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**Faith and Freedom: Muslim Women Between
Tradition and Modernity in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret***

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication 1

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. A special thanks to my source of inspiration and support, my beloved parents, to my grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, to all the family members.

OUMAIMA

Dedication 2

Al Hamdoulillah—I begin by giving thanks to God for all the blessings in our lives.

First, I thank myself for not giving up, for persevering and reaching this moment.

I also want to express my deepest gratitude to:

My grandfather, my mother, my husband, my sisters and brothers, and my friends.

SAFA

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Abstract

This study examines the transformational journey of Najwa, an Arab Muslim woman in the UK, in Leila Aboulela's 2005 novel *Minaret*. Facing cultural dislocation and alienation, Najwa turns to her Islamic faith as a means of rebuilding her identity, finding empowerment, and reclaiming agency. The research aligns with Aboulela's broader literary goal of challenging Western stereotypes about Arab women by portraying Islam as a source of strength rather than oppression. Through an analytical lens, the study explores Najwa's character development, emphasizing her evolving social relationships in a diasporic setting, her educational growth, and her spiritual awakening. It highlights how she negotiates a hybrid identity, balancing her Sudanese heritage with her Western experiences. Additionally, the study investigates Aboulela's narrative techniques, which reflect her own position as a diasporic writer, to depict Najwa's complex journey. Thus, the research argues that Najwa's spiritual and cultural hybridity resists dominant Western narratives, offering a deep understanding of empowerment and belonging through Islam. By doing so, the study contributes to broader discussions on the distinctive identities of Muslim women in diaspora and the role of faith in their self-discovery and resilience.

Keywords: Faith, Identity, tradition, modernity, hybridity, diasporic

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Postcolonial feminism developed as a critical response to popular Western feminism's tendency to globalize women's experiences, often overlooking the specific realities confronted by women in previously colonized societies. It draws attention to the ways that the entwined legacies of patriarchy and colonialism result in particular types of oppression for non-Western women, who endure what is known as "double colonization"—the concurrent subjection by patriarchal systems and colonial powers within their own communities. This theoretical approach critiques both Western feminist frameworks and traditional postcolonial theory for their failure to adequately address gendered experiences, race, and cultural specificity. Postcolonial feminism aims to include indigenous feminist perspectives and contest Eurocentric viewpoints, highlighting the significance of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality in grasping the varied experiences of women. It also examines how religion, tradition, and migration influence identities and acts of resistance. Strategies in postcolonial contexts, particularly focusing on how colonialism disrupted indigenous cultures and imposed Western norms. This study posits itself within this framework to analyze the complex intersections of gender, colonial history, and cultural identity in postcolonial societies.

Leila Aboulela a Sudanese English diasporic Arab writer, Sadia Abbas (2014) states that Aboulela is against the misrepresentations of Arab women and how they are undermined and stereotyped in her literary and artistic works. She tried to give the actual image of the Arab women, who have been misinterpreted and stereotyped in the West. Her works reflect the struggles Arab women face when they want to engage with the outer world, particularly the West, as it always visualizes them in passive roles due to religious strictness. Arab women, in general, are trying to change their domestic roles to more critical roles in the Western community. In this context, Laila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* published in 2005

discuss journey taken by Arab woman living in Western country and context empowered by self-experience and various surrounding factors

Najwa, the protagonist in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* achieves balance between her Sudanese background and her life in the UK through a significant personal transformation based on faith, education, and community. Initially leading a secular lifestyle, Najwa's exile and solitude in London led her to rediscover Islam, which serves as both an anchor and a cultural bridge. Religious education and deeper spiritual connection provide her with the fortitude and clarity to make tough decisions based on her convictions rather than cultural expectations. She finds love and solidarity among other women in her community, strengthening and providing her understanding and direction without judgment. By combining the positive components of her traditions with her new experiences, Najwa overcomes cultural conditioning and embraces authenticity, resulting in a distinct identity that draws strength from both worlds. As a result, she becomes the strongest version of herself, founded on faith, formed by knowledge, and maintained by a supportive community.

2. Statement of the Problem

In postcolonial narratives many studies and works have been conducted by writers that describe the state of marginalization and racism that Muslims were exposed to in the West, especially after the events of September 2001. Some writers have deliberately sought to express these phenomena through their writings, such as Leila Aboulela, who lived an experience similar to the journey of the heroine of this novel, Najwa who find her place in a multicultural British society. However, the heroine of this story succeeded in preserving her Muslim identity in a Western society that has a distorted image of this religion. She was also able to integrate into a multicultural society far removed from the culture of her home country. Therefore,

The main question here is: how was Najwa able to balance two different cultures in terms of religion, beliefs and traditions and reach the strongest version of herself? The dissertation also addresses other questions:

- How was Aboulela challenge Western stereotypes about Muslim women?
- What role does faith play in shaping the protagonist's identity and sense of freedom?
- How does "*Minaret*" reconcile the tension between tradition and modernity for Muslim women?

3. Aim of the study

The aim of this study is investigating and demonstrating how Najwa's Islamic faith is essential to her identity reconstruction and empowerment in the face of cultural alienation and displacement in Western society. In order to confront her trauma and identity issue, it explores Najwa's faith, highlighting the ways in which religion gives her agency, community, stability, and continuity. This study also examines Najwa's balancing act between tradition and modernity, emphasizing her cultural hybridity as she balances her life in London with her Sudanese origin. In the end, it illustrates how Najwa's spiritual development contributes to the development of a hybrid identity that subverts Western preconceptions and strengthens her feeling of acceptance and strength via Islam.

4. Significant of the study

This study is important because it challenges dominant narratives, amplifies marginalized voices, and provides new insights into the ongoing negotiation of identity, tradition, and modernity in postcolonial contexts-especially as experienced by women. It not only advances academic knowledge but also has practical implications for fostering social justice and cultural understanding, while highlighting the diaspora's ability to use religion as a source of strength and identity reconstruction. In addition, there is a need for a nuanced theoretical approach that centers the voices of these women, challenges imperialist and patriarchal frameworks, and explores the ways in which faith, tradition, and modernity intersect in their lives.

5. Methodology

The methodology of this research is primarily qualitative analytical approach that allows an in depth Analyze of the novel's Najwa character using a critical perspective. It will center on her experiences adjusting to new social and cultural contexts and navigating significant life transitions. By highlighting the intricate connection between her personal convictions, cultural background, and societal pressures, the analysis will show how Najwa transforms her Arab Muslim woman identity into a source of strength within a Western framework. The research will focus on the potential impact of the author's personal experiences on the protagonist's portrayal, especially in subverting common Orientalist assumptions. It examines how Najwa's character serves as counter-stereotypical representation, complicating and dismantling homogenized Western perceptions of Muslim women. Through this lens, the study reveals how the narrative challenges reductive stereotypes while reconstructing Muslim female identity. Through the combination of textual analysis and knowledge of religious and cultural topics, this approach aims to provide a

comprehensive analysis of Najwa's development as a person. As demonstrated in the novel, it will also touch on more general themes of identity, empowerment, and hybridity that Muslim women face in diasporic settings.

6. Structure of the study

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents and explains a number of significant perspectives, including Islamic feminism, Western feminism, and postcolonial theory. It also examines important ideas like diaspora and hybridity, providing thorough justifications of their meanings and consequences.

Furthermore, The second chapter turns its attention to the significant social and political developments that influence the course of the story. It emphasizes the contributions of Muslim women writers such as Aboulela, providing insights into the author's life and demonstrating how she infuses her personal experiences into her writing. Crucially, this chapter emphasizes how the author's identity as an Arab Muslim woman living in Britain is reflected in the character of Najwa.

Finally, the third chapter looks at Najwa's personality from a number of perspectives. It explores the ways in which Islamic traditions and beliefs would shape and empower her identity. In addition, it discusses about how Najwa navigates Western culture in contrast to her Arabic Muslim background, showing how she successfully combines the two worlds using the idea of "cultural hybridity," which enables her to succeed in British society.

Chapter 01: Theoretical Framework

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Introduction

This theoretical framework chapter provides the critical groundwork for examining the intersections of postcolonial theory, faith, tradition, modernity, and feminist thinking. Postcolonial theory provides a lens through which to examine colonialism's long-lasting cultural, political, and social legacies, emphasizing how colonial histories continue to impact identities, power dynamics, and global disparities. It highlights decolonization processes such as reclaiming indigenous traditions and questioning Eurocentric narratives, as well as how religion and migration are inextricably linked to colonial and neocolonial dynamics. The chapter also delves into how colonialism damaged indigenous traditions and imposed Western ideals, resulting in cultural identity crises that postcolonial cultures attempt to resolve through hybridization and cultural revival. It also investigates postcolonial nations' complex connection with modernity, which combines a desire for advancement with a resistance to cultural oblivion. Finally, the chapter draws on feminist perspectives, both Western and Islamic, to highlight the gendered aspects of postcolonial experiences, urging for inclusive approaches that acknowledge multiple voices and reinterpretations of faith and gender roles. Together, these theoretical threads form a complete framework for critically engaging with the complicated reality of postcolonial societies.

1.1 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory is a critical framework for analyzing the cultural, political, and social legacies of colonialism, as well as the ongoing struggles faced by formerly colonized societies. It highlights how colonial histories continue to shape global inequalities, economic

systems, and power dynamics, with former colonies often grappling with poverty, political instability, and underdevelopment as consequences of colonial exploitation. Postcolonial theorists like Homi K. Bhabha explore how colonized peoples navigate their identities in the aftermath of colonialism, often creating hybrid cultures that blend indigenous and colonial influences. The process of decolonizing culture involves reclaiming indigenous traditions and challenging Eurocentric narratives (Bhabha, H. K. 1994). Postcolonialism also critiques how colonial powers have represented colonized peoples in literature, media, and academia. Scholars such as Edward Said, in "Orientalism", argue that Western depictions of the "Orient" perpetuate stereotypes and justify domination, while postcolonial literature and art aim to amplify marginalized voices and disrupt dominant narratives (Said, 1978). Furthermore, postcolonialism examines how global power structures, such as neoliberalism and globalization, sustain colonial-era inequalities, with former colonial powers often maintaining economic and political control over their former colonies through neocolonial practices. Decolonization, in this context, extends beyond political independence to include the dismantling of colonial ideologies, institutions, and practices, such as efforts to decolonize education, restore indigenous land rights, and combat systemic racism. Postcolonialism also intersects with other critical theories, including feminism and critical race theory, to analyze how race, gender, class, and other identities shape experiences of colonialism and its aftermath. Scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", investigates the marginalization of colonized women and stress the importance of centering their voices in postcolonial discourse (Spivak, 1988).

