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Dialogic Experiences: Negotiating Muslim Women's Experiences and Dilemmas of Transitivity, Family and Religious Spirituality in Leila Aboulela's Narratives.

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Dedication

To my dear children:

Israâ Meriem, Iyad Yassine, Adam Mohamed, Allaa Tessnim

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Abstract

Anglophone migrant Muslim literature has become a rich field of knowledge about Muslims in general and migrant Muslim women's lives in particular. Indeed, it is a major source of investigation of Muslim women's migratory experiences. Starting from the depth of migrant Muslim women's dilemmas of transitivity, family disrupted relations and religious spirituality, the current study is an examination of Muslim women expatriates' dialogic experiences in the Sudanese author Leila Aboulela's novels: *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) and *Lyrics Alley* (2011) and her collection of short stories entitled *Coloured Lights* (2001). The notions of exile, dialogism, hybridity and third space are embodied in this thesis to highlight the female protagonists' in-between states and the reshaping of their hybrid consciousness. Through dreams, memories and nostalgia, their transitivity between two different worlds is depicted to hint to their transnational border-crossing, dialogic connections and constructive cross-cultural bridges. Consequently, by adopting a qualitative critical analytical approach based on an Islamic feminist perspective and postcolonial theory, this research work discusses migrant Muslim women's representations and the empowerment discourse that stress their hybrid identities and dialogic roles within their interstitial spaces and open new avenues for their postcolonial resistance against gender perceptions, patriarchal practices, and western hegemonic discourses that distort their image as being victims of their oppressed culture and religion.Writing back to these discourses, Leila Aboulela debunks, in her narratives, the Islamophobia and the veiling discourses and emphasizes the possibility of flexible Muslim identity and inter-religious dialogue.

Résumé

La littérature anglophone musulmane immigrante constitue un riche domaine de connaissances sur les musulmans en général et sur la vie des immigrantes musulmanes en particulier. En fait, cette littérature est considérée comme une source majeure pour étudier les expériences des immigrantes musulmanes. Basée sur la profondeur des dilemmes de transition, de relations familiales turbulentes et de spiritualité religieuse vécus par les femmes immigrées musulmanes, la recherche actuelle discute des expériences dialogiques des femmes musulmanes expatriées dans les romans suivants de l'auteure soudanaise Leila Aboulela : *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret (*2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011) et son recueil de nouvelles intitulé *Coloured Lights* (2001). Les concepts de dialogue, d'hybridité et de troisième espace ont été incarnés dans cette thèse pour mettre en lumière l'état intermédiaire et la conscience hybride des héroïnes. À travers les rêves, les souvenirs et la nostalgie, leur transition entre deux mondes différents est représentée pour indiquer leur mobilité transnationale, les liens dialogiques et les ponts de dialogue constructifs entre les cultures. En conséquence, en adoptant une approche analytique critique qualitative basée sur une perspective féministe islamique et une théorie postcoloniale, cette recherche scrute la représentation des femmes immigrées musulmanes et du discours d'autonomisation qui met l'accent sur leurs identités hybrides et leurs rôles dialogiques au sein des espaces interstitiels. Cela ouvre également de nouveaux horizons pour leur lutte contre les perceptions genrées, les pratiques patriarcales et les discours hégémoniques occidentaux qui les présentent comme des victimes opprimées de leur culture et de leur religion. En réponse à ces discours, Leila Aboulela expose, dans ses textes, le discours de l'islamophobie et le discours du hijab, et assure la possibilité d'un dialogue entre les religions tout en adoptant une identité religieuse flexible

ملخص

يعد الأدب الإسلامي المهاجر الناطق باللغة الإنجليزية مجالًا غنيًا للمعرفة حول المسلمين بشكل عام وحياة النساء المسلمات المهاجرات بشكل خاص. في الواقع، يعتبر هذا الادب مصدر رئيسي لدراسة تجارب النساء المسلمات المهاجرات. انطلاقا من عمق معضلات الانتقال و العلاقات الاسرية المضطربة والروحانية الدينية التي تعيشها النساء المسلمات المهاجرات، يناقش البحث الحالي التجارب الحوارية للمغتربات المسلمات في روايات الكاتبة السودانية ليلى أبو العلا التالية: المترجمة (1999)، المئدنة (2005) وزقاق الأغاني (2011) ومجموعتها القصصية المعنونة الاضواء الملونة (2001). وقد تجسدت مفاهيم الحوار والتهجين والفضاء الثالث في هذه الاطروحة لتسليط الضوء على الحالة البينية للبطلات وكيفية اعادة تشكيل وعيهم الهجين. من خلال الأحلام والذكريات والحنين، تم تصوير انتقالهن بين عالمين مختلفين للإشارة إلى الانتقال عبرالحدود، والروابط الحوارية، والجسور الحوارية البناءة بين الثقافات. وعليه ومن خلال اعتماد منهج تحليلي نقدي نوعي يرتكز على منظور نسوي إسلامي ونظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، يناقش هذا البحث تمثيل النساء المسلمات المهاجرات و خطاب التمكين الذي ياكد على هوياتهن الهجينة و ادوارهن الحوارية داخل الفضاءات البينية. كما يفتح افاقا جديدة لنضالهن ضد التصورات الجنسانية و الممارسات الابوية و خطابات الهيمنة الغربية التي تصورهم كضحايا مضطهدين لثقافتهم ودينهم. وردا على هذه الخطابات، تفضح ليلى أبو العلا في رواياتها خطاب الاسلاموفوبيا وخطاب الحجاب، وتؤكد على امكانية الحوار بين الاديان مع تبني هوية دينية مرنة.

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General

Introduction

Anglophone migrant Muslim literature is a literary field rich with the experiences of migrant Muslims and an important field of knowledge about Muslims in general and Muslim migrant women in particular. Its great interest is to highlight the Muslim migrants' lives and dilemmas in Western Diasporas and their transitivity between their indigenous countries and the host ones. Sims argues that an author writes to change the world by altering the way people look at reality (79). In this sense, it is clear that Anglophone migrant Muslim authors play a vital role in portraying and creating fictive worlds through their past knowledge and experiences; thereby creating new experiences and multifaceted worlds for the readers. While writing from their own socio-cultural and even ideological backgrounds, the authors affect the readers' response to the characters living within the texts and the ideaspresented in their writings so that readers can reflect and react to these ideas. Consequently, a rich field to investigate in this category is postcolonial literature.

Postcolonial literature tackles various issues of people who belong to colonial or postcolonial countries. It emphasizes the notion that travelling or immigration is the beginning of the process of dialogic contact where cultures and languagesdifferentiate, compete and merge. Generally, postcolonial writings point out that the mixture of different cultures produces confusion and fusion, coalition and diversity, contrast and contact zones, alterity and hybridity as adopted by Homi Bhabha, Mary Louis Pratt and dialogism as introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin. Being the pioneers in the discussion of these discourses, Bhabha theorizes that this mixture constructs hybrid spaces and creates third cultures or third spaces, while Mikhail Bakhtin views the impact of migrants on language and identity as performing a similar process to that theorized by Bhabha. Bhabha highlights a significant connection between transitivity, the articulation of cultures and third spaces, when he theorizes that "culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and *trans/ational*" (*Nations and Narrations* 247). The term trans/ational conveys the meaning of displacement and invokes the journeys that economic and political migrants, refugees and expatriates have in their lives. Bhabha continues his theory, stating that "culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue" (247). Bhabha's vision, here, connotes that migrants who are actively engaged in the process of cultural hybridity have been criticized for their portability to homogenize difference by privileging the experience of cosmopolitan intellectuals and by neglectingthe reality of exploitative socio-political relationships (Werbner&Modood 15). Despite these criticisms, it can be maintained that the concept isuseful to signify the continual and contingent process

of cultural interaction in concrete, particular contexts (Shohat 121). Hence, the concept of "trans/ationality" occupies a great part of Postcolonial Literature.

Given these noteworthy concepts, Postcolonial Literatureis not restricted only to ex-colonized countries. Conversely, Elleke Boehmer defines postcoloniality as: "that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical agents in an increasingly globalized world"(3), and he makes a distinction between the word postcolonial and the hyphenated word 'post-colonial', which implies the end of British colonialism in the 1950s. Under this label, literature, that takes 'the colonies' or the former colonies as its priority, is actually emphasizing the 'colonizer' identity through a relationship of assumed superiority to the former. Thus, issues such as identity, difference, Otherness and hybridity are surely significant in postcolonial literature which shows the different connotations of these concepts. In short, although there are apparent challenges to define Postcolonial Literature fully, the basic definition suggested by Yang will provide sufficient framing for this thesis: "A body of works produced by a previously colonized nation" (qtd.in Jefferson 1). Therefore, the term is applied in AnglophoneMuslim literature because it indicates the case of the writings produced either by migrant Muslim writers or in Arab Muslim countries that were under European colonization.

Accordingly, based on Yang's definition, this study takes postcoloniality as a condition that affects seriously the lives of migrant Muslims, as reflected in Aboulela's narratives. Through her characters that come from ex-colonies such as Sudan, Pakistan, Egypt and other countries, Aboulela tries to define an identity position for them as hybrid subjects located in the potcolonial centre.Arguing in the same line, Bhabha also focuses on two important concepts, hybridity and third space. In *The Location of Culture* (2012), he examines the relationship between colonizer and colonized, and what he calls "border lives" and "interstices" of culture in the postcolonial world and the West. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Bhabha confirms that the 'hybridity' created within individuals is what is of most concern and uses hybridity as a crucial concept to explain the interaction between colonizer and colonized and to theorize the mutual construction of subjectivities andthe "articulation of cultural difference", which he also refers to as a "Third Space of enunciations" (*The Location of Culture* 56). Therefore, he elucidates this concept of hybrid subjects by saying that "the demarcation of the natives is not neat and cut and dried, but a dual image; a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once" (64). In the same trend, Bhabha defines the concept of third space through its

unrepresentability as it"constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (55). In this sense, the third space is a time-bound "alien territory" that exists in some sort of a never-land between "translation and negotiation" (56).Thus, these allied relations between these nuance theories of hybridity and third Space and their merger with the concepts of postcolonial theory to convey the positioning of Muslim migrant women, are shown clearly in Aboulela's literary works.

Postcolonial theory including cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism and hybridization provides a contextual and theoretical framework for this research work. Postcolonial theorists like Fnon, 1963; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; and Bhabha, 1994 represent the core of the field of postcolonial theory. However, they are perhaps more closely affiliated with other overlapping fields such as Diaspora studies, history, anthropology, cultural and literary studies. Postcolonial theory, in particular, is one field that has accumulated a variety of ideas and concepts that have considerably shaped Diaspora studies. As an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, postcolonial theory focuses on interrelated issues of colonialism, imperialism, decolonization, literature, nation, language, and identity and consequently concentrates on migration and displacement. Briefly, this theory presents how knowledge is created and circulated by global power relations. According to Said (1978), exploitation of the colonies shaped the sense of how the colonizers regarded themselves, as colonial texts created a certain way of visualizing the natives of the colonized regions. In concurring with Said, Western argues that knowledge was and is created in comparison to an accepted norm; that of a powerful class of European (English speaking) countries. This perspective shaped a different sense of self or a different identity for the previous colonizers as well as that of the inhabitants of the colonies (Western 165). In addition to these two explanations, Ania Loomba asserts that"colonial or postcolonial identities are always oscillating, never perfectly achieved" (125). Therefore, Postcolonial theory gives great importance to the representation of people who belong to the colonies or former colonies so as to re-represent themselves to the coloniser.

It is in this same line that Edward Said’s Orientalism theory highlights the impact of the Orientalist discourse on postcolonial literary writings. It was Said's influential theory of the relationshipbetween knowledge production about the Orient and the hegemonic Orientalist discourse that highlighted the debates about the complex relations between the East and the West. Said's Orientalism analyzes the relation between the East and the West through his Gramscian-Foucauldian

lens to show how the relations between the production of knowledge, power and truth contribute in the "positional superiority" of the West (7). Said defines Orientalism as "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction . . . but also of a whole series of 'interests' which not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different world" (12). As setting the groundwork for the arguments in this thesis, Said's relevant study *Orientalism* (1978) has demonstrated the oppressive ideological discourses and practices of the West to dominate the East. For Said, in other words, Western representations of the Orient are part of a discourse that accentuates the unequal power relations between the East and the West in political and intellectual domains, promoting the theory of the Orient's alterity and normalizing such power relations in the name of the inferiority of the Orient as the West's Other for being feminine, backward, irrational, exotic, erotic, and immoral (66-67). Thus, there are, to be sure obvious similarities between the representations of Muslim women in the Orientalist discourse and in contemporary literary representations by Western writings and Media discourse.It is for this reason that migrant Muslim women's representations and experiences have become the major interest of Islamic feminism.

As a further matter, Islamic feminism has granted a great importance to the exploration of migrant Muslim women's issues. To start with, the term 'feminism' is used by Miriam Cooke in her book "*In Women Claim Islam*", to refer to Arab Muslim women who think and do something about changing expectations for Muslim women's social roles and responsibilities. It is, above all, an epistemology. Feminism provides analytical tools for assessing how expectations for men's and women's behaviour have led to unjust situations, particularly for women, seeks justice wherever it can find it, involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination and a rejection of behaviours furthering such discrimination (Cookeix-x). In this sense, contemporary Muslim feminists argue that migrant Muslim women face various representations as backward, weak and victims of their societies' traditions and backward cultures (Badran 20). In the same spirit, Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeks rights and justice for women and for men in the totality of their experience"(18). According to her, Islamic feminists resist all the patriarchal misinterpretations of the Qur'an that stand as social traditions or family laws, defend women's rights and agency and fight for equality between the sexes and social justice. They relentlessly

revolt against women's oppression, subordination and inferiority. Thus, Islamic feminism is an appropriate framework that shapes migrant Muslim women's rights and roles.

Furthermore, Muslim women's positions and roles within their families and societies have been the primary concern of Islamic feminists who struggle againstpatriarchy and gender discrimination. Generally, Arab Muslim societies are built on specific perspectives which define women as the different Other. In most contemporary Arab Muslim countries, men arealways valued more than women since customs, traditions, and social norms always subordinate women to men. This, of course, created dichotomies between men and women and led to the creation of the present process of gender differences and patriarchy which have become powerful structures that are created for many reasons, but especially for the marginalization and subordination of women. Graciela Hierro notes that genders were historically and socially constructed on the basis of sex difference (11). According to her, since male-female inequality is not a product of a biological difference but of psychological, social, and cultural differences, gender, thus, is a system of social hierarchy and an inequality of power imposed on sex that constitutes the sexualisation of power. Therefore, from then on, to distinguish among genders means to rank them. (131). Based on this concept, Arab Muslim women, like most women, have been stigmatized as the Other who is oppressed, marginalized and 'colonized' by both Western imperialism and patriarchal institutions. Therefore, migrant Muslim women writers adopt Islamic feminist principles to portray migrant Muslim women's experiences and to defend their rights in their various literary productions. And for this, Anglophone migrant Muslim literature embraces Islamic feminists concerns to highlight gender disparities and patriarchal practices against migrant Muslim women.

Anglophone migrant Muslim literature, thus, represents the Arab Muslim countries and provides an authentic image and understanding to their societies and cultures. It is a gust of ideas that illuminate the imagination of inquisitive minds to clarify the ambiguous and obscured concepts, debunk the disseminated stereotypes and create transnational understanding where comprehensibility has far been neglected. In general, Anglophone migrant Muslim literature is defined as writings that write back to hegemonic discourses, deconstructing the preconceived images and presentations and looking for authentic notions and representations of the real self. According to Tlahite, this literature "contributed to [the emergence of] the idea that both culture and identity are the products of discourse and that as invented, unstable discursive fabrications, they could be transformed, recreated, redefined"

(60). In short, the increasing interest in Anglophone migrant Muslim literature has led to the growing body of studies on migrant Muslim writings.

Anglophone migrant Muslim writers are regarded as the representatives of their nations and the gatekeepers of their cultures. The distance from their culture of departure offers these writers the possibility to gain new perspectives as they are outside the indigenous social position. In their displacement, they occupy a space of what Turner calls 'liminality' that many scholars have made use of it to describe the exilic condition. According to Turner's definition, liminality is a transitional period from one state to another. The "liminal" in the words of Turner, is "ambigious neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification, he passes through a symbolic domain that hasfew or none of the attributes of his past or coming state"[1]. Adopting this understanding of this term, Said describes exile in his essay "'*Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals*", as that most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware at least of two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that is *contrapuntal*(115). Therefore, Anglophone migrant Muslim writers' works traverse national and transnational divides and, thus, show that questions of identity, agency and representation are negotiated mutually across such boundaries. Hence, all the narratives discussed in this thesis explore this reciprocal relationship between cultures and between the locals and the migrants whose presence, in a different place, speaks of the "history that happened elsewhere" (Bhabha, *Nartions and Narrations* 168-9). All these texts show that most of the migrants struggle to build up these social networks, which would afford them the susceptibility of dialogic relations and belonging.

Undoubtedly, among Anglophone migrant Muslim writers are a great number of Muslim women writers who make a great contribution to the field of fiction writing. Using creative hybrid and dialogic socio-cultural competencies, these Muslim women writers have been influenced by their migrant experiences and have greatly influenced the discourse about migrant Muslim women who are poised between the colonial and postcolonial history of their countries, their indigenous cultures and the cultures conceived as different or might be considered hybrid. It should not be forgotten, however, that the hybridity of migrant Muslim writings is the result of writers who produce a narrative able to deliver migrant Muslim people from the status of the rejected Other. Thus, it is through hybrid Anglophone

[1] Helleh Ghorashi. Ways to Survive, Battles to Win: Iranian Women Exiles in the Netherland . Nova Publishers, New York, 2003, p.125

Muslim literature that authors are able to "write back" against the literature of colonialism. Through their characters, the ingenuity of self-representation of their characters adds a sense of authenticity to their texts and the narratives that compose this corpus as well. Thereby, these writers have produced new literary tools to address postcolonial Muslim identity and its role in their dialogic experiences. In their texts, Muslim migrant characters arguably live dynamic lives, functioning to preserve their values, yet continually battling for a hybrid space. This characterization expresses the flexibility of the contemporary Muslim identity portrayed in these texts, its dynamic evolving state, and the roots of its hybridity. Therefore, the female migrant Muslim writers adopt those different artistic literary tools to portray their narratives' female characters.

Among Anglophone migrant Muslim women writers Leila Aboulela is a case in point. This Sudanese Muslim woman spent many years of her childhood in Sudan, and then moved with her husband to Scotland. Her life there can be described as an exile from her homeland where she had to face representations and prejudices as a Muslim veiled woman. She has been described as a 'hybrid' writer, a label that is difficult to deal with intellectually and literarily; however, it is a suitable adjective since she blends Arabic words and idioms into English and fuse two different worlds together. Therefore, relying on Aboulela's label as a "hybrid writer", her narratives will be investigated from a hybrid perspective in this thesis. Her writings, then, strongly question the elements of the Western discourse on Muslim women's identities and experiences as being miserable and victims under Islam or as being 'the exotic' Other to the West; and defy the stereotype that Muslim identity is imposed on them and their experiences are a monolithic one. Therefore, each narrative emphasizes one or two aspects of this counter-discourse and presents new portrayals of Muslim women experiences as being defiant participants in the dialogic process between nations and are able to open dialogic contacts with the Other.Furthermore, her texts create positive images and explore deep aspects of the complexity of migrant Muslim women identities and experiences. They arguably criticize the stereotyping of Muslims, especially migrant Muslim women, transcend the condemnation of Muslim woman's Othering and critically advocate for the discourse of Arab Muslim women empowerment.

The Egyptian-Sudanese-born author Leila Aboulela is the first British Cain prize-winner for African Writing in 2000 for her short story *The Museum*. She finished her degree in economics at Khartoum University, and then she obtained a master's degree at London School of Economics. In general, her writings portray the exile of her migrant female Muslim characters who engage with an

Islamic worldview in order to shed light on the role of Islam in Muslim migrant identity formation. "Her literary works, which appeared partly as a response to the outbursts of negative sentiments against Arabs and Muslims after the Gulf War, is an attempt to imagine the world through the eyes of a believing Muslim in alignment with 'the Islamic logic'(Toossi, 86). Aboulela's fiction was also labeled by some Arab Critics as 'halal'fiction (Ghazoul 12-18) since she is one of the pioneers to defend Islam as a religion of peace and justice as against the spread notions of violence and terrorism. Aboulela focuses on the importance of Islam in shaping her Muslim character's identities and hybrid consciousness through depicting the challenges they have to face in Western communities. Therefore, her fiction is an act of 'writing back' to western hegemonic discourses about Islam and Muslim women since she is concerned with Muslim women's religious perspectives and greatly interested in the binaries of self and Other and the need to negotiate the differences, construct dialogic bridges and open hybrid spaces. She also strives towards familiarizing Muslims through deconstructing the differences that divides them from their foreign counterparts and native families.

It is noteworthy to mention that Aboulela's narrativesmake, as postcolonial literature usually does, an intensive attempt by a 'Third World' agent to produce a work of literature in the language and the setting of the colonizer. The concept of the 'Third world' has generally an intellectual and political connotation. It arguably refers to the ex-colonized nations or the ex-colonized land, whereas the postcolonial concept is argued to be used to depict a home for displaced people in the period of decolonization.And while the' Third world' discourse restrained diversity perspectives within nations in order to propagate a homogenous anti-colonial narrative, the postcolonial discourse has tended to privilege diasporic hybrid identities, where transnational experiences of those displaced people and their relation to their nation state of origin and destination, have been illuminated. This results in demonstrating opposite sentiments of the colonized and the language used by the colonized writers. These sentiments are usually revealed in the representations used in the writers' depiction of the homeland and the coloniser's land. At this point, it suffices to note that Aboulela's narratives echo the idea of new relationships becoming possible in this interstitial space, because the Other is not swallowed up by universalist transcendence (Gyssels&Hoving11). Subsequently, through migration and displacement, Aboulela's characters' dialogic experiences are clarified and stressed.

Through reading Aboulela's narratives, the reader can easily notice that she uses nuanced literary strategies with which, as a woman writer, 'de-colonise' ethnocentric European and African discourses,

and thus, create her own space of hybridity and cross-cultural convergence. It is plain that Aboulela's writings, by going beyond cultural-national categories and boundaries, introduce vital alternative for cross-cultural and transnational dialogue in a manner that facilitates multi-cultural co-existence in dialogical hybrid spaces. Responding to this alternative, Aboulela's dialogic discourse makes a critical contribution to the opening and broadening of both European and African literary canons. Therefore, Leila Aboulela coins the term **'**New Orientalist Narratives**'** in her writings to refer to the anti-Orientalist discourse and a host of other narratives that are now proliferating and promise the authentic image of their nations. Based on this definition then, Aboulela's narratives consciously perform a job similar to that of the anti-Orientalist discourse in providing the ground for the challenge of cultural and political domination of the West over the East and the opening of dialogic spaces between the two schisms. Their primary strategies for the construction of dialogical relationships are, first, the deconstruction of the present atmosphere of fear and Islamophobia that distorts the image of Islam as a backward religion, and second, the authentic portrayal of the East and its peoples, with a focus on Muslim women's image as being the major issue that stamps the inevitability of the conflict between Islam and the West.

As a migrant Muslim veiled woman writer, Aboulela experiences the paradox of cultural, national and religious 'in-betweeness', not only through ethnic-cultural labels but also through gender ones. Thus, her resistance against the marginalisation and categorisation of the migrant Muslim woman turns out to be a multi-faceted task in her writings. She also resists Islamophobia and the representation of Arab Muslim woman as a victim of an oppressive patriarchal culture and fixed gender roles by means of re-conceptualisation and re-contextualisation which is defined by the linguist Per Linell as: "the dynamic transfer-and transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context (the context being in reality a matrix or field of contexts) to another. Through, breaking genre boundaries and [2]" literary norms, she also creates a combination of literary traditions and subsequently her own dialogic and hybrid spaces are both of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts. She introduces the creativity of dialogic narratives, of cross-cultural, transnational, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious perspectives, by

[2] Per Linell. Discourse across Boundaries: On Re-contextulizations and the Blending of Voices in Voices in Professional Discourse, Routledge. New York1998, p.154

interspersing them with notions of gender, diaspora, continuous conscious and subconscious transitivity, religious spirituality and cultural hybridity.

Notably, the Arab Muslim woman's struggle against patriarchy and gender discrimination dominates Leila Aboulela's narratives since they are part of literatures of both post-independence Arab Muslim countries as well as Anglophone Muslim migrant writings. As a female Muslim writer, Leila Aboulela adopts Islamic feminist concerns to reject all gender biases and patriarchal practices against migrant Muslim women through her literary texts. Her literary texts reveal that the rebellion of the Arab Muslim woman, mainly migrant Muslim woman, is a double one in which she rebels against both negative stereotypes and representations, and the restrictive rules of patriarchy in her native society. Therefore, although her two novels: *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) are two distinct novels, some very similar trends can be traced in each one and, consequently, they will be discussed together in the following chapters.

For the purpose of this study, it is of essence to speak of Aboulela's literary corpus that covers her fiction published in English-speaking countries in the West between 1999 and 2011, which explores Muslim women's dilemmas in both their native communities and foreign ones. Her collection of thirteen short stories, *Coloured Lights,* to which her short story,*The Museum*belongs, was published in 2001. Later, Aboulela enriched the literary scene by two diasporic novels *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) that generally explore the dialogic experiences that exist in the spaces between East and West and an ingenious patriotic saga family novel *Lyrics Alley* (2011)that portrays life within the homeland borders(Sudan) during the 1950's and portrays transnational dialogic relations among different characters from Sudan and Egypt. However, since Aboulela has written discursive narratives on themes ranging from Muslim women's inner-faith conflicts in the host cultures to their dynamic roles within these societies and her native ones, I have chosen only the short stories that have reflections on the theme of the thesis and that support my arguments. This corpus has been chosen for critical exploration and reflection in this thesis to analyze how Muslim women's hybrid identities and dialogic experiences are reflected in both the Western and Muslim contexts, and how Aboulela contributes to the creation of hybrid female characters that struggle against hegemonic forms of gender discrimination and conventional images of oppressed Muslim women.

Central to this thesis is the question of how Leila Aboulela's fictional texts create dialogic spaces through the conflated dilemmas of transitivity, faith, and family relations. Generally speaking, literary texts may contain various themes, characters, images and morals but, if they wish to be taken as dialogic narratives, these texts must be scrutinized from hybridized angles. Also, most migrant Muslim writers' stories and texts that take dialogic spaces and hybridity as their starting points, though widely read, are generally restricted to postcolonial characters in foreign settings, ignoring their dilemmas and challenges in their homelands or when they come back to their native societies after migration. In contrast, Aboulela's texts are postcolonial in that they reflect their characters' lives both in their homelands and non-native countries as well. These fictional texts are called postcolonial for a number of reasons: Firstly, because of their 'counter-narrative' technique that writes back to dominant Western discourse about Muslim women. Secondly, these fictional texts are postcolonial due to their Muslim women's representation from non-Euro-centric perspectives. Thirdly, these texts belong to a postcolonial context because of the portrayal of Muslim women's authentic image from variant social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, Aboulela's fiction gives voice to those 'hitherto silenced' group of people, Muslim women, and, at least in part, "write back to correct and undo Western hegemony" (Mishra and Hodge 378; Gugelberger 582). In this context, the following research questions are very salient:

1-How are these concepts of transitivity, faith and family intertwined in Aboulela’s narratives?

2- How does the writer use Muslim woman’s empowerment narrative to emphasize her dialogic role within her family and society?

3-What are the dialogic aspects attributed to the Muslim character in these texts?

4-How does the writer negotiate through her writings the issue of cross-cultural dialogue and the East-West encounter?

With this in mind, this thesis' critical interest in Leila Aboulela's fiction calls for the investigation of these questions. Accordingly, the first hypothesis to propose is that the Sudanese author Leila Aboulela generally weaves these concepts in complex human relations. They are the bases on which most of her narratives are built. The transition of the characters from one place to another and from a particular time to another would put them in a dilemma of living in a new place and remembering the old one; interacting with a new culture and trying to preserve their native one; living in the present and clinging to the past, accepting Western modern life and yearning for their indigenous traditions. Also, the notion of family is an important concept in Aboulela's fiction. It is the axe of her characters' lives

and the source of social, psychological and economic support. Therefore, her characters'transitivity would put them in various dilemmas of broken family ties,incommunicability, misunderstandings, hatred, and divorce, which affect directly their self-perception and the perception of the Other. Moreover, since religion is a vital part in Aboulela's characters' lives, they unwillingly find themselvesin religious dilemmas of living a secular mode of life or choosing a religious way of living, mainly a devout Islamic one, which makes her characters go through serene spiritual journeys to reshape their religious identities, to challenge the perception of the ' Muslim Other' and to forge for inter-faith dialogue.

Second hypothesis is that Aboulela's protagonists would generally be female characters who belong to different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. They are spirited fighters, always seeking to extend their significant dialogic role and influence within the family and out in the wider world. Thus, her texts emphasize the Arab Muslim women's roles in taking care of their families, fighting against patriarchy and contributing positively in the society. Being wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, Arab Muslim women share the great part of the conservation and stability of the family and the improvement of the society. Thus, these fictional texts can be considered as mirrors reflecting the positive dialogic role of Muslim women.

Third hypothesis is that the religious dilemma is an important issue that prevail Aboulela's narratives. According to Aboulela, religiosity or religious spirituality is centred in the inner-life of most of her charactersand affect their relations with others in different ways. Their religious beliefs would be the primary motive that makes them reach the right decisions and make the suitable choices in their lives. They would also enable them to challenge and overcome the difficulties which they face within their countries or foreign ones. The spiritual journeys, that some of her characters would undergo as the case in *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005),are symbols of their inner-sense struggles to find peace and solace. Therefore, although these two distinct novels are different, they will be discussed together in the following chapters because they have some very similar themes in common. Being Muslims puts Aboulela's migrant characters in a dilemma of maintaining their religious beliefs and practices, mainly the dilemma of inter-religious marriage which demands the conversion of one of the couples. Even the turning point or the moment of epiphany in some of her characters' lives is depicted from a religious point of view to argue for the dialogic role of religion in their lives. Additionally, Aboulela's texts embody many aspects and beliefs of the Muslim religion, such as: praying at home or

in the mosque, fasting Ramadan, eating *Halal* food, wearing the scarf (*Hijab*) and going to pilgrimage (*Haj*). However, they also shed light on the forbidden practices that they have to avoid such as: parents' disobedience, abortion, eating pork and drinking wines. All these practices are astutely performed by the characters within hybridized spaces and dialogic contexts.

Fourth hypothesis is that these Muslim narratives have been chosen mainly to explore a wide range of transnational issues such as East-West encounters and cross-cultural dialogue, and to argue for the cross-cultural relations and the emergence of hybrid identities that forge a new path between East and West and mediate different cultures together. These writings' plots negotiate the reflection of their nations and cultures in the western mirror and reject the available clear-cut options of Arab/Muslim or Western/non-Muslim. Through the encounters of their different characters, translatability and the effective rhetoric of the contact zone and Third space, they call for an acute awareness of the binary oppositions: East and West and the racist propaganda of the Western and Arab/Muslim. They write back to the mis-representation of Muslims and the ready-made assumptions about Islam as a religion of terrorism and suppression of woman and subvert the discourse of the clash of Islam and the West.

