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Minor Literature Between Collective and Individual Voice in Leila
Aboulela's *Bird Summons* (2019)

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Ahmed HIMRI, my father and to Dalila MERABTI, my mother for their unconditional love, support, and trust. You are the best parents one could ask for.

To my two little sisters Kawther, and Afnene for their noisiness and for the funny moments they made me feel amidst my sadness.

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Abstract

This study aims at probing into the heated debate about whether minor literature deals exclusively with communal concerns or it manifests an individual value. Minor writers discuss various themes related to their transnational identities, belonging issues, displacement, and alienation. However, in recent years, scholars claim that these writers are becoming more comfortable in their host countries. Thus, this comfort appears in the themes they tackle which are more likely to reflect postmigrant realities of individuals' everyday experiences. In Britain, minority writers have gained an increasing attention for their literary production which showcases skill and creativity. The Arab Muslim British writer Leila Aboulela occupies an important position in the British literary canon. Through her latest novel *Bird Summons* (2019), this study will investigate whether minor literature is solely a representation of political, collective experiences or it is an individual expression of minority writers. The thesis will deal with collective concerns that Aboulela's characters express such as, frustrations of displacement, the empowering aspects of Islam, and food as an ethnic solidarity. This study will also explore the individual aspects in the novel embodied in the ambivalence of motherhood and the anxiety of age. The thesis shows that Aboulela is a minority writer whose work reveals the possibility of combining the collective and the individual concerns in minority literature.

Keywords: Minor literature, Individual voice, Communal voice, collective value, postmigration, Leila Aboulela, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

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Introduction

Minor/Minority literature is the set of literary works produced by minor writers within a major language. It depicts the minor writer's experiences and world perceptions in the context of the host society he/she lives in. In their book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari identify three major characteristics of minor literature: the deterritorialization of language, the political value, and the writer's responsibility of voicing the concerns of the ethnic community (16-7). In Britain, the waves of immigration from the British colonies in the mid-twentieth century gave birth to a multicultural society with minorities mainly from Asia and Africa. Since then, minority writers have gradually gained a growing attention in the literary scene. Narratives of Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and Bernadine Evaristo have enacted an impact on British literature and have won many national and international prizes.

In contemporary era, the number of literary productions written by British minor writers is significant; especially novels by writers of African origin such as, the works of Ahdaf Soueif, Aminatta Forna, and Leila Aboulela. Leila Aboulela was born in Cairo in 1964, but grew up in Khartoum. She is the daughter of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother. When she was young, she studied at the Khartoum American School and a private Catholic high school. Later on, she attended the University of Khartoum for a degree of Economics. Afterwards, Aboulela moved to London in the pursuit of a Master degree in statistics. In the meantime, she resides in Aberdeen due to her husband's career. Her two novels *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) were nominated for the IMPAC and the Orange Prizes (Chambers 99), and her short story entitled "The Museum" won the first Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000 (Chambers 98). Leila Aboulela is considered one of the most important contemporary Arab Anglophone writers who succeeded to portray the realities of British Arab minority through fiction.

In recent years, minor\minority literature has gained a considerable scholarly interest. This interest was based on the theme of social protest in minor literature. Minority writers oppose many relationships that are based on hierarchy such as self\other, west\east, minor\major, and black\white. Studies on minor literature have also dealt with transnational identities, belonging issues, hybridity, and alienation. However, there are current calls to shift from the previous themes and to attempt to envisage migrant and migration matters from a different lens. As a consequence, the new perspective of postmigration has emerged lately. Postmigration seeks to look beyond transnational connections and diaspora by normalizing migration and by regarding immigrants' problems as a reflection of everyday experiences that shape the society as a whole.

This thesis discusses the debate between two contradictory ideas on minor literature. It aims at showing whether minor literature is exclusively a representation of political, communal experiences or it is an individual expression of minor writers. This idea of focusing on individual experiences of minor writers helps accentuate the plural and heterogeneous aspect of British society. In this regard, Leila Aboulela's latest novel *Bird Summons* (2019) is suitable for the study. In this novel, although the characters suffer from homesickness, question their belonging, and face an identity crisis; they strive to anchor themselves in the Scottish lands. These characters deal with issues in which immigration does not play a focal role. This study attempts to discuss this paradox; therefore, it highlights on the one hand issues of transnationalism and diaspora and on the other hand, the postmigrant realities.

The reason behind the choice of this theme is the capacity of the novel to depict both aspects of minor literature. As a British Arab Muslim author, Aboulela's works have been mainly analysed from a collective perspective related to her portrayals of the hardships, dilemmas, and struggles of her minority within the British society. However, this dissertation offers a contribution to the latest novel of Aboulela's *Bird Summons* as a significant

representation of both collective as well as individual aspects of minor literature. While earlier works by Aboulela often highlight transnational and diasporic matters, *Bird Summons* tackles these matters and also emphasizes a sense of stability and belonging to the host country cherished by Muslim, African, and Arab minority members.

Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* is examined through the theory of cultural studies, where a focus is directed to the theory of minor literature and the concept of postmigration to fulfil this study. The first approach seeks to examine the political view and the common value that characterize minority writings. It puts emphasis on themes of transnationalism and diaspora. The second approach, which is a new one, aims at discussing the individual aspects of minor literature. The characters under this approach are no longer anxious and reluctant about their identity and belonging. In fact, they are more at ease at their host country and are more aware of their transcultural identity. The themes of this perspective mainly discuss quotidian matters of immigrants in the major society without referring to migration as their central theme.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical one; it is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to examine the collective aspects of minor literature through the theories of the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and of the British Indian writer Salman Rushdie. These theories are used to interpret the three characteristics of minor literature. Likewise, the second section will introduce the individual aspects of minor literature through the concept of postmigration. This section gives insights into the development of this concept in the field of literature presented by Anne Ring Petersen et al. It also provides the reader with an explanation of the four features of postmigrant literature offered by Sten Pultz Moslund. Finally, the third section of the chapter, analyses various novels produced by British minor writers from the collective view as well as from the individual view of minor literature. In this respect, Ahdef Soueif and Fadia Faqir

novels are considered as representations of collective aspects of minor literature, whereas novels by Zadie Smith and Nadeem Aslam are examined from the postmigrant perspective.

The second chapter is an analytical one. This chapter is sectioned into three parts. It is devoted to the analysis of collective aspects of minor literature in *Bird Summons*. The first section will focus on the experience of displacement through one of the main characters Iman. In addition to that, the second section will endeavour Islam as a source of empowerment for the three main characters Salma, Moni and Iman. Finally, the third section of the chapter will show the portrayal of food as a means to build cultural and ethnic solidarity.

The third chapter is also an analytical chapter. It deals with the individual aspects of minor literature in *Bird Summons*. This chapter is divided into two sections. While the first section tends to analyse the notion of motherhood through the main character Moni; the second section of the chapter explores the notion of age, specifically ageing anxiety; through the chief character Salma.

To conclude with, the value of this study mainly focuses on showing the changes in Aboulela's representation of her minor community from focusing solely on their sufferings within Britain into undermining the emphasis on her characters' transnational anxieties. It is obvious that Leila Aboulela succeeds in portraying both aspects of minor literature in her latest novel *Bird Summons* because it reflects her own life experience as an African Arab Muslim woman in the British society.

Chapter I: A theoretical Examination of Minor Literature

This chapter will elucidate different aspects of minor literature. It is sectioned into three parts. The first part of the chapter introduces the collective aspects of minor literature. Moreover, the second part of the chapter discusses the individual aspects of minor literature. In both parts of the chapter, an emphasis is put on the characteristics of each aspect and an attention is given to claims of British and Arab and/or Muslim critics. The third part of the chapter tackles various examples of fictional representations of these debatable collective and individual aspects in literary works of mainly British minor writers.

I.1. The Collective Aspect of Minor Literature

Minor literature is the body of literary productions which are produced by minorities via a major language in the host society they live in. This term was first introduced by the French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their collaborative analysis of the life, diaries, and books of the Jewish Czech German writer Franz Kafka, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. For Deleuze and Guattari, “[a] minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16).

The process of making a minor manuscript is both a unique and a complex one that can only be achieved by the minor writer himself/herself. Additionally, this uniqueness and complexity are embedded in the fusion of different and sometimes contradictory components. Only through this combination of major/minor and self/other items, the minor writer creates a literature that embraces his/her particularity and which helps him/her make a true sense of his/her surrounding world. In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari assume that by writing for his minority of Prague Jews in German, Kafka makes their literature impossible to be achieved otherwise. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari denote three impossibilities of this minor literature represented by Kafka. First, “the impossibility of not writing” because literature is the motif and the fuel to transmit the suffering of this minority group. Second, “the

impossibility of writing other than in German” because Kafka is not only a Prague Jew but his identity encompasses divergent major and minor ethnicities. Finally, “the impossibility of writing in German” because it is not his mother language. Moreover, German is considered the language of the oppressor. Besides Kafka is both part of the German population and alien to it at the same time, hence; he deterritorializes German to meet his needs as a Prague Jew in Germany. The result of this combination is the creation of a new language that is appropriated for minor usage which is the Prague German (16).

Although each minority embodies special cultural, historical, and social contexts; they all encounter the same discriminatory practices in relation to the major society of their country of residence. The Same thing applies for their literature which tries to highlight those discriminations and hardships faced by minorities in their host society. According to Deleuze and Guattari, all the literatures produced by minorities within the great literature are characterised by three main characteristics. Those three characteristics of minor literature are “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (18).

The first characteristic of minor literature is the deterritorialization of language. Deleuze and Guattari denote that this deterritorialization of a major language is derived from the “impossibility of writing other than in German” which is a major language. Since the minor writer is living within the major society, he/she is obliged to write in its language, as Deleuze and Guattari describe it in the following passage: “Even he who has the misfortune of being born in the country of a great literature must write in its language, as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian” (18). In this passage Deleuze and Guattari claim that in order to make their voice heard, they ought to write in the major language because it is the language of power.

In addition to the first impossibility, Deleuze and Guattari add “the impossibility of writing in German”. In this sense, this impossibility of writing in the major language is because the minor writer is simultaneously familiar with this language and strange from it. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari claim that this minor writer deliberately exhibits a special use of the major language in order to make it representative of his/her community which takes part of the major society and is marginalized from it at the same time. In this case, Kafka’s writing is a representation of minor literature which creates a new avenue to access this impossibility through the deterritorialization of German. German is considered as a bureaucratic language used by an oppressive German population. Hence, the minor writer invents a new language appropriate for minor usage which combines both the language of his home country and the major language of the country he/she resides in. In the case of Kafka, the language he creates Prague German. In this passage, Deleuze and Guattari make it clearer:

In this sense, Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature into something impossible— ... And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses, like a "paper language" or an artificial language; this is all the more true for the Jews who are simultaneously a part of this minority and excluded from it ... In short, Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses. (16-7)

In this process of deterritorialization Kafka does not imply an abuse to the German language but rather suggests a new way of using it. As a language of the masters, Kafka attempts to deprive German from its oppressive power by applying some modifications to its structures in addition to fusing it with Czech and Yiddish. The product of this fusion is the German language of Prague which is characterized by its poverty in vocabulary and its incorrect sentence structures. Despite the aridness of Prague German, he successfully revives it with a

new way expression and fluidity. Furthermore, this expression is achieved through the creative utilization of linguistic forms of Prague German including: “the incorrect use of prepositions; the abuse of the pronominal; the employment of malleable verbs ... the importance of the accent as a tension internal to the word; and the distribution of consonants and vowels as part of an internal discordance” (23).

The British literary critic Geoffrey Nash suggests a suitable example of deterritorialization of the English language in his book *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English*. His study examines the fictional and biographical narratives by writers of Arabic descent in English, and their incorporation of themes and topics from Arab culture into the English language. Nash argues that in his three novels *Homesick*, its sequel *Unreal City*, and *Eros Island*, the Arab British novelist Tony Hanania deterritorializes English through Arabic language and the Lebanese dialect.

