REDISCOVERING FAITH AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF LEILA ABOULELA'S NOVELS

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

By

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented work in the thesis entitled **Rediscovering Faith and Identity: A Study of Leila Aboulela's Novels** in partial fulfilment of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** is the outcome of research carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Balkar Singh**, working as Professor in the Department of English/School of Humanities of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with the general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgments have been made whenever work described here has been on the findings of another investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph.D. thesis entitled **Rediscovering Faith and Identity: A Study of Leila Aboulela's Novels,** submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in the Department of English/School of Humanities, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India, is a research work carried out by **Nida Nighat, 11916488** is a bonafide record of her original work carried out under my supervision, and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.

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Abstract

This study titled *Rediscovering Faith and Identity: A Study of Leila Aboulela's Novels* attempts to explore the novels written by Sudanese based writer Leila Aboulela using postcolonial theory mainly Edward Said's valuable insights on discourse and representation as a paradigm of analysis. The texts taken up for study are: *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011), *The kindness of Enemies* (2015) and *Bird Summons* (2019). The selected novels have been analysed in the light of the counter hegemonic discourses they contain - discourses that contest, challenge and respond to the structures of dominance. These literary works intervene in discourse and discussions regarding various beliefs and thereby challenge the widely established knowledge systems of Islamophobia, Orientalism, and Imperialism that carry significant real life implications and material consequences.

The central argument of this thesis is that the works under study are constitutive of discourses of resistance, challenging dominant representations and ideological frameworks. In addition to serving as agents of resistance, the representations signify a rearticulation of identity. It has been argued that the texts under critical scanner here enable us to arrive at a more comprehensive impression of the world and global belonging in an epoch of globalization and to reinterrogate the debates of identity in the contemporary world. The analysis of the selected texts shows that they do not simply negate the dominant tropes of hegemonic discourses, but also actively strive to deconstruct Muslim stereotypes and decentre Eurocentric perspectives and priorities by innovatively presenting alternate images and differential understanding of reality. Ultimately, these novels attempt at reshuffling or reorienting the Western readers' perspectives on matters of geopolitical concern which are considered most urgent in the contemporary world of unequal power relations.

In today's world, the word 'Muslim' or 'Islam' has become synonymous with terror, danger and nuisance everywhere. In fact, it can be said that Muslims have become the new Jews and niggers of the twenty first century. Edward Said in his Introduction to *Covering Islam* says "malicious generalisations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West" (XII).

However, such denigration and endorsement of anti-Muslim prejudice by Eurocentric literary and cultural intellectuals is not ignored and left unnoticed. There certainly has been a burgeoning of Muslim interventions in the form of literary fiction which refuses to remain silent and provide well-wrought responses to the self-appointed experts of the West. Thus it is important to discern and analyse how Muslim writers are "writing back" to the hegemonic Eurocentric discourses, which have a tendency to homogenize Muslims globally irrespective of their discrete cultures and backgrounds. Their religion is equally framed in reductive and essentialist terms, without acknowledging the diversity within the Islamic traditions across different geographical locations and regions. Such reductionism has institutionalized Islamophobia and also the urgency to redefine it as an ideology. By placing Aboulela's novels within this political and cultural context, this research project proclaims to portray a Muslim or Islamic perspective on identity as well as a significant relationship between politics, history and narrative.

Dominant representations function as framework for interpreting social and political reality and disseminate particular kinds of knowledge that have often been strategically used to justify war, interventions, occupations and to assert power and essentialize hierarchies. As Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* says, the struggle over territories and domination is "complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and canons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (7). The stereotype of Muslims as terrorists, backward and women oppressors in dominant discourses has always been used to justify violence inflicted on Muslim bodies and the need for saving Muslim women. These stereotypes are used to justify the expulsion of Muslims from the political community, a process that takes the form of stigmatization, accusation, labelling, detention etc.

The heightened sense of insecurity felt by the Muslim world and the rising Islamophobia acted as catalysts to respond back, which eventually gave rise to the novels written mostly by Anglophone writers. Apart from voicing contemporary Muslim concerns particularly diasporic, these novels may be considered as decentered interventions into the broader geopolitical discourses with which they engage themselves. They may be taken as subaltern insights into the effects that Colonialism,

Neoimperialism and Globalization have had on diasporic Muslim citizens of the world. These novels offer counter-hegemonic discourses by questioning the discursive frameworks within which difference between the 'self' and the 'other' is conceptualized in the first place. Therefore, divisions such as East and West, White and non-White and Muslim and non-Muslim are productively subjected to discussion.

Addressing the fears, preconceptions and curiosities about Muslim identities, this study explores Aboulela's novels as expressions and articulations of counter discourse or discourses of resistance by situating them against the backdrop of hegemonic discourses of the west (Both orientalist and contemporary). These texts not only reveal but also strategically complicate the reductive, 'us' versus 'them' binary that has dominated the western political discourse and social discussions regarding Muslims and the Middle East. It is important to recognize that all her texts studied in this thesis attempt to humanize and acknowledge the Muslim Other while set across the world in diverse temporalities. Subsequently, they attempt to enter into a dialogue with the dominant western discourse and aim at clearing the misconceptions and fears associated with Muslim identity and lands and at the same time familiarizing the western reader with their world view.

Leila Aboulela intricately navigates the intersections of cultures, identities, and religious beliefs, presenting a nuanced portrayal that challenges prevailing stereotypes and fosters a deeper understanding of the Muslim experience. Against the backdrop of dominant western discourses that often essentialize and stereotype Muslim cultures, her narratives shed light on the internal conflicts faced by individuals as they negotiate between preserving their cultural heritage and embracing the changes inherent in contemporary life. This deliberate engagement serves as a powerful counter-narrative to Western stereotypes and misconceptions about the Muslim world. Furthermore, Aboulela addresses the broader socio-political issues affecting Muslim communities, particularly the challenges confronted by immigrants in the West. Her works explore the experiences of navigating unfamiliar territories, battling stereotypes, and maintaining one's cultural and religious identity in the face of a Western discourse that is often prejudiced. Thus she confronts and dismantles the prejudicial lens through which Islam and its followers are often portrayed. Aboulela

delves into the collective experiences of Muslim communities grappling with heightened scrutiny and prejudice as a result of war on terror, challenges the prevailing discourse, encouraging readers to critically examine the impact of political events on personal lives and to recognize the shared humanity that transcends cultural and religious differences. In essence, Leila Aboulela emerges as a literary voice that serves as a conscientious critic of prevailing narratives. Her works stand as a testament to the power of narratives in dismantling stereotypes, fostering empathy, and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the Muslims within the context of contemporary Western discourse and Islamophobia. The study also attempts to investigate the influence Islam exerts on characters and how central it is to identity formation in the Western context and minority situations.

This study attempts to illuminate in the subsequent chapters the following concerns with reference to the texts under study: The effects of dominant western discourse on the personal and social identities of Muslims particularly in the West and how Aboulela through her writings reconceptualises and reconstructs Muslim identities in the ongoing era of anti-Muslim racism and how identity is constructed and reconstructed under the influence of collective consciousness in literature. While examining the relationship between discourse, representation, and power as propounded by Edward Said, the study examines how Aboulela's novels articulate resistance against the Western hegemonic and monolithic representation of Muslims. Besides, the critical insights provided by various intellectuals relevant to the study shall form the bedrock of the theoretical framework of the study. Moreover, the format of the study shall be completely based on MLA 9th edition. The research work endeavours at achieving the following main objectives:

1. To understand the role of faith in identity formation
2. To evaluate Leila Aboulela's novels with respect to Identity formation theories
3. To explore the ideology of Leila Aboulela with reference to her works
4. To analyse the growing religious identity of immigrants

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the thesis is divided into five chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter titled "Leila Aboulela: Life and Works", focusses on the biographical accounts and oeuvre of Leila Aboulela

while emphasising the novels selected for the undertaken research work. A review of the literature along with the research gap is also covered in this chapter.

The second chapter titled “Identity and representation: A Theoretical Perspective” provides an insight into the theory of representation as put forward by Edward Said. In addition, it discusses the important concepts used in the theoretical framework of the study.

The third chapter titled “Exteriorization and the Predicament of Belonging” explores how the intricate web of colonial discourse profoundly implicates the identity and subjectivity of Muslims, with a keen focus on the experiences of Muslim immigrants living in the West, particularly in the aftermath of the War on Terror. This chapter scrutinizes how persistent portrayals influence not only external perceptions but also internal self-perceptions within the Muslim community. The chapter delves into the psychological and social ramifications of this internalization, shedding light on the complex interplay between identity formation and external discourse in the works of Leila Aboulela.

The fourth chapter titled “Subversion of Orientalist Tropes as Politics of Resistance” explores Aboulela’s novels as an act of “writing back” to Western assumptions of Muslim identities. Aboulela's novels serve as a profound act of “writing back,” echoing Said’s call to challenge and resist the dominant discourse that often portrays the non-Western people as the other. This chapter explores how counter narratives give voice to the marginalized people to reclaim their agency and defy the limiting stereotypes perpetuated by imperialistic perspectives. This chapter also discerns the nuances, complexities, and subversive elements that collectively contribute to the construction of a counter-narrative, one that not only challenges but redefines the discourse surrounding the non-Western experience in the global literary arena.

The fifth chapter titled “Faith, Freedom and Muslim Women,” explores how Leila Aboulela has sought to challenge the subjective and negative fundamentals which have come to dominate the western construction of female Muslim subjectivity, as much of the discourse on this important issue today is fraught with historical and cultural misconceptions. This chapter provides a powerful critique of the popular

Western notion that the Muslim women is oppressed, backward and lacking agency and the veil is a symbol of Muslim women's oppression. Further, the chapter problematizes the conceptions of veiled Muslim women as passive and oppressed; and thereby overturns the hegemony of the orientalist iconography attested to it. It deconstructs the reductive tropes of veiled Muslim women that have been used to justify war. It presents a feminine perspective to challenge the militant and chauvinistic discourse in the mainstream, which brings to light the violence that affects immigrant women. In addition, the chapter explores how the image of Muslim women as lacking agency and that the perception of veil as oppressive is based on liberal understandings of 'equality' and 'liberty' that preclude other ways of thinking about 'equality' and 'liberty'. This chapter creates an awareness of the power structures embedded in conflicting representations through insightful portrayal of female subjectivities.

Finally, the section titled "Conclusion", while summarising the research work, outlines the outcomes and the findings of the study. In addition, it enumerates the relevance and scope of the study in the context of the present world scenario beset by several conflicting issues.

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Chapter 1
Leila Aboulela: Life and Works

Leila Aboulela is a Sudanese writer who won the Caine Prize for African writing in the year 2000 and is the Elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She was born in Cairo, Egypt to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother in the year 1964. Aboulela grew up in Sudan and graduated in Economics in the year 1985 from the University of Khartoum. She moved to London in pursuit of higher education and gained a master's and MPhil degree in Statistics from the London School of Economics. Aboulela began writing in 1992 while teaching in Aberdeen College, after shifting to Aberdeen in the year 1990 with her family, comprising of her husband and children. The move or exile initiated by the economic crises in Sudan and her concern for her family is cited by Aboulela as the inspiration to write. "The anxieties about the move and my homesickness made me suddenly want to write. I realized that people around me in Scotland hardly knew anything about my identity and I was keen to share my heritage (Aboulela, "A Conversation"). The representation of Muslim migrants in the West and the hardships they face as portrayed by Aboulela's work has gained much critical acclaim. Her work, which is largely influenced by her own personal journey of immigration to the United Kingdom and the challenges she faced along the way, explores topics such as identity, cross-cultural relationships, the East-West split, migration, and Islamic spirituality. Her work draws attention to the issues that Muslims face in Europe and tells "the stories of flawed complex characters who struggle to make choices using Muslim logic"(Aboulela, About Leila). Aboulela experiences relief and satisfaction by writing about what occupies her mind. The shape and tension of a story legitimise her fascinations and troubles. Aboulela seeks to portray the working of mind, the psychological state, and emotions of a person who has faith. She examines 'Muslim' not simply as a cultural or political identity, but digs deep into something closer to the core, something that does not deny but transcends sexuality, ethnicity, class, or colour. Her work is reflective of the logic based on Islam, cause and effect in her world of fiction is determined by Muslim rationale. Her characters, on the other hand, aren't idealized

or presented as role models, they aren't depicted as necessarily 'good' Muslims. They are normal people having their own weaknesses and attempting to follow their religion and in difficult times trying to make sense of God's will (Procter).

Bagging numerous literary accolades and gaining critical acclaim from two of Africa's most prominent contemporary writers, Ben Okri and J.M. Coetzee, Leila Aboulela has established herself as a writer of significant repute. Both Okri and Coetzee praised her for the restraint with which she writes and the quite anger which is typical of the narrative of her first three books, *The Translator* (1999), *Coloured Lights* (2001), and *Minaret* (2005) (Procter). Aboulela is a practicing Muslim and her belief system and faith are quite evident in her works. Aboulela counts Jean Rhys, Tayeb Saleh, Anita Desai, Naguib Mahfouz, Doris Lessing, Ahdaf Soueif, and the Scottish Writers Robin Jenkins and Alan Spence as her influence (Aboulela, "About Leila"). Aboulela has written short stories and Novels as well as several Radio Play Broadcasts. Aboulela's writing has featured in The Guardian, Granta, Harper Magazine and The Washington Post, and has been translated into 15 languages. BBC Radio has extensively adapted her work and broadcasted a number of her plays. Aboulela's work has been included in cultural educational programmes backed by both the British Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities in the United States, and her restrained lyricism, clarity, and irony have been widely praised.

A profound feeling of geographical and sociocultural dislocation informs Aboulela's literature (Sethi) and it was writing that saved her from isolation and homesickness. Although Aboulela does not think of herself to be someone who is deeply attached to her origins or homeland, but she had a difficult time settling in Aberdeen in actuality (Aboulela, "A conversation"). Her writing hopscotches between different countries and cultures but its resting point is always her Islamic faith. Aboulela believes that a religious, personal identity brings better stability than a national one." I can carry religion with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can easily be taken away from me (Sethi)". Aboulela claims that because her faith was nurtured by her mother and grandmother, she has always seen it as a very private

and personal matter. Both her mother as well as grandmother were progressive minded so her perception of faith was shaped accordingly(Sethi). The immigration from Sudan to Scotland, compelled her to start writing as the shift felt to her as though her life was coming to an end and a new one was emerging and taking its place. Aboulela's writing is centred on alienation, faith, and Muslims who are stuck between two different worlds. In-betweeness and identity formation, two recurrent themes of her work mirror her own life. As a subject that isn't usually addressed by fiction writers, the representation of regular, commonplace faith, Aboulela says is significant to her. According to her "You get books about very fundamentalist characters or you get characters who are atheists and have rejected religion, in reality there are a lot of people in the middle. But in fiction, there is a lack of representation of the average person of faith" (Aboulela, "A Conversation"). Coming from a non-monochrome and mixed background, her writing process reflects on what she knows and what feels natural to her (Aboulela, "L A on Writing ").

Leila Aboulela has contributed significantly to the emergence of a form of literature which, according to Dalla Sarnov, is "neither Arabic nor English but is linguistically and culturally hybrid, discursively multidimensional and literarily heterogeneous" (70). Since the publication of her first novel, *The Translator,* in 1999, her fiction has attempted to decode the culturally unfamiliar and represents the embodiment of what has been termed 'insider' narratives originating from Arab or Islamic sources. Arguing that Aboulela's texts represent "an acculturation to globalisation conducted from within the territory of the dominant discourse," Geoffrey Nash defines her work as a prominent example of contemporary transnational literature, as it "embodies the issue of the transportation of specific Arab/Islamic ideologies into a literature composed for a non-Arab/Islamic audience" (*The Anglo-Arab* 4). The "transportation" Nash refers to here can be viewed as a conscious attempt to facilitate the type of cross-cultural awareness that is such a significant element within contemporary Anglo-Arab Women's writing. However, while such writers undoubtedly share a certain commonality in relation to their use of transnational literary frameworks, it is evident that within Anglo-Arab women's

writing there exists a variety of positions in relation to the questions pertaining to nationalism identity, feminism, etc., and Nash has argued that, in terms of Arab migrant literature, Leila Aboulela's fiction can be said to "represent, more or less, a school of one" (*Writing* 44). This singularity resides in the fact that, in her fiction, the framework of religion isn't just a reference point or a representative aspect of norms, both cultural and social, instead, it is a deliberate and intentional presentation of faith. Furthermore, this faith is presented as a viable substitute to secularism and certain aspects of Western modernity. Advocating for the legitimacy of what could be described as a "faith-centered subject position" (Dimitriu, "Crossing and Dwelling" 120), Aboulela's works encapsulate an Islamic moral and religious landscape, while conforming to an archetypal Western fictional structure. Encompassing various elements that extend beyond the typical political, cultural, and ethnic identifiers often seen in Anglo-Arab fiction, her religiosity serves as an antitoxin to the western existential emptiness, hegemony and materialism. Essentially uninterested in portraying Muslim identity as a cultural or political artefact, she depicts the psychology and moral imperatives of individuals who embrace religious certitude. This desire to incorporate characters who are practising Muslims into contemporary English language literary fiction and produce novels that are infused with traditional Islamic aesthetics, necessarily entails the charting of a new literary space as there currently exist remarkably few examples of such characters in contemporary literature. As Mahmudul Hasan has noted, those fictional representations that do exist invariably conform to the ubiquitous crass stereotyping increasingly evident in media discourses, such as 'the Islamic terrorist,' 'the oppressed Muslim woman,' or alternatively, liberal secular Muslims whose lifestyles are not noticeably different from those of non-Muslims ("Seeking Freedom" 93). What is undeniable is that Aboulela's desire to write sympathetically about individuals who embrace faith in a modern secular world and her desire to create fictional worlds which, in her own words, "follow Islamic logic" (Santesso 7), serve to distance her work from numerous contemporary critical discourses. Christina Phillips contends that religious belief-regardless of the specific religious denomination of affiliation which is being articulated-has been essentially eradicated from the contemporary literary canon and

argues that while it is permissible for literary texts to contain religious themes, characters and imagery, it is invariably the case that "if they want to be taken seriously by critics, these must be secularised" (166). The fact that Aboulela's characters embrace a specifically Islamic religious identification can also be viewed as an additional handicap as after the events of 9/11, both critical and popular discourses have predominantly focused upon Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, resulting in an increasing marginalisation of moderate Muslim religious subjectivities. Ashi Nandy is one observer who has noted the tendency of secular states to perceive the followers of the Islamic faith as "demonic others that need to be deforged" (Nash, *Writing Muslim* 15). In relation to literature, Tariq Ali has employed the term "the belligerati" to describe writers such as Martin Amis, Salman Rushdie and John Updike, who associate religious belief-and in particular, Muslim religious belief-as indicative of a form of cognitive paralysis, a delusional psychology deeply embedded in, and inextricably connected to, political radicalism and intolerance. In addition, 'faith-based fiction' has invariably constituted a domain that resides outside the established nostrums of post-colonial theory, which has been distinguished by an unmediated, aggressive form of secularism. Nash has bemoaned what he describes as "the dearth of useful post-colonial theoretical material germane to the issue of religion or the sacred as a key conceptual category" (*Writing* 5), and writer Sara Mahood has evinced frustration with Post -colonialism's stubborn denial of what she terms "valuable forms of human flourishing outside the bounds of a liberal, progressive imaginary" (Dimitriu, "Crossing and Dwelling" 124), which includes a disdain for non-Eastern, non-secular modes of agency.

Aboulela has herself directly alluded to some of the recurring difficulties she faces when attempting to write about individuals who embrace religious faith in an antagonistic secular world, "I want to write about faith but it is so difficult to talk about this when everyone else is talking about the political aspects. I'm concerned that Islam has not just been politicised but that it is becoming an identity. This is like turning religion into a football match, it is a distraction from the real thing ("Back to Khartoum")".

This raises the important question of what Aboulela actually means when, in the above quotation, she refers to "the real thing." Equally, in what respects can her fiction be said to embrace Muslim aesthetics and how is this aesthetics given literal representation in her texts? In general terms, the religious imperative she describes is essentially a voluntarist one, as she articulates the life stories of Muslim women who are neither victims nor escapees of Islam but willingly committed to their faith. Many critics think that Aboulela appears to introduce a different image of Muslims through the female characters in her novels who find shelter and cure in religion, rather than escaping it ("Sudanese Novelist"). Perhaps, this is why Mike Philips, a British critic considers Aboulela as one of the most important writers in a new type of English narrative fiction, contributing to a wide range of Islamic novels (Philips). She also challenges one of the major misconceptions about Islam currently held in the West, which perceives the Sharia as a legal prerequisite enforced by a government to the moral conduct of the individual, a desire to follow the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as well as a recognition of the validity of this teachings legal precepts. Equally noteworthy is how these same protagonists view the concept of Jihad as a theological legitimation of their internal struggle against spiritual atrophy and imperfection rather than an obligation to eradicate apostasy or engage in gratuitous acts of violence against non-believers.

Aboulela worked as a part-time Research Assistant while starting to write. She wrote her first novel *The Translator* in 1999 which was nominated for the Orange Prize and was regarded as one of the "Notable Book of the year" by the New York Times in 2006. *The Translator* was also shortlisted for the Saltire Society Scottish First Book of the year Award in 2000. A five-part adaptation of the novel was broadcasted by BBC Radio 4 in 2002 and was shortlisted for the Race and Media Award in 2003. Her second novel *Minaret* (2005), which tells the story of Najwa, an aristocratic Sudanese woman forced into exile in Britain was nominated for the Orange Prize and the IMPAC Dublin Award. Aboulela's third novel *Lyrics Alley* (2010) is set in 1950s Sudan and is inspired by the life of her uncle-a poet and songwriter. The novel was the Fiction Winner of the Scottish Book Awards and was

longlisted for the Orange Prize (2011) and shortlisted for the Common Wealth Writers Prize (Europe and South East Asia) (2011). Aboulela wrote her fourth novel *The Kindness of Enemies in* 2015 and her fifth novel *Bird Summons* in 2019. Her sixth novel titled *River Spirit* (2023) was called by the New York Times as one of the ten best historical fiction books of the year 2023. Aboulela has had several short stories published in anthologies and broadcasted on radio, and one of her short stories, "The Museum", won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000. Her first collection of short stories, *Coloured Lights*, was published in 2001and was shortlisted for PEN Macmillan Silver PEN Award. Her second collection of short stories, *Elsewhere, Home* was published in 2018, which won the award for Saltire Society's Fiction Book of the Year (2018). Aboulela has also written several radio plays. *Visitors* (1999) was her first radio play broadcast followed by *Cardamom* (2000), *The Sea Warrior* (2001), *The Museum* (2002), *Mystic Life* (2003) and *The Lion of Chechnya* (2005).

The novels of Leila Aboulela chosen for the undertaken study include *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2010), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) and *Bird Summons* (2019). The research work seeks to analyse these novels of Leila Aboulela with special reference to her portrayal of Muslim characters, their sensibilities and world view, while exploring the meaning and importance of religion in their lives and its impact on their identity. The study also seeks to analyse the impact of the process of 'exteriorization' on the identity of Muslim subjects. The study aims at exploring how Leila Aboulela uses her literary genius as a tool for countering the western discourse that portrays Muslims in monolithic and stereotypical ways and reduces them to caricatures. Moreover, the study seeks to highlight how the plurality of narratives can be used to break the dominance of western discourse and portray the other side of the story and thereby help in clearing misconceptions, biases and prejudices. Further, it shall focus on the ways and means that the marginalized use to resist the hegemony of the western culture.

Aboulela uses the English language as an apparatus to write and speak about her notions that have been deeply influenced by her diasporic experience. In an interview with Daniel Musiitwa, Aboulela accentuates that her yearning to "write

herself into Britain" has instigated from her personal experience of migration and settlement in Scotland where she finds herself struggling with the contemporaneous discourse of privileging the West as superior while subjugating the East. She asserts that "to be a practicing person of any faith nowadays is to swim against the tide. But it also means having access to ancient wisdom and guidance that modern society devalues but is unable to replace" (Aboulela, "Sudanese Author"). Through her fiction, Aboulela is adamant to unsettle and overthrow the dogmatic entrenched stereotypical representation of Arabs and Muslims as primitive, backward, and radical terrorists. Conspicuously, she scrutinizes the underprivileged critical space that Arabs and Muslims are pushed into in the West after a concatenation of events such as 9/11 terrorist attacks and the war on terror which have generated an atmosphere of insecurity for Muslim immigrants in the West.

The Translator (1999), Aboulela's first novel is about Love, Faith and Translation. Aboulela in this novel challenges the fixed and binary concepts of romantic love, religion, and the East and West through the stories of Sammar, a Sudanese widow living in Aberdeen and working as a translator, and Rae Isles, a lecturer in Middle Eastern History and Third World Politics. The novel also portrays how culture, religion as well as language are untranslatable. After losing her beloved husband in a car collision four years ago, Sammar, the novel's protagonist, has relocated to Scotland. Sammar is devastated by this tragedy and withdraws herself from the society as a result. The only solace comes from *Azan*- the Muslim call for prayer, which keeps her reminding that only Allah is eternal. After moving to Scotland she starts working at the University of Aberdeen as a translator of Arabic and there she slowly develops affection and love for Rae, an agnostic Islamic scholar but is soon blindsided when her faith and love come into conflict. The repressed aspects of her life, as well as the text itself, generate challenges of interpretation for both Rae and the reader, who is constantly assigned the task of analyst, attempting to translate Sammar's subconscious from an external perspective.

Minaret (2005), her second novel, is about a person's quest to find an agency that provides her both strength and freedom. Najwa, the protagonist is a young girl,

who has been living a privileged life in Khartoum with her family. Najwa belongs to a corrupt elite family of Khartoum. As a result, she comes out as a unique postcolonial protagonist, preferring the material worlds of 'Marie Claire' and 'Cosmopolitan' to the political discourses she encounters at university. Najwa remains a meek and naive figure, even after her crush on Anwar, a former member of the student Communist Party in Khartoum, is reignited by a chance meeting in London. However, her life is turned upside down when her father is jailed and she is forced to flee to London with her brother and mother. She works as a domestic helper and a babysitter while living in terribly poor condition. With the passage of time, Najwa becomes more and more attracted to Islam. She goes to the mosque in her spare time. This is not, however, a straightforward conversion story. In a review for the Guardian newspaper, Mike Phillips writes, Najwa's conversion is not an easy surrender to tradition. Instead it is a hard-won dedication to service, a kind of restitution for her former life, and the ending of the book is a disturbing hint that the peace she has achieved is contingent and subject to perpetual challenge. In her highly daring narrative detailing of her protagonist's religious conversion and spiritual dedication, Aboulela delivers marvellously.

Hassan Awad Aboulela, a poet whose verses were turned to music and became enormously successful songs, inspired her third novel, *Lyrics Alley* (2011). In this novel, Aboulela focuses on a male character, which is a departure from her earlier novels, *The Translator* and *Minaret*, which both dealt with Sudanese women struggling to practise their faith in a modern-day, secular Britain. The setting is changed to Sudan in *Lyrics Alley*, with all-Muslim characters. With no direct juxtaposition of East and West, *Lyrics Alley* focuses on Muslim cultures in a Muslim context with characters of varied degrees of religious devotion. We see in the novel that the traditions that affect adversely Sudanese women, and by extension many Muslim women, are 'not related to religious observance, but to cultural customs that have nothing to do with Islam. The narrative is set in 1950's, shortly after Sudan gained independence from the British. The lives of three fictional ladies orbit the true event of a poet's birth. His uneducated mother, Waheeba, is enraged that her husband

has married a younger, more adored wife. Nabilah, the second wife, is sophisticated and articulate and longs for her native city of Cairo. She is frustrated by Umdurman's 'backwardness'. Finally, there's the poet's sweetheart, the gorgeous, short-sighted Soraya, who becomes his muse and ultimately his loss. The novel also depicts the conflict between Sudan's diverging ethnic and religious population. We also witness a conflict between modernity and tradition, insider and outsider, established and pioneer. The two co- wives are well-matched, and their conflict erupts over the decision to circumcise the family's younger girls. Despite the fact that the practise is African rather than Islamic, and despite the fact that the family's head is against it, Waheeba sticks to tradition. Women come to embody these struggles and changes in *Lyrics Alley*, where tradition and modernity compete for legitimacy. In terms of economics and politics, the 1950s was a promising time for a country like Sudan, which was on the cusp of independence. Decades of colonial domination was coming to an end, and people were fighting for and achieving self-determination. Parallel to this national struggle, women of the time were fighting for their own rights, whether it was against female genital mutilation (FGM), gaining more equal and fair positions within polygamy, obtaining a university education, or simply having the right to wear a much-needed pair of prescription glasses.

Two stories run parallel in Aboulela's fourth novel *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), one is the story of Natasha, a history professor and another the story of Imam Shamil, a nineteenth-century Muslim leader who led the anti-Russian resistance during the Caucasian conflict. Natasha is researching Imam Shamil's life and discovers that her student Osama, who goes by the name Oz is a descendent of Imam Shamil and possesses his legendry sword. Natasha is drawn towards Oz and develops a relationship with him as well as his mother. But Osama is soon arrested by the security agencies, all this brings Natasha face to face with the issues she had long been evading i.e. her Muslim identity and faith. The author then introduces a parallel story line set in Caucasian Georgia in 1854 about Imam Shamil. Convincingly portrayed as a brave freedom fighter and devout Muslim, Shamil's understanding of Jihad differed greatly from that of today's Islamist radicals. The tale intends to give a

more accurate and a fuller understanding of the religion of Islam and its various interpretations in different places of the Muslim world. Jamaleldin i.e., Imam Shamil's son and Natasha face the similar crises of identity- both are having their origins from one place but are brought up in another place and that is very different from their origin. As she has maintained a distance from her religion, Natasha admits that she is not a good Muslim. Nonetheless, she is unavoidably a Muslim, as is Oz's mother, a seemingly well-integrated and westernised actress who devoutly practises the Sufi style of Islam. One of Aboulela's goals is undoubtedly to provide a positive image of Islam to a western audience more accustomed to hearing what faithful Muslims regard as a reprehensible and distorted depiction of their faith. She doesn't quote Kipling, who wrote where there is Islam, there is an intelligible civilisation. Yet she might have done so, for this is one of the messages at the heart of her novel. Aboulela, in short has written a story that encourages you to reflect on the times we live in and to feel the weight of its dissonant tones. This narrative about different cultures also serves as a counter-argument to a simplistic perspective of things, faiths, and people. In this novel, Aboulela brings the legend of Imam Shamil back to life and provides an important examination of the experience of Muslims in a post-9/ 11 world. In her review of the novel, Kate Braithwaite states that "by drawing parallels with history, this contemporary novel effectively shows how clarity has been lost in today's discussions of religious issues."

The novel *Bird Summons* (2019) is about three friends -Salma, Moni and Iman, who are out on a journey to pay homage to the first British convert to Islam. Despite having grown up in different countries, the three of them are members of the Arabic Speaking Muslim Women's Group. We see how their opinions fluctuate and develop as they mature and adjust to their new surroundings. One cannot live presently at new place and remain fixed in the past, and even when one adapts to a new present, one must continue to change and go forward, regardless of external challenges. They challenge and learn from one another within their group and from that which they have in common. Deep inside, all three of them are grappling with conflicting demands of their faith and duty. Salma who is happily married, is tempted

when contacted by her first love. Moni who gave up her career to look after her disabled son feels frustrated when her indifferent husband wants them to shift to Saudi Arabia and Iman who is in her twenties is already in a third marriage as she is treated as a pet because of her beauty and longs and yearns for economic freedom and autonomy. Afraid to take risk all three of them want their lives to be different. As they travel we get to know their characters, their lives, how attached they are to the place they now call home and the pressures and influences on them that come from the cultures they have left behind. They live at the intersection of a past and present, of who they were and who they are becoming. The journey turns out to be the journey of self-discovery for the three women when they are visited by Hoopoe, who compels them to question their relationships to faith and feminity, love, loyality and sacrifice.

There are some seminal works available on Leila Aboulela, amongst them some section of critics concentrate on Feminism in the fiction of Leila Aboulela like, P.V Arya in "Rethinking Feminism: A Study of Arab Muslim Women Identities in Select Novels of Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela and Ahdaf Soueif", through a feminist reading of the novels – *Pillars of Salt* and *My Name is Salma* by Fadia Faqir, *The Translator*(1999*)* and *Minaret*(2005) by Leila Aboulela and *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love* by Ahdaf Soueif explores the mode in which the three authors have represented Arab Muslim women. This helps in understanding the similarities in the representation of these women and the means through which they vary from each other. Sowmya Srinivasn in her paper "Anglo Arab Encounter and its Impact on Arab Muslim Women; A Study of the Select Novels of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela" presents a comparative examination of the cross-cultural interactions depicted in the select novels as well as the trajectory of growth of the female protagonists who are portrayed as the repositories of religious, national, gender-based identity conundrums, struggling to realize their potential and value. The thesis focuses on cross-cultural impact on the Arab Muslim World, the native Arabs and the Arab diasporic community in the West, through the lens of Islamic Arab World. The area of study is the space of intersection where the West meets the Arab culture and affects its original existence. Firouzeh Ameri in "Veiled Experiences: Re-writing Women's Identities and Experiences in Contemporary Muslim fiction in English" offers a post-

positivist realist approach to evaluating contemporary women's fiction in English, focusing on the lives and religious identities of Muslim women who are neither victims nor escapees of Islam, but who are willfully dedicated to their faith. Norah Hassan Alqahtani in "Muslim Feminisms and Fictions in a Postcolonial Frame: Case Studies of Nawal El Saadawi and Leila Aboulela", focuses on two authors labelled as "Muslim feminists" and their opposing viewpoints. Examining how the postcolonial subjects are dealt with by these writers, the study places a particular focus on women's issues in their contemporary societies. This research shows how El Saadawi's female characters use a variety of techniques, including aggressive ones, to combat the oppression they face. This study does also demonstrate how the story of the private lives of women has been entwined with the narrative of the country, in line with Fredric Jameson's Paradigm as El Saadawi is a writer with both feministic as well as nationalistic interests. This research compares and contrasts Aboulela's and El Saadawi's novels. Aboulela substantially infuses Islamic faith in her writings from the perspective of a committed Muslim. Providing a possibly universalizing, if not universal, unifying point for women, her writing provides women with an opportunity to "create an Islamic spiritual site of belonging and possible solidarity that transcends social classes, ethnic differences, and geographic boundaries". However, Aboulela's effort for liberation is restricted to a spiritual level, and her feminist focus on women's rights is not that profound. Lindsey Moore in the chapter titled "Voyages Out and In Two (British) Arab Muslim Women's Bildungsroman" of the book titled *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity In Muslim Writing*, focusing on how female characters identify themselves in relation to national and supranational communities, the two novels in question (*Ahdaf Soueif's In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) portray Arab Muslim women's experiences in their homelands and as migrant workers in Britain. The chapter also considers how far these novels reflect feminist viewpoints, putting special emphasis on informing contexts and formal textual aspects, to what extent these novels reflect feminist perspectives. Sheeba Anjum in "Locating The Female Subject in British Muslim Fiction: A Reading of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)", with reference to the novel *The Minaret* (2005), analyses the role of women in the Muslim world in light of Islam. As depicted in the

character of Najwa, the female protagonist in the novel, the paper explores postcolonialism as a condition impacting the lives of displaced immigrants. According to Anjum, "*Minaret* (2005) is a challenging novel which portrays how religious faith can be used as a power that eases the trauma of migration. It makes a significant contribution to how British Muslim identities are represented and how religion acts as an alternative way of achieving belonging in exile". Ashraf Ibrahim Zidan in "Islamic Feminism and The Concept of Hijab: A Study of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)", argues that the Islamic feminists have resisted the patriarchal readings of the Holy Qur'an as well as the Prophet's Hadith, which have validated the particular and turned it into accepted laws, demanding a revisiting of history based on a revaluation of the social context in which it was created in order to construct a cultural identity that is not bound by time. It also displays how particularly when it comes to the issue of hijab and its implications, Aboulela agrees with the Islamic feminists. These concerns are explored in Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005), and also her other works. Islamic feminists are chastised for being discriminating, non-specialists, non-Arabs, and receiving funding from the West. This paper argues that both Muslims and Africans, as well as the West, are accountable for the fragmented stereotypes. The western depiction of the Eastern women as oppressed or truncated is baseless as they are free to dress as they wish just like their fellow human beings. It also highlights that Aboulela's protagonists are untrustworthy since they are fragile, self-absorbed, and more concerned with details than with action. Finally, religion, not fundamentalism, could provide immigrants with belonging, security and stability. Geoffrey Nash in "Re-sitting Religion and Creating a Feminized Space in the Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela" positions the writings of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela, Egyptian-Sudanese writers, in the gendered space that exists between the continuous pressures of Western cultural imperialism and conservative, anti-modernist cultural Islamism. Subtly criticizing traditional gender stereotypes while navigating their own way around contemporary western standards, Soueif's female protagonists in Sandpiper, wander in isolation, within the bounds of these fundamentally opposed discourses. The study looks at Leila Aboulela's debut novel, *The Translator*, in particular examining how she promotes a feminized Islamic

discourse that allows her main female protagonist to deal with the tensions of a malfunctioning Muslim African polity as well as discrimination in a desolate Western metropolis. Lize-Maree Steenkamp in “Building Oppressive Proxies: Sudanese and Egyptian Domestic Place and the Production of Patriarchal Femininity in Leila Aboulela’s Lyrics Alley”, reveals that "women's domestic places emerge not as inherently resistant to patriarchy, but as conducive to the production of patriarchal women" by conducting a spatial analysis of *Lyrics Alley*. It investigates how patriarchal women are formed by domestic spaces in addition to being inherently resistant to patriarchy through homosocial exchanges, using the prism of the house as the nation writ small, to use Susan Andrade's phrase. The study also takes into account the ways in which patriarchal women may use small spaces-such as the kitchen, the living room, and even the body as the most intimate home of the self-to carry out oppression of other women through the manipulation and control of these spaces. Shirin Edwin in “Veiling the Obvious: African Feminist Theory and the Hijab in the African Novel” Validating and challenging simultaneously the specific orientations among African and particularly African feminist theories in relation to African Muslim women and Islam, focuses on the depiction of hijab in three African novels. Examination of the representation of the hijab is conducted in order to respond to the narrative that Islam is oppressive to Muslim women, who are usually compelled into wearing it. Seda Canpolat in “Scopic Dilemmas: Gazing the Muslim Woman in Fadia Faqir’s *My Name Is Salma* and Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005)”, analyzes how racist and sexist gazes are presented in two British Muslim women's novels, *My Name Is Salma* (2008) by Fadia Faqir and *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela. Both the texts, it is argued, emphasize a binarized form of seeing, wherein the female Muslim protagonists oscillate between racist and sexualized modes of being looked at. Through the lens of postcolonial fiction, the study examines the Muslim woman's place in today's neocolonial Scopic economy. It accomplishes this by developing dialogic links between Fanon's Masks and the aforementioned works.