To better investigate the core of this work, this study adopts a qualitative analytical approach dependingmore on postcolonial theory and Islamic feminism.This approach is of an utter importance to reach an in-depth understanding of Aboulela's Muslim counter-narratives that portray migrant Muslim women's dialogic experiences and their exilic dilemmas in a globalized world for the benefit of English-speaking audience. Relying on this approach, the authentic images of Muslim women and their roles in constructing dialogic bridges and hybrid spaces are highlighted through deconstructing the popular representations and stereotypes that prevail Western culture and media.Accordingly, this approach proves true to this research that is induced around two interrelated arguments. First, this study argues that migrant Muslim women engage into dialogic experiences within their new environments that manifest in varying degrees the articulation of their flexible hybrid identities within mostly effective liminal spaces, contact zones or Third spaces. Second, this thesis concentrates on the analysis of Aboulela's narratives as dialogic narratives from a point that challenges the Orientalist frames of reference about Muslim women in the last and present century. Using a critical conceptualization of hybrid identity, third space and contact zone, and focusing on such often very complex places of in-betweeness can serve as an analytical tool to read Aboulela's literary texts and better understand the circumstances and day-to-day experiences of migrant Muslim women asrepresented in contemporary

migrant Muslim literature. Therefore, by approaching Leila Aboulela's dialogic texts, from these two angles, it will be clarified how migrant Muslim women may feel temporarily out of place or displaced, but are always in a process of reformulating their hybrid identities and constructing their hybrid spaces. Thus, this perspective offers a new framework through which to examine the relationship between migrant Muslim women and their environments and, therefore, considered as a different paradigm from the conventional theorizations of exile. It is for this purpose that this thesis is written and divided into the following chapters.

The first chapter will provide the reader with theoretical considerations to approach dialogic narratives. It focuses mainly on Muslim Immigrant literature, hybridity in Muslim narratives and Muslim travel narratives. The second chapter, on the other hand will be devoted to investigate the between-worlds dilemma endured by Aboulela's Muslim female characters and their transitivity from their native countries to foreign ones. Specifically, it highlights the exiles of the Muslim female characters, their struggle between cultural inheritance and resistance and the negotiation of their hybrid identities. The third chapter will shed light on Aboulela's theme of family and the discourse of Arab Muslim woman's empowerment. The fourth chapter is finally devoted to highlight the discourse of religious identity and religious spirituality or religiosity. It will engage with the pictures of Islamophobia that distorted the image of Islam and Muslims and concentrates on the way these narratives show their preference for an interpretation of flexible Muslim identity, which importantly takes both attachment to Islam and flexibility in its interpretation.

The transition from chapter one to chapter four is, thus, a journey through Aboulela’s fictive world to afford precise and detailed answers. Indeed, this thesis examines the ways in which postcolonial Anglophone Migrant Muslim literature constitutes a counter-narrative strategy that enables migrant Muslim female writers, such as Leila Aboulela, to participate in writing back to these western hegemonic discourses and representations. It is also the focus of this thesis to highlight Aboulela's transnational narratives as laden with a dialogic discourse and a hybrid consciousness where Muslim identities and awareness are influenced by national and transnational boundaries as much as by cross-cultural encounters. In addition to the theoretical perspectives and the analysis of the writer's narratives, the thesis includes attention to and the discussion of the position of her migrant Muslim female protagonists in the context of cross-culturality, trans-nationality, and cultural hybridity. These protagonists, also, confront issues of in-betweeness, misrepresentation and negative stereotypes in the midst of other intersecting transnational dilemmas.

Chapter One

Literary Intersections: Locating Leila Aboulela's Postcolonial Muslim Diasporic Transcultural Narratives within Hybrid Dialogic Contexts

Introduction

To start this chapter, it is so important to give a clear-cut explanation of the narrative notion in the first place. As a distinct form of qualitative research, narrative can be used as a method of inquiry in order to examine past experiences and decolonize minds (qtd. in Willinsky in Abdi & Richardson viii). A significant characteristic of narrative is that it can allow for new meanings and diverse ways of knowing to emerge so that we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form (Taylor 51-52). Also, narrative is used by postcolonial writers, as a deconstructing methodology in which, according to Said (1978), indigenous people are responsible to provide their narratives to counter the perspective of outsiders. In this sense, Narrative concept is one of the founding stones that cover various themes of Orientalist discourse, postcolonial immigrant literature, travel literature, gender issues and the pervasive tensions between East and West in Aboulela's works.The term "Narrative", in so far as it will be used to refer to her works, means the articulation of the author's hybrid ideology achieved by the counter-narrative discourse which writes back to the western hegemonic discourses. In particular, Aboulela's texts are investigated as narratives that counter these hegemonic discourses and to write back to the negative stereotypes of Muslim women as victims of their faith and culture.It is through the characters' dialogic voices informed by both her novels and short stories, that Aboulela highlights the reality that migrant Muslim women's voices are more than physiological factors; rather their dialogic voices are the real articulation of their authentic identities and experiences. It is, thus, the dialogic narrative mode that permits these women to be literaryrivals and to compete with the male and the western norms in order to make their voices heard.

Aboulela's narratives, actually, reinvent dialogic experiences and construct hybrid spaces within postcolonial migrant contexts. Through their characters' experiences of migration, family disrupted relations and religious spiritual journeys, they portray authentic images of migrant Muslim women's lives. Her hybrid characters are flexible with an ever-changing self-discovery in their loyalties and less rigid in the assertion of their belonging. In this regard, this chapter seeks to explore Leila Aboulela's narratives as belonging to the emergent body of 'Postcolonial Muslim Diasporic Transcultural Narratives' in English. In analyzing the category of 'Muslim narratives' in English, I cite Amin Malak's *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005). In his book, Malak emphasizes the importance of the religious inspiration in the creation of literary productions within the world of Islam.

In this book, Malak investigates the ways in which Islam impacts the literary productions of writers who have Islamic backgrounds and write in English. He clearly argues for the consideration of religion as

an important component of identity. According to him, three criteria function as the common feature for the works treated in the essays in his book: the writers' primary contact with Islam, the important role Islam plays in their fictional writings, and the use of English as the medium of communication. In so doing, he highlights new possibilities for the study of literature produced by writers who share the same religious background, but who do not necessarily belong to the same categories of class, race, gender, or even nationality. Malak's exploration of Muslim authors who write in English and derive their literary inspiration from their Islamic experiences provides the reader with an authentic and inspiring resource for the investigation and appreciation of Islam and Muslim identity.His book explicitly investigates Muslim identity and language politics adopted by Muslim writers who, according to his argument, appropriate "a language with a perceived hostile history toward Islam" not only render it "a site of encounter for cultures and peoples on equal terms, and thus shift from resistance to reconciliation, but also fertilize, muslimize, and enrich it" (11). The same Islamic literary prosperity is found in the narratives of Muslim women writers, which for Malak, reveals a clear sense of pride in their Islamic cultural heritage; and the most intriguing perhaps is his assessment of Muslim feminists (11). He highlights the eloquent, assertive, and distinct voices of women writers who, while rejecting the abusive patriarchal practices in both Western and Islamic societies, retain a neutral attitude toward Western feminism, and speak essentially for themselves and in their own voices without reproducing the views of Western feminist theorists.

Throughout his book, Malak also treats the presence of Islam in the discussed literary texts with a potent attention. In fact, his book has twofold aims, the first one is exploring Muslim narratives in English, and the second one is to unveil the oppressive forces within Islam and the Western hegemonic discourses against Islam. He calls for a better appreciation of Islamic values, and he proposes a fresh concept that "foregrounds the cultural and civilizational contexts of Islam as revealed in Muslim narratives in English" (152). His accurate analysis of these narratives provides a real portrait of Islamic norms and Muslims, and opens new spaces for cultural encounter. Muslim Narratives, thus, serves as a paradigm to promote dialogue and peace rather than clash and hegemony between civilizations through emphasizing East-West dynamic and complex interactions that come into play with literature produced in English by writers who belong to a Muslim culture. Accordingly, the use of the term 'Muslim' in Aboulela's narratives regards Islam as a world view and as a faith that affects Muslim people's perspectives and individual lives in various ways. Belonging to this body of Postcolonial Muslim Diasporic Transcultural Literature, Aboulela's texts discuss the Muslim characters' experiences and dilemmas out of the contradiction of dealing positively with the

distortion caused by the representation and stereotyping of Muslim women in the West, by blurring the lines of assimilation and misrepresentation and displaying a multifaceted dialogic hybrid self.

I.1.Leila Aboulela's Postcolonial Muslim Diasporic Transcultural Narratives

In postcolonial era, English has become the official language in some of the ex-colonized countries and some Muslim writers from these countries together with migrant Muslim writers launched their authentic narratives about the Muslim world and Muslim issues and experiences, using this language.Generally, postcolonial migrant Muslim narratives in English deal with the sensibilities of being a migrant Muslim in the West and reveal mainly the complexities embedded in the notion of being a devout Muslim. Belonging to this type of narratives, Aboulela's writings attempt to refute the monolithic conception and distorted images of Muslims accumulated inthe atmosphere of Islamophobia and distrust. These narratives write back to the discourse of the clash of civilizations through crossing the geographical borders and the embodiment of dialogic contexts and hybrid perspectives. Additionally, the presence of Muslims in Western countries encourages the production of 'Muslim narratives' in English by many migrant Muslim writers who are defined as ethnic minority writers and whose works are referred to as minority literary productions despite their dissemination and fame in the western literary scene. In this sense, Michael A. Bucknor explains the paradox: "On the one hand, ethnic minority writers are given much public and academic support, while, on the other hand, the very same institutions tend to reduce them to 'ethnic ghettos' by racially and ethnically marking their works" (13). Moreover, being part of this category of minority literature, Leila Aboulela's writings are also categorized within other different literary intersections: Postcolonial, Muslim, Diasporic and transcultural categories.

I.1.1. Postcolonial Anglophone Muslim Literature

The emergent body of Postcolonial Anglophone Muslim Literature is, in fact, a part of a larger field of literary productions. This literature touches various fields such as Anglophone Muslim minority literature, Anglophone Muslim Immigrant literature, or Muslim Transcultural Literature. This body of literature tries to make sense of the non-Western writers'dual or multiple cultural and ethnic heritages of their home and host countries. It is also connected to places where the literary, social, cultural and political traditions have been affected by postcolonial perspectives.In an interview with Professor Andrea Kempf, she argued that "Instead of being viewed as literary texts and assessed by literary standards, the literature

produced by non-Western writers is viewed as windows to the inside, granting a glimpse into the oppression of Third World women"(qtd. in Ozer11). In general, Postcolonial Anglophone Muslim literature is actually situated within this larger surround and it is engaged with the discussion of the major issues of Islam and Muslims.

One of the major producers of Postcolonial Anglophone literature is the fast flourishing field of Anglophone Muslim writings that bring Arab Muslim and English worlds into contact. Anglophone Muslim literary productions gained particular prevalent reputation after the terrorist attacks of September, 11th, 2001 as an attempt to react to the subsequent distorted images of Arabs and Muslims. The emergence and development of this literature has been so fast that the homogenized notion of an Islamic world has been deconstructed in Western thought through revealing the diverse heritages of Islamic nations and highlighting the diversity of the Islamic world's cultures and traditions. Anglophone Muslim writings are also tied to places where the literary, social, cultural and political traditions have been impacted by Islam, whether as a dominant religion or a minor one, and Anglophone Muslim writers have been particularly vigorous in the confrontation of Orientalist stereotypes and mis-representations of Muslim women and Islam. Said clarifies that "Orientalist discourse can explain most of the more recent representations of Islam and appearances of Islam in English literature, especially after the middle of the eighteenth century" (Said, Orientalism 165).Therefore, as a reaction to this Orientalist ideology, the demarcation of Muslim identity has been at the core of Anglophone Muslim writers' texts.

In general, the starting point of people's identities is often situated in their homes and families during their childhood. It has been mentioned previously that home is usually considered as the starting point of constructing their identity, as it is the place where the formation of their identity begins. This identity, which is the essenceof any discussion of culture, is defined by Stuart Hall not as "an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent," but as "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation"("The Question of Cultural Identity" 222). This production has to be seen as embedded in the discourses of history and culturesince it is evident that "identities are not static or predefined but infinitely malleable"(Woodward 313). In this sense, cultural identities come from somewhere and have histories, transcending place and time. Therefore, cultural identities in Hall's view are "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us"(Hall 16).This means that being always in a constant change, identities are constructed and reconstructed and persistently negotiated in accordance with the changing circumstances of

a certain epoch and specific place.A brief look into human history, thus, unveils how every epoch has its own concerns and conceptions on the identity formation issue, which ultimately induced discourses that function as basis for evaluation on which identities are formulated. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo continual renovation. In concurring, Hall asserts that far from beingeternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous changes of history, culture and power (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). Therefore, to delineate the characteristics of Muslim identity, an investigation of the term 'Muslim' is required.

In order to specify the factors of Muslim identity formation, my approach to the concept of 'Muslim' in Anglophone Muslim literature needs to be clarified.The first time the word Muslim was introduced in literature was shortly after 9/11, when Professor Kempf wrote an article entitled *The Rich World of Islam: Muslim Fiction,* that contributed in the delineation of an innovative area of writing. In so doing, her 2001 article, along with Professor Amin Malak's work on *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* in 2005, outlines a new categorization in terms of literary analysis and defines a pioneering area of writing. In an interview with Professor Kempf (2008), she suggested:

> Instinctively, I recognized that the authors were not necessarily Arabs or wrote in Arabic….the authors come from many places: Senegal, Bosnia, Turkey, Albania, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, and Morocco, etc. as well as the Middle East. Many of them do not write in Arabic, but they share a common bond as Muslims. (128)

Accordingly, a new generation of Muslim writers from various localities has started materializing distinct parameters of their Muslim identities through their literature. This flourishing body of literature has appeared, at least partly, as a reply to the needs of Muslims who are not only trying to cling to the principles of their culture and religion, but are also interested to transmit their authentic images, culture and religion to the Other.

Correspondingly, the use of the term 'Muslim' in Leila Aboulela's narratives is more cultural and religious than political. Aboulela as Muslim veiled woman author is firmly attached to the area of 'Muslim women writings', a point she has made clear in her narratives set mainly between Sudan and Britain. Though all her texts predominantly characterized a hybrid Muslim identity, her protagonists are identified in her texts as 'Muslims' for the purpose of the narratives' plots, not the personal involvement of the author. More particularly, Aboulela's writings are also considered as a rapidly growing body of Muslim narratives,

written in English and published in the West because they portray a world based religious principles of pious Muslims in Western societies, where Islam is a minority religion.

Though Islam is a minority religion in Europe, Aboulela's characters' religious belonging is well stressed in her whole literary works. The term Muslim is recurrent in her narratives because it allows, first, for the particularities of individual representations influenced by historical, political, social, ethnic, and cultural variances of the Islamic world without making a claim to represent in a prescriptive correct picture. Second, since the focus is on Aboulela's works as literary productions, narratives in which religious principles occupy a positive dialogic focal point in the lives of the protagonists are deliberately selected. And third, the term allows for the inclusion of Leila Aboulela, a migrant Muslim woman, as an author of "Muslim Migrant narratives" in English. This inclusion serves to shake the popular notion about the credibility of her indigenous knowledge over that of the foreigners about the culture and religion she represents.Furthermore, it opens up new avenues for hybrid identifications and conveys the focus from the author to the narratives themselves as hybrid works. The primary concern of her narratives is, thus, the thematic issues of migrant Muslim experiences and the creative hybrid contexts in this fast growing transnational world of Muslim people in postcolonial times and in the context of globalization. In concurring, Ali Mazrui calls one of the salient features of the second half of twentieth century,"the intensified demographical presence of Muslims in Western societies-the 'Muslimization' of the West" (15). Hence, through her Muslim migrant narratives that dare to walk the tightrope between representing Muslim women and the difficulties of stereotyping, Aboulela is able to think out of the box and write against the main stream.

Consequently, writing stories of Muslim women from an Islamic perspective makes Aboulela's fiction one of the first paradigms of "Islamic literature". Ferial Ghazoul argued that her works were one of the first cases of Islamic-informed writings which took place on the international literary scene and called her fiction "Halal Literature" (2001). According to her, "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" (Ghazoul 12-18). In fact, Aboulela gives a new interpretation of religion in her characters' lives so that Islam re-shapes their lives and behaviours.However, Aboulela's characters are not ideal samples of devout Muslims or perfect people whose behaviours are always veracious; rather the vices and defects of some of her characters are portrayed as well. In her narratives, the benevolent and the virulent of Muslim communities are represented together, and the prejudgments and the bigotry of some Muslim people and

even the misogyny of some Muslim men, are portrayed and criticized. Further, her narratives encompass flawed characters who are depicted as "trying to practice their faith or make sense of God's will in difficult circumstances"(Ghazoul 12-18).Generally, her narratives revere Muslim culture at many points, though they criticize it at many other points.

The portrait of Islam that comes out of Aboulela's narratives has several facets. Aboulela's texts are not only the voice of Islam, but they are also concerned with some interpretations of Islam. More than a portrait of didactic Islam, her fiction is concerned with difficulties and opportunities of being Muslim in contemporary Europe and reflects Muslim women's struggle of living in-betweeness.Her narratives portray this struggle between Islam and the West in an attempt to correct the misperceptions of Muslims in the West, mainly their perception as Others. Many in the West consider Islam as a religion of uncivilized standards while Muslims perceive the West as a threat to the existence of their religion, cultural values and moral codes.Aboulela asserts that the first time she decided to write *The Translator* and *Coloured Lights* was induced by the rancor of the British media towards Arabs and Muslims during the First Gulf War. When she was asked about the direct reason that urged her to write, she answered: "Just to express this feeling of being a Muslim, Arab, African woman in the West"(Abu-Lughod 785). This claim emphasizes all three identities and distinguishes them from each other so that her religion, ethnicity, and nationality are all considered in comparison to one entity**,** the West. Nevertheless, Aboulela writes these narratives in an attempt to reconcile Islam and the West through dialogue. This dialogue is initiated through using mainly Arab Muslim voices to respond to Western distorted images of Islam and to promote it as a peaceful and tolerant religion. Hence, the use of English by Aboulela and Anglophone Muslim writers, as a language of writing and expression of Muslim issues, has become an urgent necessity in the Western literary atmosphere.

The knowledge of the Other's language is part and parcel of the process of dialoguing and interacting with the English Western audience. In general, language is a medium of communication that differentiates human beings from other life forms and determines people's relations with the outside world. Martin Heidegger asserts that "language is not word, but way of speaking. It mirrors the state of mind and the inner mood of being; so, revealing something about the individual" (Heidegger 205).He emphasizes that language is the articulation of reality because through language we are concerned with speaking and listening to the unspoken and when language is used to direct attention to a problem it is called "articulation"(205). In this sense, Aboulela managed to enter her characters' worlds by articulating their

stories and allowing them to share their experiences. The narratives told permitted her to arrive at Heidegger's realization of reality. Thus, the concept of language is very important in the investigation of Aboulela's narratives, as it helps to explore her Muslim women's authentic worlds through English words.

The use of English by Muslim authors as a medium of expression and translation draw these writers to a poised position between their native cultures and the foreign ones. The major use of English in their writings does not imply an acceptance of foreign values and codes, but the major purpose is to use English for cross-cultural communication, translate their cultures and traditions to the Other, convey their cultural values and norms and articulate their authentic identities. M.Q.Khan asserts that the postcolonial writers tried to acclimatize their indigenous cultures and traditions in English (Khan 6).Therefore, the use of English as a medium of writing in migrant Muslim women writers' fiction has eased the transmission of their worlds, cultures and traditions into the Westsince non-Western English authors are able to express their cultures through English with piercing detail and insight into both cultures.

Also, Aboulela's main characters are confined betweentwo worlds: the Arab Muslim world and the Western world and two languages Arabic and English. On a linguistic level, although the language used is English, Aboulela employs Arabic expressions, proverbs and words. She merges the two languages, cultures, and traditions in an attempt to prove that the transaction between cultures is a mutual process. She subtly gives an accurate picture of weddings, funerals, family, social affairs andpolitics in Sudan and Scotland. Through these pictures and descriptions, she allows for new amalgamations to arise from dialogue between cultures, which would put an end to the binary categories of the past and pave the way to new models of cultural exchange.In the same line, Mona Fayed argues that literaryworks produced by Arab writers who write in the European languages of their colonizers are stamped with inevitable hybridity of cultural practices (147-60). Accordingly, through the use of English language and hybrid characters, Aboulela adopts a dialogic discourse to assert migrant Muslim women's identities, disrupt the hegemonic Western discourses and redefine their histories in hybrid spaces. In general, her fictional works are described as intermediaries between different cultures as well as between Arabic and English and stand as an example of balancing her Muslims' ties to both their native communities and foreign societies. Therefore, constructing Muslim hybrid identities can only be achieved in transcultural contexts.

I.1.2. Muslim Transcultural Literature

It is also worth mentioning in this context that there is another trend in literary studies that might characterize Muslim Literature as Transnational, Transcultural or Cross-cultural literature, and stress how Muslim writers and their narratives' protagonists are not represented in terms of clear-cut national belongings. The theoretical discussions of this thesis approved the hypothesis underlying the principle theme that both Immigration Literature and Cross-cultural Literature are hybrid. Steiner refers to Cross-cultural Literature as an avenue to open up "cracks of light" between people who would otherwise not come into contact with each other (12).Her symbolic imagery of monochrome light changing into colour reflects a visual picture of dialogic processes, in which lie the prospect for change of perceptions, standpoints and relationships as well as the acceptance of the Other and their diversity. Here, Diversity refers to "[...] the human's spirit striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence. Diversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a *new relationship"*(Gyssels&Hoving 11). Taking this into consideration, Jamal Mahjoub defines Transcultural Literature as:

> Transcultural Literature demands more, both of reader and writer. It does not have the support of those cheering waving crowds who would like you to be European or Third World, Black, African or Arab. It can only rely on that thin crack of light which lies between the spheres of reader and writer, [...] something is always lost in reaching for that light, but something is also gained: Gradually that crack grows wider and where there was once only monochrome light, now there is a spectrum of colours. (qtd. in Steiner 2)

In this context, the concept of Transcultural Literature which has been introduced and defined in recent studies on Transnationalism proves quite valuable.

Further, Fadia Faqir argues that Aboulela's "Halal fiction" while propagating "an Islamic world view", is also a good example of "Transcultural and Transnational literature" (169).The term "Halal" aptly describes her fiction and is ascribed to her fiction by many Arab writers. Emerging from the auspices of Islamic-informed writing from a woman writer living between the West and the East, Aboulela has championed fiction that "reflects Islamic logic" and "fictional worlds where cause and effect are governed by Muslim rationale" (Phillips70). Therefore, Aboulela's narratives, discussed so far in this thesis, variously defy popular Western presumptions about the localization of Muslim identity and experiences.Each of them, with a particular theme, focus and style, probes transnational dimensions of Muslim women's identities and experiences, unknown to Western and non-Muslim readers and illuminated for Muslim readers. In fact,

these narratives help correct what, to many Western people, may appear to be rigid representations about devout Muslim women's lives. The constant of the representations in all her fictional works, however, is the deep belief of the characters in the transnationality of Islam. Aboulela's narratives display how a Muslim woman's deep belief in Islam does not hinder her from being opened to other cultures and religions.They also highlight the compatibility of Muslim women's adherence to their Muslim identity and culture with their commitment to their national identity. They explore the possibility of being at the same time true believers in Islam and critics of specific perspectives about Islam adopted by even pious Muslims so that Muslim women are able to construct flexible hybrid identities that pave the way to transcultural dialogue.

In addition to challenging Western stereotypes about Islam and Muslim communities, Aboulela's writings also suggest the possibility of an interpretation of transnational Muslim identity that is compatible with Western modernity. Her narratives can be interpreted as representing the notions of cross-cultural encounters, hybrid identities, dialogic experiences and border-crossing as necessarily oppositional to Huntington's "clash of civilizations"theorythat is strongly challenged and transformed to the potential of a dialogue between and across cultures, religions, and borders. Despite such a transformation and inter-religious dialogue, however, the idea of religious spirituality, portrayed in the narratives through the main characters' Islamic faith, is not relinquished; rather it preserves its strength, significance andcentrality in Muslims' lives.Aboulela's "Halal" texts, especially, emphasize the possibility of transcending the dualism of Western culture and an Islamic worldview through the presentation of migrant Muslim characters, which while allowing themselves to enjoy the spiritual aspects of Islam, embody a flexible reason-based interpretation of Islam. Thus, Aboulela's narratives, which represent a new generation of Muslim migrants, also belong to Muslim Immmigrant literature.

I.1.3. Muslim Immigrant Literature

This newly flourishing body of literature has featured as a reaction to the demands of the second generation of migrant Muslims who are not only trying to cling to the principles of their culture and religion, but are also truly attached to the Western societies to which they belong. Therefore, as point of departure, the classical theories of migration are not adequate to comprehend the new quality of peoples' transitivity today.Migrants do not simply move from one society to another, cutting all old connections and defining the new society as their point of identification; rather, many migrants preserve bonds between their indigenous societies and countries of migration.They also take part in the socio-cultural life of both societies

which is made easier by modern transport and means of communication. In this context, migrants may feel tentatively out of place or displaced, but they are never without a place. On the contrary, migrants sustain meanings and belonging to places which they inhabit, relying on specific conscious or unconscious strategies to connect to their new environments and establish a sense of belonging that plays out in many different ways either as a sense of home or a "homing desire" (177) as Avtar Brah names it. They also create a sense of comfort and attachment, or new ways of discovering these host societies so that nation belonging does not become a boundary and a third space can be smoothly constructed.Thus, migration phenomenon unveils the reality that migrant Muslim authors are engaged in Muslim Immigrant literary productions.

This area of research also intersects with the scope of this chapter, in so far as it probes the phenomenon of migration as a focal attribute of narrative-as-travel in the work of Anglophone migrant Muslim writers. Migration, in particular, as one of the most complex forms of transitivity, results in an infinite number of stories. It nourishes the most unique narratives that begin with leaving and end by the relocation from one place to another or to several places on a long and unpredictable journey. This relocation ceaselessly affects and produces new spaces on varying scales such as the host country or the new living space. Keighobad Yazdani states that "The immigrant and exiled authors and/or actors of each realm have created an especial literature with its own peculiarities in their artistic and literary activities at the host countries. This literature, which differs from the domestic literature both in content and register is typically known as immigration or exile literature"(15). Therefore, the previously inhabited places are, however, not entirely abandoned, but are carried with their subjects and often define their new directions.

Accordingly, the migrants' past affects how they react to and think about their new present even as the places left behind become blurred and changed not only in the reality of their persistent present but also in the their memories. Those places of the past, affecting and probably resurfacing in the present, is integral to Tim Cresswell's argument that "[t]ime and space are both the context for movement (the environment of possibility for movement to occur) and a product of movement" (4). This claim means that space and time should not be taken for granted or conceived as natural or constant elements. Movement occurs through space and time which are produced and constantly reshaped by human transitivity. Due to this migration from a country of origin to a new context, the host or destination country turns to be 'out-of-country'. Writers who have experienced the continuity of being in a present that does not reflect the past and in a land elsewhere from their homeland, particularly when this 'out-of-country' also means writing in a different

language, and thinking within a different culture often feel the "urge to reclaim, to look back to the homeland" (Rushdie10). Salman Rushdie goes on to explain that the experienced physical alienation results inevitably in fragmented memory, because the totality cannot be recalled. Therefore, writers create "not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands" (10). As a result, the migrant is forever pendent between departure from the prior home and arrival in the new host country which always put them in a third space and hybrid position.

Migration in the work of many Anglophone migrant Muslim writers is the central "existential and epistemological condition from which spatial and temporal states of being and becoming are examined" (Zeleza 2). This applies to Aboulela and other African migrant Muslim writers as well. While writing their texts about migrant people, these authors themselves remember, recreate and re-translate their experiences of home and exile, shedding light on an 'exilic postcolonial condition' and affecting 'numerous African intellectuals' (Zeleza 2). Experiences of migration differ for each author and are determined by "enigmatic issues of personal temperament and disposition" as well as "nationality, race, class, gender, and ideology" (14). In this sense, the common threads are interwoven with the particular, multi-dimensional concerns of Aboulela's narratives and each narrative to be discussed.While belonging to the relatively elite group of intellectual migrants, Aboulela is committed to a wide scope, and more representative view of migration in her fiction where she tells the stories of some journeys that she undergoes herself as well as the journeys of Muslim migrants and refugees, veiled women caught between two different cultures, and Muslim students struggling to preserve their identities; with a focus,at the same time, on hybrid spaces where two different cultures fuse, differences are negotiated and dialogic bridges are constructed between two divides.

Undoubtedly, the migrant is forever found in a dilemma of leaving the former home and arriving in the new host country. Therefore, these Anglophone migrant Muslim women writers, in creative and thoughtful prose, shed new light on what it means to be a writer in a world different from where they used to belong to. They constantly describe their shared and yet different identity, the impact cultural diversity has on their lives, the inspiration they have taken from their past and their present, their memories of life in at least two different worlds, and their love of a language comprised of the words of one culture and the meanings of another. Dealing with the sense of not belonging and not fitting-in, Anglophone migrant Muslim authors adopt particular strategies of dialogic communication, hybridized interaction and cultural translation which enable their characters, even if not persistent and completely, to find paths of connection and dialogic relationships that allowfor some sense of acceptance, communicability and stability. Moreover,

the experience of migration, even though sometimes painful, opens new avenues for writers to think about culture, language and the past and the present in their fiction.

Actually, some literary critics have their particular terms to refer to a kind of literature that is known as immigration literature in general. For instance, Susan Bassnett employs the term 'Travel Literature' instead of 'Immigration Literature'. As she puts it:

> Travel literature, like translation, offers readers access to a version of another culture, a construct of that other culture. The travel writer creates a version of another culture, producing what might be described as a form of translation, rendering the unknown and unfamiliar in terms that can be assimilated and understood by readers back home. The travel writer operates in a hybrid space, a space in-between cultures…a space that is often referred to as 'no-man's land. (In Kuhiwczak&Littau 22)

On the other hand, it is Leslie A. Adelson's "literature of migration" that presents itself as a genuine solution to the fragmented and often vague attempts at categorizing the kind of literature that tackles issues of migration (In Steckenbiller 22). Literature of exile, Diaspora literature, migrant literature and minority literature are only some of the labels that have been used over the years. But "literature of migration" emerges as a more discrete and more flexible concept that allows this category of literature to enclose all writers regardless of their national or cultural backgrounds; or their belonging to different generations of migrant writers; or writers who are not migrants themselves but write about migration and its associated topics. The term "literature of migration" is not only restricted to immigration which refers to exile, specific diasporas or diasporic communities, and it does not signify only the intention to stay in the host country, rather it is a more inclusive concept that incorporates the negotiation of the complexeties and particularities of such phenomena that comprise transitivity, multiple destinations and a possible homecoming.