Another characteristic of minor literature denoted by Deleuze and Guattari is the connection of the individual to a political immediacy. What a minor writer produces is directly linked to politics even if he/she does not announce it. Unlike major literature, politics does not serve as a plain background for individual stories but rather as a central theme in which all individual aspects such as: family, love, marriage and different individual concerns are embedded in other political systems, for example: juridical and bureaucratic agencies, as Deleuze and Guattari denote that “[m]inor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics”. In this sense, the conflict between father and son addressed by Kafka is argued by Deleuze and Guattari to be related to a political program instead of being generated from an oedipal disorder as mentioned in previous interpretations of Kafka’s works (17).

Since minor literature is concerned with politics, there must be a reference to the discourse dedicated to western colonialism and its devastating consequences on the ex-

colonies from which these authors originate. This matter is especially addressed by immigrant writers who were politically forced to leave their home countries in order to inhabit another one. Like any other writers in major societies these exiled writers tend to describe the world around them from their own perspective, however; their description is a political action in itself. In his essay entitled “Imaginary Homelands”, the British Indian writer Salman Rushdie questions if “[Indian writers in England] [can] do no more than describe, from a distance, the world that they have left[.] Or does the distance open any other doors?” and afterwards he suggests an answer to these questions which are considered to be partially political. His answer entails that “... all that description is itself a political act” (13). In fact, these descriptions are achieved through the collage of various painful and fragmented memories that are still haunting these authors and putting them into a state of diaspora despite the time and space they are filling. Despite being in an alien country far from his/her home country, the minor writer finds himself/herself engaged with the matters of his community. In this case, the question that may arise is whether these authors are qualified to tackle such political issues related to a land that they are no longer resident in, or not? The answer is well presented in Salman Rushdie’s following passage:

Literature is self-validating. That is to say, a book is not justified by its author's worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written. There are terrible books that arise directly out of experience, and extraordinary imaginative feats dealing with themes which the author has been obliged to approach from the outside. (14)

The British Indian novelist does not only show the politicized notion in the fiction produced by minority writers but he also explains the aim behind this politicization. He believes that the role of minor literature is to change unaccepted situations of the world in addition to unveil the truth that lies behind the lie of official states. He adds that “Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both groups try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same

territory. And the novel is one way of denying the official, politicians' version of truth" (14). Indeed, to do so minor writers are ought to create an alternative reality to what is being altered and modified by states through fiction including what he calls "the novel of memory" (14).

While some minority writers deal with the tremendous losses caused by western coloniality in their countries up to present times, others shed light on western racialized views based on the politicization of religion, such as the matter of Islamophobia and the war of terror which are highlighted by British Muslim writers as well as non-Muslim writers. According to the British critic Claire Chambers, the increase of the attention given to Muslim minority in Britain started with the Rushdie affair in late 1988 and was accentuated with 9/11 attacks, and 07/07 bombings ("Making Sense" xii). In the monograph of *Making Sense of Contemporary British Muslim Novels*, Chambers analyses many novels written by British writers of Muslim backgrounds from a postcolonial and sensory studies point of view. She argues that the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verse*, was a turning point in shaping the British gaze towards the Muslim community. Before the publication of Rushdie's novel, the Muslim community was neglected in western discourses. However, the chaotic aftermaths the novel held inside and outside Britain on Muslims; made them negatively visible in Britain (xii). Additionally, the 9/11 and 07/07 bombings reinforced racial attitudes and Islamophobic political stances of British society towards Muslims. As a consequence of the incidents, many British non-Muslim authors including Nigel Williams, former-Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, Martyn Waites, and Sebastian Faulks to mention a few, negatively portrayed Muslim individuals through a description which emphasised stereotypes of terrorism, violence, and submission against this minority (Chambers xxv).

To counter the negative depiction of Muslim minority by white non-Muslim authors, an outpouring publication of fictional works created by British authors of Muslim background emerged. In an earlier book entitled *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary*

Writers, Claire Chambers studies the heterogeneity of the subjects discussed by writers of Muslim heritage in Britain. Furthermore, she analyses to what extent these writers identify with the label of “British Muslim writer”. In this sense, Chambers states that one of the recurrent themes that British writers of Muslim background return to is the war on terror which has a devastating impact on the safety and life conditions of Muslims in Britain. Since the misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims are taken up as facts in the mainstream society, these writers feel an urgent need to write back against the subjective misrepresentations of them. Authors including Kamila Shamsie, Nadeem Aslam, Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela, and Robin Yassin-Kassab among others hold the responsibility to defy previous negative fictionalizations of Islam and Muslims within Britain through their Literary texts (Chambers 27). In this regard Robin Yassin-Kassab’s believes that:

I suppose if you can have Black writing and Gay writing and London writing you can have Muslim writing too. The label, like any other, is limiting if it's used as a box, but liberating if we use it as a springboard. The point is, that as Muslims in Britain, many fictions are being written about us. Many are presented as fact. ... So we should write back. (qtd. in Chambers, “British Muslim” 25-6)

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari point out to a third characteristic of minor literature, strongly tied with the previous one; which is the collective assemblage of enunciation. That is to say that the words of a minority writer echo the voice of the whole community he/she belongs to. Moreover, “what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). In this case literature becomes what Deleuze and Guattari call “a machine-like product”. This machine-like product constructs a revolutionary collective force due to the sensitive situation of marginality that the minority groups encounter in the mainstream culture. As Deleuze and Guattari explain it in the following

passage, “The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: literature is the people's concern” (17-8).

Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the role of minor writers in voicing the concerns of their excluded communities within major literature because “It is literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism”. They believe that writers from minority groups should necessarily feel the burden to represent their minority, because “... if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community ...”. In this vein, if minor writers reject such responsibility, they may fall in risk of representing another community which they are not part of and this may also open the door for misrepresentations of these groups from the part of mainstream writers. (17)

Closely related to this latter, Claire Chambers projects in her monograph of *British Muslim Fictions*, the theme of representation as one of the major common themes in Muslim British writings. In this sense, Chambers acknowledges that British Muslim writers find themselves and their minor communities excluded from Western literature. Thus, this exclusion is the main cause for the misconception drawn by major societies about them and especially about their religion. Chambers further defends her argument by quoting the British Zanzibari writer Abdulrazak Gurnah who assumes that Muslims were marginalized even in African literature, “I couldn't find myself in the mirror of fiction” (qtd. in Chambers 29). Consequently, these writers felt an urgent need to “mirror” themselves as British Muslim writers through fiction in order to alter what has been taken as facts about them in the British society around them. In addition to that, they want to create an authentic image of their fragmented and mosaic identity which results from their migrant status (29-30).

In the same respect, minor writings are characterized by a diasporic notion which is the consequence of writer's political flee from their country of origin, by their immigration for social and economic reasons, or by simply being a child of immigrant parents in western environment. This diasporic notion is featured by the blending of various aspects which construct the hybrid identity of minor writers. In *the Diaspora Writes Home*, Jasbir Jain relates the representation of diaspora in minor texts to the writers' visions of "home" and the memories they possess about the homeland they have left behind. In her analysis of Punjabi immigrant writers in Canada, Jain claims that Punjabi authors who use their native language tend to reflect their day-to-day experiences; whereas, Punjabi writers who use English as their medium of expression "translate their homeland experiences and memories" (43-5).

Meanwhile, in *Negotiating Diasporic Identity in Arab-Canadian Students*, Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar examines the diasporic experience in the anglophone Arab writing in U.S.A, UK, and Canada. Abdul-Jabbar suggests that this diasporic issue may be very traumatic, especially for first generation immigrants who try to negotiate their identities through different and sometimes conflictual spatial, cultural, and linguistic notions of both the country of origin and the host country. Furthermore, he accentuates that this diasporic experience can be harder on second generation Arab immigrants who sometimes tend to internalize their ethnic identity be it Muslim and/or Arab when their self-worth and self-realization becomes related the racialized gaze of the mainstream society. Therefore, to navigate the displacement and the fragmentation of this diasporic condition; Abdul-Jabbar adopts the conception of "double consciousness" coined by Gilroy. He argues that this double consciousness permits those minor community members to obtain a hybrid identity that is neither in favour of the homeland's culture nor fully assimilated to the receiving country's culture (77-81).

While Abdul-Jabbar discusses the negative impact of the diasporic condition on minor communities which is reflected in their literature; Layla Al Maleh argues that the diasporic

notion of Anglophone Arab authors has a positive impact on both expatriate and immigrant British Arab writers. After categorising Anglophone Arab writings as “diasporic in awareness”, Al Maleh assumes that this diasporic experience allowed these writers a sense of freedom and a comfortable space to raise different social and political issues that are often considered taboos in the Arab world. She further explains this as follow:

Distance from country of origin granted them breathing-space to reclaim their own narratives after they found freedom in hybridity and choice in acculturation. Literary and political activism was particularly attractive to them, perhaps because they found in the diaspora a site of absolute freedom, a free political and intellectual community that could accommodate the non-conformity of their views. (14)

Al Maleh exemplifies her opinion with Soueif, Faqir, Ghandour, and Aboulela who were able to voice many issues only when they migrated to Britain. According to Al Maleh these female writers successfully manage to tackle political and gender related matters from distance rather than doing it in their home countries.

I. 2. Individual Aspects of Minor Literature

Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of minor literature has been one of the most prominent theories to analyse and interpret the lives and literatures produced by minor writers which focus mainly on communal concerns of minorities. However, in recent years another theory of “Postmigration” has emerged to suggest new ways of dealing with migrant realities, and to present a new lens of seeing these minorities. In the book of *Reframing Migration, Diversity and the Arts: The Postmigrant Condition*, Anne Ring Petersen et al. assume that this concept “offers a fresh perspective on the conflicts and struggles taking place in societies facing increasing cultural plurality as a result of immigration” (04). Hence, it was not first introduced at the level of academia but in the field of arts and culture by artists and intellectuals in the city of Berlin and specifically in the theatre of Berlin. At the beginning, the

term was used as a social and political protest against the racialized labelling and the marginalization of minorities and people of colour in European societies. These scholars claim that the German theatre director Shermin Langhoff along with other artists and activists was the first to reveal the concept to the public. In 2008, Langhoff held the responsibility of transforming this conception into practice by rejecting the label of “Migrant theatre” and by challenging the exclusion of artistic productions presented by minority group artist from the “German culture” (Anne Ring Petersen et al. 03).

After the success of this movement at the cultural scene in Germany, scholars in sociology, migration studies, and cultural studies started to examine the term of postmigration and to include it in the academic field as a nuanced perspective mainly in 2010. Furthermore, the concept was used to analyse the diversity of contemporary European societies with reference to different excluded minorities. Therefore, previous binary oppositions of self/other, west/east, migrant/non-migrant, and home/diaspora were not the focus of these scholars (Anne Ring Petersen et al. 03).

In the same field, the reception of the term postmigration has raised three major inquiries. One of these inquiries is the analytical perspective of postmigration. Around 2013 the sociologist Erol Yildiz has expanded the term to be applied as an analytical perspective to deal with social conflicts and contemporary cultural phenomena of plural societies. In this field of inquiry, the emphasis is put on the daily experiences of immigrants as part of the society as a whole instead of focusing only on them as different from other members of the host society. Anne Ring Petersen et al. explains this enquiry in the following passage:

a postmigrant perspective offers an inclusive and differentiated view on societal struggles for recognition, equality, etc., because it does not focus on a specific group in society marked as ‘migrants’ or ‘ethnic minority’. In this case, the idea of

postmigration is applied to a broader context, with a general focus on the struggles and negotiations taking place in society as a whole. (05)

As the perceptions of postmigration have grown varied and multidisciplinary, literary scholars have adopted the postmigrant analytical approach in order to analyse the cultural phenomena in line with social struggles of contemporary plural societies. In his chapter entitled “Towards a Postmigrant Reading of Literature: An Analysis of Zadie Smith's NW” Sten Pultz Moslund argues that there is a change in the writings of immigrants and their grandchildren from “migrant voices” to indigenous voices. Sten Pultz Moslund stresses his analysis on Black British minority experience. In this sense, Moslund suggests four main features that are common in the postmigrant fictions. According to him, the first feature of postmigrant reality in literary fiction is depicted as “a new confidence in the display of ‘black British’ identities and the imagination of new and heterogeneous ways of being British” (94). He argues that unlike their predecessors, contemporary minor writers have grown more confident and comfortable within their host society through the themes they discuss in their fictions. Additionally, Moslund asserts that these authors are no longer stuck in the betweenness of the binary cultures and spaces and this ease appears in the little attention they show towards issues of marginalization and cultural differences which are the main cause of alienation. As a result, they refuse to be labelled as “immigrants” and/or “blacks”.