1.2 Postcolonial perspectives to Faith, Tradition, and Modernity

Postcolonial thoughts on faith, tradition, and modernity look at how colonialism influenced the interactions between these notions in countries that have been colonized. Colonial norms and ideals frequently disrupted or replaced existing cultures, religions, and social institutions among colonized peoples. Postcolonial theorists critically examine how faith, tradition, and modernity connect, especially in the context of resistance to colonial power and the complexity of postcolonial identity creation.

2.1 Faith (Religious) in postcolonial thought :

A postcolonial perspective on religion and migration explores how colonial histories and power dynamics shape the experiences of migrants, particularly in relation to their religious identities and practices. It argues that contemporary migration patterns are deeply rooted in colonial legacies, such as forced displacement, arbitrary border creation, and economic exploitation, which continue to influence global movement (Asad, 1993).. For migrants, religion often serves as a crucial means of preserving cultural identity and fostering community cohesion in the face of displacement and assimilation pressures. However, migrant religions are frequently stigmatized or marginalized in host societies, reflecting colonial hierarchies that privilege certain faiths over others (Tweed, 2006). This perspective also highlights how colonial impositions of religious norms and neocolonial dynamics perpetuate inequalities, framing migrant religions as "foreign" or "threatening." At the same time, migrants create hybrid religious practices that blend traditions, serving as both resistance to cultural erasure and adaptation to new environments (Hervieu-Léger, 2000). Religion also

acts as a site of empowerment, providing networks of support, solidarity, and political mobilization for migrant communities. By examining diasporic communities and refugee crises, this perspective underscores the intersection of global economic inequalities, rooted in colonial exploitation, and the religious marginalization faced by migrants (Spivak,1988).

Ultimately, it calls for a more equitable understanding of religion and migration, centering migrant voices and challenging the enduring legacies of colonialism in shaping global inequalities and identities (Chakrabarty, 2000).(Settler, F. (2018).

Christian missionaries in colonial projects argues that they were complicit in the cultural and spiritual domination of colonized peoples. Missionaries often served as agents of colonial powers, using religion as a tool to undermine and dismantle indigenous belief systems. Through forced or coerced conversion to Christianity, colonial authorities sought to erase local traditions and consolidate their control, framing indigenous religions as primitive or inferior. This process not only disrupted spiritual practices but also reinforced colonial power structures by imposing European religious and cultural norms on colonized societies. How missionary efforts were deeply intertwined with the broader goals of colonial domination, illustrating the ways in which religion was weaponized to subjugate and reshape colonized communities(Nye, 2019).

1.2.1 Tradition in Postcolonial Perspectives:

Colonial powers imposed foreign cultural norms, values, and social structures upon colonized societies, leading to the disruption, marginalization, or outright erasure of indigenous traditions (Nandy, 1983). In regions like India, Africa, and the Caribbean, colonial regimes often displaced local practices, mocked traditional ways of life, and created profound crises of identity. In India, British colonialism introduced the English language and Western education systems, while dismissing or restructuring Indian social structures, religions, and

cultural practices. Traditional forms of governance and local customs were suppressed in favor of British-style institutions and values (Hogan, 2000). In Africa, European colonial rule dismantled traditional tribal systems and imposed Western education and religious frameworks, often portraying African societies as "primitive" and their traditions as inferior to Western civilization. Similarly, in the Caribbean, colonialism led to the imposition of European traditions and Christianity on a diverse population of indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and indentured laborers from Asia (Césaire, 1950). Indigenous cultures were nearly eradicated, while African cultural practices were distorted and suppressed under colonial rule. These disruptions not only undermined local traditions but also created lasting challenges for postcolonial societies as they sought to reclaim and revitalize their cultural identities. Language plays a pivotal role in the crisis of tradition in postcolonial literatures, as colonial languages often create a divide between the colonized and their indigenous cultures (Bhabha, 1994). The English language, for example, symbolizes colonial domination but also serves as a tool for postcolonial writers to reclaim their identity and assert their voices. In India, writers like Parthasarathy (1976) and Seth (1993) use English to navigate the complexities of Indian cultural identity, blending it with Indian linguistic traditions to reclaim cultural agency. In Africa, writers such as Achebe (1958) chose to write in English to reach a global audience but adapted the language to reflect African sensibilities. In contrast, Ngũgĩ waThiong'o (1986) rejected English entirely, opting instead to write in his native Gikuyu as an act of political resistance against colonialism. In the Caribbean, language becomes a means of exploring identity, with authors like Lamming (1953) and Walcott (1990) blending Creole and English to reflect the region's complex cultural history, challenging colonial linguistic structures while asserting postcolonial identities. Additionally, postcolonial literature often centers on reclaiming, reinterpreting, and reviving indigenous traditions that colonialism suppressed or altered (Hogan, 2000). This reclamation is not about nostalgically returning to the past but

about reimagining cultural identity in a way that honors the past while adapting to the future. In India, writers like Das (1976) and Chughtai (1942/1990) challenge colonial impositions by offering alternative portrayals of Indian womanhood and sexuality, balancing traditional values with modernity. In Africa, Armah's (1968) "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" explores the struggles of postcolonial recovery as African nations attempt to rebuild their cultural and political systems. In the Caribbean, figures like Césaire (1950) and Fanon (1961) call for the reclaiming of cultural traditions as part of the decolonization process, urging the restoration of cultural pride and empowerment

1.2.2 Modernity in Postcolonial Thought

The article "Modernity and Postcolonial Ambivalence" examines the intricate and often contradictory relationship between modernity and postcolonial societies, focusing on how these societies grapple with the legacies of colonialism while engaging with global modernity (Enwezor, 2010). At its core, the article introduces the concept of "ambivalence," which captures the dual feelings of attraction to and resistance against modernity that postcolonial societies experience. Modernity, often imposed during colonialism through Western education, technology, and governance systems, disrupted indigenous traditions, leading to cultural dislocation and loss (Nandy, 1983). Postcolonial societies, however, exhibit a complex ambivalence toward modernity; they are drawn to its promises of progress and development, yet they resist its association with colonial domination and cultural erasure (Enwezor, 2010). This tension gives rise to hybrid identities, where traditional and modern elements coexist in dynamic and intricate ways (Bhabha, 1994)

"Tradition and Modernity in Postcolonial African Philosophy" explores the intricate relationship between traditional African thought and modern philosophical frameworks in the context of postcolonial Africa (Ciaffa, 2008). It argues that colonialism

disrupted and devalued indigenous African knowledge systems, imposing Western cultural and philosophical paradigms, which led to cultural alienation and dislocation (Wiredu, 1998). In response, it emphasizes the importance of reclaiming and revitalizing African philosophical traditions, which offer unique perspectives on ethics, community, and spirituality, while critiquing the dominance of Eurocentric philosophies in African intellectual spaces (Gyekye, 1997). Modernity is presented as a double-edged sword, offering opportunities for progress but also risking the erosion of traditional values and social structures (Appiah, 1992). The work advocates for a balanced approach that integrates the strengths of modernity with the enduring wisdom of African traditions, fostering cultural hybridity and innovative solutions to contemporary challenges (Ciaffa, 2008).

1.2.3 Western feminism

A review of the history of Western feminism traces the development of feminist thought and activism from its early beginnings to contemporary movements, highlighting key phases, arguments, and contributions. The first wave, spanning the 19th to early 20th century, focused on legal inequalities such as women's suffrage, property rights, and access to education, with figures like Susan B. Anthony and Emmeline Pankhurst leading the charge (Stanton, E. C. 1898). The second wave, from the 1960s to the 1980s, expanded the focus to issues like workplace equality, reproductive rights, and domestic violence, influenced by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan (Friedan, 1963). The third wave, emerging in the 1990s, emphasized diversity, intersectionality, and the deconstruction of gender norms, with contributions from scholars like bell hooks and Judith Butler (Butler, 1990). The fourth wave, beginning in the 2010s, addresses issues like sexual harassment, body positivity, and digital activism, leveraging social media for movements such as the MeToo movement (Mendes, Ringrose, Keller, J. 2019). Central themes in Western

feminism include the debate between seeking equality with men versus emphasizing women's unique experiences, the importance of intersectionality as introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and the ongoing struggle for reproductive rights and justice. Feminist theory also critiques patriarchal systems, examining how power operates in both public and private spheres. However, Western feminism has faced critiques for historically excluding marginalized voices, such as women of color, individuals, and working-class women, and for its Western-centric focus, which often neglects the struggles of women in non-Western contexts(Lorde, 1984). Despite these challenges, feminism has driven significant legal and social reforms, including voting rights, anti-discrimination laws, and greater representation of women in politics and the workplace. It has also spurred cultural shifts, challenging traditional gender roles and increasing awareness of gender-based violence(Fraser, N. 2013). In academia, feminist theory has influenced fields like sociology, literature, and philosophy, leading to the development of gender studies and critical theory. Contemporary feminism continues to evolve, with digital activism playing a key role in mobilizing support for issues like sexual harassment, while also advocating for transgender rights and fostering global solidarity with feminist movements in non-Western contexts(Garvía, & Matamoros, 2021)... In conclusion, the history of Western feminism reveals a dynamic and evolving movement that has made significant progress in challenging gender inequality, though it continues to grapple with issues of inclusivity and representation. By embracing intersectionality, global perspectives, and contemporary challenges, Western feminism remains a vital force in the ongoing struggle for gender justice and equality.(Aziz, M., & Sabri, S. N. 2023).