Consequently, Anglophone Muslim migrant narratives are texts which are dependent on the projection of Muslims' migration, mainly Muslim women's migration from a particular place to another. The fact that these narratives are characterized by travelling between different worlds, by the level of detail through which they convey the characters' experiences of in-between two spaces and their movement across countries, underscores the way these narratives invite the reader not only to read, but to travel outside their world and to dialogue with the Other. These narratives also depict the adventure of a person moving between spaces in certain time, endowing this space with certain meaning as in Bakthin's words: "time

becomes endowed with the power to bring change"(84).Many of the plots of such narratives are evinced in the genre, that Bakhtin defines as the adventure novel of everyday life and which has been depicted as a temporal sequence based on moments of transformation connected with identity. In these plots, transformation is central, and there are typically two images of the individual: a 'before' and 'after' that are both separated and reunited through crisis and rebirth (Bakthin 84). Therefore, identity transformation reflects a portrait of the whole of an individual's life that goes through important dilemmic moments and experiences, showing how individuals become others than what they are.

Therefore, 'Muslim immigrant literature' has yet to be recognized as a distinct phenomenon. Very few scholars make use of the term, and the literary works to which such a term might be attributed are, instead, defined as 'migrant fiction', 'Arab minority literature' or 'foreign literature'. Some are described only by nationality. Working within this field of Anglophone migrant Muslim literature, Malek, in his previously mentioned book, advocates a new trend for the notion "in-between". Criticizing precisely the idea of displacement and the position of the migrant as "in-between" or "between two worlds" or "two cultures",Malek demands that research today transcends such dualisms and transgresses notions of betweenness in favor of new hybrid innovative ideas. In agreement with Malek, Arjun Appadurai claims that, migrants and locals, their cultural contexts and stories, touch and overlap or clash in often unpredictable ways, consciously or unconsciously, and can no longer be described as two separate homogeneous worlds between which the migrant is forever suspended (34). Accordingly, Aboulela's narratives are migrant Muslim narratives, written by a migrant Muslim author who deals with many important issues such as exile, nostalgia and cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. In Geoffery Nash's words, Aboulela's novels work "through many of the usual exile's routines"(“Re-siting Religion and creating feminised space in the fiction of Ahdaf Souif and Leila Aboulela” 30); making the migrant literature genre, more interestingly, affected by the religious consciousness of her migrant devout Muslim characters and making it possible to call her novels Muslim migrant novels. In the same vein, Wail S. Hassan also argues that Aboulela's works are great contributions to a new trend, "Muslim immigrant literature", which he defines as "a literature that seeks to articulate an alternative episteme derived from Islam but shaped specifically by immigrant perspectives" (182). Thus, Leila Aboulela, herself, labels her works within this literary genre.

In an interview, Leila Aboulela describes her fiction as an instance of "Muslim Immigrant writing" and explains that her writing career came into being not only as a reaction to negative representations of

Muslims in the mainstream Western media during the Gulf War in 1992, but also as an attempt to redress what she regards as the unjustified absence of religion in some writings by Arab and Muslim writers (Aboulela, July 2005). In so doing,Aboulela launched her fictive writing in an attempt to fulfill the need for authentic self-representations on the behalf of the younger generation of migrant Muslims. She confirms that "Islam is the epistemological force in these people's lives and the West is their home and yet they do not see an adequate representation of themselves in contemporary fiction and daily television programs and radio" (Aboulela, July 2005). Hence, Aboulela's migrants who come from various cultural backgrounds and belong to different Diasporas, mainly African Diaspora, forge dialogic bonds to other migratory locals in spite of their exilic feelings; but those dialogic ties are forged only within global hybrid spaces.

I.2. Hybridity Spectrums in Contemporary Studies

Nowadays, we live in an inconstant world in which nothing is stable and boundaries have been exceeded. As a result of these changes and border-crossing, new concepts like 'hybridity' have come into existence.This concept has a wide scope and it is debated in different fields of study like Postcolonial Studies, Cultural Studies, Translation and Communication Studies. At the beginning, hybridity has had a wide range of usages, for example it was a meaningful term in forming a discourse of racial mixing that came into being at the end of eighteenth century. Later, while some theorists such as Edouard Glissant and Stuart Hall link hybridity to the postcolonial subject, others problematize the notion, highlighting that hybridity is a multilayered concept. Thus, by examining the concept of hybridity, different theorists have placed it in various significant historical and contemporary global contexts: Cultural context, Postcolonial context and Diaspora context.

I.2.1. Cultural Hybridity Context

In the debates about hybridity, most scholars approve that it is the product of cultural process, but James Lull confirms that this view to the concept of hybridity is a simplistic one and, instead, he has a panoramic view. He claims that "Hybrids are not simply the cultural products of everyday interactions; they are the sources and media through which such phenomenological interactions take place" (Lull 157). Discarding the myth of authenticity and purity, culture is not only seen as mutable and inherently diverse, but also viewed positively as horizon rather than limitation (Genetsch20). Therefore, recent debates about

hybridity have emphasized the varities of cultural hybridity as infinitely creative processes. Within such a scope, cultural hybridity refers not only to an amalgamation of cultures, but also to the opportunities for individuals to probe the best of a multitude of worlds and, consequently, to depart conceptual constraints. Hence, cultural hybridity has become a pivotal concept in cultural studies with its negative and positive meanings.

Despite the controversial use of the concept of cultural hybridity, many critics insist on its positive connotation in the current field of cultural studies. Others like Kraidy and Nederveen Pieterse consider hybridity as the outcome of globalization. According to them, it is an inevitable result of the cultural amalgamation of globalization and internationalization andbecause of globalization, cultural boundaries are fused and are submitted to great changes. Jane Neverveen Pieterse defines cultural hybridity as: "Hybridity is to culture what deconstruction is to discourse: transcending binary categories" (238).In the light of this statement, cultural hybridity is a heterogeneous concept that presents a combination of diverse cultural effects to a more or less homogeneous new whole. In this sense, cultural hybridity is a versatile concept in hybrid identity formation.

Cultural hybridity continues to be an outstanding aspect of identity-constructionand it is strongly located in cultural representations. Though representations of migrant experiences and identity are clearly controversial, this does not imply the abandonment of representations as Spivak confirms: "as long as one remains aware that it is a problematic field, there is some hope" (63). Linda Alcoff also argues that "if the person who represents is conscious of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved, representations become less dangerous acts" (24).For that reason, representing or speaking for people who have different social backgrounds from our own can be problematic because of the role of social locations in shaping our knowledge of the Other. In other words, non-natives who represent us should not be our only representatives. If we concentrate on discourses, then, it can be argued that anyone can represent the others' identities and experiences.Therefore, it is of great interest to be careful not to take any representation, of self and other, as authentic truths about the subjects of representations, as all representations are sophisticated processes that comprise selections and omissions of different 'realities'. These selections and omissions are based on power relations, hegemonic discourses and ideologies.

Similarly, representation is a central concept in Cultural Studies andAnglophone Migrant Muslim Literature. Since "representation is an extremely elastic notion" (13) as W. J. T. Mitchell claims, it is

necessary to examine this concept closely at the outset. Stuart Hall, a prominent scholar of Cultural Studies, defines representation as "*an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things"* ("The Question Of Cultural Identity" 15; italics in original). Through his quotation, Hall refers to three main approaches to representation of meaning through language: the reflexive approach in which language is believed "*to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world*" (24; italics in original); the intentional approach which focuses on the speaker or the author and holds that "it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language" (25); and the constructionist approach according to which "*neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don't mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems, concepts and signs*" (25; italics in original). It follows that,to discuss these approaches, it is important to illuminate three forms of representations: the first one is our representation of people from a different social background to our own, the second is our representation of people from our same social background, and the third one is our self-representation. Following Wilfried E.Glabach's argument that "social locations identify the way people experience privilege and power and the way people are marginalized, exploited, or oppressed" (81), these social locations include the cultural, ethnic, social class, gender, age, economic level, racial and religious backgrounds of people and other distinctions. Then, it can be argued that the relevance between the source of representation and the validity and falsity of that representation is still problematic.

In a like manner, the representation of in-between positions portrayed in Aboulela's narratives draw attention to a highly complex problem, namely that of finding hybrid spaces in-between cultures for the migrant agents and transforming their breaking up with their native countries and families to dialogic contexts where cross-cultural interaction and hybrid spaces exist. This proves to be very complicated in its specific ideological political contexts, but possible in socio-cultural contexts since it reveals biases and positions that can become rather delicate. In the light of this complication, the question if Aboulela's third spaces of hybridity can really offer a viable alternative to the binaries investigated and challenged in her writings evokes itself. To answer this important question, a significant parallel in Aboulela's literary works needs to be highlighted. I argue that through the problematic issues that are raised in her disputable literary works, she displays vital possibilities and stimulus for cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. Therefore, Aboulela's writings that exemplify the confluence of the Muslim culture and the secular Western world and go 'beyond' cross-cultural-national categorizations and boundaries, which means that she re-performs cross-

cultural coexistence within hybridspaces. Therefore, the remarkable polyphonic, humanizing and dialogic dimension of her fictional writings provides such literature the opportunity for greater visualization, a better coexistence and real dialogue in a postcolonial hybrid world.

I.2.2.Postcolonial Hybridity Context

Hybridity has become the master concept in the field of Postcolonial Studies. For this reason, the definition and introduction of this concept from different postcolonial scholars' point of view is required. It should be noted that different postcolonial scholars have different views to this concept and the definition proposed by each of them is not an undisputed one. According to Nikos Papastergiadis, the concept of "cultural hybridity" is an invention of postcolonial theory, a radical substitute to the homogenous ideas of cultural identity such as racial purity and nationalism. Another disputed definition is that 'hybridity' commonly refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Laragy1). The term 'Contact Zone' was first coined by Mary Louise Pratt and is used in this analysis to clarify the interrelation between this term and Homi Bhabha's concept of 'Third Space'or 'liminal space'. Pratt argues that "Third Space' as an ambivalent 'contact zone' that, on the one hand, offers perspectives of compresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices; yet, on the other hand, these points of cultural intersection are tense areas where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (7).Hence, hybridity is a manifold concept that is manifested in various contexts

Moreover, investigating the relationship between hybridity and other concepts will hopefully help relate the concept of "hybridity"to a communicative space or practice in the context of postcolonial theory (Kraidy, 2005; Naficy, 1994).Christina Schaffner and Beverly Adab's words confirm this claim: "Hybridity has been shown to be a constituting characteristic of social interaction resulting mainly from the contemporary globalization of communication and from the effects of communication in spaces of fuzzy or merging borders, which in turn, affect cultural and linguistic identities" (301). In this sense, understanding hybridity as a transcultural practice leads to the recognition that postcolonial relations are complex, practical and dynamic. However, hybridity has lost its significant meaning in the postcolonial political context. Theorists like John Hutnyk have criticized hybridity as politically invalid and despite the difficulty to grasp the political meaning that hybridity may include in the complexity of cultural interactions, it is impossible to deny the political role of hybridity. Politically, a critical view of hybridity considers it as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential powers. Thus, this versatile concept that lost its meaning in political and colonial contexts, has regained its positive meaning in the postcolonial field.

Accordingly, while hybridity is negatively connoted within colonial discourse, Postcolonial Studies evoke the term and understand it in a significant different way. For example, Ella Shohat analyzes the ways that terms like postcolonial and hybridity can carry meanings that debunk the hegemony of the West. "As a descriptive catchall term", she asserts:

> Hybridity per se fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, of for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejections, political cooptation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence. The reversal of biologically and religiously racist tropes-the hybrid, the syncretic-on the one hand, and the reversal of anticolonialist purist notions of identity, on the other, should not obscure the problematic agency of postcolonial hybridity. (110)

Consequently, as a feature of postcolonial discourse, hybridity has been investigated by many postcolonial theorists.

One of the contemporary postcolonial pioneer critics, who gave a great consideration to this concept in his works, is Homi Bhabha. He has made a greater contribution to the development of discussions on hybridity. His book *The Location of Culture* (2012) had a great effect on the development of hybridity theory. He is the first scholar who has developed this concept in the field of Postcolonial Studies and his argument has a key role in the discussion of this concept. Through his studies, hehas focused on the interrelation and interdependence between the coloniser and the colonized and as a result he coins the term "cultural hybridity" that has been employed later by many contemporary theorists in various fields of research. He demonstrates that the colonial and postcolonialidentities that "encounter" in a "contact zone" are constructed in a hybrid space or a "liminal space", which he refers to as "The Third Space of enunciation … [that] may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*56). Additionally, Bhabha's postcolonial interest imposed on him a postcolonial investigation of this concept to argue that "hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self" (Ben Beya 3). The aim of Bhabha's argumentative study is the deconstruction of the hegemonic notion of the purity of cultures. According to his argument, living "in-between" cultures does not suggest a mere exchange

between cultures; it rather aims at the creation of new cultural forms (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*56). Therefore, he affirms that "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha, *Nations and Narrations*2). Thus, Bhabha emphasizes the ability of hybridity to subvert and re-appropriate dominant discourses.

Further, according to Bahbha, hybridity deconstructs the monolithic characteristic of colonial discourse and turns it into a form of heteroglossia[3]. It can become a source of resistance because in its duality, it prevents to draw clear-cut boundaries between coloniser and colonised. Following traces of familiarity in the Other as well as focusing on trace of Otherness in oneself creates a dichotomous imagination that is based on difference in order to achieve a stabalized new self-image. Consequently, this makes it more difficult for the coloniser to foster his identity in the colonies and opens up new opportunities for the Other. Accordingly, Bhabha clarifies the reality that seeing in the Other as much sameness as difference opens up possibilities of hybrid identity-formation, apart from stressing the cultural value of hybrid formations (qtd. in Genetcsh 21). Accordingto him, rigid or inflexible identities, which generally have binarist features, can only be changed by hybridity which is characterized by its power of reconciliationand the great contribution in counter-narrative resistance (39). In this sense, hybrid identities are shaped within cultural hybrid contexts.

In fact, hybrid identity is the circulation, the transition, the transmission of pieces of a cultural heritage, as expounded by Bhabha. More precisely,Bhabha's hybridity concept investigates the idea of hybrid identity as one entity, and when deconstructed the entity is actually an amalgamation of small pieces of identities that have been compiled through time. He calls it "the transmission of culture"because it creates a partial relation between one self and a situation, this is what is probed in each narratives' characters. "This partial culture is the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures –at once the impossibility of culture's contentedness and the boundary between. It is indeed something like culture's 'in-between' bafflingly both alike and different" (Bhabha, *The location of Culture*53).Thus, hybrid identity is the outcome of all aspects of the experience of hybridity or living in-between two different cultures.

[3]"Perhaps the most succinct way to define heteroglossia in terms of dialogism….both heteroglossia and dialogism are linguistic responses to a social and cultural break down of the dominant ideology, hierarchy, and ethnocentrism. Out of this cultural breakdown comes heteroglossia, the multi-voiced condition of narrative discourse." (Halasek, 1999:9)

[3]"Intercultural hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of the cultural Other, its subject area is the interaction of members of different cultures" (Cheetham, 2011:381)

Bhabha also insists on privileging the hybrid experience if the migrant, who lives his exile in a so-called "Third Space"or in-between cultures,is free to engage in a form of intercultural hermeneutics[4].Consequently,it should be mentioned here that the concept of "Third Space" plays an important role in the discussion about hybridity. "In-between space" is a term that all scholars, who theorize about hybridity, assert its existence, although each of them use their own terms to refer to this notion. For example, Michael Wolf (2007) proposed the notion of "mediation space "in order to refer to this space.Some experts consider the concept of 'Third space' as 'Contact Zone' where different cultures encounter and hybridity is an inevitable outcome of this cultural encounter. To sum up, the "Third Space" results from the overlapping of cultures understood as "hybrid" and can be understood as a contact zone between cultures and as the encounter of spaces, which now, as the product of "translation between cultures can generate borderline effects and identifications and leading to cultural hybridity" (Bhabha, *Nations and Narrations*167). Consequently, it becomes clear that hybridity is deeply rooted not only in Postcolonial context, but in Diaspora context as well.

I.2.3. Diaspora Hybridity Context

Another significant context that embraces hybridity as a major concept is the diaspora field in which hybridity is applied to theories of identity, multiculturalism and diversity.Diaspora shares characteristics with related and equally controversial concepts such as globalization, identity,multiculturalism, home, belonging, memory and ethnicity and others which intersect, but are not exchangeable. Papastergiadis argues that hybridityis an antidote to essentialist subjectivity so that the positive feature of hybridity is that it acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps, and contradiction is not indicative of failure" (189). In this context, with its meaning of cross-fertilization, hybridity has gained much currency as a conceptual tool in the Diaspora context where it intervenes with Diaspora as the space in which it is acted out. One of the prominent studies and theories that link Diaspora and hybridity in this field is attributed to Stuart Hall's study "*Cultural Identity and Diaspora".* Basing on his study, Hall defines the relationship between hybridity and Diaspora as:

> [. . .] The Diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are

> constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

Additionally, Woodward quotes Halls' definition of hybrid and diasporic identities as:

> They are people who belong to more than one, speak more than one language (literally or metaphorically); inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to `negotiate and translate' between cultures, and who... have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from difference. They speak from the in-between of different cultures, always unsettling the assumption of one culture from the perspective of the other, and thusfinding ways of being both the same as and different from the others amongst whom they live, of course, such people bear the marks of the particular cultures, languages, histories and traditions which `formed' them. (206)

In this quotation, Hall evokes Derridas' sense of difference as *difference* to develop his idea about hybrid identities involved in such negotiations of diasporic spaces.Accordingly, there has been too much emphasis on the spatial dimensions of displacement as a foundational condition of Diaspora and migration and this requires a critical view on the dimensions of this condition. According to Halleh Ghorashi,"Unlike exile; diasporic understanding of homeland signifies not a place to return to but rather a domain or an idea that serves as one of the available discourses within the present negotiation of identity"(133). Therefore, diasporic identities are those, which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* 235). Accordingly, diasporic identities are constructed within these diaspora contexts.

On the whole, the discourse around Diaspora is multifaceted. It accumulates profound cultural studies and various theories. In addition to Hall's influential study, James Clifford's participation in this field is considered as a great contribution to the Diaspora studies. Clifford demonstrates that there is no clear-cut definition of Diaspora. He asserts that "Diaspora cultures mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another plac" (Clifford 255). Building on this quotation, it can be said that while expatriates have often managed in reconstructing 'homes' abroad, it is important to point to the significance of the hybrid spaces 'in-between' old and new homelands for creating alternative forms of belonging. In this sense, Ien Ang's advocates for "a politics of Diaspora that neither privileges the (real or imaginary) country of immigration nor the (real or imaginary)

homeland, but that instead keeps a 'creative tension' between the two" (16). As a result, migration has a great influence on the process of diaspora.

Correspondingly, the locality of the migrant and the experience of migration have been subdued to considerable criticism in different fields of studies and have created a variety of intertwined discourses in Diaspora writings. These discourses prove that while Diaspora, on the one hand, is used as an inclusive term, as Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur claim, it has, on the other hand, also been used very discreetly either as a theoretical concept, discourse, critique, or as a term to refer to specific Diaspora movements, people, communities, or individuals, as well as diasporic spaces (7). Hamid Naficiy insists that "Diaspora is more a network between different compatriot communities outside the homeland rather than a close link with the homeland itself" (qtd. in Ghorashi 133).It is also important to mention that this term often implies spatial manifestations to focus on specific "Diaspora spaces", displacement, border crossing, "contact zones" and above all the specific location of the migrant in "Third space". Although theorists of Diaspora studies are further interested in specific locations, spaces, and postcolonial migratory contexts, they neglect in their scholarly endeavors, a deep critical attention to such forms of hybridity and dialogic spaces.

Accordingly, John Hutnyk examined the effect of migration and transitivity on the production of diasporic literary productions, and he classified the writings of Diaspora under the heading of immigration literature. According to him "migration and movement, that produce much cultural product and writings of diasporic character, which are so often marketed under the signature of hybridity, have been among the most often acclaimed, and most debated items in theorizing the socio-political predicament of our times"(Hutnyk 98). Again,members of diasporic communities are inclined to possess a sense of 'racial', ethnic, or diaspora consciousness that transgresses geographic borders, to share broad cultural similarities, and sometimes to express a strong desire to return to their indigenous homeland.In this sense, diaspora consciousness has two contexts of reformulation: the negative and the positive context.Diaspora consciousness is shaped negatively by experiences of discrimination, Othering and exclusion; whereas it is reshaped positively through self-discovery, accepting the Other and reconstitution of diasporic identities. Consequently, Diaspora consciousness is constituted within totally different environments or in-between two different cultural and social contexts. Hence, Muslim Diaspora consciousness plays a distinct role in migrant Muslims' acclimatization to the host communities.

The process of Muslim Diaspora through time and across space may not be as much about being African or Arab as about being migrant Muslim. The idea of Muslim Diaspora is especially well rooted in

Diaspora discourseto highlight a consciousness of community which does not contradict with being in particular localities other than home, but does shape expatriates' stabilization in the new communities. Clifford claims that "Diaspora cultures work to maintain community, selectively preserving and recovering traditions, 'customizing' and 'versioning' them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic situations" (263). Indeed, he argues that the focusing of Diasporas around a centre of origin and return exceeds the specific local interactions that are essential for the preservation of diasporic social forms. Therefore, the empowering paradox of Muslim Diaspora is manifested in representing a wide range of nationalities, with their own particular cultures and histories of migration and settlement. They preserve different bonds to their old and new homelands because according to Clifford, "Diaspora cultures are, to varying degrees, produced by regimes of political domination and economic inequality. But these violent processes of displacement do not strip people of their ability to sustain distinctive political communities and cultures of resistance" (265). It is noteworthy to emphasize, then, that the dynamics of Muslim Diaspora must be grasped at a collection of local, national and transnational scopes. It is also apparent that at each of these scopes, powerful concepts of what is considered as Islam tend to be counted as the norm.

On the other hand, the investigation of African Diaspora entails the intersection of multiple, frequently overlapping Diasporas.This investigation includes a comparative approach that probes both the African experience and other cosmopolitan diasporic communities. Part of this comparative approach asserts the variations among different African Diasporas and the similarities between them.It is also no less fundamental, the recognition that there can be no significant assessment of African Diaspora without comparing it with a number of global diasporic experiences from past to modern contemporary times. In addition to this, while this investigation recognizes the critical role that diasporic intellectuals have played in defining the idea of being in Diaspora, African Diaspora places equal significance on popular, non-elite traditions that link dispersed communities of Africans to notions of Africa or locally defined categories of being different and "African" that might otherwise fall outside of more self-conscious identifications of being part of an African Diaspora (Zeleza 18).However, since definitions require investigations, it is far better to refer to the categorical characteristics proposed by Colin Palmer as he attempts to reach a definition of what he calls "the modern African diaspora" that he defines as:" Diasporic communities,…, possess a number of characteristics. Regardless of their location, members of a Diaspora share an emotional attachment to their ancestral land, are cognizant of their dispersal and, if conditions warrant, of their oppression and alienation in the countries in which they reside "(22-23). As concepts, Muslim and African Diasporas intervene critically in Leila Aboulela's writings.

Indeed, in a way similar to Postcolonial and Diaspora theorists, Leila Aboulela finds hybridity inspiring, not obscuring the Sudanese facet of her British identity. Therefore, she embraces the concept of hybridity in her narratives that highlight her tremendous contribution to the debate over cross-cultural and transnational dialogue.In her writings, Aboulela participates in the discussion of hybridity on many levels, including linguistic, cultural, and religious. However, linguistic hybridity is the starting point of this participation as epitomized in her use of "Islamic words" and other vernacular languages in addition to the English language. Consequently, Aboulela has been criticized for fixing on hybridity in her texts through injecting "Arabic and Islamic words" into English contexts as well as her use of English as her language of writing. In fact, the reason for Aboulela's inclination to write in English is evident. Her aim is to attract mainly the western reader and at the same time to introduce a piece of fiction that appeals to both Muslim and western readers in order to bring together their different views and to understand each other's civilizations, not to unite them as two different civilizations existing in their own right.Through colligating religious discourse and postcolonial discourse, the author strives to create a new language of dialogue between Islam and the West in order to debunk discourses that depict the West and the Islamic World in strictly extremist terms. Eventually, Aboulela's language constitutes a linguistic and a dialogic literary communicative bridge between the former colonized and the colonizer as well as between East and West as several instances in her texts demonstrate this intention. Thus, Dialogism is a pivotal concept that needs to be investigated in Aboulela's narratives.

I.3. The Discourse of Dialogism and the Dialogic Novel

It is plainly evident that Leila Aboulela's migratory narratives are overwhelmed by both Bhabha's hybridty discourse and the discourse of Bakhtin's dialogism. Bakhtin attributes tremendous social power to literature, proposing that entire world-views are based on changes between monological and dialogical types of literature. According to him, hybridization or heteroglossia causes long-term linguistic and aesthetic changes so that epics and poetry create fatalistic and closed worlds, whereas novels create open worlds. In this sense, dialogism involves particular characteristics which can be applied socially in everyday life. It is considered as a refusal of closure since it opposes the fixation on any particular monologue and also rejects dominant fanatical forms of coexistence. Therefore, Bakhtin's theory is not an accumulation of empty juxtapositions or opinions, or just an attractive discourse in which all perspectives are equivalent. Rather, his theory asserts that the dynamic interactions and the different dialogic perspectives are taken to produce

new realities and new ways of perception which give dialogue its power to produce a decisive reply which produces actual changes.

Accordingly, from Bakhtin's point of view, dialogism or 'hybridization' is "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation, or by some other factor"(BenBeya1). Dialogism is investigated at length in Bakhtin's extensive analysis of the novel, and the course of his argument results into four essays in his seminal book, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin argues that language "is revealed in all its distinctiveness only when it is brought into relationship with other languages" (411), that is to say, only when it exists within a dynamic and dialogic relationship, and as part of a continuous and active interaction between various languages. In applying this term to social relations, it conveys the meaning that "A dialogic world is one in which I can never have my own way completely, and therefore I find myself plunged into constant interaction with others-and with myself"(Holquist 37). Therefore, the words dialogism and hybridization or **(**Heteroglossia) will be used interchangeably in this thesis. On the other hand, this concept can also be applied in relation to memory theory, the characteristics of Bakhtins' use of dialogue emphasize the continuously dynamic interplay that exists between the present, one's remembrance of the past, and the predicted impact this interchange has upon the future. This is a constant process of negotiation, as the dialogic memory is positioned neither in an accurate representation of a past self, nor in a clear-cut projection of the present or a real actualization in the future. Dialogic memory, thus, is the term, used here, to depict this process of reformulating the past, and the subsequent regulation of present perspectives induced by the act of remembering. Hence, Dialogic memory can include both individual and communal experiences which can be invoked individually or reciprocally.

Additionally, dialogism can be discussed from social perspectives since this literary analysis includes social interpretations. For Bakhtin, the social world is also made up of multiple voices, perspectives, and subjective 'worlds' so that existing means engaging in dialogue that must not come to an end.According to him, dialogues are not fixedaccording to positions or subjects; instead they are modified by people who are also transformed through dialogues, integrating with parts of the Other's discourse so that the Other's reaction can alter everything in one's own consciousness or viewpoint. For Bakhtin, dialogism also characterizes the entire social world that participates into an open-ended, multi-voiced, dialogical whole.It is a world composed of many worlds, all equally able to express themselves, visualize their objects and

dialogue with the Other. Therefore, Bakhtin views human life as an open-ended dialogue and considers humanity as basically indeterminate and unfinalizable.He asserts that it is not enough to be simply aware of the Other's perspective, but there is always a hidden thing within each specific person, which can only be comprehended through a free discursive process, and not in a pre-defined context. This comprehension of the Other can only be achieved through dialogue.

Consequently, according to Bakhtin, dialogue is an active and engaged understanding of Others' discourse and the integration of the Other's perception into one's own frame, giving it new inflections and nuances. Also, it is this possibility of understanding and integrating the Other's discourse that creates dialogue and newness in language. In this sense, Bakhtin argues that "dialogue orients to the perspective of the Other, seeking to introduce new elements into it. It is always directed towards or through a field of 'alien words' and alien value-judgments. It is carried out 'on alien territory' " (276).Therefore, Bakhtin's concept opposes the perspective that language is only a means to communicate information since a social field of mutual interaction of perception always intermediates the relationship between the speaker and the world so that any specific way of perception illuminates some aspects of an object and hides others. Hence, any language use is doomed by social ways of perception, which are always contested and varying in dialogue. This concept, thus, can be wittingly applied in dialogical novels.

Dialogical novel explores and reveals linguistic and pragmatic borders and makes dialogue travel across them. For Barkhtin, a mature person should not accept all directed discourses and should take on only those parts of Others' perspectives which are convenient with their values and experiences because one can locate oneself socially by relating one's own viewpoint to those of Others.These intertwined viewpoints contribute to the process of self-actualisation since it is the special standpoint of 'outsideness' which makes something new of the other's perspective by combining it with one's own.Therefore, a Bakhtinian dialogical discourse is a process to self-retrospection in the formation of one's perspective. It is not a question of an outcome, or a formal discourse in a particular system; it is recognized only when all subjects are able to speak and act autonomously. Thus, this is a particular kind of discourse of fundamental dialogic perspectives

The significance of using narrative as a dialogic methodology by the novelist is twofold. First, it contributes to a better understanding of Arab Muslim women as significant members of both their native societies and minority groups by exploring their views and perceptions of their lives and experiences.Such understanding not only expands general knowledge about Arab Muslim women's lives, but also creates a

base for improvement of Western society views towards Arab Muslim communities. Second, after revisiting pertinent literature, it becomes evident that there have been few attempts made by some migrant Arab Muslim women writers to present narratives that portray migrant Arab Muslim women's experiences within hybrid dialogic spaces. Therefore, Leila Aboulela's narratives are situated in this hybrid dialogic surround.

I.4. Locating Leila Aboulela's Narratives

Leila Aboulela's narratives can be located within various contexts that explore the transcultural interconnections and hybridizations they originate with respect to the concepts of, postcolonial diaspora, hybridity and cross-cultural dialogue. Although Aboulela's characters have very different ethnic-cultural and historical backgrounds and live in different cultural, national, and lingual environments, the experiences they undergo as Arab Muslim representatives in a dominant Western secular society, show significant similarities on the cultural, social, and personal levels. However, the comparative method suggests a trans-ethnic, inter-national procedure that recognizes cross-cultural interplays and transnational connections between different ethnic-cultural groups and, thus, avoids stigmatizing literature by ethnic labels. In this same context, Aldo Nemesio's statement confirms this notion: "what happens within the boundaries of a culture [a language, a literature, an academic discipline as a heterogeneous construct] can be understood only if we relate it to what happens elsewhere"(3).In this instance, different spectrums of hybridity and various dialogic processes are scrutinized in Leila Aboulela narratives.

As stated previously, elaborating on Barkhtin'sconcept of "dialogism" and Bhabha's "hybridity", Aboulela tightly associates cultural and literary hybridity, and thereby highlights not simply the presence of different cultural forms in language, but also the desire for cultural diversity and hybridity. The experiences of migration impose on Aboulela's characters a state of living in-between two different spaces, and accordingly, they have to experience a sense of belonging to another place different from their home, which are provisional, fluid and dynamic processes that were tested by Aboulela as well. For instance, as the title of her novel *Minaret* indicates, the migrants' faith is like a minaret; it is always there, clear and resilient to guide them in their various experiences and provide them with a sense of self-confidence. Also, in *Coloured Lights* collection, the protagonists' cultural and religious journeys are used as common images to express the flexibility of belonging and the fluidity of hybridity in their Diasporas.