A section of critics focuses on the representation of Hijab in Leila Aboulela’s texts like Md. Mahmudul Hasan in “Oppression versus Liberation: Representation of Hijab in Two Post-9/11 British Literary Texts” looks at how the hijab and hijab-

wearing women are portrayed in two post-9/11 British literary works, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) and Shelina Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf* (2009). This study explores Najwa and Shelina's commitment to dress in Islamic attire in spite of much pressure to not do so. Analyzing how hijab is portrayed in dominant discourses, before delving into the specifics of their unwavering commitment to wearing hijab, the study thus puts Aboulela's as well as Janmohamed's treatment of it into context.

Some researchers concentrate on the theme of Displacement like, Sherine Fouad Mazloum in her paper titled, "Displaced Muslim women in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)" looks at two Muslim writers, Monica Ali and Leila Aboulela, and their nuanced representations of Muslim women characters. The paper draws on Spivak's concept of 'displacement' and applies it to the instance of Muslim women who have been displaced. In order to emphasize the point that Muslim subjectivities whether or not they engage with their religion are influenced by the tradition of which Islam is a part Islam, it also refers to Talal Asad's examination of the concept of Islamic tradition. I n order make sense of their displacements, we see both the protagonists go through "a process of empowerment and agency "as they embark on their journey of finding a place in the world.

Some critics focus on the theme of Translation like, Ahmed Gamal Abdel Wahab in "Counter-Orientalism: Retranslating The 'Invisible Arab" In Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and *Lyrics Alley*", examines "the aesthetic and political boundaries of cultural translation" in Arab–British writings as illustrated by Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Lyrics Alley, by drawing on the counter-traditional concept of translation as engagement rather than transfer. Frauke Matthes in "Writing and Muslim Identity: Representations of Islam in German and English Transcultural Literature, 1990-2006", examines the link between traveling, translating, and gender with respect to Islam. In current fictional and semi-fictional travel and migration writing, an examination of how German and English language authors, both Muslim as well as non-Muslim address notions of literal and figurative movement, (cultural) translation, and the importance of gender constructs is presented. This study uses

postcolonial criticism to facilitate a parallel analysis of the selected texts, evaluating the commonalities and distinctions in German and English Transcultural writing, with a particular focus on the purpose of Islam in these texts. Alessandra Rizzo in "Constructing Places and Identities: Migration and The Role of Translation in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* And *Lyrics Alley*", focuses on the intersecting point of postcolonial, translation, and migration studies in the functioning and shaping of place, as well as the mechanisms by which a place can be turned into "a fluid translated place or a place in translation". The research aims to explore how translation can be used to represent a place both as a linguistic and metaphorical practice as well as a tool for cultural transposition. Wail S. Hassan in "Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction", elucidates the ideological worldview informing Aboulela's fiction, first by elaborating on *The Translator's* allusions to Season, before tracing, in *Colored Lights* and *Minaret (2005)*. It also evaluates the advantages and limitations of her contribution to a new movement known as Muslim immigrant literature, which aims to establish an alternative episteme drawn from Islam but formed specifically by the perspective of immigrants. Tamar Steinitz in "Back Home, Translation, Conversion and Domestication in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator",* argues that Aboulela's novel The *Translator,* questions the conceptualizations of translation derived out of western philosophical and theological traditions. The paper analyzes how this process in which a secular westerner gets rewritten into Islamic faith, challenges and redesigns ideas of equality, transparency, obscurity, and domestication that are popular in Anglo-American translation models. Again Brenda Cooper in her paper titled "Look Who's Talking? Multiple Worlds, Migration and Translation in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*", examines Aboulela's quest towards finding the appropriate sort of English for the effective portrayal of multiple languages, cultures, and knowledge bases into which she herself as well as her lead character in *The Translator* are engaged. Solid objects in Aboulela's work have a distinct language than that of the most obvious literary usage of subtle images and deep metaphors, according to the paper. They speak of the complexity of existence and the loss experienced by those who have negotiate multiple cultures and identities. To put it another way, while Sammar, the protagonist of the story, is payed

to translate between English and Arabic, the subtler interpretation takes place within the English language and between different cultures. In Rachael Gilmour's "Living Between Languages: The Politics of Translation in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) and Xiaolu Guo's *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers"*, the concept of translational writing is examined by looking at two contemporary London novels set in London: Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) and Xiaolu Guo's A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers (2007). Both novels are told from the perspective of female protagonists, whose movement across linguistic planes generates a translingual identity that is uniquely feminine. Illustrating that translational writing, like translation theory, offers no a consensus on the practice of translation, both works also evaluate the potentiality, challenges, and constraints of a life lived between languages. Their contrasting conclusions regarding language relationships, translation's nature and objectives, and the relationship between language and truth present much pertaining to the difficulties of translational writing. Nadia Butt in "Negotiating Untranslatability and Islam in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator"*, through Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator*, discusses the issue of Islam's untranslatability. The very concept of the 'untranslatability of Islam' refers to what Bassam Tibi, the Islamic scholar and others have described as 'the crisis of modern Islam' against the backdrop of an emerging transcultural world marked by global migration. Emphasizing that the untranslatability is a key feature of Islam, the novel seems to indicate that Islam appears to be beyond all translations. In fact, through the interaction of a European man and an African woman, the narrative of Aboulela stages the concept of Islam's untranslatability as an irrefutable fact of life, raising in the process intriguing concerns about the function of different beliefs in a globalized world marked by far-reaching procedures of social transformation and cultural change.

Faith is the focus of some critics like Edwin Shirin in her paper "(Un)Holy Alliances: Marriage, Faith and Politics in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*", using Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, examines the intent or purport of Islamic spirituality. This paper accentuates an admiration of such aspects of the Islamic

faith that translate into a Believer's everyday life on a spiritual level, by employing several recent theories and perspectives on Islamic feminism, in addition to Saba Mahmood's 'conceptualization of feminism beyond the predictable rubric of politics and activism. The paper aims to lend critical purchase to Aboulela's issues regarding Islam's over politicization; it analyzes the intricate tenor of the religion more as a faith that is modulated by psychological and emotional considerations and less as a bundle of impermeable laws and doctrines devoid of human factors such as emotions, weaknesses, and psychological situations in *The Translator* by exploring what Aboulela means by "the real thing". Ferial J. Ghazoul in "Humanizing Islam's Message and Messenger in Postcolonial Literature", argues that there is an ongoing battle over the definition and redefinition of the Prophet Muhammad that touches intimately on the message of Islam as embodied in the Qur'an. Recent postcolonial literary works have engaged in this battle of representation and have endeavored to alter persistent misconceptions of Islam's message by drawing a different understanding of Messenger. This article addresses the image of Islam with specific emphasis on the message of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad who delivered the message as portrayed in three postcolonial novels: Leila Aboulela's *The Translator (1999),* Assia Djebar's *Loin de Medine: Filles d'Ismael* (1991), and Salim Bachi's *Le Silence de Mahomet* (2008).

Some critics focus on the themes of Identity, Diaspora and Transculturality like Md. Mahmudul Hasan in his paper titled "Seeking Freedom in the "Third Space" of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) and Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*", asserts that Muslim communities, particularly Muslim women, have really been fetishized in (neo) Orientalist writing. Providing a platform or a space for the voices of Muslim, particularly those who wear the hijab, has been much delayed. When challenged with the advantages and limitations of Diaspora, these two works depict how Islamic identity is managed and prioritized by Muslim Women in metropolitan spaces. The research examines how the West promotes a critical evaluation of a group of Muslim women's feelings of identity vacillation, providing them with a valuable approach of analyzing their religious

practices and ultimately assisting them in conceptualizing and articulating their sense of belonging. It creates a third space for many others through which they can partake confidently in a rereading of Islamic literature, reclaiming an identity that relieves them from traditionally enforced observances of their home nations. Huda Ahmad Ulayyan and Yousef Awad in their work titled "The Quest for Self-Discovery: A Study of the Journey Motif in Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Aboulela's *The Translator*" discusses how an important part is played by the 'journey motif' in the writings of diasporic Arab women writers. The study examines how Khadra's and Sammar's respective experiences influence the structural and thematic substance of these two novels. Ultimately, the article helps in bringing to fore as to how Khadra and Sammar navigate their cultural conditions and deal with imperative societal expectations by examining the significance of journeys and travels in the two novels. Ghadir K. Zannoun in "Home as Love: Transcending Positionality in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*", explores how the novel treats place and identity as 'constructed entities embedded in emotion' by employing feminist theory and postcolonial theories of place and identity, as well as Lila Abu-Lughod's concept of emotional discourse as a pragmatic act. This representation of place and identity challenges numerous positionalities and binaries, such as self/other and east/west, enabling Aboulela to go for a more critical examination of them according to this study. Ghania Ouahmiche and Dallel Sarnou in "Voices of Errancy, Spaces of Silence and Traces of Writing in the Narratives of Fadia Faqir, Leila Aboulela and Assia Djebar", aims to demonstrate how in an attempt to construct a point of identification for Arab women, "home" is portrayed as an object of quest in the literature. In this light, this paper seeks to foreground the primacy of voices over silences and to explain their translation into written. This paper tends to articulate the depiction of home/homeland in the three novels Willow Trees Don't Weep, Lyrics Alley, and La Femme Sans Sépulture (The Woman without a Burial Place) by Faqir, Aboulela and Djebar respectively, to foster the idea that each character is a wanderer in-between space and continuously creates new spaces and voices. Majed Aladaylah in "Negotiating Narrative in Transcultural Spaces in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)" using Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005), attempts to negotiate the presentation of narration in cultural places. The

paper examines how Aboulela by employing space symbolically and aesthetically to navigate transculturality in the novel, recreating the ideas of home and homeland through an approach of cultural narration. In an effort to promote 'deference, assimilation, and adaptation', Aboulela attempts to transcend cultural, emotional, spiritual, and national distinctions. Her quest is to step outside of one's immediate circumstances, identities, and consciousnesses. As a result, in order to build oneness and a harmonious cultural space, Aboulela aims for mutual assimilation and the eradication of disparities and divisions. Hassiba Mazouzi in her dissertation ""Selves and Others": The Other and their Encounter in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*" explores the portrayal of the "Other" in Aboulela's novel *The Translator* (1999) and the encounter of this "Other" in two different contexts (Scotland and Sudan). It probes the three types of "otherness" depicted by Leila Aboulela in this twentieth-century text: cultural, racial, and gender othernesses. It focuses on the status of the Sudanese Muslim female protagonist as the foreign Other in an intercultural context (Britain) and in an intracultural setting (Sudan). Additionally, there is in this dissertation another dimension of the discourse on otherness in the novel. This discourse stresses the performance of this character in human relations and her function as an active wooer that overcomes the differences, prejudices and representations in both twentieth century contexts. Through cultural communication, dialogue of civilization, unprejudiced gaze and the challenge of misconceptions and misunderstandings; instead of the rejection of the Other, the novel depicts the convergence between the Eastern and The Western characters and the acceptance of the Other in the dominant group. Emily Churilla in "Coming Home: Communities Beyond Borders in Caryl Phillips' *The Atlantic Sound* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)", explores the impasse of working around and against the frame of Western temporality and space, and specifically how narratives of diasporic subjectivity, exemplified in *The Atlantic Sound* by Caryl Phillips', subvert and disrupt normalized constructs of home and history, belonging, and identity. Furthermore, it considers Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) as a female voice, offering a unique reading of temporality and the building of subjectivity through communities of women not based on national affiliation. Ileana Dimtrui in her paper titled ""Crossing and dwelling": home as a state of mind in

Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) and Gordimer's *The Pickup*", investigates the postcolonial concept of diasporic re-routing, as not necessarily associated with loss and alienation. After an analysis of these novels, it is contended that alternative types of 're-rooting' and belonging still stand a chance, even in the middle of postcolonial fissures and mass migrations, if home is taken as a state of mind and identity as grounded in geographies of faith. Maha M. H. Mostafa in "*Lyrics Alley*: Leila Aboulela's New 'Lyrics' on Hybridity", examines Aboulela's thoughts on how hybridity might be embraced as a constructive approach to live and coexist in a heterogeneous society and emphasizes the factors Aboulela believes are crucial for the implementation of such a policy. The paper brings to fore varied forms of hybrid identities that Aboulela presents by drawing on concepts of "The Third Space," "border," and "nomadic subjectivity," by Bhabha, Gomez Pena and Rosi Braidotti respectively. Susan Taha Al-Karawi and Ida Baizura Bahar in "Negotiating the Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)", assert that Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005) presents genuine and substantial material to examine the difficulties faced by Arab Muslim women in order to carve a modernized yet religiously conventional identity. This study basis its arguments on Homi Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and the third space as well as Victor Turner's conceptual framework of liminality. Employing the image of veil, the study attempts to investigates how identities and struggles arise and are carried out. This study presents Cultural hybridity as a blend of the protagonist's adopted British culture and his native Arab culture. Farzaneh Doosti and Amir Ali Nojoumian in "Of Hideous 'Half-and-Halfs': Reading the Grotesque in Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*", examines 'the alien(ated) body of migration' in Aboulela's *The kindness of Enemies* one of the notable books of post-millennial British Muslim Diaspora. The study starts off by giving a general outline of the Bakhtinian concept of the grotesque and how it correlates to the diasporic body in the context of the Muslim Diaspora, and then it expands this concept into a more inclusively 'diasporic condition'. "the primordially grotesque conditions forming the human body as a doubled, hybridized space that is constantly becoming changed and re-fragmented" are then traced in the female character Natasha. Alessandra Rizzo in "Leila Aboulela's *Lyrical Alley*: Crossing the Sudan, Egypt and Britain", views

travel as a way of exploring one's identity, in which the act of moving itself represents the effective balance of movement and emotion. The assessment casts light on Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* by exploring the relationship between travel and migration as dynamic concepts which are dependent upon mechanism of cultural translation. It does this by taking as its initial point the recent critical research on postcolonial and translation studies, travel writing and migration theories. The conceptual and practical modalities that make Aboulela's work a point of intersection between fluctuating territories are scrutinized in this article. Lusia Rath in "Interculturality in African Fiction: Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*", examines the meaning of the term 'Interculturality' from the viewpoint of literary studies. The novel *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela is utilized to demonstrate how the clash between different cultures can transform identities. The paper contends the argument that the notion of being an outsider and feeling at home tend to merge into one another and can no longer be differentiated from one another in a distinct manner. According to Rath, the novel deals with the aspects of intercultural encounters and raises questions about the 'translatability' of cultures and religions. It approaches these concerns through a postcolonial lens, drawing into view the impact of Westernization and modernization on Africa. The novel also reaches for a deeper understanding of the experiences of being a stranger, of belonging and of being at home life.

Some critics have concentrated on the Rhetoric in Leila Aboulela's fiction like in Ms Enaam Hashim Albashir and Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed Alfaki's paper "An Exploration of the Rhetorical Devices in Leila Aboulela's Novel *The Translator*", Aboulela's literary narrative technique is examined by studying her novel, *The Translator*. A mix of narrative, rhetorical, and stylistic analysis is employed as the methodology for this study. All of the techniques that are employed for the analysis are taken from within the constructivism interpretive research paradigm. Dina Hassan in "Multilingualism in literature: A socio-pragmatic reading of Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1999)", while reassessing the assumption that code-switching is linked to establishing the writer's primary identity, examines its functions in The Map of Love (1999) by Soueif and *The*

Translator by Aboulela. Influencing perceptions regarding multilingualism and enhancing the veracity of experiences described in a foreign tongue are the two main goals that are the focus of this research. Eva Hunter in "The Muslim "Who Has Faith" in Leila Aboulela's Novels *Minaret* (2005) And *Lyrics Alley* (2009)", examines the narrative strategies used by Leila Aboulela in her two most recent texts for the portrayal of a Muslim who has faith. When examined with respect to what is understood about how her writing has been received in Sudan and the United Kingdom, the narrative strategies Aboulela employs for the portrayal of such figures i.e. people with faith, sync with her wish to be a mentor and to teach.

Some critics focus on the theme of Marginalization in Leila Aboulela's works like Yousef Awad in his paper titled "Writing from the Margins of the Nation: Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*", explores the portrayal of marginalized characters in a manner that helps them to voice their perspectives concerning Sudan's approaching freedom by Arab British author Leila Aboulela in her historical novel *Lyrics Alley* (2010). Illustrating how the hopes and disappointments of the people overlap with discussions and debates about the country's future, the paper examines how the novel, focuses on mini narratives instead of the grand narrative of independence. Attention is drawn towards Fredric Jameson's striking claim that the cultural productions of third-world are "national allegories", by the vividly reverberate voices of the characters all through the book. Ken Junior Lipenga in "Voicing Marginality: Disability in Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*", investigates how Aboulela conceives disability as a marginal space putting emphasis on how this space holds potential to facilitate novel interpretations of masculinity, nationalism, and poetic creativity and is therefore reaction against what is called by Tobin Siebers as "the Ideology of ability". The focus of the paper is to demonstrate as to how marginal spaces have the capacity to develop into 'spaces of being and becoming', spaces where people occupying them can channel their creative abilities. The paper in doing so, leaves behind the body of research which has illustrated that the significant proportion of literary perceptions are marginalizing in the manner that they do have a tendency to concentrate nearly entirely on the able-bodied individual as the only potential central character in fiction,

on the highly questionable premise that it is only with such a persona that readers could really identify.

The focus of some critics is Identity and the representation of Islam in the works of Leila Aboulela like Asma Benguesmia and Oumbarka Refice in “Hybrid Identities and Muslim Faith in Leila Aboulela’s Novels: *Minaret* (2005) and *The Translator”,* explores the construction of Hybrid Identity with respect to Muslim Faith. The pursuit for identity among Muslim diaspora in the west, the establishment of hybrid identities within the paradigm of Islam, and the impact of belief in these developments are captured by these texts Emphasizing the significance of the relationship of religion, faith, and identity, the paper analyzes how religious beliefs impact identity formation. Stuart Hall's and Homi Bhabha's theories of hybridity in cultural studies and postcolonial studies are employed for a thematic exploration of the two texts. Boukhari Sarra in ““Sometimes a Shift Makes Me Remember”: Displacement, Identity, and Religion in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005)”, analyzes Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* (2005) in a way that evokes culture, identity, and religion for the sake of finding migrants’ lost identity after being a subject to displacement effects. It questions the reality behind the process of the cultural change expressed in the novel and its outcomes on Muslim migrants. It investigates the role of an ‘exotic’ cultural setting in defining migrants’ identity and religion. Dr. Eiman Abbas Hassan El-Nour in “Faith as Refuge: Female migration in Leila Aboulela’s Novels”, discusses how belief became the rock in a turbulent world where identities are being challenged and reshaped. The paper shows how nostalgia and faith in Aboulela's texts are crucial components to give the characters a firm frame of reference by analyzing how belief is completely rewritten in these works as social practice, psychic comfort, and how Aboulela's nostalgic perception aims an actualization of home in Islam. Ileana Sora Dimitriu in ““Home in Exile” In Leila Aboulela’s Fiction”, focuses on fictional depictions of home and exile, faith found and lost in the wake of enormous mass migrations to the North. It asserts that alternate forms of rootedness may exist at the core of various displacements, with home-in-faith seen as a panacea to a fragmented identity thus challenges the view of home as inescapably linked to a place of origin.

Saba Idris and Sadia Zulfiqar in “Remapping London: Islam in Aboulela’s Fiction”, focuses on how Leila Aboulela's fiction depicts Islam while exploring the topography within her writing. This article explains how London is portrayed, how it impacts the characters, and how the topography is useful.

After a thorough review of the literature, it has been found that in the works of Leila Aboulela, critics have focused mainly on the issues of, displacement, translation, faith, feminism, diaspora, rhetoric and marginalization. However, her works have not been, yet, analyzed from the postcolonial lens of representation and identity construction. The research work aims at a study of role of faith in identity formation and will examine how Muslim identities as well as Islam are portrayed in writings of Leila Aboulela. Postcolonialism, particularly Edward said theory of representation and his concept of “writing back” provide the theoretical underpinnings to this thesis. The selected novels will be studied in the light of the counter hegemonic discourses they contain. The central argument of this thesis is that the works under study are constitutive of discourse of resistance, challenging dominant representations and ideological frameworks. In addition to serving as agents of resistance, these novels present a re-articulation of identity based on faith and the same will be the focus of the study.

Chapter 2

Identity and Representation: A Theoretical Perspective

Understanding the significance of Colonialism and Postcolonialism, along with their intricate interrelation, is indispensable. Delineating the dissimilarity and the disparity between Modernism and Postmodernism, Tim Woods writes in his book *Beginning Postmodernism*, that the "despite the prefix 'post 'suggesting that postmodernism emerges after modernism, as a chronologically later period in social and cultural history, there are many theorists who argue that postmodernism is not a chronological period, but more of a way of thinking and doing" (8). Similarly, one could argue that a comparable analogy exists in the disparity and distinction between colonialism and Postcolonialism. In his, article "Postcolonialism: what's in a name?", Aijaz Ahmad believes that "the word 'postcolonial 'was to be used increasingly not so much for periodization as for designating some kinds of literary and literary critical writing, and eventually some history writing" (28). The primary distinction betwixt colonialism and Postcolonialism therefore, does not constitute the Time. Postcolonialism, as a matter of fact, serves as a critique of colonialism. Certain critics even believe that the works such as "Beowulf" and Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" could be construed as postcolonial texts, given that their writing took place after the Roman empire's conquest of Britain (Boehmer 6). Conversely, as according to Gandhi, "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (17) so certain texts produced in what is termed as the postcolonial era today might therefore be regarded as colonial. The Point that is principally being pointed out here is that if "The Canterbury Tales" could be interpreted as a postcolonial text by Boehmer and any novel of the contemporary times can be read as colonial by Gandhi, time does not emerge then as the crucial differentiator between colonialism and Postcolonialism.

One could contend or claim that it is imperative to regard culture as the point of contest in the struggle between colonialism and Postcolonialism. The colonizing powers strive to usurp the physical territory as well as conquer the mental territory of the people they are colonising, through colonialism while the Postcolonialism in

response involves efforts to reclaim both geographical territory as well liberate the psyche from colonial influence. “Cultural representations”, Boehmer writes, “were central first to the process of colonizing other lands, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer” (5). Furthermore,“ Cultures are even more worth fighting for than nations” according to Simon During, because “hierarchies of cultures seem to fix identities, whereas hierarchies of nations merely seem to belong to history and politics. Under this dispensation an imperialist nation, competing with others, must regard itself as having a world-historical culture” (139). In other words, it is imperative to view colonialism as a dangerous threat not only in a political or economic sense but also as a cultural one. Postcolonial movements typically commence with cultural resistance before focusing on the other dimensions. In *The Empire Writes Back,* the authors explicitly underscore this notion through their utilization of “the term ‘post-colonial’ to cover all culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2). Here, two key points emerge, firstly, the postcolonial process predominantly addresses cultural domains. Secondly, the ongoing necessity of postcolonial criticism remains imperative to illustrate the enduring presence of cultural colonialism today. Putting it briefly “Postcolonial criticism”, Homi Bhabha points out, “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (*The Location* 245).

It can be argued that colonialism manifests in two forms: geographical and cultural. While the former, for the majority of people, appears to have dissipated with the attainment of independence, the latter persists. Some even contend that geographical colonialism is in place even today, suggesting that recent developments merely represent a transition from a formal to an informal empire. It is quite evident that “for the most part, the same (ex-) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies” (Young 3). Apart from the colonizers and the colonized, there exists another category, that is the native informants. According to Said “This group of people being close to their colonizing masters “feel[s] superior to his own people” (Orientalism, 323-324). These people turn into

"the Antilles Negro [who] is more 'civilized' than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man" (Fanon, *Black Skin*, 26). These indigenous intermediaries frequently appear in the form of politicians or intellectuals, acting as channels through which colonizers sustain their control over colonized populace even after the gaining of independence from the colonial rule. While the politicians facilitate the colonial powers control over the land, intellectuals enable domination over the collective psyche. Consequently, the challenge of Colonialism persists, underscoring and highlighting the imperative and the necessity of a postcolonial response.

Throughout the history of mankind, identity has been one of the most pertinent issues of debate and deliberation. Starting with the colonial encounter up until the culture of global capitalism, identity has been constructed multifariously so that it has come to occupy a significant place in academic and social circles. But unlike other issues which are primarily academic, this debate takes centre stage not only in theoretical terms but also in performance. The formation of identities within a post-colonial framework involves the establishment of identification systems. This process operates on two fronts: initially, by the colonizers who propagate myths regarding the subject races, coupled with a belief that these subjects are incapable of representing themselves; subsequently, by the colonized, aiming to resist colonization and foster solidarity against their rulers. Similarly, in the global arena, the third world serves as a marketplace where identities are shaped by the dynamics of consumerism. Here, identities are once again fashioned on dual levels: firstly, by multinational economic forces, resulting in globally hybridized and distinctively diversified communities; and secondly, by the narratives of unique national cultures, providing a counterpoint to the dominant economic influence.

Identity is the term used to denote who or what we are collectively as well as individually. The concept of identity serves the dual purpose of establishing affiliation and belongingness on the one hand and distinction and uniqueness on the other. The politics of identity lies between the construction and reception of identity in these two aspects. Where the collective idea of identity is a macroscopic grouping together of people in a category based on one or more common factors such as origin, nationality, time, place, education, economic status, ideology, gender, class, caste, religion, sexual

preference, and the purposeful ignoring of other differences, the iteration of individuality through identity entails a microscopic underlining of these (and/or other) differences. Identity as category creates a sense of homogeneity and sameness, while as an individuating factor it rests upon the assertion of heterogeneity and difference. Barring exceptions, the homogenizing aspects of identity create discourses about communities and people belonging to them, while the aspects that demonstrate heterogeneity dismantle these and are often regarded as postmodern reactions or counter-narratives.

The politics of identity is designed through the conflict that erupts between identity established on sameness and that on difference. The discursive construction of identity gives preference to those narratives of identity fixation that are based on homogeneity, timelessness and popular belief. Such discursive identity is depictive of a sense of doubtless permanency and lack of transmutability. It is such definitions of identity that support the global discourses about Americans and progress, Islam and terrorism, women and oppression, third-world cultures and backwardness, and so on. It must be noted however that identity in terms of discourse theory is not 'essentialist' without purpose and is more 'strategic and positional' (Hall, "Introduction" 3). To counter such universalizing discourses and their politics, the counter-narrative of individuality is developed and often the two stands on collectivity and individuality are situated differently vis-a-vis temporality. While theories of collective identity tend towards past traditions, collective experience of generations and historical cultural values, blurring the differences of lived experience and a strategic will to maintain certain definitions, individual identity is sceptical of inherited ideologies. It is rather contemporary in its constitution and mutates with time.

The desire to identify one's 'self" is one of the most primitive impulses of human beings. Identity refers to the establishment of affiliation as well as individuality. It is an effort to assert a sense of belongingness with a group and establish a singular recognition for the 'self' in counterpoint. "Identity of things, people, places, groups, nations and cultures is constituted by the logics of both sameness and difference" (Curie 3). Similarly, Weeks observes: "Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates

you from others" (88). Identity is never undifferentiated. It is always fragmentary. The uniqueness of identity then lies in a unique conflict and negotiation of differences and fragments each time.

> Identities are not neutral. Behind the quest for identity are different and often conflicting values. By saying who we are, we are also striving to express what we are, what we believe and what we desire. The problem is that these beliefs, needs and desires are often patently in conflict, not only between different communities but within individuals themselves. (Weeks 89)

Identity is then a "patchwork that lives no less from its seams and ruptures than from individual patches of social affiliation of which it is made up" (Meyer 16). Identity is not only an attempt to negotiate conflicts without, but also to negotiate the conflicts that exist and erupt within. Further identity includes not only what one projects the 'self as, but also what the 'other' perceives this 'self' to be. It is an "open process of negotiation between the self-image that the individual conjures up of himself and the image that his partners in social interaction form of him in changing contexts" (Meyer 15). But this idea of fragmentation shouldn't be led to a total denigration of any sort of collectivism. A collective identity denotes "those feelings and values in respect of a sense of continuity, shared memories and a sense of common destiny of a given unit of population which has had common experiences and cultural attributes" (Smith 179).Whereas such ideas of common identity are often thought of as unrealistic and discursive in nature and abandoned in the theoretical process of debunking meta-narratives, such collective identities are of utmost significance for communities that have faced 'brutal ruptures' in the form of colonial encounters, and their resistance movements (Shohat 175). This is to suggest that collective or fragmentary, identity in all discursive and counter-discursive forms underlines a politics of representation.

The attempt towards identification comes as a natural instinct and is informed with the desire to fight isolation and alienation. It is an effort to fit in the matrix of human relations and exercise one's power from that location. The attempt towards establishing identity is an attempt to assert power. Identity provides a voice that allows one (at the level of a community or an individual) to emphasize a stand point or a discourse. It is through identity that the politics of power can be executed or

countered. The history of the world is the story of representations and discourses based chiefly on the attempt towards attaining and executing power. The politics of identity and representation is informed by three distinct modes; the Gramscian instinct of 'knowing thyself' (Forgacs 326); the inherent narcissistic impulse to superiority; and the Nietzschean 'will to power' (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*). The history of imperialism (colonial or economic), is driven by the reins of discursive practice and hegemonic control. Be it the imputed Darwinism of 'survival of the fittest' (Spencer 444), the so called civilizing mission that forms the 'white man's burden' (Kipling 280), or the current popular/mass culture of cosmopolitanism, representation is never a 'non power laden discourse' (Kahn 7).

The simultaneous reference in a name or an identity to what it is and what it is not is reflective of the presence in "every proper designation [of] its different and thus disruptive double" (Li 6). This dichotomy of 'self' and 'other' forms a primary basis in the attempt to ascertain identity. It is this idea of dichotomy that Said's theory of orientalism is founded upon. Further it is this dichotomy that allows for the creation of counter-narratives. If identity as discourse is created by the process of screening out the 'other' that is already informed in its name, and politically manipulating the signifier to exercise power, then the counter-narrative or the counter-discourse can be orchestrated by exercise of articulation by the 'other' that has been hitherto silent.

The dichotomy of identity informs both discursive and counter-discursive exercises. Not only is identity relevant in the construction of power, it is also enormously significant in the disruption of power. But the conception of 'self and 'other' changes temporally and spatially and this makes identity a constantly transforming concept. Identity is conceptualized as a referent for an 'enlightenment subject', that highlights the evolutionary and reactionary individualism of every subject, a 'sociological subject', that necessitates social interaction and influence, and a 'postmodern subject' with multiple and overlapping or conflicting affiliations and a plurality of being. This conceptual framework renders identity and its foundational premise of defining 'self by defining the 'other' and vice-versa, as a transforming and mutating concept. Identity is not a 'possession but a social process' (Meyer 15). With

reference to this mutability and essential dynamism, identification as a process informs the politics of identity and its representation.

The colonial process has always been acknowledged as an important factor in shaping the identity of the colonized. The influence of colonialism on identity first became apparent in the form of the discourse created about the orient by the west. The essentialist orient created by the west not only supplied as a suitable justification for the colonial advance as a mission in philanthropy, it also served as a means of categorizing the subject races in absolute opposition to the western 'self'. This entailed a process of identification by default for the west as well. The colonial process then becomes not just a political or economic pursuit for the west, but also a sort of self-revelation and affirmation. The fact that the 'self" is pitted against an 'other' which is dominantly a western invention makes it a narcissistic venture.

In the study of third-world identity with reference to the discourse of polarity between the colonizer and the colonized and its application in the process of creating systems of identification that support the exercise of colonial expansion, Edward Said occupies a significant place. In his seminal work, *Orientalism*, Said provides an elaborate analysis explaining how the creation and promotion of the discourse about an essentialist orient perpetuated the imperial exercise. The discourse mechanism supporting imperialism comprises of the process by which a stagnant and universal belief is created about an orient in keeping with the interests of the imperial powers. Orientalism, as a discourse, is the representation of the colonized as a homogenously regressive group, as opposed to the dynamic and progressive west. The colonial perception of the world situates the west in a discursive space of progress and development. The perception that the west signifies advancement and is considered to be the trendsetter for the rest of the world to follow, carries on even in the current jargon of globalization which is seemingly suggestive of neutralization of hierarchy. In the dichotomy of west and the rest, the former occupies a space of development in temporal terms as well. At any given time, the west represents a sense of being ahead in time and the rest of the world is seen to be trudging along the standards set by it and trying to catch up desperately. In this sense then, the imperial context places the west as the first world and the developing world as the third world.

The term ‘third-world’, though vastly criticized and almost rejected by academic circles for its political overtones, is used here for two specific reasons. First, in geographic and political terms, ‘third-world’ groups together all those countries which have been colonized or have faced colonial rule. The use of the term ‘third-world’ then is to clearly and plainly denote the communities that were included therein. Secondly, even in the current context, the neo-colonial activities and invasions conceive of the euphemistically termed developing world as the world that follows as an inferior entity to be controlled by the superior west. In this context then the term ‘third-world’ may be rejected for its semantic obsoleteness in the absence of a second world, but it is still quite alive in terms of grouping together subservient nations and communities with reference to American capitalism. The term ‘third-world’ in this sense, has come to symbolize a sense of marginality and minority. It is not only inclusive of imperial colonies but also developing nations in the era of globalization. The rejection of the term ‘third-world’ may be euphemistically liberating but in the current scenario too, the hierarchies, imperialisms and the self/other dichotomies exist and govern the politics of identity. The term ‘third world’ then occupies a significant space in the context of identity politics as it is evocative of subservient and regressive communities. It brings memories of the myths of oriental inferiority and the colonial ‘mission civilisatrice’ (Said, *Culture* 33) to the continuing western claim to supremacy.

With colonial advancement identity and culture come to a space of interaction. The hegemonic discourse of identifying the west as a superior ‘self and the rest as its default opposite and inferior ‘other’ lays the foundation of the politics of imperial rule. The development of this binary identity gives a strong and almost unbeatable impetus to the exercise of colonial advancement. In reaction (or resistance) to the colonial discourse of binary oppositions, the homogenized identity of the colonized from the colonial discourse is used to develop a unified national identity. This unified identity is ironically depictive of a sort of ‘orientalism-in-reverse’ (Jalal al-Azm 18) but the repetition is fashioned in a way to assert a sense of strength with what was earlier presented as a cause for inferiority. This attempt towards subverting the perception as offered by the colonizers is designed to question its ostensible claim to

absolute credibility and irrefutability. So the 'Negritude Movement' in Africa underlines the blackness of its people, hitherto symbolic of evil, as beautiful, and the 'Non Co-operation Movement' in India challenges the European discourse of oriental passivity with a changed perception of patience and non-violence.

Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* includes an analysis of identity as a means of resisting colonialism. Through a study of the colonial narratives in the genre of the 'novel', Said analyses the factors that create the cultures of imperialism, nationalism and revolt. He scrutinizes the rhetoric of power in the presumed authority and hegemony of the culture of imperialism, and the mythology of nativism in the revolt against it. He also states that the binary codification that is rendered through the mechanics of empire allows the two communities to interact and subsequently be hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic. Said critically evaluates the dynamics of revolt and resistance but nevertheless defines 'resistance' as the effort of the native against the colonial power. While re-affirming the polarity between the colonizer and the colonized Said lays the foundation of resistance as a means of subverting canonical perceptions and creating new methods of understanding culture and identity. The fact remains however, that a universal appeal and acceptance of these discourses (as aids to imperialism and/or resistance or anti-colonialism) is central to the credibility and efficacy of discursive formations (Said, *Orientalism* 7). The discourse of orientalism and that of 'orientalism-in-reverse' (Jalal al-Azm 18) as resistance reflects the possibility of discernible opposing or at least differing perceptions of the same identity. These perceptions may be arbitrary and politically manipulated but their bases were nevertheless apparent in the subject being identified (Said, *Orientalism* 6). However, the possibility of manipulating these bases makes identity elusive and any attempt towards defining it would also be arbitrary and not absolute or final.

In *Orientalism*, Said establishes the significance of projected identities and the power function associated with these representations. Said observes that the idea of an oriental identity is created by the west based on inherited perceptions about it. Profusely referring to Foucault and Gramsci, Edward Said explains that the construct of oriental identity is re-iterated to create a discourse of oriental inferiority upon

which the project of colonial annexation can be designed. Despite the overwhelming response it received, Said's seminal work has been criticized for re-embarking upon a discourse of orientalism in the absence of an alternate identity (Young, *White Mythologies* 167). In his refusal to accept the western idea of the orient as authentic, Said does not provide an alternate account. Furthermore, the only voices heard in the analysis are those of Said and first-world theorists. The 'real' orient, if there can be anything like that, still remains silent (Ahmad, "Orientalism and After" 172; Moore-Gilbert 51). Moreover, in his discussion of the advance of imperial rule, Said entirely ignores the development of resistance to it (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 40). In the absence of resistance to the discourse, his account fails to provide a holistic analysis of identity politics, a task that he takes up later. Whereas the attention is centered on the construction of oriental identity and its colonial ramifications in his landmark work of 1978, its sequel, as it were, *Culture and Imperialism* focuses on the cultural aspect of imperialism, resistance to the colonial rule and the development of third-world identity with reference to it. Said emphasizes two key phenomena in this work: first, the "general worldwide pattern of imperial culture" and second, "the historical experience of resistance against empire" (xii).

In *Culture and Imperialism,* Said focuses on culture as an evolving system which directs the colonial process and reflects on the identity of the colonizer and the colonized. Colonial interaction, in the form of imperial advancement and the resistance to it, bears an enormous influence on third-world identity. The colonizer as well as the colonized are both indelibly transformed in the course of colonial experience. The cultural aspects of imperialism, colonial interaction and resistance are of utmost significance when discussing the development of third-world identity. Like identity, culture is also defined in fluidity. It is an ever changing process and never reaches a state of final signification. Raymond Williams understands it as 'a whole way of life' (qtd. in Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 89). To Williams, culture is an all-inclusive statement of being. Williams identifies it as:

> an intricate historical process of struggle, communication and negotiation, in which the dominant and the sub-ordinate 'class cultures' of an epoch or society interacted of course, in very uneven ways and together with other

> practices (production, consumption, politics, the family, the work etc.) and created distinct 'structures of feeling'. (Benewick and Green 260)

With reference to the imperial process too, culture reflects the social impetus behind the western attempt towards occupying the non-west, the various relations developed between the colonizer and the colonized and the reactions and retaliations that ensued out of the colonial experience. In this respect, culture becomes exceedingly reflective of identity. Said defines culture as "all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy from the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure (*Culture* xii)". With Arnold, Said believes that culture is the reservoir of the best a society has known. It signifies a cleansed and glorified image of the 'self against the 'other' and provides as a justification for the extension of colonial rule upon the latter (*Culture* xiii). He locates culture in the area of literature and arts so as to find an understanding of the politics surrounding the history of colonialism.

The historical episode of imperial annexation and the resistance offered to it through various means are both functions of culture. Imperialism is directed by a cultural acceptance of the principal of Western Enlightenment, which Jameson describes as a "part of a properly bourgeois cultural revolution, in which the values and discourses, the habits and daily space, of the ancient regime were systematically dismantled so that in their place could be set the new conceptualities, habits and life forms, value systems of a capitalist market society (*Postmodernism* 96)".To Marxist thinkers like Gramsci and Williams, such cultural annexation is undertaken through hegemonic means which include the development of discursive knowledges that can be projected to the colonized as a fact of nature (Gramsci 12; Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 108). It is only through a discursive projection of the native culture as inferior that the colonizer's culture can be placed in a position of superiority. With the development of such hierarchies between the colonizer and the colonized, the entire process of imperialism is garbed in the disguise of a humanistic civilizing mission. The process of what seems to be the "progressive assimilation of native peoples" is in fact an "attempt to deny the culture of the people in question" (Africa Information Centre, 40). Revolutionaries like Cabral identify culture as the means to counter

imperialism, as it is only through culture that imperialism can be instituted or dismantled. If imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture. (Africa Information Centre, 43)

Beginning with an exceedingly national fervour, resistance movements against imperialism are primarily anti-colonial. But due to colonial interaction, the cultural space of the colonizer and the colonized becomes permeable and the stark opposition between the two is challenged. Resistance then takes the form of an inclusive reaction against imperialism and the culture supporting it. Along with forces countering the imperial occupation of colonies, resistance is also reflective of a culture that challenges stereotypes and essentialist categories. Culture reflects on identity through all these processes. The culture of imperialism is based upon creation of identity constructs for the colonizer and colonized in water-tight compartments of the superior 'self' and the inferior 'other'. Resistance begins with retaliation from the 'other' in an exceedingly opposing manner and a default acceptance of the discursive constructs. But the cultural interaction caused by the colonial experience reflects upon the identity of the colonizer and the colonized and brings them to a space of negotiation and reconciliation. Like culture then, identity also becomes a means of establishing as well as challenging imperialism.

The second part of Said's work *Culture and Imperialism*, is devoted to the culture of resistance developed in counterpoint to the culture of imperialism. The culture of imperialism creates a discourse about oriental identity in stark opposition to the myths of western culture. Said's constant attempts at questioning this discourse find a new methodology when he dismantles the cultural matrix contrapuntally. He engages in a contrapuntal reading of imperialism to unfold a culture of resistance directed against the discourse of orientalism and its application in the imperial process. Said identifies two voices in the experience of imperialism: that of the colonizer in the form of metropolitan discourses; and, that of the colonized in the form of resistance to imperialism (*Culture* 234). The simultaneous experience of these voices creates a dissonant and "disjunct" scenario where various cultures contest

"contrapuntally together" (234). It is out of this contrapuntality that Said attempts to theorize resistance against imperialism.

Said is of the view that the issue of resistance has been unduly resolved by equating it to a force in opposition to western culture. Resistance by means of opposition tends to aggravate the polarity between the colonizer and the colonized (*Culture* 237; Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 106). Since the ideas of nationalism are framed in absolute opposition to the projected western culture, nationalism tends to solidify the polarity between the east and the west, thereby affirming the discourse of orientalism rather than countering it, which was the real motive behind resistance (Innes 123). Said clarifies right at the outset, that his theory of resistance is not directed against a community but the culture of imperialism. His attempt is to counter the hegemonic dominant discourses and not any particular community or nation. Resistance is analysed not in the colonial space of east and west but in the imperial space of domination and liberation. His theory of resistance is directed not only against the colonial rule, but also against the postcolonial domination of nationalism, and the current American ascendancy. Said's rejection of the polar identities of east and west as objects of his study for the cultural domain of imperialism and liberation suggests his movement beyond the essentialisms of orientalism and Occidentalism to a resistance against the codifying forces of representation. There is a conspicuous movement beyond the boundaries that divide cultures, to place identity in the real space of influence and evolution rather than situating it in mythical arenas of warring fanaticisms. Said transcends the barrier of "opposition of inside and outside which inaugurates all binary opposition" (Marrouchi 70).

Without doubt, national identity is extremely significant in the early stages of identity formation in counterpoint to dominating representations but one should be critical of the way in which national consciousness changes to nativist tendencies if not controlled in time. Nationalism is an important tool in creating a sense of "solidarity' (Ahmad, "Culture" 401) and identity between the colonized against the hegemonic control of the dominative mode, but it comes as a stumbling block in the path of "reconciliation between the West and the non-West" (Moore-Gilbert 65). Nationalism needs to be transformed and adapted "in tangible ways" to the larger

battle against hegemony (Ahmad, "Culture" 399) precisely like the metropolitan tools of narration. According to Said "Unless national consciousness at its moment of success is somehow changed into a social consciousness, the future would hold not liberation but an extension of imperialism (*Culture* 323)". Referring to the Negritude movement, Said explains that nationalist movements, though resistant in nature, are "trapped inside themselves" (276). Here, Said seems to echo Fanon and Cesaire in their belief that the development of a nation as resistance is a bourgeois phenomenon which must be opposed vehemently as it is at best a local reincarnation of the imperial process (Mohanty 123). Echoing the views of Fanon and Wole Soyinka, he links such nationalist movements to other resistance movements; such as, Yeats and the Irish context. Such endeavours of locating identity in the space of a mythical past are isolating in nature.

According to Said, "Nationality, nationalism, nativism: the progression is more and more constraining (*Culture* 277)", so he brings forward a theory of resistance not through opposition, but rather a deconstructive and alternate methodology. He echoes Fanon's warning against the pitfalls of national consciousness (*Culture* 323) and necessitates the appropriation of metropolitan culture to accommodate the expression of nationalism and resistance to domination. Resistance is most effective when it acquires a place in the mainframe of dominant culture and then transforms it to establish cultural difference within the discursive territory of the imperialist (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 106). This complex area of resistance is to be read outside the scope of separatist and fracturing categories. The discourse of orientalism is based on the politics of opposition in timeless and universal frames. The resistance to it ought to come out of attempts to reconcile the supposed oppositions and grant them an organic and individual rhetoric. The idea of resisting through establishing essential oppositions is regressive in nature. Rushdie asks about culture:

> Do cultures actually exist as separate, pure defensible entities? Is not melange, adulteration, impurity, pick 'n' mix at the heart of the idea of the modem, and hasn't it been that way for almost all this shook-up century? Doesn't the idea of pure culture in urgent need of being kept from alien contamination lead us

> inexorably towards apartheid, towards ethnic cleansing, towards the gas chamber? ("Learning" 21)

The culture of resistance cannot be backward looking and obstinately exclusive of the colonial experience. On the other hand, the culture of resistance can be progressive if it allows an inclusive expression. To Said, "The dense fabric of secular life can't be herded under the rubric of national identity or can't be made entirely to respond to this phony idea of a paranoid frontier separating "us" from "them"-which is a repetition of the old sort of orientalist model, (qtd. in Sprinker 233)". Said stresses upon the importance of reading the text of culture and identity in counterpoint. In the postcolonial space, resistance can result in a fanatic and defensive recourse to tribalism or it can be maneuvered towards some grand synthesis through a clarified political and methodological commitment to the dismantling of systems of domination (*Reflections on Exile* 215).

Said has been criticized for not acknowledging forces of resistance from the colonized in his earlier work (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 40). But he clarifies in *Culture and Imperialism* that imperial power was never accepted by a "supine and inert non-Western native; there was always some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out. (xii)". This seems to reflect that imperialism subsequently results in resistance. Resonating the Foucauldian belief that where there is power there is resistance, it can be simplistically concluded that resistance is an unavoidable effect of imperialism (Said, "In Conversation" 5). But Said's theory of resistance does not end with active aggression against the colonizer. He observes two distinct stages of resistance: 'primary resistance' which includes the reclaiming of the 'geographical territory' under siege; and, 'secondary resistance' which refers to the reconstitution and restoration of the 'cultural territory' (*Culture* 252). The active aggression against colonial rule is followed by a resistance against the mental and cultural domination against hegemonic forces. This resistance against the mental imperialism extended by the dominating ruler in the form of discourses is a means towards reclaiming the native imagination (Chatterjee 13). It is this form of liberation that Said concerns himself with in the main.

Said situates his theory of resistance in the space of literature and suggests that the act of restoring the suppressed past of the native can be materialized through a process of "writing back" to the empire (*Culture* 260). This act of writing includes not just a contrapuntal reading of canonical texts but also a rewriting of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This rewriting of canonical texts reflects an "intellectual and figurative energy re-seeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and non-whites" (*Culture* 256). Such an exercise is transformative in that it resists the canonical binary by subverting its canonicity. Re-writing of canonical texts in a way returns the 'gaze' of the colonizer and 'transforms our view of cultural possibilities' (Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial* 35) thereby diminishing the staunch imposition of imperial stereotyping. This act of revisiting the past in counterpoint is to come to a state of liberation with an acceptance that the history and culture of the colonizer and the colonized are inevitably inscribed in each other and they cannot be subscribed to a pre-colonial past. Such a study in counterpoint is vital to the development of a diversely affiliated identity and it is this space of identification that allows for the dismantling of the essentialist compartments of 'self and 'other'.

This process of writing back includes a breakdown of the oppositions between various cultures. It includes entering the dominant discursive mode and transforming it to allow the suppressed voices to speak, not in the absence of the dominant voices, but in counterpoint with them. This form of resistance marks a movement towards empowerment through a denial of essentialist representations. Further Said's insistence upon the presence of both voices and the creation of cacophony is to suggest the idea that culture and identity in the postcolonial world cannot be defined or defended in a space of singular voices. The identity of the postcolonial world, on the other hand, can only be defined in a state of continuous conflict. By acquiring the western means of representation and subsequently appropriating them to reject domination, the orient, once considered powerless, is brought into a state of challenging dialogue with the metropolitan intellectual.

Locating the space of resistance in literature is based on a premise that narratives themselves make a nation and that narrative itself is the representation of power (*Culture* 330). The author of a text has the authority to tell. This authority, if

acquired by the native, allows for the telling of the story from the other side of the canon. Said's theory of resistance is based on this thesis regarding the relationship between power and narration. The language and the syntax remain those of the dominant class but are appropriated to the native's experience. This exercise of appropriation is metaphorically significant as it represents the movement of the native into the space of narration, hitherto reserved for the imperial ruler alone. As opposed to nativist methods that demand a complete substitution of dominant forms with the oriental means, such an exercise is more inclusive and anticipates a resolution and reconciliation of identity, rather than continued exclusion and chauvinism. Total substitution of narrative techniques with native forms would restrict the counter narrative to native readership alone and would not let contrapuntal voices be heard in the western world. This would result in a resistance which is isolated from the rest of the world. To make resistance a global phenomenon of opposing human suppression, rather than a conflict between two categories, Said insists upon a "voyage in" (*Culture* 295).

Resistance is then directed towards acquiring the metropolitan literary mode and appropriating the language to suit the national expression (Chatterjee 7). This is exemplified in Raja Rao's successful attempt to 'convey in a language not one's own, a spirit that is one's own' by infusing the 'tempo' of Indian life into an Indian English expression ("Foreword" v). Rushdie's methodology of writing "outside the whale" demands a similar appropriation. "Outside the whale is the unceasing storm, the continual quarrel, the dialectic of history. Outside the whale there is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality, and make new languages with which we can understand the world ('Outside the Whale'100)". Achebe in a similar manner believes that, "English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings (62)". The space of this hybrid work is a space of constant polemic between the forces working within it. It is in this polemical space of conflict, appropriation and attempts towards resolution, that the postcolonial third-world identity is defined.

Said is criticized for accepting the west as superior to the orient (Jalal al-' Azm 18). By insisting that the native must enter the metropolitan centre and appropriate it, Said repeats the canonical belief of superiority of the west in contrast with the orient. The orient has to voyage in to the mainframe of western culture to liberate himself. This conscious movement towards the canon for empowerment makes the native undeniably aware of western superiority. Said demands an appropriation of the western systems of narration and thereby necessitates the acquisition of western cultural and linguistic tools to liberate the orient. He accepts that the western culture is the metropolitan culture and his repeated insistence upon the native adapting to the metropolitan culture so as to transform it makes western culture an unshakeable and unchallengeable entity. On the other hand, the native is defined as extremely malleable. The native intellectual is identified as the human force capable of redirecting western sources of power against the western discourses of power. The native intellectual is empowered in Saidian theory to "voyage in" to the metropolitan centre and dismantle its constructs. But Said simultaneously makes the identity of the native intellectual a fluid construct which can make "the voyage over" to a new transnational cultural identity wherever it is located (Moore-Gilbert 72). Said identifies innumerable powers of strategic and productive resistance in the native, but at the same time defines identity for him in a space of no affiliations. Native intellectuals like Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka and Yeats were educated in western models and their location is problematic vis-a-vis their syntax and content (Innes 123-4). The dubitable identity and culture of these 'middle men' most often results in the third phase of resistance where they dismantle the colonial structures by reconciling the oppositions between cultures and accepting the transformation that imperialism causes.

Third-world identity bears in it the imprint of a pre-colonial past, the colonial experience, the resistance though nationalistic means and the reconciling efforts of the native between forces of nationalism and incorporated influences of imperialism. Nationalism may primarily be a western term, but it is appropriated by the resisting native to oppose subjugation by all dominative modes: imperial as well as nationalist. The resistance to imperialism comes from an amalgam of forces which employs both

opposition and incorporation. It is because of this dual movement that the space of third world identity becomes "hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (*Culture* xxix). It is this multiplicity of identity and culture, without a fanatic warring of ideas within, that Said attempts to uncover through his theory. To him, such an acknowledgement of hybridity in culture and identity marks a progressive movement in the society from the separatist oppositions to an environment conducive to inclusion. It is by developing a 'pluralistic vision of the world' (*Culture* 277) that a true sense of 'liberation' can be brought about in the imperial space (278). The act of liberation suggests rising above and beyond the bonds of one's existence. Resistance to imperialism and hegemonic control should be directed towards transcending the bonds of race through an inclusive and conciliating form of resistance (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia 112).

Further Said takes the concept of imperialism to the space of American ascendancy and suggests that the representation of America as the nation entrusted with a 'world responsibility' because of its unsurpassable superiority over the rest of world continues the play of representations as a means of empowerment (*Culture* 345). In counterpoint, the east is defined as backward, terroristic and fanatic (375). A demolition of the essentialist identities created out of the American 'will to power' is possible only through a dismantling of these strategies to power by a greater 'voyage in' to the structures of power and revising them from a view in counterpoint. Despite the inconsistent structure of *Culture and Imperialism* (Moore-Gilbert 70), Said manages to draw a theory of resistance based on conciliation rather than antagonism. He manages to break the binaries of 'self and 'other' and find a sense of identity in the space of overlap between them. Bringing identity into the hybrid space of constant contestation, he celebrates the ideas of secularism, tolerance and acceptance as against the essentialist oppositions of constraining representations. Observing that resistance to subjugation comes not only from the colonized but also from the colonizer in the form of disillusionment in the civilizing mission, Said brings the colonizer and the colonized to a 'largely common' ground (*Culture* 241). With the native emulating and appropriating the colonial experience and the colonizer doubting the ethics of imperialism, Said populates the middle space of colonial experience with

'differentiated' peoples, hybridized by colonial interaction (xxix). Referring to the space of anxiety and distrust in the imperial mission shared by the colonizer and the colonized (241) Said almost explains the working of the middle space and the interstices without using the terminology in currency. He provides the ground on which the theory of multicultural identities can be developed. One can almost hear Bhabha as an expectation in Said, who claims in his Introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* that "because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxix) and concludes with the idea that "no one today is purely one thing. . .. Imperialism consolidated the mixtures of cultures and identities on a global scale" (407).

But Said seems to embark upon the idea of a common culture of difference created due to the colonial exercise and seems to arrive at a possibility of resolving the conflict between identities and cultures by passively accepting them as a matter of fact. He suggests that "hybrid counter-energies ... provide a community or culture made up of numerous anti-systemic hints and practices for collective human existence . . . that is not based on coercion or domination (406)" and further that a secular realization and acceptance of difference includes "not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one (408)". In the area of third-world identity, Said's work can be appreciated as a landmark in that he initiates the idea of a mixed identity and culture as opposed to the previous notion of identity as a pure and reclaimable form.

As we venture into the politics of globalization and multiculturalism, the question of locating identity becomes all the more important. It becomes highly imperative then to understand the politics surrounding representation and its discourses. As the current study is centred on Muslim or Islamic identity, it becomes necessary to look into the relationship or the equation between Islam and colonialism and Islam and post- colonialism and how it evolved. A.L. Macfie sheds light on specific aspects of the correlation and the association between Islam and colonialism, in the important excerpt from his book *Orientalism*. He writes that:

> As Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (1960) and Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962) have shown, by the end of the twelfth century many European scholars had acquired a sufficient knowledge of Islam to understand its principle features. But their understanding was vitiated by a polemical desire to distort the religion, denigrate its followers, and where possible secure their conversion to Christianity, which was seen as the one and only true faith. (Macfie 42)

It's imperative to acknowledge that there was a 'a polemical desire to distort' the religion of Islam as early as the twelfth century which predates the colonial period by centuries. Consequently, it can be said that Islam came under attack by the West before Muslim territories were targeted. In other words, long before the colonization of Muslim nations, their religion, that is Islam was already being subjected to the process of colonialization. Islam was specifically targeted throughout history due to its clash with Christianity, which the Western world proclaimed as the 'one and only true faith'. Islam even today remains a target because it espouses a different ideology from that of the Western world. If Liberalism is now asserted as the sole true philosophy, the primary issue with Western colonial mentality lies in its assertion of possessing the sole truth in faith, philosophy, civilization, freedom, democracy, human rights, and so forth, while distorting the beliefs and values of others. The conflict in the present times between Islam and the West:

> is more than a clash of cultures, more than a confrontation of races: it is a straight fight between two approaches to the world, two opposed philosophies. … … One is based in on liberal materialism, the other in faith; one has rejected belief altogether, the other has placed it at the centre of its world-view. It is, therefore, not simply between Islam and the West (Akbar Ahmed 264).

Even though Christianity may not have been the primary driving force behind colonialism, the colonial powers of the West adhered to the same 'one and only truth' mentality, which served to justify their perceived superiority over other cultures. As Macfie observed in the aforementioned excerpt, cultural colonialism for Muslims began prior to the colonial period and persists even after the formal end of

colonialization, as indicated by Said in his work *Orientalism*. The Western powers continue to directly and indirectly target Islam, whether through media channels, specific Western politicians and intellectuals, or through Westernized figures in Islamic countries. As Edward Said noted in *Orientalism*, "books and articles are regularly published on Islam and the Arabs that represent absolutely no change over the virulent anti-Islamic polemics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (Said 287). Since at least the twelfth century until the present, Muslims have faced continuous colonial aggressions motivated by a polemical desire to misrepresent their faith, degrade its followers, and, when possible, enforce conversion. Initially rooted in Christianity during the twelfth century, the crusading ethos has evolved to embrace Liberalism today, embodying diverse forms such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. Nevertheless, the issue at hand transcends Christianity or Liberalism; it pertains to what the West regards as the standard and norm and any deviation from this is deemed to be problematic and hence necessitates global adherence to Western values and beliefs.

The novels examined in this study predominantly explore the crises and challenges confronted by Muslims in the Western world due to migration. Drawing from *The Age of Migration,* by Stephen Castles and Mark Miller's "migratory movements generally arise from the existence of prior links between sending and receiving countries based on colonialism, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties" (24). Quite evidently it is the West that bears the principal duty in the migration process, given its dominant role across various domains, "colonialism, political influence, trade, investment or cultural ties." Colonialism, along with factors like "industrialization and integration into the global economy", has contributed to the "reshaping of nations and states" (29). Hence, the West emerges as the primary catalyst for the proliferation of large immigrant populations residing within its borders. The ccolonized individuals were transported either directly as slaves by colonizers, or as bound laborers, and subsequently as economic migrants to the West. Additionally, indirect migration occurred through the propagation of a black-and-white colonial narrative that portrays Western civilization as superior and non-Western civilizations as inferior. As Salman Rushdie expressed:

> One last point about the ‘immigrants’. It’s a pretty obvious point, but it keeps getting forgotten. It’s this: they came because they were invited. The Macmillan government embarked on a large-scale advertising campaign to attract them. They were extraordinary advertisements, full of hope and optimism, which made Britain out to be a land of plenty, a golden opportunity not to be missed. And they worked. People travelled here in good faith, believing themselves wanted. This is how the new Empire was imported. (Rushdie, *The New Empire* 133)

Today the Muslims residing in the western nations do have Western citizenships, but, are they really considered as British, American etc.? Who bears the responsibility to address this inquiry: Muslims themselves, Western society, or both? Moreover, why is it that Muslims are tasked with grappling with questions of identity today while other groups, such as Jews, are not? If Muslims are considered to be British, what takes precedence: their Islamic faith or their British identity? These interconnected questions appear to be rooted in the enduring presence of Western imperialism rather than in Islam or the Muslims residing in the West. “No matter what the Muslim identity is or what the Muslims say about it, the fact is that a choice must be made between religion and progress, enslavement and liberation, the old tradition of duties and the modern culture of genuine freedom (Ramadan, *European* 184)”

This binary, black-and-white distinction is not something new, it is a lingering remnant of colonialism persisting into the postcolonial era. Many Muslims seek to reconcile with Western societies by adopting a middle path of tolerance, striving to forge a harmonious identity that honors both Muslim and Western elements. For instance, they advocate for multiculturalism as a means to mitigate conflicts arising from diverse identities within a single society. This is evidenced by the advocacy for multiculturalism within Muslim politics in Britain, as noted by Modood in "British Muslims" (52). Moreover, Muslims consistently emphasize that the Muslim identity is not static or constrained by inflexible principles. Instead, it thrives on a continuous and evolving interplay between its foundational sources and the surrounding environment, seeking a path toward harmonious coexistence. (Ramadan, *European* 191). The primary objective behind this advocacy for multiculturalism and addressing

the issue of Muslim identity is to assert that "a person can be a devout Muslim and a loyal citizen of Britain" (Akbar Ahmed 263).

Nonetheless, despite the endeavors of Muslims residing in the West, setting extremists of both the camps aside, The Western society at large remains apprehensive about embracing Muslims. This reluctance does not appear to stem from Muslim beliefs per se, but rather from Western perceptions of the beliefs of Muslims. The issue then lies not within Islam itself, but with the anti-Muslim sentiment perpetuated by Western literature and culture. In his work, titled *Islam, Europe and Empire*, Norman Daniel writes, "Islam's image in the mind of Europe was greatly affected by the equation of European with imperialist" (65). Unavoidably, "as the history of the West is a tale of exploitation of other societies, all European cultural practices are touched by imperialism" (During 138). Moreover, besides the influence of the Western cultural framework, this perception of the clash between Islam and the West is partly fueled by certain Westerners and Muslims who subscribe to this belief. Within the Western discourse, Edward Said contends that "the academic experts whose specialty is Islam have generally treated the religion and its various cultures within an invented or culturally determined ideological framework filled with passion, defensive prejudice, sometimes even revulsion" (Said, *Covering Islam* 6-7). One could argue that Huntington ascribes to the notion of a clash between Islamic civilization and the West, partly because of the influence of the negative portrayal of Islam by certain Western experts. Muslims on the other hand remain unheard as their voice gets lost in uproar created by the anti-Muslim rhetoric of west. "whatever Iranians or Muslims say about their sense of justice, their history of oppression, their vision of their own societies, seems irrelevant" (Said, *Covering Islam* 8). Some Westerners are of the belief that Muslims have the capability to demolish modernity, "but it could be argued that such fears are based on racist ideologies rather than social realities" (Castles and Miller 233). As pointed out by Robert Young, even though "you may assimilate white values, you never quite can become white enough" (*Postcolonialism* 23). In the contemporary Western context Muslims encounter similar challenges, albeit in varying forms, to those faced by Muslims that were colonized by the West in their native lands in the past. Despite differences in time and

location, Muslims have consistently been subjected to the same discourse, with Islam being presented as unchanging across vast expanses of time and space within Europe. (Robinson 5). Muslims are consistently pressed to adopt more and more to the Western ways of life, which is equated with being modern, civilized and of course more humane. However, it appears that for certain Western individuals, acceptance of Muslims as Western is unattainable, even if Muslims aspire to such assimilation. From the colonial era to the present day, the West has remained the focal point of global influence, with peripheral entities expected to emulate its practices in all aspects. For example, the objective of promoting Christianity during the colonial period and in contemporary times shares a common element: encouraging adherence to God in a Western context. Regarding the colonial era, Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, pinpoints that "the Church in the colonies is a white man's Church, a foreigner's Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor" (7). The Western viewpoint does not reflect much change and remains the same, in spite of the vast expanse of time that have passed since the advent of Western colonialism, as is highlighted by Said: "the legendary American missionaries to the Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took their role as set not so much by God as by their God, their culture, and their destiny" (Said *Orientalism* 294).

The comprehension of this colonial perspective is essential for elucidating key identity challenges Muslims confront in the West. If Muslims for instance, immigrating to the Western countries are automatically judged for not assimilating enough into Western culture and for lacking a thorough understanding of Western customs, it is reminiscent of the colonial era, where "the colonized subject [was] always presumed guilty (Fanon, *The Wretched* 16)". The Muslims today are made to feel inferior just like the way in the past, the colonized were "made to feel inferior, but were by no means convinced of their inferiority" (16). The need of the hour is multicultural coexistence of people. Nevertheless, from the colonial Western standpoint, multiculturalism is perceived as a threat, potentially hindering the dominance of Western culture and undermining the justification for the West's superiority, as it allows for the coexistence of multiple cultures alongside the Western

one. Huntington, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, for instance, points out that the "multiculturalism at home threatens the United States and the West ... [as it denies] the uniqueness of western culture" (318). The perspective of the Western societies that inhibits and restricts the acceptance of Muslims can generally be viewed as racist, given that the "traditions and cultures of racism are strong in all European countries and former European settler colonies" (Castles and Miller 233). During the era of colonialism, "white men considered themselves superior to black men" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 12), and some individuals even today, maintain this belief of superiority over Muslims, based both on color as well as culture. According to Tariq Modood, "the discrimination against Muslims is mixed up with forms of color racism and cultural racism" (Modood, "British Muslims" 43). During the colonial times "the Antilles Negro [was] more 'civilized 'than the African, that is, he [was] closer to the white man" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 26). In the present times Muslims face similar challenges with racism which is still prevalent in the West societies, even though "the truth is that there is no pure race and ... the noblest countries, England, France, and Italy, are those where the blood is the most mixed" (Renan 14). However, due to the widespread racism that still prevails in the West, "a lot of people don't like the term 'postcolonial '[because] ... it refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 7).

As a result of extensive migration and globalization, Muslims now find themselves portrayed as the 'inside Other', a shift from their previous classification as the 'outside Other'. This process of 'othering' exacerbates feelings of alienation among Muslims, compelling them to emphasize their Muslim identity as a means of self-protection. Castles and Miller are of the belief that, "the strengthening of Muslim affiliations is often a protective reaction of discriminated groups" (Castles and Miller 233). The prevalent portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Western societies, it can be posited is influenced by a persisting colonial viewpoint, which categorizes Muslims as the 'inside Others'. In his book titled *To Be a European Muslim*, Tariq Ramadan asserts that Muslims residing in Western countries form distinct groups. According to Ramadan while some of them are "Muslims without Islam but still they are Muslims" (186). Others consider themselves "in Europe and out of Europe at the same time"

(187). while the second group tends to prioritize their Muslim identity over Western cultural influences, the first group leans towards being more aligned with Western culture than with their Muslim identity. However, both groups are considered extreme according to Ramadan. In his view "there is a need today to define the Muslim identity in the West so as to avoid the reacting process. This means considering both the Islamic teaching and the European environment" (180). Nevertheless, despite the endeavors and efforts by Ramadan and other Muslim activists, Muslims will continue to confront the same quandary regarding their identity if the colonial Western viewpoint persists which is fueled by Islamophobia as well as racism. With respect to the cultural Racism, Muslims, "found it difficult to call themselves 'British' because they felt that the majority of white people did not accept them as British because of their race or cultural background; through hurtful 'jokes', harassment, discrimination, and violence; they found their claim to be British was all too often denied (Modood, "British Asian Identities" 74)".

This discrimination towards Muslims on the basis of their cultural and religious differences is the continuation of the colonial discrimination that was propagated through the colonial discourse by the west and is still in place and reinforced through popular culture. The majority of postcolonial writers and critics maintain that the legacy of colonialism persists. While figures like Boehmer and Gandhi employ the term 'colonization' to describe this ongoing influence, others like Young opt for alternative terminology such as 'domination'. Elleke Boehmer articulates this perspective by stating "colonialism is not a thing of the past" (10) and Leela Gandhi argues that "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (17). However, Robert Young is of the belief, that "for the most part, the same (ex-) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies" (3). In actuality, postcolonial theory may vary in its terminology and rationale, but the crux of colonialism lies beyond the mere nomenclature. For those who have been subjected to colonization in the past and present, the essence lies not in the label or justification of the colonial process, nor in the ethnicity of its participants; rather, it resides in the experience of being colonized. Muslims continue to be perceived as the 'Other' indicating that they are still, to some extent, culturally

colonized and therefore must confront this cultural colonization. Despite the numerous discussions surrounding postcolonial theory, there are still some critics and writes for whom, "there is no single entity called 'postcolonial theory': postcolonialism, as a term, describes practices and ideas as varied as those within feminism and socialism" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 7). Given this reality, the opportunity is available to all individuals who were formerly subjected to colonization and are still feeling subjugation in one form or another to discuss their own experiences, feelings and thoughts on the matter. Postcolonial nations vary in terms of race, religion, history, traditions, and other factors, resulting in diverse colonial experiences. For instance, Africans, unlike other colonized peoples, endured both slavery and colonialism. The legacy of slavery has shaped the interpretation of colonialism for Africans, impacting their understanding of postcolonialism as well. As observed by Homi Bhabha:

> In theory courses you can have a range of students, but with postcolonial courses, I have noticed very few African students. [...] This could be because Black Americans see these courses as about another set of problems, maybe to do with minoritisation. And I do think that the experience of colonial racism is different from that experienced by slave societies. Slave societies have such a different history". (Bhabha, "Homi K. Bhabha" 20)

Muslims who were colonized represent another illustration. The extensive historical interaction between Islam and the West has imparted a distinct hue to the colonial encounter of Muslims. Consequently, while the postcolonial dialogues among colonized or formerly colonized individuals may share a common objective, each group possesses its own unique set of experiences. Africans should assert their own experiences and formulate their own rendition of postcolonial discourse, just as every other group should do likewise. In combating Western colonialism, Africans are best equipped to articulate the African experience and confront it, just as Muslims are most qualified to speak about their own experiences. Many of the colonized people have been followers of Islam, spanning various races and nations, including the Africans, Indians, Arabs, Persians and the Indonesians. Consequently, for Islam and the Muslims, the period of colonialization may be regarded as one of the longest in

duration and one of the most extensive and diverse in terms of geographical space. In this context, postcolonialism is employed with the specific objective of challenging colonial stereotypes and depictions found in literature concerning Islam and Muslims, utilizing postcolonial methodologies. However, given the diverse backgrounds, experiences, geographies, and histories of Muslims, applying postcolonialism to Islam or Muslims may encompass a range of issues, including slavery, racism, and Islamophobia. Furthermore, the intricate dynamic between Islam and the West, coupled with Islam's significant influence on the lives of Muslims, contributes to Islam becoming a battleground of conflicting perspectives. Contentious topics such as the sacred, the Quran, the veil, and fundamentalism underscore the necessity for postcolonial discourse to amplify Muslim viewpoints and combat the lingering colonial prejudices and stereotypes. The postcolonial reading in this context is employed to direct attention to the persistent colonial stereotypes surrounding Islam and Muslims, which are still employed to marginalize and exert dominance over Muslim communities today. In conclusion, it is crucial to underscore the significance of the use of stereotypes as a colonial instrument within this thesis. Despite the disparities between Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, they both demonstrate a keen understanding of the pivotal role of stereotypes in colonial discourse. Both of them acknowledge the colonial aims inherent in such discourses, while their analyses of colonial discourse offer distinct perspectives. John McLeod states that “like Said, Bhabha argues that colonialism is informed by a series of assumptions which aim to legitimate its view of other lands and peoples” (*Beginning* 52). In his seminal work, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism”, while illuminating the nature of colonial discourse, Bhabha underscores the significance of stereotypes within it. Bhabha explains that “an important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity ’in the ideological construction of otherness” and that the stereotype “is its major discursive strategy” (94). Asserting that the discourse of colonialism is inherently stereotypical and serves to validate colonialism, Bhabha further explains that by generating stereotypical knowledge of both the colonizer and the colonized, albeit with contrasting evaluations, the discourse of colonialism seeks validation for its tactics. The primary

aim of the discourse of colonialism is to depict the colonized as "a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (101). Hence, notwithstanding their disparities, both Said and Bhabha recognize the utilization of stereotypes within colonial discourse and its inherent colonial objectives, irrespective of whether these objectives are fully achieved or not. It can be argued that stereotypes persistently serve to reinforce the supremacy of Western values and cultures. This study will examine how Leila Aboulela, through her literary works, portrays Islam and Muslims while challenging the colonial discourse regarding their representation. The stereotypical depictions of Islam and Muslims in contemporary western fiction, viewed through a postcolonial lens, serve as stark indicators of the persistently prevalent colonial biases. The persistence experiences of racism, marginalization, and exclusion faced by Muslims further substantiates the existence of a colonial perspective, which is also reflected through their stereotypical and negative portrayal in fiction as well as mass media and therefore there is a need for more and more postcolonial voices to present an inside perspective of Muslims like the works of Leila Aboulela, the Writer to be analysed in this study.

