of this study is to follow the journey of Najwa as a Muslim immigrant woman who has to face both social discrimination and racism in London along with the stereotypes and the religious ignorance inherited from Sudan. Moreover, this dissertation seeks to answer questions related to the novelist's use of the Islamic religion as a source of power to the protagonist providing a different perspective about Muslim women. Finally, the study shows how Najwa as an immigrant Muslim woman has struggled to find and protect her religious identity.

## Table of Contents:

Dedication.....	i
Aknowledment .....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents .....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter one: Understanding Islamic feminism And Halal fiction:.....	6
1. The Life of the Author as an Immigrant Reflected in Her Works.....	6
2. Representation of Arab Muslim Writers in Britain.....	10
3. Exploring Identity in the 21s Century.....	14
4. Understanding Islamic Feminism and Halal Fiction.....	19
1. Islamic feminism.....	19
2. Halal fiction.....	23
Chapter two: the Development of Najwa’s Identity.....	27
1. The journey of Najwa between Home and Diaspora.....	27
2. The Discovery of Fragmented Identities Through Faith and Religion.....	35
Chapter Three: The Role of Islam in Empowering Muslim Women.....	40
Conclusion.....	47
Works Cited.....	50
Abstract in Arabic.....	54
Abstract in French.....	55



## **Introduction:**

Literature plays a major role in portraying, reflecting and representing the political, cultural, and social problems related to every society. Literary works are like a weapon used by writers to defend a certain phenomenon. They express their voices through their works, which sometimes reflect their personal lives and the suffering they face. For example, immigrant writers write about the homeland, alienation and their suffering in coexistence in a different society, not to mention the racism and discrimination they face. In the same context, Arab writers embody some of the struggles of Muslims, which is represented in the wrong ideas, stereotypes that have spread, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and other hardships. As for Muslim women writers, they portray the suffering of Muslim women and the racism and persecution they face, not only in their Muslim community, but also during their stay in exile. Westerners believe that Muslim women are oppressed and have no special freedom, and that men control them, but of course not all of these conceptions are wrong but most of them are. Thus, Muslim women writers take a stand to defend their reputation by writing artistic literary works that correct these wrong and offensive ideas to encourage Muslim women to have the courage to defend their rights, whether in Muslim countries or Western countries

The struggle of Muslim immigrants in Western societies is largely marked by stereotypes instead of knowledge, as well as the misinterpretations of the holy text, especially towards Muslim women, it is where the challenges they face are much more daunting. For example, in terms of their physical appearance or the image shaped by westerners of them as oppressed and inferior. Hence the combination between the Islamic religion and women is centered under the concept of Islamic feminism which is the light of the research or the heart of this dissertation. Thus the subject of this study is to highlight the misconceptions about Muslim women and their complexities as immigrants in regards to identity through the use of Leila Aboulela's novel *minaret* (2005) as a source of investigation.



It is difficult to describe how hard when your normal happy life became a dream and your good times became only memories in a blink of an eye. This is the story of the protagonist Najwa in the novel of *Minaret* (2005) written by Leila Aboulela,

The Islamic identity in Leila Aboulela's novel plays an essential role to Najwa for her surviving journey, thus, this thesis focuses on the Islamic identity built by a migrated female. The steps, the main reasons, how it started and what leads her to choose religion specially and particularly, in order to create her own world after a mental breakdown and a great depression. Not only that but also the migration as a problem and its disadvantages towards the protagonist. (Hassan El-Nour 330)

The novel is studied from a feminist perspective because the writer deals with issues that face a migrated female who ends up living alone in a foreign land with different cultural background. Yet the main focus is specifically on Islamic feminism as a concept where faith and religion plays an essential role to this theory, by describing the way and the reasons of choosing religion as a way to escape. Also, this concept focuses on the challenges of being a lonely Muslim female in diaspora and its results from mental issues to social problems even with one's own identity and beliefs.

The novel focuses on a migrating Muslim female and the challenges she encounters in the western society, as well as the misunderstandings of the holy text, which leads to a bad relationship with God and weak beliefs. Also it reflects the personal experiences of the writer, which makes her take writing as a means of expression the trauma she faces during her time in exile, as she depicts all the feelings she experiences from isolation and longing for the homeland, to those misconceptions about Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. This, in turn, prompts her to write about Islam and Muslim women in her novels to

reflect their suffering and encourage them to embrace Islam as a religion because it preserves their rights and strengthens them spiritually.

Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*, is considered as one of the most revolutionary novels in the Western world due to the principles and concepts that she takes into consideration as a Muslim writer, as she focuses mainly on the concepts of Islam with regard to women and Islamic identity, whereby she analyses and corrects the misconceptions along with the negative stereotypes about Muslim women as she takes the Qur'an as a support and evidence for that, Mike Phillips argues that: "Aboulela takes a huge risk in describing her heroine's religious conversion and spiritual dedication." (Phillips) because for her, having a religious identity is notably important since she can carry out her religion with her anywhere she goes. However, Muslims are confronting many forms of racism in western societies, especially for women how are wearing the veil because it is an evident that they are Muslims, for this reason their experience in living in a non-Muslim society is remarked by several challenges and obstacles as it may be more dangerous than that, Seda Canpolat in her article *Scopic Dilemmas: Gazing the Muslim Woman in Fadia Faqir's My Name Is Salma and Leila Aboulela's Minaret* says that: "Muslim women's greater visibility as a sartorial minority facilitates and precipitates hate crimes against them". In such cases, what Muslims, especially women, must adhere more to their religion and return to it because it represents their identity in a large and special way. As Md. Mahmudul Hasan mentions in his article *Seeking Freedom in the "Third Space" of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's Minaret and Janmohamed's Love in a Headscarf*: "Aboulela's protagonist Najwa suffers in the host society of London, but it is also the place where she re-discovers her religion and finds fulfillment as a practicing Muslim" (102). The novel is much read from the Muslim version of feminism which is termed as Islamic feminism in which Muhammad Abdullah refers to as "[the] potential to unify women who come from varied geographical and cultural

backgrounds. It is a mean to keep Islam interested in places where gender is crucial and discussed.” And “one of those strong voices emerging in contemporary feminist milie”(Abdullah 154).Likewise Ashraf Zidan in his article*Islamic Feminism and the Concept of Hijab:A StudyOf Leila Aboulela’s Minaret*argues that:“Islamic feminism defends women’s rights, equality between the sexes, social justice; it also fights patriarchal family laws that are falsely innovated and illusively immortalized by some clerics, not by Islam” (32). This is to highlight the point that Aboulela adhered to the concepts of Islam as a means of empowering women and defending them as Muslims in the West.

This dissertation studies the novel from a feminist perspective;precisely Islamic feminism, to examine the protagonist Najwa’s journey as a Muslim woman in a non-Muslim context; wherebythe focus of this theory is determining the problems and obstacles faced by Muslim women in the West, as it is portrayed in the novel, and how the author’s dependence on the holy text as a source of power for her protagonist against the patriarchy.Furthermore, this study attempts to analyze the spiritual side of Najwa’s character and how she succeeded in embracing her Islamic identity within the development of the novel’s events.

The first chapter deals with immigration as a process and its impact on writers and how it is reflected in their literary works based on their own experiences, because many writers are forced to leave their homelands under diverse circumstances and for different reasons. Also it focuses on the author’s life as a female Muslim Arab writer who immigrates to another country and reflects her personal experience through the novel, in which she depicts Islam and faith as an essential element to build a strong spiritual identity. Alsothis chapter explores the concept of identity through the works of some writers who touched upon it in their artistic works, which in turn depicted the sufferings of the protagonists in finding and building an identity in the West, and their confusion in coexisting with new circumstances, and eventually surviving to become stronger and more

solid in exile after clinging to their identity. Additionally, this chapter explores a theoretical framework to Islamic feminism as a concept in order to understand its main points that serve the analysis of the novel, and it recognizes Halal fiction as a genre of literary writing through which some Muslim writers bravely write about Islamic subjects and correct some misconceptions without violating the rules of Islam in terms of the way they write their subjects.

Chapter two is an analytical part that attempts to explore and analyze the journey of the protagonist Najwa between home and Diaspora and the challenges that she faces throughout her life in exile as a Muslim immigrant woman. Also it depicts her way of coexisting with the new situation and overcame all those obstacles when it becomes clear to her that she must stick to her religion and her faith. Since faith it is the only way that makes her recognize her true identity as a Muslim and be proud of it as a means of strength and liberation from the concepts of the West. This chapter also discovers her scattered identity when she is in her hometown, which is formed because she is the daughter of a rich man, and the fact that she lives a Western life makes her think that she is different, but after she moves to London and suffers great losses, she realizes that she is committing a lot of sins and this is what makes her suffer, so she decides to taking a new path towards religiosity, which has become her new identity. As a result, the Islamic identity makes her stronger and inspires her inner peace. Also it examines the role of Islam in providing different perspectives about Muslim women and how it uplifts them to live as free as any other creators in contrast to all those misconceptions and stereotypes made against them by the patriarchal interpretations of the holy Quran, it also concentrates on the new version of the protagonist after she becomes a better Muslim and after finding a peaceful world. It shows the importance of taking Islam as a source of power

## Chapter one: Understanding Islamic feminism And Halal fiction:

### 1. The Life of the Author as an immigrant Reflected in Her Works

Leila Aboulela is born in Cairo, Egypt and grew up in Khartoum, Sudan. She is a Sudanese fiction writer whose literary works are centered on issues of identity, immigration and Islamic religion. Aboulela won the first Caine Prize for African Writing as she is the writer of many famous novels, among them her first novel *The Translator* (1999) which is one of the New York Times 100 Notable Books of the Year, *Minaret* (2005) is long listed for the 2006 Orange Prize, *Lyrics Alley* (2010), the Winner of the Scottish Book Awards for fiction and *Elsewhere, Home* (2018) which won the Saltire Fiction Book of the Year Award. In 1985 with a degree in Economics and then a Master's degree in Statistics from the London School of Economics. Her personal experience in living the sense of in-betweenness. “Aboulela +0never thought about herself as a writer, yet she loved to read novels when she was young” (The National). She reads in English which is the reason for her to write in English and chose this universal language in order to deliver her message to different nationalities. This urge of writing comes immediately after she moves with her husband to Aberdeen in Scotland in 1990, where she is surprised and disappointed by the westerners’ view on Muslims. She thinks that all people were nice and kind like her mother-in-law who truly supported her (The National). She states: “[She] expected everybody to be like her and of course I was horrified that they weren’t” (The National). Sadly she dies before she could ever read any works of Leila Aboulela. After moving to London she feels a strong desire to write and that she should write to defend those misconceptions about Muslims and Islam and to ease the tension between the West and Islam, which at that time was strong and widespread. In which she declares: “I had to do something to change that negative image and tendentious reputation, so I started writing to correct that ugly picture” (Fanak.com). She could not remain silent

without doing anything concerning her desire to write. This explains her feeling of alienation and longing for the homeland, where she feels herself a stranger in a place where no one knows true her religion and beliefs. She started writing when she moved from Sudan and that the Sudanese society doesn't support women writers, however, the reason that makes her to write is that movement from one country to another when she clearly states:

It's just that in my case, personally, the thing I wanted to write and to talk about was this movement from country to country, this immigration, this tension between the West and Islam," Aboulela continued: "These were my topics, what I was writing about. If I had stayed in Sudan, these issues would not have come up. (The National)

Thus fiction is her own way of embodying her trauma in moving from one country to another, she also says in an interview with Keija Parssinen: "These thoughts and emotions couldn't find any outlet except that of fiction" (Parssinen). It was for her as a direct reaction to the western society.