Similarly, Aboulela's fiction shows a marked interest for diasporic issues and the need for the exploration of African Diaspora to reconcile different cultures and religions; and indigenous and non-

indigenous histories in postcolonial global environments. Aboulela's narratives tackle cross-cultural and trans-national relations and design an in-between space that becomes a site of dialogic interaction. Through the interpretation of her texts, it becomes clear that her three novels and the collection of her short stories are particularly interesting in dialogic experiences of migrant Muslim women who live between two different places and whose hybrid identities are deeply negotiated. In particular, what is unique about her fiction is that she suggests, in her critical works, the mobilization of hybridity as a literary motif, and dialogic contacts as social strategies to negotiate between two different contexts and cultures. In this context, it is clear that Aboulela employs hybridity both linguistically and culturally in her writings to highlight the established relation between inter-culturality and hybridity.

Therefore, Leila Aboulela's narratives are cultural dialogues between two different worlds: East and West. Her narratives are dialogic and hybrid on a cultural and linguistic level. Most important, Aboulela does not concentrate only on Muslims and their point of view, but also extends her thoughts and consciousness to the Western world. In her novel *Lyrics Alley* (2011) that is set in contemporary Sudan, the Sudanese male protagonist Mahmood Abouzeid's house is a transcultural space where collective histories and hybrid identities are discussed. It is also a "Third space" where a Sudanese illiterate and traditional woman (Wahiba) and an Egyptian educated modern woman (Nabilah) live together in this contact zone. It is by no means a perfectly safe house, but often a zone of conflict as these two women and other characters resist at the beginning of their interactions the notions of flexible identity and communicability. However, the concept of hybridity is negotiated and represented in the novel through the portraits of the two different women coexisting and living together at the same home: one side of the home, where the young Nabilah lives, represents modernity, high standard living style and well-educated sphere; the other side, where elderly Wahiba lives, represents tradition, conventional standard living style and illiteracy. This hybrid house emerges as a 'melting pot' that functions as a mirror of contemporary Sudan; a time / space encounter of the various geopolitical, cultural and social forces at work, as well as the individual stories and traumatic experiences of thosepeople who the circumstances bring them together and are considered as an internal threat in the house, like Sudan itselfbecomes the ground for internal conflicts. This same situation is experienced by Aboulela herself.

Leila Aboulelas' self defined position between two countries and her migration to more than one country has provided her with a vantage point from which to deal with the spectrums of hybridity and the difficulties in occupying what Thomas King has called "the racial shadow zones that have been created for

us and that we create for ourselves"(14). In several interviews, as well as in her creative writings, Aboulela has explicitly and implicitly revealed her personal attitude toward Sudan, her birth country, and Britain, the country that she has called home for many years. Considering roots a matter of choice to some extent, she has explained why she distanced herself from the Orientalist discourse, to which she is culturally linked, and felt more affinity with the dialogic discourse, that constitutes the major source of material that forms the realistic component of her novels and short stories. Her works that are situated in a cultural and linguistic context of hybridity, swing between English as her language of education, writing, intellectual formation, and her Arabic language as her mother tongue language and a heritage of her Islamic culture as Ashcroft et al. argue: "Worlds exist by means of languages. The English language becomes a tool with which, a 'world' can be textually constructed" (44). Hence, this Diaspora world becomes the real world of Aboulela's migrant characters.

Conclusion

This chapter started by exploring a continuing legacy of postcolonial writings in a new body of literature by women of Muslim cultural and religious background. It then moved to highlight the ways in which a flourishing body of fictional narratives, which are referred to as "Muslim Narratives in English", criticize the problematic migrant Muslim women's stereotypical, and homogenizing portrayals. This new field of Anglophone Muslim narratives is not a completely new literary eventuality since writing about cultural and religious experiences of Muslims in the West is not a recent phenomenon. Another overlapping field is the now well-established and rapidly fledging terrain of Transcultural Muslim Fiction that has existed at least since the second decade of the twentieth century, particularly after the terrorist attacks of September 2001 that boost the production of literary creations, which in different ways, deal with the heterogeneous world of Islam.

The predominant themes in the works of many contemporary Anglophone Muslim women's writings arise from the investigation of the individuals' experiences and relationships in specific foreign contexts and the world at large as well as their interactions within time and space. In investigating many of the subjects treated by contemporary Anglophone Muslim women writers, it seems that they are also concerned with and foreground in their work many issues that belong primarily to women such as illiteracy, subordination and subjugation, domestic violence and changes within families. Thus, contemporary Anglophone Muslim women's writings appear to offer a natural extension to the discussions of Muslim feminist concerns. By reaching a wide public, not only the Arab world's readers, but the Western audience as well, these writers

have the benefit of letting Europeans, Muslims and non-Muslims, come to terms with migrant Arab Muslim women's images that are stigmatized and misunderstood, particularly, in the Media representations of Arab Muslim women .

Generally, this chapter aims at using narrative as a method to deconstruct negative images and misconceptions about migrant Muslim woman and to visualize her significant role in dialogic interactions and hybrid spaces. Accordingly, Leila Aboulela's migrant Muslim narratives which serve to help decolonize the common misrepresentations of migrant Muslim women were convincingly introduced. Also, this chapter show how these narratives create images which may be set against those perpetrated by Orientalism and open spaces for dialogue and reconciliation. I demonstrate that the narratives of the Sudanese Muslim writer, Leila Aboulela, portray migrant Muslim women's experiences as being dialogic agents within their societies and foreign ones. I determine how these women are able to create a third space in which they negotiate their hybrid identities, explore their hybrid consciousness, create dialogic communications with the Other and deconstruct stereotypes of Islam as an oppressor of woman and as a Fundamentalist religion. Thus, Leila Aboulela's narratives are considered as a great contribution to Postcolonial Muslim Diasporic Transculturalliterature. Through this body of literature, Aboulela expresses her sense of transitivity and her interpretation of hybridity which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

Leila Aboulela's Sense of Transitivity and the Interpretation of Hybridity in her Narratives

Introduction

In this chapter, I want to investigate what has been described as transitivity or displacement in Leila Aboulela's literary texts by shifting the focus onto spatial displacementand subconscious transitivity through exploring the symbolism of the journey and the semiotics of dreams and memories that invade Aboulela's narratives as a strategy of transnational border-crossing. These spatial and subconscious displacements, in Aboulela's representative twenty-first century texts, reflect her migrant characters' in-between status and interpret theirthird spaces and hybrid consciousness through which they construct dialogic relations within the new communities. Her literary works entitled as the following: *The Translator*, *Minaret* and *Lyrics Alley*; and the collection of her short stories *Coloured Lights*, portray new possibilities for migrants to ascribe dialogic meaning to their everyday lived experiences and spaces.

Through employing a critical geographical, cultural and socio-psychological conceptualization of 'transitivity', Aboulela's narratives portray the experiences of transitivity of the characters from their native homelands to foreign countries and their returning back home as well. In particular, they shed light on their transnational spaces and journeys, the dilemma of their exile and nostalgia; and their hybrid consciousness. Important places like homes, apartments, mosques, gardens and neighborhoods are depicted to demonstrate the influence of these spaces in their migrant experiences and the construction of their hybrid identities.

Correspondingly, transitivity is a dominant theme in Aboulela's fictive works that portray, generally, two or more places which hold significance for her migrant characters in each narrative. According to Steckenbiller,"narratives by migrant writers about migrants are dynamically transitive and migration can be described as a transitional phenomenon" (1).In this sense, her characters' transitivity holds two distinct meanings: the first one is geographical or spatial transitivity, and the second one is subconscious transitivity through dreams, memories and nostalgia. Professor Susan Stanford Friedman defines 'new cosmopolitanism' as an effect of intensified migration and globalization, thus making diasporics the avant-garde of the new cosmopolitanism (4). Accordingly, Aboulela'snarratives'characters travel extensively and, therefore, they can be described as hybrid in their affiliations, both to their homelands or the place of exile because"migrants move through this world from one space to another and with

them they bring a sense of the places of their belonging and their past experiences. They carry their past experiences, memories, and cultural traditions, and they have the ability to deeply affect and change the places through which they pass or to which they relocate" (Steckenbiller 1). In fact, migrants construct a sense of hybrid consciousness and dialogic connections in their in-betweeness (home and host country) that manifests in affective terms as third space, and hybrid identity as a way of creating hybrid spaces and cross-cultural bridges (2). In the same context, Aboulela's characters come from different countries and try to enact new lives in different geographical lands.

Consequently, it is important to demarcate the definitions of both transitivity and displacement as they emerged as pivotal issues in the twenty and twenty-first centuries. According to Steckenbiller, transitivity as a more general term is derived from transit, and refers to everything relating to movement and the conditions of this movement at large, whereas displacement denotes a forced movement from the larger original geographical area such as a country, region, a city or a specific district to another (26). In the same respect, transitivity of people from one place to another is termed as migration and it is a complex problem that has many dimensions and induces various cultural and economic effects. Thus, belonging to migrant Muslim women writers, Leila Aboulela explores, with great interest, the migratory experiences of migrant Muslim women in her literary texts.

In general, Aboulela's narratives highlight the connection between female migrancy and the unstable spaces which are portrayed as spaces of both geographical and subconscious transitivity between the traditional boundaries and the different places that the characters pass through. Specifically, in these texts, the places that the protagonists inhabit in the foreign countries or when they come back to their homelands emerge as intimate hybrid places despite of the complicated traditional conceptualizations of migration experience and exile. In this sense, Aboulela’s characters' transitivity from one place to another or from one country to another is performed either geographically between two different spaces; or subconsciously between the past and the present or between two dislocated places through their dreams, memories and nostalgic strategies. Therefore, Aboulela’ characters are always in move between two juxtaposing worlds.

II.1. Leila Aboulela's Juxtaposing Worlds and her Sense of Transitivity

Aboulela's first novel, *The Translator*, is, in itself, a juxtaposed literary piece. It is divided into two main juxtaposed parts: part one describes the protagonist's life in Scotland and part two portrays her life in Sudan after her return from her exile. In this novel, the narrative follows Sammar, a young Sudanese woman who migrates to Scotland with her husband, Tarig, who died later in a car accident. Grieving the death of her husband, the widow Sudanese woman comes back to her family in Sudan where she is faced with the feelings of estrangement within her family, which forces her to leave her son with her mother-in law and come back again to Scotland where she meets and falls in love with the male protagonist, Rae Isles, a Scottish academic. As her beloved man refuses to convert to Islamto get married to her, Sammar returns again to Sudan,where she has to challenge her foreignness within her native community. Later, she received a letter from Rae's friend to inform her that he converted to Islam and he was waiting for her agreement to fly to Sudan to marry her and to come back again to Scotland. Thisspatial juxtaposition in the plot reflects the characters' transitivity between two different places so that Sammar avows a sense of belonging to both places. Nonetheless, she transits to Scotland to escape the feeling of in-betweeness and to get free from her emotional exile.

Again in *Lyrics Alley*, the female protagonist, Nabilah, has to face the same feelings of displacement. Nabilah lives between her homeland Egypt and her host country Sudan where she got married to a Sudanese Man, Mahmood Abuzeid. In Sudan, though the protagonist tries to tie herself to her husband's family and his country, she feels that she is out of place. Therefore, she often thinks to get divorced and to come back to Egypt with her two children. Once she took the decision and returned to her mother's home in Egypt, where all her childhood memories rose inside her and her nostalgic feelings intensified, she went back to Sudan after following her grandmother's advice to be strong and responsible and come back to her husband's house where she started engaging in dialogic relations with her husband's family members.On the other hand, the same sense of transitivity can be seen in *Minaret*, which charts the struggles of the protagonist, Najwa, who is a Sudanese woman whosefather's execution after a military coup forced her into exile in Britain. The protagonist's transitivity with her family between Sudan and Britain started a long time before this event. Najwa and her family used to move to London to spend their holidays and then to come back again to Sudan. But this time, their transitivity is for

good where they have to engage into a new life and challenge their geographical migratory conditions.

As a matter of fact, Aboulela's narratives portray her characters' geographical displacement through time. These narratives offer visions of the missed past and contemplations of the present that remains hard to reside. Spatial disruption and time confusion are central to all Aboulela's protagonists' lives. In *The Translator*, the heroine, Sammar, comes from Sudan to her exile in Britain after her marriage to her cousin Tarig and his death in a car accident. Initially, Sammar was born in Britain to Sudanese parents, but she did not visit Sudan till she became seven years old. Because of her fragmented journeys that transformed her to a different "westernized woman" accused of her aunt's son death, Aboulela's heroine had not been able to establish a sense of affinity and authentic identity within her family. Therefore, she has to make another journey to her past and go through a self discovery process in her aunt's house, to be able to start planning her own life after her husband's death. As the weight of this new situation dawned on her within her family in Sudan, she returned to her present in Scotland where she was motivated to take the first step and to ask Rae to convert to Islam in order to get married. After his initial refusal, Sammar made another journey to her past to escape her hopeless present without her lover. There, in her homeland, Sammar's new conditions inspire her to empower herself and this inspiration enables her to narrow the distances between her and her family members.

On the other hand, in her novel, *Minaret*, Aboulela's protagonist, Najwa comes from Khartoum to London to find her Muslim identity and the lost practicing Muslim side of her family. After her father's execution and her refugeeism in London with her family, Najwa and her family have to start a new life in this new country where she has to work as a maid after her mother's death and her brother's imprisonment. While Najwa used to live a secular way of life in the past with her family in Sudan and she continued her living that is almost drawn entirely from her past in London, she tries to build her new present as a maid by erasing that same past. Najwa declares that:

> It still takes me by surprise how natural I am in this servant role. On my very first day as a maid (not when I worked for Aunty Eva-I didn't feel like a maid with her-but later when I started working for her friend) memories rushed back at me. All the ingratiating manners, the downcast eyes, the sideway movements of the servants I

> grew up with. I used to take them for granted...but I must have been close to them, absorbing their ways, so that know, years later and in another continent, I am one of them(Aboulela, *Minaret* 83-84).

Therefore, Najwa's transitivity between Khartoum and London contributes to her self-discovery, identity formation and the creation of hybrid relations with these new community members.

In her novel, *Lyrics Alley*,Aboulela's protagonist, Nabila finds herself moving between two different worlds (Egypt and Sudan) and between her past in Egypt and her present in Sudan. This transitivity from the past to the present and vice-versa proves that she lives in a changing world where time gives meaning to her existence and experiences. According to Heidegger, the past, present and future all influence peoples' experiences and lives. People's past experiences integrate into their present lives to change it and construct the future, a state of reality that result from their existence within dimensions of time. The past is known; people acknowledge that it is out of their control, but that it still exhibits a significant influence on their present state of being, and opens for them new possibilities in the future. In this sense, the presence of the Muslim women's past experiences, mainly lived in their homelands before immigration, remains to shape their present lives as migrants in the host countries.These experiences are also affected by the generational gap or the transition from one migrant generation to another.

Correspondingly, transition between different generations is another type of transitivity in Aboulela's fiction that tackles the theme of transitivity through the generational gap between the old and the new generation, mainly, when they are labeled as traditional and modern. The structure of her novels might be interpreted as focusing on not only the transitivity taken between two different places (Kharthoum and Aberdeen or Cairo), but also two different generations through similarities and differences between the young and the old women: Sammar and her aunt Mahasen, Najwa and her employee's mother Doctora Zeineb, and her mother's friend Waffa, Nabilah and her co-wife Wahiba. The young women's subconscious transitivity is taken on looking back to the past while the old women,as the centre of consciousness, register present events, cultural norms and traditional convictions more immediately and have further views for the future. This type of transitivity reflects both the characters' and the writer's cultural authenticity of their cultural backgrounds as it is defined by Bishop: "cultural authenticity is the success with which a writer is able to reflect the cultural perspectives of the people whom he or

she is writing about, and make readers from the inside group believe that he or she, knows what's going on" (29). And for this, Aboulela insists on depicting this transition between her different generations to hint to the notion of tradition and modernity and how the gap between them can be bridged.

In *The Translator*, Sammar, a young veiled woman, is regarded by her oldmother-in-law as useless, good-for-nothing, and she is accused as being the ever guilty one within the family (169). This accusation reflects the tense relationship between her and her aunt and puts her in uneasy position in her aunt's house. This position stresses the generational gap between the old generation that represents traditions of the indigenous culture and the young generation that reflects modern cultural practices brought over from the modern country. This novel, thus, can be said to detail "the ironies, the pathos and the hardships of having to live between two worlds, neither of which provides the harmony of a life that the mind imagines and craves for"(qtd, in Mohr 129). The generational gap between Sammar and her aunt is revealed through their different views in the novel. For the protagonist's aunt, Scotland is a land of opportunities and advancement, whereas for Sammar it is a place of exile and isolation. Eventually, the novel, already at an early stage, alludes to the complexparadox that the migrant protagonist is fraught with and the different processes of transitivity she has to go through.

On the whole,these processes are often framed in terms of diaspora, migration, exile, or refugeeism that logically evoke feelings of isolation and nostalgia, conveying the image of migrants who have left behind their home for good, lost their belonging either here or there, and are temporarily uprooted and displaced. However, Leila Aboulela's contemporary migrant Muslim narratives theorize the migrant Muslim position in more creative and productive terms such as 'Third Space' or hybrid spaces, emphasizing how migrant Muslims uphold ties to their homelands and, at the same time, underscoring how they forge dialogic connections to both diasporic communities and native subjects through their hybrid consciousness.

II.2.Shaping Hybrid Consciousness in Leila Aboulela's Third Spaces

Everyday life is by no means structured, particularly, within the living space. The living space, here, means the homeland or the foreign country that may in a sense be a primary or immediate space we tie to the notion of 'homeland' that is not the only place where such a sense

is graspable. On their daily routines, people pass through or pause in many different places that are never fixed or permanent and the totality of which produces a distinct spatial network of their lived space. The different places that people pass through have the ability to shape their lives and they, in turn, shape them.They appear and disappear in people's lives and they change and are changed by their surroundings. But as indicated above, the physical relocation to a new place does not automatically erase all traces or all knowledge and memories of the past and does not preclude the possibility of alternative places of the native land. Places of the native land are embodied and can be reenacted in third spaces, as it is the case of Aboulela's migrant protagonists who also remain connected to their new lands through their hybrid consciousness. Such connections, in turn, influence how places of the present are experienced and transformed into third spaces.

The left homeland can be embodied in various third spaces, being a family space, living space or workspace. The third space is not, therefore, a natural space of native home and belonging, but is imitated into a larger collectivity of constantly mixing circumstances and cultures that are experienced differently by individuals. Often it is as a result of daily experiences and routines that migrants attach meanings and symbolism to certain places. Moreover, the migrants' hybrid consciousness enables themto tie more closely to specific locations, anchor in their environment, and feel comfortable and in place. In the literary texts, discussed here, the home is above all a third space that affects the female protagonists' lives and makes them acquainted with their most private emotions, fears, memories, desires, and daily practices. It is also the arena where these female migrants navigate between their past and present experiences and negotiate their hybrid identities, thereby, coming to terms with their new dialogic experiences of migration and constructing a sense of home and belonging in the new cultural contexts. In these contexts, Aboulela's protagonists enable themselves and shape their hybrid identities in their third spaces.

Similarly, third spaces in *Minaret* do not merely constitute the background for the events taking place in the novel, but are represented as co-developing with the female protagonist, Najwa, changing with and being changed by her. Her transitivity from Sudan to London forced her to experience a different place and to try to find a new life in this dislocated space. The London Najwa gets to discover here is not the city in which she used to pass the summer

vacations with her family in their luxurious apartment in Lancaster Gate. It is a new London where she has to face a new experience of exile, and to move from one location to another in order to start a new life without her fatherand, later, without her mother who died because of a cancer and her twin brother Omar who was imprisoned of getting drugs. Though Najwa had visited London many times before and was accustomed to the different places of the city; this time and after leaving Khartoum, she moves with her family into this apartment and their permanent transitivity, there, is not like any other summer: "Our first weeks in London were OK. We didn't notice that we were falling. . . We had never been there before in April… It was fun to do all the things we usually did in the summer" (Aboulela, *Minaret*56). Consequently, Najwa's hybrid consciousness has soon risen.

As a further matter, Najwa has to realize that their relocation to London is not a visit. It is not a temporary escape from home and from life in Sudan, but it is a new permanent home and a new life altogether. The London of her adulthood is not the same as the London of her youth and, thus, requires reorganization and restoration of her life. She has to discover new places and locations. This time, beside the family's vacation home and Najwa's own apartment, she is obliged to discover other places such as Doctora Zeinab's apartment (Najwa's workspace), Regent's Park mosque (Najwa's religious space) where her religious identity will be constructed, and Regent's Park (Najwa's social and romantic space)where her first meetings with her lover, Tamer, will take place.These places between which Najwa crosses back and forth and which, become, later, personally meaningful to her, enable her to construct a third space and new hybrid social relations. In this same context, Doreen Massey's claim that "spaces and places are constructed out of particular constellations of social and other relations, a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (10), clarifies Najwa's hybrid locality in the novel.

As shown formerly, in *Minaret*, Aboulela depicts the protagonist's transitivity from her home city, Khartoum, to a foreign city, London; and from her house to an apartment in Lancaster Gate. This transitivity reveals a very intricate web of multiple various places of London in the late 1980s, the 1990s, and the early 2000s, a web that consists of streets, neighborhoods, parks, restaurants, buildings, and apartments that undergo constant mobility and different processes of interactivity. Upon arriving in London in 1985, Najwa's family moves into their old vacation home. During these early years, her spaces are restricted only to the districts that surround her

apartment such as: Oxford Street, Bond Street, Leicester Square and Gloucester Road. After her mother's death and her brother's imprisonment, the protagonist has to transit toward the area of Regent's Park. There, she moves into a new place on Edgware Road and starts a new contact with the religious community of Regent's Park mosque. This community helps her to find a job in an apartment on St. John's Wood High Street where the reader meets Najwa in the early 2000s.This spatial transitivity also affects her everyday lived spaces and manifests the minaret of the mosqueat the religious spiritual center of her life so that Najwa's dialogic experience can be described as being uprooted from her familiar environment to a new third space, especially when she has to start working as a house maid with an Egyptian migrant family in London. Thus, in the course of the novel, these juxtaposed spaces change significantly as the protagonist goes through a process of transitivity and undergoes massive changes that constitute her hybrid consciousness.

This new hybrid position, that Najwa has to take in her life as a house maid, affects her self-perception as well as her dialogic relations with the members of the host community. This job plays a major role in adjusting her to this new place that turns to be a third space for her and enables her to have a sense of belonging. On her first day at work, Najwa describes her new job as consolatory and uplifting: "I run the hot water over [the plates] a long time, until they become unstuck. I enjoy being in a home rather than cleaning offices and hotels. I like being part of a family, touching their things, knowing what they ate, what they threw in the bin. I know them in intimate ways while they hardly know me, as if I am invisible" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 83). Basing on how she describes her first day at work, it is clear that Najwa enjoys being within a family though she is invisible and in the background. She, herself, confesses that she would rather be "the family's concubine, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, with life-long security and a sense of belonging" (215) than going back to a life of loneliness, isolation, and invincible guilt. These repetitive acts like doing the dishes, cooking, washing, and ironing soothe her and make her feel at home. They reveal a character that feels comfortable in routines and in being useful since performing those daily house duties help Najwa approach her old self, negotiateher past and present experiences, and basically get a clearer sense of who she is. They also afford her a space for daydreaming and reconnecting to old memories, and though filling her with the feelings of nostalgia, bring her back to the present. In short, performing those dutiesbestow Najwa with a sense of reality, interactivity and stability.

Nevertheless, this lingering sense of stability was shattered when Najwa entered into an intimate relationship with Tamer (her employer's young brother). Attracted by Tamer's reciprocal admiration to her, she empowers herself to emerge as a stronger character with renewed self-confidence. In this phase, she is described as a dependent character who desires to be in the comforting presence of these family members even if this means that she performs the role of a servant.Not only did her fondness for Tamer inspired her hopes of having a family of her own in this Third Space, it also revitalized her job and made her endure Lamya's disrupted moods. Through this romance relation with Tamer, she begins to discover herself again, construct her hybrid identity and build dialogic bridges with the Other. However, this romance relation did not last for a long time because soon as Tamer's mother discovered it, an end to this relation was an obligation.On the condition that Najwa breaks off this relation with Tamer, Doctora Zeinabwrites her a generous check that will possibly allow her to go back to university and go on *Hajj*, that is considered as an exciting opportunity or a dream that Najwa had not previously the opportunity to make true. Despite this sudden ending of her employment, Najwa is able to enliven her strength from this short-lived romance. The consoling atmosphereof her experience is, thus, replaced with the prospect of another place of belonging in the future, a spiritual place of pilgrimage and another feeling of home.

Likewise, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*hints to the possibility that third spaces are also opened and new forms of dialogic interconnectedness are produced between two different worlds. These connections bring the multiple separated divides closer together and drastically alter traditional experiences of migration, in which the Muslim migrants are in constant isolation and exclusion from the host society, to hybrid consciousness, through which migrants face all their social, cultural, emotional and psychological attributes and, consequently, reconstruct new communities, cultures and hybrid identities. The protagonist Sammar's transitivity, in addition to Rae's transitivity, between Sudan and Scotland is not a mere reflection of their unsuitability in their new spaces but it is an interpretation of their ability to adopt to new environments and to embrace the cross-cultural disclosure dogma that forges for dialogic connections and rejects the Others' aversion.

On the other hand, *Coloured Lights* (2001), the title story of her eponymous short story collection, has also been interpreted mainly through this lens. In the short story *Coloured Lights*,

Aboulela refers to the different places that the protagonist inhabits and various experiences that constitute an important part of her hybrid consciousness. The variety of these experiences resembles different coloured lights and reminds the protagonist of the coloured lights of her brother's wedding long years ago in Sudan. Though the image of these coloured lights suggests a positive meaning of joy and hope, it recalls the tragic accident of her brother's death because of the decorative lights in his wedding party. The protagonist narrates: "We use in Khartoum todecorate the wedding house. But the lights for Taha's wedding did not shine as they were meant to on that night. By the time night came he has already buried and we were mourning, notcelebrating" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights*3). Again in the narrative, the third spaces that the protagonist inhabits in London are compared to these coloured lights that are diverse and multiple so that the constructed spaces serve specific functions, and are embedded within larger networks of hybridized socio-cultural relations. Such places are, furthermore, experienced differently by the protagonist like the perception of different coloured lights. These lights convey different meanings to her, on the one hand, she considers them as signs of happiness, release or enjoyment, while on the other hand, she perceives them as false signs that reflect sadness, loss or grief. Consequently, with relevance to these lights, some places of migration are experienced as intimate spaces and safe places, whereas other places are translated into negative terms as places of death, stress, fear or danger. These attitudes toward theses places reflect that they are endowed with emotions of belonging and hybrid consciousness that enable the migrant Muslim protagonist to challenge her everyday migratory experiences.

Another important short story that portrays the protagonist's hybrid consciousness and her existence within a third space is *The Museum*. The protagonist, Shadia finds herself in the museum where everything about Africa is distorted. Inside this place, she feels as if she is looking in a shattered mirror which reflects a distorted image of her homeland Africa as well of herself as being an African migrant woman. Linking back to this image on display in the museum, Bhabha (1994) provides a clear description of how black people are perceived through these words: "the black is both savage and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces" (82). This black African's image that invades the museum reflects the British colonial and postcolonial history and the museum, thus, becomes a physical reminder

of an emergent historical presence that calls attention to what Barnor Hesse has called "multicultural transruptions" within Britain's modern history (19). The museum, then, represents a contact zone, but also empire and colonialism, and, therefore, hints at Britain's powerful processes of inclusion and exclusion. Within this space, Shadia declares the falsification of these representations and the distortion of this history. Consequently, in the integrity of the female protagonist's third space where she interacts with the male protagonist Bryan, the reality of British history is questioned and the legitimacy of Western authority is challenged as Bhabha (1994) clarifies: "what emerges [...] is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (87-88). Therefore, in a reversal role, Western representations of Africa in the museum become the subject of postcolonial criticism and the possibility of resistance becomes possible within the third space. In general, Leila Aboulela'sthird spaces and hybrid consciousness are not her only dialogic strategies; rather the motif 'journey' is another strategy for border-crossing in her narratives.

II.3. Symbolism of the 'Journey' in Leila Aboulela's Transnational Border-crossing

It goes without saying that Aboulela's migrant characters never arrive at their final destinations and they are always in movement, never quite here or there. Therefore, they are forever conscious of their places of departure and arrival and try to find their third spaces in these differentdestinations.Accordingly, through using the metaphor of the journey, Aboulela's sense of transitivity continues to reinscribe itself through the process of journeying. In this context, Papastergiadis claims that these temporary reinsriptions which are formed in the contestation between departure and arrival are the signs with which diasporic communities enunciate themselves (139). Therefore, the question whether a place of relocation becomes home or whether home remains the place that is left behind, depends mainly on the kind of displacement the migrant characters undertake and this is dealt with differently in each of Aboulela's fictive texts. As a result, passing back and forth between varieties of places, Aboulela's migrant characters have to endure both geographical and cultural displacement. Mahjoub remarks about such cultural displacement as the following:

> In moving from one cultural sphere to another we take shortcuts, make adjustments, to fit into the landscape. Each time we relocate our lives we have to leave something of ourselves behind so as to make room for what we encounter…It is a kind of acclimatisation, and it is part of that process of relocating. (qtd. in Steiner 35)

Accordingly, as a result of journeying, geographical and cultural displacements are frequently portrayed in Aboulela's cross-cultural texts. Thus, suffice to say here that 'the journey' appears as a central symbol of transnational border-crossing between different dislocated contexts.

In *Minaret*, thefirst person narrator and the protagonist, Najwa, also finds herself in the turmoil of a forced journey to London after the military coup that happened in her country, Sudan, and which results in her father's imprisonment and execution. Consequently, Najwa does not seem to be able to overcome the loss experienced through her displacement and, thus, her journey to a foreign country affects her life in different ways. This narrative is set almost exclusively in London and thematizes language, exile, and cultural differences between Sudan and Britain. It depicts Najwa's journey from Khartoum to London and its impact on her life. After this journey, the protagonist is no longer the Sudanese child and young adult, or the Sudanese guest worker who has just started to work as a maid in a migrant Egyptian family's home. She spends most of her time with these family members, taking care of the girl baby at home and in the garden. This is the protagonist in her late twenties who had been dreaming of returning to Sudan all along; who speaks English fluently; and whose love of London turns it, in particular, into the place where she wants to be, live and work; a place where she already started to feel at home.

Additionally, the journey that the protagonist has to endure from Sudan to London follows an unchronological order in the narrative. It jumps between different time periods in the life of the protagonist and her family. This structure of the novel reflects the hardship of the journey that the protagonist goes through. The novel is narrated by an unnamed middle aged woman, originally from Sudan, who moved to London with her mother and twin brother Omar after a military coup that ended her father's life. Najwa's mother and her brother are all the support she has in a foreign country where they try to survive together as a strong family. Thus, her first

journey to London can be described as a structural journey.The fact that Najwa is experiencing the very chaos of her life in London that she tries to order retrospectively is an instance of this structural journey. Also the journey is deemed useful itself within what looks like an exploration of the nature of self through the constant connection with the past. Therefore, immediate access to the past can always be gained, and striving for its truth is disclosed as an ultimately successful experience. Hence, Aboulela again leaves this novel's ending wide open, and [...]uses physical and emotional journeys as a metaphor for the insoluble internal shuttling between national and personal affiliations (Lewis 220). Thus, journey, in this novel, is a medium that is made in the in-betweeness of potentially infinite transitivity that provides an opportunity of rediscovering herself.