Chapter 3
Exteriorization and the Predicament of Belonging

Edward Said in his book *Orientalism,* explores how Western cultures have historically depicted the East (Orient) and its people. He contends that this representation was instrumental in justifying and perpetuating colonialism and imperialism. Said highlights the concept of "exteriorization" which refers to the process by which Western powers created an image of the East as the 'Other'-foreign, exotic, and inferior-by which the West defined itself. Said argues that the Western cultures have historically constructed a binary opposition between the 'Self' (the colonizer or dominant culture) and the 'Other' (the colonized or marginalized culture). This binary is central to the process of 'exteriorization'. 'Exteriorization' involves projecting certain qualities, characteristics, and attributes onto the 'Other' that reinforce the identity and superiority of the 'Self". In other words, the dominant culture defines itself by what it is not, which is the 'Other'. This portrayal of the East as the 'Other' served to consolidate Western identity and reinforce its domination over the East. According to Said:

> Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation. (*Orientalism* 20-2)

Edward Said highlights how the construction of the Other through 'exteriorization' has been a central element in the discourse of imperialism, colonialism, and cultural hegemony. Edward Said critiques globalization and suggests that imperialism, while it has evolved, still plays a significant role in contemporary global dynamics. Said argues that the concept of Orientalism, which involves the

construction of the East as the ‘Other’, remains relevant even in this age of globalization. He argues that Orientalist representations and stereotypes continue to shape how the West perceives and interacts with non-Western cultures, contributing to the perpetuation of global inequalities.

Muslims throughout history held a focal place in the consciousness of the Western world as the ‘other’ as thoughtfully deliberated about by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Muslims are depicted as the ‘Other’ not only because of color but also because of their religion. Apparently religion has substituted color as the marker of race. During the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, Christian identities were formed in contrast to Islam, Judaism or heathenism (which nearly amalgamated all other religions, nature worship, paganism and animism). Primarily, it was Islam that operated as the predominant binary opposite of and threat to Christianity (Chew). Religious distinctions thus started to serve as the indicators and markers of the variations and differences in race, culture and ethnicity (Ania Loomba, *Colonialism* 93). Far from being a new phenomenon related to modern confrontation between Islam and the West, Islamophobia or more accurately anti-Islamic racism holds an extensive historical background and fortified, reinforced as well as justified by Orientalism in the past and in our times. It is not incidental that the predominant aspects delineating Islamophobia apply to the discourse of Orientalism which continues to treat Islam as the ultimate opposite of the West and consequently a prime threat.

The concept of Islamophobia, which has gained prominence since the onset of the 21st century, is not something that is utterly novel. The genesis of this phenomenon can be traced back to the orientalist perspective, coinciding with the onset of colonialism in the East. Over time, this perspective has metamorphosed into the contemporary manifestation of Islamophobia that prevails in our society. The superiority and racist behaviors of the colonizer towards the peoples and cultures of the East are also valid for the religion of Islam. For this reason, it can be stated that the origin of Islamophobia is colonial racism, and-this racism is grounded in the fears of social and economic deprivation elicited in the complex relationship of Islam to the West, including the history of European sectarian wars, the Crusades, and the

Inquisition. (J. Rana, 149). The conceptual framework of Islamophobia gained prominence with the release of the Runnymede report which outlined its definition. Islamophobia manifests through a 'closed' view of Islam, systematically evidenced by conditions such as perceiving Islam as a monolithic, unchanging entity, detached from common aims and values, considered inferior to the West, associated with violence and terrorism, viewed as a political ideology, rejecting criticisms from Islam outright, justifying discriminatory practices against Muslims, and normalizing anti-Muslim hostility. (Racism 164)

Disagreements arise on defining a 'closed view' of Islam, with concerns that it might hinder the legitimate criticism which leads to a resolution by comparing the consequences of racism and Islamophobia and examining their interplay. More significant for our purposes, however, is identifying where a closed view of Islam, articulated in opposition to Islam, or in an attempt to denigrate Islam, interacts with racism. Such an interaction is most clearly visible in the consequences of this interaction: exclusionary practices, exclusionary discourses and hostility. When there is an interaction between the articulation of racism and Islamophobia, Muslims (qua a racialized group as well as a religious Other) are variously characterized as inferior and backward (but with a 'noble savage' quality), as incompatible with Westerners, or even as direct threat to the West (Brown, *Imagining* 84). In all of these cases, in parallel with Orientalist discourses and with the ideology of racism, Islam is represented as, stricto sensu, essentially different from the West, and as homogeneous or even inferior (Brown and Brown, *Racism* 165).

Orientalism often reduces the complex and diverse cultures and societies of the non-Western world to stereotypes. Muslims are frequently portrayed as fanatical, exotic, or backward. These stereotypes oversimplify the reality of Muslim subjectivities and contribute to a distorted image of Muslims. Moreover, in today's climate Muslim immigrants are faced with a complex cultural environment. The impact of 9/11 on the lives of Muslims in the West has been widespread and incorporates their distorted representation in the media (Peek, 280; Jackson). Addressing the unfavorable portrayal of Muslims, Sen argues against the common understanding of a singular Muslim identity as monolithic, oppressed, one-

dimensional, and oriented towards terror. The presence of Muslim immigrants in the West is complicated both historically and currently by events and movements including 9/11, colonialism, globalization, and transnationalism. Muslim immigrant communities in their diverse origins and practices have been 'Othered' by the West, and held hostage to Orientalist misunderstandings and exoticized impressions perpetuated by Western governments, media and hysteria. Following 9/11, immigrants, along with their children, have been irrevocably impacted by the responses and reactions by much of mainstream West. This creates a problem for Muslim immigrants because the events have not only altered the cultural landscape for the Western mainstream communities, but have changed the way Muslim people identify themselves and are identified by others. They must negotiate multiple identities, for example, as residents who function much as every citizen even as they are perceived as threatening outsiders.

This Chapter explores how the intricate web of colonial discourse profoundly implicates the identity and subjectivity of Muslims in the works of Leila Aboulela with a keen focus on the experiences of Muslim immigrants living in the West, particularly in the aftermath of the War on Terror. At the heart of this exploration lies the phenomenon of exteriorization. From exoticizing depictions to portraying the Muslims as backward or threatening, these stereotypes laid the groundwork for the genesis of Islamophobia or anti-Islamic racism. The impact of these stereotypes on the identity and subjectivity of Muslims is profound. In this chapter we will be scrutinizing how persistent portrayals influence not only external perceptions but also internal self-perceptions within the Muslim community. As we scrutinize the impact of these stereotypes, our focus sharpens on Muslim immigrants navigating life in the West, particularly in the post-9/11 era. The chapter delves into the psychological and social ramifications of this internalization, shedding light on the complex interplay between identity formation and external discourse in the works of Leila Aboulela.

The social and political atmosphere created as a result of western discourse leads Muslim immigrants in the west to hide their real identities. The phenomenon of denying one's identity, becomes one of the prominent means of evading the stereotyping and prejudice faced by Muslims as a result of their negative portrayal in

the western discourse. A primary factor motivating immigrants to assimilate into Western society is their desire for inclusion and a need to fit in. However, this assimilation is premised on integration based on Western culture and civilization, potentially leading to the erosion of one's identity within the vast realm of Western materialism. Moreover, assimilation within Western perceptions necessitates individuals of the Islamic faith to embrace liberalism in order to be included in Western society. The rationale for this stems from the envisioned contradiction between Islam as a faith and critique that is assumed to be exclusively secular, "Indeed, today the secular derives much of its meaning from an imagined opposite in Islam, and, as such, veils the religious shape and content of Western public life and its imperial designs (Asad, et al.10).The hegemony of the western culture pressurizes the young Muslims, like Natasha as we see in the novel *The Kindness of Enemies,* to hide their Muslim identities, out of fear as well as shame of their traditional Muslim roots which they find to be old-fashioned and not Western enough. Furthermore, in the midst of Islamophobia, these young Muslims eagerly detach themselves from everything that connotes to their native culture and in this way try not being labelled as Muslims, for fear that they would be treated differently. Natasha's adoption of the Western culture is a reflection and is also in response to this discourse. The following excerpts describe the secular, non-Sudanese or non-Islamic lifestyle that Natasha adheres to "I ate the stodgy lasagna I had ordered and drank enough to shed a few sentimental tears over Yasha" (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 105). "On the way out of the café, I threw the pro-life leaflet into the bin. A friend once said to me, 'you are not the first or last woman to have had an abortion. Get over it'" (139). Natasha has completely given up her religious as well as cultural practices as is evident by her indulgence of alcoholic drinks and the acts of premarital sex which are against the fundamental Islamic teaching as well as Sudanese culture. Natasha completely has given up the Sudanese and Muslim cultural attire as well in her everyday life as is evident by the following lines, "On Oxford Street I joined the Christmas shoppers, looked at the window displays, wondering if I should buy new Sudan-friendly clothes, but I did not want to be stuck with them if my visa did not come through" (213).Natasha in her eagerness to feel belonged to the community, has assimilated so

well to the Western culture and lifestyle by her choice of cultural values as well as attire. She dresses up and leads her life like any mainstream western person, hoping that other people would see her as one and wishes that she is seen as no different from the rest of the majority. Idris and Zulfiqar proposes that "through Natasha, Aboulela discusses … the need of foregoing one's indigenous beliefs in the face of societal pressures, and the conflicts caused by judgment on the basis of culture and religion" (1). In other words, societal pressures as well as religious stereotypes influence Natasha who is also driven by her quest for belonging, to let go of her cultural identity. This process of cultural assimilation can be argued to be a common phenomenon among migrants or those with diasporic background in their attempts to feel belonged to their host country. In order to feel accepted in the community, these characters, with migrant backgrounds, find it necessary to follow the dominant culture, be it in terms of appearance or conduct. Comprehending this Western colonial viewpoint would elucidate certain fundamental identity challenges encountered by Muslims in Western societies. For instance, when Muslims relocating to the West are assumed culpable for not aligning sufficiently with Western norms and lacking fluency in their grasp of Western customs, it is crucial to recall that during the colonial era, the subject under colonization was consistently presupposed to be at fault (Fanon, *The Wretched* 16). Today, if Muslims are compelled to experience a sense of inferiority, historically, those subjected to colonization were "made to feel inferior..." (16) in the very same manner.

The presence of West in the Arab world is marked by political domination and its gradual infiltration into the cultural domain. Nayar's claim regarding this is justified by a study of the visible ramification of Colonialism on the Arab culture. Nayar writes, "In the cultural realm, colonialism subverted established traditions by interfering with local customs, setting up norms of conduct, rejecting native beliefs as superstitious and, finally, ensuring that the native himself believed all this through the medium of Western education". This is quite evident in the novel *Lyrics Alley* in both Soraya's as well as Nabilah's fascination with everything that is Western. Soraya as well as Nabilah are Westernized in their life style choices and adopt the Western style of life. Soraya realizes her dreams of modernity by abandoning the traditional tobe,

opting for a short haircut, and diverging from Umdurman's conventions, gliding through the fashionable salons and parties. Soraya even chooses to wear a white wedding gown like the Christians on the day of her marriage which showcases her fascination with Western customs. She emulated Nabilah, the Egyptian wife of Md. Abuzeid, who was completely Western. She educated her kids the Western way, taught them manners and etiquette as per western way of life. Nabilah's attitude of superiority stems from her adoption and affiliation to a Western lifestyle and it is this sense of superiority that makes Soraya follow in her footsteps and distance for her own cultural practices and lifestyle. From this standpoint, spanning from the colonial era to the present, the Western world has been the focal point of global affairs, and individuals on the margins are expected to emulate its practices and ways of life in their entirety. For instance, the objective of encouraging others to adopt Christianity during both the era of colonization and contemporary times is, to a vast extent, identical and that is adherence in a manner that is Western. Regarding the colonial era, Fanon, in his work *The Wretched of the Earth* noted that "the Church in the colonies is a white man's Church, a foreigner's Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor" (7). This Western viewpoint has remained nearly unchanged despite the epochs of time that have passed since the inception of Western colonialism, as pointed out by Said that, "the legendary American missionaries to the Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took their role as set not so much by God as by their God, their culture, and their destiny" (*Orientalism* 294).

Growing up as an 'insider outsider' in an atmosphere of islamophobic racism is problematic. And when you bear a name that is out and out stereotypical makes the condition worse. Both Osama as well as Natasha, embrace Anglicization or adopting Western names which serves as the initial move undertaken by them in their journey of assimilation. In order to camouflage within the Western culture, the alteration of their names constitutes a pivotal aspect of this process of transformation of "forming and reforming" their new identities. Natasha says that Osama's mother "called him Ossie and his friends and teachers called him Oz. We were all eager to avoid his true name, Osama" Aboulela, *The Kindness* 4). In the context of 9/11, the name "Osama"

is particularly problematic. Everybody tries to avoid and distance from this name because of the negative associations of the name. In the same manner, Natasha's adoption of the Western culture is largely marked by her decision to get rid of her Arabic and Muslim last name while inheriting her Scottish stepfather's last name that is neutral of any Sudanese or Islamic connotation:

> I too had an unfortunate name; my surname. One that I nagged my mother and stepfather to change ' …Imagine, 'I said, 'arriving in London in the summer of 1990, fourteen years old, just as Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Imagine an unfamiliar school, a teacher saying to the class, "We have a new student from Sudan. Her name is Natasha Hussein. '"From the safe distance of the future, I joined my classmates in laughing out loud. (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 4).

When she moved to Britain Natasha becomes aware of the fact that she has a last name that is foreign and controversial to the western society in general and therefore she changes it. To be more precise, she alters her name due to 'apprehension' of not fitting in and embarrassment of her name which might be taken to link her to any potential connection with Saddam Hussein, the former leader of Iraqi (Azman & Bahar 581). It appears like her name turns into a contentious boundary between her current status and the aspirations that she seeks to achieve. In other words, Natasha is affected by the stereotype that the West attributes to the Muslims in general. Indeed, we note how Natasha feels uncomfortable with her last name and, wishing to feel accepted in the community, she finds it wise to simply eliminate the name altogether. This evidence supports an earlier view by Almaeen who explains how the characters in the novel "have to alter their Arabic names in fear of negative association … Natasha Hussein changes her name to Natasha Wilson to avoid comparison to deceased Iraqi president Saddam Hussein" (112). Here, we argue that the main reason behind Natasha's decision of changing her last name is, as correctly described by Carroll, "to blend in to a place where neither of her parents felt at home." She expresses that it's preferable to be addressed in that manner rather than being referred to as Dr. Hussein. The omission of that name, makes things easier feels Natasha as

people would not suspect her a Muslim and she, in return, does not have to prove that she is a Muslim. She elucidates her preference by the following statement,

> Many Muslims in Britain wished that no one knew they were Muslim. They would change their names if they could and dissolve into the mainstream, for it was not enough for them to openly condemn 9/11 and 7/7, not enough to walk against the wall, to raise a glass of champagne, to eat in the light of Ramadan and never step into a mosque or say the shahadah or touch the Quran (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 6).

This avoidance and distancing from being identified as Muslim depicts how the western discourse against Muslims not only affects non-Muslims but also Muslims themselves and that the widespread 'fear of Islam' has both external and internal bases because it associates Muslims with terrorists (Buyukgebizl 227). It is natural for any person to avoid being identified by his religion if it stigmatizes them as terrorists, which normally explains their avoidance of their 'cultural identity'. Thus, Oz as well as Natasha forgo their real name as a way of avoiding conjectures and suspicions in the West. Howbeit, Osama's arrest and sequestration verify the actual uselessness of swapping his name from Osama to Oz or Ossie and Natasha Hussein's to Natasha Wilson. The point is that talking about a religion as violent by nature and viewing its adherents as terrorists is a close-minded view of a religion that is present in at least three continents in great numbers. To reduce the multiplicity of Islam to a homogenous mass of violent people constitutes Islamophobia.

Muslims in the West these days face the same challenges, in one way or another, as those Muslims who were Colonized by the West in their own territories in the past. In spite of the different times and places, Muslims have been on the receiving end of the same discourse, as for Europe, Islam "is always the same, across vast reaches of time and space" (Robinson 5). Muslims are always asked to be more western which means, undoubtedly, to be more modern, more civilized and much better human beings. Yet it seems that for some western people it is impossible for Muslims to be accepted as western even if Muslims want to be so. The impact of Othering and stereotyping makes Natasha feel "ashamed to be seen with him (her father) around the campus when he visited her in London" (Aboulela, *The kindness*

77). It is the social atmosphere that leads her to behave awkwardly as she feels ashamed of standing in public with her father, who has crossed a long distance to see his daughter. Taking about the extent to which the students go in order to fit-in and belong she says that the immigrant students I taught over the years even feel ashamed of their parents who bear the signs of being immigrants:

> Muslims I taught throughout the years Couldn't wait to bury their dark, badly dressed immigrant parents who never understood what was happening around them or even took an interest, …, who obsessed with about halal meat and arranged marriages … They grew up reptiles plotting to silence their parents ' voices, to muffle their poor accents, their miseries, their shuffling feet their lives of toil and bafflement, … (7)

Here, the main thing that these young people are trying to get rid of is of course their cultural identity. Away from their own lands, the immigrants feel uprooted which leads to a sense of alienation from their own self. A sudden realization of the evident distancing often leads to identity crises. They even fall prey to the surge of Eurocentric dilemma that confounds them to believe that they are inferior. According to Sardar, "modern Orientalism proceeds to rely heavily on the medieval images of Islam" (58) confirmed by Butler that the "Orient has long fascinated British artists as an imaginary realm of luxury, violence, and sensuality" (4). The fear that a single Islamic symbol or trace of immigrants will be enough to declare them terrorists is manifested in these young immigrants as a fear of their own identity. In order to fit in and belong Natasha herself got rid of her religious and cultural affiliations from the beginning of her life there. Natasha believes that, "I was actually one of the lucky ones. I was one of the ones who saw the signs early on in the tricksy ways of schoolchildren, in the way my mother, snow-white as she was, was disliked for being Russian. I saw the writing on the wall and I was not too proud to take a short-cut to the exit (Aboulela, *The kindness* 7)"

Aboulela exemplifies the discontent faced by Muslims as a result of the negative discourse with regards their religion and culture throughout her writings. She reflects with very real examples how Islamophobia, which is seriously influential in the West, affects Muslim immigrants. Aboulela embodies the identity confusion

experienced by young immigrants by featuring a dream of Natasha. After Oz is detained by the police, Natasha goes to Oz's room and falls asleep in his bed. In her sleep, she sees herself as a half-human-half-reptile creature. She states that even a mythological character is more natural when compared to her own transformation and that she describes herself as completely different is very important in understanding immigrant psychology. The emotional trauma of not being accepted by both the host and their original culture is revealed in the novel with Natasha's dream. It is no accident, of course, that she had this dream in Oz's bed. The common sub consciousness of these two immigrant characters was masterfully embodied in this way by the author. Natasha describes her dream in the following words:

> From the top of my head, all the way down in one straight swoop, I split in two, half-human and half-reptile. In the logic of dreams it made sense that my left side was human because that was where my heart was. In the logic of dreams I was not embarrassed that I was naked, nor that a part of me was inhuman. With my left hand I ran my fingers over a pattern of scales on my right shoulder, ridges of shell, leathery grooves. In the logic of dreams what perplexed me the most that I had split vertically rather than horizontally. It was natural to be like a centaur or a sphinx; it was usual to have a full human head. But I had failed; I had morphed into something completely different. (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 76)

Natasha's confusion about positioning her identity is also evident in her relationship with her mother. The fact that she could not get her mother's white skin, which she thought would make it easier for her to adapt to Western society and hide her immigrant identity, turns into Natasha blaming her mother. Her mother deprived her of white skin, she believes which could have made it more easy for her to integrate into Western culture. Natasha describes the west as the 'privileged world', and withholding this 'gift' from her perfectly sums up Natasha's identity dilemma. "For the first time since her death, I cried. I cried over the wasted time, conversations in which all I did was mock her accent and taste; time wasted in aching to be white like her and blaming her for the failure as if she were the one barring me from entry into a

privileged world, as if she were begrudging me a gift she could give (Aboulela, *The kindness* 170".

The challenges faced by immigrant Muslims, who have come to the point of giving up their identity to adapt to the host culture, are quite diverse. Still, most importantly, they face these challenges within a social and political context characterized by stereotyping and growing religious discrimination (Giuliani, et al. 67). The difficulty of adapting to the western cultural atmosphere becomes so complex as the Muslim individuals living in the West face direct racism as well as a subtler racism as exemplified in the novel *The Kindness of Enemies* by the following words from Oz to Natasha, "You are different from the other lecturers. A Muslim talks to them, and they put on that wide-eyed tolerant look, quick little nods, and inside they're congratulating themselves thinking, look at me, I'm truly broad-minded, listening to all this shit and not battling an eyelid (Aboulela, *The kindness* 13)". We find a similar example in the novel *The Translator* when Sammar is called abruptly and unexpectedly by the Head of her department, Jennifer one day and tells her that even though she "was not religious but respected people who were religious. That was during the Gulf War, when suddenly everyone became aware that Sammar was Muslim" (Aboulela 99). She further tells her that "My boyfriend is Nigerian", pausing as if the declaration held a profound significance she wished Sammar to comprehend. Jennifer continued with a lively and confident demeanor, emphasizing her open-mindedness and tolerance, distinguishing herself from others and as a display of her broadmindedness and tolerance expresses, "I have no problem at all with the way you dress (100)".

The animosity and doubt directed towards cultures other than the Western are an unavoidable outcome of the colonial mindset. The prevalence of Islamophobia in Western societies poses a significant challenge for Muslim immigrants attempting to assimilate into the host culture. As a consequence of the radicalized perception of Islam, Muslim in the west strive to conceal or even repudiate their religious identities. According to Edward Said, this phenomenon makes clear that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony" (*Orientalism* 5). In a similar manner according to

Hall, globalization, in regards to cultural homogenization, is more likely to be a Western phenomenon than a global one, conflicting the very idea of globalization itself. In this sense, global consumerism, for instance, equals Westernization with the trade of Western culture to the other parts of the world regarded as the periphery, from the Western perspective. On this matter, globalization overlaps with power play and even Colonization because cultural homogenization involves unequal cultural exchange between the West, namely the colonial center, and the colonized periphery. The periphery becomes the receiving end of the Western culture while the West is presented with these alien and exotic cultures of the 'Other', only less significantly (Hall, "The Question"). Here, we argue that Natasha embraces the Western culture because she wants to feel belonged to the majority-white society, not discriminated because of her different ethnicity and inborn religion. It is the hegemony of the western culture which forces her to choose and adhere to the mainstream Western culture and eradicate the Sudanese and Islamic practices:

> Perhaps we half and halfs should always make a choice, one nationality instead of the other, one language instead of the other. We should nourish one identity and starve the other so that it would atrophy and drop off. Then we could relax and become like everyone else, we could snuggle up to the majority and fit in. (Aboulela, *The Kindness*104)

Here Natasha, in order to feel belonged and fit in thinks it is best to simply choose only one identity which is quite evident the dominant one while neglecting the other. The fact that it is the Western culture that she adopts echoes Hall's view that "globalization in the form of cultural homogenization - though by definition something which affects the whole globe - may appear to be essentially a Western phenomenon ("The Question" 305)". The hegemony of the western culture leads to the erosion one's national or cultural identities. In Natasha's case, as she adopts the Western culture to find a sense of belonging in her new home country, she simultaneously subdues her Sudanese and Muslim identity. The eroding of Natasha's Muslim identity, particularly, can be discerned when in order to blot out her Muslim identity she goes to whatever extent it takes to make herself feel not in any way related to being a Muslim, as she says "Then a young girl in hijab asked, 'Are you a

Muslim?' It was easy to dismiss the query as irrelevant, even silly. I laughed and that made her face flush with embarrassment (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 5)". She continues, "If I had been Dr. Hussein, the girl wouldn't have asked me if I were Muslim. And yet still I would have had to explain the non-Muslim Natasha. Better like this, not even Muslim by name (6)". Natasha's cultural detachment from her father's identity is reflected through her own eagerness as well as those of other Muslim youth in Britain "to erase their Muslim identities" as posited by Carroll.

In *The Kindness of Enemies,* we see how this 'Exteriorization' which generates stereotypes and prejudice devastates the life of Oz who seems to relish a normal life at the onset of the narrative. We observe the transformation following Oz's apprehension and confinement, despite his subsequent release without formal accusations. Oz is reduced to a 'social hazard 'in Georgiana Banita's words. Reducing him into such a state means that he is socially alienated which later results in his identity crisis. Osama is arrested and dragged into prison under suspecion of being vulnerable to radicalization. The way he is investigated and treated by the police in addition to the biased way the media reports his arrest leads to his identity crisis. As Awad remarks that, Oz is demonized, tainted and 'otherised'. His sense of citizenship is washed away by being pushed to the margins of the nation. Overall, this incident has made Oz re-think and re-position his identity as a British Muslim, and it even made him feel isolated and alienated from the greater society. As a young British Muslim, Oz has come to realize the liminality, precariousness, and tenuousness of the position he occupies within the nation. He is disgruntled because he is 'otherised' in the very country in which he was born and grew up. In a way, Oz's case parallels those of many young British Muslims who feel estranged in their own country because of their religious beliefs and outlooks ("Fiction" 80). In Anglo-Arab English writings, "The subject goes beyond and traverses' cultural borders. In other words, cross-cultural encounters that occur are constitutive i.e., they lead to transformed subjectivity involving cultural disorientation, hybridity and the problem of not knowing where one belongs (Nash, "From Harem" 356)". They shuttle between multiplicity and singularity, and adoption and rejection of the new culture.

One of the key consequences of this ‘exteriorization’ is the objectification of the Other. The colonized or marginalized people are represented as exotic, inferior, or even threatening. This objectification serves to dehumanize the Other and justify imperialist or colonialist actions. By portraying the Other as different, alien, or hostile, it becomes easier for the dominant culture to justify its control and dominance over them and that is exactly what happens in case of oz. Debra Merskin states that “once an individual is defined as a social outsider on the basis of meeting a set of stereotypes, he finds himself in ‘symbolic exile’, often even denied the most fundamental trait of ‘having humanity’ (161)”. Natasha’s description of Oz’s sudden arrest illustrates the awkwardness of the situation as time stood still and everyone is speechless. “I looked up and through the window saw two policemen… One of them speaks and says the other name instead of Oz. His voice is loud, says they have a warrant for his arrest. Malak asks why and the answer starts with ‘t’, ends with a suffix and she draws in her breath.... (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 74)”. Malak repeats that it is a mistake as she is unable to make sense of the situation and believes “They’ve mixed him up with someone else, I’m sure (77)”. This episode with Oz subtly highlights how in the west, the exteriorization of Muslims leads to their demonization and how they are looked upon as terrorists that need to be be ‘monitored ’(147). Richardson in the *Three Oriental Tales*, writes that same old binaries Islam and Christianity, East and West were articulated and reinforced by the mainstream Western media after 9/11attacks on New York, which speak to the 'stereotypical Oriental Other’ that offers cinematic and literary depictions of the Oriental culture (59). Oz is released without any charges after enduring ten days of continuous interrogation and rigorous investigations. However, he now views himself as a social misfit and feels profoundly ‘out of place’. Additionally, his release goes unnoticed as there is no mention of it in the media, and therefore no attention is paid to the intense scrutiny he underwent which showcases the hypocrisy of the Western society. As a consequence, Oz undergoes a profound transformation, he is left shaken and traumatized because of this incident and is unable to reclaim his ‘sense of self’. His future has been utterly destroyed, and to make matters worse, he’s struggling to move on as is described by his mother while talking to Natasha that he was released

yesterday but he is refusing to talk to her, he is not leaving his room and does not eat and she doesn't know what to do and therefore she asks Natasha to come over in the hope that he might talk to her (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 209. As is quite evident through his behavior, Oz is going through emotional turmoil and thus abstains from communication with anyone, including his own mother. More importantly, he opts to withdraw from the university and relocate to South Africa. This Traumatic situation leaves him psychologically devastated and unable to let go of the episode from his mind. This loss of a cohesive 'sense of self' is occasionally referred to as the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This dual displacement, which involves individuals being dislodged from their position in the social and cultural sphere as well as from their own internal understanding, constitutes a profound 'crisis of identity' for the individual. As the cultural critic Kobena Mercer observes that, "identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty (943)". Unfortunately, all the people in his proximity have become plausible suspects, including his mother and Natasha, who are equally implicated by the episode. Consequently, his father in South Africa dismisses the notion of extending a helping hand to his son in London, expressing, "They might drag me into it, and then what use would I be to him? (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 178)". This clearly demonstrates how the discourse of west which exteriorizes the Muslims leads to their harassment and dehumanization and negatively impacts how Muslims are viewed and treated. Oz's disclosure to Natasha further underscores the impact of his encounter with the police on his overall experience, "In his letter which he started with an apology, he informs her, 'I'm sorry I behaved poorly that day you came over. I was not up to talking much and to tell you the truth, it was because what happened psyched me out. The cell felt as a small as a cupboard and …" (298-99).

Oz's arrest and imprisonment show that irrespective of their position, the life of any Muslim, can unexpectedly take a downturn. What compounds the distress and deepens Natasha's sorrow is the sense of helplessness which is expressed by her saying that as soon as the department came to know that Oz has dropped out everyone seemed to feel a sense of relief as if they were all wanting and waiting get rid of him.

She says that he was one of the best students in the department and this didn't help him in any way. She continues, "I hid myself in the ladies 'and cried with anger, ashamed that, even now, I could not stand up for him" (323). This incident makes it clear how the representation of Muslims and Islam through the lens of Orientalism often leads to their dehumanization as is very clear by this gesture of feeling relief upon hearing the news that Oz has dropped out and it also leads to the suppression of their voices and narratives. Western interpretations tend to dominate, and this erases the diversity of Muslim subjectivities and experiences. Similar loss of a stable 'sense of self' can be observed as well in Natasha's character that endures the same sense of un-belonging and up-rootedness. According to Azman and Bahar, Natasha's crisis of identity and the clamorous sense of unbelonging and uprootedness drives her not only to change her name, but also to change the whole course of her life and to abandon her ethics and morals when she agrees to inspect and report college students who might show signs of radicalization (584). She tends to assimilate to the culture and to the power politics by all means possible. Even so, within the British environment, the only thing that can jiggle her confidence is when anybody brings her skin color or her Hussein name during a conversation. To her, that Hussein name is a burden, a disfigurement, or in other words, an unpleasant reminder of the incongruity evident between her and her pure British peers. This might delineate her urge to assume a British persona that might aid her assimilation and blending into mainstream British society and culture.

According to Young, although "you may assimilate white values, you never quite can become white enough (*Postcolonialism* 23)" which is quite evidently illustrated by the treatment Natasha and Malak receive after Oz's arrest. Natasha's office was examined. She was also questioned about her relationship with Oz, her student and whom she once visited at home to learn more about Imam Shamil, the subject of her academic research papers. She had just like that turned into a suspect, a Muslim who happened to be a teacher of a student arrested on charges of being associated with terrorism. Here we are presented with how this discrimination and suspicion affects a person's 'sense of self', as in Natasha's words she admits that her "dignity was shaken and her balance broke" (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 176). That

incident along with the process of being investigated triggers Natasha's bygone sense of humiliation and marginalization again. As she spells it out distinctly in the following lines:

> Natasha Wilson denoted a person who was smeared by suspicion, tainted by crime. I might as well have stayed Natasha Hussein! Even though my laptop and mobile phone were returned to me, even though no formal charges were ever levelled at me, still, it now took conscious effort to walk with my head held high. My voice became softer, my opinions muted, my actions tentative. I thought before I spoke, became wary of my students and, often, bowed my head down. (310)

The police investigation of the robbery of her house throws further light on the difficulties of Muslims in the West as Natasha does not get the kind of response from the police she expected to get. She says that it felt as if they were not interested in investigating the case of robbery at her apartment and were on the contrary asking her questions of which she wanted answers from them, which made her feel as if the robbery was her own fault. Natasha says that the police questioning made her nervous, "my skin flared in their presence, it became more prominent than what I was saying; and I was now an impostor asking for attention, a troublesome guest taking up space. They had better things to do and worthier citizens to protect (102)". This encapsulates the predicament of Muslims in Britain, finding themselves as unwelcome guests. Natasha acknowledges that the police showed little concern for her case, and notably, their apathy reflected a neglect for her, deeming her as the unwelcome 'other'. In a similar sense we see Oz's mother, Malak who is also is impacted by the situation with her son. As an actress has been entertaining the audience through the years and suddenly comes to realize that she does not belong and she is seen as an outsider. She experiences neglect as she is met with both contempt and suspicion. Ultimately, she comes to the realization that, despite her role in the entertainment industry and contribution to the community, she remains an outsider. Her life has undergone a profound transformation" from the optimistic activist mum campaigning for the release of her son to the shadows of being under suspicion (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 226)". During a discussion with Natasha, Malik

voiced her grievances, expressing," my dinner invitations drying up, even the offers of roles dwindling ever so slowly without knowing exactly why. … (226)". Despite her prior dismissal of grievances from Muslims in Britain, Malak eventually comes to regretfully acknowledge that she is unwelcome and under suspicion and, like her son Oz, she is also shaken by the whole situation. The exchange between her and Natasha vividly depicts her present condition as Natasha makes earnest efforts to assist her in overcoming the situation, "I think you are unduly pessimistic". However, the response from Malak's completely sums up her new predicament, "all my life I have been hugely optimistic. I have gone ahead with loads of energy, loads of goodwill, until now. I am stumped. I stay up at night …" (226). This pessimistic response mirrors the adverse effects of the situation on her life. The optimistic outlook that she used to have has now completely dissipated. Natasha ultimately comes to the realization that despite her successful tenure at the university as an academician, where she has taught for an extended period that she doesn't belong, just like to Malak came to this realization. Clearly, neither Natasha's anglicized surname nor her academic achievements have played any sort of role in establishing her and aiding her to reach the space she has been striving to occupy. She feels that:

> Every step climbed, every achievement, every recognition – all that hard work – had not taken me far enough, truly redeemed me, not landed me on the safest shore. The skin on my skull tensed so that I could not form a facial expression; even pushing my glasses up my nose felt strange, as if my skin was both numb and ultrasensitive at the same time. To have your personal files examined, to reveal what is exceedingly intimate – a password and search engine history – felt a hundred times worse than having luggage examined at the airport. (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 167)

Regardless of the remarkable scholarly achievements she has attained, she is still seen as an 'outsider' and her attempts to integrate have been proved to be futile. Natasha's endeavor to adopt a Western persona reveals the inherent flaw in the concept of 'assimilation' to the discerning reader (Campbell 62). Muslims will continue to grapple with questions surrounding their identity as long as the Western colonial perspective persists, fueled by racism and Islamophobia, which is the

apprehension or prejudice towards Muslims and Islam. As far as racism is concerned, Muslims "find it difficult to call themselves 'British 'because they felt that the majority of white people did not accept them as British because of their race or cultural background; through hurtful 'jokes', harassment, discrimination, and violence they found their claim to be British was all too often denied (Modood, "British Asian" 74)". Islamophobia, additionally, exacerbates the complexity of identity issues by intermittently fostering challenges that seek to reinforce an immediate clash between Islam and the West.

Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab often find themselves becoming prime targets of racist attacks due to their visible adherence to Islamic practices, which points out their Muslim identity. In numerous instances within these novels, female characters' encounter harassment based on their appearance which specifically signals their Muslim identity. The demeanor toward Muslim women and the veil exposes the bigotry manifesting in the mistreatment of Muslim women that don the hijab, racially insensitive jeers, and acts of physical aggression. The portrayal of Islam as 'unchanging' and 'totalizing' faith constitutes a form of racial prejudice. Wieviorka states that, "To dislike Islam to the point of violence [...] is racist, if Muslims themselves are constructed as a natural category, and their behavior, real or imagined, is presented as informed in some way or another by an essence, by innate attributions or an almost genetic cultural heritage (quoted in Nieuwkerk 229-246)".