Building on the previous characteristic, Moslund draws the second feature of postmigrant literature from Upstone’s study of British Asian literature. Moslund denotes that this characteristic is the rejection of “‘the obligation of representation’ that is often imposed on them [minor writers]” (95). This means that they no longer feel the burden to voice the suffering, discrimination, and marginalization that their minority group faces on a daily basis. As Moslund denotes, these minor writers discuss themes of everyday life in relation to society as whole and issues that each individual encounters in contemporary world of plurality. Such

themes describe matters of friendship, family, sexuality, age, and marriage instead of the former ones which deal with matters of identity crises, hybridity, racism, and belonging. The scholar gives reference to many British minor writers whom he considers postmigrant writes including: Atima Srivastava, Mike Phillips, and Bernadine Evaristo to mention a few.

With his perspective on how postmigrant literature is represented since its inauguration, Moslund introduces the third feature of postmigrant literature as “the general disappearance of the spectacular dramas of movement, hybridity and double-visions” in addition to the emergence of “a sobering social and often gritty realism” (95). In his readings of Peter Childs and James Green reference to ‘aestheticization of migrancy and marginality’ and of Upstone’s analysis of Rushdie’s ‘hyper-real magical realism’ Moslund admits the move of minor writers from the implication of postmodern aesthetics. Moreover, this move is depicted in the chaotic and disruptive way of narration, its fragmentation, and from language games¹ to the use of real ways of representing the world ugliness without playfulness. This scholar also highlights the absence of magical realism which is considered as one of the fundamental aesthetics of postmodernism particularly used by the British Indian author Salman Rushdie. He also points out to the description of multiculturalism and plurality of contemporary societies as not only conceptual terms used in theory but also as real experiences of everyday life of people.

As a continuation for the former three features of postmigration in literature, Moslund adds a fourth one feature which is referred to as, ‘post-ethnicity’, ‘post-black’, ‘post-race’ or ‘post-racial’. He notes that earlier minor British fictions exhibit a great importance to the topic of ethnicity and racial discrimination among people of colour and minority groups. Furthermore, this topic is highly used as the motive of the story and mainly vibrates at the forefront of the issues discussed within it. Unlikely contemporary minor literature, Moslund

¹A term suggested by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. In this vein, the meaning of language games implies that the use of language is affected by the way of life and ideologies of people and changes accordingly.

believes that postmigrant literature does not accentuate problems of race and ethnicity of minorities. Furthermore, Moslund denotes that postmigrant literature fuses racial matters within other complexities of social life of characters in a heterogeneous society. This decrease in importance of the terms post-ethnicity and post-racial matters within contemporary minor writings does not mean its end in real contexts. However, it connotes the reformulation of its conceptualization and utility in these fictions.

I. 3. Individual and Collective Aspects in British Minor Literature

The debate whether minor literature is characterized by collective features or by individual facets is indeed recurrent in British minor fiction. Because of the diversity of these minorities, each of them deals with a range of different themes and matters. In addition to that, their experiences and the ways they were integrated within the adoptive country are focal points in shaping their varied views about life. Writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir tend to support the communal concerns of their minorities via tackling divergent issues that encounter them within the host country, while other authors like Nadeem Aslam and Zadie Smith tend to favour individual matters within a multicultural society which is in growing heterogeneity between all members of the society despite their particularities.

Writings of both Ahdaf Soueif and Fadia Faqir fall into the intersection of the three following minorities: Arab, Muslim, and women. Hence, the fictions of these two female writers are divergent in themes. In her article entitled “Narratives of Arab Anglophone Women and the Articulation of a Major Discourse in a Minor Literature” Dalal Sarnou declares that although these writers originate from different nationalities, their literary discourses direct towards common goals related to home, diaspora, religion, and most importantly transnational identities (69). She asserts that their literature is a unique one because it contributes to a hybrid culture and language in which these authors act as cultural

translators and mediators between two binary national, historical, and linguistic opposites of the Arab world, precisely the Middle East; and Britain.

In her second novel *The Map of Love* (1999), Soueif tackles the binary oppositions connected to what Jeffery Nash coins “the Anglo-Arab encounter” through her intertwining of western/eastern characters and through the fusion of two languages. *The Map of Love* is a story about the widowed Victorian Englishwoman Anna Winterbourne who moves to colonial Egypt between the years of 1889 and 1911, where she falls in love and marries the Egyptian nationalist Sharif Al-Baroudi. In fact, the story of Anna is not told by her but by her American granddaughter Isabel Parkman a century later. The American journalist Isabel falls in love with an Egyptian conductor and political activist who lived for a long time in America and who by coincidence turns up to be Isabel’s far cousin and the grandson of Anna’s sister-in-law Layla. This connection leads Isabel to travel to Egypt where she brings Anna’s artifacts and diaries in order to discover her heritage and story. In Egypt, Isabel meets Omar’s sister Amal, who also becomes obsessive with Anna’s diaries and starts a research project to unravel her story along with the family’s history at that time. The two women become friends and together they trace the life of Anna and at the same time they engage in political conflicts and matters in the family’s countryside in order to restore a land that belongs to it. Although a century had passed since the story of Anna, Sharif, and Layla had occurred; the history repeats itself with their grandchildren and only the names seem to change.

The political stance in *The Map of Love* is very apparent through the conflicts and the local revolutions against the British colonizer in the dawn of the twentieth century in addition to the political struggles in Egypt and the Middle East in the dusk of the same century. In *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Amin Malak claims that Soueif writings are hybrid in which she integrates between various trajectories of colonialism/neo-colonialism, east/west, and migration/exile (127). He states that:

through extensive excerpts from Anna's private journals, Soueif not only reclaims an Egyptian nationalist perspective, but also appropriates an "English" voice, Anna Winterbourne's, and transposes onto it statements and testimonials regarding British atrocities in the Sudan in 1898, British colonial arrogance in controlling Egypt in the 1900s including a detailed description of the massacre of the fallaheen in the village of Denshwai in 1906. (137)

On the one hand, Anna's political position is neutral at the beginning of the story. However; She changes her perspective after she moves to Egypt. The change in Anna's political views is because she discovers the brutal massacres the British soldiers commit in Egypt. Consequently, the Englishwoman commences to sympathize with Egyptian Nationalists and becomes a political activist to defend them (Malak 138-140). On the other hand, Amal, in her process of reading and analysing Anna's diaries, reflects on the current political struggles in Egypt in comparison to the past ones. Amal discovers that the past colonial state is repeating itself via a neo-colonial control. Hence, she blames all the destruction of Egyptian economy and the political conflicts in the Arab world to United States contemporary policies (Malak 143).

Similar to Soueif, Fadia Faqir, the British Jordanian novelist; uncovers topics of home/diaspora, and transnational identity/hybridity through her fiction as well as non-fiction writings. Her most recognizable novel *My Name Is Salma* (2007), is a tale of an Arab Bedouin woman named Salma who originates from a village of Hima in Lebanon. The young unmarried Salma falls pregnant and almost get killed because of honourcrime accusation by the males in her family. Fortunately, thanks to the help of her mother and her friend; Salma is swept into prison to save her life. There, she gives birth to her little daughter Layla who she gives up on to a children's home. After that, she gets legally adopted by an English woman called lady Asher who takes her to Britain for refuge. As an asylum seeker, Salma attempts to

culturally assimilate into the British society, however; she cannot easily adopt because she remains always haunted by the memories of her past in her small village. At the end of the story, Salma risks all her life and gets back to Lebanon in search for her own left alone baby.

One of the most significant themes discussed by Faqir in this novel is dislocation and identity crisis as a result of immigration and exile. As a victim of forced dislocation, Salma finds herself stuck between two worlds that are completely distinct in terms of location, culture, language, and religion. Furthermore, her state of in-betweenness forces her to assimilate within her new environment via constructing a new identity “with a new name ‘Sally Asher’ and a new language with which she fuses Arabic, while she is still haunted by past experiences echoing from Hima, her home-village” (Sarnou 75). In her paper “The Crisis of Identity in “My Name is Salma””, Dr. Nayera El Miniawi states that “She [Salma] is cursed no matter what identity she assumes. The West is not really ready to welcome Salma/Sally even when she confirms her adopted Englishness by saying ‘I am English’” (41). In addition to that, the Bedouin woman finds herself alienated and her identity “is changeable to the point of fragmentation” (Sarnou 76). Indeed, the journey of Salma is a real representation of minority members who go through long process of dislocation and acculturation within western countries.

Although the British Jamaican author Zadie Smith and the British Pakistani author Nadeem Aslam do not belong to the same minority group; they both tackle similar individual subjects in the contemporary heterogenous British society. They both highlight social issues that encounter minority members as well as other members of the host society without referring to conflicts that have an “Othering” effects on them, in addition to refusing the labels imposed on them as a result of being part of a divergent ethnicity. As a consequence, their focus is on the different individual matters which contribute to the future of the whole society in contemporary times.

Zadie Smith's fascinating novel *NW* (2012), nominated for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2013; depicts the story of four protagonists Leah Hanwell, Keisha (later Natalie Blake), Felix Cooper, and Nathan Bogle who grew up and are still living in the Northwest corner of London city (its postal code is NW from which the title of the novel is inspired). Leah and Natalie are friends since childhood until their adulthood life. The novel is sectioned into four parts, each tells the story of a certain protagonist. The first part of the novel depicts the tale of Leah, the Irish girl; and her relationship with her husband. The second part of the story is about Felix and his struggle with addiction and alcohol problems and then his murder by two men after the act of leaving his seat for a pregnant lady at the bus. Additionally, the third part is about Keisha, the Jamaican girl who changes her name to Natalie at college; and her pursuit for a better life and career far from her poor conditions. Finally, the fourth part is about Nathan and his encounter with Natalie after being colleagues at high school many years before. Although the four protagonists seem to have different lives and struggles, they all share the same search for an authentic self and face the same existential crises despite everything. In short, *NW*, is a story of individual concerns, educational and academic achievement, motherhood, class, friendship, and family ties.

In his analysis of *NW* from a postmigrant perspective, Sten Pultz Moslund asserts that the new confidence and the ease of presence of characters is displayed not only in the interethnic marriage of Leah and her husband and in her friendship with her friend Natalie who is from an African descent but also in the general atmosphere of the streets of London where there are many multicultural and multicoloured phenomenon (105). Moslund also claims that the identity crisis which Natalie suffers from is not a result of her problems of belonging and racialization which both mark a very little appearance throughout the novel and within Natalie's thoughts; but they are the result of her denial of her childhood self who lived in a very poor neighbourhood. Furthermore, the apparent class distinction between the old and

the new Natalie leads her to existential questioning of her authentic self; as he points out that “[t]he causes of Natalie’s collapse may just as well be sought in other dynamics of estrangement, such as existential doubts and the growing distance to her family and younger self caused by the class-divide” (106). Finally, he concludes by confirming that *NW* describes a reality of a society that no longer distributes power based on the preference of ethnicity or skin colour of certain group of people but rather it does favour certain individuals on the basis of their educational and academic achievement in addition to their financial status regardless of their race, ethnicity, and religion.

In addition to Smith, Nadeem Aslam is another good example of writers who are adopting a postmigrant view in British literature. His novel entitled *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) opens up with the disappearance of two Muslim lovers Jugnu and Chanda, who used to live together without being married in a small town in London where the middle-class Pakistani immigrants call “desert of loneliness”. The police suspects Chanda’s brothers for murdering them. The story of the couple is told by Jugnu’s brother Shamas, a non-religious man who is always in disdain from the strict Islamic restrictions; and his wife Kaukab, the traditional Pakistani woman and a devout Muslim. Both Shamas and Kaukab start to reflect on their lives and past events before the couple disappear in addition to their faith and spirituality. Aslam also tackles the generational gap and the relationship between Kaukab and her three adult children who decide to adopt the western culture and lifestyle at the expense of their parents’ original culture and tradition.