The moods of her books are shaped by this sense of exile and dislocation and reflect real life situations. In Aboulela's fiction, the protagonist is almost always a woman living in Sudan or elsewhere in the world who contends with stereotypes about Islam while striving to find her own way in life, since most of her protagonists are immigrants. She dramatizes the complexities of that intellectual and emotional encounter between Sudanese and the British people through her characters even though she makes it more dramatic. Then in her situation, since there are other Muslim immigrants and refugees who leave their houses by force and they really suffered and still suffering more than in her case. Importantly Leila Aboulela's works depict Islam as a universal thing that can be practiced anytime and anywhere, rather than the idea that it is attached or concerned only with a Muslim community. It is the same cases with most of her characters who are Muslims in a non-Muslim country but still adhere

to their principles concerning their religion, Islam. As it is a personal thing that everybody follows without any higher authority or any force in which she clearly claims in her interview with Claire Chambers:

This point is very important in all of my writing: Islam isn't just part of the culture in my fiction, it's not a social norm or something like that, it's to do with the individual and their faith and their own belief and what they want to do. I think that this has been central to my writing, and maybe this is what makes my writing different from that of other writers, who see the *sharia* solely as part of society and part of culture, rather than belonging to the individual herself. It's highlighted in my work, because my characters are largely based in Britain, which is not a Muslim country, and yet they as individuals want to practice Islam. (Chambers 97)

In this regard, what she intends to convey is embodied in her fiction, among them her first novel *The Translator* (1999) Sammar a Muslim girl who falls in love with the Scottish lecturer Rae Islel for whom she works as a translator and the obstacles they had because of their different religious backgrounds, through which Leila Aboulela indicated to her that she is not only a language translator, but she was also translating Islam for Rae to teach him some of those special concepts that she cannot marry him unless he converts to Islam. In which Alaa Alghamdi argues in his article *Translating Silence, Transmitting Faith: Personal and Cultural Understanding in Leila Aboulela's The Translator* "Summar does not translate merely the Islamic texts that Rae needs in order to undertake his work, but arguably 'translates' the man himself" (Alghamdi 31). In this sense, the novel as Hassan mentions "enacts a poetics of translation on several interrelated levels, plot, theme, language, and discourse" (Hassan 304). This paved the way for Leila Aboulela to correct the negative stereotypes and misconceptions in the western vision about Islam. In addition to her second novel *Minaret* (2005) where she reflects her life as an immigrant in a dramatic and fictional

way through the lens of her character Najwa, who wears the *hijab* by her choice and embraces the Islamic identity when she finds herself alone in a complete different environment. At this point Aboulela tries to make it clear that the Muslim females are not forced to cover their head and that it doesn't violate their freedom instead, they wear it by their own choice as a symbol of their Islamic identity and pious without being forced by any patriarch oppressiveness. The same idea is highlighted by Saba Mahmood in her book *The Politics Of Piety* when she mentions that "bodily acts [. . .] are the critical markers of piety as well as the ineluctable means by which one trains oneself to be pious" (158). And she adds that "The force this coupling of the veil and women's freedom commands is equally manifest in those arguments that endorse or defend the veil on the grounds that it is a product of women's 'free choice' and evidence of their 'liberation' from the hegemony of Western cultural codes (Mahmood 195). This view implements that covering the head is a sign of freedom and liberation.

Along with the collection of short stories *Elsewhere, Home* (2018) in which Aboulela tackles the theme of immigration and the sorrow that is associated with leaving home in each tale. The book covers narratives concerning a yearning for Africa and the Middle East, the difficulties and anxieties of being a female and a mother raising children in the West, and the isolation of being a Muslim in a Western country. All these stories revolve around the different statuses of women in exile are linked under special and precise intertextuality in terms of their lives in the diaspora; however, this collection of stories is quite different from her previous writings, Through it, one can feel the sense of coexistence with the coincidence of events and see that the heroines of the novel build a bond of familiarity despite the longing for the homeland, this notion was explained by Bartels et al when he claims that " [the] diasporic existences become ever more the norm rather than an exception" (80). Generally speaking, Aboulela's displacement from one country to another raised her desire for



reflecting all her feelings of trauma through writing fiction which explores how literature can reshape other cultures through intercultural dialogues and knowledge exchange, almost all her literary works tell a different story within the same context; The blurring boundaries between the identities she occupied were the central to her writing. Moreover, her artistic writings have been extremely popular in both Western and Arab countries because they portray an accurate reality that cannot be neglected.

## **2. Representation of Arab Muslim Writers in Britain:**

Because of some changes that occur in some countries, including political, cultural economic issues, many are forced to emigrate to find suitable conditions for living, but they face many obstacles such as the difficulty of coexistence in a different and new place.

There are many definitions of the term immigration and each person would define it in a specific way. According to Berger, immigration is an emotional experience that involves stages of changes (Bergerqtd. in Wang 9). It couldbe a fresh start for some people who desirenew beginnings with a wish to assimilate in a brand-new worldwhere they could be more creative, happy, and perhaps even free.

Regrettably, desires do not always get fulfilled into realities. On the contrary, they could turn into major disappointments. Most importantly, the struggle of Muslim Arab immigrants in Western societies is largely marked by falsified stereotypes instead of truthful knowledge, as well as misinterpretation of the holy “Quran”.

As mentioned above, the process of immigration is not always easy. In fact, it could be more challenging for females and at times, even dangerous. Muslim women have and still facing numerous intimidations that are quite obvious in terms of physical appearance and the unreal image shaped by Westerners as being oppressed and inferiors. In fact, Muslim Arab women’s unfortunate struggle is even multiplied when experiencing the conflict of being a Muslim female

in a Western society. Hence, Muslim immigrant women's experiences can be affected by a general conception of the host community (Afzal qtd in Wang9).

An undeniable fact is that every misfortune has a hopeful solution. The Brightside of all the unwanted struggles was words that needed to be urgently heard. Muslim Arab immigrants turned their hardships into powerful literary masterpieces that act as a wonderful aspiration for overcoming the daily faced difficulties. In truth, when focusing on one specific domain we find a whole ocean of amazing literary works written by a variation of writers with different stories to share. Divers nationalities and origins all fell under one common thing called immigrant literature. In it, writers talked about their life problems in which they have encountered both in their home land and the new country. These writers also attempt to change some of the untruthful ideas and wrong thoughts held by the West world about them. After being misunderstood and awfully discriminated in a society full of misconceptions and stereotypes, Arab Muslim Writers finally decided to use literature to represent themselves first then to describe what happened in their personal journeys. The writers also provide a map on how they could find that peaceful place where they could settle down carrying their origins, beliefs, and thoughts. Unfortunately, some of these writers are largely marginalized. In fact, they are considered to be different, inferior, and lesser to the Western societies. The situation got even worse after the 9/11 attacks which was a horrible wakeup of the world that kept wondering and asking questions about the reality of Muslim Arabs. Hence, stereotypes and social discrimination increased even more. The unpleasant situation triggered some of the Arab Muslim writers to portray the hidden, untold reality by describing the process of displacement and how it affected their lives. Also, the writers chose to loudly speak about their different sources of strength that made the pursuit of self-recognition a bit easier.

Furthermore, they glorify the meaning of literature by admitting the fact that the latter is way more than just words but a refuge that acts as a safe escape from the ugly realities. That is

to say, when everything seems dark and gloomy, the act of writing hands them a destructive weapon to survive the battle of life. Away from that, a big variation of Arab immigrant writers from both genders became well known by showing the world how their life experiences reflect their artistic literary products after being triply displaced for political, economic, religious, reasons. Among them, those who immigrated to Britain, such as Tayeb Salih the Sudanese writer who immigrated to the United Kingdom for higher studies in London, in his novel *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) which was the reason for his fame and prominence. He is described as a genius of modern Arab novels. *Season of Migration to the North* is a classic post-colonial novel published in (1966). In it, Salih dealt with the impact of British colonialism and European modernity and its effect on other African societies specifically when shaping the new contemporary Sudanese society. Undoubtedly, *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) is a turning point in post-colonial narratives that combines between two different societies and cultures. As previously mentioned, female Muslim writers also did great job writing about these issues and there are many examples where the impacts of immigration is more than obvious on both the writers and their works. Fadia Al Faqir the Jordanian writer, after receiving her BA degree in English literature from the University of Jordan in (1983), two years after she traveled to Britain to pursue her higher studies, then she obtained the first doctorate in Britain in creative and critical writing in (1989). Also, Al Faqir has written many interesting novels where she clearly explained the reality of women living under patriarchal societies.

In these novels the heroines have multiple, intense, and in-depth experiences, both in their satisfaction with social and family oppression or in prison where freedom has a compound connotations or meanings or in their immigration to the south escaping from oppression by an unjust father or a cruel husband carrying with them their imaginary dreams. Moreover, in her novel, *Pillars of Salt* (1996), Al Faqir portrays the struggle of females in a male-dominated society where she uses feminism and postcolonial approaches to deeply analyze the situation. In

reality, the writer herself faced the same issues in her life when her father forced her many times to wear the veil considering the fact that he came from a Bedouin tribe. Hence, the father was not very comprehensible.

Consequently, all these conflicts were well reflected in her works. In one of her interviews she clearly states that the environment where the writer lives really affects his or her literary works. Faqir mentions that “if you are born in an area of conflict, writing ‘art for art’s sake’ becomes a luxury. However, my literary journey shows how writing political fiction can also change” (Bower). Importantly, the different characters are from Islamic societies also, the novel is full of Islamic symbols specifically the title which has a religious story behind its meaning.