In Aboulela's novel, *The Translator*, the female protagonist also endures three important journeys that affect her personal experiences and her self-perception. Her first journey was from Sudan to Aberdeen. After her marriage to her cousin, Tarig, Sammar has to move with him to Scotland to follow his studies in medicine. There, Sammar experiences for the first time in her life the meaning of exile and foreignness. In this country, she undergoes various culture-shocks and has to struggle with the British different culture and weather. Later she finds companionship with her only son, Amir, till a car accident ends her husband life and obliges her to go on in her life alone without even her son. The second journey that Sammar has to take in her life is after her breaking up with Rae who refuses to convert to her religion in order to get married to the protagonist. Consequently, Sammar is obliged again to move to Sudan because she cannot continue her life in Aberdeen after the loss of her love.Her friend Yasmin advises her to see the journey as self-help, to consider it as an opportunity to visit her homeland again, to see her son, and tostart a new life in her homeland with a Muslim man like her. She urges her saying; "You are leaving in a few weeks…If I were you, I'd avoid him like the plague till then. Go home and may be you'll meet someone normal, someone Sudanese like yourself. Mixed couples just don't look right, they irritate everyone" (Aboulela, *The Translator*93). Hence, when the cultural barriers stand between her and the man she loves, she decides to travel again to see her family, only to end up feeling alienated at her 'new home'.

And so, after her journey to Sudan, Sammar has to face new experiences of alienation and contempt within her family and native community. Sammar's aunt, Mahasen, judges her journey

without knowing about it. From a different time and different place, she accuses Sammar that her journey back to Sudan is due to the reality that she is fired from her job (170). This accusation made the journey more difficult for her and pushed her to work for the 'Erasing Illiteracy' programme (149) in order to contribute to her aunt's house and fulfill the needs of her son.The house shared with her aunt symbolizes the protagonist's re-connection with her cultural heritage and traditions as well as with her family. Sammar declares: "As for living with her, Amir and I both have a share in the house. It's our right to be there" (151). In the narrative, the destination of Sammar's journey captures a certain feeling of belonging associated with her original homeland, her aunt, and the friendship she (re)discovers with the neighbour Nahla.

Accordingly, the Sudan that Sammar re-discovers from her second journey is the space that translates her experience of re-visiting the motherland and of celebrating its intimacy. However, the author intentionally leaves Sammar's third journey open at the end of the narrative to pave the way to the construction of cross-cultural and transnational relations. After Rae's conversion, he also undergoes a journey to Sudan to meet Sammar in order to get married and come back to Aberdeen together. This time, Sammar understands that a sense of belonging for him is not connected to a particular place; rather it is his relation with her that matters for both of them. Rae confesses to her: "Ours isn't a religion of suffering," he said, "nor is it tied to a particular place." His words made her feel close to him, pulled in, closer than any time before because it was "ours" now, not hers alone. And because he understood. Not a religion of pathos, not a religion of redemption through sacrifice" (Aboulela, *The Translator*198). Sammar, thus, asserts that "She had been given the chance and she had not been able to substitute her country for him, anything for him" (198). Thus, both characters, Sammar and Rae, meet in foreign environments to share the experiences of their journeys from their homelands to foreign countries, negotiate their culture-shocks and exchange their transnational and transcultural stories into a shared present, resisting differences and barriers.

Similarly, the main male character, Rae Isles, undergoes various journeys that affect his dialogic experiences. These experiences are defined by two main journeys. His first journey to Africa was exactly to Morocco where he settled down, marrying Emilia, a Spanish-Moroccan girl he met in Morocco where he also buried his first dead baby from her. For Rae, Emilia represents the exotic woman because she is a mixture of her parents' cultures. Emilia's father was English

and her mother was Spanish (Aboulela, *The Translator* 60). Though her parents were against her relationship with a man who looks like an Arab, this same exotic look made Emilia attracted to him. However, their relationship comes to an end after the death of their newborn baby and Rae has to come back to Scotland where he gets married again to another woman and has a daughter.Later, his second journey was to Sudan after his conversion in order to marry the female protagonist Sammar and to come back with her to Scotland. In this sense, these journeys generate and reveal various forms of transnational border-crossing induced by Rae's encounters, ambitions, and desires. These journeys also represent a cross-cultural weaving loom whose to and fro motion intertwines individuals and forms of life that are sometimes so different that they are apparently incompatible. Rae's journeys are the vehicle of this weaving process, moving from his Scottish childhood to his 'Arab' adulthood, and more generally from the past to the present, because in the light of each journey, the present is implicitly connected with the past. These transnational journeys suggest that the dialogic process is not only a fact for this Scottish immigrant, but also a motive. In addition and above all, it is a weapon, a survival strategy and an instrument of border-crossing.

On the other hand, the narrative of both characters in Aboulela's short story, *The Ostrich*, provides different interpretations of their entangled journeys that result into their exilic living in England as well as cross-cultural experiences. Through their journeys, Aboulela explores a complex and ambivalent world where notions of home, family, language and exile are constantly questioned by the interwoven and sometimes parallel transition of the two characters. The author uses these journeys to portray apart binaries and draws attention to what Brah calls the "multi-locationality [of characters] within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries" (Brah 197). As such, this short story is a complex set of journeys, forcing the characters to try and make sense of their multi-locationality. After her marriage to a Sudanese migrant man, the female protagonist, Sumra, undergoes a journey to England where she will meet her husband for the first time at the airport. There, in that foreign land, she lives various experiences of estrangement and isolation at the beginning of her arrival. At the airport, when she always has to come back from Sudan to London after a visit to her family, she feels herself as "a stranger suddenly appearing on the stage with no part to play, no lines to read" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights*39-45). This image of an actor on the stage in the wrong play, without a part, evokes feelings of acute loss and a sense of deep exile. Hence, Sumra has to endure the paradox of living physically in a foreign land and

emotionally in her homeland and, thus, she has to go back and forth between them. Also, this potential is explored more fully and centrally into a different trend in Aboulela's next novel.

In her novel, *Lyrics Alley*, the journeys of Aboulela's characters are portrayed between different lands and from different lenses. In this novel, Aboulela demonstrates that the characters' journeys sometimes have constructive results in their lives and sometimes destructive ends. The protagonist,Nabilah, has to endure a difficult journey from her homeland Egypt to Sudan after her marriage with Mahmood Abuzeid who is twenty years older than her. There, she has to start a new life with her husband and his family (his first wife Wahiba, his son Nur and the other members of the family) and to struggle to live in a different culturally and geographically environment. Later, Nabilah also takes another journey back from Sudan to Egypt to visit her family. However, this time, Nabilah's journey is a temporary one for she has to return to her husband's house in Sudan and to erase the idea of divorce from her mind. Back in Sudan, she manages to create a third space for her and her children and to construct dialogic bridges with the members of her husband's family.

In addition to Nabilah's journeys, both main characters, Nur Abuzeid and Soraya Abuzeid undergo journeys between Egypt and Sudan. These journeys reflect their transitivity from their homeland Khartoum to Alexandria as well as their transition from a state of happiness, because they were engaged and going to get married, to a state of separation that resulted in deep feelings of grief and despair since Nur endured, there, a tragic accident that left him paralyzedfor the rest of his life. All these complications pushed the characters to undergo another journey to come back to Sudan where Nur was condemned to the inability to move and continue his life as before. In his parent's house, Nur has to face the reality of his state and the pity in the eyes of the members of his family. In order to find a remedy for his disability, Nur and his fiancé together with his father, Mahmood and his wife Nabilah have another journey to London. There, they engage into reciprocal dialogic experiences with each other and with the members of the host country. In fact, in spite of the hardship of Aboulela's characters' geographical journeys in this narrative, they can be described as symbolic bridges for transnational border-crossing.

Further, by examining Aboulela's narratives and their protagonists in detail, it becomes clear that these narratives explore migrant Muslim characters' journeys as mediums of border-

crossing and dialogic connections. More particular, her protagonists and narrators tell stories of their transnational journeys from Sudan to England or Egypt or the opposite direction, stressing the interdependency between the old and new worlds and, thus, foregrounding the processes of cross-cultural exchange and reconciliation. These processes of cross-cultural negotiation can best be explained by using the concepts of hybridity and dialoguing, literally as well as metaphorically, for understanding how the foreign and the familiar intersect in hybrid spaces through dialogic interactions. Transitivity from one place to another can serve as a model for border-crossing and an act of cross-cultural connection that the protagonists engage in during their journeys and dialogic experiences. These journeys are traced between the homeland and the foreign one, whereby the protagonists move from a particular cultural context into a completely different one in the host community. These journeys grant the original 'continued life' elsewhere where the protagonists find themselves in contact with a new culture and a different community and consequently enter dialogic relations that challenge the discourse of the clash of cultures and stress the possibilities of authentic representations, adaptation and continuing dialogue of cultures. Aboulela's texts, then, can be read as case studies of the way migrants move between the host culture and their source culture through the narratives themselves. In the process of their geographical journeys, the processes of departure and arrival are never complete and it is in the temporary articulations between them as well as their spiritual journeys that their hybrid consciousness emerges.

Aboulela's narratives also emphasize the spiritual journeys that the characters engage in through their migration experiences. In this case, the word 'journey' does not only refer to physical transitivity from one place to another but also, or even mainly, to spiritual journeys that the characters have from one spiritual case or state of mind to another. In *The Translator*, Sammar, Rae and her Pakistani friend's spiritual journeys are aimed at finding themselves and ordering their lives again. Their spiritual journeys are fragmented and their scattered pieces are played off against each other. However, despite of the truth that their journeys' chronology as well as linearity are disturbed and their purposes are diverse, these journeys lead them to a meeting point. Therefore, the structure of the novel reflects the inner life of their protagonists so that the fragmentariness of the narration would then mirror the fragility and difficulty of their spiritual journeys as a whole.

In general, Aboulela's texts add to the discussion of this thesis an important focus on the stories of migrant geographical and spiritual journeys and how these journeys influence the migrants' self-perceptions and their environments. The protagonists' journeys in Aboulela's narratives function as processes of transitivity where 'transition' across time and space creates a present for the migrant subject. In this present, Aboulela's characters engage in exactly dialogic relations through sharing their stories of migration and experiences of geographical and spiritual journeys in order to construct a hybrid present for themselves in the new world where they find themselves moved to. Nevertheless, the successful creation of this new world can only be constructed in third space through acknowledging the past by facing it and weaving dialogic contacts between the past and the present. In fact, Aboulela's characters invoke the past only to face it and to be able to shape a future. In short, Aboulela's protagonists' journeys are not only unique, but single challenges that are recurrently undertaken and recounted in their migratory dialogic experiences and that is the reason why theseexperiences prove successful in transcending their exile and invoking their cross-cultural encounters.

II.4.Transcending Exile and Invoking Cross-cultural Encounters

The topic of migration and the wide-ranging discourses of exile and cross-cultural encounters are noticeably recurrent in Leila Aboulela's literary works. They are also common themes in contemporary Muslim migrant literature and they further regain significance in the first half of the twentieth century due to the prolificallywritings about such topics by contemporary postcolonial critics. Perhaps one of the most prominent critics to theorize these concepts is Edward Said whose memoir, *Out of Place*, is considered as a scholarly and a personal issue in his lifetime. Also, in his essay "*Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals*" Said defines exile as a dilemmic condition. According to him, "[you] cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation" (2000: 373), a definition that underlines exile as a temporal as well as a spatial position. Said also points toward advantages of this position, ascribing to exile what he calls a "double or exile perspective" (378) that stems from the constant comparison of several spaces. Therefore, he asserts that exile might even be the positive alternative to living in the periphery.

Thematically, Said claims, in his essay "*Reflections on Exile*" (1994a), thatthe value of the experience of exile lies in a challenging task of balancing between the experience that has to be maintained and the one that needs to be given up.In other words, he explains: "[…]only someone who has achieved independence and detachment, someone whose homeland is 'sweet' but whose circumstances make it impossible to recapture that sweetness, has the ability to accomplish the task" (Said 186). In this essay, Said points out that much of the exile's life is "taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule" (144). Said, thus, uses exile as a term to describe various types of transitivity, displacement, and exilic communities and individuals which he classifies as "exilic types" or "exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés" (181). All these types are genuinely depicted in Leila Aboulela's fiction.

Correspondingly, Aboulela portrays her characters' exile in two different portraits: one reflects the trauma of exile as a negative experience as Hoffman explains in her moving exploration of the meaning of exile; the other portrait conveys a positive image. Hoffman declares that exile can deprive the subject of access to the radically different surroundings by "draining the world not only of significance but of its colours, striations, nuances, its very existence" (Hoffman 107).Obviously, using the notion of trauma to describe exile and its effects, among which are the feelings of alienation, suggests an ample and inclusive understanding of trauma, as an experience that is "understood to be elusive and impossible to grasp," and that "elude[s] sense making and the assignment of meaning [and that hence] cannot be integrated into memory, but neither can … be forgotten" (Radstone 117).Cathy Caruth also emphasizes the "unspeakability" and "unrepresentability" of trauma, which constitutes the central aporia at the heart of literary treatments of exilic experiences. According to her, representations of trauma essentially attempt "to narrate the unnarratable" because traumatic events characteristically overwhelm the individual and resist linguistic representation (4).Therefore, trauma is highly significant for the migrant's identity formation since it constitutes a primary threat to identity; it "undoes the self by breaking the ongoing narrative, severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future" (Brison 41).The other portrait in Aboulela's narratives presents the experience of exile in a positive way as a challenging experience to reconstruct her characters' hybrid identities and as an empowering space to create communicative bridges with the members of the host society. Aboulela repeatedly refers to this positive portrait of her

characters' exile, both in her short stories and novels. In this sense, Aboulela's narratives reflect their characters' exilic experiences from double views lenses.

In her first novel, *The Translator*, the narrator's identification with the female protagonist, Sammar, is reflected in the self-portrait she paints as a lonely and weak woman in her exile after her husband's death and it is clear throughout the narrative that she cannot overcome her emotional despondency and exilic feelings This reflects Said's statement that exile's "sadness can never be surmounted" (Said 137).In the first part of the novel, Sammar moves with her husband Tarig to Aberdeen where he has to follow his studies in medicine. There, Sammar experiences the life of exile from her family for the first time. The narrator clarifies that "She had early on, from the first year she had come with Tarig, that the winter sun of this city was colder than its winter rains. Many times before that lesson was learnt, she had seen the bright from the window, felt its warmth through the glass and gone out lightly dressed, only to shiver with incomprehension and suffer as every inadequately dressed African suffers in the alien British cold"(Aboulela, *TheTranslator*65). After her husband death, she has to live her exile alone in the city, especially after her decision to leave her only son with her in-laws in Sudan because she has neither the power nor the conditions to mother a child (58). In general, though exile can be voluntary or involuntary, internal or external, it generally implies a fact of instability, a recurrent state of trying to fit in.

Aboulela's novel is also full of these sensual exilic moments that come out very clearly when the reader looks at Sammar's reactions to her Scottish environment. The Scottish landscapes as well as the geographical and social scenes are seen as completely opposite to the past territories and scenes in Africa. At first, Sammar experiences her exile in Scotland very negatively. She is far from her family, she has lost her husband in such a strange place and is constantly reminded that she is different and that she somehow does not belong. This makes her living experience in Scotland passive so that during her stay in this place, she often refers to it as 'Room of hibernation' or 'the hospital room' (Aboulela 51, 67). There is nothing hung on the wall, no pictures, nothing personal that indicates any sense of life in her room. There is only her exile that suggests a painful or penalizing expulsion from the homeland. Indeed, her description of this place suggests sickness and weakness caused by the exile she feels. For her, it is possible to be able to return to her homeland and chooses not to do so, but instead she continues to dream

of and imagines a glorious return. However, in the second part of the novel, when Sammar comes back home to Sudan after an initial breaking up with her beloved man, Rae Isles, she finds herself in another experience of exile and alienation from the members of her family. The writer describes her status within her family as the following: "This was her life here. Fighting malaria, penicillin powder on the children's cut. The curfew at eleven. Immersing herself, losing herself so that there would not be pauses in the day to dwell, no time for fantasies at night" (162). Accordingly, Sammar's transitivity between Sudan and Scotland fills her life with tremendous exilic feelings in both settings.

Consequently, after breaking up with Rae, Sammar has to return to her homeland where she endures another type of exile. Being within her family members can be described as living in turmoil, that is not very different from the exile in Scotland. The idyllic scene of seeing her homelandagain is broken by the alienation Sammar suffers from at home within her family. Through this scene, Aboulela distances herself from Sammar's exile, exposing its limitations in its inability to link dream to reality; the dream of turning back home and the reality that homehas become no more home. It is at this point in the narrative that the exile from a different country and life changes to become an exile from the left behind beloved so that nostalgia for the left behind homeland changes to become a longing for the life of exile in a different country. This nostalgia for a new life in a foreign country is centred on Sammar's desire of union with Rae whose proposition for her to participate in the anti-terrorist project in Egypt shatters this desire. Summar clarifies: "*It wasn't a mistake. I was homesick for the place, how everything looked. But I don't know what kind of sickness it would be, to be away from you.*"(Aboulela 113, italics in original).Therefore, the closer Sammar gets to departure from the host land, the more she questions her desire to return home.

In this regard, Aboulela emphasizes her protagonist's reluctance and hesitation to unveil her exilic feelings. The narrator describes these feelings as: "She thought of going home, seeing home again, its colours again and in spite of years of yearning, all she had now was reluctance and some fear" (87). Aboulela suggests through this reluctance, that turns out to be quite accurate, that homecoming is not necessarily the solution to the exilic experience and longing for her homeland; rather constructing a dialogic bridge through the romantic relationship with her beloved man can overcome the exilic feelings that she endures. Therefore, when Sammar travels

to Khartoum to visit her family, the image of the ideal home cannot be saved and the reader is left with the fragments of her earlier exile unfitness, which is described in the following scene: "She wore sunglasses now. They darkened the blue of the sky…Two hours before sunset and the sun was a spot of blue heat, still too piercing for eyes that had seen fog and snow" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 135). This scene also confirms that the protagonist's attempt to connect past and present, reality and dream fail.And for this, Aboulela's fictive text questions the protagonist's exilic state in order to hint to the truth that her journey back home also hails feelings of estrangement and exile.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy to mention that though *The Translator'*s protagonist was born of Sudanese parents in Britain, she moved with her family to Sudan where she grew up in her aunt's house with her cousins. However, after her return to Scotland, Sammar was subjected to exile and loneliness and left alone with her son Amir. She was let down, like the *Minaret*'s protagonist who was let down by her brother Omar after her mother's death, facing her exile and isolation alone. Consequently, her exile attracts her to Rae whom she describes as different…….He's sort of familiar, like people from back home (21), who right at the end of the novel contemplates whether he would convert to Islam and join her in Sudan in order to get married(175). Therefore, throughout the narrative, the reader is left with a glimmer of hope that, from their romantic relation, the protagonist might be able to engage into a cross-cultural encounter with Rae in order to overcome her exilic feelings, and Aboulela points out what might be enough for such relationship to survive.

Accordingly, Aboulela makes intentionally the reader know that with Rae, the protagonist's exile can be balanced because their encounter is framed by truthfulacceptance and spiritual love. Rae's presence into Sammar's life helps her rediscover herself and goes out of her hibernation or cocoon. Sammar also affects Rae's life, especially, during his asthma crises that enter him the hospital several times. These crises help Sammar to approach him through visiting and cooking for him. During these crises, Sammar had a great empathy towards him so that she got upset and hurt when his secretary Dian made a comment about his asthma attack and his being in hospital (76). This novel ends up with the potential for a subtle narrative that is a truer mediator between the past and the present, and East and West. It is a real translation of human relationships and

feelings and how different binaries can come together through cross-cultural dialogue and comprehensibility.

On the other hand, what is tremendously interpreted as the core of Sammar's exile is her inability to deal with the weather. I have shown this in relation to the particular use of weather in Aboulela'sfiction. The weather becomes a prominent signifier of the protagonist's exilic experience in Scotland, especially when she just arrived with her husband and are particularly vulnerable. In most of Aboulela's texts, as in *The Translator,* the Muslim migrants arrive at the onset of winter as the narrator clarifies: "It wasn't raining when she woke that morning, a grey October sky, Scottish grey with mist from the North Sea" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 3). This description functions as an enduring image of geographical displacementand reveals the significance of weatherasa metaphor for the difficulty to arrive and settle in the new environment. In this new environment, the weather, far from being an inherent sign of national belonging, signifies the changing pathways of transitivity. When Aboulela's migrant protagonists arrive in the West, their imagined geographies change so that the English weather, which might have had its appeal in Africa, loses its attractive power. Therefore, the protagonists redirect their attention to the climate of their country of departure with renovated emotional attachment. Following the same pattern of behaviour, *The Translator'*s protagonist explains: "We have a winter in Sudan, a cold that stays on the skin, does not punch inside to the bones, is content to crack people's skin, turn it into the colour of ash" (44). These references to the weather, thus, offer metaphorical ways to manifest geographical differences and feelings of exile.

On a different note, the image of the weather as a sign of death in the foreign setting suggests more than just a nostalgic yearning for the homeland's warmth. It is an image of an exilic feeling and danger, where the migrant struggles against a natural geography that is as hostile and painful. At first and after their arrival in Scotland, Sammar and her husband have trouble of adapting to the Scottish weather. Therefore, she insisted on him to buy a car to avoid the cold of this climate; the case that leads later to his death in a car accident because a gentle old man blinded by the sun, kills him. An apologetic, tearful little man because it had not been a cloudy day like so many of this city's cloudy days (58). These descriptions of the weather frequently occur in Aboulela's diasporic texts to highlight in the most immediate sense that the migrants are out of place, struggling to enact a warm place for themselves. In this sense, by

focusing on the weather, Said registers, in his memoir *Out of Place*, a continuing defamiliarisation. Said's memoir expresses his ongoing struggle to adapt to such a climate as he explains in this statement:"I experience the changing seasons from fall to winter with dread, as something unfamiliar, having come from a basically warm and dry climate. I have never gotten over my feelings of revulsion for snow, [...]. For me snow signified a kind of death [..]" (qtd.in Zeleza 3). Following the same meaning, the Scottish weather that Sammar dreamt of and had to encounter on entering Scotland becomes an indication to her exile as the narrator clarifies: "She [Sammar] was afraid of rain, afraid of the fog and the snow which come to this country, afraid of the wind even. At that times she would stay indoors and wait, watching from the window people doing what she couldn't do" (Aboulela, *The Translator*1). The narrator also insists that last year when the city had been dark with fog, she hid indoors for days, eating her way the last packet of pasta in the cupboard, drinking tea without milk (1). Thus, Aboulela's characters' struggle with the different weather reflects their unsuitability to this new place that needs tremendous efforts to adapt and compromises.

Therefore, in Aboulela's fiction the weather is a sign of national boundaries, traversed by the migrant protagonists. Novels' passages such as the above make it clear though, that such border-crossing and transition are perilous processes, likely to involve pain and hardship for the migrant. In her writings, Aboulela contrasts the Scottish cold weather that reflects the protagonists' alienation, with the African warm climate that proves to be a healthy condition for them. This difference reflects that the former is a hard experience that the protagonists have to endure than the life difficulties of the latter. This reflection precipitates the process of adapting to the climate both literarily and socially. Hence, as the protagonists settle, get adequate clothing and become used to the weather, their exilic status become less difficult.

For this reason, it is significant that Aboulela's texts relentlessly deconstruct the trope of the cold English climate. The migrants, in her writings, remember the weather in Africa, its colours and warmth, as a source of affirmation to their belonging; while the weather in Northern Europe becomes its cold paradox that requires adaptation. This reversal is important in more than one way and it signifies different shifts in two different contexts. Within the new metropolitan centre, migrant existences do not reiterate strong national boundaries, but privilege a new openness to an altogether different climate and geographical spaces. This new openness to the European

landscape and climate manifests itself in the Western environment and results in shaping diasporic geographies through which the migrants view their new sense of belonging in the Western setting. For instance, the 'Winter Garden' in *The Translator* is a 'contact zone' where two geographies fuse together: The British cold green land and the African hot sandy continent. In the context of the novel, the familiarity of the Winter Garden and the retention of the indigenous land's geographical characteristics accompanied with it, is comfortable. This familiarity offered by this place helps the protagonist to adapt to the host environment and an understanding of its culture as essence is, thereby, implicitly introduced. By direct comparison, acceptance and mutual understanding between the female and male protagonists inside the Winter Garden and the departmentblock in Aberdeen University can be translated as a cultural understanding between two different communities and geographies.Thus, though Aboulela's description of this community of exile is so tight, so self-contained and so alienated from the mainstream; it is that of an almost hybrid context. It is not an extreme of multiculturalism, but its ideal as a way of transformed life with a portrait of exoticism and polarization preserved and protected.

The polarization between the cold and hostile weather in the North and the warm and sunny climate in Africa is resolved in the narratives whenever the migrants find ways to adapt to the new environment and translate themselves into the new cultural context. Symbolically, snow indicates the emotional coldness of the exile experience and the possibility of the unknown in realizing ambitions and dreams. Therefore, to adapt to the English weather is to fathom rapidly the most immanent and changeable signs of transnational difference. The recognition of these signs encourages memories of the indigenous nation and paves the way to the acceptance of the host society. Confirming this notion, Sammar asserts that her aunt thinks that after living here for so long, she will hate it when she goes back to Khartoum. She thinks she will see everything as ugly and backward (Aboulela, *The Translator*88). Therefore,the English weather is used significantly in opposition to the Sudanese weather in Aboulela's narratives to revive memories of the juxtaposed location such as the heat and dust of Africa as well as the shabbiness of Sudan. The paradoxes of this liminal position paint a sane picture of the possibilities for the protagonist to ever ‘fit in’ the exilic environment.

In Aboulela’s text, *The Translator*, there are similar descriptions of the weather just after the protagonist’s arrival in Scotland. At the beginning, Sammar experiences the English weather

as physically painful; but she protects herself against the cold and tries to adapt to this weather by wearing a beautiful red woolen coat, which the narrator describes as a "henna-red colour" coat to avoid the cold of the city (65). This coat becomes a translation object, as Cooper points out: "The coat may be new, but it translates from her past to her present in its henna redness [...] It is the colour of henna used by Muslims in body decoration; it is in the same spirit of celebration of Eid that she remembers from childhood. It is sensuous, pleasing and integrates the different communities and cultures that Sammar brokers" (Cooper 53). In this context, the coat smooths the effect of the climate, which can be manipulated more successfully underneath the warm wool. Moreover, it is important to note here that while Sammar is scared of this weather, she does not refuse adapting in its entirety. Instead, she does go out with her husband for shopping, and later, she does not hesitate to take the bus, if she needs, to go to her work at university where she works as a translator. Therefore, the novel shows that as the migrants negotiate and adapt, they develop strategies to deal with the cold climate. In this sense, though the weather connotes the strangeness and harshness of the host land, it does not deny the possibilities of suitability that such a new land might bring.

Again, in Aboulela's *Minaret*, it is specifically Muslim women who migrate and find themselves in a state of exile. Cases in point are the female protagonist Najwa and her employer Lamya. Najwa leaves her homeland Sudan after a military coup d'état for England. At first, she enjoys England because life in the diaspora as a political refugee is not confining but liberating to her. For Najwa, if life in England does not provide total freedom from the restrictions imposed on her by her Sudanese community, it allows her to escape the regime of her traditions as well as the dominant morality of Sudanese society. Though living on the margins, England makes self-fashioning possible for Najwa and as such initially allows her to counter the arrest of personal growth that the institutions of her family and community threaten her with. Stressing this feeling, she confesses: "Perhaps it was my displeasure at being forced to leave a land to which I was finding myself more and more attached-precisely, I think because of its strangeness, because of my lack of natural attachment to it. Nothing was expected of me, you see, and so I could make it all up as I went along. I suppose it was inevitable, wasn't it – that I would fall in love with a land that gave me such freedom." (Aboulela, *Minaret* 218).Hence, while Sudan poses a threat to Najwa with its political instability and the constraints of the community, England seems to provide safety and freedom.

For Najwa, the lack of her Sudanese society norms and tradition is compensated by the rich culture of the modern metropolis. The encounter with a different culture entails for Najwa a change of paradigms of what her old culture means in general. Her switch from one culture to another is concomitant with a switch from one definition of culture to another. However, Najwa's experience with the English culture, while initially promising, quickly becomes disappointing. Due to her visible Muslim identity after wearing the Muslim dress "*hijab*" and embracing the Muslim community membership, Najwa is not allowed to live her Muslim ethnicity outside the mosque and is exiled on the basis of a perceived similarity with other members of the Muslim minority. While she is not forbidden to stay on account of her individual personality, the English, in their turn, reject her for precisely the same reason she herself had rejected the Sudanese in favour of Britain before.

In the final analysis of the novel, it is England that grants both Najwa, her Sudanese boy friend Anwar and Lamya a greater degree of individuality than Sudan. In their study of migrant workers, Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman claim that "[an] 'end' to the migration journey is not afforded to all migrants; for some, pain, anxiety and desperation as a result of migration never quite subside" (233), and also in the novel these same feelings, underscored by Cresswell and Merriman, prevent Najwa from fully feeling comfortable in her environment. Although Najwa considers London as her "second home" (Aboulela 148), negative feelings and memories keep manifesting, and the desire to construct a family with a former boyfriend further aggravates her situation. As she is never quite able to express what causes her sufferance, the reader can only portend the silences or voids in Najwa's life that result from the gaps caused by feelings of exile.

In this regard, *Minaret* illustrates the Muslim migrant's fate in Scotland where the protagonist, Najwa, immigrates with her family. There, she renewed her life in the mosque where various members of the Muslim community who have migrated to England before now live under various circumstances, cherishing the notion of 'home' from an alien society. As Earle H.Waugh notes:

> While the mosque is a place where, the Qur'an is recited, the reciting is only part of the sacredness of the place. Indeed, a mosque is primarily a house for prayers….Yet the mosque has been the central feature of Muslim piety and it continues to carry significant

> socio-religious weight. It sets up a decidedly sacred space, one that touches many aspects of community and personal life. (42)

Thus, in foreign contexts, the mosque becomes a safe place for Muslim people from exile and all orientations of life independent of social class, ethnicity, or place of origin. Even converted white British citizens are considered to be members in this religious place. In the novel, this membership to the mosque is portrayed through Wafaa and her husband who is a British converted Muslim, and who participate in the mosque rituals as Muslims. Moreover, Najwa's new situation promises novel possibilities so that she experiences this shift as being, the exact opposite of the meanings provoked by the minaret, the title of the novel. According to her new situation, places are never constant, but change continually depending on one's own personal circumstances, motives, and desires.

Also, Leila Aboulela's novel, *Lyrics Alley*, is concerned with Muslim characters in exile. Mahmood's second wife, Nabilah, occupies a special position in the text in that the effects of transitivity are made most explicit in her story. The Egyptian young Nabilah suffers from a sense of exile and rootlessness in Sudan like the Egyptian characters, Badr and Shukry, who were forced to move to Sudan, and thereby moved from an urban to a rural region (Umdurman). Since Nabilah's time in Sudan can be read allegorically as woman's struggle against exile and finding meaning in life, her cultural background is significant in this context. Nabilah is a young educated woman in comparison to her illiterate co-wife, Waheeba, the reason that enables her to live in a modern house and be the prestigious wife of Mahmood Abouzeid who is able to receive his high class guests. The narrator clarifies: "How could Waheeba ever be a true rival? How could Nabilah's position be threatened when Mahmood publically and privately, in no uncertain terms, favoured his younger wife" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*178). However, her cultural background is more than a description of her education level; rather it represents the endeavour to invest a real meaning of life. Nabilah's overall education level is strongly reflected in the education of her children: Ferial and Farouk, a task which offers a perspective of challenging her exilic status and the feelings of alienation in her life. In the end, her alienation suggests that all her exilic feelings cannot ultimately be erased, but will always make its impact on her.