In his article entitled, “A Bricolage of Identifications: Storying Postmigrant Belonging”, Roger Bromley sheds light on second generation immigrants who were born and grew up in Britain as postmigrant subjects in *Maps for Lost Lovers*. Bromley explains that the meaning of postmigration in his study does not entail the specific definition of the term but rather a futuristic vision and an attempt to build a postmigrant environment by these second-

generation characters in order to go beyond states of displacement and unbelonging within the host country(41). He further asserts that these children of immigrants try to carve their agency between the traditional and historical past of their parents which they have never experienced, and the present life trajectories which do not fully welcome them within the British milieu²(40). In this sense the Bromley illustrates with Charag, the son of Shamas and Kaukab who initiates a painting career instead of becoming a doctor as his mother wishes; as he quotes him saying to his parents that “Jugnu taught me that we should try to break away from all the bonds and ties that manipulating groups have thought up for their own advantage” (qtd. in Bromley 41). Bromley also refers to the paintings made by Charag to have an agency of a postmigrant perspective (41).

In conclusion, minor literature encompasses indeed collective as well as individual values. On the one hand, the collective value of minor literature discusses various political and communal concerns which minorities share within the mainstream culture. On the other hand, the individual value of minor literature highlights the daily life activities which minority members practice in a multicultural society. Moreover, some British minor writers such as the Arab Muslim British novelists Ahdef Souief and Fadia Faqir often discuss communal matters related to transnational issues. Whereas, other British minor authors including the Black British novelist Zadie Smith and the Pakistani British Muslim writer Nadeem Aslam prefer to tackle more individual matters in relation to everyday experiences of immigrants in Britain.

²Bromley here talks about the period of 1990s in which the novel is situated

Chapter II: The Analysis of the Collective Aspect in *Bird Summons*

The second chapter is an analytical one that focuses essentially on examining the communal aspects of minor literature in the novel *Bird Summons* (2019) from different angles. This chapter is sectioned into three parts. The first section of the chapter sheds light on the experience of displacement of one of the protagonists, Iman, while the second section deals with Islam as a source of power. Finally, the last section of this chapter highlights the politics of food as a means of building cultural and ethnic solidarity.

II. 1. Iman as Diasporic Displaced Muslim Woman

In her latest novel *Bird Summons*, the Sudanese writer Leila Aboulela traces the journey of three Arab Muslim immigrant women who embark on a trip to the Scottish Highlands in order to visit the grave of Lady Evelyn, the Scottish convert who is considered the first European woman to do the Islamic pilgrimage in Mecca. The three chief characters are: Salma, an Egyptian woman and the eldest among them is married to a Scottish convert and have given birth to four children. Back home in Egypt, Salma studied to become a doctor, however; when she moved to Scotland with her husband David, she failed her qualifying exams and became a massage therapist at the hospital instead. The second character is Moni, a Sudanese woman and the most financially stable among the three women. Moni used to work at a bank, yet after giving birth to her disabled son Adam, she quit her job. In fact, Moni does not give up on her successful career only, but also on being a good wife to her husband Murtada and on taking care of her own self. Hence, she devotes all her time for her son. Finally, the story also includes Iman; the youngest among them and the most beautiful one. Iman is a Syrian refugee who escaped from the civil war in her country with her second husband. She is in her twenties and already in her third marriage to a young man called Ibrahim who is in Britain thanks to a university scholarship. Her first marriage ended by the

death of her husband just after a year of their marriage. Her second marriage with the man who brought her to Britain has ended by a divorce after his imprisonment

The three women take to the road by a car; they plan to spend few days in a cottage near the loch before pursuing their trip to the grave. During these days, Iman is the first to be visited by the hoopoe who recites fables and moral stories to her; before he meets her remaining friends later in the novel where he acts as a spiritual guide. Moreover, what the three women learn in this vacation is life-changing. They grow to be different matured women, facing their utmost fears of loss and alienation, their bad deeds and selfish attitudes, and their total freedom of choice for the future of their lives and families. *Bird Summons* is a journey of self-discovery, faith, identity, friendship, and love. It is a story about female individuals who are connected to distinctive lands, people, and cultures. However, they are attempting to make a home of their own.

The novel is a tale of movement, immigration, and displacement. The notion of displacement represents one of the cornerstones of the fiction presented by Leila Aboulela. This notion is presented by Aboulela through her male and female characters who move from their country of origin to another place either by force due to a war state or by choice in order to look for better life conditions. In her dissertation entitled, *Chinese American Women amidst Cultural Confusion: A Case Study of Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*, Nadjiba Bouallegue employs Roger Bramley's study of immigrants' displacement to understand the intricacies of this experience. Bouallegue argues that Roger Bramley "attributes Immigrants' displacement to the fact of lying in-between zones" (10). After moving to a new land, these immigrant characters find themselves stuck between two different cultures and lands that is why they engage in a quest for belonging either by resisting the host society's culture through alienation such as, Sammar in *The Translator* (1999), and Najwain *Minaret* (2005); or by rejecting their homeland's culture

through assimilation such as, the character of Anwar in *Minaret* and Majdy in her short story “The Ostrich” (2001). Despite their attempts to belong, these immigrant characters are rejected from both sides. As a result, they encounter displacement to which they adapt using different mechanisms.

In *Bird Summons*, Aboulela tackles this notion of displacement mainly through her protagonist Iman. In the novel, Iman faces a constant search for a home to which she seeks to belong between her homeland village near the Euphrates and her new land in Scotland. In Scotland, Iman struggles to adapt. Furthermore, her state of in-betweenness results in her sense of displacement which is analysed in this section through her struggles with English language in Scotland. Furthermore, her feelings of rejection and abandonment by her family members back in Syria add to her feelings of displacement. Amidst her suffering and anxiety; Iman manages to cope with her state of displacement and confusion by seeking refuge in her memories of homeland and childhood. In this regard, it can be argued that memory plays a fundamental role in keeping Iman’s sanity intact and comes at rescue as a coping mechanism to her displacement. To sum up, Vijay Agnew denotes that, “the individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living ‘here’ and remembering ‘there,’ between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home” (05).

In *Bird Summons*, Aboulela points out to one of the major barriers that her protagonist Iman undergoes in Scotland: the issue of language. In the novel, the narrator states that “Iman’s English was poor” (13). Indeed, this issue is a clear manifestation of Iman’s displacement in Britain. On different occasions, she finds herself at odds with her status of in-betweenness concerning the use of language. In her first meeting with the hoopoe, Iman tries to make it rest on her wrist. Consequently, the bird leaves her and she unconsciously pleaded it to stay longer, “‘Come back,’ she said in Arabic, her voice sounding foreign in her ears. But

would the bird understand English better? What language was the speech of birds?” (Aboulela 08) This quote shows the state of confusion in which Iman is stuck, early on in the novel.

In fact, her spontaneous code-switching between English, Arabic, her mother tongue; and Kurdish occurs in many incidents where she is overwhelmed by sadness and anger. When Ibrahim tells her that they should consider divorce because his family figured out about their marriage, she addresses him saying “‘Coward,’ ... ‘Eunuch. Sissy!’ Swear words in Kurdish that he couldn’t understand, insults in Arabic which he could. ‘Mummy’s boy,’ she screamed’.” (33) In another incident later on in the novel “Iman started arguing in Arabic” (70) because she was supporting Salma against Moni in pursuing their trip despite the extended distance. Even though sometimes she knows the English words, her inability to retrieve them obliges her to switch to Arabic instead. This is shown when she is attacked by a dog in the loch. After his owners hurried to check if she was seriously hurt, “[h]er tongue betrayed her. She answered them in a language they didn’t understand. She couldn’t help it. The English words were out of reach, she knew them but could not retrieve them. They had slipped away, unreliable” (91).

Additionally, the difficulty Iman encounters in Scotland does not lie only in her inability to speak good English, but also in her struggle with understanding some vocabularies. When the three women first arrive to the loch, Salma tells them that they need to leave the car and to cross the loch by ferry. On this scene, the narrator states, “Iman had misunderstood the word ‘ferry’ to mean bridge” (39). Iman understands her friend’s claim to continue without the car, yet her limited vocabulary makes her assume that there is a bridge because it is a familiar word to her.

As a consequence of her struggles with language, Iman loses her self-confidence and finds herself incapable of speaking up for herself let alone maintaining her independence in a foreign country. This obstacle of language is not a creation of her imagination; even her

friends believe that her limited English knowledge hinders her adjustment in Scotland. When Iman tells Salma that she wants to find a job, “Salma tried not to laugh”. She thought that “Iman’s greatest asset was her looks, her finest skill was in drawing men to her; zero qualifications, English language minimal” (46). Language is a handicap. In her *Crossing Cultures: Creating Identities in Chinese and Jewish American Literature*, Judith Oster argues that, “Another way to look at the relationship between language and culture is to see them as analogous: learning a new culture and feeling comfortable with it, identifying with it, might be likened to learning a new language, gaining ease and fluency in it” (63). For this reason, when Iman decides to reconstruct her life; the first thing she considers is to enhance her English language, “[m]aybe she should have stuck to that job at the supermarket. Maybe improving her English was the way forward” (Aboulela 47).

Besides the issue of language, the other manifestation of displacement appears in Iman’s feelings of rejection by her family in her home village. When she first fled to Britain with her husband; all her family members and relatives considered her to be very lucky to escape the war. She remained in touch with her mother and sisters to whom she transmitted her mourning for being lost and alienated. However; their new reaction makes her feel unwanted, as the narrator puts it:

‘Don’t come back,’ that’s what they said to her whenever she phoned. ‘You’re envied,’ her mother said. ‘You’re lucky,’ her cousin said. So did her neighbour and her best friend. None of them wanted her back. For her own good, of course. But still, it felt, at times, like a rejection. She wanted them to say the opposite: come back, we need you, we miss you, we are waiting for you with open arms. Instead, they said, stay where you are, and with time a coolness grew in these conversations. Her family had less and less patience for her trials or complaints, and to mask jealousy there was now

a faint contempt. A refusal to listen or understand. ‘Stay put, my girl. Don’t come back.’ (33-4)

Iman’s displacement negatively affects her self-confidence and makes her feel as the novel describes it as if “[s]he was in the way: unnecessary” (Aboulela 43). Iman tries to find another refuge for her abandonment through her relationship with Salma who is almost double her age. In this sense, the narrator declares that “Iman admired Salma’s perseverance, her confidence in doing the right thing. This was why she felt safe with Salma. Someone who knew all the answers, who filled in the gaps for older cousins and young aunties left behind” (08). In the previous quote, it can be seen that Salma represents a role model for Iman. Besides, she helps her transgress her fears and uncertainties through acting as her older females of her family would.

In order to cope with this displacement, Iman finds solace in the imaginary world of her hopeful memories. Amidst her confusion, Iman seeks refuge in her childhood memories when she was happy and free of responsibility as the novel indicates it: “... [T]he sea was calling her and she speeded effortlessly towards it. ... It was as if she were a child again, ... She was carefree in those days, snotty and bare-footed, wild in the fields and the alleys of her Euphrates village. She had played and skipped and run, feeling the wind against her face” (24), in the previous quote, Aboulela inserts a strategic way of reconstructing the homeland through what the writer and critic Andre Aciman calls the “‘diaspora of memory,’ the memory that no longer has a single anchor in the native city but unfolds through superimposition of native and foreign lands” (qtd. in Svetlana Boym 258). The memory in the previous passage acts as an escape for Iman. She runs to her memories in order to rebuild her sense of belonging to a land, in which she is physically, psychologically, and linguistically lost. Moreover, the notion of “home” in Iman’s memories is what Svetlana Boym considers to be “no longer a specific place where one belongs but rather a social context that one could

export into diaspora” (258). Iman avoids all the traumatic memories of the civil war and instead she shifts her attention to how her people challenged their sufferings and tried to normalize their situation on a daily basis. In this regard she recalls, “[i]nddoors, the women kept their homes clean, washed and ironed their family’s clothes. Men went to the barber even when the children couldn’t go to school. Women sugared the excess hair from their legs and armpits, even after the rationing started” (Aboulela 33).