Another important female writer is Ahdaf Soueif the Egyptian novelist who immigrated to Britain for her PhD studies then she married a British man. Ahdaf wrote *Aisha* (1983) and *Sandpiper* (1996) which is a collection of short stories beside two other novels, one of her award winning novel is *The Map of Love* (1999). In it, Ahdaf believes that cross cultural love does exist even if it is a complex story. Ahdaf also highlights the positive points to encourage the idea itself because for her culture is exchangeable with no borders and with no problems. Soueif has another interesting novel where she tackles the issue of the “Veil” and “Nikab” as well, by considering both as empowering not oppressive as everyone else believes. In fact, all these ideas were clearly mentioned in her collection of writings *Mezzaterra*(2004). In it, Soueif turns her situation from celebration to defending due to the changes of the world’s point of view after the 9/11 attacks where both Islam and Muslims become a debatable subject of the world(Dr Nick). The common thing between these writers is the fact that they are different in reflecting their literary works by embodying the personal experiences and stories of their lives unconsciously and without any intention, something that makes their works a remarkable touch in the immigrant literature. Both male and female Arab Muslim writers are and still are trying to

represent themselves, to fight stereotypes, and all the misunderstanding held against them. These writers attempt to deliver a truthful image about the reality of Arabs by sharing all the problems and issues they face in their themes of writings. The accessibility of these writings is easy due to the common language i.e.; English has helped Arab Muslim writers after being strangers in a complete different society. Most importantly, these writers act as a voice for all Arab Muslims at that time in both homeland and the host country. In fact, these works express the unjust situation better than journalism, political reports and essays written in English.

Best examples are shown the works written by Tayeb Salih, Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Al Faqir, and Hisham Matar. Their literary masterpieces serve as a bridge that strongly links different cultures and portrays their truthful one to create a sense of understanding and acceptance by Westerners.

Furthermore, their literary works also shed light on women considering the fact that they are badly harmed and discriminated more than any other immigrant. These examples are about different writers that have dealt with migration issues by negotiating them from multiple perspectives taking into consideration the writers' ideas and beliefs based upon realistic experiences that are clearly represented in Layla Al Maleh *Arab Voices in Diaspora* (2009) which is a very rich and interesting book to highlight such problems and also to raise awareness all over the world especially towards Arab Muslim females.

### **3. Exploring Identity in the 21s Century:**

If we ask ourselves what is identity, we would define it as self-belonging to a given group of people, a community, or a society. This happens after acquiring the different qualities and behaviors of the culture, religion, and the history of that place. It also includes traditions and customs of a given nation. By knowing our true selves and where exactly do

we belong. Identity creates a sense of loyalty and responsibility, taking into consideration the fact that each area has its unique identity.

When it comes to Arabs generally, they proudly embrace their unique identity that has been inherited from a rich history including the principles and values of Islam that remarkably differentiates them from any other identity. Moreover, the collective identity is what makes Muslim Arabs special especially in times of need. For example when facing problems we find people with the same identity standing and aiding each other in all means of harmony and peace. What is also known about the Arab identity is its severity and conservative atmosphere that was inspired from Islam. However, time explains and proves that being a conservative society does not necessarily mean being intolerable. On the contrary, it can be more open to accept and tolerate other cultures and differences coming from the outside, without denying their true roots.

Evidently, Islam is the source of power; the root of the tree since it reflects all the values and principles that form or create an identity. Hence, Islam is definitely an essential thing in the formation of the Arab Islamic identity, in his book *Muslim Narratives and The Discourse of English* (2005) Amin Malak speaks about the Algerian president who states: “I am a Muslim first, Arab second and then Algerian. Am also proud to be an African” (Nkrumah qtd in Malak 3). Additionally Amin Malak argues that “many Muslims regard religion as a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or ethnic affiliation” (Malak 3). Also in the same book, it is said that religion cannot be separated from the Islamic identity, because the latter is largely based upon it and as it was already mentioned, Islam works as a light or as an inspiration since it is related to everything in their lives (Malak 3). However, with all these rules and basics there are some exceptions by those who are against or in a position of denial. These people simply couldn't accept the fact that religion and identity are two sides of the same coin

Some of the reasons that lead a category of Arab Muslim writers to abandon their home lands are the difficult circumstances that they have to encounter from severe poverty to unsupportable faithless atmosphere. Hence, their identities are questionable and even unexcitable sometimes. In fact, their feeling of belonging is kind of weak and fragile. This explains and justifies the reasons why it is easy for some to leave their countries and immigrate without missing their home lands at all. Nevertheless, not all writers are in a complete denial of their origins, some are in a position of in-betweens or in other words trapped between two worlds. Clearly, this category is the most damaged one as they are unwillingly forced to abandon their homelands, as a consequence these type of writers attempts to protect their original identity by creating a small world for them and at the same time integrating and assimilating with the foreign society without forgetting their true identity, that is always existent and present inside of them. Islam for the Arabs is a civilization and at the same time a religion, unlike what the Western world was and still misinterpreting almost everything about it by creating an ugly picture that does not truly exist. However, Islam is a religion that appreciates differences and diversities in all races, religions and distinct nationalities. As the prophet Mohammed (peace is upon him) says in his Hadith: “there is no difference between Arabs and Westerners only piety and good deeds”. Therefore, Islam is not only a religion but also an entire civilization and a major part of culture.

In fact, the reason why some Arab Muslim writers have an identity issue is simply because they are in some mixed situations such as defending, embracing denying, and sometimes rejecting their identity. However, Bill Ashcroft in his book *Post-Colonial Studies the Key Concepts* assumes that “an identity that cannot be denied, rejected or taken away by others (Ashcroft 54).

Indeed, identity has always been a major problem for some writers, while for others identity is a source of power and strength, taking the example of the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf as it is mentioned in the previous section that she considers the Nikab which is part of the Islamic identity as empowering not oppressive since it is coming from a personal choice or a decision. Further, when a woman willingly decides to cover herself and wear the Nikab with a sense of confidence it is obvious that this comes from a free will not the opposite way around. Here, the writer tries to show how women are proudly embracing their Islamic identity. In fact, even when Ahdaf decided to immigrate to the UK, Ahdaf kept living normally in a non-Islamic society with the same attitude after accepting that her religion is an inseparable part of her own identity. Hence, her identity cannot for sure be considered as an issue because in her situation she is protecting, embracing and enjoying her life being a Muslim by stating in her other literary works that there is no problem in cross cultural interactions and that the latter has no relation with identity (Dr Nick).

Another example that can't be ignored is the Jordanian novelist Fadia Faqir who is exactly the opposite of Ahdaf since she is rebellious against her own religious identity and her father's attitude by considering it oppressive and patriotic behavior; at the end she escaped away to reject and deny her real identity. In reality, all that clearly appears in her works, when she writes multiple stories about different females sharing the same goal, taking a similar road, and the same objective which is the result of identity rejection and denial. Here, the problem is in their thoughts, Islam and Islamic attitudes are made to create boundaries and limits in their lives. However, Ahdaf Soueif felt discriminated and her works are reflected specifically by her personal life. Further, she relates her identity rejection to feminism and looking for a better treatment from her father in the past. However most of these feminist writers didn't get it the appropriately, they were looking for equality but for



what reason and what kind of equality exactly. In fact, they don't know the real reason behind all of this.

Importantly Islam is a religion of equality and fairness for both sexes and any opposite behavior is coming from abnormal persons, surely Al Faqir is suffering in her life and it automatically reflects her literary works, she manifests and reacts through her writings talking about female issues which lead to identity problems, a sense of discrimination and inferiority as a result they escape and deny their Islamic one. At the end, all these problems are not by choice, they are forced to be that way and their reactions in this case are somehow logical (Bower). Moreover, the story of Salih is different and special. Salih tries to combine between the two cultures while living in a foreign country. In fact, Salih's case cannot be considered as in-betweenness as he tends to show a complete acceptance and balance between the two identities. Further, Salih focuses more on the impact of colonialism and the way the latter tries to omit their real identity which is the principle goal of any colonial attacks and the struggle of the whole society (Hassan 298).

To conclude, these writers portray their Islamic identities' issues in different ways. For some, identity is a source of strength, for others it is a contradicting problem. Moreover, Arab Muslim writers use English language to spread their words, share it around the world to correct the misinterpretations and the wrong ideas held against them especially women. In reality, the literary works are based upon their own realistic stories and experiences, how they manifest and react in their lives, how they tackle identity not only as a concept but as a theme that embodies the whole situation and also describes the consequences and the results of it. These previous writers are some of those who tackled with the concept of identity in their literary works in regards to discovering or rejecting it. Therefore, the common idea is that literature is a mirror to reflect the Arab Muslim writers and represent them and help them spread their voices to the world.

#### 4. Understanding Islamic Feminism and Halal Fiction:

##### 1. Islamic feminism:

“It's culture, not Islam.” As a result of cultural traditions and masculine interpretations of the holy text, many patriarchal behaviors toward women have developed in our society; however Islam in fact, provides women the right of freedom regarding their actions and does not make them subservient to anyone. In addition to the social value and a special position in the family structure that men cannot violate or misuse it. Therefore women are honored by having equal rights with men in a different position since both genders have different roles in life, For God Almighty says in *Surah Al Imran*, verse 195 “Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another” (Surah Al Imran, 195). The general idea of Islamic feminism lies in this exact sense that Islam embraces and uplifts women to the maximum possible extent, and Muslim feminists try to draw a red line under this concept to retrieve their rights that are stipulated by Islam since ancient times and call for respect and gender equality. Apparently, the term Islamic feminism is a combination of the two words "Islamic" and "Feminism" that should be understood separately to realize the meanings and concepts behind both terms. Amin Malik in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* explains: “The term Islamic emphasizes the faith of Islam It denotes thoughts, rituals, activities, and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam or directly associated with its theological traditions” (5). Whereas the concept of feminism generally claims women's rights and calls for gender equality, yet the concept ranges differently to several theories that have its unique demands such as "Liberal Feminism", "Radical Feminism", "Marxist and Socialist Feminism", "Cultural Feminism", "Eco-Feminism" as well as "womanism" which is

developed by women of color, and "western feminism". Each of these concepts stand for different perspectives and ideologies, as it is the case for Islamic feminism which calls for women's rights based on the Islamic religion. For example, western feminists think that "veiling" or the hijab which is a type of scarf or hair covering widely worn by Muslim women is a sign of oppressiveness and submission to men, whereas the veil is worn by Muslim females as a symbol of the Islamic identity and liberty from the imperialistic Western culture, in which Saba Mahmood argues:

The force this coupling of the veil and women's freedom commands is equally manifest in those arguments that endorse or defend the veil on the grounds that it is a product of women's "free choice" and evidence of their "liberation" from the hegemony of Western cultural codes. (Mahmood 59)

Yet it is important to highlight that Feminism and Islam are two distinct ideologies, each has its characteristics that may be utilized for positive or negative objectives, and both can help to deconstruct oppressive structures within the society, especially those who are concerned with women. Therefore, Islamic feminism is defined by Badran in her book *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* as:

[A] feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism is both highly contested and firmly embraced. There has been much misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and mischief concerning Islamic feminism. (Badran 242)

In other words, Islamic feminists are willing to "redefine their identity in a more genuinely modern manner that befits their religion and culture" (Yazbek Haddad and Esposito 13).