Within the novels, the female characters illustrate a narrative landscape in which Muslim women disproportionately endure the impact of such racist attacks. It constitutes a method of exerting pressure on Muslim women to integrate and marginalize them from public spheres, and hinder their engagement with society on self-determined terms. In the novel *Minaret* Najwa, is an exiled woman who experiences an assault while on a bus in London. Describing the incident Najwa says that the boys walked past her to the back end of the bus and one among them while staring at her said something to the other boys which frightened her, made her turn to look away out of the window. She adds that she reassured herself that Allah will take care of her and protect her and even if they attack her she "won't feel it too badly; it will be a blunted blow, a numbed blow (Aboulela 80). The assault escalates from

verbal abuse to a physical attack, marked by laughter emanating behind her, followed by an object striking the seat beside her and ricocheting down the aisles. She does not know what it is as the attackers have missed their target this time and Najwa is anxious what if they come closer and is worried that what will they do if they run out of things to throw at her (*Minaret* 80). This assault showcases a deliberate manifestation of racial prejudice, while the driver's response is the evidence of implicit bias and complicity. As Najwa seeks assistance, the driver averts his gaze, exhibiting an approving or indifferent silence and in the process underscores how the 'exteriorization' has dehumanized Muslims. This acceptance of Islamophobia has reached a point where witnessing attacks on Muslims does not prompt people to extend help. The attack goes on "I hear footsteps come up behind me, see a blur of denim. He says, 'You Muslim scum', then the shock of cool liquid on my head and face. I gasp and taste it, tizer. He goes back to his friends- they are laughing. My chest hurts and I wipe away my eyes" (*Minaret* 80-81). Muslim women are subjected to assaults due to their lifestyle and are singled out as the enemy or the outsider. They are exposed to racial discrimination in public areas like buses, bars, offices and even apartments. In the novel *The Translator* we see Sammar being attacked in a similar manner when a man shouts at her in the Kings Street "Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein" (Aboulela 99). Sammar faces racism on almost daily basis as the residents of her apartment often sneer and grunt at her presence on the landing while she speaks to Rae over the common phone. These occurrences illustrate the vulnerability of Muslim women to various disheartening and degrading situations, encompassing bias, prejudice, hostility and surveillance. Again in the Novel *Minaret* on an occasion, Najwa is shocked at the woman's party hosted by Lamya, where a girl enters the house with the hijab and demonstrates a strip-tease leaving everyone around in laughter. This demonstration is derisive of the fully cloaked Muslim woman as seen by the Westernized Muslims in the West.

Benguesmia and Refice note, "western media have promoted the idealization of the western values of democracy, on the other hand portrayed Islam as the religion of violence, sexism, and described it as hostile and unreasonable, and accused Muslims of terrorism" (25). Mahmoud Khalifa further notes, "the representation of

Islam in the west was built around a binary system that endowed Islam with negative characteristics and the west with positive characteristics". He adds, "west makes Islam one of the most recurrent images of the other in Europe and one of the most stereotyped and vilified religions …" (1). Mahmudul Hasan also points out that "Muslims have been made into objects of exclusivity and of continued analysis" since the attacks on New York and London, adding that "their identity is hidden behind a smokescreen of uncertainty…". For him, "both the popular media and literature lay enormous emphasis on the religious affiliation of the perpetrators of the infamous 9/11 and 7/7 horrors". According to him this leads to Muslims immigrants residing in the western countries to be seen as 'exoticized others 'and 'outsiders and who pose a danger to the western culture and way of living by their presence ("Seeking" 95). The prejudice against Muslims is further highlighted through Gaynor's complaint against Natasha. Surprisingly, Gaynor didn't take any action against another staff, she made her complaint only against Natasha, a woman of a different color and religion.

The alienation and othering as a result of 'exteriorization' of Muslims experienced by the characters has been skillfully portrayed by Aboulela to produce a clear image of Muslim lives in West after 9/11. According to Edward Said, Muslims "where ever they may be settled, are viewed through a certain lens" (*Orientalism*). Said's view is confirmed by Janmohamed, who provided a list of labels that are generally attached to Muslims, particularly women, "Oppressed, repressed, subjugated, backward, ignorant Violent, extremist, hateful, terrorist, jihadist, evil, radical Weakling, moderate, sellout, self-hating, apologist" (M. Hasan, 92-3). According to him it is quite evident that this widespread islamophobic and racist tendency of the Western host society contributes to the oppression of Muslim women (99). The situation of Muslims, for instance is aptly summed up in Natasha's words after Oz's arrest when she says that it takes conscious effort to walk with head held high and points out the ridiculousness of the situation saying that even though she did everything possible to fit in, she ultimately realizes that she would never belong. Even though she is an accomplished and a successful academician, Natasha struggles with a deep "sense of disconnect and duality about her identity and place (Carroll). On the contrary in Sudan, amidst her mother's associate Grusha, her former partner Yasha,

and her sibling Mikki, she tastes a genuine sense of belonging. Natasha articulates that in her native land, she experienced a profound relaxation, devoid of the obligation to validate, elucidate, or assert her identity. She felt no compulsion to conform, nor did she have to be vigilant about potential threats that her mere existence might elicit in an inappropriate or bad situation or amongst the wrong sort of people (Aboulela, *The Kindness* 310). Quite evidently, the mere reference to the term 'to fit in' encapsulates the entire concept of belonging. Like Malak, despite the accomplishments she achieved, Natasha feels like a stranger in the west. Malak and Natasha both worked hard for their success and conducted themselves to their best of their abilities as citizens of the western nations, nevertheless, as soon as they begin to feel comfortable as a part of these societies, those societies appear to repudiate them. These characters are left regretful and with a sentiment of deprivation and shame which supersedes the former feelings of belonging and affiliation with that community. This is best illustrated through Oz, who is left with a similar feeling of alienation after being arrested by the police. Sammar and Najwa also feel a sense alienation from the dominant community after being attacked both verbally and physically from time to time. Like many of Aboulela's characters, we see Malak as well as Natasha after the episode with Oz, ultimately drifting towards their own religion and culture. Malak seeks comfort in spirituality, endeavoring to get over the abrupt change in her life. Her inclination towards religion is evidenced by her participation in numerous Islamic rituals, for which she extends invitations to Natasha as well. After running away from her religion her whole life we see Natasha face to face with it the narrative. These "Muslim gatherings in the mosque create an alternative space for immigrant Muslim women" (Khalifa 67). These characters Khalifa believes are "engaged in a struggle to define their Muslim identity in a culture that is hostile to their beliefs and cultural heritage. … They find redemption in reclaiming their Muslim identity" (38) after facing alienation from the dominant Western Society. Similarly, Najwa in *Minaret* also completely abandons her western life style and starts to live according to her culture after feeling a sense of belonging and identity in doing so.

One of the objectives of this research work is to evaluate Aboulela's novels in the context of identity formation theory which has been achieved in this chapter. The chapter arrives at an inference that discourse plays a prominent role in shaping identity and the orientalist discourse affects Muslim subjectivities profoundly. Aboulela through her narratives, highlights how the orientalist discourse through 'exteriorization' leads to 'othering' of the characters in these novels and subsequently affects their identity. The hegemony of the western culture pressurizes them to assimilate into the western society by giving up their cultural identity and yet they never feel a sense of belonging in the western society as we see in the characters like Natasha, Malak, Najwa and Osama. They distance themselves from their culture and religion in order to escape being stereotyped and discriminated however the western community fails to offer them a feeling of belonging in spite of their efforts at integration.

Another objective of this research work is to analyze the growing religious identity of immigrants and an analysis of the same in the works of Leila Aboulela has led to the following outcomes. The alienation and segregation faced by the different characters in Aboulela's works as a result of islamophobic discourse in spite of their efforts to fit into the western culture leads to a crisis of their identity and a gradual return to their native culture and religion like Najwa in Minaret and Natasha in *The Kindness of Enemies*. These characters reject their culture and religion in an attempt to assimilate into a society that is hostile to them and is blatantly Islamophobic. In order to evade stereotyping, racial slurs, and facing accusations on a recurring basis a Muslim or Arab commits a crime these characters even try to anglicizes their name like Osama to oz. and Natasha Hussein to Natasha Wilson. When all their efforts to fit-in fail, they are left in a crises and so they fall back upon their native culture as well as religion for a stable sense of self and identity. In the Novel *The Kindness of Enemies*, Najwa Malak as well as Oz's subjectivities are affected due islamophobia when a single episode nullifies all their efforts of assimilation in the western society in spite of them being successful in their respective fields. Similarly, Najwa in *Minaret* and Sammar in *Translator* face islamophobia both verbal abuse and physical

attacks which leads to alienation and identity crises and their eventual return to their religion which gives them a stable sense of identity.

Another finding of this study is that the Islamophobia qualifies as a form of racism as it employs analogous methods of social exclusion. It embodies a discriminatory narrative that marginalizes Muslims, isolating them in minority contexts, and oversimplifies and makes sweeping generalizations about their conduct which leads to discrimination and prejudice towards Muslims and it profoundly impacts their identity. It is the same reason which leads to Oz's arrest and subsequent treatment of her mother as a suspect. This Islamophobia is present in every narrative explored in this study. The migrant characters, though settled abroad pushed by circumstances, struggle to locate themselves. The following words of Krister Stendahl that, "the ultimate violence against the other is to use them as negative symbols in one's own system" aptly sums up the situation and the condition of the Muslims in the West (20).

In conclusion, Leila Aboulela's intention in writing about the issues faced by the immigrants; issues of belonging, identity crises, islamophobia and the like, is to bridge the gap between various cultural, religious and political differences by giving voice to the issues and concerns faced by immigrants in the West. An understanding of the differences can help in constructing a bridge of recognition and integration without pressure from the dominant society which will help to overcome all forms of differences and eventually lead to a peaceful coexistence. Shenkar opines that "cultures can be 'bridged' but not infringed upon or overshadowed, nor can they threaten or be threatened" (909). In Aboulela's narratives we see a negotiation of the construction and formation of identity and belonging. Najwa, Malak, Sammar, and Natasha open spaces to create opportunities for a sense of belonging regardless of circumstances stemming from displacement and fragmentation. These immigrants strive to assimilate and long for a place they would call home. Natasha in *The kindness of Enemies,* say that "I came so that I would not be an outcast, so that I would, even in a small way, faintly, marginally, tentatively, belong" (Aboulela 290) but hostility towards non-west because of orientalist discourse leads to the treatment of these characters as outsiders and as outcast. We see Natasha ultimately drifting

towards her native culture and religion which she had earlier completely blotted out of her life. Looking at the characters other than Natasha, we see Oz in identity crises and with a lost sense of self. Through Oz's character, Aboulela effectively illustrates the feeling of loss and identity crisis encountered by second and third-generation Muslim migrants. Malak also provides a noteworthy instance of mirroring the adversities faced by both her and the subsequent generations concerning assimilation. As a Muslim immigrant of the first generation, Malak's distress and obligations are more substantial. In addition to her own challenges, she must shoulder the weight of her son Oz's difficulties arising from assimilation. Throughout her writings, Aboulela skillfully deals with the damage done by the stereotyping and anti-Islamic racism to the Muslim immigrants and at the same time familiarizing her readers with the other side of the story and seems to advocate for the normalization of relationships between different communities and sides. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the enduring legacy of colonial discourse and its contemporary relevance. It calls for a nuanced understanding of Muslim identity, particularly within the diaspora, and advocates for collective efforts to dispel the shadows of stereotype and Islamophobia.

Chapter 4
Subversion of Orientalist Tropes as Politics of Resistance

With the publication of his hugely influential book *Orientalism* in 1978, it was Said who first problematized the politics of representation on such a large scale. He realized the need for deconstructing myths, for deflating pre-conceived notions about the superiority of the West or the inferiority of the East, and most of all the veritable need for a counter-discourse that would challenge the pervasive assumptions of the West. Said in *Culture and Imperialism* takes up this issue of the resistance of the subaltern to colonialism through forms of "writing back" to the empire in creative and critical ways in order to create a counter-discourse to power and imperialism. "Resistance, far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history" (216), Said writes, highlighting the importance of postcolonial resistance that undercuts the tropes of Orientalism, narratives of empire, and colonial discourse. Said makes a crucial distinction between colonialism and imperialism. Imperialism is the "practice, theory and the attitudes of the dominant metropolitan center ruling a distant territory," while Colonialism is "the implanting of settlements on a distant territory. Imperialism lingers after Colonization is over" (8). Culture is at the center of Imperialism, with a deep investment in representing the politics of nation. On the other hand, culture is also a means for the powerful dissent and resistance. It is ingenious and interesting that Said's politicized cultural theory is argued and represented through the threads and tropes of literature. Said elaborates on the notion of fiction and literature as "Writing Back," as a means of undercutting, "the authoritative, compelling image of empire, which crept into and overtook so many procedures of intellectual mastery that are central in modern culture" (335). He contends that "opposite (contrapuntal) practices or "secular impurities" such as mixed genres, unexpected combinations of tradition and novelty, political experiences based on communities of effort and interpretation" (335) are tools that can be deployed by postcolonial writers and critics for "re-doing the narratives of empire," as Said called it in one of his lectures at the University of Toronto in 1986. Indeed, many

contemporary postcolonial writers and critics strategically deploy these methodologies for critique.

The strategy of "writing back" (Ashcroft, et al., *The Empire*) is a form of resistance, of reclaiming one's ownership of oneself by resisting the hegemony and undercutting the tropes of Orientalism, overturning the narratives of empire and thereby disjuncturing colonial discourse. Said says that "writing back to the metropolitan cultures, disrupting the European narratives of the Orient and Africa, replacing them with either a more playful or a more powerful new narrative style is a major component in the process" (*Culture* 216). As an example of this methodology, Said cites and praises Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as:

> A brilliant work based on the liberating imagination of independence itself, with all its anomalies and contradictions working themselves out. The conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories is of particular interest in Rushdie's work, and in an earlier generation of resistance writing. This Kind of Work was Carried out by dozens of scholars, critics, and intellectuals in the peripheral world; I call this effort the voyage in. (*Culture* 216)

Aboulela's works fall within the same category as that of Rushdie. Like Rushdie's work, it creates an oppositional narrative of empire by inventing Muslim protagonists, using native words and names as common parlance, normalizing other cultural scenarios and actions, thus bringing the 'Other' into the mainstream, Aboulela literally turns the Eurocentric overtones on their head, de-centering colonial discourse. Aboulela seems to be actually writing in Arabic - stylistically, idiomatically, and culturally - with inflexions and expressions, variations and tonalities from the rich Arabic language. However, the writing happens to be in English, and its rhythms sound like transliteration. This, I feel, is the quintessential reason as to why her style is found to be fascinating, idiosyncratic, curious, and new by Western critics and readers. For someone familiar with Arabic it seems pretty mundane. This is indeed the construction of a new stylistic and thematic counter-discourse to the narratives of empire.

Interventions by non-European writers, artists, scholars cannot be dismissed or silenced, as these interventions are a part of a political movement and its guiding imagination. They are a form of intellectual energy that wishes to inscribe itself as a counter-discourse in an effort by subjectified people to regain identity. A counter discourse in this context is a form of deep resistance that speaks through creativity, words, and actions, deliberately negating the dominant discourse of colonialism. A counter-discourse is a re-inscription, rewriting and re-presenting in order to reclaim, reaffirm, and retrieve subject peoples' ownership of their own lives, which had been appropriated by the colonizers; it is a discourse that goes against the grain to challenge assumptions of imperial power. A counter-discourse tries to generate new narratives, new paradigms of empowerment and resistance for the oppressed, colonized, and subjectified people and nations. Talking about this type of literature Said says that these texts are not master discourses, but they create a counter narrative of resistance in their own terms. What he is implying is that creative and ingenious means of undercutting the dominant discourse are being used by other writers to disjuncture the grand narratives. Currently, more and more writers from the former colonies are experimenting with literary forms like parody, satire, comedy, irony, humour, use of indigenous language, and dialect, among other styles, to create a counter-discourse in order to undercut the grand narratives of empire. In Said's view, the 'Orient' can't be studied in a non-Orientalist manner. Rather, it is necessary for the scholar to study more focused and smaller culturally consistent regions. The Oriental must have a voice; it must speak for itself. The second-hand representation of the Orient, in Said's view, must take a back seat. Besides, it must give way to the narrative and self-representation on the part of the 'Oriental.' Edward Said brings to light the mechanics of how knowledge interacts with power. His views have a particular lasting influence on what is now said and written about the 'post-colonial' world.

Aboulela's writings serve as a profound act of "writing back", echoing Said's call to challenge and resist the dominant discourse that often portrays the non-Western people as the other. Edward Said's call for resistance through "writing back" emerges from his critical examination of the imperialistic narratives that have historically

shaped the discourse surrounding the East and West. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said, contends that the dominant narratives, often disseminated by Western powers, have been instrumental in not only legitimizing imperial conquests but also in perpetuating a distorted image of the 'Other.' He argues that these narratives serve to marginalize and essentialize the cultures of the colonized, casting them as passive, exotic, and inferior. In this context, Said posits that there is an urgent need for those subjected to such imperialistic representations to engage in a form of counter-discourse, a process he terms as "writing back."

Said's notion of "writing back" is a deliberate act of reclaiming agency and voice for the marginalized. By engaging in the act of reinterpreting and reconstructing the narratives of empire, individuals from the colonized societies can challenge the stereotypes imposed upon them. It involves a conscious effort to reshape the discourse, presenting alternative perspectives that defy the simplistic and often dehumanizing portrayals perpetuated by the dominant discourse. Through the act of writing back, Said envisions a transformative process wherein the colonized subjects not only resist but actively participate in reshaping their own narratives, thereby dismantling the power structures embedded in imperialistic discourse.

This methodology of resistance through narrative by postcolonial writers like Leila Aboulela enables a profound exploration of how narratives can be transformed to give voice to the silenced people and challenge the hegemonic structures perpetuated by the discourse of empire. Aboulela’s narratives give voice to the marginalized people to reclaim their agency and defy the limiting stereotypes perpetuated by imperialistic perspectives. As we navigate through Aboulela's literary landscapes, we aim to discern the nuances, complexities, and subversive elements that collectively contribute to the construction of a counter-narrative, one that not only challenges but redefines the discourse surrounding the non-Western experience in the global literary arena. Through this exploration, we aim at engaging in a critical dialogue that transcends conventional narratives, inviting a deeper understanding of objectified and subjectified people of the hegemonic western discourse.

The emergence of Leila Aboulela’s fiction might be said to represent a turning point in contemporary fiction in relation to the depiction of Islam and Muslims.

Aboulela's writing challenges the stereotypical portrayal of Muslims. In a sense, she is "writing back" in order to give voice to those Muslims who have been depicted negatively in fiction. She tries to "write from inside the experience of growing up and living with a network of customs and beliefs" (Philips). Writing from the inside, Aboulela has created a new image of Islam and Muslims; once the perspective is changed, the positions of the 'Self' and 'Other' do the same. In the first phase, Islam was the 'Other', but now, in the new phase, it is the 'Self'. Writing about Islam and Muslims, for Aboulela, is writing about herself. The image of Islam is hers and in defending Islam she is defending her own beliefs. That is why, for of all she has written about Islam and Muslims, she can report, "I have so far written close to my autobiographical situation" (Aboulela, "Interview"). Aboulela's portrayal of Islam and its relationship with the West does not challenge the western image only. Rather, it challenges some eastern ones too. Since Islam and western secularism are widespread all over the world, Aboulela's fiction has emerged as a different voice in terms of much Eastern as well as Western fiction. Anita Sethi writes in *The Observer*: "Aboulela offers a very different portrayal of Muslim women in London from that in … *Brick Lane*. Rather than yearning to embrace western culture, Aboulela's women seek solace in their growing religious identity". The fact of living as a minority group or being an immigrant does heighten the consciousness of dialogic understanding of things and makes the question of identity an urgent and fundamental problematic in the works of Aboulela. The question of identity seems to be the axial point around which her novels revolve. Her novels are populated by devout Muslims as well as lay ones who are between two cultures: Western and Arab. These characters are engaged in an identity struggle in a culture that is hostile to their beliefs and cultural heritage.

The appropriation of language is a key strategy used by non-Western writers to reclaim their voices and assert their identities in response to colonialism. The appropriation of language refers to the process by which individuals or communities, often those who have been historically marginalized or oppressed, reclaim and redefine language in a way that empowers them and challenges existing power structures. This involves taking control of the language that was once imposed by the colonizers, reshaping it, and using it as a medium to convey indigenous perspectives

and experiences. Slemon observes that irrespective of the locale, the postcolonial literary language,

> seizes the 'language of the [imperial] centre' and replaces it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place [...] first by an 'abrogation' or refusal of the normative standards of the imperial culture…and then by an appropriation' of the colonizer's language, appropriately adapted, to the cultural and political ends of the colonized. ("Post-colonial" 188)

English is used by the post-colonial writers as a medium to voice themselves. However, the native lingual affiliation remains undisturbed. The appropriation of English language by postcolonial writers allows them to create a space for their own cultural expressions within the linguistic framework imposed by colonial powers. It becomes a means of resistance, cultural preservation, and a celebration of linguistic diversity in postcolonial literature. Aboulela endorses Achebe in this regard who talks about conducting our business within the English language, including the business of throwing off colonialism. We master the English language and we write back in English; in other words, we carve a space for ourselves within it. Although there is a smooth East-West dialogue, Aboulela doesn't fail to highlight the ideological variance in her texts through English, which Zabus calls as relexification. He says, "it forces English to carry the weight of the colonized culture and attempts to convey indigenous concepts, thought-patterns, structures and rhythms and linguistic features of the mother tongue" (36).

Aboulela has attempted to deterritorialize the English language by infusing native Arabic words, expressions, speech patterns and the world view of her characters into her writing, which differentiates her narrative from the mainstream narratives. This linguistic subversion challenges the hegemony of the dominant language. Aboulela's novels carry a unique Cultural and religious flavour with exclusive cross border experiences. The response of her characters to culture shocks and secularism are bundled in an Islamic diction that is a constant reminder of Allah's presence in their daily lives. Her novels are profuse in Islamic diction based on their

Islamic fervour. Words like wudu (ritual purification before prayers), Taraweeh (voluntary night prayers during the month of Ramadan), Isha (daily night prayer), Allahu-Akbar (God is the greatest), ayah (a verse in Islamic Qur'an), fiqh (deep understanding of something), Hajj (annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca) and Hadith (a major source of Islamic religious law containing sayings of Prophet Muhammad) on the one hand familiarize the western readers with the Islamic practices and at the same time become a means of asserting firm allegiance to their native culture and religion, in spite of the cross-cultural exposure. In a way, if the very mention and presence of religion can be seen as a form of resistance, then Aboulela uses it as their rightful weapon to write back to the Empire. The influx of Arab words has become part of the globalized English which has undergone many inflections. Words like falafel, kebab, Sherbet, tahini are being used frequently in the West. However, usage of words with religious and cultural connotations by Aboulela in her novels like wudu, shirk-alasbab, shahadah, exclusive Arabic expressions like "Ya Allah, Ya Arham El-Rahimeen, emphasize the significance of the Arabic language for the characters as well as its richness, resisting the dominance of English as the sole medium of expression. Aboulela uses the English language in her writing as a tool to express cultural nuances and traditions. Through the careful integration of Arabic terms, cultural references, and linguistic expressions, she enriches the narrative with a sense of authenticity that goes beyond stereotypes. Aboulela uses the English Language as a tool for cultural expression. The readers get an idea of the native dress patterns like "the head-dress and white kaftan lined with black" (*Minaret* 179), the Sudanese traditional bridal dress "a fine satin fabric embroidered with mauve threads" (*Lyrics Alley* 228) and the incorporation of Sudanese wedding songs and summer songs open a window to that culture through these intimate writings. The use of cultural signifiers within the language is used by Aboulela to create a new vocabulary that encapsulate the unique aspects of their cultures, experiences, or socio-political conditions. Aboulela incorporates words from Sudanese language and cultural terms in her writings which adds authenticity to the narrative but also challenges the dominance of English, the language of the colonizer. The linguistic playfulness in her works blending English with Arabic words creates a linguistic tapestry that mirrors

the cultural hybridity of her characters and at the same time asserts the importance of linguistic diversity in the face of attempts at cultural erasure. So, Aboulela uses language as a site of resistance by creatively manipulating the colonizer's language.

Aboulela's nuanced Portrayal of Muslim characters through her writings counters the western stereotypes about Muslims. Aboulela's novels feature Muslim characters with diverse beliefs, personalities and experiences. By avoiding one-dimensional stereotypes, she challenges the monolithic representations perpetuated by Western narratives. This complexity challenges prevailing stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. Regarding Aboulela's giving a new direction to the portrayal of Muslims, Tamer in the novel *Minaret* as well as Osama in *The kindness of Enemies*, both young conservative Muslims living in the west, challenge the image of the fundamentalist. In contrast to the assumption that conservative Muslims appear unable to strike a balance between their religious belief and Western culture, Tamer, in general, succeeds in harmonising the relationship between Islam and the West and his appreciation of them both helps in shaping his identity. He is balanced in the way he views his background, and more realistic in his aims. In spite of Tamer's disagreements with his mother and sister on religious issues, we do not see a confrontation between the two, neither does he become involved in any activities against the British culture or society. The character of Tamer therefore clearly contradicts the stereotypes of young conservative Muslims who are often portrayed as fundamentalists and extremists. Through Tamer, in fact, Aboulela provides the young conservative Muslim with a new, more rounded image. Tamer's relationship with Najwa also subverts the oriental image of the male conservative Muslim who oppresses women.

Aboulela challenges the Western assumptions about Muslim women as passive or oppressed. Her female characters navigate their faith in ways that reflect empowerment, agency, and a negotiation of traditional and modern roles. In *Lyrics Alley*, Aboulela introduces strong female characters like Soraya and Nabilah who are educated, articulate, and actively participate and engage with societal changes in Sudan during the 1950s. The novel challenges stereotypes about Muslim women by

depicting them as agents of change within their cultural context. In *Minare*t, Najwa's resilience in facing adversity and the negotiation from a privileged lifestyle to one of economic hardship showcases her agency and subverts the Western preconceptions about Muslim women. In her book *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed remarks that colonial discourse criticises veiling, accuses Islam of the oppression of women, and believes in the inferiority of Islamic societies and the backwardness of Islam. In this discourse, according to Ahmed, the oppression of Muslim women is a result of the backwardness of Islam itself. Islam then is the main target in order to free Muslim women. Amal Amireh in her article, "Arab Women Writers' Problems and Prospects", probes the reasoning behind the western welcome afforded to the writings of Arab women writers. While writing about Nawal El Saadawi, for example, she observes that for some critics "the West welcomes her feminist critique of Arab culture because it confirms the existing stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims as backward, misogynist and violently oppressive". She adds, historically, the West's interest in Arab women is part of its interest in and hostility to Islam. This hostility was central to the colonialist project, which cast women as victims to be rescued from Muslim male violence. The fixation on the veil, the harem, excision, and polygamy made Arab women symbols of a region and a religion that were at once exotic, violent, and inferior. This indicates that the colonial and stereotypical images of Islam and Muslim women are still vivid in the West and some Arab women writers re-enforce these images. The portrayal of the hijab in Aboulela's novels is a clear example of Aboulela's method of challenging colonial assumptions regarding the position of women in Islam. A signally important subject in colonial discourse, the hijab, has succeeded in convincing many people in the West of the inferiority of Islam. "For many westerners, the veil is a symbol of patriarchal Islamic societies in which women are assumed to be oppressed, subordinated, and made invisible" (Young, 80). In dealing with these assumptions, Aboulela -by according the hijab its religious significance and context – appears to differentiate herself from those Muslim female voices that tend to think of the hijab traditionally, and as a sign of patriarchy. Miriam Cooke, for example, in her book *Women Claim Islam* writes that, "the veil symbolizes belonging to a religious community that is both patriarchal and powerful,

but beyond it has many meanings. While some of these meanings are negatives, others are empowering" (Cooke 132). The first implication here is that the woman in Muslim communities is forced to wear the hijab by "patriarchal and powerful" currents. The second is that the hijab, especially because some of its "meanings are negatives", does not seem to belong to Islam. In short, Cooke believes that the symbolism of the hijab "is so saturated with patriarchal meaning that it is difficult to appropriate for feminist purposes" (136). *Minaret* challenges this point of view. Najwa's freely arriving at adoption of the hijab in London directly after leaving Anwar contradicts the influence of the patriarchal and powerful community, reverses Cooke's view, and is thus an implicit criticism of it. In other words, where Cooke upholds freedom of choice and argues that powerful communities should not put pressure on women to wear hijab, Aboulela asserts that freedom of choice is precisely what Najwa needs in order to do so. In complete contrast to colonial assumptions, the hijab in Aboulela's fiction "is an outer cover that far from hiding oppressed women is merely the public uniform of a variety of types: feminine looking, attractive, glamorous, motherly, Somali etc. – all united by the occasion and a further implied emphasis: living in West" (Nash, *Writing* 48). In *The translator* Sammar takes pride in wearing the hijab, she sees her hijab as a part of her Identity, it is important to her and she chooses her hijab with utmost care as she feels that it makes her look more elegant, "She thought of herself as better dressed. She covered her hair with Italian silk, her arms with tropical colours. She wanted to be as elegant as Benazir Bhutto" (Aboulela, 8). In *Minaret*, Najwa, who decided to wear hijab finds comfort in her connection with Allah, prayer provides security. Prayer is not just a ritual but has the strength of connecting people to their Islamic roots and practices. Najwa feels a spiritual calm that propels her towards showing more commitment to her faith through wearing the hijab. Living away from her family in a western country, she could very easily abandon wearing it because there is no one there who would oppose or force her but that does not happen because she herself chooses to wear it as she sees it is an intrinsic part of her identity and the same is true of Salma as well as all hijab wearing women in her novels.

Aboulela positively portrays Islamic practices, emphasizing their significance in the lives of her characters. Through her narratives, she challenges the notion that Islamic beliefs and practices are inherently oppressive or backward. Unlike the orientalist assumption that Islam is one of the reasons behind women's oppression in the Muslim world, Aboulela through her narratives shows that Islam has its own way of liberating women through spirituality. Tina Steiner suggests that, "Aboulela portrays her characters' spirituality as a liberating force, which affords them the room to construct transnational identities as Muslim women" (10). As we see in the novel *The Translator*, Sammar's faith, her belief in Islam is what keeps her going in a very tough Phase of her life in an alien environment. Again in *Minaret* Aboulela portrays Najwa taking refuge in Islam after she loses her homeland, her position and her family and finds solace as well as meaning to life by giving Islam the central place in her life. Similarly, in the novel *Bird Summons,* Salma, Moni and Iman overcome the crises and challenges in their lives through their religious commitment. An 'Islamic logic' moves their modes of living. Ferial Ghazoul points this out as the reason for describing Aboulela's writing as Islamic. "What makes her writing 'Islamic' is not religious correctness or didacticism. Rather, it is a certain narrative logic where faith and rituals become moving modes of living" (14).

Aboulela integrates Islamic spirituality into her works, depicting characters who navigate their faith in diverse ways. This inclusion serves to counter Islamophobia and provide a more authentic and nuanced portrayal of the role of Islam in the lives of her characters. In *The Translator*, Aboulela explores Sammar's spiritual journey as she grapples with grief, faith, and the challenges of living in a Western context. The narrative subverts stereotypes about Islam and emphasizes the individualized nature of spiritual experiences. The Islamic rituals provide stability to the characters that Leila Aboulela presents in a state of crisis or surviving a tragic event. In *The Translator*, Sammar, a Sudanese widow who survives the tragic death of her husband in London, finds in prayer a form of support in a world of existential insecurity and a giver of identity, "Her prayer mat had tassels on the edges, a velvety fee, a smell that she liked. The only stability in life, unreliable life, taking turns the

mind could not imagine. When she finished praying, she sat for the tasbeeh…" (Aboulela 37). Prevalence of sacred devotions does create an existential axis around which these characters revolve. Prayer indeed seems to punctuate the life of Sammar and endow her with a sense of wholeness. Communication with God through prayer forms one of the most recurrent images in almost all the novels. It stands for the perfect communion that gives characters' strength and a sense of the existence of an ultimate point of reference. Sammar in the novel *Translator* begins her prayer silently, "All praise belongs to Allah, the lord of all the worlds, the compassionate, the Merciful… and the certainty of the words brought unexpected tears, something deeper than happiness, all the splinters inside her coming together" (74). During prayer, Sammar experiences a 'sense of fullness' to use Charles Taylor's words. Again in the novel *Minaret,* Najwa, finds solace and strength in her Islamic faith. Aboulela presents Islamic rituals, such as prayer and fasting, as sources of comfort and empowerment rather than oppressive practices. Aboulela thus humanizes her Muslim characters by focusing on their everyday lives, personal relationships, and internal struggles. This approach counters dehumanizing stereotypes and fosters empathy by presenting Muslims as individuals with universal experiences. This humanizing lens challenges stereotypes and fosters understanding. Postcolonial writers explore the spiritual dimensions, providing readers with a perspective that challenges Western secularism and materialism. In the novel *Lyrics Alley,* we see how Badr draws strength from his religion while facing financial hardships and how he strives to provide for his family while never resorting to unfair means to ease his hardships. Again when he is falsely accused of stealing, his belief in Almighty that he will clear him of these false accusations grants is the reason behind his patience and courage in that tough phase of his life. Again in the novel *The Translator,* Aboulela by depicting Sammar's shock at the note written by Ray's daughter saying get well soon without any mention of God highlights the holistic understanding of health and well-being in religious cultures as for Sammar it is ultimately in hands of God to cure people, challenges the monopoly Western biomedical perspectives. By incorporating indigenous knowledge systems into their works, postcolonial writers assert the value and resilience of their cultures. By weaving these elements into her narratives, Leila

Aboulela challenges Western-centric perspectives and contributes to a more inclusive representation of Sudanese and Islamic cultures.

Aboulela explores the intersectionality of identities considering how factors such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and class intersect to shape the experiences of an individual thereby challenging the monolithic representation of Muslims and emphasizing the complexity of their identities. Her writings feature characters with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds like in the novel *Minaret* for example Tamer is born of a Sudanese father and an Egyptian in Oman. He studied in an American private school in Oman, then he moved to London to study Business. In spite of his young age, he has exposure to the cultures of different countries (three Muslim and two western) though in different degrees: Oman, Sudan, Egypt, America and UK. Expressing the influence of both Islam and the West, when asked by Najwa about his identity, he states: "my education is western and that makes me feel that I am western. My English is stronger than my Arabic … I guess being a Muslim is my identity" (Aboulela 110). Again Minaret explores the intersectionality of Najwa's identity as a Sudanese Muslim woman. The novel delves into the complexities of her experiences, considering both her privileged past and her struggles in the aftermath of political upheaval. Similarly, *The Translator* addresses the experiences of a Sudanese Muslim woman living in Scotland. The novel explores how Sammar negotiates her Islamic identity within the context of challenges of diaspora. Likewise, in the novel *Lyrics Alley* we see Soraya going through a number of struggles that intersect, gender struggles, anti-colonial resistance, and the pursuit of individual agency. Her experiences illustrate the interconnectedness of personal and collective struggles within the larger historical context.