In contrast to Sammar in *The Translator*, whose longing for home ends by her returning to Sudan and figuring out that these nostalgic memories are not yet fulfilled through this return (qtd. in Tina Steiner 14-20); Iman’s longing for home through her memories does not mean her desire to return back there. Aboulela explains Iman’s difference through this passage, unlike “[m]any of these women [in the Muslim Women group] lulled themselves into believing they were in Britain temporarily; that somehow, someday, they would return ‘home’. ... Iman ... wanted to be here for the long haul” (26). Furthermore, her memories are of a great help to adjust to her life in Britain. Hence, when she visits the cave below the castle where they stop to meet Ibrahim; she finds a dried date in her pocket, as a result:

She bent down and buried the date stone in the sand. ‘I am planting a date tree,’ she said out loud. Maybe it will grow, maybe by Allah’s will it can grow in this cold climate and be a little miracle. She smiled at her foolishness, her childlike arrogance. But it gave her great satisfaction to plant that palm tree. A palm tree that would hang forlornly in the snow, buffeted by gales and waves, clinging to the weakest form of life and yet, against the odds, still bearing fruit. (28)

Although Iman is aware that palm trees grow only in hot regions, she insists on planting it in Scotland which is known for its cold weather. What seems a foolish act to her is a significance of her optimistic vision of the future. By maintaining a connection to the land

through the seed from her Saharan homeland, Iman creates a bond between her opposite geographies, languages, and cultures in order to survive.

II. 2. Islam as a Source of Power in *Bird Summons*

One of the striking things about Aboulela's writing, is her innovative way of approaching Islam. The portrayal of Muslims has often been covered by orientalist and secularists in a negative way. Classical/neo-orientalist and secularist writings have depicted Islam as a backward, an oppressive, and a terrorist religion. As a consequence, the image of the Muslim is caricatured as an inferior person whose sufferings are due to his/her faith and who is always saved by the civilized westerner. In contrast to this image, Leila Aboulela has made a drastic change in the representation of Islam and Muslims through her devout immigrant characters. Moreover, Aboulela's unique depiction is embedded in her appropriation of Islam as an empowering religion to which her characters seek refuge and freedom in secularist western societies. In an interview with C. E. Rashid, Aboulela points out to her motivation in writing about Islam in fiction as follow:

There are still very few examples of Muslims in contemporary literature and most of these examples are those of the 'Islamic terrorist', the 'oppressed Muslim woman' or on the other side of the spectrum examples of liberal Muslims ... But what about the thousands of men who crowd mosques, the thousands of women who go on Haj, the teenage girls who wear hijab? They are the ones who fascinate and compel me - and they are the ones whose stories I am motivated to write. (622)

The previous depiction of devout Muslims may put Aboulela's writing at the risk of representing an unauthentic and idealistic picture of religious people; however, she is fully aware of this misinterpretation of her characters' faith. Thus, Aboulela explains that she wants to express "the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith. My characters do not necessarily behave as a 'good Muslim' should. They are ... ordinary Muslims trying to

practise their faith in difficult circumstance and in a society which is unsympathetic to religion” (qtd. in Tina Steiner 09).

Although Islam is a prominent theme in *Bird Summons*, it does not overshadow the story of the novel. Alghamdi Alaa describes that “Islam is inextricable from other aspects of Aboulela’s worldview, and co-exists easily with the story, neither dominating it nor hiding within it. At the same time, it can easily be conceived of as a source of empowerment” (29). In the novel, the hoopoe is a significant symbol of Islam. The hoopoe is a sacred bird in Islamic logic because it is the only bird mentioned in the Qur’an. The narrator describes it to the reader through Salma’s voice, “he was one of the animals of Paradise, one of the animals mentioned in the Qur’an. ‘He was King Solomon’s special messenger, carrying important royal letters in his beak’.” (72) Furthermore, the hoopoe makes his presence in different parts of the novel without intruding the story. It follows the journey of the three women from the beginning yet it is seen only by Iman at first, as Aboulela mentions in early chapters, when they are preparing for the trip Iman sees it, “She smelt the grass and heard a bird sing hoo poo hoo poo again and again. She opened her eyes and saw it on a branch of the tree. Gold necklace around its neck, a delicate crown. There was something reassuring about it, a weight and a balance” (08). The hoopoe appears also when the women take on the road after visiting the castle:

Iman heard a sound and sat up ...A movement caught her eyes; it was as if something was skidding or flying alongside the car, like a shadow or a reflection. ... the shadow did have wings and at times it slithered nearer, then seemingly lost the connection, disappeared, then became visible again as if it was a struggle for it to catch up. Iman felt comforted by the shape and the sound it was making: soothing, not exactly urgent but with a forward lift. (37)

Even though the hoopoe makes no direct contact with Iman, the feeling of his presence fills her with comfort and reassurance.

Later on in the novel, the hoopoe starts to visit Iman on a regular basis where he acts as the voice of wisdom. He constantly tells her stories and fables carrying oral lessons. For instance: When he tells her the story of the girl who kept the diamond, she inherited from her family safe despite all the obstacles; Iman does not get the moral behind the story. Then the bird reminds her of her faith saying ““You value your faith too little, you take it for granted, the sacred words you were taught, the path you were born into” (75). In this passage, the hoopoe tries to shift Iman’s attention from the material possessions to the spiritual ones manifested in her Islamic faith and Qur’anic verses she memorises. Despite the fact the bird is a spiritual guide for the women; he does not interrupt their freedom and life decisions. In this sense, when Aboulela implements magical realism to transform the bodies of the women in order to continue their journey; they arrive to a point where they cannot go any further. At this moment the hoopoe reappears to help, “[h]e was now the mightiest of the birds, and if they accepted, he would be their guide. If they said yes, he would show them the way” (161). This quote reinforces the tolerance of Islamic rules which gives people the freedom to choose in life without imposing anything on them. This idea powerfully contradicts westerners’ portrayal of Islam as being supportive of oppression.

In addition to the Islamic symbol of the hoopoe, the author contradicts secularist ideology, “one that accords Islam the status of an abstract system of beliefs that has no direct bearing on how one lives, on what one actually does in the course of a day” (Saba Mahmood 44). In her social study of the women mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood accentuates the role of Islam in organizing the everyday lives of Muslims through different minor habits, aptitudes, and emotions in parallel to their essential spiritual duties. In this vein, Aboulela incorporates Islamic faith into the daily lives of the three women by making Islamic “acts of

worship relevant to the organization of [their] everyday life” (Mahmood 46). In the novel, the narrator describes how Salma, the massage therapist; sometimes deals with male clients feels very safe in her *Hijab*. The narrator comments, “There are weirdos and perverts out there.’ She sometimes felt that her hijab protected her, made her hazy and distant, further out of reach. The signals she sent out were muffled by clothes, obscured by layers, buried out of the way” (94). The significance of the *Hijab* does not appear only in the physical appearance of Muslim women but it also defines the boundaries of their relationships with men. Since its role is to cover woman’s beauty, Salma feels secure wearing the hijab because it does not draw men’s attention towards them. In another scene, when the women are transformed into other creatures of different shapes, Salma reminded them in the midst of their attempt to go back to the cottage of prayers, as the narrator describes:

‘We used to pray,’ said Salma when she saw the faint layer of light over the night.

‘What happened to that?’ None of them could remember when they had last prayed.

When they had last prayed properly and it was not like brushing their teeth, going through the motions with their minds elsewhere. Noon jumbled into night, sunset mixed with dawn. (160)

In the previous quote, the author highlights the issue of redundancy which occurs due to the daily repetition of spiritual habits. The three women are committed to their dutiful five prayers each day, however; the daily repetition turned their prayers into a habit that lacks intention and resembles brushing teeth. As a consequence, they cannot remember the last time they prayed with their hearts and minds focused. In the midst of their disabilities, the women seek repentance by praying with their hearts. As the narrator accentuates:

Iman could not remember the words, neither Moni nor Salma could stand up straight.

But they could pray with their hearts, couldn’t they? With their eyelids, with the breath they pulled in and out. They could, weakened as they were. Imperfect prayers, like

those of the unclean and those who had not yet fully repented. Feeble prayers, but sincere because they were in genuine need. (160)

At this particular moment of need, it does not matter if the movements of the prayer are correct or if the words Salma, Moni, and Iman recite are perfect. What really matters is their sincere intention in praying as a way to repent from their sins and ignorance. This urgent need to connect to Allah the almighty despite their inability to perform fuels them with strength. In her interview with Claire Chambers, Aboulela foregrounds the importance of this urgent need in her writing, “I wanted to write about faith itself and how spiritual development is a need that is as valid and as urgent as love and career” (100).

Through her portrayal of Islam, Aboulela is doing what Mahmoud calls the use of “religious knowledge, as a means for organizing daily life” (44). In the novel, the three friends gather in the living room of the cottage and discuss many Islamic related matters. For instance, when Salma tells her two friends that her children want to adopt a dog, they discuss how this would affect the daily religious duties as Moni and Salma explain, “‘And don’t forget having to renew your wudu every time the dog touches you.’ ‘No, licks you. It’s a misunderstanding. Its saliva is what is impure, not its fur.’ ‘I had no idea. Iman, did you know this?’” (93) This passage shows the emphasis of considering what is right and wrong through an Islamic lens even in the minor details of day-to-day life of Muslims.

II. 3. Food as a Means of Ethnic and Cultural Solidarity

Food has always been an important marker of culture. In the Arab world, there is a huge variety of food, culinary activities, and eating habits. From North Africa to the Middle East, the language of food plays a major role in defining one’s religious beliefs, class, and ways of living. As for literature, Anglophone Arab writers employ the language of food in their fictions as a literary strategy to convey certain interpretations of the world around them. In a similar vein, these works of fiction become a way of expression which mediates between

cuisine and ethnic solidarity of Arabs who are constantly trying to negotiate their hybrid identities in the host country they live in. Within this context, Hafez Sabry emphasises the significance of food in communicating distinct cultural and social meanings in the narratives of Anglophone Arab writers:

food provides a particular semiotics of expression, a system of culinary codes and signifiers that constitutes a “literary strategy capable of generating multiplicity of meaning within the text” In other words, culinary practice as a multi-layered palimpsest historicizes the significance of food as a cultural and social system with its own language of culinary ‘authenticity’. Arab cuisine as the manifestation of a particular world-view provides the necessary codes for deciphering the cultural, social, and racial markers of identity and group affiliation by which the culinary complexities come to reflect the cultural systems that are the guiding rituals of social life. (qtd. in Layla Al Maleh 205)

In addition to Arab culture, food plays a focal role in Islamic religion. Furthermore, the holy Qur’an includes many verses that call to appreciate food as a gift from Allah which requires Muslims to take care of. As Brinda J. Mehta suggests, “The frequent references to food in the Qur’an testify to its divine origin, whereby the very possibility of minimal cultivation in the desert birthplace of Islam symbolizes God’s generosity, magnificence, and benevolence” (203). Hence, Leila Aboulela deciphers the religious and cultural culinary features of her minority within British society through her literary texts in order to interpret a special world view.

As a Muslim Arab British writer, Aboulela represents the Muslim minority in Britain which is in turn composed of other minorities such as: The Arab minority. As a consequence, her literary texts unfold portrayals of the religious, cultural, social, and also culinary notions that are related to this particular minority. In her second novel *Minaret*, Aboulela discussed

the food habits in relation to Islamic law. As Claire Chambers declares, “Najwa uses Islam in a way that evokes a child eating comfort food, something to receive without question and consume without too much thought” (“Making Sense” 128). Najwa discovers that Islamic dieting through fasting and her dinners in the mosque are healthy ways of living which lead to her healing. In this section, a focus will be put on the representation of culinary activities in the novel by both Islamic rules and Arab cultural notions.