The concept is based on the notion that Muslim women are spiritually and politically oppressed and, as a result, deserve equality. However, equality in Islam doesn't mean that women and men are equal, which is a fact, because women and men are different mentally, physically, and emotionally, they think and analyze differently and both have a different view to the world. But this does not mean that one is better than the other, but in fact Islam focuses on these differences to invite attention on the different skills and unique roles and responsibilities which in fact lead women and men to complete each other, as Allah Almighty summarizes beautifully in the Quran in *SuratAl-Baqarah*, verse 187: "they are clothing for you and you are clothing for them" 2: 187. The meaning of clothing in this verse represents security, comfort and beauty which mean that the relationship between women and men is not a competition, it's about cooperation. In simpler words, equality in Islam means that women and men should acknowledge and respect each other's rights and show support regarding their different responsibilities and aims to elevate Muslim women's views and voices, enhance their sense of autonomy and security, and strengthen the foundation of the family which is a cornerstone of society, this is how Islam recognizes the differences between both gender in which Asma Barlas in her book *'Believing Women' in Islam* emphasizes that:

men and women do not have identical responsibilities in Islam (which is why they also have some different rights), this is, not because the Qur'an views the social sphere as being separate from the moral, or women as being unequal to men; it is because the Qur'an seeks to protect women's rights within patriarchy by recognizing their sexual specificity as women. (149)

Yet, it is difficult to fully understand the notion of Islamic feminism without looking forward to its historical context. For more than 14 centuries, Islam has existed. In 610 CE, the Prophet Muhammad has started his mission of spreading Islam, he promotes equality for all

individuals and enables women to have an education and participate in public life throughout his time. The Quran is the basis of these beliefs and ideals, which reflects them in the holy text. Therefore, women are given the rights they did not have before Islam. Islamic Feminism is a modern Muslim women's movement that strives for equality in society and is opposed to traditions that oppress women. In both Western and Middle Eastern civilizations, this movement shares parallel with the feminist movements but has its roots based upon the growth of Islam. According to Margot Badran the term "Islamic feminism" is defined as an approach to comprehend Islam as a source of women's rights and gender equality (242). In general, Islamic feminists believe that Islam does not discriminate against women and it may provide alternative options for achieving gender equality in Muslim countries. The creation of a Muslim feminist discourse can be traced back to the Muslim world itself, and indeed the works of Qasim Amin (1863–1908), one of the founders of Arab feminism, are very significant in his time. Amin advocates for women's freedom from patriarchy in "*The Liberation of Women*," published in 1899. However, as a term, Islamic feminism becomes highly noticeable in the 1990s across many locations in the world. Since then, there has been an explosion of Muslim feminists in different countries. When women were treated as second-class citizens under the name of Islam, these women are challenging fundamental assumptions about religion and gender inequality. In countries like Iran, progressive groups are fighting to create a more egalitarian society with increased access to education for all genders and improved conditions for women in public life. The emergence of Islamic feminism is largely being led by secular feminists who are challenging traditional interpretations of Islamic texts from a male perspective and reinterpret the holy text from a female perspective instead, Wadud is critical of dominant interpretations of the Quran who calls for rereading the Quran from a female perspective in her book *Quran and Woman Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*:

What I am calling for is a reading that regards those reforms as establishing precedent for continual development toward a just social order. A comprehensive just social order not only emphasizes fair treatment of women, but also includes women as agents, responsible for contributing to all matters of relevance to human society. (xiii)

Also, Margot Badran in her article *Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s:*

*Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond* states: “several elements catalyzed the rise of Islamic feminism, women, both secularists and religiously oriented grew increasingly by the imposition and spread of a conservative reading of Islam by Islamist movements and found the need to respond in a progressive Islamic voice” (9). However, it is important to mention that Secular feminism advocates for equal legal rights for men and women as well as the right to reproductive autonomy. Religion and culture are not essential aspects in women's lives, according to secular feminism As such; secular feminists focus more on developing their education and their economic status. The location of Islamic feminism on a global scale is not uniform; due to several factors such as political and economic conditions, sociopolitical norms, and education level. In areas with less active Islamic politics may be safer for activists and scholars to study and write about the topic. In countries such as Iran and Turkey, feminist activism have begun in the mid-twentieth century right after women are granted equal citizenship rights through the new secular constitutions in both countries. But nowadays the media plays an essential role in spreading their voice across the world. Yet this struggle for gender equality within Islam is still ongoing even with this growing movement; however, it is becoming less controversial.

## **2. Halal fiction:**

After the emergence of postcolonial literature, sub-genres in fiction writing in world literature have experienced a dramatic increase and diversity. Just as African writing, feminist

writing, and subaltern writing, these genres make their presence apparent in the literary scene; also Muslims have raised their voices in literature. Unlike the previous categories, Muslims who have been raised in pure Muslim conditions, at the same time educated in English, have been progressively drawing a place in English literature. Generally, Muslim authors are linked by some common factors in terms of the characteristics of the storyline and the topics. Their writings rarely contain explicit sexual themes or inappropriate language. Religious identity is of primary significance to them. This type of literature is called "halal fiction" due to this strict devotion in their writings to the representation and the purity of Islam (Subrair 3).

The term "Halal fiction" refers to the genre of literature that covers topics that are in line with Muslim values and Islamic religious, especially themes on social justice, spirituality, equality and religious identity as well as exile and belonging and women subjects(Subrair1).In other words, "Halal fiction' describes any fictionalwork written by Muslims with an eye to adhering to and upholding Islamic teachings" (Nagom 1647).It is a genre of literary writing produced by Muslim authors targeting both Muslim and Non-Muslim readers in reaction to the worldwide political situation after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ongoing War on Terror. At this level, where there is widespread stereotyping against Muslims and widespread distrust towards Islam, the responsibility of Muslim authors has become essential. Due to their Muslim identity, these authors are allowed to deliver a more relevant and correct portrayal of Islam than what is presented in the Western media. Furthermore, this concept is used as a response to those non-Muslims and including Muslims who want to insult and distort the image of Islam in their writings, as Koç argues:

Within the British context, halal fiction can be thought as a response to fiction produced both by the white English, and also by writers of Muslim heritage, such as Salman Rushdie, whose novel *The Satanic Verses*, led to a crisis among some of the

Muslim circles, as the book was regarded as an insult to the Prophet Mohammed and Islam. (Koç 22)

As such, Muslim immigrant writers draw attention in their writings in correcting those misconceptions created by the west on the Muslim community as a whole and present their Islamic identity. Wail S. Hassan refers to this writing as a “new kind of literature [that] explains to non-Muslims aspects of Muslim lives, especially those of minorities in Europe and North America, while at the same time exposing prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia” (Hassan 317). Indeed, the writings of Muslim authors are revolving around these topics, as they recount various topics and tales, especially those that take place in exile, to expose misconceptions and present their Islamic identity in their literary writings, which have received special attention and appreciation, Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom believes that: “Pride in Muslim identity and a clear-cut display of an aesthetic that attempts to bridge the cultural and religious divides are inscribed in Halal writing” (1648). These writings challenge stereotypes, exploring themes like honor killings, arranged marriages, and domestic violence. The stories are meant to be shared by Muslims around the world without fear of judgment or prejudice. Many who adhere to Islam often feel marginalized in society because their faith is so often misrepresented through politics and media. Halal Fiction writers intend to counter that view by giving them an outlet for storytelling that they can be proud of, identifying with, and connecting with others through. Among these prominent writers of halal fiction are Jamilah Kolocotronis, author of *Echoes* (2006), Leila Aboulela the author of *The Translator* (1999) which is recognized as the first halal novel written in English by *The Muslim News* and her novel *Minaret* (2005), Samina Ali, author of *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004), And many other writers who prove their presence in the literary world as Muslim devout writers whose literary works support the Islamic rules.



To sum up, this chapter deals with immigration as a process and its impact on writers and how it is reflected in their literary works based on their own experiences with it, because at that time many writers are forced to leave their homelands under diverse circumstances and for different reasons. Also, it focuses on the author's life because Leila Aboulela is a female Muslim Arab writer who immigrated to another country and reflects her experience through the novel in which she depicts Islam and faith as essential elements to build a strong spiritual identity, then it explores identity through steps of reconstructing someone's own identity after facing a lot of struggles in the lives of the main characters of her works, she manifests the importance of Islam in relation to feminism. She makes the suffering of her protagonists in exile as a main concern and an important theme in each of her works. Additionally, this chapter explores a theoretical framework to Islamic feminism as a concept in order to understand its main points that serve the analysis of the novel, and it recognizes Halal Action as a genre of literary writing through which some Muslim writers bravely write about Islamic subjects and correct some misconceptions without violating the rules of Islam in terms of the way they write their subjects.

## Chapter Two: the Development of Najwa's Identity

### 1. The journey of Najwa Between Home and Diaspora:

Being an immigrant is extremely tough and challenging because of the difficulty of adapting to a new culture and a different way of life. Even the climate changing may become one of those obstacles that immigrants suffer from, not to mention racism towards one's origins and skin color... etc. However, being a Muslim immigrant is a matter of extreme difficulty which necessitates a strong faith and personality to survive in a Western environment. It is easy for someone to bury his/her Islamic identity to avoid the hate and those harmful stereotypes against Muslims, but this is considered a weakness of personality and faith. For this reason, a true Muslim will always cling to his/her religion which represents his identity and empowers it while living in diaspora. This is actually the same way that the protagonist Najwa of the novel of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) resorts to.

Leila Aboulela is a well-known writer who has made an impact on world literature, especially with her novel *Minaret* (2005). The novel explores issues of identity, power, and gender and juxtaposes two different cultures, the Life in Sudan and the life in Scotland. This is done to contrast the life of the protagonist while she is still part of her community and later on as an isolated person out of her culture. Thus, this chapter attempts to explore and analyze the journey of the protagonist Najwa between home and diaspora and the challenges that she faces throughout her life in exile as a Muslim immigrant woman. Also this chapter addresses the way she coexists with the new situation and overcomes her obstacles that she faces. It becomes clear to her that she must stick to her religion and faith because it is the only way that will make her recognize her true identity as a Muslim, and be proud of it as a means of strength and liberation from the concepts of the West. Also, it examines the role of Islam in providing different perspectives about Muslim women and how it uplifts them to

live as free as any other creators in contrast to all those misconceptions and stereotypes made against them by the patriarchal interpretations of the holy Quran.