Implicitly, Nabilah's situation in Sudan can be understood almost exclusively by referring to her exilic position. For her, the vocabularies of 'rootlessness', 'nostalgia' and 'alienation'

indicate that Sudan is regarded at worst as a punishment and at best as an exile to be stuck in. In marked contrast to her years spent in Umdurman, Nabilah does not mention any relationships that lend meaning to her life. In fact, after nine years she does not even know the country of her exile in any detail: "Our life here is not like there, …He is so much a part of his family, of his wife and all the customs. He is Sudanese like them and I'm just not happy with that…Sometimes unhappiness seemed like the symptom of a malady that had no name, but flared and calmed down on its own accord"(Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 86). In this sense, Sudan becomes a place that Nabilah has not identified with, and which, consequently, has not transformed into a home for her. It merely contributes to a confusion of Nabilah's sense of identity by prolonging her estrangement as the narrator states: "Yes Sudan was like a province of Egypt, and now she, Nabilah, like her mother before her, was yearning for the metropolitian centre" (38). Thus, Nabilah's in-betweeness position intensifies both her exile and her yearning for her homeland.

In the same spirit, Nabilah frequently remembers the Egyptian alleys and her family while she is in Sudan as a way of challenging her exilic status. The narrator clarifies the differences between the two cities: "In Cairo, the nights were alive with the pleasures of leisurely walks, roasted peanuts and grilled corn, people chatting and shops that stayed open late - the liveliness and light of it all" (30). However, her yearning for Egypt is far from being a solace so that already at an earlier stage, Nabilah feels that she was wasted in this place (31). She even goes so far as to associate an inherited despair in her yearning and meaninglessness to her exile in Sudan: "Enough of this African adventure, of being there while thinking of here, of being here and knowing it was temporary; enough of the dust, the squalor and the stupidity" (84). The yearning only conceals that Nabilah is, in fact, out of touch with her native country and she does not know anything about the events of Egypt in her absence so that she wanted this feeling of home to settle inside her until it gave her the sweetest of dreams (99). This expression is indicative of the fact that Nabilah's image of Egypt has become blurred because she lives far away from Cairo, and somewhat excluded. She once wondered if it was her fate to be always in the periphery (37). The important point to stress, in addition, is that Nabilah characterizes Egypt in terms of memories, thereby, suggesting that it has become unreal to her in her absence. For her, life in Egypt is reduced to a spectacle watched from a distance. It is neither a lived nor a livable reality because while the ties to her country of origin are inevitably broken, her adopted country does not provide her with alternative ties. Unlike Badr and Shukry, Nabilah lacks the ability to adapt to

her environment, a shortcoming which results in her temporary return to Egypt. Nabilah, afterwards, leaves Egypt for an eventual stay in Sudan where she engages into dialogic relationships with her husband's family members. Thus, though displacement has brought about exile that can be regarded as a characteristically diasporic experience, the protagonist succeeds in creating a third space for herself.

Aboulela's collection of short stories also deals with the notion of exile from different perspectives. For example, in the short story *The Museum,* the Sudanese protagonist, Shadia, thinks to herself that she should not be here; there was nothing for her here. She wanted to see minarets, boats fragile on the Nile (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 117). The most emphatic passage in the short story is where Shadia thinks about Scotland's cold: "Hell is not only a blazing fire, a part of it is freezing cold, torturous ice and snow. In Scotland's winter you live a glimpse of this unseen world, feel the breath of it in your bones" (118). The opposites of warmth climate and colourful life in Africa against the cold and faint life in the host country become a key literary device in structuring Aboulela's fiction. In the short story *Souvenir,* Manaal visits her brother Yassir, in Aberdeen and literally hibernates in reaction to the different environment "as if lost in the cold, slept and slept through the nights and large parts of the days" (18).The protagonist of the short story, *Coloured Lights,* also expresses her exilic feelings in this scene while sitting in the bus in London. The anonymous protagonist starts crying and confesses: "I was crying for Taha or maybe because I was homesick, not only for my daughters or my family but sick with longing for the heat, the sweat and the water of the Nile" (1). Accordingly, Aboulela's protagonists find themselves exiled in a totally different geographical, cultural and religious environments.

Another dichotomy that finds its most significant pair in Aboulela's fiction and reinforces the notion of exile is the faith-secular binary. This dichotomy is particularly well seen in the short story *The Boy from the Kebab Shop*. This short story illustrates how the concept of exile works to propel Aboulela's characters from secular way of life towards an Islamic one. The female teenager protagonist, Dina, lives with her Westernized mother who is not a devout Muslim and who is constantly dieting.She meets Kassim, a devouted Muslim man who works in a Kebab shop and is very serious about his faith. The food that he offers Dina becomes a promise of affiliation and communication that she could attain if she decides to adopt his Islamic way of life. Therefore, metaphors around food manifest clearly in this story where physical nourishment is a

symbolic expression of Islamic spiritual nourishment. Consequently, Aboulela intentionally constructs opposites in this story, where dieting, bitterness, loneliness, and individuality represent Dina's Western side; whereas food, amiability, companionship and Islamic community are Dina's alternative Islamic life represented in Kassim and the shop.The last sentence of the story expresses this clearly: "She [Dina] paused on the pavement, hesitating between the succulent mystic life he promised and the puckish unfullfilment of her parent's home" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 71).This scene portrays an exilic state where longing is covered with a spiritual sense and offers a real home. This portrait is also linked in the text to the restoration of identity, as Dina "was not an outsider today, not a customer, but one of 'them', pushing open a private door, as if she was Samia, as if she was part of the family too" (69). Thus, the imagery of the open door and the joining of a family are expressive of Aboulela's narrative aim that exile and alienation are overcome when faith is accepted.

In general, it is plainly evident that Aboulela's "hybrid consciousness" enables her to capture these dialogic experiences. Her narratives open up the reader's eyes to the ways in which a formerly non-existent term, "dialogic experience" found a welcomed position in the contemporary Muslim Anglophone literary scene. Unlike the typical New Orientalist narratives, Aboulela's narratives do not propose assimilation as a solution for the trauma of exile as Zygmunt Bauman comments on this sense of being in a place that is unreal in his essay 'Assimilation into Exile': "What makes ... exile an unreal place is the daily effort to make it real - that is, to cleanse it of all things that are out of place. In exile one is pressed to stop being in exile, either by moving elsewhere or by dissolving into the place, not being anymore out of it. The latter is the pressure of assimilation"(321). In this sense, exile is a place of compulsory confinement, but also a disrupted space which is itself disorganized and out of place. Therefore, Bauman also suggests that one way of making the new environment real is to assimilate, a radical form of cultural translation that seeks to erase difference in favour of conformity. In contrast, Aboulela rejects this possibility in her texts. Her Muslim migrants, because of their hybrid identities, do not have this option; rather Aboulela charts their dialogic reconciliation. Her migrants negotiate the differences and reconcile their exilic feelings with their yearning for the past in order to manufacture a particular image of themselves in the present. Realizing that the romanticizing tendency of exile has its limits, Aboulela insists that her migrant's alienation in the host country

can be countered by dreams and memories that are used as subconscious transitivity between their dislocated spaces.

II.4.Subconscious Transitivity

Through reading Aboulela's narratives, it is plain that she uses subtle nostalgic strategies, semiotics of dreams and motifs of memories with which, as a migrant writer, depicts her characters' subconscious transitivity between multiple geographical spaces and across their past and present. Accordingly, the reader can easily notice that Aboulela's writings, by going beyond geographical positionality and boundaries as well as cultural-national categories, introduce nuanced alternatives for cross-cultural dialogue and transnational bridges in a manner that facilitates cross-culturality, border-crossing and multi-cultural co-existence in hybrid spaces.

II.4.1. Semiotics of Dreams and Motifs of Memories in Aboulela's Narratives

Leila Aboulela's fictive texts also concentrate on the way in which dreams and memories translate migrant Muslim experiences into narratives, thereby, creating an enduring and complex transitivity between place and time for the migrant. The migrant memory is a "dialogic memory" since it is riddled with connections and it is an approximate version of the real past. Since this memory claims to be authentic, it is representative of a nation, a culture and a place. As dialogic memory gives way to dialogue, the dialogic figures of the protagonists of Aboulela's narratives are reinforced by various powerful female qualities. These qualities of the female power they embody are dismantled by their flexible hybrid identities and cultural openness to dialogue. Accordingly, such an analysis of the processes of memory in relation to exile does not foreclose on personal experiences of migration from interaction in communal spaces and acceptance of Other; rather it creates a space where the progress of dialogic memories and cross-cultural relations is enriched. Therefore, as the emphasis rests on the communal connection of memory, the stigma of individuality or ethnocentrism alters not just to the act of communication itself, but to the responsibilities of the migrant towards whom such connection extends.

Additionally, this dialogic memory is already invested in Aboulela's narratives and is a powerful symbol of globalization and her need to transform these memories into dialogic experiences. According to Susan Stewart, the souvenirs' Narrative of Origins has the power to

miniaturize monuments, capture cultural emblems, and to fix the past in the present; it is the narrative of interiority and authenticity. It is not a narrative of the object, it is a narrative of the possessor, since it is in the nature of the memory to reconcile the apparent contradictions between personal experiences in the homeland and the host one (Stewart 136). In this sense, the pervasiveness of these memories is the very means by which we access the worlds of other cultures and make them our own because they are shorthand for cultural indicators and a means of reaching far places. Consequently, memories encompass a dual narrative, both personal and cultural.

As a result of the wide-ranging Diaspora studies, more recent conceptualizations of memory as shared and collective has prevailed this field. In the transnational, transcultural, and global contexts, memory studies have not only enriched, but also begun to transform diaspora studies. As Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser, and Yolande Jansen note in their introduction to the edited volume *Diaspora and Memory: Figures of Displacement in Contemporary Literature, Arts and Politics* (2007), that memory used to be traditionally defined as incomplete and cut-off from the past and, consequently, they identify this definition as the crucial link between memory studies and Diaspora studies. However, they insist that instead of viewing both memory and Diaspora as confined to a specific place, they should be seen as based on a pivotal emotional reorientation that opens the possibility for the formation of new memories based on new experiences. This also conveys that memories are not bound to places of the past or places left behind, but transit with the migrant and mirror their reaction to new places inhabited in their journeys.

The act of recalling a past moment has not only an impact on the individual engaging in the community, but it also affects his sense of communal belonging. This means that memories are not only representations of the past, but they also influence and shape the present Therefore, as individual memories are varied and unstable, the remembered factual accuracy is destabilized. In this context, the protagonists' personal memories create a continuously evolving representation of themselves that can never be entire or complete. Through their memories, the experience of migration is challenged through the possibility of exchange of individual and communal contexts that encourage dialogue and permit dialogic relations as the dialogic exchange between the past and the present, also connect the self to the other as well as the narrator to the reader. Then,

memories ultimately function in dialogue through connecting representations of the past with moments in the present.

Accordingly, Aboulela is very much invested in the interplay between the past and the present, and the means by which personal memory connected these temporal locales. Her writings fuse remembered instances of past moments into a present communal narrative.For Aboulela, the personal memory generates a subtle power to refresh the present moment through recalling previous events. In particular, memories of a troubling nature or moments of yearning that are strongly imprinted upon one's memory provide a significant dialogic connection between the past and everyday life. These dialogic instances and casting one's mind back to them allow the present moment to be refigured on the basis of the previous event. Because these individual memories exist in dialogue with the past and the larger communal context that surrounds them, the dialogue that ensues between the past and present, event and context, gains significance not only through the accuracy of memories, but through the individual productive engagement in such an exchange, which manifests itself in the dialogic interaction of such memories into an interactive context.

Dialogic memory is included in all Aboulela's characters' lives; being Najwa in *Minaret*, Sammar in *The Translator* or Nabilah in *Lyrics Alley* as well as the short stories' protagonists. Although her characters' memories are authentic, they are nostalgic, and therefore, their presence in the host country is destabilized and their potential for the future cannot not be fully realized. For instance, the traumatic nature of Najwa's memories of the military coup and her father's execution disturbs her reference of her past that affects her present. At the beginning of her arrival, she swings between them and she is unable to distinguish between the two. Therefore, she becomes destabilized and alienated, which reinforces the rupture of her narration. The narrator clarifies that Najwa never cooks or does the dishes back in Khartoum; however, she reenacts such tasks in England in order to recreate an idea of home. Performing these domestic acts with and for her mother's friend, aunty Eva, as well as Doctora Zeinab's family, reminds Najwa of home and of her childhood in Khartoum, and generates a sense of belonging to a family; whereas simultaneously brings the feeling that Najwa will never be with her own family again. Moreover, the events taking place in the apartment also generate negative memories. For instance, the event of Lamaya's lost necklace relives a memory of Najwa's brother stealing their mother's necklace.

These memories are deeply graved in Najwa's mind and affect her self-image and her interaction with others. However, her positive memories outweigh negative ones and illuminate that these memories do not simply connect Najwa's old home to the apartment where she currently lives, but help Najwa negotiate between past and present and move between Khartoum and London. Thus, through her dialogic memories, Najwa constructs a new life and an individual sense of 'home' that is a continuation of her childhood home.

Consequently, Najwa's memories are the medium of her subconscious transitivity between London and Khartoum. Najwa confesses on the first page that her transitivity to London works itself into her life, but her life also works itself into this city. Memories of her childhood, her time in Kharthoum, her friends, family, and ex-boyfriend, Anwar,prevail the text and are induced by random people, objects and places. Memories of the city, too, are manifesting at every corner for Najwa to be appreciated and reconstructed. Occasionally in the novel, place functions as a tool to introduce Najwa to the different parts of the city such as the mosque, the garden, Wafaa's home and various British streets that do old memories work and pave the way to the present to be constructed. At other times, the place itself serves as a means for memory. At the beginning, for instance, Najwa went to her boyfriend's flat where the bathroom brought back an old memory of her home: "a memory came of another bathroom mirror, of me admiring myself while Baba packed and Mama fussed over him. Admiring myself in my yellow pajamas, while Baba left the house for the last time" (Aboulela, *Minaret*173).All these memories affect Najwa's existence in her new world.

Najwa's memories significantly shape her perception of everyday life in the city and transform the city into an equally complex and disrupted place that should be rediscovered. Memories of Najwa's past are intertwined with her new experiences in London and gradually Aboulela provides the reader with a somewhat coherent though fragmented story. Najwa's account of her memories is highly selective so that she relates certain details about her life such as her mother and father, her childhood in Sudan and her friends. For instance, her memories of her mother convey a deep connection to her homeland and Doctora Zeinab's accent reminds her of the Egyptian soap operas she used to watch with her mother, and taking care of her granddaughter induces Najwa with an emotional relationship of motherhood that generates feelings of attachment and belonging. She also remembers how she used to go with her mother

doing shopping everyday, how she used to dress and go to the University and all the things she had left behind in Khartoum (Aboulela, *Minaret* 177). Consequently, memories are not the only medium of the characters' subconscious displacement, but souvenirs and dreams are also another medium of their transitivity.

On the one hand, souvenirs occupy very sensitive roles in Leila Aboulela's transnational narratives. A souvenir can be bought, received as a gift or made, but, its key characteristic is its value to the owner and this value is the meaning that has been invested in her narratives. The role of souvenirs is to fix the past in the present although the fixed narrative is mutable and always incomplete. "Souvenirs have resonance on both physical and emotional levels, with the materiality of the object playing as important a part in the lure of the object as its narrative importance. "Souvenirs are objects that prompt feelings of loss and longing and nostalgia and they are dependent on their narrative for agency" (Stewart 136). Nostalgia is concerned with a memory that is implicit in longing for another time or place or person, which is in turn, blurred by changing contexts over time. Therefore, a souvenir becomes an aide memoire through its materiality which satisfies a need for certainty that makes the past real in the present whilst provoking feelings of loss and longing. In this sense, the souvenir is an incomplete symbol of the past which is, in turn, fictionalized by the migrants themselves. Thus, souvenirs, bought at a specific location, become representatives of a whole experience, a different nation and culture and a period of time in the migrants' life.

On the other hand, dreams are also a metaphor of subconscious transition in Aboulela's narratives, and this transition symbolizes her characters' willingness and ability to move between two worlds. Subconscious transition, through dreams, testifies to the complexity of the immigrants' experiences by reflecting their state of living here and belonging there, their psychological and mental states and their feelings and emotions. The recurrent dreams of Aboulela's protagonists throughout the narratives metaphorically allude to the hidden desire of being there and hint to the difficulties of getting ahead in an environment that is alien to foreign migrants. While the emphasis is on transitivity, dreams as subconscious means of transition are charged with symbolic significance in Sammar, Najwa and Nabilah' lives as they symbolically represent their struggle in in-betweeness, too.

In *Minaret*, Najwa always dreams of what it would be like to have a family. In so doing, she remembers her past: "I fell asleep and dreamt I was young and ill, lying in my parents' room in Khartoum. Mama was looking after me. I could feel the cool crisp sheets around me, the privilege of being in their bed. She gave me a spoonful of medicine. Delicious syrup that burned my throat. Omar was jealous because he wasn't given any…She put a cool hand on my forehead. I smiled and closed my eyes. I could hear my father, upset because I was ill. He was with my mother" (Aboulela 132-133). Additionally, Najwa dreams ceaselessly as being a child back at her family home, surrounded by her parents' love. The novel even ends with one of these dreams: "I am not well. I have a fever and I need my parents' room. I need their bed; it is clean sheets, the privilege. I climb dark steep stairs to their room and there is the bed I have been forgetting for" (276). But suddenly this room transforms, and appears in ruins (75).Therefore, the structural form of the novel mirrors Najwa's continuing relationship to Sudan through her dreams so that the structure of the story as one alternating between London and Khartoum is significant for an interpretation of the novel. While in London, Najwa dreams of Khartoum, her father, her house and her friends. She confesses that "My mother was vivid and alive in my dreams. She was always in Khartoum…" (158). Accordingly, the protagonist's dreams and the reality of being far from her country are interdependent, and again, the novel's structure and narrative mode imitates her experiences and spatial array of the new land. Thus, opposed to the digressive stream of consciousness of Sammar's dreams, *Minaret* is fast-moving and captures the deep feelings of the protagonist's in-betweeness.

Similarly, *The Translator's protagonist*, in fact, suffers both mentally and physically from her exile in both settings and her sufferance is reflected in her dreams, memories and hallucinations that invade her time abroad. In the novel, Aboulela elucidates: "Outside Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balanced just for her. She saw the sky cloudless with too many stars, imagined the night warm, warmer than indoors. She smelled dust and heard barking of stray dogs among street's rubble and pot-holes. A bicycle bell tinkled, frogs croaked, the muezzin coughed into the microphone and began the azan for the *Isha* prayer" (Aboulela, *The Translator*20-21). This dialogic memory of a different place and time suggests a way of inhabiting the world that interrupts the dislocated existence of the protagonist. This hallucination reflects a sensual memory of the sight of streets and sky, the feel of warm

night air, the smell of dust and the hearing of the azan, frogs and a bicycle bell and powerfully and tangibly inscribe cultural difference; but at the same time creates a narrative of dialogic memory that is grounded in an amalgamation of a past self and a sensual representation of the present.

Metaphorically speaking, Sammar could not engage into a romantic relation with Rae without taking into consideration his secular background. At the same time, though she cannot imagine her life without him, another journey back home was an obligation in her life. There, in Sudan, memories of the other part of the world left behind, invaded her life. Once, as she opened the refrigerator, a memory of the cold weather of Scotland brightens in front of her eyes: "Another time, opening the fridge to get her aunt a glass of water. The sudden chill when she opened the fridge door on a day that was too hot; the blue cold, frost and it was Aberdeen where he was, his jacket and walking in grey against the direction of the wind. White seagulls and a pale sea" (182). Again in her homeland, the strain between the past and the present is problematic for Sammar as well. She struggles to permit past constructions of her identity to fit comfortably within her own perceptions of her present self. For instance, as Rae shares with Sammar a dialogic memory about the death of his son in Africa, such private memory underscores the impossibility of a reductive narrative; especially for adequately condensing personal experience and further destabilizing the dominant ideology that endorses the discourse of colonizer and colonised. Also, the moment of epiphany experienced by Sammar at the end of the first part of the novel is realized more fully as a moment of being, an instant of unpremeditated shock that turns Sammar's exile into a reality again.This new reality reinforces Sammar's memories of her homeland.

In *The Translator*, Sammar's memories significantly shape the narrative and her experiences in Aberdeen. Like Najwa, her background makes her aware of the multi-ethnic structure of her new migrant life and memories of Sudan are invoked on a daily basis, often stimulated by the most common events. However, unlike Najwa, it is important to note that Sammar is neither involved in any form of political recollections nor trying to reinscribe Khartoum onto Aberdeen. Sammar vividly recalls personal stories connected to her family, friends, and her mother-in-law in particular, but distances herself from the political rule that has taken a hold of Sudan. Unlike Najwa, Sammar is not searching for herself using clues in the new city. Rather, Sammar confirms that the hometown and other cities she used to live in are

engraved in her memory. The narrator describes a scene when Sammar remembers "A time when she belonged to a particular place, before she knew the feeling this has nothing to do with me, these shops, these people have nothing to do with me, this sky is not for me. Times when she was silent but never detached: watching her aunt rub the luxury of Nivea on her legs….Her aunt's face so serious: this was something important, necessary not a game" (Aboulela 103). All these memories make Sammar swing between her past in Sudan and her real present in Scotland.

As is the case with *Minaret*, in *The Translator*, Aboulela sets the memories of the protagonist's childhood in Africa. She particularly insists on the call of the muezzin, which represents a traditional way of structuring time that is in direct opposition to modern commodified time (97).This kind of memories functions early in Aboulela's narrative to "de-familiarise the Western metropolitan landscape" (Nash, 29) and, at the same time, asserts a vivid sensual and spiritual texture of another location and another time. Another childhood memory that comes to Sammar's mind was during her visit to Rae's house where Sammar sees a picture of a group of schoolgirls wearing school uniform on a magazine. This picture takes her back to her home and her days at school so that her present is punctuated by her past and they balance at Rae's house. Rae, in the meantime, watches her in a kind way which encourages her to share with him a memory from her former home. She informs him: "I used to wear a uniform like that in secondary school" (Aboulela 230) and Rae was pleased to share this memory with her.

Nevertheless, there are many contradictions in the novel regarding the notion of 'homeland'. Sometimes Sudan is presented as a backward place that Sammar does not want to return to, and other times it is represented as a beautiful country that she longs to come back to, especially towards the end of the novel. Though Sammar is aware of the hardness of the host country, she tends to be in favour of Scotland because, as suggested in the novel, it is more 'civilized,' cultured, sophisticated and, of course, because it is Rae's homeland. For example, when she compares between the stray cats of Khartoum and Rae's cat, she hints to the backwardness of the East and the purity and civilized manners of the West. The narrator says:"Sammar was wary of cats. They were savage cats, their ribs visible against matted, dirty fur. Some had a black hole instead of an eye, some had stumpy legs, amputated tails.... Rae's cat was slow and wellfed. She walked, glossy and serene, around the room" (14). This passage from Aboulela's novel reflects

the migrants' awareness of the deficiencies of their homelands, but they still cling to their belonging feelings to them.

On the other hand, Aboulela's third novel, *Lyrics Alley*, is the most complex narrative in an artistically rather than conventional narratology. In particular, the complexity of the story consists in its demonstration of postmodern thought. *Lyrics Alley* becomes an autobiographical story when one day the male protagonist Nur's father, Mahmood, published a collection of his short poems, as it is the same case of Aboulela's uncle. Thus, in a self-conscious move, the distinction between writer and narrator is lifted and Nur is identified as Hassan Awad Aboulela. Her novel tells the story of her uncle's freak accident, paralysis and aborted romance; a story that Leila Aboulela had grown up hearing and felt it best belonged in the annals of family history, not fiction. Hassan Awad Aboulela had been a spirited teenager from the upper class of Sudanese society with a world of wealth and privilege waiting at his feet. On one of his summer vacation in Egypt, he dived off a shingled ridge off Alexandria's shoreline to hit a rock below the waters and break his neck. This accident results in his permanent paralysis. During the event, Hassan's betrothed, Soraya, with whom he had a passionate engagement, watched him as he took the playful jump, and thus, she witnessed the last time he would face life before his permanent disability. Therefore, the reader needs to be in the same position as Soraya in order to make sense about Nur's tragic experience and deals with it. At the end of the novel, both Nabilah and Nur come to terms with the past by remembering it and overcoming the difficulties intruded in it. Thus, *Lyrics Alley* displays characteristics of metafiction, which means fiction that is self-reflexively in its conditions and reception as part of the act of narration.

Like Nur, Nabilah attempts to deal with the past and balance it by remembering it. At the beginning, Nabilah's failure to adapt in her new environment results from her strong ties to the past that hinders her to connect with the present and accept it. She is preoccupied with memories and dreams and totally obsessed with the past. As a matter of fact, the memories of her family and mainly her mother, always connect her to her home and her native homeland so that this obsession with 'there' consumes too much of Nabilah's time in order to enable her to concern herself with 'here' in a serious life. The narrator avers that she was a little girl that was how he was tending to view her, a daughter with unhealthy attachment to her mother, a youngster who was refusing to grow up and become a woman (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*266).In fact, in order to attach to the present, Aboulela's characters have to come back to and negotiate their past

It is, of course, common that migration raises memories and imposes on the migrant a sensual journey back to the past. In the short story, *Coloured Lights*, the narrator and the protagonist is a self-reflexive and highly perceptive character that accesses her own past, stories, and memories via the places she encounters through her journey in a bus, thereby, also getting to know the historical narratives that affect her life experiences. Looking back in time, the narrator renders transparent the processes of remembering and shows how certain narratives are highlighted at the expense of others. This effect is visible in the journey that is in itself structured like memory, a journey of life that is constantly being remembered, but it is also applicable to the narrator's own experiences. Remembering her past and holding its memories despite of their cruelty will connect her to the part of herself that she has already left behind as well as her authentic identity. This specific identity as a Sudanese Muslim woman makes her sensitive to the underlying stories of marginalization, victimization, oppression, racism, suffering and the events that occurred in the past in her homeland. As a result, during her journey in the bus, she systematically excavates these memories and constructs a sense of belonging that is based on nostalgia and sensitive engagement. Accordingly, she remembers her brothers' wedding that turned to a funeral when he died because of his wedding lights in this scene: "But the lights for Taha's wedding did not shine as they were meant to on that night. By the time night came he was already buried and we were mourning" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 3).Thus, Aboulela's characters' memories turn the experience of migration into an inner struggle between the past and the present, making them in a continuous transitivity between them.

Generally speaking, *The Translator, Minaret* and *Lyrics Alley* tell about a world in transformation and people who migrate from one country to another and move between two worlds through their dreams and memories. Aboulela focuses, above all, on women's migration and how they manage to enact dialogic connections. Her main characters are women who live by themselves into foreign contexts: England, Scotland, Egypt or Sudan. For example, in *The Translator* and *Minaret*, even though both protagonists arrive in the UK with their families, tragedies force them to live alone. Najwa and Sammar, like other Aboulela's characters, come from Sudan, an African country shattered by coups d'etat and poverty. Their lives in the UK are not easy because being foreigners marks their daily life. Therefore, different states of exile and displacement color the mood of both narratives, which make the suffering of the Muslim migrant protagonists a central theme in Aboulela's writings. Brydon asserts that Aboulela returns several

times to this subject, mapping the deep mental suffering that marks the lives of several immigrants. Reading her, it is possible to find echoes of the "suffering of the post-colonial subject" studied by Fanon (282).Though this suffering leaves the characters unsure of how to deal with reality, dreams and memories enable them to connect to the past and deal with it. Also, the protagonists, who have not adapted to their new environments yet, are not fully part of Sudan anymore either. They are in-between spaces and cultures and they do not fully belong to either the new or the old world. Therefore, they create a third space or a contact zone between the two worlds.

This tension between the past and the present is examined at greater length in Aboulela's protagonists' migrant experiences. Her characters' status quo encourages the homogeneity of migrant experiences so that in her texts, such dominant homogeneity can appropriate personal expressions of dialogic interactions. Therefore, the protagonists' reactions to their continuous rememberingof their migrant experiences are seen as challenging. The juxtaposition of images of approved dialogic connections and representations of their cultural background illustrates the dislocation between socially endorsed expressions of Muslim culture and the reality of migrant life. These dialogic connections hold a great affection to reflections of the memory, as images from the past and their reconstitution in the present are enacted through personal and communal manifestations of dialogic memory, a process where destabilizing instances in the present impact memories of the past, which in turn, participates in regenerating the present moment. Hence, migration is alienating, but through a collective experience of dialogic remembering, the protagonists can challenge their exilic feelings, and through their continuous turning to nostalgic strategies, they subtly cross all the boundaries, thereby, emphasizing the ceaseless evolutionary action of dialogue.

II.4.2.Leila Aboulela's Nostalgic Strategies for Crossing Boundaries

Aboulela's narratives and her dialogic strategies, thus, set up and displace hegemonic discourses which only ever partly define the subject positions her Muslim women characters occupy. Nostalgia is another dialogic strategy which frequently occurs in her fiction and which will be explored in greater detail. Nostalgia is defined by Svetlana Boym as: "from the Greek roots *nostos* means return home, and *algia* means longing. It is a longing for a home, a sentiment

of loss and displacement"(Boym xiii). According to this definition, nostalgia is the result of a departure from the homeland and the displacement to a foreign land. This displacement is the precondition of nostalgic memory because the distance from home results into a certain investigation with which the past is assessed and incorporated into the present. Therefore, homeland is usually considered the starting point of describing the migrant's identity, as it is the place where it all began. To some of Aboulela's characters, homeland represents safety and security; and to others it evokes danger and risk. In both cases, there are often deep feelings of nostalgia attached to it.

This feeling of nostalgia is often focalized in literature, because with its literary techniques and modes of expression, it expresses sentiments that are usually more spontaneous and sincere. In fiction, home and nostalgia for home are usually romanticised. The desire to return home suggests a need to stabilize one's identity and attain attachment when it is compromised in another location. Accordingly, Faqir pointsout that the displacement of transcultural writers forces them to "revisit their culture of origin by the essential questioning of their relationship with their body, faith, rites and languages" (168). Hence, in Aboulela's texts this revisiting happens by affirming the culture of origin through romanticised nostalgic emotions, which are invoked against an alien environment in Britain.

Obviously, Aboulela's context, in which she writes about migrancy, is different in various ways from the majority of writers. Her nostalgia is generally a tool of criticism of the migrant's homeland and resistance to a new Western environment, which continuously inserts her migrants into a reconciliated position. Her nostalgic vision seeks an actualization of home in Islam and is emphasized by the challenge of the binarism in favour of the discourse of cross-cultural dialogue. Therefore, Aboulela's voice is quite different from the voices of many Muslim migrant authors because her emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue is influenced by two important elements: firstly, her personal relationship to Khartoum and by extension to Sudan is not one of traumatic rupture and forced departure. As a result, Aboulela's texts are more overtly nostalgic and her migrants are more powerfully attached to their homeland. Secondly, Aboulela insists that migrancy does not have to entail secularization in the Western environment where her characters may lose their authentic identities and faith in moving from Africa to the West; instead, she insists on their

ability to adapt through their flexible hybrid identities and to engage into dialogic relations with the members of the host community.