Relatedly, the British professor Peter Morey describes Aboulela’s works as “Halal fiction” in which she deals with the Islamic rules as well as the lives of devout Muslims in British society. Similar to *The Translator* and *Minaret*, In *Bird Summons*; the author highlights the Islamic influence on every aspect of her characters’ lives. At the culinary level, Islamic laws highly impact what Muslims eat through the categorization of Halal and Haram food and drinks.

Early on in the novel, when the three women prepare for the trip; they pack all the Halal food precisely meat because it is not available outside the city, as the novel indicates, “‘Moni will take forever. The meat will thaw,’ she [Iman] said. They were carrying frozen halal chicken and minced beef in the boot, knowing they would not find any in the shops near the loch. ‘No, it won’t,’ said Salma. ‘I wrapped it in aluminium foil’.” (04) Despite the lack of Halal food in their country of residence, the women strive to secure it for the trip. This act embodies their devotion to their faith and moral standards. In this regard, Claire Chambers argues that, “[t]he halal certification is something that ends up exerting a psychic, rather than sensorial power. It leads to a definition of taste in relation to moral sensibility” (125).

In addition to the Islamic view on food and eating habits, the Arab culture also pays great attention to culinary practices and dishes. In the novel, the kitchen represents a space of mutual gatherings in which the women build their relationships and discuss different matters. For example, when they first arrive to the cottage, Iman and Moni, who were not very close

before the trip; start a conversation and Iman finds an answer that no one could convince her before, as the narrator indicates:

Iman walked around the kitchen,...‘Do you think marriage is religiously sanctioned prostitution?’ she said it as if she was wondering out loud. Moni glanced up but didn’t immediately reply. ... When she finally spoke, her voice was calm, without protest and this surprised Iman. ‘If a woman doesn’t have her own means, it could feel that way. If she is passed from one husband to the next without choice, if there is no love or understanding, it could feel that way. But one is halal and the other haram. ...’ Iman could not think of a reply or a further question. (41-2)

Later on in the novel, the two women develop their friendship by discussing their daily events in the loch with great appreciation for each other in contrast to their first meetings, as the narrator demonstrates, “Later, at the kitchen table, she [Moni] told Iman what had happened. They haddrawn closer since coming here. Moni cooked, and Iman appreciated her efforts” (87-8). As exemplified in the previous passages, the kitchen thus becomes an alternative space of the homeland in diasporic Britain in which the women negotiate their religious and national identities in addition to their ethnic solidarity through their dialogues.

The novel also shows that cooking and traditional Arab dishes are of great value since they show acts of hospitality and generosity. As Hafez Sabry argues that, “Cooking, as a highly expressive language, thus itself becomes a form of social praxis”. He also relates this social praxis to “the famed custom of Arab hospitality, which has always been articulated in terms of food, drink, and the idea of providing guests with nourishment” (qtd. in Almaleh 205). In the novel, the language of food is mainly represented in Moni’s offerings to cook for her friends once when she first meets Salma who treats Adam, Moni’s disabled son; in a special manner. Hence, to express her gratitude towards Salma’s kindness; Moni cooks her a common traditional dish in the Middle East called “Falafel” which makes them close friends,

as the novel describes, “[s]he often brought Salma gifts, or cooked falafel for her. Salma adored the way Moni cooked falafel. ... It gratified Moni that she could please Salma. Her admiration of her friend was so great that she elevated her to a special status” (20). In this passage, traditional food acts as an expression of love and appreciation which aims at maintaining a social connection in the form of friendship. Moreover, when the three friends settle in the cottage, without hesitation, Moni heads to the kitchen and offers to cook another well-known Arab traditional dish which is “Kofta”. The novel highlights the way this dish is cooked and how their gathering for dinner contributes to reinforcing their friendship:

Later when Salma and Iman complimented her on her cooking, Moni was pleased. She explained her cooking methods and told them about how she had found mint leaves in the garden. Mint in the kofta mixture enhanced the flavour and looked pretty too, all those specks of green that matched the jellabiya she was wearing. (49)

In this respect, the Arab traditional dishes are a means to juxtapose the cultural identity of the protagonist with assimilation practices related to western food. The greenish combination between the traditional costume and the mint mirrors Moni’s attempt to create a sense of home inserted through her cooking. This embodiment of cultural belonging in traditional dishes is exhibited by Claudia Roden as follow: “There is a lot more to food than eating and cooking. Behind every dish lies a world, a culture, a history. Dishes have social meaning; they have emotional and symbolic significance. Food is about power. It is an expression of identity and ideology” (qtd. in Al Maleh 207).

Not only food but also drinks especially tea have a unique cultural significance in Arab countries which are served mainly in social and familial gatherings. The same significance is shown in the novel whenever the women gather in the living room where they play board games, listen to Iman sing, or discuss different topics concerning their families, concerns, and future plans. As the narrator illustrates, “After they ate, Salma washed the

dishes. ... She [Iman] brewed tea for the three of them using the rest of the mint leaves Moni had picked” (49). In this passage, culinary codes enact the solidarity of the three women. This solidarity is manifested in their cooperation in sharing kitchen tasks of cooking, washing dishes, and then brewing tea in order to sit together and communicate.

To conclude with, indeed *Bird Summons* exhibits many collective aspects of minority literature. The protagonist's Iman displacement is one of these aspects. Iman find herself lost between a country she left because of the war and a country runs to for better life condition. Consequently, Iman suffers from language issues in Britain leads to a lack of self-confidence. In order to cope with her displacement, the protagonist Iman run to her childhood memories for comfort. The collective value is also present in the Islamic tradition which represent the Muslim ethnicity. Moreover, the depiction of kitchen as a cultural place where the women build their friendship through cooking traditional food also stems for collective value in the novel.

Chapter III: Individual Concerns in *Bird Summons*

The third chapter is an analytical one; it offers more insight into the individual aspects of Aboulela's novel through the implication of the theory of postmigration. This chapter aims at showing to what extent those postmigrant features are presented in the novel in order to go beyond collective concerns introduced in the previous chapter. The third chapter is divided into three parts. While first section tackles the theme of motherhood and sacrifice manifested mainly by the character Moni, the second section of the chapter seeks to examine the notion of age in the novel through the character Salma.

III. 1. Moni the Self-Sacrificing Mother

In contrast to the collective concerns of Aboulela's characters in *Bird Summons* analysed in the second chapter which are related to the characters' marginalization and discomfort within the host society, the novel also indicates a sense belonging of characters to Britain. Despite the hardships of immigration which immigrants and various minority groups still encounter; some people think that the host country has become more open to cultural and ethnic differences. Furthermore, in the past, the British society was a homogeneous group in which minorities are obliged to integrate otherwise, they are excluded. However, in recent years, thanks to mass immigration from different parts of the world, this society is growing into a heterogeneous group in which different minorities feel the urge to participate instead of melting within mainstream culture. In a passage from the novel, the author shows that this change is embodied in the variety of cultural manifestations in British cities:

Salma, Moni and Iman – travelling companions. Escaping the stuck-together buildings of the city, the regenerated Waterfront, the Jute Museum, the busy Tay Road Bridge and the pretty park overlooking the estuary; distancing themselves from the coffee-scented malls, the kebab restaurants and the trapezoid mosque; getting away from the

scheduled rubbish collections and the weekly meeting of the Arabic Speaking Muslim Women's Group. The three of them moving together and alone. (03)

In this quote, the narrator indicates a visible cultural and ethnic multiplicity of buildings in the Scottish city where the characters reside. British urban buildings such as: Museums, parks, and malls exist side by side with other multicultural buildings for example: Kebab restaurants which represent the Middle Eastern ethnicity, in addition to the mosque which manifests the large Muslim groups coming from African and Asian continents. This co-existence of local buildings is thus “‘normalized’ . . . registered but routinized as an everyday fact among other everyday facts. It no longer stands out as something extra-ordinary, exceptional or spectacular” (Sten Pultz Moslund 98). In this regard, it may be argued that an examination of individual concerns such as, motherhood and age would provide more insight into the idea of postmigrant reality of the British society within Aboulela's novel.

In previous studies on the theme of motherhood in Anglophone Arab/African literatures, the notion of sacrifice among mothers is often referred to as the result of external factors related to cultural and ethnic norms. However, in *Bird Summons*, the novel under study; the idea of self-sacrifice in motherhood represented by Moni, a mother of a disabled child, is related to an individual concern. Before giving birth, Moni is a financially independent and a happily married woman. After giving birth to her disabled son Adam, her life is reversed upside down. In order to fully take care of Adam, Moni gives up her successful career in banking. In addition to that, her relationship with her husband becomes a wreck due to her neglect. The narrator demonstrates: “Before his birth, Moni had been active, positive and smiling, with her high-powered bank job and independence . . . Then Adam's birth bulldozed her” (10). The change occurs not only at the career level but also in her marriage because “[t]he more they slept apart – she with Adam and Murtada on his own – the more they disliked each other. Murtada was not comfortable with Adam and she could not

forgive him for this” (10). In these passages, the author shows how the maternal emotions of Moni excel her desires of success in her job and of her love for her partner.

Moni’s devotion to her child is not related to the cultural and religious pressures imposed on her by her community. Her husband, her parents, and her friends encourage her to move on with her life and try to have a second child. While Moni receives this love and support from her loved one, she is subjected to rejection in her place of birth, Sudan. People back home somehow blame her for her son’s disability. In the family gatherings people do not cease to highlight his handicap either through their feelings of sympathy or through down looks out of curiosity. When Moni and her son visited Sudan to attend a family wedding, “people were so unkind about Adam, so blatantly curious, at turns blaming her . . . and pitying her, that she was miserable”. Consequently, Moni starts, “to keep Adam not only indoors but in her room, away from the prying visitors, who seemed to be attracted to him as a grotesque curiosity” (10). The reaction of people in Sudan boils Moni’s anger who not only refuses to go there on holidays again but also calls them “backward fools” (10).

In this sense, the protagonist’s sense of motherhood and her willingness to protect her child exceeds her sense of belonging to her home country. Moreover, the way in which Moni deals with the changes in her life after her son’s birth empowers her. In spite of giving up on many financial and personal advantages and desires, Moni still feels fulfilled especially when the nurses appraise her for her great sacrifices, as the narrator demonstrates: “You’re a good mum, the nurses said. You’re doing a brilliant job. A job that was hard but encompassing and all-absorbing, rousing all her sincerity and resilience. Looking after Adam, Moni became stronger” (11). Since Moni finds the solace she looks for in Britain instead of Sudan, she becomes “one of those women to whom things were clear-cut. Everything back there was bad, and everything here was good” (10). This passage shows that the main character’s judgement of her home country and the country she immigrated to is not a result of her transnational

confusion or of her struggles to belong but it is the consequence of an everyday lived experience. This experience shapes her reality as a mother who prioritises her son's benefits over her own.

Britain becomes home for Moni because it embraces her and her son. Despite her dark skin, Moni does not encounter racialized treatment or any kind of racism on the basis of her skin's colour. In *Bird Summons*, there are some scarce references to the racialization of people based on their appearances. However, these racialized views are intertwined with other everyday matters which make them less significant. In this regard, Sara Upstone explains how “blurred ethnic identities are contextualized within a broader rejection of categories’ in new writings, where racialization and ethnicity are thrown into (and sometimes disappear in) the mix of other social differentiations like age, class, gender or sexual orientation” (qtd. in Moslund 96). On this note, the novel depicts how Moni behaves in Scottish public places inhabited by whites. When she finds out a catering van, for the first time in her life she dares to go eat there by herself. The narrator depicts it as follow:

Picnic benches were arranged around the catering van and Moni found an empty one. She always found it easy to ignore her surroundings. ... A place could be ugly, noisy and smelly and she would be oblivious. Awareness was not her strong point. When people were rude to her, she simply didn't notice. So she continued to sit at the table, ... She continued to sit even as others joined her at the table, expecting her to make way. She was thinking about Adam, imagining being with him. A queue formed of people waiting to be served and then waiting to be seated and still she sat staring straight ahead at them without feeling the need to move. It was the children who caught her eye. (30-1)

The previous quote emphasizes the sense of stability Moni feels within Britain and her confidence in being surrounded by white British citizens. In the quote, her oblivion and

neglect are not the result of defensive mechanisms against racial practices, but they are the consequence of her ignoring many things to focus solely on her son. This mothering extinct is embodied in her focus exclusively on children in the park and comparing them to her son Adam whom she misses. Indeed, “the fact that ethnic and racial othering loses prominence in the greater multiplicity of life matters” appears in the novel through Moni’s thoughts. Moreover, Moni “rarely think of [herself] in terms of racial or cultural Otherness” (Moslund 102). The neglect of racial issues in the novel is manifested in the focus on individual problems that Moni as a mother and a woman endures. The clash between Moni’s role of a mother and her desires for self-fulfilment is depicted in this quote:

Moni clashed with Iman. Right was right and wrong was wrong, and Moni was confident of her position. Briefly, she was released and found herself sounding like her old self: the Moni who worked in the bank, who followed and gave orders, who understood the legal structures, the stock options and the fluctuations in interest rates. This was the same Moni who now faced Iman. ... Moni was flexing a muscle she had thought long atrophied. It made her feel better. (118-9)

In the previous passage, Moni remembers the time when she was in control in her banking job. Her lecturing to Iman reminds her of the confidence she used to maintain when she worked in a British work place environment. In these thoughts, there is no mention of racism towards Moni in her work place.