In addition to other issues regarding the portrayal of Muslim is the issue of individuality. Young conservatively-oriented Muslims are generally shown as belonging to a group, community or a society which are shown as more powerful than the individual. This membership is shown to be at the expense of their individuality. Within this frame, those who wish to practise their full individuality must depart from the Muslim group or flee the Muslim society. However, Aboulela through Najwa and

Sammar challenges the imbalance of the relationship between Islam and individualism. Najwa decides as an individual on her own religiosity. In Aboulela's novels, Muslims are not forced by a society or a group leader to embrace Islam, Tamer does not belong to a group and he is the only practising Muslim in his family, likewise we see Najwa deciding to be religious without any kind of pressure and same is true of Osama. Najwa challenges this assumption about the relationship between Islam and individualism. The decision that she has taken to be religious is hers alone and was made without any kind of pressure from family or society. She accepts Islam as a way of life and a form of identity. Religiosity, she thinks, will benefit her. When she went to the mosque for the first time she reviewed her feelings, "I wanted to be good" (Minaret 237). Before she had thought of others, the Sudanese who lived in Khartoum; the university students; and herself as one of a group of friends gathering in the American Club, as one of her own family in Sudan and then in London, as the sister of Omar, and finally the partner of Anwar. Now she thinks for herself for the first time in her life. In this intensified state of individuality, she chooses to be religious. In spite of leaving Tamer, she is happy in the end because she is going on hajj and becoming "innocent again" (*Minaret* 43). The hajj, in Aboulela's words, is the "final stage in her process of completely getting over the past and becoming a new person". In *Minaret* therefore we see an attempt to represent the hidden side of the picture of religion by its focus on capacity of religious beliefs to effect self-realisation and spiritual consciousness in an individual. Najwa's loneliness in London symbolises, arguably, her loneliness in the materialistic world. She "yearned to go back to being safe with God" (242). God is her source of safety. Her sense of being close to God helps enhance her spiritual nature with its different forms and she says that, "I felt a kind of peace" (237) and "now I wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence" (242). She seeks for "exfoliation, clarifying, deep cleanse" (247). The demands she places upon her spiritual life are the consequence of growing weary of her previous spiritually empty existence. "I'm tired of having a troubled conscious. I'm bored with feeling guilty" (244). At this stage, she has discovered a new kind of pleasure. "I reached out for spiritual pleasure and realized that this was what I had envied in the students who lined up to pray on the grass of Khartoum University"

(243). The discovery of spiritual fulfilment is very striking here as it led to the discovery of the self. Many times before, Najwa envied those students who prayed and wore hijab at university. She even envied her servants who woke up early in the morning just to pray the dawn prayer. Her materialistic life did not provide an answer to her questioning self. She awakens to the realization that materialistic side of human life is limited and spirituality is not merely a source of peace but a means of knowledge, too. In short, Najwa's religious spirituality is her source of safety, peace, purging and soul knowledge. By depicting religious belief as a source of empowerment, Aboulela's novels challenge another stereotype "that her religion is constricting" (Hunter 96). Aboulela's novels add a fresh perspective to the marginalized Orientalist literature from this part of the world. Hassan's following words sum up the powerful role of such novels:

> From a literary historical viewpoint, Muslim immigrant literature represents a significant new departure from the predominantly secular orientation of postcolonial Arab and African fiction, in which religion is often seen as a problem or as a part of crisis. In its translational dimension, this new kind of literature explains to non-Muslims, aspects of Muslim lives, especially those of minorities in Europe and North America, while at the same time exposing prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia with the growth of Muslim minorities in the English speaking world; this trend is certain to continue. (Hassan "Leila Aboulela" 317)

Aboulela often weaves Islamic values into her narratives, emphasizing the importance of faith, family, and community. By doing so, she counters portrayals that reduces Muslim identities to external markers and instead highlights the internal moral and ethical dimensions. This challenges Western individualism and emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within a community. Aboulela emphasizes communal values and the importance of relationships within families and communities by exploring Najwa's relationships with her family and community. Aboulela delves into the communal values and the impact of social connections, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of Sudanese as well as Muslim

diasporic society. In *Minaret*, the second novel by Leila Aboulela, the main heroine Najwa who hails from a high class family flees Sudan for London after a coup causes the execution of her father, a high government employee. In London she meets Anwar, a leftist student whom she knew at university in Khartoum earlier. She is drawn into a relationship with him, but disappointed, she is drawn towards her religion and starts to live her life religiously. Islam gives meaning to her life and solace in this precarious world. Having emerged from a world that had brought her family down because of the political disturbances in Sudan, Najwa finds solace in the company of Muslim sisters in London's Reagent Park mosque. Again the relationship between Tamer and Najwa is full of sympathy. It is striking to notice that Islam's centrality in their lives marginalises all their differences. The gap between Najwa and Tamer is twenty years; while she is a poor servant, he is a rich university student. However, they are both practising Muslims. Najwa finds in Tamer the sobriety, the respect and the understanding that she is looking for. Rather than exoticizing Arab or Muslim cultures, Aboulela resists this tendency by presenting everyday moments, concerns, and challenges faced by her characters. This approach helps to normalize these cultures and counters the exoticization often found in Western literature. Like In *Translator* we see how Sammar is helped to cope in the immediate aftermath of the death of her husband through the Islamic atmosphere recreated by people from the mosque who are totally strangers, "People helped her, took over. Strangers, women whom she kept calling by the wrong names, filled the flat, cooked for her and each other, watched the ever-wandering child so she could cry. They prayed, recited the Qur'an, spent the night on the couch and on the floor. They did not leave her alone, abandoned" (Aboulela 9).

Writers like Aboulela showcase the religious significance of being a Muslim and "emphasize the faith of Islam" by denoting the "thoughts, rituals, activities and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam" (Malak 5). Portrayed as the outcome of divine intervention, Sammar in the novel *Translator* receives the news of Rae's conversion. Her changed attitude, reflected in her selfless prayer attests, "Religion profoundly influences goal-seeking behaviour in conflict situations, by establishing the criteria and frames of reference for determining the rightness and

wrongness of events" (Said and Funk 38). Her goal to marry Rae is interposed by her desire for his spiritual prosperity that changes her pattern of prayer. Sammar's initial expression of "anxiety about the strength or the weakness of one's own faith … is now widespread among Muslims" especially those settled in the West (Roy185). Yet she finds the answer through her faith which "kept her going day after day: he would become a Muslim before he died" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 184). Although a major number of her characters are placed in non-Muslim countries, their ideologies are interlaced with their religion at all circumstances. Aboulela's characters are average devout Muslims who face religious dilemmas and challenges in an unsympathetic non-Muslim domain and still cling on to their faith. Aboulela confesses, "The misrepresentation of Islam in the western media fuels my desire to express my faith in my words and present fictional worlds that reflect a Muslim vision…. My ambition is to put practicing Muslims in English literary fiction, to write novels that are infused with Muslim aesthetics" (qtd. in Vettah). Islam forms the core spirit of Aboulela's novels. The Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic dictums are the fulcrum of the plot that is built on purely religious actions. In her fictional world, the cause and effect are governed by a "Muslim rather than [a] non-Muslim rationale" (Cooper, *A New Generation* 57) which Aboulela calls as Islamic logic. Her characters are religious men and women practicing the daily rituals and infusing every moment with thoughts and actions in the name of Allah. Therefore, amidst all the incidents, events, character sketches, descriptions of the physical and mundane, there is a constant presence of a guiding force prominent among other distractions. The identity of practising Muslims, in Aboulela's works not only relates merely to the physical, external appearance like the dress, prayer cap, veil or beard but also to the internal connection with their Creator through Islamic rituals. Her devout characters adapt to tough circumstances easily due to their spiritual inclination. They relate to Islam through regular prayers five times a day. They are at peace in the company of believers; desolate and restless devoid of Islam. The distant azan comes as a relief for Sammar in *The Translator*. It was "the reminder that there was something bigger than all this, above everything. Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar… she had missed the call for prayer in Aberdeen, felt its absence" (Aboulela 143). Similarly, when Najwa is alone in London after the coup

and all her privileges are gone, in that difficult time she turns to Islam and gains strength to cope with the challenges at hand. Aboulela's characters cherish their Islamic identity due to its day-to-day significance and relevance in their lives.

By positing Islam as a gratifying component of identity in her novels, Aboulela demonstrates "the truest form of anti-imperialism" (Abbas 435). Aboulela delves deep into Islamic philosophy, and the result is an evident transformation in her characters. Her works have a unique Islamic plot that saves its protagonists from an immanent fall, and guarantees a spiritual catharsis. Aboulela's characters not only strive to harmonize their desires and actions with Islamic dictates, but also embark upon a spiritual quest "to find their way to God or strengthen their faith" (Hassan, "Leila Aboulela 310). Religion is "the place for identity formation" (Cariello, "Searching" 340) in Aboulela's novels. Her religious characters do not turn western or secular under any circumstance. Rather they evolve into better Muslims with a deeper understanding of their religion at the end of the crisis. Islamic identity takes precedence over cultural, ethnic and national identities and therefore they remain Islamists in transnational, multi-ethnic environment. For instance, Tamer in *Minaret* says, "I've lived everywhere except Sudan…My education is Western that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So, I guess, no, I don't feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being Muslim is my identity" (Aboulela 110). This remains the case with Sammar, Najwa as well as Salma too who, choose to prioritise their Islamic identity over a national or cultural affiliation.

Aboulela dwells on cross-cultural themes as a by-product of Colonialism, migration and Globalization. Islam has had the impact of these historic movements and therefore, the novelist captures the effect of cross-cultural encounters on her native and migrant Muslim characters. Aboulela critiques the impact of Colonialism on Sudanese society, challenging the colonial narrative which serves as a form of writing back against narratives that downplay the destructive consequences of colonization. The novel *Lyrics Alley* critiques the impact of colonialism on Sudanese society, shedding light on the struggles faced by individuals and communities in the aftermath of colonial rule. In the novel Mahmoud Abuzeid's efforts to navigate the

changing political and economic landscape, preserving cultural values in the face of external pressures, serve as a critique of the lasting impact of colonial legacies. Instead of presenting a generalized view of Sudan, Aboulela provides specific details about Sudanese traditions, rituals, and historical events. Nur uses his poetry to promote cultural pride and resilience in the face of colonial attempts to erase or denigrate local cultures and to celebrate and motivate his fellow Sudanese people to remain firm in their pursuit of overthrowing the colonial rule. The novel's focus on cultural specificity challenges the tendency to homogenize diverse societies in Western narratives. Detailed descriptions of Sudanese customs, rituals, and traditions, such as the arrangements for Soraya's marriage in *Lyrics Alley* offer a rich and authentic representation of Sudanese culture. Aboulela sheds light on how historical events continue to shape contemporary realities. Exploring the lasting impact of colonization on cultural, social, and political dynamics, *Minaret* addresses the legacy of British colonialism in Sudan and its aftermath showcased by political instability in the form of coup's. The novel reflects on the consequences of colonization and the challenges faced by postcolonial societies. The lives of Sammar and Rae in *The Translator*, Najwa and Tamer in *Minaret* and Usatz Badr in *Lyrics Alley* demonstrate the impact of British-Arab encounter on their faith. These characters undergo different kinds of experiences. Aboulela's religious characters are not impacted by the western influences. Their religiosity rather increases in the West and matures through cross-cultural experience, transforming them in the process.

Aboulela's characters often resist the pressure to assimilate fully into Western cultures, preserving aspects of their cultural and religious identity. This resistance challenges the hegemony of the Western culture and celebrates the diversity of voices within diasporic communities. In *The Translator*, Sammar's commitment to her Islamic faith becomes a form of resistance against complete assimilation into Scottish culture. The novel explores the negotiation of cultural and religious identity in a diasporic setting. Aboulela through her writings questions the multi-culturist sense of superiority of that idea of civilization which adopts "Western mode of thought, Western notions of modernity, Western secularism" as supreme (Hassan, "Leila

Aboulela 307). Aboulela though her narrative explores and ascertains the possible ways of infusing Islam in any social and political context by bringing in a religious resolution to personal or social crisis. Through her religious characters, who encounter cross-cultural conflicts intruding into their religious space, Aboulela intends to "write back to that Anglo-centric tradition which is also Christian" ("Islamic Individualism" 621). Aboulela thus, attempts to emplace her belief system in the English novel. She sees her religion in the least as an oppressive force but as a source of embodied knowledge that "enables her characters to root themselves during migration, a set of meanings and bodily rituals that allows them to dictate the terms of their own acculturation and assimilation and finally write their own script against the ones written in Europe and the US" (Hewett 256). Sammar's faith reflects Aboulela's ideology that her religious principles are constant, and are uninfluenced by any factors. Hence, it becomes mandatory for humans to change themselves as per these constant teachings, and that is why Sammar resisted her marriage until Rae was ready to embrace Islam at least in words. Aboulela shuns all impossibilities of an irreligious or un-Islamic life by constructing impenetrable religious firewalls around them. Najwa in *Minaret*, faces a major religious challenge in the form of Anwar who distracts her from her religious path. Najwa, gets into an illicit relationship with Anwar, partly hoping it would culminate in their marriage and partly because no one else would bother about it other than themselves. But, Najwa realizes her mistake and turns to her religion which rescues her by giving her support and strength. She realizes that moving closer to Anwar was equivalent to moving away from God permanently, and eschews his company with determination. Religion, here, is projected as a redeeming force. In the company of devout women, Najwa learns to tie hijab, read Qur'an and pray regularly to feel the presence of Allah. It is quite ironical that the non-Muslim West becomes a viable space for the germination of a new religiosity that grants her peace and contentment. Islam is seen as a positive force in Tamer's life too. He is a religious young man and the brother of Najwa's employer. He takes recourse to Islamic teachings in all aspects of life. Contrary to his interest, he takes up a course in Business Studies to satisfy his parents because Islam states that it is a sin to displease one's parents. He finds in Najwa, although older than him, a

suitable life partner with whom he could share his religiosity. He proposes marriage to Najwa citing, "It's not very Islamic for a man and a woman to be friends" (Aboulela 211) and so they should get married. He argues that there is nothing wrong in their age difference because "Prophet, peace be upon him, married Khadijah … fifteen years older than him" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 263). In spite of several oppositions, he remains firm in his decision to marry Najwa. But finally, he gives up his desire, in accordance to the wish of both his parents and Najwa. Aboulela addresses the challenges of assimilation and cultural hybridity faced by her characters, acknowledging the complexities of navigating between different cultural worlds. This challenges the simplistic narratives that may stereotype individuals from non-Western backgrounds. Contrary to assimilation is the attitude of partial resistance where the immigrants confine themselves to their utmost necessary sphere of movement, so that they do not find themselves in awkward positions that demand their complete acceptance of the host culture. Sammar, Najwa, Salma, Moni and Iman stick to their culture in terms of dressing (although Najwa turns to veiling after a sudden spiritual transformation) and beliefs, they neither rebuke the host land nor accept it as a part of their life. They trudge the middle path that does not touch extremes. Aboulela's novels sometimes exhibit a visible resistance to assimilation that "aspires to preserve the specificity of migrated cultures, veneration of ancestors, and loyalty to original languages" (Seyhan 51). Aboulela's novels portray characters who "reject the binary opposition between East and West and the violence of acculturation." (Hewett 267). The faith of Sammar, Najwa, Tamer, Salma, Moni and Iman lends them balance as they carefully negotiate their own identity, rejecting Western way of life. Leila Aboulela draws her works on the concept of Counter-Orientalism by "appropriating Orientalist stereotypes of space, history, identity and gender in counter-narratives that seek to demythologize and therefore de-Orientalize Arab subjects" (Wahab 220). Hassan writes on the paradigmatic magnitude of the twenty-first century Arab Muslim women writings thus:

> [The] work acquires the added dimension of being not only of the culture from which it emerges ... but ultimately about that culture in its totality…. It also

> becomes a novel about the receiving or target culture, since consciously or unconsciously, readers look for an image of themselves reflected in the mirror of a 'foreign' novel…. such reconfiguration is inevitable… which is not only an aesthetic but also a cultural (cross-cultural), discursive, and political activity. (*Immigrant Narratives* 30)

Thus, the strong majority of unruffled individuals in the face of cross-cultural onslaught prove Aboulela's personal conviction in the true value of Arab identity and culture. Through her characters, Aboulela breaks the Oriental stereotypes and even subverts Oriental myths through visible instances. The migrants are pushed to extremely critical circumstances. They are marginalized on the foreign land. They face religious challenges and racial discrimination. Yet they grow internally strong after every experience. They do not shirk their social, familial and religious responsibilities and do not fear crisis. They convert the crisis into a challenge and overcome it through their will power.

Aboulela's writings not only resists the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the colonial discourse, it also resists the criteria used in positioning them. Western cultural norms are the criteria and the perspective used in these novels. Western freedom, the pleasure principle, education and arts are some of the values against which Islam and Muslims are weighed. In other words, the more westernised they become, the better they appear. In Aboulela's novels these criteria are challenged. The centrality of the West is superseded by the centrality of Islam. The more Muslim Najwa becomes the happier she is. Similarly, Sammar in *The Translator* derives meaning to her life and every small life activity from Islam, it is her religion which keeps her going when she is going through a difficult phase in her life after the death of her husband, Tarig. However, her novels do not reject western criteria in their entirety; it limits them and gives the priority to Islam. Najwa practises the western freedom to choose when she decides to practise her religion. she experiences pleasure and contentment in living according to the teachings of her religion. Contrary to the western criteria, In *Minaret* Najwa appears to welcome and celebrate her religiousness in spite of all her difficulties. Aboulela's novels attempt to familiarize the western

world with the Muslim world view, rituals, controversial issues like the significance of hijab and the meaning of individuality in Islam, in order to debunk the colonial discourse. In opposition to the hijab's negative depiction as a sign of female oppression, hijab in all her novels conveys positive meanings. Aboulela's portrayal of hijab contrasts with its stereotypical depiction as Hijab for her practising characters Najwa, Sammar, Moni, Eman and Salma symbolises their religiosity and is an important part of their identity. Freedom and liberation, according to the west, connotes the adoption of western way of life, a secular lifestyle and abandoning one's religious identity. Aboulela's characters choose "to embrace Islamic identity with all its ramifications and manifestations in individual and social relationships and moral and social values" (Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives* 198) and yet find freedom in this way of life. This freedom relates not to the routine worldly existence but to something that sets the inner being free from the temporal cares. This freedom has a guaranteed permanence which retains its characters at ease to an extent that, a unique sense of contentment dawns on them as willed by their creator. Islam, through its laws, provides solace and solution to her characters.

Aboulela "writes back" to the western centre making visible those marginalised Muslims who are frequently subjected to polemical prejudice. Challenging the colonial image and giving voice to marginalised Muslims, Aboulela "posits complex personal relationships experienced by women whose identities are co-defined by Islam and the post-colonial condition" (Stotesbury 69). Aboulela, in a sense, 'shifts' the centre. Islam is Aboulela's centre and the perspective by which she writes. In order to understand her novels, Aboulela asks the western reader to respect her centre and perspective as she respects the centrality of the West while reading western novels. Speaking about Rae's conversion to Islam in *The Translator*, she explains:

> I was often asked 'Why should Rae convert, why should religion be an obstacle etc., etc.?' In my answer I would then fall back on *Jane Eyre* and say 'From an Islamic point of view, why can't Mr. Rochester be married to both Bertha and Jane?' In the same way that I, as a Muslim reader, respect and

> empathise with Jane's very Christian dilemma, I want western/Christian readers to respect and empathise with Sammar's very Muslim dilemma (Stotesbury 81).

This centralization of cultural and religious beliefs in Aboulela's writings leads to a world with different "centres" which contradicts the centrality of the West in colonial discourse without undermining the margin. In fact, in spite of her belief in the centrality of her religion, she does not seem to believe in the marginality of the West. She writes against stereotyping Muslims as well as performing a similar function with the West. By writing about Practising Muslims in the West, Aboulela resists the colonial prejudice at its centre. The West, historically, is the geographical and cultural centre of the polemical discourse directed against Islam and Muslims through Orientalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Aboulela's fiction resists the colonial discourse replete with Islamophobia and racism against Muslims, by focusing on equality and providing a voice to Muslims to narrate their own values and experiences. In Aboulela's fiction, Islam is not a backward religion, Muslims are not portrayed as fundamentalists but just simple human beings, Muslim women are not portrayed as oppressed, from this positioning, Aboulela humanises Muslims, abrogates colonial stereotypes, and actualises the postcolonial bases of her fiction. In Hassan's words, Aboulela's "fiction adds nuance and complexity to the representation of Islam and Muslims" ("Leila Aboulela' 317) and is therefore a "writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives" (Boehmer 3). In addition, Aboulela thinks that the media coverage of Islam is still influenced by these stereotypes. "The coverage of Islam in the media is becoming more sophisticated and there is more access to knowledge. […] Still, though, there is a stereotype of Islam as a religion of violence and oppression of women" ("The Poet"). Her novels are written with the aim of refuting this "stereotype of Islam as a religion of violence and oppression of women". She tackles the issue of violence through her characterization of Tamer and Osama and the issue of women oppression through the portrayal of Najwa, Sammar, Salma, Natasha and Lamya and Soraya.

Aboulela subverts the colonial narratives by providing an insider's perspective. The narrative disrupts dominant Western narratives about Africa and the Middle East, allowing readers to see the story from opposite viewpoint. Aboulela through her works provides the voice to a Muslim Self to challenge the voice of the Muslim Other which is created from non-Muslim perspectives. The Muslims in all her novels; *Minaret, The Translator, Bird Summons, The kindness of Enemies* as well as *Lyrics Alley* are imaged by a Muslim. Aboulela articulates her own Muslim identity and experience through her characters. By doing so, she is one of those writers who, in Mike Philips' words, "write from inside the experience". This "from inside" writing resists the writing from outside. Said notices that "since an Arab poet or novelist – and there are many – writes of his experiences, of his values, of his humanity (however strange that may be), he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés, abstractions) by which the Orient is represented" (*Orientalism* 291). Writing about the self "disrupts" the colonial image of the other. Aboulela clearly states her positioning of self in her writing about Islam. "I can never truly see Islam through Western eyes. I am in this religion. It is in me" ("Restraint?"). We might argue that Aboulela's writing about the Muslim self appears closer to the reality than western assumptions. As Young puts it: "when western people look at the non-western world what they see is it often more a mirror image of themselves and their own assumptions than the reality of what is really there, or of how people outside the west actually feel and perceive themselves" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 2).

Aboulela addresses the experiences of exile and displacement in her writings highlighting how individuals negotiate their identities in unfamiliar environments. This theme challenges colonial narratives that homogenize and marginalize the experiences of the displaced. Aboulela's *The Translator* is a reflection of a strong nostalgia to memories of home and the associated Islamic pattern of life. The religious rituals permeate the lives of Muslims and they are faced with a challenge when living as a minority in a hostile and Islamobhobic space. For living as an immigrant makes it hard to follow the Islamic pattern of life. Yet somehow, the rhythmic re-creation of Islamic rituals helps characters' cope with the new environment. Sammar in the novel finds it difficult to relate to the rhythm of life in that place. Sammar used to complain

about the way the English people feel time, and about how they label everything, their sense of orderliness, "In this country everything was labelled, everything had a name. She had got used to the explicitness, all the signs and polite rules" (*The Translator* 4). There is coupled with this, the feeling of missing Sudan where she always expresses dissatisfaction with the Scottish weather. Her apparent psychological imbalance and failure to integrate is related to the lack of rhythm. She lacks any feeling of the natural progress of time which in Sudan was punctuated by the Azan to the extent that she mistakes the noise made by the central heater for the voice of a distant Muezzin. Her attachment to homelands with all its cultural and religious markers is accentuated in the novel. The immigrant characters do face difficulties in following these rituals in a western atmosphere as it is devoid of their ritualistic pattern but they overcome the initial difficulties and conduct their life in accordance to their religion thereby creating a Muslim pattern in their private spaces and it is the same pattern which helps them to cope with their environment and gives them a distinct identity. Despite all this, Sammar expresses some alienation from surroundings, while in Sudan prayer was a collective practice that had a communal significance, in Aberdeen, Scotland, prayer loses some of its rhythm when performed individually, indoors and with some embarrassment as to how people, not least of whom Rae whom she marries later, will react to any public display of Muslim piety, it had seemed strange for her when she first came to live here, all that privacy that surrounded praying. She was used to seeing people pray on pavements and on grass. She was used to praying in the middle of parties. In places where others chatted, slept or read. But she was aware now, after having lived in this city for many years she could understand. How surprised people would be, were they to turn the corner of a building and find someone with their forehead, nose and palms touching the ground. She wondered how Rae would feel if he ever saw her praying. Would he feel alienated from her, the difference between them accentuated, underlined, or would it seem to him something that was within reach, something that he himself would want to do? (*The Translator* 75). To sum up, Islamic rituals create a rhythmic movement that is particular to Muslims. They create a sense of community and sometimes when Muslim characters practice Islam in 'foreign lands' they somehow feel some kind of estrangement but they overcome the

difficulties and practise their religion which connects them to a larger community through a shared spatiotemporal practice of Islamic rituals such as prayer, the Ramadan Fast, and Hajj and grants them a sense of identity.

However, Aboulela pinpoints the insecurity that surrounds Islamic identity. Sammar and Najwa encounter humiliation in public owing to their appearance indicating their Islamic identity. Once on her way home alone, Sammar is jeered at as "Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein" (*The Translator* 99) by a white man. This points at the western conception of Muslims which yokes any ordinary Muslim with a terrorist organization. Najwa, in *Minaret*, is attacked by a group of young white men in a bus, who mock at her dark presence and throw a sticky liquid on her. The bus driver ignores their action and Najwa is expected to bear the humiliation without response. She gets down at the next stop and walks home wiping and wondering what the liquid could be. These situations highlight the plight of Muslim women, whether refugees or citizens, treated with contempt by the westerners. Such conditions are the outcome of the of politicization of Islam and the resultant Islamophobia which affects innocent Muslims especially the defenceless women. Hassan too corroborates this fact that cross-cultural encounters anticipate and pre-empt "the confirmation of stereotype, expose the structures of racism and Islamophobia… to the practicing Muslims living in non-Muslim countries" ("Leila Aboulela" 309).

Aboulela in her novels insists on the differences between the reality of Islam and Muslims on one hand, and the assumptions made about them in colonial discourse on the other. In colonial discourse, according to Leela Gandhi, "the 'West' attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the 'non-West'" (16). As a result, postcolonial writers resist this colonial attempt by "emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire* 2). Aboulela's depiction of Tamer, Najwa, Sammar, Salma, Osama and Malak are all different from western culture and different from the colonial assumptions. In contrast to the colonial assumptions about fundamentalism, although Tamer as well as Osama are both practising Muslims, they are not violent or anti-western. In fact, Tamer's western education and his appreciation of his American teachers led him to

critique the anti-American feeling among some of the Muslims. The portrayal of Najwa and her independent decision to wear the hijab in particular confronts colonial assumptions regarding female oppression in Islam. In *Minaret*, Najwa appears freer and more independent after becoming religious in a portrayal that clearly resists the colonial one. Islam provides Najwa with peace, spiritual fulfilment, social life, a new identity, and dreams. Same is true of Sammar, Salma, Moni and Iman, who find meaning and fulfilment as well as strength through their faith. To reiterate this portrayal of Islam is different from Islam's habitual representation in western hegemonic discourse. Aboulela's novels in short, present Islam and Muslims differently, her representations of Muslims and Islam debunks all the stereotypes produced in colonial as well neo-colonial discourse building in the process an identity based on their Faith which stands in contrast to the colonial one. Aboulela through her works rejects the superiority of western culture. Robert Young argues that postcolonialism "disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (Young *Postcolonialism* 7). Aboulela's works adopt all these perspectives. "The order of the world" demands that people should leave their inferior cultures to join the supposedly superior western one. *Minaret* 'disturbs' this order when Najwa refuses to accept the assumed 'privilege and power' of western culture and embraces her religion and similarly in *The Translator* we see the same rejection through Sammar's undeterred practice of her faith and the same goes on in the novel *Bird Summons*. In point of fact, Islam takes the centre stage in the lives of the practising Muslim characters in Aboulela's novels, however, western culture is not represented as inferior. Tamer demonstrates an important positioning here. His respect for his American teachers is an endorsement of the western education. These works, then, both refuses the superiority of western culture but without ignoring its positive aspects. It is clear that postcolonialism seeks to change the terms and values under which we all live and that, as Edward Said argues, "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism" (*Orientalism* 328). Nevertheless, while challenging colonialism, its images and stereotypes become Aboulela's primary concern, from this base we can strive to erect a harmonization of the issues that set Islam and the West against one another.

Moreover, the stable life pursued by Muslims in West in spite of feelings of alienation and prejudice resulting from colonial and neo-colonial discourse portrays Islam as a religion which could be followed in the heart of the western culture debunking the idea of the incompatibility between Islam the West. Aboulela, according to Ghazoul, "makes it possible to join South to North under the emblem of a universal quest, that of Islamic humanism" ("Halal fiction"). Muslims who live in the West are usually imaged either as culturally defeated or as strangers. They are either westernised or branded as fundamentalists. These two categorizations of Muslims are a result of the perceived inferiority of Islam and Muslims in the West. Aboulela's portrayal of Muslim characters, however, is different. Najwa, Tamer, and all the Muslims who they meet in the mosque are all practising Muslims who conduct their lives in the western culture but are not fundamentalists neither are they affronted by the western culture. The same is true of the characters in her other novels like Sammar in *The Translator*, Salma, Moni and Iman in *Bird Summons*. Attending the mosque, praying, fasting and the like, are the tools they utilise to strengthen their affiliation to Islam and to inoculate themselves against the culture of the host country. This Islam and these Muslims are strong. They are not westernised but neither are they strangers to the West. Tamer, as a young practising Muslim living in London, challenges the image of the fundamentalist and succeeds in harmonising the relationship between Islam and the West through his appreciation of them both as factors shaping his identity. Tamer's image clearly contrasts with the images of Muslim extremists who are always in conflict with British culture and unable to live in peace in West. Through Tamer, Aboulela provides the young conservative Muslim with a new image. In addition, by depicting Tamer as peaceful, Aboulela does not follow the colonial discourse which insists on the aggressive and threatening character of the young fundamentalist Muslims. Muslims are commonly portrayed as aggressive and violent, always willing to fight, whether against an idea, a woman or a whole culture. Fighting, is shown as their way of living. Tamer displays contrasting behaviours. Love not fighting is the main challenge for Tamer, he doesn't leave his family and ignore his studies to practise activism, rather he does so because of his love for Najwa. Aboulela here presents a normal Muslim character who loves and

does not fight. Tamer's American education and his admiration for his American teachers' further challenges the image of the extremist. Tamer, is not anti-western in spite of his affiliation to Islam. Aboulela here stereotypes neither the West nor the Muslims.

Keeping in view the first objective of the study, that is, to understand the role of faith in identity formation in the novels of Aboulela, this chapter explores how religious beliefs are integral to identity formation. In The *Translator* we see how Sammar resists the hegemony of western culture by holding on to her religious identity as it is an essential component of her being and gives meaning and purpose to her life. In the novel *Minaret*, Najwa after feeling alienation in the western society turns to religion to resolve her crises of identity and seeks solace and a sense of belonging in the company of other religious women.

Another objective of the study is to evaluate Leila Aboulela's novels in the context of the identity formation theory. The objective has been achieved in this chapter by exploring how the characters rewrite their identity by debunking the western discourses which portrays them in stereotypical ways. The analysis of the Aboulela's texts undertaken in this chapter brings forth the findings which are outlined in the following section. Aboulela's texts act as narratives of resistance to the hegemonic western discourse which reduces non-western people and cultures to stereotypes playing a significant role in the formulation of the subjectivity as highlighted by Said. For instance, in the novel *Bird summons* Salma and Moni debunk the stereotype of passive and oppressed Muslim women as both of them are strong independent women who exert their agency in negotiating the daily realities of life in diaspora. Salma leads and guides the women of her group and acts as a guardian for Eman who is displaced and left alone in diaspora. Again in the novel *Minaret* tamer's character subverts the stereotype of a practising Muslim man as a fundamentalist as he is shown to be conducting his religious life peacefully within the western society without any animosity to the western society.

Furthermore, in discussing the perspective from which Aboulela writes her fiction I propose to argue and demonstrate that she is successful in two things. In her

representation of issues concerning Islam and Muslims in the West, she sets out to identify and challenge the images projected in colonial as well as neo-colonial discourse. This she does by building into her writing a constructive spirit which attempts to facilitate better understanding of each other's cultures. Aboulela's preferred approach to the continuous conflict between Islam and the West globally is to replace negative misunderstanding by positive appreciation. Her discourse sets itself against the extreme western discourses that attack Islam in the West as well as East. For this reason, some critics see Aboulela as one of the founders of a new kind of literature in representing Islam and Muslims in the West. This new kind of literature explains to non-Muslims aspects of Muslim lives, especially those of minorities in Europe and North America, while at the same time exposing prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia. In her fiction, Aboulela tries to bridge the gap between Islam and the West by explaining the role of Islam in Muslims lives and voicing the fears of its followers.

It is certainly true that she gives voice to Muslim sensibilities through her fiction and succeeds in creating a new image of Islam and Muslims by looking at them from a new perspective. At base, her work represents a criticism of the discourse that undermines Islam, while, on the other hand, endeavours to place Islam in a stronger position in its dialogue with the West. Aboulela represents a new page, then, in literature written by writers of Arab ethnicity. Aboulela's portrayal of Islam is significant because it resists the distorted image of Islam that has prevented the West from searching out a common ground upon which to address the diverse cultural issues over which it and the Islamic world diverge. Islam in colonial discourse is presented as inferior both as a religion and the cultures it has produced. The opposition between Islam and the West inscribed in this discourse cannot lead to a dialogue; it leads, instead, to a clash of two cultures in which the West attempts to impose its values on Islam. The distorted view of Islam found in colonial discourse is thus an obstacle in the way to fruitful cross-cultural interchange. The widely appreciated slogan across the world today is the need for dialogue between civilisations and cultures; such dialogue requires clear imaginations and authentic voices. Aboulela's representation of Islam is neither inferior nor a threat, although for

the West it stands in a position of difference. However, while the distorted image of Islam in colonial discourse complicates the differences between Islam and the West and creates misunderstanding. Aboulela provides Islam with an image that has the potential to contribute to harmonisation of this relationship and to opening the door to greater understanding. If Islam is the Other of colonial discourse and the West is the Other of Aboulela's postcolonial discourse, where the former stereotypes its 'Other', Aboulela's postcolonial discourse gives the West appropriate respect. Indeed, voices like her arguably have the potential to play a part in establishing a foundation for successful dialogue between civilisations and cultures owing to the respect it entertains towards difference. It aims to marginalise the stereotypes of the Self and the Other as well as to centralise and give respect to the positives of both sides. It also has the potential to transform the analysis of fiction about Islam and Muslims for Muslims and for others alike.

Chapter 5
Faith, Freedom and Muslim Women

Discourses on Arab/Muslim women today, as in the colonial era, reveal prejudice, misunderstanding, and confusion. Post-September 11, the international media has made a striking connection between what many call ‘Islamic terrorism’ and the oppression of Arab/Muslim women. This connection has been important as it shows the centrality of gender politics in the ‘war on terrorism’ and the ways gender has been manipulated to reinforce the `clash of civilisations' thesis of Islam versus the West. Many scholars argue that gender politics and the image of the Arab/Muslim woman are two of the focal points of the increasing hostility towards, and misunderstanding of, Islamic culture and the Arab World in the present political situation. Harking back to the colonial era, the Muslim woman has come to represent the ultimate symbol of backwardness and oppression and acts as a visual signal to strengthen claims of an alarming rise of what many refer to as ‘Islamic militancy’. Colonialists and Western feminists both claim that the only ‘true way to emancipate the Eastern woman is to adopt a Western model of feminism and modernity. Edward Said’s thesis on Orientalism provides a framework important to the development of feminist scholarship (McClintock; Yeˇgenoˇglu; Reina Lewis) and remains of ambient relevance for understanding the contemporary representations of Arab/Muslim women and men, and for an interrogation of the treatment of Muslims in the post 9/11 period. Spivak, and more recently Yeˇgenoˇglu, together with a substantial body of scholarship by women on women’s personal status in the Middle East and in diasporic communities in the West, collectively demonstrate the breadth of postcolonial feminist analysis of the tropes of Oriental women within colonial discourses, and the perpetuation of these tropes in contemporary narrations, all of which are understandings inspired by Said’s framework and interlocutions. Whilst Said focused on the effects of Orientalist ideology made by men in their representation of ‘Othered’ men, post-colonial feminism focuses on the Orientalisation of gender produced by men in the construction of ‘Othered’ women. Whatever the cultural form, whether in the written word, pseudo-science, art and photography, etc., historical Western

imagery presented Muslim and Eastern women as the voiceless docile subjugates of men, submissive, 'covered' and veiled, whilst at the same time turning them into pornographic tropes, sexualised and eroticised for the Western male gaze. These past tropes have contiguity in the present in constituting the female Muslim subject. If Said omitted women from his observations on Orientalism, his strength lay in his method since "After Orientalism scholars in the humanities and social sciences could no longer ignore questions of differences and the politics of representation" (Bayoumi and Rubin 67).

Said, neglected the subject of face veiling, head covering and body covering and the sexualised Orientalist representations of women in cultural and art forms, although in general terms his work does contain references to the Orient as 'feminine'. Said's omissions may be several, but his contribution to understanding European racism of the Arab/Muslim and Near and Middle Eastern region peoples provides an enduring framework for analysis of contemporary anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia which continues to reproduce these and other tropes of Muslim men and women, from Middle East, Arab and Muslim countries, and also of Arab and Muslim diasporic communities in the West. The Muslim man remains constructed as he was then, as dangerous, violent, albeit now as terrorist. We witness however a seismic shift in the representation of the Muslim women, who, whilst she remains subordinated under Muslim patriarchy and religious theocracy especially in Muslim majority countries, and remains a sexualised and alluring trope in the Western mind she now has another persona that of a terrorist sympathizer mostly because of the way she dresses. (Hussein).

Leila Aboulela has sought to challenge some of the subjective and negative fundamentals which have come to dominate the western construction of female Muslim subjectivity as much of the discourse on this important issue today is fraught with historical and cultural misconceptions. We will be looking at how Aboulela through her writing provides a powerful critique of the popular western notion that the Muslim women is oppressed, backward and lacking agency and the veil is a symbol of Muslim women's oppression. Aboulela's nuanced portrayal of the Muslim women and the Hijab challenges with great sophistication both the popular culture view of

Muslim women as being utterly subjugated by men, as well as the more complex arguments put forward by liberal feminists who have sought to criticize women's choices to cover as ultimately 'un-liberating'. Examining and questioning the validity and accuracy of some of the assumptions, the author puts forward the case that the perception of Muslim women as oppressed and the judgment of the veil as being an oppressive feature of Islam is based on liberal understandings of 'equality' and 'liberty' that preclude other ways of thinking about 'equality' and 'liberty' which would offer a more positive approach for the way Muslim women conduct their lives as well as the issue of the wearing of the veil. Therefore, in this chapter we will be looking at how Leila Aboulela's female characters help us in understanding that the popular Western notion of Muslim women as oppressed and that veil as a symbol of Muslim women's oppression is a constructed image that does not represent the experience of all the Muslim women. This construction has always served Western political ends, and it continues to do so even today.