1.2.4 Islamic Feminism: Reinterpreting Faith and Gender

Islam does not allow the domination of men over women rather it upholds the rights, quality, honour and status of women by icing gender equivalency and also equivalency of

rights for both manly and womanish in every area of mortal life. In Islam a woman is fully tone-regulating who has legal personality and who issuitable to enter into contract or can make birthright in her own name. She has right to perform any profession or business and has authority to dispose her property as like as men. She is entitled for heritage in different capacity like as mama , as woman , as family and as son. She has full freedom to elect her hubby and also allowed to her dower and conservation. As the command of Islam to the men is to treat with compassion and full respect to their women are respectable and honourable in Islam(Mohammad, & Lehmann, 2011). Allah has created men and women as company for one another and so that they can propagate and live in peace and tranquility according to the commandments of almighty Allah and the directions of His Messenger. Allah says:

"And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts. really in these are signs for those who reflect. "(Surah Ar-Rum30:21)

Marriage is treated as the base of social life and the morning of the family life. It's mandatory(Wajib) for a man who has the means to fluently pay the dower(Mahr) and to bear the charges of a woman and children, and also physically fit, and dubieties that if does not marry, he may be allured to commit infidelity(Zina) and also obligatory for a woman who do not have any other legal way of maintaining herself and who doubts that her sexual appetite may move forward her into infidelity(Doi, 1992) . Also , In Islam, both men and women are required to acquire knowledge. In this sense, an unmarried woman is completely free to learn, and nothing can stop her from doing so. A married woman has the right to learn, but she must respect her husband's and kids' rights (Patoari, 2019)

1.3 Diaspora And Women Identities In Exile

1.3.1 Diaspora overview

The term diaspora finds its roots in the Greek language and is based on a translation of the Hebrew word, Galut. Based on speiro (to sow) and the preposition dia (over), in the Ancient Greece, the word referred to migration and colonisation. In Hebrew, “the term initially referred to the setting of colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands” (Shuval2003, p 42); In other words; Diaspora refers to a substantial assemblage of individuals who may possess a shared national or regional heritage yet, due to an array of factors, inhabit territories distinct from their ancestral homeland. These diasporic populations are often positioned as a minority within their newly adopted nations.

Throughout history, numerous migration movements have contributed to the formation and ongoing existence of diasporic populations. Many of these diasporas have been marked by trauma. The Jewish diaspora, for instance, encompasses centuries of migration driven by historical expulsion and discrimination. The African diaspora refers to the substantial numbers of Africans forcibly transported to the Americas through slavery. The Irish diaspora arose from famine and dire economic conditions, compelling many Irish individuals to migrate to North America and Europe. Additionally, the Armenian, Palestinian, and Syrian diasporas have developed as a result of conflict. However, not all diasporas stem from traumatic circumstances; for example, between the eighth and eleventh centuries, Vikings from Scandinavia disseminated their population and culture across the Northern Hemisphere, an event now recognized as a diaspora.

Populations living in diaspora frequently maintain strong cultural ties to their homeland and their community members. These links serve to emphasize their membership in

their ancestral ethnic or religious community. However, members of populations in diaspora also participate and create ties within the overarching cultural group they find themselves in. This can lead to a dual identity, where both cultural or religious contexts affect the way the individual perceives himself. And that is exactly what the people of a diaspora do — they scatter from their homeland to places across the globe, spreading their culture as they go. The Bible refers to the Diaspora of Jews exiled from Israel by the Babylonians. But the word is now also used more generally to describe any large migration of refugees, language, or culture.

Cohen defines diaspora as the dispersion of an ethnic or cultural group away from its original homeland, but he also highlights that a diaspora is characterized by the maintenance of some form of connection to the homeland, whether through memory, identity, or political and cultural ties. The notion of "diaspora" extends beyond simply displacement to encompass the complex relations between host societies and displaced populations (Cohen, 1997).

1.3.2 Exile and Identity

The experience of exile is often accompanied by feelings of discomfort, confusion, and pain for both individuals in a new country and the communities they leave behind. This concept inherently brings about suffering for migrants. In a socio-political context, identity is intricately tied to one's location and encompasses a sense of difference that individuals or groups adopt for their survival. Dominant groups may impose identities on marginalized populations to reinforce their power. Philip Gleason articulates that identity, particularly in the context of migration, pertains to the connection between “the individual personality and the collection of social and cultural characteristics that define various groups.” (2006,194) . This framework is useful for examining how individuals engage with the host society, navigate survival, and perceive their place within a broader community. In a multiracial environment,

the complexities of identity can leave exiles feeling unmoored and alienated. The tension between a migrant's desire for belonging and their rejection by the host society serves as a lens through which to understand the relationship between exile and identity.

Exile and identity are deeply interconnected, with the former playing a crucial role in shaping the latter. The complexities of an exiled individual's identity are effectively articulated by Lorenzo Ferrante (2014,44), who posits that migration leads to a disorientation for the exile. The cultural expectations of the host society alter his sense of self, compelling him to adapt in ways that distance him from his original identity. Torn between the urge to conform to the host community's perceptions and the desire to remain true to his roots, the exile's journey often becomes a source of trauma. Building on Ferrante's insights, Hussain Hamzah (2016,257) emphasizes that the concept of home instills a sense of memory within the exile. Nevertheless, the necessity to assimilate into a new environment prompts the construction of a new identity, which can lead to feelings of instability and emotional distress as he moves away from his original self(Olubunmi,2022).

1.3.3 Women in exile

The identities of women in exile are complex and influenced by the interplay of gender, culture, and displacement. Exile frequently alters conventional gender roles, forcing women to adapt to new environments where they must redefine their identities in the context of unfamiliar social norms. This journey transcends mere survival; it embodies resistance and the quest for self-definition. A notable example is Afghan women in exile, who have vigorously opposed systemic oppression through initiatives such as the Bishnaw project, which seeks to have gender apartheid acknowledged as a crime against humanity.

The experience of exile often results in a deep sense of internal dislocation, as illustrated by the Cuban poet Dulce María Loynaz. Following the Cuban Revolution, Loynaz

encountered marginalization stemming from her perceived political ties, prompting her to choose self-imposed exile. During this time, she halted her writing and publishing activities, indicating a withdrawal into her own inner world. Her poetry, marked by introspective themes and fundamental imagery, served as a vehicle for articulating her personal dislocation and the intricate facets of her identity while in exile.

Literary creations also shed light on the intricate experiences of women in exile. In Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, the main character confronts cultural norms and her own identity while living in the diaspora. The story examines how exile disrupts traditional ideas of belonging, leading to a reassessment of cultural traditions and self-identity. Likewise, Palestinian-American author Layla Halaby's *West of Jordan* explores the relationship between gender and exile, depicting how Palestinian women maneuver through the challenges of identity within the diaspora.

The recognition of women in exile, both legally and socially, has progressed significantly over the years. Traditionally, the concept of exile was largely interpreted from a male perspective. However, starting in the early nineteenth century, women began to be recognized as essential participants in exile stories. Key milestones, such as the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1985 UNHCR conference focused on refugee women, represented crucial advancements in acknowledging the distinct experiences and requirements of women in exile. This transformation highlights the necessity of viewing exile not merely as a political or geographical phenomenon, but also as a gendered experience that deeply influences women's identities. The identities of women in exile are complex and diverse, shaped by a variety of cultural, social, and political elements. Literature, activism, and legal systems play a crucial role in examining and comprehending the experiences of these women, emphasizing their resilience and autonomy as they navigate the challenges of displacement.

1.4 Postcolonial narratives

Postcolonial narratives encompass literary, cultural, and intellectual expressions that capture the experiences, challenges, and changes faced by societies affected by colonialism. Emerging in the wake of colonial rule, these narratives frequently delve into themes of identity, resistance, memory, and the enduring impacts of colonization. A primary focus is often placed on the experiences of colonized individuals as they navigate the psychological, cultural, and political ramifications of external control. The narratives can be personal, collective, or historical, all aiming to analyze and critique the repercussions of colonization. They confront colonial ideologies by presenting alternative perspectives that resist the cultural, social, and political frameworks established by colonial authorities. Additionally, these narratives highlight the intricate nature of identity formation, as colonized individuals often find themselves negotiating between their native traditions and the influences of foreign cultures, languages, and values.

Beyond examining themes such as cultural hybridity, displacement, and resistance, postcolonial narratives also critique the lingering impacts of colonialism in the post-independence period. These works frequently tackle issues like neocolonialism, economic exploitation, and the ongoing presence of colonial frameworks in altered forms. The protagonists often engage in battles for self-determination, while the narratives themselves reflect a wider intellectual discourse on decolonization, aiming to reclaim indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultural traditions from colonial dominance. Language emerges as a crucial symbol in postcolonial literature, with many authors utilizing the language of the colonizers to reinterpret and transform it into a medium for expressing their own voices and identities. Through these stories, postcolonial writers address the dual challenges of colonial oppression and the intricate process of forging new national and cultural identities within a context shaped by colonial legacies.

Things fall apart by Chinua Achebe, published in 1958, stands as one of the most renowned works in postcolonial literature. The title draws inspiration from a line in W. B. Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," written in 1920. Achebe's narrative follows a man from the Igbo community in Africa, structured in three parts that explore his character, familial heritage, values, tribal customs, and his response to the growing influence of Christian missionaries and colonizers, whom he views as a threat to the integrity and traditions of Igbo culture.

Salman Rushdie's novel, *Midnight's Children*, stands out as one of the most celebrated works in English literature. It received the Booker Prize in 1981 and was later honored with the 'Booker of the Bookers' in 1993, recognizing it as the finest among all previous winners. The narrative explores the events surrounding India's independence from British colonial rule and the subsequent partition of the country. Through the eyes of the protagonist, Saleem Sinai, the story unfolds as an allegorical account of the children born at the stroke of midnight on August 15, 1947, the moment India achieved independence. Rushdie employs magic realism throughout the novel, a technique frequently found in postcolonial literature.