Furthermore, Moni’s sense of self-sacrifice becomes a burden because of her misunderstanding of her natural emotion of motherhood. Because of this misunderstanding, Moni falls into an ambivalence of mixed feelings between the responsibility of being a mother of a disabled child and her urge to fulfil her own personal needs in addition to her duty as a wife. In this instance, Jane Lazarre believes that ambivalence “is the most eternal and natural emotion in mothers” (qtd. in Elizabeth Beaulieu 146). Moreover; Moni’s maternal confusion

develops into perilous thoughts of self-harm which are diagnosed by the therapist to be a reversed signal of her inability of coping with all the stress of her life after giving birth (17).

In the novel, when Salma suggests that they play a game in which each one of them mentions one major sin she likes to do if she is allowed to, Moni mentions suicide and killing. Moni expresses this: “Kill Murtada, thought Moni. No, kill myself. No, kill both Adam and myself. Her eyes filled with tears. She had been counselled once and was told that these fantasies of self-harm were signals that she was exhausted, highly stressed, on the verge of not coping” (17). Through these words, Moni realises that she is in need for a break, yet she relates this to her struggles with her husband rather than to her overbearing responsibility of her child.

Only later on in the novel, after she encounters a little boy called Adam in the loch and maintains a close bond with him; Moni realises that she torments herself by overdramatizing her son’s case. On maternal ambivalence, Rozsika Parker argues,

a mother’s capacity for nurturing both herself and her offspring is greatly augmented once ambivalence is acknowledged. In other words, conflict and conflicting emotions can serve to catalyze self-awareness and can bridge the understanding gap that necessarily exists between mothers and their children. (qtd. in Beaulieu 146)

At the end of the novel, Moni embraces her sense of motherhood with all its encompassing complexities. As the narrator reclaims, “‘I love life,’ said Moni ... She was beginning to look around her ... [t]o be more than a mother of a disabled child, more than a full-time carer”. Additionally, the narrator depicts the change of her view towards her way of mothering her son in the sense that “[i]t should not be a burden looking after Adam, a sacrifice to be self-righteous about, it should be carried with firmness and ease. With gratitude too, because he was special in his own way, unique”. Moreover, Moni succeeds in overcoming her motherhood ambivalence; she decides to give birth to another child and take care of herself.

The narrator comments: “If she let her guard down, she could be more generous, more willing to mother another child, a sister for Adam or a brother. That would be moving on – members of a family, each with their weaknesses and strengths. My children, she would say to others” (163). Although Aboulela’s characters belong to the Arab and Muslim community in Britain, she focuses on motherhood as an individual concern. This shows that Aboulela is a writer who can transcend the collective concerns of her community to focus on her characters’ individual issues.

III. 2. Salma’s Ageing Anxiety in *Bird Summons*

Ageing is an inevitable stage in any individual’s life. This process is manifested in the physical and psychological changes in every person. It can also be a successful process if the person is knowledgeable about the positive sides of old age. However, a lot of people encounter a fear about getting older. This conception of ageing anxiety is defined by the Psychology Professor Scott M. Lynch as “the combination of people’s concerns or fears about getting older” (533). This kind of anxiety may be the result of factors such as age itself, fear of losses, and appearance. As a result of this concern, people tend to express different physical and psychological attitudes. *Bird Summon* deals with the transnational anxiety caused by the notion of displacement as well as the anxiety of age. Salma’s fears are associated with an individual concern of ageing anxiety. In this regard, it can be argued that this anxiety is related to her fear of losing her children who are growing more distant from her. In the same vein, her fear is also linked to her obsession with her physical appearance and health.

The most salient factor for ageing anxiety is age itself. In *Bird Summons*, the protagonist Salma is in her forties. Consequently, she falls in a midlife crisis because her children, especially her eldest daughter; are growing distant from her. As the novel indicates:

Her quarrel with her daughter still blazed in her ears. Free to study what she wants, to turn down an offer to medical school, after all the private tutoring and the gruelling

interview. To get that far then cop out for something easier. Sports science! ... Just thinking about the whole thing made her feel betrayed – the daughter she had fed through cracked nipples, taught how to belly dance, worked extra hours so that she could afford to give her the best of everything. ... Salma instead was the one left smarting. (05)

In the previous quote, the narrator describes the conflicts between Salma and her daughter who is growing more independent from her mother and more out of her control. Because Salma fails many times her test to become a doctor in Britain; she works hard so that her children and specifically her eldest daughter achieve what she could not. Hence Salma's anxiety is manifested in her fear of losing her children.

Although Salma is in her forties, she looks a lot younger because she pays a special attention to her appearance and health. In this sense, Claire Carter suggests that, "women generally endorse the thin-youth ideal. They are more likely to engage in 'body practices' to achieve a slim physique they believe denotes youth and healthiness" (qtd. in Béré Mahoney 09). In the novel, Salma maintains this beauty standard and healthiness through dieting and exercising in addition to being "the most stylish" among her younger friends (13). Thus, she looks much younger than her true age. When her friend Moni first meets her, she thinks that they are the same age. The narrator explains this as follow: "Salma was older than Moni, over forty, even if she did look younger. The first time they met, Moni thought they were the same age" (19). This younger look is the consequence of great hard work and a lot of challenges against her desires. In the novel, there are many scenes which demonstrate her persistence in resisting her desires to eat the cupcakes Moni prepares. The narrator adds:

In the afternoon it rained heavily and none of them went out. Moni baked cupcakes ... Salma wasn't pleased. 'Count me out. I need to watch my weight,' she said. The irritation in her voice was because she knew that she would be tempted by the smell of

baking, knew that she would struggle to resist and there was a fifty-fifty chance she would give in. (64)

The quote above depicts the reluctance and the mixed feeling Salma feels in the cottage concerning her eating habits. Moreover, she feels angry because she knows that she may not succeed in refusing to eat the cupcakes. However, Salma ends up by resisting to eat the cupcakes and instead she opts for “a tuna salad” at dinner (64).

In addition to her healthy eating habits, Salma exercises hard in order to keep a good shape. Later on in the novel, after the three women arrive safely to the loch; Salma goes for a walk or a run whenever she is outside the cottage. In the novel, there are recurrent scenes that show Selma’s obsession with her physical appearance. When she heads to the forest near the cottage in order to discover the place, Selma still thinks about her shape:

Salma went for a walk ... It felt good to walk after sitting in the car for so long. Her body, inherently athletic, needed movement ... She smiled to herself and walked faster, enjoying how her body warmed up. Tomorrow she would wear her trainers and go for a run. It would be great to thrash through these trees, to smell the earth and her own sweat. (41)

The passage above highlights Salma’s dedication to her healthy lifestyle and her powerful will to make effort despite her exhaustion. This commitment to this lifestyle is not only noticed through her physical stamina but it also reflects the positive emotions she enjoys when exercising. Regarding this emotional state, the narrator denotes that, “she kept walking and the more she walked, the healthier and stronger she felt”(44).

Even though Salma’s attitudes towards her age and body seem genuinely positive; she feels self-conscious about her body most of the time. The narrator describes Salma’s awareness of her body through different parts of the novel. Her low self-esteem is illustrated when her husband David tries to reassure and support her before she leaves the next morning

for the trip. This can be illustrated in the novel through this quote, “Last night, he had hugged her as she was packing her suitcase, pressed his palm against her lower stomach and she had felt pleased that it was flat (well, almost flat) even after four pregnancies, her pelvic floor muscles in excellent condition” (05). The protagonist’s satisfaction about herself is related to the others’ impressions about her looks. Hence, she is pleased that her husband still finds her almost fit whenever he is close to her. Each time one of her friends or any other person makes a remark about her age or body; Salma feels vulnerable and sometimes her vulnerability turns into a frustration. In this regard, Margaret Cruikshank argues that “ageing is a creation of this time and place, more cultural than biological, determined by social institutions, or, more optimistically, a set of life experiences we can consciously shape, once we see how others are attempting to shape them for us” (qtd. in Cathy McGlynn et al. 06). The narrator accentuates her sensibility first when she and the other women head to the cottage with Mullin, the man responsible for the cottage; who seems to be oblivious about everything related to them except his wonder whether Iman is Salma’s daughter. This incident makes Salma angry and her anxiety begins to flow on the surface. In this sense, the narrator comments, “In turn, he [Mullin] did not seem curious about them except to assume that Iman was Salma’s daughter. That’s new, thought Salma, slamming the door of the cottage after him. I look that old!” (40). The previous quote demonstrates the effect of people’s opinions on Salma’s thoughts about her age.

Selma’s anger is aggravated when Iman points out to Salma’s bodily changes, specifically the volume of her hair which is becoming thinner through time. This innocent remark from her friend, causes Salma a lot of money in buying expensive hair products in hopes to fix her hair and bring it to its healthy state. Later on in the novel, when Salma returns to the cottage after her walk in the forest, she thinks:

In the bathroom she combed her wet hair. She was conscious of its thinness compared to Iman's luxuriant tresses. But a month ago, at Salma's house, Iman had said with genuine surprise, 'Your hair is getting so thin, Salma!' Salma was not prone to overreacting, but from that day on she had become self-conscious about her hair. She started using an expensive scalp foam, volumisers and fillers. She topped up her supplements. (48-9)

Furthermore, Salma's anxiety is not only related to her hair but it is also linked to her weight. In the shower, in addition to checking the condition of her hair; she notices the rest of her body too. The novel describes her anxiety in the next passage: "Turning sideways, she glimpsed a diagonal roll of fat above her waist. Where had that come from? Pilates twice a week, regular walks and eating more or less the same. Her bathroom scales back home had failed to flag this up. She put on her pyjama top and started to make wudu" (49). This quote confirms Salma's obsession with her self-image. Thus, she turns to her friend Iman looking for reassurance:

Stepping out of the bathroom, she asked Iman, 'Do you think I've put on weight?' Iman's eyes flickered over her friend, noticed the wet hair. It distracted her from answering Salma's question. Instead she said, 'How come you washed your hair?' Silence is a sign of agreement, as the Arabic saying went. So, I am getting fat, Salma thought, I am spreading out, this is exactly what they call middle-age spread. 'I felt sweaty from my walk.' (48)

Despite the fact that sweat is a natural body response towards making a physical effort, Salma takes it as a sign for weight gain. She misinterprets Iman's avoidance to answer her question and ends up with the conclusion that she is in a midlife crisis.