Aboulela's fiction particularly creates an awareness of the power structures embedded in conflicting representations through her insightful portrayal of female subjectivities. Her writing engages in the re-translating of the silent woman in Islam, into a discourse of self-expression and identity building within the parameter of faith. Her fiction, with its insistence on a religious worldview, functions as defiance against the hegemony of the western secular worldview. Her characters' grapple with the personal crisis faced by many Muslims around the world, who "wonder how they can be integrated into the modern world without losing their souls" (Hawley 4). Aboulela's texts engage with the problem of the need to assert belief in doctrines which are under attack by modernity and secularism in small measure at home but much more aggressively in the host society.9/11 especially, was the catalyst that legitimated the discipline, control and punishment of Muslim men, Muslim women, Muslim countries, and Muslim communities. The dualism that is at the core of the Muslim Women's appropriation is the mission of "saving Muslim women" from Muslim men by the West on the one hand and religious decrees and dictates in Muslim majority nations (Abu-Lughod; Khan) whilst on the other, the domestic proscribing the Muslim female body and dress, and divesting Muslim women

"metaphysically" of a core element of their identity. The "metaphysical" world of Muslim women is under attack in the West. Fanon's in the essay "Algeria Unveiled" documents the French colonialist's strategy to strike at the metaphysical heart of Algerian society by forcibly unveiling Algerian women. Fanon in observing the tyranny of the colonialist understood that not only men but women were "equally victims of the same tyranny" ("The Algerian Family" 120). This tyranny today enlists the coercive and discriminatory social practices and propaganda strategies including all the ideological state apparatuses of which Althusser spoke in general terms to affect this purpose. The western countries appropriate the substantive norms of gender equality, human rights etc., all camouflaging under the banner of "secularism" to propel the regulation and restriction of Muslim societies through steering and controlling women's body.

In the western discourse on what is often referred to as 'covering' the Muslim woman is objectified and reified and made an object, spoken of as the 'hijabi' or 'niqabi' woman, through iterative "performances" in words, language, acts, gestures and through state regulatory practices (Butler, "Performative", "Gender") and the garment that covers her is anthropomorphised. Her dress has been simultaneously the object of fascination, repulsion, prejudice and xenophobia (Grace). Muslim women are constituted and defined by others, in and by the West, as both the oppressed woman to be "saved", and as suspect terrorist as pointed out by Hussein in her book *From Victims to Suspects*. Both these stigmatising representations have provided the raison d'être for Western intervention in Muslim majority countries and foreign policy and legal regulation albeit that there is no such homogenised identity. Women who perceive themselves as Muslim may have parents of Muslim faith, or one parent of Muslim faith, they may have converted to the faith, they may practice their religion or not, "Muslims, like other people, include in their ranks orthodox believers, practising individuals, non-practising skeptics, secular and laic members" (Moghissi 1). It is acknowledged, that women in some Muslim majority countries have less power to determine what they wear, how they look or the appearance of their body. It is also recognised that some women of the Muslim faith, who once wore a symbol of their religious faith, have now removed any outwardly visible sign of identity in order

to protect themselves from assault on the street (Zempi and Chakraborti). What is certain then is that there is no homogenous reading.

When the subject of Muslim women's body and her dress is discussed, Muslim women are invariably excluded (Scott; Benhabib) whilst governments, political figures, the media and mainstream feminism consider themselves to be the standard bearers and key interlocutors of the meaning of "her" bodily appearance. The marginalisation of Muslim women's voice is symptomatic of the general widespread erasure of Muslim women's accounts from public discourse. Fanon's observations in *Black Skin, White Masks* on the silencing of the African voice, who in the field of vision of European racism is excised and erased, provides an instructive parallel. Hall, in his commentary on Fanon, explains: "…in the colonised, colonial relationship there is no recognition going on, that is why Fanon is concerned that racism depersonalises, it is a denial of recognition. It is the master saying, 'I do not see you at all'" (*Frantz Fanon* 3.32–3.50). As for the Muslim woman, she too is denied recognition and stripped of agency, as racialised Oriental tropes continue to define her. According to Khan, "Western Feminism (which is still the mainstream) centres the agenda and needs of western women while making claims that it speaks on behalf of all women" (1).

Fanon spoke of the importance of social context and materiality to an understanding of what he observed as the "historic dynamism of the veil" ("Algeria Unveiled" 63). This dynamism is subject to historical, political, economic, social and cultural and local articulations and has been considered by feminist scholars, El Guindi, Grace, Saadawi (*The Hidden*) and Khan. "Covering" in these several ways is central to identity, belonging and being as Brems , Almila and Inglis, Zempi and Chakraborti amongst others have discovered, symbolising a myriad of complex meanings including amongst others, an adherence to the precepts of a particular interpretation of Islamic faith, an expression of identity, culture, a resistance to Western-imposed definitions, a reaction to the sexualisation of women, a public statement and expression of solidarity with a group constantly maligned and stigmatised and subjected to Western aggression and Western occupation in Arab/Muslim countries. "Covering," may also be rebellion against the sexualised

commercialisation of the Western female body (Khan). Notwithstanding, the West argues that the explanations are to be found in social, family and faith pressures, denying that Muslim women have agency (Abu-Lughod 39; Ahmed "The Clothes").

The spiralling Islamophobia, and gendered Islamophobia has centred Muslim women as the target of racism. Criminalisation of the Muslim woman's body is bolstered by pseudo-altruistic, equality and security justifications. Political rhetoric is characteristically uniform, confecting a paternalistic concern of protecting women's rights to equality and where stripping a woman of her dress is said to be "saving her" (Abu-Lughod). President Bush and Prime Minister Blair appropriated the equality norms of women's liberation, to serve as a "handmaid to colonialism…. this theft of feminist rhetoric is not new, particularly if its function is national expansion" (Viner). Such paternalistic fawnings couched in equality rhetoric, have receded in recent years as public, political and media narratives make way for a new and upcoming rhetoric which suffuses her dress and body coverings with a text of social and political dissent, an unwillingness to integrate, a display of anti-Western values and, in some cases, evidence of radicalisation and support for terrorist sympathies. These insinuations are appropriated by official and legal others such that her dress and body has become, in an Althusserian sense, overdetermined. Muslims women dress (Head covering) has become anthropomorphised as a racial marker (Kundnani,11).

Writing against this backdrop, Aboulela in her writings gives space to Muslim women who adhere to a religious worldview and conduct their lives in accordance to it and thereby puts forward their side of the story which is otherwise mostly silenced or spoken for by others. Aboulela through her characters demonstrates how for practicing Muslim women dress is an important part of faith and therefore identity and they wish to outwardly profess a visible Muslim/Islamic faithed identity through wearing the hijab. She also portrays Muslim women who have taken a decision not to wear the headscarf or any identifiable items which in making them visible expose them to a risk of physical assault and insult and also those Muslim women who do not adhere to an Islamic identity in outward appearance. Aboulela's writings therefore functions as a lens that brings into focus a very nuanced portrayal of Muslim women's subjectivity thereby questioning the western monolithic discourse of Arab/ Muslim

women and at the same time exposing the power relations at play as explored by Said in *Orientalism* in such construction and representation. Aboulela's characters contradict the western image of Muslim women as she portrays Muslim women who do not feel suffocated or oppressed by their religion and culture and do not embrace Western culture; but rather her female characters seek solace in their firm religious identity. In portraying powerful, independent, and active Muslim women, she distinctively combines the physical and the metaphysical aspects of their lives presenting the complexity of human experience and the importance of belief systems in our lives. Her female characters like Sammar, Natasha, Najwa, Yasmin, Mahasen and others provide an inclusive analysis of the effect of 'Othering' over the identity and lives of these women and concedes their role in rearticulating their identity and in overcoming the western imposed labels.

Looking at how the sensory, affective, and kinesthetic dimensions of lived experience change as a result of migration, being seen by different viewers, being subjected to different webs of discourses and institutions and how these shifts impact subjectivity by translating the sensory and affective experiences of her protagonist into words, Aboulela attempts to represent the full humanity of Muslim female subjects whose lives have frequently been reduced and flattened to stereotypes or simplified narratives. Aboulela through her writing counters the orientalist as well as contemporary narratives that have marked Muslim bodies as Other and instead charts the impact of these discourses on lived experience. In particular, its focus on the experience of religious faith, expanding and complicating many of the theoretical debates that have preoccupied the fields of postcolonial studies till date. *The Translator* suggests that all experience, including religious faith, is embodied. As a way of being that contains physical, affective and spiritual dimensions, Aboulela suggests, religion provides an important grounding to the characters, especially in diasporic situations. Sammar's religious desire, accompanied by her longing for companionship and intimacy with another human being, provides a complex portrayal of her identity as a Sudanese immigrant, a Muslim and a mother. Similarly, in the novel *Minaret* we see how Aboulela contextualizes the life of Najwa in London after migration, her spiritual turn and the shift in her identity from a fully western lifestyle

to a devout Muslim as well as her relationships with Anwar and Tamer. As such, the narrative critiques discourses about Muslim women's bodies, and demonstrates the power of literature as a tool in the project of rewriting Orientalist and imperialist scripts.

Marnia Lazreg criticizes Western academic feminism for repeating flawed ideas about the East. She thinks these ideas often unfairly target Islam, portraying it as the main reason for gender inequality and economic struggles. Lazreg suggests that we need to ask different questions that recognize the impact of religious practices on gender, but also understand that there's much more to it (85-86). She refers to Saba Mahmood, who argues that we should consider the contemporary Islamic practices by women in shaping their own identities, beyond just focusing on gender roles (159). Salma and Moni from the Novel *Bird Summons* provides a case in point. Both of these characters don't experience Islam as oppressive, but rather as a source of embodied knowledge that enables them to root herself during migration, a set of meanings and bodily rituals that allows them to dictate the terms of their own acculturation and assimilation and, ultimately, to write her own script against the ones written in mainstream western discourse. Similarly, we see Najwa in the novel *Minaret* turning to religion for solace when she finds herself grappling with her sense of self and belonging.

One of the most powerful of these existing western discourses centres on Muslim women's bodies and their sexuality. In particular, the western male gaze and the resulting history of sexualization and eroticization of Muslim women have produced countless images that have simultaneously attracted and repulsed their Western viewers. While these Orientalizing discourses have primarily focused on Arab Muslims, they have also included other eastern and African women within these racist discourses viewing them as primitive, hypersexualized, and eroticized (Hammonds 175). Such Othering discourses have not receded in recent years but, rather, have reappeared and reconstituted themselves in various ways (Hirschkind and Mahmood 341). Muslim women in these discourses is frequently reduced to an article of clothing: the 'veil', or 'hijab' (Ahmed *Women*). Viewed by the west as a symbol of the patriarchal control of women and their sexuality, the veil has been at the centre of

multiple debates and struggles - both the Western narrative of Islam as oppressor and the West as liberator and native classist versions of that narrative as well as the Arabic narrative of resistance of the essentialness of preserving Muslim customs, particularly with regard to women, as a sign of resistance to imperialism, whether colonial or postcolonial (Ahmed, *Women* 167) These narratives have emerged despite the wide range of veiling practices and the diverse understandings and deployments of these practices by Muslim women. As a result of overly simplified understandings of the veil that views it solely as a symbol for gender oppression under Islam (reproducing Orientalist discourses), Western feminists have frequently been criticised (Lazreg). While veiling practices are not uncontested among Muslim women, they do not presently represent a central issue around which Muslim women have gathered, even among Muslim feminists or women's movement activists (Keck and Kathryn 191). The 'multiple and contested meanings' of the veil among women have meant that this issue has not gained the traction and international consensus that other feminist issues - primarily, violence against women, have garnered within transnational feminist networks (191.)

Despite this contested terrain, Aboulela's fiction counters such politicised and overly simplified views with its deft displacement of the discourses and debates surrounding the veil (*Translating Desire* 258). Like in the novel The *Translator*, Aboulela represents a character whose religious identity is not solely equated with, or even defined by veiling practices but is an important part of her identity. For example, the novel begins with Sammar's memory of her intense grief at losing her husband and her gratitude to the women around her in Aberdeen who helped her survive her loss:

> They prayed, recited the Qur'an, spent the night on the couch and on the floor. They did not leave her alone, abandoned. She went between them dazed, thanking them, humbled by the awareness that they were stronger than her, more giving than her, though she thought of herself as more educated, better dressed. She covered her hair with Italian silk, her arms with tropical colours. She wanted to look as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerizing as the Afghan princess she has once seen on TV wearing hijab, the daughter of an

exiled leader of the mujahideen. Now the presence of these women kept her sane, held her up. (9)

Aboulela presents the hijab as an item of clothing in the story and the full meaning and importance of its significance is attained by placing it in the full context of the whole belief system of the characters practising it. According to Geoffrey Nash, "Aboulela rewrites the veil through Sammar's thoughts, insouciantly asserting identity and re-appropriating loaded Islamicisms from the lexicon of Western intolerance'' ("Re-Sitting Religion" 30). Sammar acknowledges her own fascination with veiled bodies, viewing them as elegant and attractive, highlighting her desire to see herself as more educated and better dressed than others. In this context, the veil becomes a feminine accessory which although is significant but at the same time Aboulela presents the significance of other things which have deeper meanings, illustrated by presence of 'stronger' and 'more giving women'. Similarly, in the novel *Minaret*, Aboulela contextualizes Najwa's arrival at adopting hijab and in the process shifts focus on her belief, revealing its power to foster self-realization and spiritual consciousness. Najwa's loneliness in London mirrors her isolation in a materialistic world; she yearns for the safety of God. Feeling close to God brings her peace and a desire for spiritual purification. Dissatisfied with her spiritually empty past, she seeks a profound cleanse, expressing weariness with guilt and a troubled conscience. Discovering spiritual pleasure, she realizes its significance, envying students who pray and wear hijab. This newfound spiritual fulfillment leads to self-discovery, highlighting the limitations of her materialistic life. Najwa recognizes that spirituality is not just pleasure but a path to knowledge, becoming her source of safety, peace, purging, and soul knowledge. According to Haddad who is among the major scholars in the study of Islam and Muslims in America:

> For many Muslim women, dressing Islamically- which in its most common form means covering the hair, arms, and legs – is not about coercion but about making choices, about 'choosing' an identity and expressing a religiosity through their mode of dress – some women say that by veiling they are making a statement against Western imperialism, which sees Muslim piety as a sign of terrorism, and against conservative Islam, which seeks to impose a

traditionalist understanding of Islam that oppresses women" (*Muslim Women in America*, 10).

In Aboulela's writings the choice to wear hijab which is a mandatory practice in Islam takes on a cosmic importance in the life narratives of the practising women protagonists, not only because it is a religious requirement but also because it is a marker of identity. Said elaborated in his book *Covering Islam*, that "For almost every Muslim, the mere assertion of an Islamic identity becomes an act of nearly cosmic defiance and a necessity for survival" (76). This indeed applies to the struggle Muslim women launch to assert their identity. In the novel *Minaret* Najwa's transformation into a devout Muslim through her experience in London signifies her resistance to westernization by adopting the Islamic code and conduct and the alteration of "historically male centered character of mosques as well as Islamic pedagogy through engaging in Islamic discourse with other believing women in the Mosque" (Mahmood 2). By foregrounding the context in which Najwa adopts the Islamic way of living Aboulela portrays Najwa's act as a way to subvert hostile life experiences. The enrichment she experiences in associating with the Islamic way of living could be seen in her refusal to live on the standards set by others. Her resistance to Anwar's attempts to convince her "...I can't handle the things you say about my father anymore. I can't live a life where I don't even know that Ramadan has started. I can't. I'm tired of having a troubled conscience" (*Minaret* 244), could be understood as one such instance. This also marks the end of the overbearing relationship with Anwar and the western culture marked by the donning of her dress in accordance to her faith i.e., hijab. Her first experience on wearing Hijab is expressed in these words: "Around me was a new gentleness" (247). The choice Najwa makes aids her to be more confident in the public space, linked to the invisibility of her body especially from men. Likewise, in the novel *Translator,* we see Sammar as an expatriate Muslim woman who wears Hijab and follows Islamic doctrines, thereby resisting to give up her cultural and religious practices which in turn allows her to stay within the realm of her own values, beliefs and cultural legacy. This resistance to westernization depicts that these women who are otherwise portrayed as passive are actually intellectually mature

woman who live according on their own terms and control their own lives regardless of the triple marginalization due to being Muslim, female and culturally colonized.

Muslim women's attire collectivises space and enables Muslim women to associate with fellow Muslim women in Western space where they usually find themselves as marginalized as it is a strong visible identity marker. It has a familiarizing attribute where it gathers Muslim women under one collectivising sign and gives them a sense of common sisterhood and belonging even though they hail from different countries and ethnicities. In *Minaret* as well as *Bird summons* Muslim women transpire their differences in terms of race, class, ethnicity, culture, nation, education and age to unite in their faith in Islam. This unity Amina Wadud argues in her work *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Women's Perspective* that comes as a result of the belief that Allah doesn't distinguish on the basis of wealth, nationality, sex, or historical context but on the basis of taqwa. Aboulela through her works presents how Islamic codes support and strengthen this idea of unity. In *Minaret* hijab is portrayed as one of the Islamic elements that helps overcome the difference in terms of ethnicity, job, nationality, economic status and other material aspects and the similarly the female characters in *Bird Summons* bond and unite together in spite of their differences and help each other cope with personal struggles and as well as the difficulties resulting from their migrant situation. The veil, as presented in the Minaret, acts as a unifying element among Muslim women, symbolizing a connection despite diverse backgrounds. Najwa's reaction to seeing other Muslim women without hijab at a party highlights the veil's significance in connecting believers as Najwa's immediate response on seeing other Muslim women in the party without hijab is that of disconnectedness. Aboulela thus adds another dimension to the veil from the position of a Muslim woman who has faith. In this context veil acquires the significance of an essential element that connects one believer to another in spite of their difference. The difference that they entail is immense and for that reason there is a necessity of a cloth that covers their difference and brings out the similarity in them, which is their faith in Allah. The veil thus acts as a covering agent that keeps certain aspects of personality to themselves and unites the women by helping them to identify with each other by masking their difference.

This significance of the veil is further reflected through Najwa's observation of the difference that these women have from one another when they meet at a party without hijab; "without her hijab, in a tight crimson party dress, her hair tinted, her face brimming with make-up she looks so Arab…This one is all peaches and cream, this one is like a model, this one is mumsy without her hijab" *(Minaret* 184-6). Aboulela thus presents hijab as a uniform as an official outdoor version of the believing Muslim women that masks the differences of their personality, desire, nationality, ethnicity, culture and physical appearance and thereby brings them together in their faith. This also brings into discussion the aspect of difference that disrupts unity and allows the possibility of segregation based on various identifications. However, it must be noted that Aboulela doesn't advocate the system of disruption of difference, an agenda followed by the West through cultural imperialism. Her opposition for such a practice of disruption of difference is based on the Islamic belief that differences are all divinely ordained. According to Barlas in Qur'an difference is discussed as an expression of God's Will, thereby presenting it as normal and forbidding an attempt to eliminate it through any mode (146). Thus hijab serves the purpose of unity by not obliterating difference but obscuring it to help believers to come together. Such a covering of difference is necessary among believers in order to prevent any form of hierarchy based on race, gender, economical status, class, ethnicity, physical appearance and nationality, as it is against the preaching in Qur'an. This aspect of Islam that accepts differences but at the same time thwarts the hierarchy between believers is further ascertained by Aboulela by exploring the meaning of prayer in the lives of the protagonists. Among believers offering prayers has multiple significances; while it grants spiritual strength to the believer it also disturbs the social hierarchy among believers determined on the basis of different factors by the act of praying together. For instance in *The Translator* Sammar, the teacher by the act of praying with her female students in Sudan subverts the hierarchal position attained by the professional status of a teacher: "When she stood her shoulders brushed against the women at each side of her, straight lines…Under the sky, the grass underneath it was a different feeling (160). This disruption of hierarchy is also be seen in the novel *Minaret* in the bond Najwa builds with the wife of the Senegalese ambassador as a

consequence of praying together in the mosque. “In Ramadan I was chauffeur-driven home every night…wife of Senegalese Ambassador, one of the many women who come to the mosque only in Ramadan. She prayed next to me, shoulder to shoulder, every evening …I didn’t tell her more than my name and what I did. There was no need – we had come together to worship and it was enough” (Aboulela 188). Unlike the bond she forms with Randa and other westernized aristocrats in Sudan – based on their economical position that prevented them to connect and relate to other classes in Sudan – her relation with the Ambassador’s wife is on the grounds of their faith in Allah. Thus by enabling an alliance between an aristocratic woman (wife of Ambassador) and a maid (Najwa’s status in London) Aboulela establishes her argument of irrelevance of any form of hierarchy in Islam. *Minaret* also presents Islamic sisterhood as a house of social stability and emotional nurture as we see how after being displaced from her homeland, Najwa finds social and psychological security in the Regent’s Park Mosque. Najwa’s respect for the Muslim women of the Regent’s Park Mosque stems from the support and help they offer her following the demise of her mother. For instance, Wafaa, one of the four women from the mosque who washed and shrouded Najwa’s mother, frequently phones Najwa and enforces Najwa’s sense of belonging to a community of Muslim women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Shirley Hughes points out that Wafaa stirs Najwa’s ‘dormant religious yearnings’. However, to attribute Najwa’s religiosity to a yearning from the past is to miss the point about the socio-historical context in which Najwa embraces Islam, namely, the intersectionality of social class, gender and diaspora. Likewise, in the novel Bird summons in case of Iman, we see how displacement negatively affects her self-confidence and makes her feel as if “she was in the way: unnecessary” (43) but she finds refuge in Muslim Women’s group of the Mosque and develops relationship with Salma who is almost double her age. Displaced by war and left alone in foreign country at a very young age, Salma filled in the gap for “older cousins and young aunties left behind” (8). Iman “admired Salma’s perseverance, her confidence in doing the right thing. This was why she felt safe with Salma. Someone who knew all the answers, besides, she helps Iman to transgress her fears and uncertainties by acting as an elder member of her family’’. This sisterhood helps

Salma and Moni as well when they are grappling with personal struggles and uncertainties in their lives. The sisterhood that these female characters' experience, transcends all boundaries of culture and nation while creating a space of familiarity with Muslim women anywhere in the world. It connects complete strangers through the visible identity marker which is the Islamic hijab and establishes allegiances between Muslim women young and old. Wearing the hijab at the mosque unifies women and gives them a sense of belonging. Without the hijab, ethnic differences seem to alienate Najwa from the Muslim women she knows. The hijab erases social class and ethnic differences. In this sense, the mosque is presented as the epicentre of an Islamic transnational feminist movement with the hijab as a symbol of unity. The mosque becomes Najwa's, as well as Salma, Iman and Moni's point of reference for regulating their lives and providing them a space for socializing in the novels *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*. The mosque therefore, as Claire Chambers points out, "provides a sense of security, well-being and locatedness (184) to these characters in diaspora.

In her book, *Rethinking Muslim women and the Veil*, Katherine Bullocks asserts that in choosing hijab, they are constructing a Muslim identity, a minority identity, in the face of the dominant (Western) culture's messages about women-about the need to dress fashionably, and be slim and beautiful. They use their Islamic heritage as a way to resist, rebel against and counteract these powerful images of ideal beauty. For these and other like-minded Muslim women, hijab is a counter measure in the West, an appropriation of the feminist critique of Western culture's valuation of woman as sex object, and a rejection and rebellion against that model of women via an Islamic route (other women take other routes) (191). This is further elaborated in the function of the hijab as gaze regulator and as a segregator. It controls the encounter between the male gaze and the female figure so that sexuality is not part of the equation:

> To sum up, hijab does not smother femininity or sexuality. Rather, it regulates where and for whom one's femininity and sexuality will be displayed and deployed. In the home, in women's gatherings, and with one's husband. Muslim women can dress up, play with, display and otherwise

> enjoy their beauty and sexuality. Beauty/sexuality is something special, not to be enjoyed by strange men. (Bullock 199).

Consequently, hijab presents a strong critique of the Western materialistic world view that objectifies the female body and puts it in the market place of sexuality to be enjoyed and subjected to the approving or disapproving male gaze. Many feminist scholars question why some consider that women's rights in European modernity can only be delivered by a state of undress (Saadawi, *The Nawal*; McRobbie 96). Aboulela depicts the hijab in her writings as empowering which challenges the oppressiveness which Orientalism as well as the contemporary discourse smears hijab with. The hijab has multiple meanings and purposes and one important meaning lies in its making a statement against Western consumerist culture. It takes Muslim women off the sex economy so that they are treated as human beings not as sex objects. It undermines the male gaze, as we see in the novel, *Bird Summons*, the narrator describes how Salma, the massage therapist; dealing with male clients feels very safe in her Hijab. Salma says that "there are weirdos and perverts out there and she felt that her hijab protected her, made her hazy and distant, further out of reach. The signals she sent out were muffled by clothes, obscured by layers, buried out of the way" (Aboulela 94). The significance of the Hijab does not appear only in the physical appearance of Muslim women but it also defines the boundaries of their relationships with men. Since its role is to cover woman's beauty, Salma feels secure wearing the hijab because it does not draw men's attention towards her. Similarly, in the novel *Minaret* we see how Najwa is protected from the daily harassment by the men on the street as they stop leering at her when she adopts hijab and falls off their radar. Aboulela's characters demonstrate how the different "acts of worship are relevant to the organization of [their] everyday life" (Mahmood 46) in this case the adherence to hijab. This notion of covering the body and resisting male voyeurism by the means of Hijab is also depicted by Aboulela in the context of Sammar in the novel *The Translator*, "hidden from Rae ...her hair and the skin on her arms... only be imagined" (4). This portrayal of the veil as an Islamic symbol that aids in strengthening and empowering women through the resistance to men's voyeuristic

pleasure could be seen as Aboulela's effort to subvert the stereotyped image of it from the position of a covering Muslim women.

Haleh Afshar's discussion on the perception of veil from the position of Muslim/Islamist women in article "Islam and Feminism: An Analysis of Political Strategies" lends a better understanding of their stand. Islamist women are particularly defensive of the veil...many Muslim women have chosen the veil as the symbol of Islamisation and have accepted it as the public face of their revivalist position. For them the veil is liberating, not an oppressive force. They maintain that the veil enables them to become the observers and not the observed; that liberates them from the dictates of fashion industry and the demands of the beauty myth. (201) This vision of veil as empowering and liberating is highlighted by Aboulela through her protagonists Sammar, Salma as well as Najwa who move from the realms of private space to public space in order to be independent, without being objectified with the help of Hijab. However, this perception of the-veil as symbol of resistance against westernisation is only an aspect of the multitudes of meanings associated to it by Aboulela as we have already discussed above. Therefore, choosing to wear the hijab is more than a matter of style or blind assertion of tradition, it is choosing a specific world view and identifying with it against all the odds. These narratives of Muslim women are ones that challenge the status quo and never follow the path of completely assimilating into the western way of life and culture and thereby resisting the hegemony of western culture. They write themselves into the new atmosphere yet never completely identify with it.

One of the enduring epistemological biases against Islam that was spearheaded by Orientalists as mentioned earlier as well is Islam's supposed oppression of women which the imperialist powers, assisted by the canons of Orientalism, used and still use as a pretext to launch wars of 'liberation' to rid the "oppressed Muslim women" of their Muslim male "tormentors". Islam's supposed oppression of women showed itself most clearly to Western eyes in Islam's mandatory practice of women veiling. In her classic book, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Leila Ahmed explains that, "Veiling- to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies- became the symbol of both the

oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of assault on Muslim societies" (152). This Orientalist attitude towards Islam persists. In the present climate of virulent Islamophobia, mainstream Western culture projects itself to be in favour of Muslim women who, unlike their brothers, husbands, fathers, or sons, are not usually seen as menace to the western society, but rather as powerless victims of their own religion. The impulse to save Muslim women from their male kin pervades various social and political movements in the west, proving to be a common denominator between ideologies as seemingly disparate as Christian fundamentalism and liberal feminism. Even in the twenty-first century, Western feminism retains its highly exploitative approach to other women, "the much touted openness of academic feminists to 'Third World' women is predicated upon these women's indigenization-that is upon their trivialization as native speakers whose role is to provide the occasional piece of up-to-date information, but more importantly to entertain, in one way or another, audiences hungry for tales about women" (Lazreg, "The Triumphant" 34-5) .The Orientalist attitude is very clear in writings of feminists such as Mernissi whose anti-hijab stance, which she takes to be a practice that secludes women from public participation, dovetails with Orientalism. For "In ignoring covered women's voices and in reducing them to passive victims, Mernissi is only re-inscribing the colonial and Orientalist view of 'veiled woman'." Her vision is reductive, ignoring the sociological complexity of covering.' (Bullock 180) This bias against covering has its roots in Orientalism and in the Western consciousness that views the world as picture which is an objectifying metaphor. So covering by virtue of its blocking the gaze undermines the Western gaze and the metaphor of the world as exhibit. That is why hijab has come under such repeated attacks that persist until our days. According to katherine Bullock, "It is the nature of the veil as gaze inhibitor that most contributes to it coming under attack. Though the dynamics at play started during modern colonialism, they continue to the present day, and explain contemporary attacks on the veil." (5) Bullock argues following Timothy Mitchell, "What I need to highlight about the modern experience of the world-as-exhibition is the priority given to looking" (5). She goes on to elaborate:

> What happens, then, when one encounters a world set up to deny the gaze? The gaze requires a 'point of view', to see but not to be seen, and also that the natives present themselves as a spectacle…. The veiled women violated all the requirements of the world-as-exhibition: they could not be seen; but were seeing; and they were not a picture that could be read they were mysterious beings who refused to offer themselves up to the visitor. For me, this is a key aspect of the European campaign against the veil. (6)

This above lines makes clear the main reason why the hijab goes against the modern Western consciousness, which views the world in an objectifying manner. By essentially barring the looking subject, the hijab turns the Western observer into an observed which in a way challenges the power of the Westerner whose gaze is a metaphor of his power: to look is to objectify and consequently possess and control.

In her essay "On being a Muslim woman writer in the West" Mohja Kahf, professor of English and Islamic literature, affirms the continuation of the Orientalist tradition of stereotyping Muslim women. She explains that, "The biggest Western stereotype there is about Muslim women is 'The Victim'. It goes way back to the era of Romantic literature, and the Byronic plot of white man saving a harem girl which continued to thrive in the hey-day of European colonialism, feeding a white Christian supremacist hero complex" (83). This narrative is discredited by the female characters in theses novels as we see them taking control of their lives and exerting agency by resisting the pressures of the hegemonic environment. The novel *The Translator* in particular appropriates and revises this classic trope and this deviation from the norm reshapes the literary tradition that often portrays white men saving women from other cultures. Aboulela deconstructs the binary of the white male saviour and the helpless Muslim woman and replaces it with a more authentic and powerful narrative in which a Muslim woman in spite of living in an alien culture and dealing with personal battles shows resilience and maturity by not giving up her beliefs and instead dictates the terms of her relationship. So, this stereotype is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain as Muslim women writers carve out a new space and discuss Islam from an insider's view point. In their quest for their Muslim identity, many Muslim women

writers create a counter discourse of themselves and of Islam through fiction writing. They use English as a language of cultural and literary expression. They write from within the English tradition using one of the most prominent of literary genres: the novel. Fiction writing provides a means to fight the oppressive stereotypes and the silence imposed upon them by the Western literary tradition which represented and still represents them as passive and oppressed. They challenge the orientalist static vision through narrative which introduces real life people in action not as metaphors or as static beings outside history. According to Edward Said:

> Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, … it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision. (*Orientalism* 241)

Aboulela challenges the static vision of Islam as oppressive of women by depicting the lives of normal people, who live in normal time and live Islam as a dynamic belief system and a positive value system that is relevant to the modern world. Her writings are actually 'Islamising' the language of the colonizer to give expression to a culture and a religion that remain very much misunderstood, misrepresented and distorted. Aboulela is engaged in self representation which has heralded a new promising epoch whereby Muslim women return the gaze back to the Orientalist discourse which represents them as oppressed and in need of liberation and the only way to this liberation, the Orientalist instructs, would be by giving up the whole culture and belief in Islam in exchange for modern Western ideology and culture.

Leila Ahmed observes that this notion of -the inherent superiority of Western civilization and the inherent backwardness of Muslim Societies was introduced to the native land by the colonizers through western education and natives who received western education (149). According to her consequently this led to the circulation of the need of Muslim society to abandon its backward ways and follow the western path

to success and civilization (156). Akin to this view is the view of Randa the westernized friend of Najwa, who on seeing the image of girls marching in black chadors on the cover of Time magazine, "Totally retarded, 'She said looking at the picture and handing me a spoon. We 'are supposed to go forward, not go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything?" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 29). Anwar, is of the same opinion as he is contemptuous of the black chadors the Iranian girls don and tells Najwa that "Arab society is hypocritical [. . .] with double standards for men and women" (175), while himself being hypocritical by exploiting Najwa. He is unable to understand that the dress code is a sign of Iranian women's alignment to the Islamic revolution against Western intervention. It represents, to borrow Fadwa El Guindi's words on the phenomenal spread of Islamic dress among Egyptian women in the mid-seventies, an "affiliation of an Islamic identity and morality and a rejection of Western materialism, consumerism, commercialism and values" (*Veil* 144). Anwar is unable to see or comprehend Najwa's metamorphosis when she tells him "'I've changed, Anwar" and he replies, "No, you haven't. You're just imagining." (Aboulela, *Minaret* 224). *Franz Fanon in Black Skin White Masks* perceives this phenomenon of colonized assimilating into the culture of colonizers as an attempt on the part of colonized to be accepted as white or more precisely as civilized. He asserts:

> Every colonized people - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality-finds itself face to face with the language of civilizing nation; that is, with culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above the jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (9)]

This attempt to assimilate and identify with western culture by renouncing and ridiculing their own culture and considering it as backward is also pursued by Najwa's employer Lamiya in the novel *Minaret*. For instance, in the party she hosts in London, Lamya and her friends clearly ridicule Arab and Islamic culture especially the practice of wearing hijab. Najwa describes the episode in the following words:

> A girl in hijab, wearing exactly what I wear when I go out, a beige headscarf, a floor- length skirt and a short coat that doesn't reach the knees. I don't understand why everyone is laughing. …she starts to take off her coat, removes her headscarf, loosens her curly hair. When she throws her headscarf across the room and everyone shrieks…Her smile and her gestures are theatrical; everyone is looking at her… (Aboulela, *Minaret* 223)

The veil here is seen as a symbol of both oppression of women or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women and the backwardness of Islam from the perspective of the westernized aristocrats in Muslim Societies like Randa as well as for the westernized Arab women settled in foreign lands like Lamiya . Asma Barlas argues that such view of Islam as oppressive and backward especially with respect to women is the result of the presumption that equality is a western value and not part of Islam and therefore a struggle for women's empowerment within an Islamic framework is impossible (27). However, this monolithic vision of Islam propagated by the West with the agenda of cultural imperialism is contested and resisted by Aboulela. She does so by depicting women like Najwa, Sammar, Salma and others who while remaining within the frame work of Muslim culture and adopting an Islamic way of living show utter resilience in going about their life in a hostile and alien environment and don not show meekness of any kind. We see them drawing strength from their religious beliefs and associated rituals and codes like Mosque, prayer, veil etc. that is otherwise showcased in a negative light as a source of their oppression.

In addition to challenging the Orientalists, Aboulela's writings also challenge the hegemonic secular feminism which shares some of the Orientalist biases. Haifaa Jawad and Tansin Benn agree that "…secular feminists tend to ignore the relevance of issues such as the centrality of Islamic spirituality or Islam as an issue of identity to Muslim women" (13). Aboulela in her writings portrays Islam as liberating as we see in case of Sammar in in the novel *Translator* and Salma in the novel *Bird Summons* and hence helps to remove it from its consistent association with Muslim patriarchal oppression, her novels demystify the hijab and render it as a source of comfort.

Through highlighting this aspect of the hijab, Aboulela is writing back to some unexamined assumptions in some feminist circles about the nature of the hijab. In this sense, her novels are entering into a dialogue with other feminist movements. Aboulela seems to suggest that there is no point in trying to ignore and transcend differences among women of different cultural backgrounds because they do exist. Instead, feminist movements need to engage in conversations and listen to different voices. According to Kinser, her novels seems to urge feminists to find ways of hearing multiple, divergent and even discordant voices with clarity and resonance (110). She Believes that this can be achieved if feminists retrain themselves 'to hear the cacophony in new ways, sometimes to allow for a little discord, other times to focus on underlying rhythms (110). Kinser explains that these 'concordant' or 'discordant' voices are 'interdependent […] and heuristic' and hence feminists should not think of differences as something either fixed or blended together nor as something that can always be transcended, but as something that needs to be engaged with seriously and profoundly (111).