1. Homi Bhabha's Work on Cultural Hybridity and the In-BetweenSpace

Homi Bhabha, a postcolonial academic, offers a novel viewpoint on how cultures interact and change one another in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994). His idea of hybridity exposes the intricate, reciprocal interactions that take place when several societies clashed, going beyond direct notions of cultural dominance. "The Third Space", a flexible, transitional area where new cultural meanings arise, is central to his idea (Bhabha 1994). Cultural interactions are frequently portrayed in traditional perspectives of colonialism as

one-sided, with prevailing powers forcing their customs on oppressed peoples(Said, 1978). But according to Bhabha, these relationships are much more dynamic. His idea of hybridity demonstrates how as opposed to passively absorbing foreign ideas, colonial communities actively reinterpret and change them. New cultural expressions are produced by this process that defy easy classification as "native" or "foreign". Mixed languages that combine aspects of several linguistic traditions, such as Caribbean creoles or Spanglish, are examples of this. Similar to this, fusion fashion, music, and cuisines show how cultural borrowing results in creative forms as opposed to just copying (Hall, 1990).

" The Third Space", a conceptual space where cultural borders are blurred and new identities emerge, is a major theme in Bhabha's work. This is a symbolic area of interchange and reimagining rather than a real location. It allows for the formation of hybrid forms that subvert established hierarchies by dissolving rigid conceptions of culture.(Bhabha,1994) for example, colonized peoples frequently provide their own interpretations to elements of the colonizer's culture, such language or clothing. Bhabha refers to this implicit form of resistance as "mimicry," in which imitation is accompanied by a critique. In order to express their agency, marginalized people modify and reinterpret symbols of dominant culture (Spivak,1988). Bhabha highlights how colonial relationships are characterized by ambivalence, the combination of resistance and attraction that characterizes interactions between colonizers and colonized. This ambivalence shows that authority is continually negotiated rather than absolute. The colonized discover ways to reinterpret and resist imposed cultural standards, even in situations when power dynamics are unequal. This is aptly illustrated in postcolonial literature. Authors such as Jamaica Kincaid and Arundhati Roy create works that transcend cultural boundaries by fusing Western literary traditions with regional storytelling customs. These stories show the creative possibilities of cultural

hybridity by creatively reworking colonial influences rather than merely rejecting or embracing them.(Rushdie, 1991) .

Bhabha's theories have changed postcolonial studies by emphasizing agency and change rather than oppression. Earlier theorists such as Edward Said studied how colonial powers framed the "Orient" as the "other", but Bhabha emphasizes how the colonized actively change who they are via interaction. Additionally, his work challenges rigid ideas of identity by demonstrating how culture is constantly changing as a result of interaction. This viewpoint is particularly pertinent today since migration and globalization are fostering communities that are becoming more interconnected and where cultural borders are always changing. (Appadurai, 1996)

Conclusions

Finally, this chapter has established a comprehensive theoretical framework in which postcolonial theory is crucial to understanding colonialism's complicated legacies in relation to faith, tradition, modernity, and gender. It emphasizes how colonialism not only imposed economic and political dominance, but also severely destroyed cultural and religious systems, demanding continual attempts at decolonization and cultural reclamation. It emphasizes religion's dual position as an instrument of colonial control as well as a place of resistance and identity creation, particularly in relation to migration. The examination of tradition illustrates how indigenous cultures were marginalized but survived dynamically through postcolonial reclamation and hybridization. The ambivalence toward modernity represents the dichotomy between accepting development and rejecting cultural erasure, which fosters new hybrid identities. Feminist viewpoints extend this paradigm by highlighting the intersections of gender, culture, and colonial history, underlining the importance of

inclusive and context-sensitive approaches. This theoretical framework enables the dissertation to critically examine the ongoing negotiations of identity, power, and cultural continuity in postcolonial situations.

Chapter 02: Historical and Literary

Context

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Introduction

Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* is set against Sudan's chaotic political backdrop in the late twentieth century which was marked by coups, civil wars, and societal upheaval, all of which significantly altered the lives of its population. The novel follows Najwa, an affluent Sudanese woman whose life is upended by the 1989 military coup and subsequent exile in London. This displacement compels her to confront the issues of cultural alienation, identity crisis, and Islamophobia in a post-September 11 Britain. Aboulela, a Sudanese expatriate with a strong Muslim religion, uses Najwa's story to explore themes of migration, faith, and the need for belonging. *Minaret* challenges Western perceptions of Muslim women while also emphasizing religion's transforming capacity as a source of resilience and identity reconstruction in the diaspora.

2.1 Political situation in Sudan 1989

Sudan comprises 18 states that are inhabited by approximately 580 ethnic groups, each speaking a variety of languages and dialects. Historically, the area now known as Sudan, derived from the Arabic term "Bilad as-sudan" meaning 'land of the blacks', has been associated with Egypt, its northern neighbor. Additionally, it holds a distinct identity as the eastern terminus of a major trade route that traverses the open savannah south of the Sahara. The region has experienced ongoing conflicts among ruling factions, each representing different civilizations, which has fostered a rich cultural diversity evident in the customs and practices of its people today. Islam was introduced to Sudan from Egypt in 652, leading to a significant increase in followers, particularly in the northern regions. Many Sudanese have played a vital role in the advancement and spread of knowledge rooted in the teachings of the Holy Quran.

Sudan has long been known to be a country of coups, with its history subjected to a staggering 35 coups, attempted coups and coup plots since its independence in 1956 – more than any other country in Africa. The most significant event to date appears to be the military coup of 1989. Three years earlier, in 1986, Sadiq Al-Mahdi was elected as Sudan's Prime Minister following a military coup the previous year, and he endeavored to establish a civilian government that was praised for its commitment to enhancing human rights and broadening civil and political freedom. As the second civil war in Sudan continued, army officers presented Al-Mahdi with an ultimatum in February 1989, compelling him to either resolve the conflict or transfer power to the military, a choice he opted to address the situation himself. His inability to end the war, both politically and militarily, coupled with the deteriorating Sudanese economy, heightened tensions with the military. Consequently, on June 18, he ordered the arrest of numerous military and civilian officials whom his government accused of conspiring to overthrow him. However, the actual coup occurred nearly two weeks later, on June 30, when the army executed a pre-dawn operation to detain various civilian and military leaders, including Prime Minister Al-Mahdi. Omar Al-Bashir, who orchestrated the coup, subsequently declared on Omdurman radio that a new Revolutionary Council would take charge, asserting that the coup was necessary to rescue the nation from ineffective political parties. (Hussein,2003)

Over the course of thirty years under Bashir's rule, which began with the 1989 coup and concluded with his ousting by another military coup in 2019, his legacy is seen as having significantly shaped the current situation in Sudan. Many view the 1989 coup as a crucial turning point that has led to the ongoing crises facing Sudan, keeping the country far from the civilian and democratic governance that its citizens have long desired. (Hussein,2003)

2.2 Muslim British community after 11-09 attacks

Following the events of September 11, the British government implemented new policies and enacted legislation aimed at addressing the threat of terrorism. These measures inadvertently led to increased discrimination against the Muslim minority in Britain. The antiterrorism strategy, coupled with a political and media narrative that often implicates Muslims in terrorist activities, has resulted in the portrayal of Muslims as a 'suspect community.' Consequently, there has been a significant rise in Islamophobic incidents, hate crimes, and discrimination directed at Muslims. This process of labeling British Muslims as suspects has not only transformed their daily lives but has also had a profound impact on their sense of identity. (Guessar, 2023)

Islamophobia, characterized by a fear or aversion to Islam and, consequently, to many Muslims, manifested in various forms. Muslims globally faced hostility, and those in Britain were not spared. Both adults and children from the Muslim community experienced physical and verbal assaults. Incidents included being punched, spat upon, struck with umbrellas at bus stops, publicly splashed with alcohol, and pelted with fruits and vegetables. A woman in Swindon required hospitalization after being attacked with a metal baseball bat; two students from Cambridge University had their headscarves forcibly removed in broad daylight near a police station. Saba Zaman, who had her scarf yanked off and suffered two broken ribs in Tooting, London, was subjected to police stops and searches three times within two weeks following the terrorist attacks in the United States. Muslims received death threats, and reports indicated a 72 percent increase in 'race-hate' crimes in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in September 2001 compared to the previous year, with 17 out of 100 reported crimes directly linked to the events of September 11. The Islamic Human Rights Commission

(IHRC) documented a total of 206 incidents in the month following the attacks in the USA, which included serious violent crimes (43%), verbal and written abuse (36%), psychological harassment (8%), discrimination (4%), and other miscellaneous incidents (9%).(Ansari,2002).

In response to rising anti-Muslim sentiments, discrimination, and Islamophobia, British Muslims have actively reaffirmed their identity as a form of resistance. They have shown a stronger connection to the religious aspects of their identity, choosing to embrace their identification with Islam rather than conceal it. This has been evident through various demonstrations. Following an increase in hate crimes and Islamophobia, British Muslims cultivated a reactive identity, enhancing their understanding of Islam, fostering closer relationships within the Muslim community, and striving to educate the public about Islam in the wake of the 9/11 events (Nagra, 2011). One participant in Nagra's research observed that after 9/11, Muslims appeared to become more religious, adopting traditional attire, contrary to expectations that they would downplay their faith to avoid discrimination (Negra,2011).

The mainstream society's focus on Islam led British Muslim women to assert their identity by donning the Islamic dress (Hijab or headscarf), which symbolizes a profound commitment to Islam and serves as a visible expression of their Muslim identity. Following 9/11, there was a notable increase in British Muslim women choosing to wear the Islamic dress, as young women and girls embraced it as a means of self-assertion and to reinforce their sense of belonging. (Guessar, 2023).