In order to avoid the tension between herself and her daughter, as mentioned at the beginning of the section; Salma shifts her attention towards her young friend Iman. For

Salma, Iman is a great distraction from her daughter's revolts, because Iman is always dependant and supportive of her. Early on in the novel, the author justifies the motives behind Salma's reliance on Iman: "this holiday was a good idea. She must forget the anxiety about her daughter's future and focus on Iman instead, the one who was always there for her, never thwarting or challenging" (05). However, later on in the novel, when she fights with Iman when Iman asks her not to interfere in her life decisions; Salma's anxiety intensifies. Furthermore, she panics over being gradually left over by her beloved people. Salma expresses her fears to Moni as follows:

The tears rolled down Salma's face.... How do I pull my children back so that they're little again? It can never happen. ... If people spoke the truth they would admit how sad it is to get old.' 'You're not old,' said Moni. 'You are fit and healthy. And yes, you are young.' 'These are platitudes, Moni. Forty is the new thirty. Fifty is the new forty. These things that are said so that people can be cheerful. When people are cheerful they get on with their lives better. They go to work, they shop. That's what it's all about. Then, at a certain point, sooner or later, they drop dead. And it goes on and on. One generation replacing the other, making a mess of things one way or another.' (121)

This passage shows how Salma is finally able to face her fears after losing control over Iman. Meanwhile, Salma transcends her obsession with age and develops depressive mood that leads her to reflect upon death. Consequently, Moni advises her to take a rest so that she relaxes from her negative ideas. Finally, at the end of the novel; Salma successfully overcomes her anxiety of losing her children. In this sense, Cruikshank Believes that by being socially constructed, ageing can be resisted. In her view, "learning to be old requires that we both observe how aging is socially constructed and find ways to resist being molded to its dictates" (qtd. in McGlynn et al. 06).Hence,"as she [Salma] understands the irrevocable

connection she has to the place where she now lives even though she herself was not born there” (Lena Englund 07). By realising that she has a lasting imprint on her children; Salma is reassured of not being forgotten even after her death.

In conclusion, the individual value of minor literature marks its presence in *Bird Summons* through the themes of motherhood and ageing anxiety. In this regard, Moni is an example of the sacrificial mother who abandons everything for her disabled son. This is very obvious in her ignorance of transnational matters. In addition to that, Salma is an illustration for the individual concern of ageing anxiety. This notion which many women in the world encounter leads Salma to pay great attention to her health. Even though this care seems positive; it negatively affects Salma’s self-image which is always tied to other’s opinions about her looks. At the end, Salma succeeds in overcoming her anxiety by realising that age is an inevitable thing every human being goes through.

Conclusion

Minor literature is the voice of the marginalized. It offers minority writers the ability to maintain their own voice within the major literature of the host country. This ability of representing minor groups permits minority writers to convey the hardships and the marginalization that their minority members endure. However, there are current calls to move towards other means to approach fiction produced by minor writers. In this regard, scholars suggest the new concept of postmigration which entails the study of minority writing emphasizing everyday experiences in the host country they live in. From this perspective, immigration no more plays a focal role in the issues discussed by these authors.

In Britain, the mass immigration of people from various parts of the globe in the 1950s and in the 1960s encouraged the heterogeneity of literary texts produced by writers from different minorities. In contemporary Britain, minor writers have gained a great interest from both the scholarly field and the audience of western readers. One of these notable writers is the British Muslim Arab novelist Leila Aboulela. Through her latest novel *Bird Summons*, this study draws attention to the debate between collective and individual aspects of minor literature.

This study has attempted to explain divergent characteristics of minor literature. It explored collective characteristics introduced by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in addition to a discussion of different ideas about minor literature's characteristics by British, Arab and/or Muslim critics. Moreover, this study elucidated various individual characteristics of minor literature through the concept of postmigration presented by Sen Pultz Moslund. In addition to that, various literary works of British minor writers have been devoted to illustrate the collective and individual values of minority writings. Among these novels, *My Name Is Salma* (2007) by the British Arab writer Fadia Faqir which endeavours identity crisis faced by immigrants as a consequence of dislocation. Therefore,

Faqir's novel is the representation of collective value in the study. Another literary text is the NW (2012) by the Black British novelist Zadie Smith. In this novel, Smith accentuates the everyday experiences of minority members beyond transnational issues of belonging and displacement. Hence, this novel exposes the individual value in this study.

The dissertation tried to tackle the most prominent concepts that are related to both the collective and individual aspects through the analysis of Aboulela's *Bird Summons*. One of these themes is displacement. In *Bird Summons*, Aboulela tackles the issue of displacement through one of the three protagonists, Iman. Moreover, Iman's displacement is due to her state of in-betweenness and to her constant search for a home between her home village in Syria and her current residence in Scotland to which she immigrated. Furthermore, Iman's displacement has been analysed through the issue of language and her feeling of abandonment. In the novel, Iman struggles to interpret and to speak English language. Thus, she loses her self-confidence and finds it hard to maintain her independence in Scotland. Additionally, Iman feels abandoned by her family members back home because they consider her lucky to survive the civil war in her country. Consequently, she tries to find an alternative to her feeling of abandonment in her older friend Salma who knows how to take good care of her despite the obstacles she faces. In order to cope with her state of displacement, Iman finds solace in her childhood memories which come at rescue to keep her sanity intact.

Another theme which entails the collective value of minor writing in *Bird Summons* is Islam as a source of power. Leila Aboulela is well known of her unique representation of Muslim characters as individuals who inspire their strength and empowerment in Britain from their Islamic faith. In *Bird Summons*, Aboulela introduces the Islamic religion through on the one hand, the hoopoe which is a significant bird in Islamic logic because it is mentioned in the holy Qur'an and on the other hand through opposing secularist vision by incorporating Islamic logic into the minor habits, attitudes, and everyday practices of the main characters. In

the novel, the hoopoe acts as a spiritual symbol for the three women Salma, Moni, and Iman which tells them moral stories inspired by the Islamic culture. Moreover, the three protagonists are highly motivated by their faith, hence they sense its presence on a daily basis in a country which is not very tolerant towards Islam.

The final collective concern which the study attempted to highlight is food as a means to build ethnic and cultural solidarity. As a British Arab Muslim author, Leila Aboulela represents many cultures. In *Bird Summons*, she accentuates the role of food in maintaining cultural and ethnic solidarity. Furthermore, since the three protagonists are Muslims; they are restricted by the Islamic notions of Halal and Haram in their eating habits. Additionally, the Arab culture is very famous of its diversity in culinary practices and dishes. In the novel, the kitchen acts as a space for cooking and communication between the three women in which they develop and strengthen their friendship. Despite the diversity of dishes in the Arab world, the dishes the chief characters cook and eat are common between most of the Arab countries. They also offer traditional food as an expression of love and compassion to each other.

Besides exposing collective aspects of minor literature in *Bird Summons*; this dissertation also aimed at examining two major themes related to the individual value of minor literature. The individual value in *Bird Summons* is represented through the characters Moni and Salma as an embodiment of motherhood sacrifice and the age anxiety respectively. In the novel, Moni is a mother of a disabled son named Adam. After the birth of her son, Moni gives up on everything including her career, her duty as a wife, and her own personal needs. She devotes all her efforts and time in taking care of her child. Therefore, Britain becomes home for Moni. Since the medical care is very developed in Britain, Moni refuses to leave it in order to follow her husband into Saudi Arabia. Despite her dark skin colour, Moni scarcely encounters any racialized treatment in Britain. Moreover, the racial issue does not

make any significant appearance in the novel because it is intertwined with other everyday realities.

Another everyday issue that has been discussed in the study is ageing anxiety. The protagonist Salma is in her forties and a mother of four children. Salma's anxiety is the result of the growing distance between herself and her children besides her obsession with her physical appearance and health. Moreover, the tension between Salma and her children comes into surface when she tries to make life decisions for them and they refuse to obey. As a mother who sacrifices her life to provide a better life conditions for her children, Salma feels left over and disappointed due to their refusal of her interference. Hence, Salma turns to her younger friend Iman who often depends on her in order to fill the void her children left. Furthermore, Salma's obsession about being always elegant and in good shape negatively affects her self-image and her perception of age. Even though, her ageing anxiety arises when people innocently point out to an imperfection of her body; Salma manages to understand this notion of ageing. She finally accepts the fact that getting old is an inevitable fact and yet she may die, her imprint and the impact she leaves in her children would always make her present.

Indeed, Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* reflects her new attitude toward Britain through her writings. In her earlier novels, specifically *The Translator* and *Minaret*; Aboulela significantly accentuates transnational confusions and immigrants struggles in Britain. In *Bird Summons*, she tackles these confusions and hardships that immigrants and minority members still encounter until now. However, Aboulela also denotes an ease of presence and a confident position within the British society. Thus, this ease shows that the notion of postmigration is not a destination that the minority members arrive to within their host county but a process they go through despite all the obstacles they encounter. Aboulela herself explains this in one of her recent interviews with Keija Parssinen as follow, "With regard to my writing, I found

that with time my characters started to feel more at ease in Britain. They experienced homesickness less and less and started to behave as if they were citizens of the world” (qtd. in Lena Englund 02-3). By being more at ease in Britain, those individuals are gradually becoming part of this society despite their cultural and ethnic differences.

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المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في الجدل المحتدم حول ما إذا كان أدب الأقليات يتعامل حصريًا مع الاهتمامات المجتمعية أو أنه يُظهر قيمة فردي. يناقش كتاب الأقليات مواضيع مختلفة تتعلق بهوياتهم العابرة للحدود، قضايا الانتماء، النزوح والاعتراب. ومع ذلك، ففي السنوات الأخيرة، يدّعي الدارسون أن هؤلاء الكتاب أصبحوا أكثر راحة في البلدان المضيفة لهم. وبالتالي، أصبحت تظهر هذه الراحة في المواضيع التي يتناولونها والتي من المرجح أن تعكس حقائق ما بعد الهجرة لتجارب الأفراد اليومية. في بريطانيا، اكتسب كتاب الأقليات اهتمامًا متزايدًا بإنتاجهم الأدبي الذي يُبرز المهارة والإبداع. تحتل الكاتبة البريطانية العربية المسلمة ليلي أبو العلا موقعًا مهمًا في اللائحة الأدبية البريطانية. من خلال أحدث رواياتها "الهدهد... ان حكى -2019-"، ستحقق هذه الدراسة فيما إذا كان أدب الأقليات مجرد تمثيل للتجارب السياسية والجماعية أم أنه تعبير فردي لكتاب الأقليات. سنتناول الأطروحة الاهتمامات الجماعية التي تعبر عنها شخصيات أبو العلا مثل، الإحباط من النزوح، الجوانب التمكينية للإسلام، والطعام كوسيلة تضامن عرقي. سوف تستكشف هذه الدراسة أيضًا الجوانب الفردية في الرواية المتجسدة في تناقض الأمومة وقلق العمر. تظهر الأطروحة أن أبو العلا هي كاتبة أقليات يكشف عملها عن إمكانية الجمع بين الاهتمامات الجماعية والفردية في أدب الأقليات.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à sonder le débat houleux sur la question de savoir si la littérature mineure traite exclusivement de préoccupation commutative ou s'il s'agit d'une valeur individuelle. Les écrivains mineurs discutent de divers thèmes liés à leurs identités transnationales, leurs problèmes d'appartenance leur déplacement et leur aliénation. Cependant, ces dernières années, les chercheurs affirment que ces écrivains se sentent plus à l'aise dans leurs pays d'accueil. Ainsi, ce confort apparaît dans les thèmes qu'ils abordent qui sont plus susceptibles de refléter les réalités posmigrantes des expériences quotidiennes des individus. En Grande-Bretagne, les écrivains minoritaires ont attiré une croissante pour leur production littéraire qui met en valeur les compétences et la créativité. L'arabe Musulmane Leila Aboulela occupe une place importante dans le canon littéraire Britannique. A travers son dernier roman *Bird Summons* (2019), cette étude examinera si la littérature mineure est une représentation d'expériences politiques et collectives ou s'il s'agit d'une expression individuelle d'écrivain minoritaires. La thèse traitera des préoccupations collectives que les personnages d'Aboulela expriment telles que la frustration du déplacement, les aspects responsabilisant de l'islam et de la nourriture comme solidarité éthique. Cette étude explore également les aspects individuels dans le roman incarné dans l'ambivalence de la maternité et l'angoisse de l'âge. La thèse montre qu'Aboulela est une écrivaine minoritaire dont l'œuvre révèle la possibilité de combiner les préoccupations collectives et individuelles dans la littérature minoritaire.