*Minaret's* main objective is to bridge the gap between Muslim community and the west, Muslim female representation in the West. It is a narrative about Najwa and her family's forced migration; which after leaving Khartoum becomes a shattered, poor family. This change that occurs to the family is traumatic. Cariello argues: "Within this context, 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" (Cariello 340).

One essential feature of Aboulela's way of presenting psychoanalytical issues which may be investigated through her literature is the geographical location, in which the opening part of the novel is set in Khartoum 1984-5. It reflects Najwa's life before the 1985 coup, and provides an opportunity to get to know her wealthy family and the way they sustain a westernized way of life. In fact Najwa's family is an illustration of an upper-class Sudanese family. Yet this section is critical for understanding the big shift that occurs later in the novel.

Najwa's life is rich and luxurious. She has everything she desires since her life is quite easy. In other words, she is living the life of an aristocrat. There is nothing she lacks. Rather, she does things that many others do not do in her region, including driving a car, she states: "In Khartoum only a minority of women drove cars and in university less than thirty percent of students were girls" (Aboulela 14). Her father's position offers her a life that many do not have in her area. Her privileged lifestyle separates her from her country's political conflict. She doesn't think or care about politics since she isn't required to. She does not concentrate on her studies as well and is always late for her classes since she does not want to work; she only wishes to marry and have children, she even admires her mother's way of living, who

seems very modern, and manages to live like her when she grows up. This is illustrated when she talks about her mother: "She had just come back from the hairdresser and her hair curled over her shoulder. I could smell her hairspray and cigarettes. "I wished I were as glamorous as her, open and generous, always saying the right things, laughing at the right time. One day I would be" (Aboulela 17). Her brother Omar is living the same way as she does. In fact, he never cares about anything since their life is already easy for them. Their westernized lifestyle has shaped and influenced their lifestyles and their identity despite the fact that they are living in a Muslim country. Many girls in Najwa's university wear the hijab and practice Islam; she doesn't consider herself one of them because her westernized lifestyle and the privileges she has, in all purposes, distract her from understanding Islam regardless of being somehow interested or kind of guilty. This is illustrated by her feeling of awkwardness when she sees two Hijabi girls at the university: "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 provincial girls made me feel awkward" (Aboulela 16). She justifies that by thinking that only provincial people practice Islam she says that "They were provincial girls and I was a girl from the capital and that was the reason we were not friends" (Aboulela 16). Additionally, she is disturbed by the idea that the servants in her house would wake up from their sleep at dawn in order to pray, even though she is likely to be awake until that time and has never thought of prayer, Najwa says: "They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't" (Aboulela 25). This depicts that deep inside her, there is a feeling that makes her feel uncomfortable about her position as an elite girl in a Muslim setting, and thus illustrates that her lifestyle is the reason for her ignorance about her religion. This ignorance leads Najwa to practice in a certain way that contradicts her religion and makes her unaware of what she is actually doing. Such as wearing mini-skirts and attending parties

late at night, and the fact that she used to cheat on Ramadan; not only her, but the entire family, this is illustrated when she says: “Last year we were in London and we didn't fast at all” (Aboulela 24), all of them lives at the same pace in a different way that inherits in them the distance from their true identity, which is the Islamic identity.

Later, a big shift occurs in part two when they are forced to fly to London right after her father's arrest because he is accused of stealing government money for his own interests. From here, things start to take another path from than it has been before. This results Najwa's feeling of disillusionment and therefore a big trauma.

At first, things seem to turn out for the better, Najwa thought that everything would go away and return to how it was after they release her father, “Our First weeks in London were OK. We didn't even notice that we were falling...Omar and I could not help but enjoy London” (Aboulela 37). But she has no idea what the future holds for her. A new life that she has not anticipated is waiting for her. Disappointments will accumulate on her one after the other, and it will not be as simple as she has hoped. Rather, it's like a nightmare in which she has fallen and has yet to find a way out, but she will continue to resist until she finds her true self that she has lost under layers of a privileged lifestyle wealth. Her loss makes her desperate and makes her vision about her true self becomes unclear; she loses connection to whom she was before and who she becomes now. She describes her feelings:

There are all kinds of pain, degrees of falling. In our first weeks in London we sensed the ground tremble beneath us. When Baba was found guilty we broke down, the flat filling with people, Manna crying, Omar banging the door, staying out all night. When Baba was hanged, the earth we were standing on split open and we tumbled down and that tumbling had no end, it seemed to have no end, as if we would fall and fall for eternity without ever landing. As if this was our punishment, a bottomless pit, the roar

of each other's screams. We became unfamiliar to each other simply because we had not seen each other fall before. (Aboulela 39)

In a blink of an eye, she finds herself alone; her father is executed after he has been arrested, then her mother dies after suffering from illness. As well as the difficult conditions she has been living, especially when Omar becomes a drug addict and starts arguing with her and loses his nerves to the extent that he has pushed her even when she has been ill. Then after her mother dies, Omar is also arrested. Although her uncle Salah wants to take her with him, she does not want to become a heavy burden on anyone, so she chooses to remain alone in London to build a new life after her great loss. She has no family, no friends, no money, so she has to work as a maid. She becomes longing for the family atmosphere that she has lost in a short period of time. She feels alienated and alone, which makes her search for comfort in different places to make her feel comfortable. This is illustrated when she speaks about Shahinaz: "It is rare to have Shahinaz in my living room. I prefer to go to her house, to be surrounded by her four children, her mother-in-law, the photos of cousins and uncles on the shelves" (Aboulela 60).

The only thing that reminds her of their past life and makes her feel that she is not alone is that she meets Anwar again when he sends her a belated letter of condolence and asks her to meet; she feels a little delighted and did not hesitate to meet him, hoping that he would make her feel at home again. Anwar is her last nostalgic symbol to her past life yet she discovers one day that he is a hypocrite who uses her and does not practice what he preached, especially when he drives her to a sexual relationship; it is this drop that overflowed the cup to realize that she must listen to her inner voice and her guilt:

It should not be like this. It should be a room in the best hotel in Khartoum, my wedding dress hanging in the cupboard, the sheets white and crisp. A view of the Nile and henna on my hands. I would slip my arms through the sleeves of a new dressing

gown that matched my nightdress. Mama had bought that set from Selfridges, peach-coloured, expensive. And she would have told the sales girl that her daughter was getting married and they would have smiled the smile they save for foreigners with money. I should not be wearing my ordinary jeans and yellow T-shirt. My mother should be a phone call away, anxious, waiting to ask, Are you all right. (Aboulela 97)

Hence, the feeling within her becomes heavier than before, and she is upset by the fact that no one cares about what happens to her and that she is not bound by laws that stop her from doing things she should not have done in the first place. Najwa feels unsafe and insecure since no one is looking after her: “Who would care if I became pregnant, who would be scandalized? [. . .] no one” (Aboulela 98). Then she continues describing London as an empty place where a person could do anything without restraint or even concern about the results that may occur: “This empty space was called freedom” (Aboulela 98). Wail Hassan argues that “her notion of freedom, then, is a mixture of wholesale rejection of Western modernity, which means to her little more than secularism and Islamophobia, and nostalgia for an idealized Arab past paradoxically and unreflectively conceived in Orientalist terms” (316).

The feeling that accompanies Najwa after all she has suffered, and her feeling that she is trapped in the nowhere and dislocated culturally, geographically and emotionally, as an alienated immigrant is illustrated through the very first lines in the novel “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” (Aboulela 1). She does not find a place to escape and belongs to. She does not know which way to take her confusion was portrayed when she says: “I wanted to pray in the same way that I wanted to sprout wings and fly. There was no point in yearning, was there? No point in stretching out. In my own way, in my own style, I was sliding. First my brother and now it was my turn to come down in the world” (Aboulela 99). Then she decides to turn to the

religion of Islam, perhaps to find what she is looking for in terms of identity, safety and belonging, as she begins her journey as a committed Muslim. She appreciates what she is doing by going to those classrooms to learn more about Islam, by wearing the hijab, and by going to pray at the Reginat Park Mosque, whose minaret's looked out from the top of the park. It symbolizes the destination that Najwa eventually take as her refuge, and that is why the writer Leila Aboulela named this novel *Minaret*. Yet her journey as a committed Muslim is not that smooth as it appears due to the Islamophobia that is widespread among westerners, she is bullied regarding her physical appearance when she starts wearing the hijab "I hear footsteps come up behind me, see a blur of denim. He says, You Muslim scum', then the shock of cool liquid on my head and face. I gasp and taste it, Tizer. He goes back to his friends - they are laughing. My chest hurts and I wipe my eyes" (Aboulela 49). But she keeps praying in the bus until she decides to leave the bus yet she is feeling stronger and protected by Allah. Not only does she face this in the street, but also her employer Lamya underestimates her and treats her as inferior, "Now I know that she will never do that. She will always see my hijab, my dependence on the salary she gives me, my skin colour, which is a shade darker than hers. She will see these things and these things only; she will never look beyond them" (Aboulela 68) Najwa realizes this fact when Lamya loses her necklaces and accuses Najwa for stealing it in an indirect when her voice tone is aggressive while asking Najwa about the missing necklaces, Najwa explains: "but today her eyes are flashing and she is almost breathless when she speaks to me. 'Where's my pearl necklace? I left it in the morning with the rest of my jewellery, where is it?' I stand up. She is not asking. She is accusing" (Aboulela 66) despite the fact that Lamya is a Muslim, her lifestyle is westernized, just as Najwa has been in the past. It also represents Najwa's previous life, which she has lived in Khartoum, but now she becomes a devout maid. Despite all the difficulties she faces as a veiled Muslim regarding racism, it is the right direction for her,



and she finds herself more comfortable with what she has become. When she starts visiting the mosque regularly she meets many women from different origins, even though they aren't sharing the same cultural background yet they are united under one faith which is Islam that shapes their identities regardless of the place they are living. Sethi argues that “religious identity provides more stability than national identity” (Sethi). Where she feels that her nightmare of sorrow and loss is over, “The skidding and plunging was coming to an end. Slowly, surely I was settling at the bottom. It felt oddly comfortable, painless. It felt like the worst was over. And there, buried below, was the truth” (Aboulela 134). Now she is open to know more about Islam, she asks daring questions that she didn't even have the courage before to ask them to admit that she is curious to know those answers that guide her to her true identity that she was seeking; it is represented when she says:

Refresh my memory. Teach me something old. Shock me. Comfort me. Tell me what will happen in the future, what happened in the past. Explain to me. Explain to me why I am here, what am I doing. Explain to me why I came down in the world. Was it natural, was it curable. (Aboulela 134)

Even Tamer, is impressed by her religiosity, which his sister Lamya misses completely, He is also very adherent to his religion, he practices all of its religious rituals, including fasting and celebrating Eids, and believes that it is the duty of a Muslim to appreciate these practices and give them time, he said: “It's actually a religious obligation to celebrate. We should be happy, we should give it time” (Aboulela 105), he wants to marry a Muslim woman who is familiar with and implements the Islamic religion. It is expressed when he said: “I would only marry someone who was devout. And she would have to wear hijab” (Aboulela 110). For this reason he wants to marry Najwa, In fact she is in the other hand impressed by him being a devout Muslim but she realizes that it would be inappropriate to marry him since he's too young for her. His mother completely rejects this

embarrassing idea to the extent that she offers money to Najwa just to leave her son. Najwa thought that this has to be a test for Tamer to obey his mother and to not make her upset like Omar has done to his mother and that she should not be an obstacle for him to pass this test, she cares more about her relation with Allah and that she has to correct her sins, thus she accepts the money immediately. She says:

I wait for her to finish, to spend herself. I sit immobile, my hands in my lap, looking at the cheque on the table. I can go on Hajj with this money, I can get a plane to Mecca, stay in a nice hotel not far from the Ka'ba - I can enjoy myself. I can get a degree with this money, go to university with Shahinaz and become a mature student. I can help Omar next month when he comes out of prison. Maybe he can be persuaded to become a student. (Aboulela 147)

She is seeking the spiritual fulfillment more than anything else, which is her true identity that she reaches after a long journey of disappointments.