In other words, nostalgia in her texts functions strategically in providing the characters with an imaginary, often romanticized memory of the past, which becomes the basis of their negotiation of the present in the West. At the same time, Aboulela is aware of the consequences of this nostalgic outlook as it empowers her migrants to settle in the new environment. Once the critique of the West is established in her narratives, nostalgia gives way to Aboulela's transnational vision of Islam, which is not bound to a particular location and accommodates transitivity and change. However, this change happens within the strict parameters of a dialogic discourse, resulting in some narrative resolutions that appear to be contrived, but logical in terms of Aboulela's ideological framework.

Another key point to note is thatAboulela's discussion of the idea of transitivity, displacement and the migrant's in-betweeness living is expressed in her texts through restorative nostalgia that seeks the return to the past origin. Such a restorative nostalgia aims to "reconstruct emblems and rituals of home and homeland in order to counter emotional displacement and alienation" (Boym 41- 9). In order to do this, Aboulela distinguishes quite clearly between the longing for a geographical place and a spiritual home. In this case, Boym's distinction is valid and interesting, but Aboulela's socio-cultural context merits the re-revaluation of the benefits of restorative nostalgia for her revisionist aims. Thus, Aboulela's texts offer a critique of the values Boym attaches to the different kinds of nostalgia, but they do not question Boym's many useful insights into how nostalgia functions for the migrant.

In Aboulela's fiction, particularly in her novel, *The Translator*, the alien and fragmented world of exile is countered by nostalgic feelings of rootedness and cultural tradition, which stem from the culture of origin and are fuelled by sensual memories of a youth spent in Sudan. The contrast in her fiction between a present of dislocation and the memories of a distanced past allows Aboulela to use nostalgia as a tool of criticism of Western culture and as a defense mechanism against assimilation. In this sense, Boym argues in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* that nostalgia is not just a longing for a place but also a "rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress" (Boymxv). Engaging with Boym's definition of nostalgia,

it will be argued that nostalgia functions in two related ways in Aboulela's texts: firstly, in foregrounding the left-behind homeland, she is able to convey the culture and representations of the Western environment and secondly, through the nostalgic longing for Sudan that is related to the spiritual longing of her characters, she emphasizes her characters' Africanand Islamic background.

It becomes clear, then, that Aboulela's particular narrative strategy in her novel, The *Translator*, firmly situates her narrative in Boym's category of restorative nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is "at the core of recent national and religious revivals" as it signifies "a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment" (Boym 49). This kind of nostalgia stresses "*nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (xviii). For Boym, this is the negative, potentially destructive and intolerant kind of nostalgia. It is, however, arguable that restorative nostalgia as the means to a moresecure position for the migrant is not necessarily negative; on the contrary, it allows Aboulela's migrant women to voice their authentic culture. Accordingly, this transitivity in space and time that Aboulela's characters experience through their nostalgic bridges emphasizes the reality of migration and the role of nostalgia in crossing boundaries. Nash also confirms thatnostalgia suggests connection to a particular location and forges a way of belonging independent of the characters physical location. In this way, it reverses "the fatalism of the emigrant novel" (Nash 30). In this sense, the fatalism of the emigrant novel puts the migrant in an experience of extreme alienation, while in Aboulela's nostalgic strategies, restorative nostalgia creates transitive bridges between the juxtaposed places. Therefore, her migrant characters realize that home can be a state of mind rather than a connection to a geographical place.

Additionally, in *The Translator*, the protagonist's longing for place is reinforced by her longing for tradition. The longing for place is expressed most clearly in sensual nostalgic recollections of geographical locations through tastes, sounds and smells. The narrator describes the protagonist's status in Scotland in this scene: "But this was Scotland and the reality left her dulled, unsure of herself. This had happened before but not for so long, not so deeply. Sometimes the shadows in a dark room would remind her of the power cuts at home or she would mistake the gurgle of the central-heating pipes for a distant azan" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 20-21). Additionally, Sammar's reenactment of her traditional rituals and Muslim wear as well as her

attempt at converting Rae can also be seen as signs of her nostalgic feelings to her origin. Consequently, the nostalgia for home with its promise of delightful belonging is seen as the antidote to disrupted modern time, the secular environment and particularly the insecurities of a migrant existence in the West. It is, therefore, important to note that this combination does not happen right away in Aboulela's texts, which exhibit a development towards this restoration in homecoming via nostalgia. It is the rich texture of cultural difference with its stubborn insistence to be read on its own terms that characterizes Aboulela's important contribution to the discussion of migration.

It is obvious, then, that Scotland, in contrast to Khartoum, is a place where Sammar feels she does not belong which puts her in a state of nostalgia to her homeland. She once admitted that this has nothing to do with her, these shops, these people have nothing to do with her, even the sky is not for her (Aboulela 91). In this statement, Scottish context is portrayed as a complete opposite to home. Therefore, in response to the realization that there is no place into which Sammar fits easily in Scotland, she again turns her attention homewards; longing for the community that was left behind. In this sense, Boym insists that the search for and resurrection of home is a collective effort because "unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (Boym xvi). Aboulela expresses this collective aspect of nostalgia through showing Sammar's faith, that is also a connection to community and homeland. The narrator describes it in this scene:"When she stood her shoulders brushed against the women at each side of her, straight lines, then bending together but not precisely at the same time, not slick, not synchronised, but rippled and the rustle of clothes until their foreheads rested on the mats. Under the sky, the grass underneath it, it was a different feeling from praying indoors, a different glow. She remembers having to hide in Aberdeen, being alone" (Aboulela 46).Nevertheless, this nostalgic feeling to her homeland will soon disappear as soon as she has to face reality after her return.

On the other hand, when Aboulela's migrants return home, they are confronted with a present that shatters some of their harmonious and idealized visions of such a homecoming. Though Restorative nostalgia protects "the absolute truth" according to Boym, at these points in Aboulela's texts, nostalgia is breaking down in face of concrete reality (xviii). In *The Translator,*

Aboulela clarifies her protagonist's state as soon as she puts her feet on her homeland: “Her eyes had let her down, they were not as strong as they had been in the past, not as strong as the eyes of those who had not travelled north. She must shield them with blue lenses and wait for them to forget like her bones had forgotten and her skin” (Aboulela, *The Translator* 136). In this case, Boym claims that restorative nostalgia ceases when the spiritual home has been rebuilt so that the connection between nostalgia and spirituality lies in the convergence of longing for a home that is both physical and spiritual. She states that: “Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Restorative nostalgia creates a single, seemingly coherent and continuous plot of the past"(Boym 49). Using Boym’s terminology, nostalgia, then, functions as the mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual"(Aboulela 8). A good illustration that backs up this claim is Aboulela's characters' common reactions to such a challenging climate that is considered as the recourse to nostalgia. Her migrants express their nostalgia through the yearning for the sunlight and warmth of their countries as the case of Sammar whose nostalgic longing for the heat and sun of Africa arises each time she has to confront the Scottish climate. The narrator states the difference between the Scottish and the African climates in this scene: "Sammar sat on the porch and there was no breeze, no moister in the air, all was heat, dryness, desert dust. Her bones were content with that, supple again, young" (Aboulela 36). Hence, moving away from the weather, Aboulela addresses nostalgia more generally in her fiction.

Aboulela also charts these nostalgic feelings in her novel, *Minaret*, mainly through the protagonist's yearning to her homeland, her family and friends. Najwa, the protagonist of *Minaret*, often brings back her past with her five senses, and this is a characteristic for the nostalgic as Boym points out: "The nostalgic [...] has an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed" (4). In this context, Najwa describes her daily routine with nostalgic flash backs: "In the kitchen I put on Radio 1 and tidied away the breakfast things. It was my favorite program, *The Golden Hour*. When they played the songs of the early eighties, I would remember discos at the American Club, New Year parties at the Syrian Club, songs Omar and I had memorized, arguing about the correct lyrics. I only listened to pop music when I was

alone in the kitchen" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 143). That is the reason why Najwa justifies her staying with her mother's friend, aunt Eva, in these words: "I needed her company, needed to hear her gossip about Khartoum, needed to sit within range of her nostalgia"(143). Therefore, for Aboulela's characters, nostalgic feelings are more than memories of their past; rather, they are, in fact, their real touch with their homelands.

Another narrative that explores the theme of nostalgia is *The Museum*. In this short story, the narrator describes the protagonist's life in Britain as the following: "On the weekends, Shadia never went out of the halls and unless someone telephoned long distance from home, she spoke to no one. There was time to remember Thursday nights in Khartoum, a wedding to go to with Fareed,…or the club with her sisters. Sitting by the pool drinking lemonade with ice, the waiters all dressed in white. Sometimes people swam at night, dived in the water dark like sky above" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 90).Basing on this description, nostalgia does not always enable the characters to form sound judgments of their new environment or even of their real homes in the source culture as the longing and dreaming of home sometimes covers reality with a rosy layer. For this reason, Aboulela is aware of this particular danger of nostalgic fantasy and therefore, she sometimes allows her characters a return to their home in Khartoum where, all of a sudden, nothing is quite as fulfilling as imagined. Thus, Aboulela uses nostalgia as a tool of criticism, but then lessens its impact when it threatens to trap her characters in a position in which they find it impossible to deal with their daily reality in the host country.

Consequently, we see in Aboulela's texts the shift from exilic feelings to nostalgia. This shift is not absolute, however, because despite the characters' struggle against their exilic conditions, transnational and nostalgic feelings for homeland do resurface continuously and are quite clearly linked to a location that is carried into the present via past memories. The sense ofnostalgia**,** in *The Translator*, shows itself not only in the way Sammar misses a sunny Sudan and a blue Nile, but also in how she misses the religious symbols and elements such as *azan*, or the interspersion of Quranic verses in her everyday speech. In this narrative, the female Muslim protagonist's nostalgia for religious symbols, such as *azan*, indicates how she only feels at home where she finds the symbols of her faith. According to Steiner, her longing for a spiritual home and her nostalgic vision are "an actualisation of home in Islam" (16). Aboulela describes accurately this scene in her novel: "She misses azan so badly that sometimes she fancied she

heard it in the rumble of central-heating pipes, in a sound coming from a neighbouring flat"(Aboulela *The Translator* 145). In Sammar's hallucination, her nostalgia for a place is, at the same time, nostalgia of a spiritual experience, because the call for the prayer or *azan* becomes a part of the nostalgic longing. Therefore, the contrast between the two responses elides the fact that both seem to exist on a continuum. According to Aboulela, nostalgia is fulfilled in faith, not by offering a geographical sense of belonging to a particular location, but by stilling this longing for homeland in a spiritual sense. And this is the point at which Aboulela idealizes the globalityand transnationality of Islam.

Furthermore, it is also through nostalgic strategies that Aboulela's textsenvision resolution to the tensions of migration and transnational identity formation. Approving with this, Boym argues that this move from longing to belonging, in its foregrounding of a particular identity, can potentially put an end to a more tolerant position. She notes: "Nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, yet the moment we try to repair the longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways" (Boym, xvi). In *The Translatror*, for instance, the protagonist uses the word *insha'Allah* (God willing) when she is speaking English as if she enjoys talking in Arabic, words like *Insha'Allah*, fitting naturally in everything that was said, part of the sentences and the vision (Aboulela *The Translator* 107). In this context, Aboulela's innovative writings create a meeting point between longing and belonging for their characters.

As a point of fact, Aboulela's fiction argues for the complex and difficult possibility of reconciliation between the new environment and the homeland (West and East), and between the past and the present through a nostalgic dialogic process. The nostalgic backward glance in her fiction functions as an assertion of a particular past which needs to be transplanted into a secular pluralised present. This backward glance is not an act of denial of the changes that occur in migration, but an attempt to save a set of root memories into the present and to imagine a present that is the continuation of a particular past. What is striking about Aboulela's contribution to the conversation between two different worlds is that her women characters, which are triply categorized as being Arab, African and Muslim, do not surrender to the pressures of assimilation. On the contrary, Aboulela writes revisionist fiction in which these women negotiate their migrant experiences on their own terms.

On the whole, Aboulela uses nostalgia strategically in her texts to portray her characters' unfitness, in-betweeness, homesickness and displacement, but also to negotiate transcultural dialogue on her own terms by embodying a past in their sensory present memories. Through her texts, she foregrounds their longing and belonging to their homelands and their influence in countering the anxieties around migration. Thus, the resistance of her characters in this situation is to turn to nostalgia, particularly, as a way to affirm their identity in opposition to their foreign environment. Eventually, when her migrant women create third spaces for themselves in the Western environment, some of this acute nostalgia gives way to an understanding of their state of in-betweeness and their roles as transnational agents.

Conclusion

All Aboulela's texts discussed in this chapter, therefore, envisage new potentials through which migrant Muslim individuals' lives are shaped by specific migrant experiences and juxtaposed spaces. Aboulela's transnational texts consists of a vast number of dislocated places and intersecting migrant experiences, the totality of which produces third spaces where her characters not only shape their hybrid consciousness, but also manage to feel anchored in their immediate environments, construct alternative places of home and enact their hybrid identities. Also, her characters' memories of the past and previously encountered places play an active role in their lives to overcome their exile and connect to their homelands. Moreover, as the different circumstances of migration, transitivity and exile are always the result of her characters'migrant experiences, they are always situated at the intersections of transnationalism, cross-culturality and hybridity. These unique circumstances of migration determine how Muslim migrants perceive differently their new contexts of migration and their new dislocated places.

As specified previously, the objective of this chapter is to reflect on Aboulela's sense of transitivity between different juxtaposing worlds in her fictive texts. Its main purpose is to investigate the impact of transitivity, exile and hybrid consciousness on the female protagonists' reshaping of their interstitial spaces, hybrid identities and transnational dialogic connectionsa. In particular, Aboulela's texts narrate migrant experiences into a space that is not defined by the radicalized discourse that constructs diasporic minority communities; rather it is constructed on the basis of hybrid perspectives. Aboulela inherently embraces the discourse of third space and hybrid consciousness to open spaces of dialogue and belonging for the migrant in her texts. At

first glance, it seems that her characters are exiled in foreign lands, but investigating her texts reveals that the only way to free up spaces of 'home' for her migrant characters lies in the construction of dialogic bridges. According to Leila Aboulela, these bridges are enacted through transnational journeys, dreams and memories, nostalgic strategies and cross-cultural encounters. Therefore, Leila Aboulela' narratives are motivated by actual journeys that urge the reader to live theses journeys with the narratives' protagonists and follow the stories of migrant Muslim women from Sudan to England or Egypt to Sudan or the opposite directions. Moreover, while the host country uses a reductive understanding of home and identity as being in a particular place or of a particular nation in order to marginalize the migrants, Aboulela's texts assert the possibility for migrants to create homes away from their homelands through narratives of the migrant experience that captures both transnationality and transitivity. Thus, Aboulela's migrant characters negotiate their dialogic experiences in rituals of their hybrid identities and Muslim faith, which for most of Aboulela's characters lie in their religious practices, acquaintances met at the Mosque and the social networks of friends and family. For Aboulela, herself, a flexible hybrid identity provides the Muslim migrants' stability better than national identity within different foreign contexts.

In conclusion, Aboulela's narratives focus on reconciliation between East and West through, hybrid consciousness and cross-cultural dialogue. They juxtapose historical and socio-cultural events of the late twentieth century with events of the late twenty-first century in order to highlight migrant Muslim experiences, the East-West dichotomies and the role of dialogue in the reconciliation process. More importantly, they draw the Western reader's attention to different Muslim cultural and social traditions and to the reality of Muslim migrant lives. It is evident that Aboulela takes as her duty the responsibility to bring the western reader closer to the reality that her narratives portray. Moreover, through romance relations between Muslim female and western male protagonists, that are also part of these narratives, Aboulela hints to the possibility of reconciliatory dialogue between different communities. As the case of most of Aboulela's female protagonists, Aboulela employs Muslim women characters to overturn stereotyping and misrepresentations of Muslim culture and religion. Accordingly, the next chapter will show how these women, who cling to Islam as their identity and use it as a standard of self-empowerment, develop a rational Islamic epistemology which challenges patriarchal practices in the interpretation of Islamic doctrines and racist hegemonic discourses about Muslim women.

Chapter Three

Leila Aboulela's Islamic Feminist Concerns and the Rhetoric of Muslim Womans' Empowerment

Introduction

Writing fiction from a feminist lens is a vital way in promoting women's issues to a wider readership, that is not familiar with feminist interests. Through creative narrative portraits, female authors can disperse misunderstandings, correct misconceptions and represent women who have been misrepresented, othered or pushed to liminality by hegemonic discourses such as the Orientalist discourse that underrepresented Arabs, mainly, Arab Muslim women. Reina Lewis argues that Orientalism, even in colonial time, was not unidirectional and univocal. There were writers from the East that were already countering Orientalist representations (323). Accordingly, through her literary texts, Leila Aboulela challenges the hegemonic discourses and the distorted images of Muslim women in the western literary, artistic and media structures. She has attempted enthusiastically, through her fictional works, to revisit the real images of Muslim women, which really need great efforts in order to be transmitted properly. Consequently, this chapter probes Leila Aboulela's narratives from an Islamic feminist approach in order to unveil her migrant Muslim women's stereotypical images and representations and to debunk their oppression under the gendered patriarchal practices through forging for Muslim woman's empowerment discourse.

Accordingly, Leila Aboulela' feminist concerns are derived from her own experience as a migrant Muslim veiled woman. For most feminist critics, "women's life writing is categorically said to employ dialogic narrative strategies and utilize frequent digression that gives readers the impression of a fragmentary, shifting narrative voice or a plurality of voices in dialogue"(Weber-Fève 14). Generally, Muslim women writers use Islamic feminist concepts and achievements efficiently in many ways in order to affect social morals and attitudes and bring profound changes in the position and the role of Muslim woman. Therefore, through their texts, Muslim women writers remove the majority of all the stereotypical pictures and the restraints imposed on Muslim woman and grant her more importance in the society by defending her political, social and economic rights, especially after the tragic events of September, 11th, 2001that affected deeply the perception and position of Muslims, mainly Muslim woman in the Western world, raised immense feelings of Islamophobia and paved theway to the emergence of Islamic feminism. In this context, Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as:

> It is a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence…the basic argument of Islamic feminism is that the Quran affirms the principle of equality of all human beings but that the practice of equality of women and men… has been impeded or subverted by patriarchal ideas and practices. (242)

Muslim feminist thought, thus, gives access to the family and religion, concentrating on the role of Muslim woman, as the two most powerful forms of social organizations. It focuses on motherhood and its important role in family connections and describes the family as a place of safety and a source of strength, thereby promoting the value of Muslim women in the survival of Muslim communities. In this sense, Cooke points out that Islamic feminists such as Assia Djebar, Fatima Mernissi and Nawal El-Saadawi "take the advantage of the transnationalism of Islam to empower themselves as women and as Muslims"(Cooke 61). She explains: "from their multiple situations they are critiquing the global, local, and domestic institutions that they consider damaging to them as women, as Muslims, and as citizens of their countries and of the world, while remaining wary of outsiders' desires to co-opt their struggle" (61).Following their trend, migrant Muslim women writers find themselves involved in the discussion and the negotiation of this issue.

Starting from this discussion, it seems to me important to recognize traces of Islamic feminism in Aboulela's works. Though the Islamic feminist movement is well known in Britain, Aboulela does not define herself as Islamic feminist, nor is she categorized within a feminist framework. Nevertheless, through her narratives, she sets herself as a defender of Muslim women's rights and as a fighter against Arab Muslim women's injustice and inequality within their native communities and foreign societies as well. Her narratives, in general, are written within a specific feminist context to highlight the possibility of negotiating traditional gender perceptions and challenging negative portrayals and stereotypes of Arab Muslim women. A main goal in her writings is to transmit to the Western reader the reality that Islam empowers Muslim woman as opposing to the propaganda that promotes her suffering under the restrictive and conservative rules of Islam. "Through criticizing Western stereotypes and Islamist fundamentalism alike, Aboulela seems to suggest a possible conciliation between secular and Muslim feminisms. In this regard, Aboulela maintains that contrary to the perception that Islam is against women and against the European way of life, she writes fiction in which Islam is described as an

instrument of empowerment in the life of the female characters"(Pepicelli 2011).Hence, reading Aboulela's narratives affords the reader a better understanding of how the positive re-positioning of Muslim woman and her effective roles within her family and society function in her lives and struggle. However,before scrutinizing Muslim women's effective roles and their empowerment discourse in Aboulela's narratives, the perspectives that lead to the construction of the Arab Muslim patriarchal societies and Arab Muslim women's gendered identities need to be highlighted. These perspectives, which affect these women's lives in various domains, especially their educational career, marriage choice and polygamy, are the direct reasons behind their retrogression.

III.1. Reasons for Muslim Women's Retrogression

It is plainly evident that the issue of migrant Muslim women's lives and experiences has been the primary focus in Aboulela's fiction. Through her narratives, Aboulela gives great importance to the different reasons that lie behind Muslim women's retrogression. She insistently emphasizes the patriarchal paradigms, the socio-cultural norms and the misinterpreted religious practices that contribute directly to the formulization of Muslim women's gendered identities. She also casts light on the veiled Muslim women's perceptions and prevalent representations that are reinforced by the negative stereotypes of the veiling discourse and the hegemonic discourses about Muslim women's oppression and victimization.

III.1.1. Patriarchal Paradoxes and Gendered Identities

Women's experiences vary greatly, even within the boundaries of one country. Although class, religion, family, and individuals reflect heterogeneity and diversity, there is a specific uniformity among different experiences of Arab Muslim women. The most noticeable is being subjected to patriarchal structures that 'engender' and oppress them. In this context, Aboulela employs counteractive representations in order to assert the important role of the Arab Muslim female in Arab Muslim societies and migrant ones as well. She also asserts, through her narratives, that those who consider the narratives as degrading and unjust prejudicial for their representation of Arab Muslim women are the same people the narratives attempt to condemn.Therefore, writings about feminine issues and interests by female Arab Muslim writers, such as Aboulela, are dominant in this context of hegemonic

discourses in order to resist the oppressive practices that have terribly accumulated for decades. Accordingly Jennifer Manion (2003) argues:

> Girls are socialized from a very early age to define themselves less in terms of autonomy and independence but rather primarily in terms of their relationships with and dependence upon others, and second, this defining sense of interdependence makes girls especially vulnerable to social pressures, especially those urging them to conform to traditional conceptions of femininity. (24)

Generally, in Arab Muslim societies, a woman's gender is centered on women's subordination, flexibility and even inferiority, both in marriage and in practically every other aspect of life. Some women grow up believing that this is necessary in order to have a peaceful life and a successful marriage. Many writings by religious and secular traditionalist scholars affirm that only the roles of wife and mother provide a Muslim woman's true identity so that all other aspects of a woman's pofessional and social life are directed toward these dual roles and certain assumed female characteristics that are publicly emphasized. These views claim that "Women are inferior, less intelligent, incapable of coping with high mental tasks and thus the only tasks fit for women are bearing children and maintaining homes" (Al-Manea 28).Hence, in order to understand patriarchal power, it must be noted that its primary component is the intensive desire to possess. This, indeed, stems from men's desire to control and their fear that without this power they will not be safe or will be surrendered to weakness. Therefore, in order to take power, men generally hate and fear women. They also find women threatening in order to legitimize any political control and to demonstrate their superiority using the devices they find appropriate (Hierro 176). Thus, all these gender perspectives are well portrayed in Aboulela's narratives.

In *Minaret,* as a female migrant of Muslim background, Najwa was born and raised in a society marked by conservative and patriarchal social relations. The subordination to men and the obligation to get married and construct a familyare the prevalent principles in her society that considers the family the core of the community. Despite Najwa's secular-learning family and her Westernized upbringing, she embodies these values that were once part of her authentic culture. In the novel, Najwa further confesses:"I would have liked to get married, not specifically to Samir (though if he had asked me I

would have accepted) but I wanted to have children, a household to run" (Aboulela *Minaret*124).Later, in London, all these local circumstances, mainly her particular social location within the power hierarchies of gender, class, ethnicity and religion leave Najwa desperate, defying her cultural traditions and religious values through engaging into a sexual relationship with her boyfriend Anwar. The narrator describes Najwa's new situation as:"She feels fuzzy when she is outside, self-conscious about the short skirts she is wearing, dizzy when she thinks of the opportunities and individual liberties the West has to offer, and sinful in light of her sexual emancipation" (175).Najwa's tailspin of unbearable grief, trauma, and low self-esteem, climaxes in the guilt and shame washing over her after she loses her virginity to Anwar. Though Najaw is living in a liberal society where liberties are guaranteed for everyone, she cannot forget about her cultural and social norms. Once, in a conversation with her, Anwar commented on the previous subject: "Like every other Arab girl ... you've been brainwashed about the importance of virginity and this comment left her more disgraced" (175). Therefore, her relationship with Anwar comes to an abrupt end when he decides to marry his Sudanese cousin.

However, dissimilar to the patriarchal relationship with Anwar, Najwa's attraction to Tamer guides her towards self-discovery. This new relation is a romantic story between two different persons who, to some extent, narrow the distances between them through projecting each other positive qualities and accepting each other differences. As does Rae for Sammar, Tamer has unveiled to Najwa a part of herself that is hidden in the way she usually shows herself to the outside world, as restrained, modest and submissive; he told her: "It annoy me when you put yourself down like this. You are better than a lot of people; you've just had bad luck. I bet so many men wanted to marry you!" (Aboulela, *Minaret*201). Najwa, in her turn, helped Tamer to find his way amid all the confusions he endures in his life so that he later became more mature and responsible. At the end of the novel, she resignedly observes that he is all grown up now and that quality she had adored, that glow and scent of Paradise, is gone, and soon he will be like the rest of people (256). In general, Najwa has romanticized Tamer just as much as he has idealized her. They fell in love with each other and engaged into a dialogic relation to overcome their deficiencies and to complement the self-image and self-identity each is seeking to construct and to overcome the dispersion of self each has suffered.

Consequently, behind this bountiful romance there is also a gender attraction. Though Najwa's feeling swing between a love feeling or nearly the feeling of falling in love, her romantic relation with Anwar implicates a gender meaning. Najwa's love for Anwar, who is a Communist student and a member of the Popular Front (which aims at defeating the Sudanese government and establishing a Communist regime),embodies a gender dimension. Najwa is attracted to Anwar to fulfill her feminine needs though, inside her, she is convinced that this relationship with Anwar does not work because they have different views on social issues, politics and religion. Attempting to imagine her life with Anwar back home, in a Communist Sudan, Najwa explains: "I wanted to know how to live with that, how to be happy with that. Change, he would say, revolution. But I had been hurt by change, and the revolution, which killed my father, did not even do him the honour of lasting more than five years" (164).Nevertheless, she felt attracted to him despite all the differences between them for the sake to get married and have a family. Furthermore, Anwar's patriarchal view towards Najwa leaves her more humiliated, mainly when she discovers that he has a relationship with another girl whom he is going to marry and construct a family with her.Eventually, as Najwa recognizes that he will never marry her, she directs her feelings to the mosque where she is going to get out of her emotional crisisand construct her new Muslim identity.

In *The Translator*, Sammar's love for Rae, the Middle-Eastern Islamic expert, is another example of this kind of gender attraction. Sammar has been attracted to Rae because of his gendered vision towards her. In fact, as her relationship with Rae evolves, she adopts a sense of emotional belonging and attachment in his homeland. It is only because of Rae that she finally recognizes that she has been neglecting herself for along time after her husband's death. She suddenly looks around the hospital room and thinks that she is not like this, she is better than this (Aboulela 67). Accordingly, in an effort to return to her 'authentic' self and leaving the past behind her, she puts all her husband's belongings in bags to give them to charity associations just like when her husband died and she took him back home; but this time without grief and tears.The narrator describes her new refreshed state as: "At night she dreamt no longer of the past but of the rain and colours of his [Rae's] city. She dreamt of the present" (224). Thus, her relation with Rae makes her feel that she has to stop grieving and neglecting herself; rather she has to overcome her passivity and recapture her life again.

In *Lyrics Alley*, the romance relation between Soraya and Nur is also based on a gender vision. Soraya is attracted to Nur because she needs his support and encouragement. He is the one who supports her to continue her studies, he brings her the books she needs and stands by her side against her father's patriarchal rules to wear glasses and to continue her studies. Soraya informs her sister Fatma that she has to leave this house and get away from her father. She will marry Nur and then she will be free to do what she wants. She will have a husband and her father will not have any say over her life (Aboulela *Coloured Lights*157). Another gender relation in the novel is manifested in Mahmood Abuzeid and his two wives Wahiba and Nabilah. Polygamy is a complicated issue that reveals deep gender relations in Aboulela's narratives. It was Mahmood who did everything to marry Nabilah. As an Arab man, Mahmood has already this view to Nabilah as a woman who can possess her. The Narrator clarifies this vision in these lines:"He just had to have her. He couldn't get her out of his mind. Would you believe how much he offered the photographer for her portrait?" (85). Even his view towards his first wife, Wahiba, is a 'gendered' one. Though she was the one who afforded him all her fortune, he could not stand by herside and he got married for a second time to fulfill his needs as a man because Wahiba is older than him and she cannot cope with his needs. Moreover, he does not want to divorce her because she is the mother of his two sons: Nacer and Nur, and he keeps her as an old thing that he possesses. Hence, though the construction and outcome of these human relationships are completely different, they play a prominent role in the plots of Aboulela's narratives and hint to the tension towards gender inequality.

Certainly, it goes without saying that introducing a surplus of characters for a saga family novel like *Lyrics Alley*, runs the risk of losing the narrative's main theme, but the main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate various profiles of Muslim women and their struggle against the patriarchal rules. The male characters that are given importance are portrayed in a way that serves this purpose. The figure of the father or husband that is embodied in Mahmoud Abuzeid, Idris Abuzeid and Ustad Badr reflects clear patriarchal perspectives. Since one of the primary elements of the oppressed Muslim woman narrative is a cruel and violent father, the figure of Idris Abuzeid as a clear reflection to it, remains central to the novel. Idris Abuzeid is not only an authoritarian father, but also a cruel controller of his daughters' lives. He once dares to prevent his daughter Soraya from going to school and wearing glasses in order to be able to read: "Idris bellowed. I forbade you from wearing glasses, which means

no wearing glasses. Can you hear me? He hit her again, a blow that landed on her shoulder… 'Do you think you are a boy? Answer me. He gripped her arm" (Aboulela *Lyrics Alley*155). In addition to this patriarchal violence, the narrator also asserts that it occurred to Soraya that he would forbid her from going to school and that any minute now the penality would fall (155). Later in the novel, Idris Abuzeid, prevents Soraya from going to school:"I have just decided that today you stay at home. Now get out of my face. Go to your room" (251). Also, Mahmoud Abuzeid is a sharp symbol of patriarchy and parental control over his sons' lives. He imposes his son Nacer to marry his cousin Fatma though he does not love her, and prevents his son Nur from writing poetry because he sees no use from these words and he wants him to be a business man in order to inherent Abuzeid's business monarchy. Ustad Badr has also this patriarchal vision towards his wife and his children so that in many occasion he applies this patriarchal violence against them.