2.3 Muslim Womanhood and Global Literary Position

The personality and experiences of a Devout Muslim woman are fictionalized in Minaret. One enters a religious realm through Minaret that differs from the one depicted by Western authors. Based on two key points, the reader can distinguish between the stories

written by Muslim women authors and the prevalent Western narrative of Muslim women. First, Minaret's pretext challenges the stereotype of a Muslim woman who is oppressed and victimized. Second, Muslim women are portrayed in this book as devout Muslims who are emotionally and morally tied to Islam rather than as victims or refugees (Ameri 88).

Western culture portrays veiled Muslim women as miserable and incomprehensible to women in the West. This pain won't leave her life until she has revealed herself and fled to the West. In Aboulela' Minaret, this concept is completely altered. The main character, Najwa, feels more at ease with her new life when she is veiled and ultimately accepts her fate when she refuses to live the Western way of life. The fact that everything in Islam is negative is another crucial point to make. This concept is also overlooked in Minaret since Najwa realizes that everything about Islam is positive after she truly comprehends what it means.

The core of Aboulela's creative effort and worldwide relevance is her status as a Muslim woman writer. In the wake of 9/11, when Islamophobia was at its worst and Muslim communities around the world were being targeted, she became a distinctive voice (STIAS, 2023). Her delicate and nuanced examination of Muslim women's lives—particularly those who seek independence and spiritual fulfillment in Western societies that frequently misunderstand or exclude them—is the foundation of her novels, short tales, and radio plays (STIAS, 2023).

By portraying Muslim women as complex persons overcoming both spiritual and material obstacles, her art challenges stereotypes of them. The main characters in Aboulela are active agents navigating their identities in the face of religious and cultural forces rather than passive victims. For instance, the protagonist's journey in *The Translator* is as much about adjusting to a new nation as it is about spiritual development and "finding home in Islam"

(Omet, M. S. M., & Moore, L. 2022). Thus, Aboulela's novel provides a counternarrative to prevalent Western narratives that frequently depict Muslim women as voiceless or repressed.

Additionally, Leila is situated within the larger framework of modern African and postcolonial literature due to her involvement with Sudanese history, themes of spirituality, empowerment, and grief, as well as her nuanced depiction of migration and disability (STIAS, 2023). She is renowned for her capacity to depict the multiplicity of Muslim identity, dispelling myths and adding historically underrepresented voices to the literary canon (Omet, M. S. M., & Moore, L.2022).

Aboulela, a Muslim woman writer who opposes patriarchal and Western misrepresentations, holds a unique position in world literature. Her writing is part of a larger movement known as Muslim feminist writing, which aims to reclaim narrative power from orthodox and colonial discourses while expressing the variety of Muslim women's experiences (Moore, L. 2014). The inner lives of Muslim women are highlighted in Aboulela's works, such as *The Translator* and *Minaret*, which place a strong emphasis on spirituality, fortitude, and agency.

Her method stands out for its nuance and avoidance of sensationalism. Aboulela portrays Muslim women as regular people whose faith and cultural heritage are essential to who they are, rather than as either victims or rebels. (N. H. Alqahtani (2017). By pushing readers to go past preconceptions and consider the daily reality of Muslim women in a globalized society, this nuanced portrayal helps create a more moral and inclusive literary canon.(Moore 2014).

2.4 Sudanese-British Identity and Its Literary Influence

Aboulela's early years in Sudan and her subsequent move to the UK after earning her degree from the University of Khartoum have had a significant influence on her narrative style and subject interests. Not only is her dual identity biographical, but it also frequently appears in her literature, where characters frequently struggle with the difficulties of migration, cultural displacement, and the pursuit of belonging. She clarified in an interview that writing in English was not a conscious decision but rather an "imposition" of her schooling and upbringing, which was further supported by her time spent in England. Leila said : "English is more comfortable for me than Arabic, which I regrettably couldn't speak as needed, she wrote. This choice has been reinforced by my residence in England, where I wanted to discuss in my native tongue the concerns of a Moslem-Arab woman living among them" (Chambers,2011,p13). Her aim to overcome cultural barriers and convey the subtleties of Muslim-Arab women to a Western audience is highlighted by this language positioning.

Aboulela regularly examines the social and psychological intricacies of migration in her literature. The Sudanese female protagonist in *ABERDEEN* is portrayed in stories such as "The Museum" as being caught between the desire to blend in and the enduring sense of strangeness and alienation in the host nation (Nasser, S. A. 2021). Aboulela's personal experiences as well as the more general difficulties faced by migrants who bring their memories, convictions, and customs into unfamiliar and frequently hostile settings are reflected in this tension. Her work challenges ideas like identification, acculturation, and integration, emphasizing the detrimental effects that Western stereotypes and animosity toward African and Muslim identities can have on the mental health of migrants. (S. A. Nasser, 2021),

The everyday struggles of Muslim migrants, especially women, who have to balance their cultural and religious identities with the expectations and biases of Western society, are also highlighted in her work. Aboulela questions prevailing narratives and gives

readers a close-up view of the difficulties of migration and adaption by emphasizing Sudanese and Muslim views (Alqahtani 2017). Characters in her books, such *Lyrics Alley* and *The Translator*, frequently have to navigate the differences between Sudanese and British culture. The "hybrid identity" that results from the fusion of several national, religious, and cultural affinities is embodied by these traits (Academia 2017). By contrasting the customs and ideals of her native nation with those of her adoptive one, Aboulela's literary method creates a narrative space that examines intercultural conflict and coexistence. She creates what academics refer to as "transformative transcultural spaces of belonging" in this way, enabling the coexistence of several identities and the potential for "home" even in the face of relocation. (2017, Academic.edu).

2.5 Minaret's Background

Leila Aboulela wrote the novel *Minaret* in 2005. The narrative is about a Sudanese woman, Najawa , who is forced to relocate to Britain following two coups in Sudan. In Khartoum, she enjoys a privileged life with servants all around her, but following her father's execution, mother's death, and brother's imprisonment, her life has changed from wealthy girl to housekeeper in upper-class families' homes. She falls in love with a man named Anwar at the University of Khartoum who constantly humiliates her father, and when she travels to Britain, she meets him and becomes his girlfriend. She gives him everything he desires, yet he will not marry her. When she realizes that their relationship cannot survive forever, she resolves to leave him. This split makes her more attracted to the lifestyle of a pious woman, and she begins to wear a scarf.

One day, she starts a new job as a maid in the home of an Egyptian lady named Lamya, where she meets Tamer, her junior, the son of Doctora Zeinab, and Lamya's brother. Najwa meets the man who attracts her. Tamer, a devoted twenty-year-old man, falls in love

with her. When Lamya learns of their relationship, she kicks Najwa out of the house. Doctora Zeinab, seeing that her son is closely bonded to Najwa, approaches her and offers her money as a reward for remaining away from him. Najwa decides to leave Tamer and take the money so she can perform Hajj in Mecca.

Najwa, in a nutshell, represents the type of Muslim, male or female, who discovers his or her identity via religion after a long struggle in a non-linear path of a different life, in a different place, and with different people and ideas. Finding the Muslim migrant identity is the same as finding God. This theory is also incorporated into Nesrin Koç's research. She asserts: "Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* portrays how faith can be used as a power that eases the trauma of migration, and in fact provides the individual with the sense of belonging and rootedness in the host country, and hence facilitating integration" (Koç, 2014 ,p27). Religion is the primary focus of the majority of interviews with Leila Aboulela concerning *Minaret*. Because of her raising conditions, like any Arab Muslim experiencing migration symptoms, Aboulela discovers in distracted religious bonds and homesickness a difficult subject that can only be addressed via literature. She believes she discovered writing when she was looking for a way to communicate her homesickness and unique heritage. In fact, this functions as a form of psychological treatment and relief.

In the above cited book on migration and literature, Frank states that he thinks the author colors his or her work to some degree. (Frank, 2013). This statement accurately describes the case of study's author, Leila Aboulela. This Sudanese author is a Muslim migrant who has encountered numerous occurrences in her life that take place between the lines of the minaret. Leila and Najwa were raised in quite different environments. Leila's Muslim family supports and pushes her to learn more about her religion. Her mother and grandma instill in her the desire to live a happy life according to Islam. Unlike Leila, Najwa's family gives her everything but an instinctive religious understanding. Despite this, they have

many things in common. While answering a question from the BBC World Club audience, the writer admits that her works are inextricably linked to her real life because they share so many similarities. Minaret describes her twenties as a period of movement and displacement from Sudan to Britain, as does Najwa (Andrea Kidd). Throughout the work, the author provides both Najwa and Omar with equal access to a set of free choices, as well as numerous more alternatives.

Attractively, the same backdrop for Najwa and Omar finishes in quite different ways. "The book shows that she does change, she does move and that instead of self-destruction or something, she does actually survive this trauma" (Hamrit Fatma Zahra, B. I., &Rebahi, K. 2023). Her life is not the same as her twin's, who ends up in prison on drug charges.

Conclusion

Minaret is a moving examination of the relation of political turbulence, migration, and faith, demonstrating how Najwa's spiritual awakening serves as a means of regaining agency and identity in the face of dislocation. Leila Aboulela's personal experiences as a Sudanese Muslim migrant contribute to the novel's accurate representation of the complications experienced by Muslim women in the West, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11. By emphasizing Najwa's changing connection with Islam, Aboulela challenges simplistic Western narratives and validates faith's significance as a source of empowerment, community, and continuity. Finally, Minaret demonstrates the endurance of diasporic identities and the continuing yearning for belonging in a shattered world.

**Chapter 03: Najwa's Journey:
Exploring Faith, Identity And Cultural
Hybridity In Leila AbouLela's *Minaret***

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Introduction

The novel “*Minaret*” by Leila Aboulela is an example of postcolonial literature. It discusses the themes of identity, space, and religion, particularly how the protagonist, Najwa, navigates her fragmented identity after migrating from Khartoum to London. The novel illustrates the effects of cultural trauma and the seeking for belonging in a new place, emphasizing the role of religion and personal space in the process of healing and self-discovery.