To sum up, Najwa's story expresses the great change that occurs in her life regarding the familial, social and even emotional loss. This section expresses the difficulty of immigration and the way to deal with it, especially for a Muslim woman. Najwa finds the appropriate path to take as she adopts the Islamic identity at the end of her journey in Diaspora.

## **2 The Discovery of Fragmented Identities:**

Immigrants, in general, face the same struggle of feeling alienated in exile, this feeling is usually characterized by a sense of in-betweenness and loss, because the act of moving from one country to another makes a person feel strange in a new setting that has different cultures and traditions than his or her original one, for this reason coexisting in another country is not easily attainable. That feeling of in-betweenness makes a person confused about his identity that becomes unclear and blurry.

In her novel *Minaret* (2005), Leila Aboulela portrays a strong and compelling protagonist who engages with the world around her in much the same way as other protagonists in literature, but what sets this protagonist apart is her Muslim identity. The novel focuses on Najwa, a Sudanese girl who moves with her family to London as political refugees. While Najwa is still adjusting to this new world, everything quickly changed when her father is executed after he is imprisoned for certain reasons. Her Westernized style is what distinguishes her from the other girls in her university, she finds herself different from them, which is illustrated when she meets two girls wearing the hijab but she considers herself different from them, “They were provincial girls and I was a girl from the capital and that was the reason we were not friends” (Aboulela 16). Her father's high status shaped her modern identity when she is in Khartoum, she sees herself as a westernized girl of the high luxury class. However, the course of her life changes when she loses all that wealth, She finds that her Sudanese identity has begun to fade and she begins to lose her sense of self recognition when her life takes a new turn, which makes her in great confusion, not knowing which way to take.

Anwar, the young man she has previously dated in Khartoum, moves to London and reaches and approaches with her, their relationship returns again, but this time without restrictions or rules that prevent them from doing anything because they are in a western place where no one cares about anyone. Anwar becomes the last glimmer of hope for her to feel herself in Sudan again. She tries to be westernized as he loves her, to satisfy her sense of belonging, but in fact Anwar loves only the fact that she is modern and independent and available to him whenever he wants. Her relationship with him takes a brave course to become intimate, but then she realizes that he never intends to marry her and that his mentality differs from hers. Anwar tries to convince her that: “the guilt would go away. `Like every other Arab girl,' he said, `you've been brainwashed about the

importance of virginity” (Aboulela 169), But this confuses her even more since she is doing what she believes represents her, but she still feels the same guilt, yet this time it is stronger, she adds: “He was right about the soreness but the guilt didn't go away” (Aboulela 168).

Thus their relation ends when she decides to seek a religious path for the sake of God's forgiveness. She feels that it is impossible to hide from the consequences of one's choices which is in fact, the turning point that the novel takes, “one life literally stops, replaced by a completely different one” (Cariello 340). Najwa attempts to reconcile between her own identity as a Muslim woman, and her Sudanese heritage, and her roots.

Najwa wears the hijab as her first step towards religiosity, and she contacts with the women who washed her mother when she died, to guide her on the path of Islam, and they invite her to the mosque to attend lessons on Islam to enhance her understanding more, she also admires them for their modest dress and high morals. She is impressed by the fact that she is in the mosque, because there are many women from different places, but they are united by one religion, and thus she did not feel strange or lonely among them, her sense of belonging parallels the same feeling when she was in Khartoum, she says: “In the mosque I feel like I'm in Khartoum again” (Aboulela 244). She also feels happier and more comfortable when she is in the mosque, because it really becomes a place that nourishes her sense of belonging. She expresses this when she says:

This is a happy occasion and I am happy that I belong here, that I am no longer outside, no longer defiant. One more line to go. My Lord, give us from your mercy and blessings so that we can love what you love and so that we can love all those actions and words that bring us closer to you. (184)

The practice of Islamic teachings and rituals makes her more stable than before, the sense of in-betweenness is fading the more she adheres to the Islamic identity. So Islam becomes for her the place to which she belongs and makes her feel the sense of pleasure that she lacked in the past, she expresses her feelings and says: “I reached out for something new. I reached out for spiritual pleasure and realized this was what I had envied in the students who lined up to pray on the grass of Khartoum University” (Aboulela 243).

Najwa's journey towards a religious life becomes more solid and clear when she meets Tamer, Lamyia's brother, whom works for her as a maid. She falls in love with him despite his young age because he agrees with her mentality and she in turn likes her and loves her so much that he asks her to marry him and this is because they share the same beliefs and thinking about religiosity and Islam which makes feel a connection to each other. They open a conversation about their origins and how they see themselves, Tamer explains: “I don't feel very Sudanese, though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity” (Aboulela 110), Najwa answers with the same answer: “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)

Despite their love for each other, Tamer's mother completely rejected the idea of marriage, but this did not affect Najwa much, as she no longer wishes to marry and does not need her man in her life to rely on him. All that became of interest to her is her relationship with God, which she wants to improve and strengthen. Hence, through the money that Tamer's mother offers to Najwa, she thinks of going to Hajj to ask Allah's forgiveness for her sins, this is evidence of the strength of the faith that she has acquired, she found in faith a strong identity that makes her not afraid of life's difficulties.

Najwa's identity is formed by her Muslim faith. The novel shows how this faith is more important to her than her Sudanese roots. Her faith is also influenced by the way she's been raised in Sudan, but through the story, she soon realizes that Islam had more to do with her identity than being Sudanese or being a refugee on London soil.

In short, it can be said that the stages of development of Najwa's identity goes through ups and downs and changes that make her confused about the fact that she recognizes herself. In the beginning, she lives in Khartoum in a very westernized way and considers herself as different from those around her, and that her father's wealth is what distinguishes her identity, but things change when her father is imprisoned and then executed, and her wealth vanishes to become in a dire need of money, not to mention her feeling of alienation after the loss of her mother and the entry of her brother to prison. She no longer knows her identity, yet the thing that makes her take a different course is her failed relationship with Anwar. She gets to know some Muslim women who led her to the new path, which will get her out of her ordeal and sadness; she takes Islam as a refuge and religiosity as an identity, and eventually reaches her goal, which is embodied in the spiritual quest for a stable Islamic identity.

### **3 Chapter Three:**

#### **1 The Role of Islam in Empowering Muslim Women:**

Although Islam is one of the most widespread religions around the world and has existed since ancient times, yet it is the most criticized and stereotyped one in the West, especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Therefore Muslims, especially those residing in the West and immigrants, face Islamophobia and racism with regard to their rights. They have been marginalized and neglected; even the image of Islam does not even resemble itself anymore. Additionally, they see women as subservient to men and do not have any absolute freedom. They thought that the veil that she wears as a cover for her hair and body is an evidence of oppression and enslavement of men. All these interpretations circulating in the West about Islam were, of course, not true. For this reason, thinkers and writers have to take their stand to defend the image of their religion through their works, in which Abdul Majid thinks that “these works should present a clean image of Islam and its followers to the wider audience” (40). Accordingly the focus of this dissertation is on one of those writers whose literary works highlight and reinterpret the misconception and wrong ideas concerning Muslim women. In her fictional novel *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela introduces the idea of how Islam has been interpreted as source of power and spiritual comfort. Also the way the protagonist Najwa overcomes her trauma and takes her strength from the Islam, without abandoning it while living in diaspora.

Leila Aboulela writes in a clear language through which her story will be understood by all readers as she speaks through Najwa’s struggles, and her achievements regarding finding the identity that represents her true self and the relief from all the obstacles she faces as an immigrant. Aboulela provides a more accurate picture of Islam by following the protagonist's life before and after embracing the Islam and what her life is like when she is a sinner. In addition to the difficulties she faces, then how does she overcome those difficulties

when she takes Islam as a means to regulate her life through faith and believing in Allah and feel more comfortable as a devout Muslim. Mahmudul Hasan in his article *Seeking Freedom in the "Third Space" of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's Minaret and Janmohamed's Love in a Headscarf* argues that in fact Muslim women "gain agency from Islam and hence do not need any Western rescue mission to counteract patriarchy" (Hassan 96). This indicates the importance of adhering to Islam in order to avoid all the difficulties that women face, including patriarchy.

During her life in Khartoum, Najwa is not less than a lost girl who follows the westernized life style and enjoys it, despite that small voice that is calling her inside to avoid what she is doing. However, she does not listen to that voice or rather she does not understand its meaning. She describes that feeling when she hears the sound of the 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 had at the disco and it went to a place I didn't know existed. A hollow place. A darkness that would suck me in and finish me" (Aboulela 25). Then, when she is forced to fly to London after her father's arrest where she finds herself facing traumatic loss, suddenly her life turns upside down, she has never expected what awaited her, the big shift that accrues makes her realize a lot, but it has happened gradually. This quote from the novel indicates her sufferance:

It was becoming clear that I had come down in the world. I had skidded and plunged after my father's execution and through my mother's illness, when I dropped out of college, then after Omar's arrest and through my relationship with Anwar. That process took so long, was mixed up and at times gave the illusion of better things. There was a glamour in coming to London, and Omar and I had fun during those first weeks before Baba's trial. We didn't know that we were being exiled, we didn't know we were seeking asylum. (Aboulela 134)



In fact, her relationship with Anwar awakened her from the mistakes she is committing; she goes through a phase characterized by senses of loss, uncertainty and no belonging, at this point, she decides to follow her spiritual need to embrace Islam and begins her journey as a devout Muslim in order to have a meaningful organized life. Islam has opened new gates for her towards a life that is less stressful than before, because she is finally applying the rituals of Islam including praying regularly at the mosque with a group of other Muslim sisters and wearing the veil out of her own choice, which is illustrated when she describes herself wearing it for the first time “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 136).