This feminist insistence on dealing with Islam as the main culprit behind oppression of Muslim women is epistemologically biased in favour of secular feminists' understanding of the rights of women. The Western expression of women's rights is universalized so that all women on earth are expected to follow in the footsteps of Western feminism to liberate themselves. This of course suppresses the authentic voice of Muslim women in favour of the continuation of the Orientalist metaphor of the oppressed Muslim women. One of the effects of this is the ignoring of voices of migrant Muslim women writers who want to break the Orientalist consensus in all its manifestations. Therefore, there is need to refute these essentializing tropes as is undertaken by Aboulela in her writings. In the novel *Minaret* Najwa is portrayed as strong Muslim women who refuses to be the sexual object Anwar expects her to be. He views her as a doll who would easily accept defeat before his 'rational, logical' attacks against her sentiments and emotions, he takes advantage of her vulnerable situation both sexually and financially. Upon realization, Najwa takes a stand for herself and shuts him out of her life completely and thus ends

her exploitation. The last time Anwar seeks her help, coming to her house, Najwa does not buzz him in as her usual practice instead she walks down the stairs in a modest attire "to the shock on his face" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 248) and tells him to leave her alone as she has completely changed her way of living. Similarly, in case of Tamer we see Najwa in full control of the situation and reaching to an agreement on her own terms. The hardships Najwa goes through as well as failure or weakness on part of all men in her life results is her transformation, it intensifies her belief in Allah and her own self. Drudging through patriarchal speculations, she emerges triumphant through her new found religiosity that saved her from a fall and awarded her independence from male clutches. According to Jawad and Tansin:

> Muslim women form a highly diverse and complex group and assumptions about them are often ill-conceived, misinformed and grossly misrepresented. This is often reflected in images of them, particularly in the West as oppressed, powerless, and victimised. The voices of Muslim women striving to keep their religious identity in Western contexts are seriously underrepresented in academic research (xiv)

This epistemological tendency to suppress the religious especially the Islamic as a formative component in the discourse about Muslim women shows the reason why Islam is under-theorized as one of the important markers of identity in the writings of postcolonial Muslim women writers. This is a corollary of the theoretical bias that neutralises religion as an analytical category that has an interpretive capability in discussions of identity formation. Some writings have alerted to this bias. In his book *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World*, Anouar Majid traces that epistemological bias to hegemonic secular scholarship about Islam, "The secular premises of scholarship have thus increased the remoteness of Islam; they thickened and intensified the opaqueness of a Muslim subjectivity shrouded in a different 'regime of truth' as Foucault suggested in an interview following the Islamic revolution in Iran" (3). He goes on to elaborate:

> …. With very few exceptions, postcolonial critics never seriously examined the place of Islam in debates of multi-culturalism. The challenge of including

> Islamic subjectivities and cultural epistemology into a world of equal differences has been left untheorized, probably because the religious imaginary is dismissed ahead of time as either conservative or unredeemable. (1)

This bias against religious expression has two effects: the suppression of religious expression of identity and the confirmation of western stereotypes concerning Muslim women veiling as a symbol of oppression. Aboulela through her writing tries to overcome this bias and prejudice by giving voice to the Muslim women who otherwise find themselves silenced or misrepresented. In the novel *Minaret* she presents Najwa's experience to her readers, and in particular, to western feminists as an example of what Islam could mean to Muslim women. The novel makes clear that Najwa's religiosity is not imposed on her by any religious authority or any oppressive masculine regime; on the contrary, it is a personal choice based on experience and self-fulfilment. By foregrounding the context in which Najwa adopts Islamic dress code, the novel invites the reader to view Najwa's act as a way to subvert a hostile diasporic experience. Aboulela is laying great emphasis on the importance of understanding how women's localized experiences trigger variant forms of resistance. In the same manner in the novel *The Translator,* Sammar sees her hijab as an integral part of religiosity and therefore her identity and does not give it up in the western society where she is all alone, free from all religious and patriarchal pressures.

The point of view of the Muslim women needs to be heard, examined and discussed at length before it is judged. Aboulela through her writings seems to suggest that the hijab, controversial as it is, needs to be seen from multiple perspectives. Just as the hijab needs to be contextualized carefully, we should also evaluate the significance of the belief system and the associated rituals and symbols in the novels. By portraying the scenes at the mosque in these novels, the reader understands what role and significance it can have in the lives of Muslim Women, like we see how happy Najwa is and how self-fulfilled she feels while describing her participation in a Tajweed class, she states that the "concentration on technique soothes her; it makes her forget everything around her'' (*Minaret* 74). At the mosque, Najwa celebrates the Eid with her fellow Muslim women. It gives her a sense of belonging, a sense of

being part of a group "I am happy that I belong here, that I am no longer outside, no longer defiant" (184). She is glad to forget her past and to become a member of a new group that cherishes her and emotionally supports her, "What they could see of me was not impressive: my lack of religious upbringing, no degree, no husband, no money" (239) but still they bond with her. Najwa is aware of the differences among Muslim women as can be seen in her comparison of herself to her Qur'an teacher, Um Waleed when she emphasizes that, "their natures are not harmonious; they orbit different paths'' (185) nevertheless, it is their interest in religion that brings them all together.

Aboulela through her novels carefully investigates the beliefs of her characters by putting them in context. Their experience in diaspora and the chaos they undergo and what motivates them to seek an alliance to survive in an alien hostile society. In case of Najwa in the novel *Minaret*, Claire Chambers argues, "an unfurling religious understanding sustains Najwa and consoles her for her losses" (182) and the same can be said of the other female characters in other novels like Eman, Moni and Salma. Aboulela portrays Islam as a common interest that can function as a basis of coalition among women of different origins and classes in the age of globalization and capitalist expansion. As Geoffrey Nash notes, in Aboulela's fiction "emergent Islam [. . .] is itself a riposte to westernising globalisation" (*The Anglo Arab* 150) Aboulela's portrayal of Islam in her fiction is not merely a passive reflection of traditional values but rather a dynamic and evolving force that responds to the challenges posed by Westernization and globalization. A properly contextualized reading of the female characters in these novels helps us to look at how these Muslim women employ certain principles within Islam as strategies of resistance. These novels present Islam as the basis which enables Sammar, Najwa, Salma, Moni and Eman "to fight off the anonymity of being a migrant in Britain" (Nash, *The Anglo Arab* 150). Just as Aboulela's novels subvert some misconceptions about symbols of Arab Muslim culture that have been associated in the West with a repressive patriarchal authority like the veil, in *Minaret* and *Bird Summons* she explores the crucial role a mosque can play for Muslim women regardless of their social class, ethnicities, education and age.

Aboulela through her fiction breaks the stereotyped "image of the Arab woman in the minds of the western people [which] is of a backward woman living behind the walls of the harem, ignorant, veiled, and crippled in effort and movement" (Al-Sa'id 359), "whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children and the other females or immediate kinship circle" (Golley 522). Her female characters are very active in their lives, exerting agency and do not appear to be subjugated by any sense. In the novel *The Translator*, Mahasen is a "woman who had an opinion on all things". (Aboulela 5). Mahasen's character express the control and power of Arab women, "My aunt is a strong woman," Sammar said, "a leader really." (17). Mahasen rules over her house like a leader and had an apropos opinion in everything. She intervenes and prevents Sammar from destroying her life when she was willing to marry the old Ahmad Ali Yassin. Again, Hanan, Sammar's sister-in-law, is very actively performing her duties as a doctor. Similarly, other women characters in Aboulela's novels like Salma, Sammar, Soraya and Najwa also debunk these stereotypes as they come across as very powerful women who resist the hegemony of western culture by remaining within the bounds of their own religion and cultural and the same time conducting their lives actively without succumbing to any pressure. These women, translate Islam in their daily activities through regular prayers, fasting in Ramadan etc. and thus "exemplify a dimension of Islamic Feminism that is not necessarily connected with politics but is expressed in spiritual and religious experience on a daily basis" (Edwin, "(Un)Holy Alliances" 77) Sammar remains rooted to Islam and its culture in spite of her exposure to the West through her education and job. She exhibits that "Islam is not necessarily more traditional than any other identification and that 'feminist' does not mean modern and, therefore, Western and imitative. She highlights women's roles and status within their religious communities while declaring a common cause with Muslim women elsewhere who share similar objectives" (Cooke, "Women, Religion" 151). In *Minaret,* compelled by circumstances to give up her luxurious life, Najwa works as a babysitter for Mai. She doesn't accept defeat in the face of the cruel, life-changing moments, but takes it up as a challenge to fend for herself. She demonstrates dignity that underlies her rejection of a parasitical living.

This commitment to Islam as a way of life is not easy though. The characters need to fit in inside a different community that is hostile to their beliefs. This makes the characters try to balance their religious life and Islamic identity and create an atmosphere of positive interaction with their non-Muslim atmosphere. The Women who populate the novels of Aboulela attempt to operate in the West without losing their Islamic ethics. Here, they feel a kind of antagonism between their world and the world out there: there is an attempt not to assimilate in the new culture and basically they sometimes fail to do so however much they try. They struggle to maintain a balance between both. Sammar, in *The Translator* falls into a real crisis when she falls in love with Rae who is a professor of Middle Eastern studies who works at the same university where she works as a translator. The conflict starts between her heart and her religious commitment. She, according to Islamic law, cannot marry a non-Muslim. However, she tries to remain within the boundaries of Islamic behaviour. She maintains a delicate balance between love and faith. There are two episodes which illustrate Sammar's strenuous effort to remain within the accepted limits of Islamic belief concerning a woman being in privacy with a non-Mahram. Most of the interaction between her and professor Rae takes place during long phone calls as when he calls her during Christmas day. The other episode is when they meet in the Winter Gardens in London which is a public place and thus they are not in forbidden privacy. This depiction of the meeting between the two skilfully avoids bringing the two in forbidden privacy according to the teachings of Islam. In a similar manner offering prayer also many a times becomes difficult due to unavailability of space as is experienced by Sammar at the airport. Similarly, in the Novel *Minaret* we see Najwa struggling to fast in the month of Ramadan in London.

The western discourse (Orientalist and feminist) essentialises hijab as an imposed bondage and therefore advocated for liberation of Muslim women and lately their attire has begun to seen as a threat. These discourse leads to islamophobia and the hijab wearing women become a primary target of such attacks. In the novel *The Translator* we see how Sammar is made aware of her different appearance by Jennifer in a very subtle way. Similarly, in the novel *Minaret*, Sammar is attacked by some

boys in a bus and is also called as Sadam Hussein because of her attire. This othering of Muslim women has culturally alienated them. As a response while some Muslim women in order to escape the attacks and stereotypes assimilate into European society as is seen case of Natasha in the novel *The Kindness of Enemies* by adopting a western identity others clung more to their traditions because they feel their identity is threatened.

The first objective of the research work, that is, to study the role of faith in identity formation in the novels of Leila Aboulela, has been achieved in this chapter. While analysing the texts of Leila Aboulela, it has been explored that the belief system of a person undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the perception of self. Moreover, the second objective of the research work, to evaluate Leila Aboulela's novels in the context of Identity formation theory has also been achieved and it has been seen that dominant discourses do certainly affect the identity both the self-perception as well as the way a person is perceived from outside or by others. The fourth objective of the study is to analyse the growing religious identity of immigrants and it has been achieved in this chapter by exploring how religious identity foster a sense of belonging in an alien and hostile environment and how it helps to fight the resultant alienation.

As such, the aforementioned discussion undertaken in the chapter deduces following outcomes and findings. The stereotype of the Muslim women as universally oppressed and view of the veil solely as a symbol of subjugation is a western construct and does not encapsulate the diverse experiences of all Muslim women. Aboulela's nuanced narratives help in understanding the positive role religion plays in the lives of these female characters and how it affects their world view. Aboulela's fiction prompts a critical examination of liberal notions of 'equality' and 'liberty' that underpin this perspective of Veiled Muslim women as oppressed. The chapter contends that such a narrow understanding precludes alternative viewpoints on 'equality' and 'liberty,' failing to acknowledge the positive aspects of living a religious life and contemplating the significance of the veil. The hijab's 'inner quality' is the focal point of the characters 'conscious choice to hold on to it not just as a marker of

identity but also on a deeper level as a reminder of commitment to Islam. The psychological power the hijab gives to women and the role it plays in their sense of self is very clear in these novels. Therefore, the discourse which portray the Muslim women as victim of their religion is a very superficial and prejudiced reading as it fails to understand and take into account its significance in their lives. As can be seen in case of Najwa who feels complete after turning to her religion and after dressing modestly feels a sense of relief and self-confidence. Similarly, in case of Sammar we see how faith keeps her going and protects her in a very tough period of her life and how considerate she is of her Islamic dress as she chooses it meticulously and feels better dressed in it.

The chapter further throws light on the complexities of female subjectivities, challenging stereotypes and providing a platform for self-expression and identity building within the framework of faith. The narratives of the women in Aboulela's fiction, firmly rooted in a religious worldview, emerge as a form of resistance against the dominance of the western secular perspective, offering a rich and multifaceted exploration of women's experiences in the context of Islam while simultaneously revealing the intricate power structures inherent in conflicting representations. The veiled women like Sammar, Najwa and Salma exert agency by adhering to their religious dress and do not succumb to the hegemony of the Western culture. They do not buy into the western notion of liberty and freedom and instead feel empowered and fulfilled by remaining within their own religious world view.

It further throws explores how religious rituals and symbols act as the unifying factor. Hijab collectivizes space and enables Muslim women to associate with fellow Muslim women in Western space because it is a strong visible identity marker. It has familiarizing attribute and thus gathers Muslim women, despite their diverse backgrounds in terms of countries and ethnicities to find a sense of shared sisterhood. The hijab, in this context, becomes a unifying sign that connects them, fostering a sense of community and solidarity. In the Novel Minaret Najwa escapes alienation and feels a sense belonging through her relations with other Muslim women at the

mosque. And similarly in case of Salma, Moni and Eman religion is the basis of their sisterhood.

To sum up, in the context of Muslim women religious identification acquires multiple significances– while it provides a stable identity, it also provides empowerment and development through a bond with other Muslim women from different contexts without negating their faith in Islam. Aboulela thereby brings into discussion some of the crucial issues which Feminism needs to address in order to become a global movement for women especially with respect to its practicality in the context of Arab Muslim women. She expresses the need to understand the variance in experiences of women – their problems and concern. This could be seen by taking into account the predicament of Lamiya, the Arab westernized women as opposed to Najwa or Sammar, who are Muslim devotees. The difference in their idea of progress and empowerment brings into question the monolithic vision of freedom as beneficial for women. Discussion on freedom of women while is essential and significant, perceiving westernization as the only mode for empowerment and progress has been contested by Aboulela. By tracing the progress of her protagonists within the framework of their faith in Islam, through its code and conduct and the aid of Islamic symbols like veil, Mosque, prayer and Sharia she presents an alternative perspective on freedom within the context of Muslim women. This aspect of freedom as void and hindrance to the progress and self-actualization of these women only implies at the problem of looking at the concept of freedom from a particular dimension. In doing so she urges the need for contemporary feminist theory to rethink its paradigm of associating western culture with the progress of women. Thereby she voices for a global women's struggle that takes into consideration the particular cultural and religious context for better understanding and addressing of the concerns of the women from different backgrounds. Thus Leila Aboulela's novels are resistance narratives that work within the frame work of post colonialism and feminism to reject the domination of west on the native customs, particularly with respect to native women, and validate the idea that progress and empowerment of Muslim women could be achieved by remaining within the frame work of Arab, Islamic culture.

Conclusion

This study has explored Aboulela's novels as manifestations and articulations of opposing narratives or discourses of resistance, which have addressed the apprehensions, prejudices, and inquiries regarding Muslim identities by juxtaposing them with the dominant discourses of the Western world (both orientalist and contemporary). These literary works intervene in discourse and discussions regarding various beliefs and thereby challenge the widely established knowledge systems of Islamophobia, orientalism, and imperialism that carry significant real life implications and material consequences. These text not only uncover but also strategically complicate the oversimplified, dichotomous framework of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ that has pervaded Western political discourse and societal dialogues concerning Muslims and the Middle East. They do not simply negate the dominant tropes of these hegemonic discourses, but also actively strive to deconstruct Muslim stereotypes and decentre Eurocentric perspectives and priorities by innovatively presenting alternate images and differential understanding of reality. It is important to recognize that all her texts studied in this thesis emerge out of different histories and contexts, but attempt to humanize and acknowledge the Muslim Other while set across the world in diverse temporalities. Subsequently, they attempt to enter into a dialogue with the dominant western discourse and aim at clearing the misconceptions and fears associated with Muslim identity and lands and at the same time familiarizing the western reader with their world view.

Leila Aboulela intricately navigates the intersections of cultures, identities, and religious beliefs, presenting a nuanced portrayal that challenges prevailing stereotypes and fosters a deeper understanding of the Muslim experience. Against the backdrop of dominant western discourses that often essentialize and stereotype Muslim cultures, her narratives shed light on the internal conflicts faced by individuals as they negotiate between preserving their cultural heritage and embracing the changes inherent in contemporary life. This deliberate engagement serves as a

powerful counter-narrative to Western stereotypes and misconceptions about the Muslim world. Furthermore, Aboulela addresses the broader socio-political issues affecting Muslim communities, particularly the challenges confronted by immigrants in the West. Her works explore the experiences of navigating unfamiliar territories, battling stereotypes, and maintaining one's cultural and religious identity in the face of a Western discourse that is often prejudiced. Thus she confronts and dismantles the prejudicial lens through which Islam and its followers are often portrayed. Aboulela delves into the collective experiences of Muslim communities grappling with heightened scrutiny and prejudice as a result of war on terror and challenges the prevailing discourse and thereby encouraging the readers to scrutinize the ramifications of political upheavals on individual experiences and emphasizes the universal humanity that surpasses cultural and religious. In essence, Leila Aboulela emerges as a literary voice that serves as a conscientious critic of prevailing narratives. Her works stand as a testament to the power of narratives in dismantling stereotypes, fostering empathy, and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the Muslims within the context of contemporary Western discourse and Islamophobia.

The research work has attempted at accomplishing four objectives which have been laid out in the introductory part of the thesis. One of the objectives of the work, that is, to understand the role of faith in identity formation has been achieved in the undertaken study. The objective has been achieved in the fourth chapter titled "Subverting the orientalist Tropes as politics of Resistance." wherein the importance and the impact of religious beliefs on the identity of characters in the novels of Aboulela has been analysed, debunking the western discourses which portrays them in reductive and stereotypical ways. Besides, the objective has also been achieved in the third chapter titled "Exteriorization and the predicament of belonging," in a way that it evaluates how the hegemonic western discourses and islamophobia affect subjectivity and how these discourses are crucial in maintaining the hegemony of the western culture and in enforcing assimilation and acculturation. The same objective has also been achieved in the fifth chapter titled "Faith, Freedom and Muslim Women". While analysing the novels of Aboulela, this chapter has sought to question

certain subjective and negative fundamentals which have pervaded the western construction of female Muslim subjectivity. Much of the current discourse surrounding this significant issue is marred by historical and cultural misunderstandings. The analysis presented herein has led to the conclusions and interpretations outlined in this chapter. The analysis has arrived at the outcomes and inferences delineated here.

Religious beliefs play a crucial part in the perception of self and are thus integral to identity formation. In The *Translator* we see how Sammar resists the hegemony of western culture by holding on to her religious identity as it is an essential component of her being and gives meaning and purpose to her life. In the novel *Minaret,* Najwa after feeling alienation in the western society turns to religion to resolve her crises of identity and seeks solace and a sense of belonging in the company of other religious women.

The stereotype of the Muslim women as universally oppressed and view of the hijab solely as a symbol of subjugation is a western construct and does not encapsulate the diverse experiences of all Muslim women. *The Translator* and *Bird Summons* feature two bold women protagonists in the form of Sammar and Salma respectively, who deconstruct the reductive tropes of hijabi Muslim women that have been employed by the West to justify their narrative of oppressed Muslim women. The self-conscious assertion of hijab as an educated and personal choice is central to their Muslim subjectivity in both the novels. Aboulela's nuanced narratives help in understanding the positive role religion plays in the lives of these female characters and how it affects their world view. Aboulela's fiction prompts a critical examination of liberal notions of 'equality' and 'liberty' that underpin this perspective of Veiled Muslim women as oppressed. Such a narrow understanding precludes alternative viewpoints on 'equality' and 'liberty,' failing to acknowledge the positive aspects of living a religious life and contemplating the significance of the veil. The characters' deliberate decision to hold on to their hijab extends beyond its function as a symbol of identity; it serves as a profound reminder of their dedication to Islam, emphasizing its intrinsic significance. These novels vividly illustrate the psychological empowerment

women derive from the hijab and its pivotal role in shaping their self-perception as can be seen in case of Najwa who feels complete after turning to her religion and after dressing modestly feels a sense of relief and self-confidence. Therefore, the discourse which portray the Muslim women as victim of their religion is a very superficial and prejudiced reading as it fails to understand and take into account its significance in their lives. Similarly, in case of Sammar we see how faith keeps her going and protects her in a very tough period of her life and how considerate she is of her Islamic dress as she chooses it meticulously and feels better dressed in it.

Aboulela throws light on the complexities of female subjectivities, challenging stereotypes and providing a platform for self-expression and identity building within the framework of faith. The narratives of the women in Aboulela's fiction, firmly rooted in a religious worldview, emerge as a form of resistance against the dominance of the western secular perspective, offering a rich and multifaceted exploration of women's experiences in the context of Islam while simultaneously revealing the intricate power structures inherent in conflicting representations. The veiled women like Sammar, Najwa and Salma exert agency by adhering to their religious dress and do not succumb to the hegemony of the Western culture. They do not buy into the western notion of liberty and freedom and instead feel empowered and fulfilled by remaining within their own religious world view.

The second objective of the research work, that is, to evaluate Leila Aboulela's novels in the context of Identity Formation Theory, has been accomplished in the third chapter titled "Exteriorization and the predicament of Belonging". This Chapter explores how the intricate web of colonial discourse profoundly implicates the identity and subjectivity of Muslims in the works of Leila Aboulela. At the heart of this exploration lies the phenomenon of exteriorization with a keen focus on the experiences of Muslim immigrants living in the West, particularly in the aftermath of the War on Terror. The fourth chapter titled "Subversion of Orientalist Tropes as Politics of Resistance" has also helped in the accomplishment of the above-mentioned objective of the thesis. It has analysed how the Subjectified and objectified Muslims reclaim their identity by deconstructing the stereotypes and false

perceptions by writing back to the dominant discourse of the west. As such, the study has deduced certain inferences and outcomes which are enumerated below.

Discourse plays a prominent role in shaping identity and the orientalist discourse affects Muslim subjectivities profoundly. Aboulela through her narratives, highlights how the orientalist discourse through exteriorization leads to othering of the characters in these novels and subsequently affects their identity. The hegemony of the western culture pressurizes Natasha to assimilate into the western society by giving up her cultural identity and religion and yet see never feel a sense of belonging in the western society. Similarly, Osama in spite of changing his name to Oz and integrating well into the western society is still seen as a suspect. *The Kindness of Enemies*, *Minaret* and *The Translator* capture succinctly the perceptions of western Society towards the Muslims living among them. The stubbornly persisting Islamophobic environment in which Muslims are constantly under surveillance, subjected to profiling and seen as suspects and terrorist sympathizers leads to their disillusionment in the course of time. Osama, Malak and Natasha in *The kindness of Enemies*, Najwa in *Minaret* and Sammar in the novel *The Translator*, grow disillusioned in the course of the novels, which ends up in their drastic personal decisions like in case of Osama his decision to return to his homeland, Natasha's shift towards her culture and religion and Najwa's rejection of western lifestyle altogether.

Aboulela's texts act as narratives of resistance to the hegemonic western discourse which reduces non-western people and cultures to stereotypes playing a significant role in the formulation of the subjectivity as highlighted by Said. For instance, in the novel *Bird summons* Salma and Moni debunk the stereotype passive and oppressed Muslim women as both of them are strong independent women who exert their agency in negotiating the daily realities of life in a foreign land. Salma leads and guides the women of her group and acts as a guardian form Eman who is displaced and left alone in diaspora. Again in the novel *Minaret* tamer's character subverts the stereotype of a Muslim man as a fundamentalist as he is shown conducting his religious life peacefully within the western society without any animosity to the western society.

The third objective of the study, to explore the ideology of Leila Aboulela with reference to her works has been achieved in the fourth chapter and Fifth chapter titled “Subversion of Orientalist Tropes as Politics of Resistance” and “Faith, Freedom and Muslim Women” respectively. Aboulela’s ideology is quite evident through her writings and female characters who are rooted in a religious worldview and carry themselves according to it. Aboulela does not see her religion lacking or oppressing in any sense but draws strength from it and that is quite evident through her character portrayals like Sammar, or Salma who view their religion as a positive force. She believes in mutual understand and harmony and does not believe in clash between West and Islam and therefore we see her writings as an effort to educate the western reader and at the same time she exposes the prejudice faced by Muslims. Her work, is largely influenced by her own personal journey of immigration to the United Kingdom and the challenges she faced along the way. In an interview, Aboulela expressed her belief that a personal, religious identity offers greater stability compared to a national identity. She emphasized that she can maintain her religious beliefs regardless of her location, whereas other aspects of identity can be more easily lost or compromised (Sethi). In the works of Aboulela the framework of religion isn't just a reference point or a representative aspect of norms, both cultural and social; instead, it is a deliberate and intentional presentation of faith. Furthermore, this faith is presented as a viable substitute to secularism and certain aspects of Western modernity. Advocating for the legitimacy of what could be described as a “faith-centered subject position” (Dimitriu, “Crossing and Dwelling”120), Aboulela's works encapsulate an Islamic moral and religious landscape, while conforming to an archetypal Western fictional structure. Encompassing various elements that extend beyond the typical political, cultural, and ethnic identifiers often seen in Anglo-Arab fiction, her religiosity serves as an antitoxin to the western existential emptiness, hegemony and materialism.

The fourth objective of the study has been to analyse the growing religious identity of immigrants. This objective has been achieved in all the three chapters mentioned in above discussions. Religious identity fosters a sense of belonging in an

alien and hostile environment and it helps to fight the resultant alienation. The alienation and segregation faced by the different characters in Aboulela's works as a result of islamophobic discourse in spite of their efforts to fit into the western culture leads to a crisis of their identity and a gradual return to their native culture and religion like Najwa in *Minaret* and Natasha in *The Kindness of Enemies*. In *The Kindness of Enemies*, Natasha rejects her cultural and religious affiliations in an endeavour to assimilate into the Western society that is fraught with hostility and Islamophobia towards Muslims. These characters' even Anglicize their names, like Osama changes it to Oz and Natasha Hussein to Natasha Wilson to evade racial slurs, stereotypes and being accused each time a Muslim or Arab commits a crime. When all their efforts to fit-in fail, they are left in a crises and so they fall back upon their native culture as well as religion for a stable sense of sense and identity. In The Novel *The Kindness of enemies*, Natasha, Malak as well as Oz's subjectivities are affected due islamophobia when a single episode nullifies all their efforts of assimilation on the western society in spite of them being successful in their respective fields. Similarly, Najwa in *Minaret* and Sammar in *Translator* face islamophobia both verbal abuse and physical attacks which leads to alienation and identity crises and their eventual return to their religion which gives them a stable sense of identity. So, it can be said that the prejudice and racism is one of significant reasons that pushes the immigrants towards their native culture and religion as they do not feel acceptance in the west even when they try hard to assimilate.

Islamophobia operates as a form of racism as it resorts to similar exclusionary strategy and tactics as observed in racism. It manifests as a discriminatory and racist discourse that marginalizes Muslims by ostracizing them, particularly in minority settings. It homogenizes and stereotypes their behaviour resulting in the prejudicial treatment and discrimination against Muslims and significantly influencing their identity. It is the same reason which leads to Oz's arrest and subsequent treatment of her mother as a suspect a well as Natasha ordeal at her department with Gaynor is also the outcome of islamophobia and stereotyping. In all the works discussed in this study, we see how Aboulela's characters, facing islamophobia in one way or other

way and to a greater or lesser degree navigate their lives and identities. The migrant characters, though settled abroad pushed by circumstances, struggle to locate themselves. In the words of Krister Stendahl, "the ultimate violence against the other is to use them as negative symbols in one's own system" (20) and that is exactly what Muslims have been facing in the west in the past as well as present.

Religious rituals and symbols act as the unifying factor for the migrant Muslims in the west. Like, hijab collectivizes space and enables Muslim women to associate with fellow Muslim women in Western space because it is a strong visible identity marker. It has familiarizing attribute and thus gathers Muslim women, despite their diverse backgrounds in terms of countries and ethnicities to find a sense of shared sisterhood. The hijab, in this context, becomes a unifying sign that connects them, fostering a sense of community and solidarity. In the Novel *Minaret* Najwa escapes alienation and feels a sense belonging through her relations with other Muslim women at the mosque. And similarly in case of Salma, Moni and Eman religion is the basis of their sisterhood.

Orientalism and contemporary Western discourse often target Muslim women, portraying them either as oppressed individuals or as subjects of exoticized narratives. The Muslim veil, in particular, is criticized as a symbol of oppression that Muslim women must relinquish to embrace the supposed freedom of Western feminism. This patronizing stance of Western feminism mirrors Orientalist attitudes and serves the interests of feminist movements, for whom the Muslim women serves as an alter ego on which to project their subterranean self. The narratives of Leila Aboulela, throws the feminist theses into disarray by portraying Muslim women speaking not spoken for or spoken at or spoken of. After facing the hegemony of the West and its culture, individuals grappling with identity crises often turn to religion as a primary means of reclaiming their sense of self and self-assurance.

The assertion of Islamic identity occurs not as a reactive response, but rather through a gradual process of growing appreciation for Islam. The two novels *Minaret* and The *Kindness of Enemies* are important in this regard. *Minaret* tells the story of a

Muslim Women who after a spiritual turn returns to her religion after seeking asylum in London and starts to practise her religion and dressing modestly. *The kindness of Enemies* shows how in order to fit in and belong Natasha tries to erase all her religious and cultural markers and affiliations by adopting the western culture and changing her name from Natasha Hussein to Natasha Wilson. In spite of efforts to erase her Muslim Identity and to fit in she finds herself face to face with her Muslim identity after Osama's arrest. After a long journey of suppressing her identity and trying to fit in, she comes to terms with background and Islamic identity when she starts to accompany Malak to different spiritual gatherings and prayers.

In Leila Aboulela's novels *Minaret* and *The Translator*, characters like Najwa and Sammar experience a sense of displacement and yearn for the 'Islamic rhythm', a term borrowed from anthropology which depicts Islam's influence on the interconnection between space and time, where the sacred permeates the world spatiotemporally. Their transition from a Muslim environment, where Islam shapes their understanding of space and time, to a new Western setting devoid of this relationship disrupts their equilibrium. Their familiar order of emotions and actions is challenged. It's only through a return to or rediscovery of their religion that these characters begin to reconcile with their new environment, finding solace in markers of space such as rituals, mosques, attire, and community bonds.

The novels discussed in the study reveal that religion emerges as the mainstay of identity, reflecting the characters' quest for self-discovery. The major characters in these novels illustrate the significant role of Islam and its profound impact on their daily lives. However, mainstream discussions often overlook the relevance of faith in favour of emphasizing other factors such as gender, class, or ethnicity. Women's studies groups, Marxist critiques, and minority studies tend to focus on these aspects while neglecting the religious dimension of identity. This study however has attempted to explore the importance and relevance of Islam as a lived experience and a fundamental component of identity in these narratives. The marginalization of Islam as a crucial aspect of Muslim identity stems from interpretations that portray Islam solely as an oppressor of Muslim women or as a religion associated with violence.

Islam has been often enveloped in a pervasive negativity across various academic disciplines. It is not merely viewed as anti-modern but is even characterized as being ‘enraged at modernity,’ echoing the sentiments of the orientalist scholars like Bernard Lewis. This perception fuelled fears of Islam as a radical, anti-Western religion fundamentally at odds with modern rational values. Islamophobia emerged as a direct consequence of this demonization of Islam, perpetuated not only by Western media but also by certain self-orientalising factions that echoed this binary narrative of a modern West versus an ancient and radical Islam. This hostile environment framed the context within which the study took place. The prevailing Western secular viewpoint, which advocates for relegating religion, including Islam, to the private sphere and excluding it from secular affairs, dominates the popular western discourse. Religion's relevance to the world is often dismissed as the Western experience and its clash with religious knowledge and religious humanism challenged the very notion of religion. However, for Muslims, religion isn't just relevant to life and the world; it’s also of paramount importance in defining their identity in a secular world. Despite the varying narratives in the novels, they concur on one aspect: Muslim identity is inconceivable without Islam as a reference point.

In the contemporary global landscape, marked by heightened tensions and cultural divides, the social relevance of this study holds profound social relevance. Aboulela's works provide a crucial entry point into understanding the complex interplay between literature, power structures, and the construction of identities. By scrutinizing the impact of Orientalist discourse on the portrayal of Muslims, it illuminates the ways in which prevailing Western narratives have contributed to the marginalization and misrepresentation of Muslim identities. The present times are marked by increasing Islamophobia and cultural misunderstandings, this research becomes a timely and vital contribution. It not only sheds light on the need for a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of Muslim identities but also underscores the transformative potential of literature in fostering cross-cultural dialogue and dismantling entrenched stereotypes. Ultimately, this research addresses broader

societal concerns by advocating for a more inclusive and equitable representation of diverse identities in the realm of literature and beyond.

As societies grapple with an influx of information and narratives, there is a critical need for perspectives that challenge stereotypes and foster mutual understanding. Aboulela's novels, positioned as a counter-discourse, offer a valuable resource in this endeavour. By dissecting and exposing the impact of Orientalist discourse on Muslim identities, the research serves as a catalyst for dispelling pervasive stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslims. In advocating for a more accurate and empathetic representation of Muslim characters and communities, the research contributes to the promotion of peaceful coexistence. Through literature, which has the power to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, Aboulela's narratives become a bridge between diverse communities. Furthermore, the research contributes to the broader discourse on multiculturalism and inclusivity, promoting the idea that a diverse range of voices and narratives should be acknowledged and celebrated. In doing so, it fosters an environment conducive to dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among individuals from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds.

Ultimately, this study offers a pathway towards building more tolerant and harmonious societies by shedding light on the potential of literature as a tool for dispelling stereotypes and promoting peaceful coexistence. It emphasizes the role of storytelling in dismantling divisive narratives, fostering empathy, and cultivating a shared human experience that transcends the limitations of cultural and religious differences. In an era where misconceptions and biases can fuel conflict, this research advocates for mutual understanding and respect and acknowledgement of other worldviews in creating a more interconnected and harmonious world.

Although this research work has attempted to analyse Aboulela’s Novels keeping in view most of the required parameters and aspects needed for the study, however, there are numerous aspects of the study that can be taken up for further study which will ultimately lead to a broader canvas of study on the subject. Delving deeper into several interconnected areas that enhance our understanding of the role of

religion, in shaping identity within literature and the wider socio-cultural landscape will surely help in gaining a fuller perspective as it is essential to integrate insights from multiple disciplines like: Literature, religious studies, sociology, and cultural studies, which will all contribute valuable perspectives. While Aboulela's works are central to the study, expanding the literary scope to include a wider range of authors and genres can provide a richer understanding of Islamic identity. This could involve writers from South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, and diaspora communities in the West. A Comparative portrayal of Islam in literature from different cultural and national contexts can reveal common themes and unique perspectives on Islamic identity. Another important aspect that can be taken up for study is the consideration of the broader socio-political context in which the literature is produced and received by examining how governmental policies and public opinion shape the discourse around Islam and how literature reflects or challenges these influences.

Further, Longitudinal Studies on the subject can track changes in the portrayal of Islamic identity over time and in response to global events. And the utilization of digital tools can help to analyse trends and patterns in the representation of Islam across various literary and media platforms. By broadening the scope of the study in these ways, we can gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how Islamic identity is represented in literature and the impact of these representations on broader societal perceptions. This expanded approach not only enriches the academic discourse but also contributes to fostering a more inclusive and empathetic global dialogue.

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List of Publications.

S. No	Title of the paper with author names	Name of the Journal	Publication datr	Issn no./ vol no., Issue no.	Indexing in Scoupus/web of Science/UGC-Care List
1	Interrogating The Narrative Of Terrorism And Islamophobia: A Study Of Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness Of Enemies*	Journal of Positive School Psychology	2022	Vol 6, No. 7, 2717-7564	Scopus
2	Narratives of Third World As Allegories Of Nation- A Study of *Lyrics Alley*	Shodh Prabha	2022	Vol. 47, issue 3 0974-8946	UGC care

List of Conferences.

S. No.	Title of the paper with author names	Name of the journal/ confrence	Publication date
1	Cultural Productions as National Allegories :A Study of Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley*	ENTENTE 2022 International Conference	3rd-5th, nov. 2022
2	Jihad and Societal Acuity: A study of Leila Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*	International Conference EDIIC 2021	25, sep, 2021