The character of Najwa provides through which to examine the intricacies of gender, faith, and cultural identity in the backdrop of migration and change in *Minaret*. The conflict between tradition and modernity, gender norms, and religious commitment all influence Najwa's trip as she makes her way from her affluent life in Sudan to her new reality in London. Aboulela paints a complex picture of a woman remaking herself in the face of turmoil via Najwa's changing connection with Islam, her defiance of stereotypes, and her balancing of Sudanese and Western influences. In order to shed light on the novel's larger themes of self-discovery and resiliency, this chapter explores how Najwa's faith becomes fundamental to who she is, how she defies and is influenced by gender norms, how she resolves conflicting cultural influences, and how her religious and cultural identities are inextricably linked.

3.1 Faith and Identity

Minaret by Leila Aboulela provides a moving examination of how faith molds, rebuilds, and ultimately strengthens Najwa's identity as she deals with trauma, cultural alienation, and displacement. The path of Najwa highlights the ability of faith to rebuild identity and its transformational power in the face of hardship.

3.1.1 Faith as a Response to Identity Crisis and Trauma

Najwa's early identity is heavily influenced by her Sudanese origin, wealthy upbringing, and secular lifestyle (El Mouti, 2019). The political upheaval in Sudan and her subsequent forced flight to London cause "identity crisis," leaving her fractured and torn between Western secularism and Islamic heritage (Lahrech& Serir, 2019). When confronted with discrimination and alienation in London, spirituality becomes a critical tool for coping with trauma and repairing her fragmented sense of self. Her spiritual journey is marked by ambivalence and difficulty, but it ultimately leads her to embrace Islam more profoundly, even in a Western society that is often antagonistic to her views.

Najwa's introspection reveals both her sense of loss and the harsh realities of her new life:

" I've come down in the world. I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room for me to move... Routine is ruffled and a new start makes me suddenly conscious of what I've become standing in a street covered with autumn leaves " (Aboulela 2005, p. 1).

This passage effectively conveys Najwa's sense of loss and transformation. Najwa was formerly privileged and secure in Sudan, but now lives a life of constraint and humility in London. The phrase "ceiling is low" alludes to her precarious situation and restricted social opportunities. Her acceptance of her "sentence" reflects a sense of resignation, but it also hints at the discipline and patience she gains through her rediscovered faith. The moments when "routine is ruffled" show how her former and present identities are still in conflict, and how her journey is more than just acceptance; it is also a constant negotiation between memory and

adaptation. This struggle is crucial to Najwa's reconstruction of identity via faith. She learns to find dignity and meaning in her new existence.

3.1.2 Faith is a source of empowerment and agency

Najwa is portrayed as an affluent, secular woman whose life is rocked by political instability in Sudan, forcing her to relocate to London. This marginalization leads to a stronger engagement with her faith, which serves as a means of reclaiming agency in a world that wants to silence her (Aboulela, 2005). Her embrace of Islamic traditions, such as prayer and veiling, is portrayed as a matter of personal choice and resistance, not capitulation. Najwa's choice to wear the headscarf, for example, is defined as "a gesture of defiance, my rejection of the secular world that had failed me" (Aboulela, 2005, p. 49) .

Aboulela's story defies popular assumptions about Muslim women being repressed by religion. Through Najwa's journey, the novel depicts how faith, specifically Islamic rituals, may be used to empower oneself and overcome patriarchal oppression. This is consistent with the ideals of Islamic feminism, which promotes women's agency and equality within Islam (Badran, 2009; Wadud, 1999). Najwa's reinterpretation of religious texts, as well as her participation in a supportive network of Muslim women, exemplify the feminist practice of reclaiming faith as a source of freedom.

Rather than a passive retreat, Najwa's conversion to Islam helps her to reclaim agency in a culture that wants to silence and marginalize her, especially as a Muslim woman (Javed and Rani, 2019). Najwa opposes patriarchal standards by reinterpreting religious activities as prayer and veiling through a personal and feminist lens, empowering her faith. This method is consistent with Islamic feminism, which promotes women's agency and

egalitarian values within Islam (Badran, 2009). Her faith transitions from a cultural legacy to a consciously chosen path.

Critical analysis emphasizes that Najwa, by choosing to wear the veil (Hijab) in a society that demonizes it and considers it retrograde, has found a way out and become her own. This observation from critical analysis emphasizes Najwa's agency in wearing the hijab against Western prejudice. The act of veiling becomes one of self-definition and resistance, rather than capitulation. It shows how faith helps Najwa restore her identity and individuality, resulting in a "third space" that is both Islamic and modern.

3.1.3 Faith and the Construction of a Hybrid Identity

Najwa's time in London inspires her to create a "hybrid identity," combining aspects of her Sudanese heritage with her new life in Britain. Although she is unable to fully reconcile her ethnic, national, and religious identities, she learns to perceive both cultures objectively, adopting a "neutral cultural position" (El Mouti, 2019). Being Muslim eventually becomes Najwa's basic identity, crossing national and socioeconomic boundaries: "I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I've changed. And now, like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim"(Aboulela 2005, p.110).

The novel uses postcolonial philosophy, namely Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, to show how Najwa and other Muslim women create a "third space." This hybrid identity is neither entirely Western nor historically Islamic, but rather a distinct synthesis that allows Najwa to meaningfully practice her faith in a modern, Western society (Canpolat, 2014). As Canpolat points out, British Muslim women's tales, including *Minaret*, demonstrate how hybridity is not a universal paradigm, but is frequently modified through gendered and religious lenses to fit opposing epistemes and cultural norms.

3.1.4 Faith as Community and Belonging

Najwa's experience in Minaret is marked by a deep identity crisis as she negotiates the conflict between Living in London, Najwa feels alienated and confused about her identity, unable to reconcile her Sudanese Muslim heritage with her new surroundings (Canpolat, 2014). This internal conflict echoes larger postcolonial quandaries, in which the combination of religion, gender, and migration complicates the process of cultural self-fashioning for Muslim women in the diaspora (Canpolat, 2014).

Najwa's path is also influenced by her interactions with other Muslim women at the mosque in London, which develop a sense of community and solidarity. These partnerships reflect the diversity of Muslim women's experiences and the dynamic, growing nature of Islamic tradition in the diaspora (Canpolat, 2014). Through faith, Najwa connects with and supports other Muslim women in London. She observes and then adds that those who attend the local mosque are many nations in the weekly Qur'an classes (Aboulela, 2005). The mosque becomes a place where she can develop meaningful relationships, learn from others, and experience Islam as a vibrant, diverse heritage. These relationships strengthen her sense of belonging and allow her to see her faith as adaptable and inclusive. rather than fixed or exclusionary.

3.1.5 Faith as Stability and Continuity

In the face of turbulence and loss, faith is the one piece of Najwa's identity that she can take with her wherever she goes. It gives her stability, a feeling of purpose, and a framework for comprehending her experiences (El Mouti, 2019). The importance of this portability is demonstrated by her statement:

The religious programmes make me feel solid as if they are telling me" Don't worry. Allah is looking after you, He will never leave you, He knows you love

Him, He knows you are trying and all of this, all of this will be meaningful and worth it in the end. (Aboulela2005, p.99)

This illustrates how faith serves as her anchor in the midst of displacement. It is not location-bound, but internal and durable, providing Najwa continuity as she navigates new and frequently unpleasant surroundings. The idea that there will be ease even during difficulty is emphasized by a powerful image, as Najwa proclaims "The Mercy of Allah is an Ocean, Our sins are a lump of clay clenched between the beak of a pigeon.... It only has to open its beak" (Aboulela2005, p10.).

3.2 Gender and stereotypes :

3.2.1 Hijab

For decades, the veil has spurred disputes in both Western and Non-Western discourses. It is undeniably the most divisive issue in human history. The veil has various meanings and connotations, the most prevalent of which is that it is seen as a symbol of women's oppression in Islam ,Indeed, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the veil has been associated with a number of negative meanings. As a result, the veil has become a popular topic not only in politics and media, but also in literature. The author of the novel *Minaret* explores the topic of veiling in postcolonial Sudan and London following the 9/11 attacks. She does not only challenge the negative connotations attached to the veil but she also offers new positive meanings to it

In one of the interviews, Leila Aboulela said that she amplified it significantly in *Minaret*. She made it quite dramatic: Najwa was highly secular before becoming very religious, but my own life was more in the middle. But, sure, she started wearing the hijab when she moved to Britain; she did not wear it in Sudan. My liberal Sudanese classmates would have been horrified if she wore a hijab; they would have talked me out of it in hours.

Similar to Najwa in the novel, she used to admire the hijab-wearing girls at university, but it wasn't until she moved to Britain that she felt free, unencumbered by friends or family, and allowed to do as she pleased. Ironically, no one even knew what the hijab meant when she first arrived and began wearing it in 1987; in London, it simply had no meaning at all, so it was a great time to start covering my head without any consequences. (Chambers p 15)

3.2.2 Najwa's Veiling Experience in Leila Aboulela's Minaret

In *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela tackles the negative meanings and connotations connected with the veil by presenting a positive hijab experience similar to her own, through the character of Najwa, who transitions from a faithless westernized teenager in Sudan to a pious veiled lady in London. In the diaspora, Najwa rediscovers the beauty of her faith through frequent trips to the Regent Park mosque, where she interacts with devoted Muslim women from various origins. As her attachment to Islam grows, Najwa decides to wear the veil. It is a careful and thoughtful decision reached after a protracted period of uncertainty, indecision, and reluctance.

Najwa's fear of veiling has persisted for a long time. According to researcher Agnieszka Stanecka, Najwa's unwillingness to wear hijab stems from fear. She was not only terrified of being rejected by British culture, which is hostile to veiled Muslim women, but she was also afraid of her new self-image. Najwa is concerned that wearing a headscarf will make her appear unattractive (Agnieszka Stanecka 2018). Similarly, Leila Aboulela admits that she delayed for so long before wearing the veil because she was terrified of looking hideous:

I tied my hair back with an elastic band, patted the curls down with pins. I wrapped the robe around me and covered my hair. In the full-length mirror I was another version of myself, regal like my mother, almost mysterious.