This is one of the misconceptions that Aboulela focuses on in order to clarify the idea of wearing the veil. It is mistakenly understood by the western people that wearing the veil is not by choice and Muslim women are forced to wear it, however, in fact it is the opposite, which is illustrated in the novel when Najwa decided to wear it by a matter choice and become happy and more secure with it. Moreover, And the fact that Najwa has started wearing the hijab while she was in a non-Muslim country, even though she was living in a Muslim country and surrounded by many Muslims, indicates her desire to wear it and that she is not forced and no one forced her to do so. For her, it defines the identity that she seeks in exile. Not only does she wear it to show that she is a Muslim, but in fact, she takes her first steps towards religiosity, which then would improve and modify her new life. At this level Koç points that “wearing the hijab and embracing Islam was both Aboulela’s and Najwa’s way of dealing with the trauma of migration” (53). In the same context, El Khawari argues that:

The veil is seen as a sign with multiple layers of meaning because voluntary veiling is believed to be an empowering tool of self-expression through which women increase

their relationship with their own faith and culture in addition to the fact that the incentive behind voluntary veiling re-establishes a link with authentic past culturally and its dissociation from the West. (Jelodar et al qtd. In Taha Al-Karawi and Bahar 256)

Thus, the hijab in the novel expresses the fact that it is worn voluntarily and not compulsory, and then it symbolizes the identity of the Muslim woman and distinguishes her from others.

Additionally, Leila Aboulela offers a different image for her non-religious characters such as Najwa's brother Omar, Anwar and even her employer Lamya whose behaviors are not acceptable as Muslims, to make the comparison between them and the other religious characters in order show how a Muslim could be a peaceful and intelligent person, this is though their representation while being at the mosque sitting in a polite way reciting the Quran verses in a comfort and respectful manner, Wail Hassan argues that

Najwa, the protagonist of *Minaret*, leads a devout life in London, where she feels much more at home with the multi-ethnic group of Muslim women at the mosque than with secular Sudanese and other Arabs. As for Scottish converts, they are often better Muslims than casual or faltering born Muslims because the converts have made a conscious choice and because they have more to lose. (312)

At this point, Aboulela draws attention on the practices that her Muslim characters do in the novel to show the level of civility they have as they call to do the good and avoid the evil behaviors as it is portrayed when Um Waleed asks Muslim women in the mosque to give charity and avoid lying, gossip and envy (Aboulela 175) Also, Aboulela portrays the mosque as a place of comfort and tranquility that makes the person want to go to it even in cases of fatigue, which will inevitably disappear when entering the mosque and meeting other people who are united by the name of Islam under one roof, despite their different culture as in this

quote “I eat quickly so that I can get to the mosque and lie down a bit before the lesson starts. I need to stretch out” (Aboulela 77). Then another quote which symbolizes the mosque as a comfort place when Najwa refers that “the whole mosque is their playground” (Aboulela 78). This representation of the mosque appears not only as a place of worship, but as a place where Muslim people gather to learn and correct concepts and mistakes, as well as to rest and meet new people. It is also a peaceful and comfortable place that sends peace and comfort, so that even young children can find it good place to play. She enjoys visiting the Regent’s Park mosque to join Tajweed classes to learn the rules of reciting the Quran with other Muslim women, and she is really happy that she is learning things related to Islam. She believes that now she is praying for the sake of spiritual pleasure not for other reasons as she describes her feeling:

Maybe I was happy because I was praying again- not like when I was young when it was just to boost my grades or to complement my fast in Ramadan-but with the intention of never giving it up. I reached out for something new. I reached out for spiritual pleasure and realized that this was what I had envied in the students who lined up to pray on the grass of Khartoum University. (Aboulela 135)

In fact, these rituals demonstrate Najwa's devotion to her faith that makes her feel secure and safe and protected by Allah. As for Najwa, becoming a devout Muslim happened in several stages and does not come suddenly. Since she has been in Khartoum, she seemed interested in the matter, but somehow lost and confused, but after what she suffers in London, she begins to learn more about Islam. Moreover, Wearing the hijab was a huge step forward for her compared to what she was once as a glamorous fashioned girl, and one of the most important stages that she has gone through and which has already confirmed her religious identity is her relationship with Tamer, he is a young Muslim and religious just like her and shares the same beliefs and ideologies about Islam, which makes her fascinated with him

despite his young age. The bonding between them is very good as they identify with each other in a perfect way, which makes Tamer think of marrying her. In her novel, Aboulela does not portray only Muslim women, but even men as Tamer to demonstrate how a Muslim devout man can be observant and moralistic in contrast to other non-religious men compared to Najwa's brother's Omar who is a drug addict. Even Tamer's mother is happy that he is religious, which is expressed when she says: "What a relief, we thought, that he's sober and religious. Being religious is good; it protects him though sometimes we worried maybe he'll become fanatical" (Aboulela 249), she is not afraid about him and thinks that religion would prevent him from committing inappropriate things.

Indeed, Leila Aboulela succeeded in portraying Islam as a religion of peace, commitment, and distance from things that might harm a person, and this is through her male character as well. In the same context, Najwa wants her brother to embrace Islam just like she did, she asks him to start praying several times so that Allah will forgive him but he did not listen to her, she even told him about Tamer's commitment to Islam yet this did not make any change. Many people find it difficult to understand the role of faith in their lives, but for Najwa, she eventually succeeds in taking Islam as a way out of her plight, and learns that a person may be punished for his actions even before his death, as what has happened to her brother and father. Even what has happened to her with Anwar, she considers it as a punishment for her from her previous life, but she knows at the same time that everything that happened to her is a reason for her awakening and that if all of this had not happened, otherwise she would not have become what she is now, despite her great loss, she is satisfied with everything and only seeks God's forgiveness, in which she expresses her strong desire to visit the Hajj when she was talking with Tamer: "I would like to go on Hajj. If my Hajj is accepted, I will come back without any sins and start my life again, fresh" (Aboulela 116). Her desire to visit the Hajj is one of the most important signs that the Aboulela tackles in

order to demonstrate the level of religiosity and maturity that the protagonist has reached, which in turn makes her give up in her relationship with Tamer. She is attracted to him because he is devout like her and fell in love with him despite his young age, but she does not want him to make his mother angry and dissatisfied with him, which makes her move away from him. In return, the amount of money that Tamer's mother offers to Najwa fulfills her desire to visit Hajj. Her choice, at the end is evidence of her maturity and reaching the highest levels of safety that makes her accept her destiny. She does not care about the idea of love after that, and she does not think of anything other than going for Hajj.

Thus, the writer succeeds in delivering her ideas and correcting some misconceptions about Islam through the lens of the protagonist, she represents Islam in the novel, claiming that it is the only way out for all these obstacles that a person can face as an immigrant, and that it modifies people's lives to make them bound under rules and laws that keep them from doing evil. The protagonist of the novel adopts these ideas of faith despite the entire trauma she has gone through and she takes Islam as a source of strength during her stay in the exile and considers it her identity that she sought from the beginning. Wail Hassan speaks about Aboulela and argues that:

Her works undertake to explain Islamic theology, shari'a, and rituals to Muslim and non-Muslim readers who have no access to the Islamic tradition in its original language and who live in predominantly secular or non-Muslim societies. The conflicts facing her characters almost always have to do with how to harmonize their desires and actions with the dictates of Islamic belief, law, and ritual; how to find their way to God or strengthen their faith; and how to do so while living in a society that views them and their religion with various degrees of suspicion and hostility. (310)

Through her aesthetic work, Leila Aboulela touches on several concepts, the most important of which are the concepts related to Islam and women. She sheds light on correcting the Western view of Muslims and Muslim women in specific through her own experiences, which urges her to write about that in her artworks and through the narration of *Minaret* (2005), she makes it become clearer through the development of the course of events that occurs in the novel because at the end, the protagonist Najwa reaches her spiritual goal and acquires the identity that defined her true personality, which she reaches after difficult stages of her life, the spiritual peace and inner tranquility, her adherence to Islamic teachings and her practice of Islamic beliefs with love and desire. Fortunately, the minaret was her guide that led her towards the right path in her long journey between home and diaspora.

### **Conclusion:**

The world undergoes numerous changes, which lead various domains to deal with and react with these developments in diverse ways. Among of these changes are the ones that occur in one's psyche. For example, the immigrant person suffers from the problem of identity that he or she is trying to preserve and at the same time adapting to a new environment. Also, their awareness of having it, the steps of building and reconstructing identity, so that living in homeland or moving to another, won't make a difference with the person's mental health. As such, Writers use literature as a tool of reflection, illustration, and depiction of these issues in their literary works to portray, deliver and represent their voices all over the world.

There are many examples of women writers who tackle this problem by writing masterpieces that reflected the real situation and the struggles faced by an Arab Muslim female in exile. One of these prominent writers is Sudanese novelist Leila Aboulela whose revolutionary novel *Minaret* (2005) is the core subject of this dissertation, in which the writer explores the

growth of identity through faith and Islam. The dissertation attempts to explore the struggles faced by Muslim female immigrant in a western society, in addition the consequences of misinterpretations of the holy book and its effect on the construction of the identity. Moreover Aboulela makes a clear reflection on her own life and experiences since she is an immigrant writer too.

This study analyzes the novel's events through the use of Islamic feminism as an approach to follow the protagonist's life before and after moving to another country, and the big shift that occurs in her life while being in exile, In addition the traumatic loss that leads to change her thoughts and take a different path towards faith and religion. The results of this analysis shed light on the elements that affect the operation of forming a strong identity, which is illustrated when the protagonist reaches the spiritual fulfillment through embracing the Islamic religion as a source of power, because for Muslims Islam is more than a religion, and for women it is a source for strength

Chapter one deals with Aboulela's life as an immigrant and how she reflects her experience through her literary works. It also understands the concept of immigration and its representation on other writer's works and how they have dealt with their trauma of moving from one country to another which has a great effect on the formulation of their identities. Moreover, this study attempt to acknowledge the theory of Islamic Feminism to have a clear sight concerning the different needs comparing to the wide range of the concept of feminism in general. In addition to Halal Fiction as a genre of literature that Leila Aboulela is known for.

The second chapter is written to analyze the journey of the protagonist between home and exile and all the struggles that she has faced there, also her reaction towards these challenges by looking for herself and her true identity by sticking to religion and faith,

because it was the only way of herself recognition. After that, Najwa became even more proud after getting rid of the feeling of guilt that she had before, wishing that there is a way to change the old life and all the things she regretted doing. After all, embracing the Islamic religion and taking it as a real source of power was the only way of surviving for a female immigrant looking for a strong identity after going through a radical change in her life, at the end, Najwa finds a stable healthy identity in a small peaceful world of her own creation.

In sum, through her novel *Minaret* (2005), Leila Aboulela touches on a content rich in Islamic perceptions, which are often mistaken by Westerners. The narration of events revolving around a Sudanese girl who lives a life of luxury, but she is forced to emigrate with her family which shatters and disintegrates in a short time of her arrival to London. She finds herself alone facing many disappointments that in turn, make her commit some mistakes that contradict the Islamic religion. With the passage of time; Najwa realizes the path that will get her out of her dilemma, which is to become religious and adopt a new Islamic identity

Aboulela portrays Islam as a religion of tolerance and compassion as well as a symbol of strength. In fact, she makes a point in focusing on individuals who succeed in adhering to Islamic principles. She aims to teach her readers that Islam may be understood in a variety of ways and linked with success or failure, depending on how it is carried out by individuals, since it offers a person a sense of meaning in life and gives him the strength to face challenges. This is what *Minaret's* protagonist achieves at the end of the novel.



### Works Cited

- Abdullah, Muhammad. "Minaret: Islam and Feminism at Crossroads = Minarete: Islam Y Feminismo En La Encrucijada." *FEMERIS: Revista Multidisciplinar de Estudios de Género*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, p. 154. *Crossref*, doi:10.20318/femeris.2017.3763.
- Aboulela, Leila. *Minaret: A Novel*. 1st ed., e-book, Black Cat, Grove/Atlantic, 2005.
- Alghamdi, Alaa. "Translating Silence, Transmitting Faith: Personal and Cultural Understanding in Leila Aboulela's 'The Translator.'" *International Journal of English and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, p. 31. *Crossref*, doi:10.5897/ijel2013.0512.
- Ashcroft, Bill. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts (Routledge Key Guides) 2Nd (Second) Edition by Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen Published by Routledge (2001) Paperback*. Routledge. 2013.
- Badran, Margot. "Al-Ahram Weekly | Culture | Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?" *Web.Archive.Org*, 20 Mar. 2015, [web.archive.org/web/20150320074746/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/569/cu1.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20150320074746/http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/569/cu1.htm).
- Badran, Margot. "Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2005, pp. 6–28.
- Barlas, Asma. *Believing Women in Islam (02) by Barlas, Asma [Paperback (2002)]*. U of Texas, Paperback, 2002.
- Bartels, Anke, et al. *Postcolonial Literatures in English: An Introduction*. 1st ed. 2019, Springer, 2019.
- Bower, Rachel. "Arab Authors & Literary Institutions: Interview with Fadia Faqir." *Rachel Bower*, 5 Nov. 2015, [rachelbower.net/2012/07/06/arab-authors-and-literary-institutions-interview-with-fadia-faqir](http://rachelbower.net/2012/07/06/arab-authors-and-literary-institutions-interview-with-fadia-faqir).

- Canpolat, Seda. "Scopic Dilemmas: Gazing the Muslim Woman in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Salma* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*." *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2015, pp. 216–35. *Crossref*, doi:10.1093/cww/vpv026.
- Cariello, Marta. "Searching for Room to Move Producing and Negotiating Space in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*." *Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, 2009, pp. 340–49.
- Chambers, C. "An Interview With Leila Aboulela." *Contemporary Women's Writing*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, p. 97. *Crossref*, doi:10.1093/cww/vpp003.
- "Deviation from the Mean: The Move That Gave Leila Aboulela Something to Write Home About." *The National*, uploaded by malikabrowne, 26 Jan. 2021, [www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/deviation-from-the-mean-the-move-that-gave-leila-aboulela-something-to-write-home-about-1.1125684](http://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/deviation-from-the-mean-the-move-that-gave-leila-aboulela-something-to-write-home-about-1.1125684).
- Dr Nick, Turner. "Ahdaf Soueif." *British Council*, 2009, [literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/ahdaf-soueif](http://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/ahdaf-soueif).
- El-Nour, Hassan. "Faith as Refuge: Female Migration in Leila Aboulela's Novels." *Neelain.Edu.Sd*, vol. 8, no. 29, 2017, p. 330, [repository.neelain.edu.sd:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/3463](http://repository.neelain.edu.sd:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/3463).
- Fanack.com. "Sudanese Novelist Leila Aboulela Becomes International Figure Through Religion, Alienation." *Fanack.Com*, 26 Apr. 2021, [fanack.com/sudan/faces-of-sudan/leila-aboulela](http://fanack.com/sudan/faces-of-sudan/leila-aboulela).
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, and John Esposito. *Islam, Gender, and Social Change (Meridian)*. 1st ed., Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hasan, Md. Mahmudul. "Seeking Freedom in the 'Third Space' of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* and Janmohamed's *Love in a*

- Headscarf.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2015, pp. 89–105. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/13602004.2015.1007666.
- HASSAN, W. S. “Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 41, no. 2–3, 2008, p. 304. *Crossref*, doi:10.1215/ddnov.041020298.
- Koç, Nessrin. *Representation Of British Muslim Identities In Leila Aboulela’s Minaret And Nadeem Aslam’s Maps For Lost Lovers*. Dec. 2014. The Graduate School Of Social Sciences Of Middle East Technical University, Master Thesis
- M, Subair. “Halal Fiction: A Proven Alternative. A Study with Special Reference to Leila Aboulela.” *Academia*, 2021, [www.academia.edu/34521147/Halal\\_Fiction\\_A\\_proven\\_alternative\\_A\\_study\\_with\\_special\\_reference\\_to\\_Leila\\_Aboulela](http://www.academia.edu/34521147/Halal_Fiction_A_proven_alternative_A_study_with_special_reference_to_Leila_Aboulela).
- Mahmood, Saba. “Feminist Theory, Agency, and the Liberatory Subject: Some Reflections on the Islamic Revival in Egypt.” *Temenos - Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2006. *Crossref*, doi:10.33356/temenos.4633.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Malak, Amin. *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*. State University of New York Press, 2004.
- Ngom, Mamadou Abdou Babou. “‘Halal’ Fiction and the Politics of Faith-Driven Praxis: A Critical Reading of Leila Aboulela’s the Translator.” *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1646–55. *Crossref*, doi:10.22161/ijels.55.45.
- Parssinen, Keija. “Writing as Spiritual Offering: A Conversation With Leila Aboulela.” *World Literature Today*, Oct. 2019,

www.worldliteraturetoday.org/2020/winter/writing-spiritual-offering-conversation-leila-aboulela-keija-parssinen.

Phillips, Mike. "Faith Healing." *The Guardian*, 22 Feb. 2018,

www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/11/featuresreviews.guardianreview12.

Sethi, Anita. "Keep the Faith." *The Guardian*, 22 Feb. 2018,

[www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/05/fiction.features2](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/jun/05/fiction.features2).

Taha Al-Karawi, Susan, and Ida BaizuraBahar. "Negotiating the Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela's Minaret." *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, vol. 14, no. 03, 2014, pp. 255–68. Crossref, doi:10.17576/gema-2014-1403-16.

The National. "Deviation from the Mean: The Move That Gave Leila Aboulela Something to Write Home About." *The National*, 4 July 2021,

www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/deviation-from-the-mean-the-move-that-gave-leila-aboulela-something-to-write-home-about-1.1125684.

TheFamousPeople. "Tayeb Salih Biography." *The Famous People*, 2017,

www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/tayeb-salih-6117.php.

Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1999.

Wang, Emily. *Identity and Self Reflection: Six Arab Muslim Immigrant Women Tell Their Stories*. 2017. University of Michigan-Dearborn, PhD Thesis

Zidan, Ashraf. "Islamic Feminism and the Concept of Hijab: A Study of Leila Aboulela's Minaret." *Humanities and Social Sciences Review, CD-ROM*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2016, p. 32.

## المخلص

يمكن أن يكون كونك امرأة مسلمة في مجتمع مسلم أمرًا صعبًا ، و كونك امرأة مسلمة في مجتمع غير مسلم يمكن أن يكون أكثر من ذلك. نجوى ، بطلة مئذنة لليلى أبو العلا (2005) ، هي امرأة مسلمة مهاجرة تعيش في مجتمع بريطاني غير مسلم. لهذا السبب؛ تبدو رحلتها طوال قصة الرواية صعبة ومعقدة ومليئة بالتحديات نتيجة أسلوب الحياة المربك والتغيرات التي تحدث في حياة نجوى.

بالإضافة إلى محاولتها تأسيس هوية جديدة كامرأة مسلمة ، في الوقت الذي تواجه فيه قضايا في المجتمع الغربي. المفهوم الأساسي لهذه الدراسة هو متابعة رحلة نجوى كامرأة مسلمة مهاجرة يتعين عليها مواجهة التمييز الاجتماعي والعنصرية في لندن إلى جانب الصور النمطية والجهل الديني الموروث من السودان.

علاوة على ذلك ، تسعى هذه المذكرة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة المتعلقة باستخدام الروائي للدين الإسلامي كمصدر قوة للبطل الذي يقدم منظورًا مختلفًا عن المرأة المسلمة. أخيرًا ، تُظهر نتائج هذا البحث كيف كافحت نجوى كامرأة مسلمة مهاجرة للعثور على هويتها الدينية وحماتها.

**Résumé :**

Être une femme musulmane dans une société musulmane peut être un défi, et être une femme musulmane dans une société non musulmane peut l'être encore plus. Najwa, la protagoniste du *Minaret* de Leïla Aboulela (2005), est une immigrante musulmane qui vit dans une société britannique non musulmane. Pour cette raison; son parcours tout au long du roman semble être difficile, compliqué et stimulant. En plus de sa tentative d'établir une nouvelle identité en tant que femme musulmane, tout en affrontant les problèmes de la société occidentale. En Outre le style de vie déroutant et les changements qui se produisent dans la vie de Najwa. Le concept principal de cette étude est de suivre le parcours de Najwa en tant qu'immigrante musulmane qui doit faire face à la discrimination sociale et au racisme à Londres ainsi qu'aux stéréotypes et à l'ignorance religieuse hérités du Soudan. De plus, cette thèse cherche à répondre aux questions liées à l'utilisation de la religion islamique comme source de pouvoir pour le protagoniste en offrant une perspective différente sur les femmes musulmanes. Enfin, les résultats de cette recherche montrent comment Najwa, en tant que femme musulmane immigrée, a lutté pour protéger son identité religieuse.