Perhaps this was attractive in itself, the skill of concealing rather than emphasizing, to restrain rather than to offer.(Aboulela, 2005, p223).

After numerous attempts, Najwa is eventually able to overcome her concerns and accept her new image in the mirror; she is no longer the girl wearing the most showing stylish clothes. Instead, she becomes the girl with the modest large clothes and a headscarf around her hair as she said in the novel wearing the veil in public for the first time, Najwa is joyful, proud, and completely delighted with her new look:

" When I went home, I walked smiling, self-conscious of the new material around my face. I passed the window of a shop, winced at my reflection, but then thought `not bad, not so bad'. Around me was a new gentleness" (Leila Aboulela,2005,233).

In the same vein, Seda Canpolat writes Najwa finds her Islamic garb lovely precisely because it expresses her Muslim identity, and she refuses to let white beauty ideals trump what she believes would suit a faithful Muslima. Indeed, the veiled Najwa begins to see beauty from an Islamic standpoint, which is centered on modesty rather than elegance. Through Najwa's good veiling experience, Aboulela demonstrates that the veil is a means for freedom and empowerment, as it offers Muslim women power and agency that orientalist and Westerners have denied.

3.2.3 Quran

As a devoted Muslim, Najwa's connection to the Quran is vital to her identity. Throughout the story, the holy Quran provides a sense of belonging, guidance, and purpose for the protagonist. When Najwa visits Regent's Park Mosque, a significant place in London, she intends to redeem her misdeeds. The Call to Prayer (Azan), its lovely echoes, and the hallowed prayer carpets used for daily prayers serve as reminders to Najwa of her religious commitments to connect with her Muslim identity and faith. The Quran, as Islam's textual

reference, is critical in the context of postcolonialism since it defines Muslim identity. One of the key relationships in *Minaret* is the Quran/Najwa relationship. The latter is complex and extraordinary.

The Quran and its accompanying religious and cultural traditions, such as Tajweed and interpretation, have frequently been attacked and distorted; this is known as negative stereotyping, which portrays Islam as regressive and aggressive in Eurocentric discourses and narratives. Najwa's attempts to confront these erroneous images in London deserve commendation. Because the Quran plays such an important role in Muslim society, Najwa strives to read it correctly: "I want to read the Qur'an in a beautiful way" (Aboulela,2005,p 82). She even takes Quran as a habit, and it becomes a part of her identity as a Muslim: "It being a Monday, I have my Qur'an Tajweed class at the mosque."(Aboulela2005,p 77).

3.2.4 Praying

It is obvious that Aboulela (2005) defines Islamic-inspired fiction as 'fictional worlds where cause and effect are regulated by Muslim rather than non-Muslim reasons . That is, what occurs to Najwa is determined by a cause-and-effect relationship in order to achieve religious pleasure. Najwa is both the narrator and the protagonist in *Leila's Minaret*.The tale story alternates between London and Khartoum. It takes her twenty years to transform from an independent Westernized girl into a religious woman. Her religious journey is primarily focused in London, where she works as a house cleaner. The novel's narrator and protagonist are the same person. From 1984 until 2003, she had a variety of experiences that provided her with the satisfaction she needs. The work also normalizes Najwa's existence as a devoted Muslim, emphasizing the importance of religion in her spiritual well-being by demonstrating how living a religious life can be pleasant, nutritious, and revitalizing to her personality.

In *Minaret*, Najwa, by linking religion with love, security, and peace of mind, indicates that living religiously and maintaining religious identity are preferable and more natural for the Muslim main fictional character, she said:

Can I ask forgiveness for someone else, someone whose already dead? Yes, you can. Of course you can. And you can give charity in their name and you can recite the Qur'an for their sake. All these things will reach them, your prayers will ease the hardship and loneliness of their grave or it will reach them as bright, beautiful gifts. (Aboulela2005,p232)

3.2.5 Ramadan

Fasting in Islam is more than just abstaining from physical invalidators; it is a profound form of prayer that enriches the Muslim individual and community spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, according to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "Islam is built upon five: testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing prayer, giving zakat, performing Hajj, and fasting during Ramadan" (al-Bukhari, 1997 p 9)

Ramadan, a religious practice, is also referenced in the story. Najwa fasts in Khartoum not for religious reasons, but to lose weight and pass her examinations. Now that she is in London, she forgets to fast and feels terrible since she believes that "fasting is the only religious thing she ever did" (Aboulela , 2005,p 221). When she realizes it's Ramadan, she attempts to fast but cannot. Even though she does not fast, she admits, "I missed the lightness of fasting, my body clean, my mouth dry, and then the special food at sunset" (Aboulela,2005, p221) That is to say, she is obligated to fast as a habit, rather than as an Islamic duty..

Later, as she grows older, she respects Ramadan more; for example, she says, "in Ramadan I have confidence, the certainty that, if I keep plodding this path, Allah will give me back that happiness again" (Leila Aboulela, 2005, 178). In addition, she says, "Today I almost felt like I was in Mecca It's the same feeling, all the people coming together, and the spiritual delight" (Aboulela2005, p177).

3.3 Navigation Tradition and Modernity:

In the novel *Minaret*, Najwa's character illustrates the complex negotiation of Islamic identity within the diversity of British society. Transitioning from a life of privilege in Sudan, where she grew up in a secular family that was strongly affected by western civilization, to a multicultural environment in London, to her experience as a Muslim woman in the diaspora. The major challenge for Najwa in her journey to London was her interaction and integration into both the Muslim community and western society, preserving her religious values, beliefs and tradition.

Logically, when talking about the traditions of the Muslim family in an Arab country like Sudan, we found the majority of these last related to and depicted from Islamic religion. In other words, all the religious practices of Muslims play a huge part in their tradition and cultures. For instance, Eid-Al-Fitr in Islam is the day that comes after the end of Ramadan. As a religious duty, Muslims should pray Salat-Al-Eid and give charity. Traditionally, people celebrate Eid by wearing new clothes, sharing deferent kinds of sweets and visiting family and friends. However, this was not the case for Najwa's family when they were in Sudan, it was more about appearance and bragging than religious practice. Her family had always been from a bourgeois class that adopted secularism as a religious orientation, which made them far

removed from the Islamic tradition and culture. Although they were surrounded by a huge Muslim community, they did not have a great reverence for this important day, and Najwa did not talk about any of these customs. However ,after a long period of exile and loss in London and during her long journey of spiritual realization and transformation ,Najwa talking about her Eid celebration : " Once at an Eid party in the mosque there was an Islamic knowledge quiz - I got all the answers right and I won a box of Cadbury's Milk Tray ".(Aboulela 2005,p99).Najwa now is pretending and participating in the Eid party and start to discover the genuine emotional and spiritual significance of AL-Eid for Muslims and realizes that it transcends mere status, but it is more about community, faith and gratitude.

The minaret, which was the main source of inspiration for Leila Abu Lela in choosing it the title of the novel, holds significant symbolic meaning; Architecturally, the minaret is one of the oldest significant elements in Islamic architecture that is situated attached to or near to the mosque. It is the place where the muezzin announces the call to prayer "adhan". Spiritually, the call to prayer from the minaret serves as a significant ritual that marks the daily lives of Muslim communities, emphasizing the rhythm of religious practice and the pivotal role of faith in their everyday existence. In the novel and during Najwa's journey in Sudan, we do not find any statements about the mosque or the minaret. That is to say, she and her family did not give attention and importance to these Islamic spaces as they were following secularism and this was clear when Najwa says: "We don't even pray"(Aboulela2005,page35), a full disconnection from their religion. This situation continues with Najwa in her first period of exile in London. However, after her spiritual transformation and awakening, she starts appreciating and practicing everything related to her religion and tradition as a Muslim Arabic woman, and we see that when she was describing the views of the city:" I remember the fresh bare trees, the cleanliness of a cold morning. Now

I look up to see the minaret of the mosque above the trees. "I might not see it again from this particular angle. "(Aboulela2005,page255).

Najwa mentions the minaret at the end as a source of belonging, something that made her remember who she is, where she came from, her faith and her tradition.

Finally, the story of Najwa as a diasporic woman in a multicultural society in this novel is not the standard one. Najwa's first period in London was comfortable and easy to deal with because she already came from Sudan with a western background. Then, when Najwa started to find out more about her religion, Islam, its rituals, rules and traditions. Here Najwa realized her realistic struggle in negotiating her Islamic identity and the diversity of British society.

3.4 Cultural hybridity and identity:

In this novel, Leila Aboulela explores the negotiation between two cultures of two spaces that are totally different in background ,values, lifestyle and culture. Aboulela explores Najwa's struggle with her identity as she navigates between Western modernity and traditional Arab cultures. This internal conflict poses a risk to her sense of self, yet it also opens the door for her to develop a hybrid identity that allows her to thrive in the West. Najwa manages to resolve this crisis by embracing hybridity and finding a third space that merges her new Western culture with her Arab roots. Bhabha's concept of hybridity highlights how identities and cultures evolve within the context of colonialism. The pushback from the colonized leads to the emergence of a distinct identity shaped by the interactions between colonizers and the colonized, as neither holds full power to dictate the outcome. This creates a binary opposition between Eastern and Western identities, which are often seen as rigid. As Bhabha suggests, "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity" (Rutherford ,1990).

3.4.1 Najwa's cross culture in Sudan

Najwa stands out in Sudan as a university student because, while she is Sudanese, she does not really engage with typical Sudanese life. Instead, she focuses on her own inner thoughts and her faith. Thanks to her father's wealth and status, she belongs more to the global elite around him. She often chats on the phone with the Sudanese president when he calls her dad and attends fancy parties thrown by the richest families in the capital. She frequently takes shopping trips to Paris and spends summers at her family's place in London. For her, there are "no dreams corroded in rust, no buried desires" (Aboulela 2005, page20). Because of this, she lacks genuine connections to her culture or a meaningful social circle in Sudan. She has not experienced the Muslim veil or the religious customs that define her country's society. Instead, Najwa opts for trendy Western outfits, like short skirts, and styles her hair in a Western way. (Al Manasir,2002)

Najwa distinguishes herself from many of her Sudanese contemporaries. She observes that other young Sudanese women wear headscarves or hijabs along with long, flowing thobes that conceal all of their skin except for their faces and hands. In a sense, she admires these women and perceives them as potentially embodying a more authentic Sudanese identity than her own. Reflecting on her fellow students at the University, Najwa expresses the following thoughts:

They were provincial girls and I was a girl from the capital and that was the reason we were not friends. With them I felt for the first time in my life self-conscious of my clothes; my too short skirts and too tight blouses If these provincial girls made me feel awkward, I was conscious of their modest grace, of the *thobes* that covered their slimness-pure white cotton covering their arms and hair. (Aboulela2005,page20).

Despite her affluent background and privileged upbringing, Najwa finds herself somewhat uncomfortable in her contemporary and bold Western attire. There is an underlying sense of incompleteness, even with all her advantages. She often senses that her fortunate circumstances do not entirely fulfill her quest for happiness and security (Al-Karawi, 2014), leading her to reflect on her life at times:

I have a happy life. My father and mother loved me and were always generous. In the summer we went for holidays in Alexandria, Geneva and London. There was nothing that I did not have, could not have. No dreams corroded in rust, no buried desires. And yet, sometimes, I would remember pain like a wound that had healed, soundless sadness like a forgotten dream. (Aboulela 2005, p20).

Here, Najwa explains the state of loss she goes through while searching for her true identity and her constant question of who and where exactly I belong to. Here, Najwa explains the state of loss she goes through while searching for her true identity and her constant question of who and where exactly I belong to.

3.4.2 Najwa's cross culture in London

Since her arrival in England, Najwa encountered various challenges while trying to adjust to her new life and cultural environment. Despite not having a conservative identity in Khartoum and not fully identifying as a Muslim, she felt a sense of discomfort in England as a Muslim Arabic woman. The Islamophobic attitudes faced by Najwa and other characters in the narrative serve as significant examples of the obstacles that hinder the process of adapting two distinct cultures (Büyükgebiz, 2023):

Laughter from behind me... I hear footsteps come up behind me, see a blur of denim. He says, 'Your Muslim scum', then the shock of cool liquid on my head

and face. I gasp and taste it, Tizer. He goes back to his friends – they are laughing. My chest hurts and I wipe my eyes. (Aboulela2005, p83).

In the narrative, Najwa undergoes a transformation following her separation from her narcissist boyfriend Anwar. This transformation is significantly driven by her embracing her Muslim identity and sincerely adopting it. The hijab takes on a profound symbolic meaning for Najwa. Having lost faith in those around her, she arrives at a conclusion where the hijab offers her a sense of security. The importance of wearing the hijab, which Anwar ridicules, lies in Najwa's realization that it shields her from the unwanted attention of men who objectify her whenever she reveals her body, as she reflects, 'The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn't see me anymore. I was invisible and they were quite' (Aboulela 2005, p. 233). As Najwa arrives at the mosque and immerses herself in her faith, she experiences a reduction in her feelings of isolation and a greater connection to both herself and her community. This journey instills in her a sense of courage and security, revitalizing her sense of belonging after a prolonged quest for stability, as she expresses, 'In the mosque, I feel like I'm in Khartoum again' (Aboulela 2005, p. 231).

Critic Nasrin Koç argues that *Minaret* exemplifies the harmonious blend of tradition and modernity rather than a failure. She asserts that Leila Aboulela's work illustrates how faith can serve as a source of comfort amid the challenges of migration, fostering a sense of belonging and stability in a new environment, thus aiding integration. However, Koç may overlook the limited options available to the characters, who must either embrace this new environment or remain marginalized as 'others.' This suggests that the integration portrayed is superficial and does not truly capture the characters' experiences. Najwa's internal conflict highlights this struggle, as she expresses uncertainty about whether to conform and integrate or to find solace in her faith within this unfamiliar context:

I never know which point of view I support. I find myself agreeing with whoever is speaking or with the one I like best. And I become anxious that someone's feelings will get hurt, or worse take serious offence, as sometimes happens, and stop coming to the mosque.(Aboulela2005,page81).

Ultimately, Najwa chooses to remain faithful to her religion. The mosque on Regent's Street serves as a beacon, guiding her and influencing her life decisions. She expresses:" We never get lost because we can see the minaret of the mosque and head home towards it." (Aboulela, 2005, p.198).

Conclusion

Najwa, the protagonist in Aboulela's narrative, is well-educated and hails from an affluent family. Consequently, her journey is marked by feelings of detachment, alienation, and loss until she finds a connection to a place that anchors her sense of self in belonging, specifically through her religious identity and participation in the local mosque. In this process, Najwa establishes a third space that respects religious traditions while being distinctly modern, situated in the Western metropolis of London. For Muslim women in the West who choose to embrace Islam, this act is not a regression into the past. Rather, it serves as a means for these women to articulate their identities and redefine themselves as a fusion of Eastern and Western influences, tradition and modernity. Najwa increasingly seeks the emotional and psychological stability afforded by her faith and her mosque visits. Ultimately, her acceptance of Islam represents a reconciliation with her identity in London, enabling her to navigate the challenges of migration and loss. This journey grants her a pathway to personal mobility, empowerment, and agency, allowing her to successfully negotiate the complexities of liminality and cultivate a hybrid identity that harmonizes Eastern and Western cultures.

General conclusion

Using Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* as a primary literary case study, this dissertation has examined the intricate connections between postcolonial theory, faith, tradition, modernism, and feminist philosophy. The study has shown, using a range of theoretical frameworks, how colonialism's effects still influence both individual and collective identities, especially for women juggling the conflicting demands of modernity, religion, and tradition in both their homeland and the diaspora. She utilizes Najwa's journey in *Minaret* to reflect on her own experience negotiating the obstacles of living in a contemporary, Western world that stands in stark contrast to her traditional Sudanese background. Aboulela's Najwa delves at the difficulties of Muslim women's religious and cultural identities, which are frequently disregarded or misunderstood in their new contexts. By regaining her faith and genuinely embracing Islam, Najwa discovers a source of empowerment and self-worth that enables her to confidently declare her identity. In a society that usually denies or ignores her origin, Najwa's newfound devotion to her beliefs serves as an act of resistance and self-affirmation, allowing her to rediscover strength, purpose, and a sense of belonging despite efforts to assimilate or leave her roots. Thus, Aboulela presents Najwa's narrative as a compelling example of how reconnecting with one's faith can provide women with empowerment and resilience as they navigate the complexity of different cultural realms.

Postcolonial societies are characterized by continuous efforts to recover indigenous customs and reassert cultural identities that colonial power had destroyed or repressed. These communities, however, show a deep ambivalence toward modernity, rejecting its connotations of cultural erasure and Western domination while welcoming its promises of advancement. As people and communities creatively and adaptably combine traditional and modern aspects, hybrid identities are created. When navigating postcolonial identity, faith becomes a potent factor, particularly for women living abroad or in the diaspora. Religious practice may be a

source of stability as well as a way to rebel against colonial and patriarchal systems, as seen by Najwa's character. The dissertation also emphasizes how mainstream Western feminism falls short in addressing the distinct experiences of postcolonial women, highlighting the need for feminist frameworks that are more inclusive and contextually aware—like Islamic feminism—and that value local agency, faith, and culture.

The study also emphasizes the importance of migration, language, and cultural hybridity in the ongoing decolonization process. The experiences of women in exile, as portrayed in *Minaret*, demonstrate how colonial history continues to influence modern identities and how literature may provide a platform for underrepresented viewpoints. The dissertation advances a better comprehension of the complex realities that postcolonial women encounter by promoting methods that respect the diversity of their experiences and the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity. The study enhances scholarly discourse and provides useful insights for promoting social justice, gender equity, and cultural resilience in a globalized society by incorporating postcolonial, feminist, and literary viewpoints.

الملخص :

يدرس هذا البحث التحول الذي تمر به نجوى، المرأة العربية المسلمة في المملكة المتحدة، كما تصورها رواية ليلي أبو العلا "المنارة" (2005). في مواجهة الاغتراب الثقافي والانسلاخ عن الهوية، تعتمد نجوى على إيمانها الإسلامي لإعادة بناء ذاتها، مستعيدة بذلك تمكينها وقدرتها على الفعل. يتوافق هذا البحث مع الهدف الأدبي الأوسع لأبو العلا في تنفيذ الصور النمطية الغربية عن المرأة العربية، حيث يُصوّر الإسلام كمصدر لقوة وليس كمصدر للقمع. من خلال منهج تحليلي، تبحث هذه الدراسة تطور شخصية نجوى، مع التركيز على علاقاتها الاجتماعية في سياق الشتات وصحتها الروحية. كما تسلط الضوء على هويتها الهجينة التي تجمع بين تراثها السوداني وتجاربها الغربية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتناول البحث الأساليب السردية التي تستخدمها أبو العلا، والتي تعكس موقعها ككاتبة مهاجرة، لتصوير رحلة نجوى المعقدة في النهاية، يجادل البحث بأن الهجينة الروحية والثقافية لنجوى تتحدى السرديات الغربية السائدة، مقدمة فهمًا دقيقًا للتمكين والانتماء عبر الإسلام. وبذلك، تسهم الدراسة في النقاش الأوسع حول الهويات المتعددة الأبعاد للمرأة المسلمة في الشتات ودور الإيمان في اكتشافها لذاتها وصمودها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإيمان، الهوية، التقاليد، الحداثة، التهجين، الشتات

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