In the collection of short stories *Coloured Lights*, Aboulela uncovers different kinds of men's patriarchal power over women as she presents pitiful portraits of women from different classes. A few of these short stories will be discussed as they reveal gender power relations, patriarchal practices and domestic violence; and consequently, are considered important to backup the analysis needed in this chapter. In the short story, *Makes your Way Home Back Alone*, for example, Aboulela depicts fierce images of Western and Muslim women's lives in Britain. The story gives an account of the trauma that the fifteen year-old Nadia had on her visit to her British friend Tracy in a nursing home where she met the Irish woman Mandy or Maggie and Kay from South Africa. All three of them have endured abortion, which is imposed on them by both the irresponsibility of men and their patriarchal power and it is the direct reason towards their painful experiences. And though abortion is forbidden and women who do it are condemned in Nadia's religion, Nadia comprehends these women's states through her hybrid identity and the creation of dialogic relations with them. The narrator describes the importance of these relations in this scene: "When friendship runs their course there are no rituals of mourning. There are no tears. There is not even a premonition of finality. Consequently, in the train as Tracy and Nadia sit…,they promise each other meetings and telephone calls" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 85-86). In this case, female solidarity is a strong motive to transcend patriarchal practices and gender classification.

Additionally, Aboulela demonstrates gender relations on many occasions in her writings, but the most shocking is revealed in the short story *The Ostrich* where the male protagonist's old traditions lead him to violent practices. In this narrative, the novelist, again, unveils men's power over women and their manifested violence to dominate them. Majdy, the male protagonist, is portrayed as a migrant Sudanese who is ashamed of his religious rules, cultural norms and traditions. Though he is a Ph.D. student and, thus, one of the elite class, he has this conviction that every one of them (English people) is better than us (Aboulela, *The Ostrich* 40).Therefore, in this short story, the female protagonist, Sumra, has to endure her husband's gender practices towards her. Although his Western liberal ideas pulled him away from his cultural norms, his gender behaviours towards his wife are still the same. He, himself, confesses that this country, bit by bit chips away at his faith (Aboulela 43). Also, in his first meeting with his wife at the airport, he addresses her: " 'You look like something from the Third World' and she lets herself hurt, glancing downwards so that he would not see the look in her eyes" (Aboulela 35). Again, Sumra finds herself facing her husband's humiliation and violence when he invites his friends to his apartment and asks her to cook the food they like. Sumra expresses her ideas aboutpolygamy once, saying that we shouldn't condemn something that Allah had permitted, remarking that Majdy's father had a second wife. When they left he slapped her, and he was fool that she didn't understand what she had done wrong. He said: "at least have a feeling that you have said something wrong. They can forgive you for your ugly colour, your thick lips and rough hair, but you must think modern thoughts, be like them in the inside if you can't be from the outside" (Aboulela 41).This act reflects the deep gender practices engraved in the Arab male mind. Though he is striving for modernity and civilized thinking, he cannot leave his violent acts against woman behind. This marital relationship reflects the different views of man and woman towards marriage.

Consequently, an important aspect of gender formulation for an Arab Muslim woman like Najwa, Sammar or Nabilah is the deep rooted notion of marriage and polygamy in their minds. Sammar's evolving sense of stability and belonging are prompted by the new male figure in her life. Her flourished emotions for Rae make her identify herself with him and grant her a sense of belonging to his homeland. The narrator reveals her feelings in this scene: "In Rae's house, Sammar felt the sense of home" looking at the Islamic pictures and pictures of his daughter "Everything, there, seemed to be warm and flowery and on top of all that Rae's voice" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 5). But, these feelings

are not only induced by Rae's house in the literal sense; rather his voice and the way he speaks to her raise her feelings, make her feel the safeness amidst her exile in this city, give her the comfort she needs and encourage her to create dialogic bridges with him.

Again, here, for the sake of marriage, she makes directly an official proposal to Rae and neglects her pride, which is viewed as an important matter in Sammar's social traditions. Basing on Sammar's background, it is unusual for women who cling to their social values and traditions to propose to men as it is considered to be the male's role. Sammar claries that she is not feminine enough coming here to ask him to marry her when she should be waited to be asked (Aboulela 128). Therefore, in order to fulfill her strong need to be with a man, she was unable to wait untill he made the first step and she directly asked him to convert to Islam even by only saying the *Shahadah* because telling the *Shahadah* is one of the five pillars of Islam. *Shahadah* is to witness that "There is no God except Allah, nothing else is worthy of worship, and that Muhammad is His messenger (the Prophet of God)" (Aboulela 123); and consequently, by saying it,they could get married. She urged him: "If you say the *shahada* it would be enough. We could get married. If you just say the words…." (Aboulela 127). However, Rae's astonishment from her proposal confused him and made him reluctant to say it (Aboulela 129). Therefore, Sammar felt humiliated because it occurred to her now that she had come to his office to ask him to marry her and he had not said yes and yet here she still sat, clinging. If she had pride she would go away now (127). Thus, Sammar's urging desire to get married again puts her in a confusing dilemma.

More importantly, Sammar utters the reality that at the beginning of her relationship with Rae, she wanted him to convert to Islam just to be able to get married, not for him to be a Muslim, because her religion prohibits the marriage of a Muslim woman with a secular man. Sammar admits that she had never, not once, prayed that he would become a Muslim for his own sake, for his own good. It had always been for herself, her need to get married again, not be alone (Aboulela, *The Translator* 171). This urgent need to get married, again, after her husband's death, pushed her to accept a proposal of one of the family's friend, Am Ahmad Ali Yaseen, when she was back home. Ahmad Ali Yasseen, is an elderly man who is already married to two wives and who used to carry Sammar as a child. Consequently, after nine months of Tarig's death, Sammar tried to talk to her aunt about her acceptance

of his proposal for marriage and being the third wife of an illiterate old man in order to be in the companionship of a man andescape her loneliness. She tried to persuade her aunt by unconvincing and egocentric reasons, informing her that he is a religious man who feels duty towards widows because of his religiousness. However, her aunt and mother-in-law, Mahasen, struck by what she heard, stood against this marriage, telling her: "Nine months have not yet passed, you want to get married again ... and to whom? A semi-illiterate with two wives and children your age. I'll never give permission for something like this. From what sort of clay have you been made of explain to me….He can take his religiousness and build a mosque but keep away from us. In the past, widows needed protection, life is different now" (Aboulela 23). All these examples reveal how this notion of marriage is deeply overwhelming Sammar, reflecting at the same time, how gender perspectives are still intruding in her personality.

On a different note, polygamy, in *Minaret*, is a possible issue that the female protagonist, Najwa, can easily deal with it. She directly asks Tamer to marry another woman and not to divorce her in case they got married because she is unable to have children. She contemplates it when Tamer asks her to marry him: "Well, to say yes, you must promise me you'll take a second wif[...]Because I might not be able to have children [...] I wouldn't want you divorce me. I would rather be in the background of your life, always part of it, always hearing your news" (Aboulela *Minaret* 254-255).Polygamy also seems a natural matter in Aboulela's novel, *Lyrics Alley*, in which the female protagonist, Nabilah, engages in a marriage with Mahmood Abuzeid, who is married to her co-wife Waheeba. The narrator explains that "he had, long before his second marriage, separated himself from Waheeba and kept his own room. He would not divorce her, though; he had made that clear from the beginning. Waheeba was the mother of his sons and Nabilah must not feel threatened by her" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 29).These images are portrayed in several parts of the narratives, especially in depicting polygamous marital paradigms and the obvious approbation by the heroines. Indeed, although polygamy is legitimized by Islamic doctrine and is interpreted in most Arab Muslim societies as something that is imposed upon women, most of Aboulela's characters accept this idea willingly.

Consequently, marriage in Aboulela's narratives is not only an individual relationship that the female characters strive to enact; rather, it is the first step that should be taken to construct a family,

experience motherhood and escape loneliness. In Najwa, Sammar and Nabilah's worldview, marriage is very important since it is the basic framework of their social life that governs the relationships between men and women and the only way to have children and a family. In *The Translator*, Aboulela asserts this notion: "She [Sammar] envied Fareed because he was married and she was not, and marriage was half of their faith" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 108). Also in *Minaret*, while mainstream social norms expect boys to continue their studies after graduating from high school, it is socially expected that girls will get married immediately after graduating or while still in high school. In most Arab Muslim societies, parents typically prefer that a girl obtains a husband rather than an educational degree. According to Hamadan, women in many Arab families were and still are convinced or forced to leave school early and start a family (432). Najwa confirms that she was going to get married to someone who would determine how the rest of her life flowed (Aboulela, *Minaret* 78), and admits that if she has the choice of getting married and starting a family on the one hand and of continuing her studies on the other hand, she will choose marriage and family because this kind of partnership is not religiously or socially permitted outside marriage. For her, marriage will not impede herfuture career, nor willa university degree make her distinctive.

Therefore, later in London, Najwa's romantic relationship with Anwar is a complete failure due to this concept of men's superiority over women and how Arab men are afraid of getting married to educated women or 'liberal ones'. Najwa clarifies that Anwar married his cousin after all and he brought her over [from Sudan] when his career took off (201). Additionally, though, *Minaret*'s protagonist also declares that good husbands should not oppress their wives, rather they should take care of them and their children, Najwa stresses this difference: "These men Anwar condemned as narrow-minded and bigoted, men like Ali, were tender and protective with their wives. Anwar was clever but he would never be tender and protective" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 242). In this sense, Najwa's interpretation of marriage and women's roles, within their families and society, is important for understanding how gender roles are culturally structured. It is clear that Najwa's strife was not with 'her personal ambitions' but, rather, with the social expectations of a woman's behaviour and attitude, regardless of her educational background. Thus, Najwa's story displays how some Muslim men might feel threatened if they have a high educated wife and also sheds light on the patriarchal societal mores

that emphasize men's educational superiority and prioritize their success onthe account of women's ambitions.

On the other hand, the sanctity of marriage is well emphasized in Aboulela's third novel, *Lyrics Alley* that portrays marriage as an important component of her female characters' lives. A good illustration in this novel is Nabilah's marriage to Mahmood Abuzeid. Nabilah's mother, Quadriyyah, pushed her to get married to a man who is a Sudanese foreigner and twenty years older than her. The narrator explains that her mother's faith in Mahmoud Bey transmited itself to the daughter and Quadriyyah Hanim had wholeheartedly, and with utter conviction, engineered her daughter into this marriage. She had brushed aside Nabilah's protests as the twenty years age gap, his foreignness and his first wife and grown-up chidren (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 38). Marriage is also privileged by Soraya and her friend Amal, but, in their cases, without abandoning their studies. Soraya confirms to her friend: "I have no intention of getting married unless I'm allowed to finish my degree afterwards" (238); and Amal responds: "My father is really eager for me to become a doctor…He will make finishing my degree a condition to my getting married" (Aboulela 238). Therefore, according to Aboulela, marriage is a necessity in Arab Muslim women's lives, but not at the expense of their individual will and personal ambitions.

In this vein, though Aboulela's narratives show how these gender views and patriarchal practices negate the value of Muslim women being wife, mother or daughter and also contradict Islamic teaching and doctrines, they portray powerful images of Muslim women's experiences, especially with regard to their agency. She emphasizes their roles within their workplace, their families as well as their societies. In *The Translator*, Sammar is portrayed as a strong woman who is able to overcome all the difficulties despite her husband's death and the troubles she faces in her aunt's house. She manages to bring back her son to her again, convince Rae to convert to Islam in order to get married and participate in diminishing the illiteracy rate in her country through working as a teacher in the illiterate program in Sudan (Aboulela, *The Translator* 166). Also, in *Minaret*, Najwa finds herself alone as a refugee in London after her mother's death and the imprisonment of her twin brother. However, she has the ability to restart her life again by working as a maid in an Egyptian migrant family apartment. She is considered as the axis of this family; the one who does the housework, takes

care of the child and helps the members of this family. She is also able to start her religious spiritual journey, practice her religious rituals in the mosque and engage into dialogic interactions with members of the Muslim community.

In *Lyrics Alley*, Nabilah is also portrayed as a powerful character that refuses all the negative effects of her surrounding in Sudan. She is an educated woman who participates in the prosperity of her family and society. She takes care of her children, Ferial and Farouk and gives so much importance to their education so that the Egyptian Ustaz Badr can be hired to give them lectures in the *Saraya*. She is the one who shares with her husband his upper-class social relations since she is an educated elegant woman who is able to receive his guests at her house and to discuss with them different subjects that interest them and the society. Nabilah's narrative defines how she was raised and educated in Egypt to be an independent woman and the portrayal of her stories, in Sudan, outlines how she forges her path courageously and challenges many social norms. In her host country, she is able to demonstrate a female agency and an eagerness to make her own choices; whether in terms of having half of the *Saraya* for herself alone, far from her husband's family with modern Egyptian furniture or choosing a modern way of dressing and raising her children. The narrator describes her new life as: "Nabilah surrounded herself with the sights, accents and cooking smells of Egypt, closing the door on the heat, dust and sunlight of her husband's untamed land" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 25). Therefore, emerging as a strong figure in the novel, Nabilah gives herself the right to criticize the others' lives.

In addition to her new ways of adapting in a foreign land, she has different views about their way of living. Accordingly, her comments on Wahiba's way of life cast light on many importantpoints where cultural norms, religious values and practices interfere, especially those related to gender discourse. For example, with reference to the wife and the husband's levels of education and what they might mean for the marriage, Nabilah opined that: "She must control herself. She was well bred, she was cultivated; she must not over react...How could Wahiba compete with me! She who was obese, menopausal, illiterate" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 33). But more important is the fact that Nabilah stands strongly against the old tradition of women's circumcision; while Wahiba who clings to her traditions and against Nabilah's will, applies this old custom on Nabilah's daughter, Ferial. Consequently, Nabilah decides to leave Sudan and to ask for divorce. In this turmoil, Nabilah's stories convey

explicitly multiplex and paradoxical meanings that mirror important aspects of women's domestic socialization processes in the broader society, and focus on their roles in reshaping their lives and societies.

Another strong character that challenges her hard patriarchal conditions, in this novel, is Soraya, the younger daughter of Idris Abuzeid. In the novel, her different views manifest as a direct challenge to gender discourses that continuously foster patriarchy, and as a persistent struggle against the possible impact of predominant gender discourses from multi-perspectives and indirect ways. Soraya challenges all her father's patriarchal rules. The first one is his refusal not to wear spectacles because according to him, only men wear them and none of his girls will wear spectacles like a man (Aboulela 11). Instead, Soraya asks Nur to bring spectacles to her to wear them secretly without her father's approval in order to be able to read books and study. The narrator asserts that she is able to continue her studies and wear her spectacles secretly despite her father's patriarchal objection (145).Second, Soraya challenges her father's decision, who forces her to stop going to school as soon as she receives an arranged marriage proposal.

Accordingly, the narrator clarifies that unlike Halima and Fatma [her elder sisters], Soraya had managed to complete school. Now she could be the first Abuzeid girl to step into university, the first girl in the alley to get a university degree (Aboulela 235). Again, Soraya seems obssessed with the idea of breaking her father's patriarchal chains by getting married to Nur. She secretly muses that "Nur had acknowledged the perfection in her……but this will help for the time being. For the time being. Until they got married and she would be free of her father's conservative restrictions"(13). Therefore, Soraya's moments of self-assertiveness and resistance suggest that the challenge of patriarchal structures in her life help her reasserting her identity. In this sense, she becomes the 'modern' face of a woman who challenges the traditional norms of her society and the customary model that Simone de Beauvoir condemns in her book The Second Sex: "A woman is non-existent without a master. Without a master, she is a scattered bouquet"(qtd. in Cohen 198). Soraya, thus, proves that an Arab Muslim woman can be responsible of her decisions and the different aspects of her life.

Eventually, if one applies this struggle for agency again to Aboulela's protagonists: Sammar, Najwa, Nabilah and Soraya, it becomes evident that they are also walking their own fighting paths against all patriarchal practices and gender discrimination. These female protagonists have to struggle and forge their own ways toward their agency and freedom from all relations of subordination to men. In *Minaret*, Najwa confidently declares: "I liked the informality of sitting on the floor and the absence of men. The absence of the sparks they brought with them, the absence of the frisson and ambiguity. Without them the atmosphere was cool and gentle" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 242). Also, Nabilah, in *Lyrics Alley*, feels at ease whenever her husband Mahmoud Abouzeid is far away from her as if his presence limits her freedom and prevails her with sentiments of subordination. The narrator explains her feelings: "At night she had the luxury and space of a double bed all to herself" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 99).On the other hand, Soraya also confirms woman's urgent desire to get free from the oppression of man. The narrator speaks her mind: "Her father despised her to that extent! For years she had accepted his treatment, knowing she would one day get away from him" (253). In *The Translator*, after her first quarrel with Rae, Sammar also confirms that she wants to leave his country and come back to her homeland where she can be happy without him. In general, Aboulela's narratives prompt Arab Muslim women's agency in order to correct Western stereotypes and 'write back' to the consistent prejudices and incorrect hegemonic portrayals about them, especially the ones related to the veiling discourse.

III.1.2.The Veiling discourse and Muslim Women's Representations

One of the most important discourses in Muslim Migrant Literature is the veiling discourse both as a general theme as well as a theme treated by Anglophone migrant Muslim writers. In general, there is much of incomprehension around the veil and the message it conveys about Muslim women and Muslim societies. Obviously, feminist scholars differ on their readings of the *hijab* or the veil in the Diaspora. Among the many current prevailing pictures over the semiotics of the veil are those that strive against the wrong belief that *hijab* is a compulsory practice imposed on Muslim women within the entirety of Muslim community. Therefore, particularly for women, cultural norms which manifest them as Muslim can act to preclude them in Western host communities; mainly the wearing of the *hijab* or the veil.In this context, Monica Mookherjee, argues that a key area of concern for research into the position of women in Muslim communities has been the way the veil has become a symbol around which Muslim women's identities are formed and contested (114). She, also, demonstrates that prejudices about Muslim women's oppression are simplistically formed when people come across a

veiled Muslim woman.It is within this social context that migrant Muslim women negotiate their religious and cultural identities, offering particular challenges for migrant Muslim women.As will be further discussed in this chapter, it is, mostly, since the colonial era that Muslim women are depicted as oppressed and repressed in Western representations mainly due to their way of dressing. These colonial preconceptions of Muslim women, however, have not remained unquestioned. In postcolonial times, some Muslim writers, including migrant Muslim women, have written back to this hegemonic discourse in order to debunk the distorted images and the misrepresentation of the Muslim woman.

Particularly, the veil has gained various connotations in the Western interpretations of this Muslim dressing. Due to this dressing, Arab Muslim women have been represented as victims of their religion and traditions in colonialist discourse. Soraya Duval confirms this claim: "Islam is viewed as the main origin of the prevalence of sexual inequality in the Middle East. Socio-religious values have been regarded as barriers for Muslim women and Muslim society to become civilized" (86). She further explains:

> In the Western eyes only by giving up these peculiar and intrinsic practices, would Muslim societies move forward on the path of civilization. The veil, for the colonisers but also in the vision of contemporary Western political culture is the most visible marker of the otherness and inferiority of Islamic societies. (86-87)

Nevertheless, the veil for many contemporary Arab Muslim women writers has become a metaphor for Muslim women's visibility and resistance of "Western civilised values". Following this trend, the Sudanese novelist Leila Aboulela, among other migrant writers, asserts that the *hijab*has made women able to fulfill their interests because it allows them to be protected, taken seriously, and thus, manifest their authentic identity. Hence, literary portrayals of the Sudanese author, Leila Aboulela, discuss ambivalences associated with the veil and the Muslim veiled woman.

In this regard, the wearing of the veil or the *hijab* is a theme frequently encountered in Aboulela's fiction. Its general interpretation as a symbol of oppression has induced Aboulela as a Muslim writer, and *hijab*-wearing woman, to join her voice to the voices of secular feminist women, who are known as the sole representatives of female emancipation in the Muslim world, to defend Muslim woman's rights and agency.Therefore, most of the female characters in her narratives have a story about the veil, the

hijab or a scarf, whether it is at the centre of the protagonists' lives, as it is in her novels: *The Translator* and *Minaret*; or addressed in a more indirect manner, as for the short stories' protagonists, in which it appears secretly at times of prayer when the heroines are practising their religious rituals alone and isolated from the main stream of the host society. To this end, without abandoning their veil, Aboulela's female protagonists have entirely complied with, or as much as their exile status imposes them to do, to acclimatizing and weaving relations with the members of the host community.

Aboulela's narratives can be read as writing back to the popular representations of the Muslim veiled woman in Western countries. Her narratives, mainly, challenge the Western conception of practicing, *hijabed* Muslim women as "exotic others" and problematizethe issue of these women's "Othering" in Western societies.Therefore, the potential that these narratives suggest for migrant Muslim woman's complex identity is the possibility of reconciliation of her Muslim identity with hybrid identity. To advocate for Muslim woman's veiling, Aboulela's narratives deal with the challenges and rewards of being a practicing Muslim woman in the West, and in the dichotomous world she inhabits; a world in which the conception of maintaining the religious dressing is understood as being oppressed, but leaving it behind is translated into becoming liberated. In this sense,the act of covering her head conveys images of her anonymity, passivity and victimhood; and this indicates that she is the bearer of some sort of an oppressive backward tradition.In contrast, the act of remaining uncovered denotes her secular state of mind to European observants and marks her liberation from the socio-religious restraints as a direct result of exposure to Western principles of modernity.Hence, within this binary world, visible signs of faith, mainly wearing the veil, define the Muslim woman's fate.

Consequently, Aboulela's narratives are very salutary for better understanding the re-positioning of the veil in Muslim women's lives and the role of veiled women within their native societies and foreign ones. The author focuses on Muslim women's need to re-position and re-present the veil in their lives. She is not the spokeswoman of Muslim women in general; however she highlights different elements to think about Muslim woman's veiling in Europe. Her main purpose is to tell about the modern veiled Muslim woman from a veiled woman's worldview. Aboulela, thus, conveys to the reader Muslim women's voices which are generally refused to be heard.

For Aboulela, who also wears the *hijab*, the veil gives an obvious dignity to Muslim women. They are not looked at for their bodies, but for who they are and for their faith. In *Minaret*, Najwa utters clearly this notion: "It is as if the hijab is a uniform, the official, outdoor version of us. Without it, our nature is exposed"(Aboulela, *Minaret* 186). In this novel, the headscarf is also an element of beauty. Wearing the traditional Sudanese headscarf, Najwa says: "I wrapped the tobe around me and covered my hair. In the full-length mirror I was another version of myself, regal like my mother, almost mysterious. Perhaps this was attractive in itself, the skill of concealing rather than emphasizing, to restrain rather than offer" (246). Again in London, after she bought her first head scarves, Najwa leaves her friend's home with her first hijab and she maintains: "When I went home, I walked smiling self-conscious of the new material around my face. I passed a window of a shop, winced at my reflection, but then thought 'not bad, not so bad'. Around me a new gentleness. The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn't see me anymore" (247). In this case, the use of the positive adjective and noun 'smiling' and 'gentleness' in reference to *hijab* differs strikinglyfrom the stereotyped Western representations of *hijab* as a symbol of Muslim woman's oppression and backwardness.

Consequently, the veil is the prevalent issue through the entire plot of *Minaret*. It is Aboulela's primary interest from the first pages of the book.Although Najwa wears western style clothes in Khartoum, she is deeply attracted to the veil. Once, looking at the veiled girls who attend courses at her university, she says: "with them I felt, for the first time in my life, self-conscious of my clothes; my too short skirts and too tight blouses. Many girls dressed like me, so I was not unusual. Yet these provincial girls made me feel awkward. I was conscious of their modest grace, of the tobes that covered their slimness, pure white cotton covering their arms and hair" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 14). But at that time, in her environment the veil was totally old-fashioned. One of Najwa's best girlfriends, Randa, considered it as "totally retarded" as she said looking at a picture: "We're supposed to go forward, not to go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or playing tennis?" (29). However, for Aboulela, the veil is not at all a symbol of Middle Ages and backwardness. It is a sign of self-awareness and visibility, pronouncing Muslim woman's identity.

In contrast to the widespread idea that those Muslim women who wear headscarves and attend mosques are ignorant women from the lower classes, Aboulela's female protagonists are educated women who belong to the higher classes. In *Minaret*, the protagonist Najwa is an educated girl who

comes from a rich Sudanese family. She finds the power to wear the veil or the *hijab* in the UK, as Aboulela did. In fact, in an interview with this author, she says: "I grew up in a much westernised environment and went to a private, American school. But my personality was shy and quiet and I wanted to wear the hijab but didn't have the courage, as I knew my friends would talk me out of it." She continues: "Once in London, it became easier. I didn't know anybody. It was 1989 and the word 'Muslim' wasn't even really used in Britain at the time; you were either black or Asian. So then, I felt very free to wear the *hijab*"(Aboulela, June 2005). In fact, it is the western setting that affordsthe opportunity, for the author and the novel's protagonist, to wear the veil.

Similarly, in Khartoum, Najwa's Islamic faith is confined to certain moments such as birth, marriage and specific holidays; it does not shape her daily life. Later, during her first years in London, she lives a Western life where her Islamic behaviour and rituals are relegated. When her mother dies, she does not help to wash her body, as it is the custom among Muslims. Najwa confesses: "I had prayed during Ramadan, during which I fasted mostly in order to lose weight and because it was fun. I prayed during school exams to boost my grades. [...] It would be difficult for me to pray, to remember the times of the prayer, to wash, to find clean cloth to cover myself" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 160-161). In contrast, the Islam that she adopts in Europe is a completely new practice, different from what she has brought from Sudan. In this sense, she adds: "We weren't brought up in a religious way, neither of us. We weren't even friends in Khartoum with people who were religious [...] Our house was a house where only the servants prayed" (Aboulela 95). As a result, it is in secular England where she learns more about Islam within a mosque, with a group of women, from all over the world, who leads her to approximate and cherish her religion.

Although this *hijab* dilemma reflects only one side of Najwa's character in Leila Aboulela's novel *Minaret*, the story is implicitly divided into two main parts of the heroine's life: before and after she wears the *hijab*. Before wearing the veil, the elegant westernized elite girl, Najwa, who used to have a luxurious life in Khartoum, was wasted awaywith the coup that led to her father's suspension and execution. Later in London, she resorted to *hijab* wearing and Mosque meetings after her family's disappointment in their exile, her mother's death of cancer and her brother's conviction for drug addiction and his imprisonment. Consequently, Najwa has to work as a housekeeper for Middle Eastern

elite families to gain her living; and while she is obsessed by the idea that someone will discover her former identity,the *hijab* becomes a mode to hide.

In addition to this, Najwa's recurrent reminiscences of her servants praying, girls wearing the hijab, students praying in the university campus in Khartoum, and her inside emptiness and her envy towards them constitute important phases in her final decision to wear the hijab and embrace the religious belief that will pervade all aspects of her life. The passages that follow attest to the fact that the *hijab*, to her, must mean more than a piece of clothing that covers her:

> I stood in front of the mirror and put the scarf over my hair. My curls resisted; the material quashed them down. They escaped; springing around my forehead, above my ears … I didn't look like myself. Something was removed, streamlined; something was deflated. And was this the real me? ... untie the material; observe the transformation. Which made me look younger? Scarf or no scarf? Which made me look more attractive? The answer was clear to that one. I threw it on the bed. I was not ready yet; I was not ready for this step. (Aboulela, *Minaret* 32)

Although Najwa still debates, in this passage, whether she looks younger or more attractive, with or without the headscarf, her introspection also hints to the irritating feeling that she has always lacked something. After wearing the veil, it becomes clear, that this emptiness and hesitation originates from the lack of will and opportunity to wear the Muslim dress in a compatible way with the disposition that she must increasingly possess by familiarizing herself with an Islamic lifestyle so that when she decides to wear the *hijab*, she feels a 'new gentleness' and 'softness' around her (Aboulela, *Minaret* 33). Eventually, this narrative presents a sophisticated account of the *hijab* as a dressing that is pure to Muslim woman's entire ethical nature.

Additionally, Aboulela sympathizes with her protagonist and understands her positions of which she is critical. At the beginning of *Minaret*, Najwa is disappointed with her new appearance of wearing the *hijab*, and only at the end of the story, she does not find it so offensive. In contrast with her life in Sudan, Najwa, in fact, is completely at ease with her headscarf in her exile since she has already reached her self-acceptance and self-satisfaction; and, thus,she has no difficulty in situating herself

between the British and Islamic cultures. During her prayers at the mosque, Najwa describes the fusion of both cultures through the diversity of Muslim women attending the mosque: “I know what she means. Ramadan [and thus Islam] had brought us close together for a month the mosque had been full of people" (Aboulela 180). Therefore, the *hijab* constitutes the final and not the first step in Najwa’s religious devotion. It is an indication to its importance in her life as more than a garment. It is clothing heavily infused with the modesty and moderation that are gradually acquired and embodied in the acts of Muslim faith and that demarcate religious belonging. Thus, the evaluative structures in understanding the practice of veiling in Aboulela’s narratives are markedly divergent, and it is these structures that make all the difference to the different portrayals of the veiled female Muslim woman.

In *The Translator,* the female protagonist Sammar is depicted from the beginning of the narrative as a veiled Muslim woman. She chooses to wear the *hijab* as a personal choice, even if she has to face various criticisms. At the beginning, though Sammar feels that she and Rae cannot seem a couple because of who she was and how she dressed (Aboulela, *The Translator* 116), it is stressed, in the narrative, that the *hijab* is something beautiful and elegant in the following description, when Sammar puts on her *hijab*. The narrator describes Sammar as: "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 had seen on TV wearing *hijab*, the daughter of an exiled leader of the mujahedin" (Abouela, *The Translator* 14). As a matter of fact, both Sammar and Najwa are subject to contrastive circumstances due to their *hijab*. Once, while Sammar was walking in King Street, a man shouted at her and called her Saddam Hussein (99). Also, in *Minaret,* while Najwa is once in the bus, she has to deal with the violent contempt of young people because of her *hijab*. She declares:

> Laughter from behind me. Something hits the edge of the seat next to me and bounces down the aisle; I don't know what it is. He has missed his target this time. Will they move closer, and what if they run out of things to throw? [...] I hear footsteps come up behind me, see a blur of denim. He says, 'You Muslim scum', then the shock of cool liquid on my head and face. I gasp and taste it, Tizer. He goes back to his friends - they are laughing. My chest hurts and I wipe my eyes. (Aboulela, *Minaret* 80-81)

Thus, despite these aggressive practices against Muslim veiled women, Aboulela portrays a positive image of this Islamic dressing and empowers her female characters to preserve their Muslim identities.

For Leila Aboulela, the veiling discourse or wearing the *hijab* is a central issue in her writing as well as in her literary discussions. It is one of her recurring themes so that she declaresthrough Najwa's speech: "I like the way she [the girl in the mosque] wears her hijab, confident that she has the kind of allure worth covering. Usually the young Muslim girls who have been born and brought up in Britain puzzle me though I admire them. I always find myself trying to understand them. They strike me as being very British, very much at home in London….They have individuality and an outspokenness I didn't have when I was their age" (77). For example, as it is discussed earlier, the protagonists Sammar and Najwa choose to wear the *hijab* themselves without any external force; and they are not only dedicated believers, but they take action and participate positively in both their indigenous societies and the foreign one. They are valiant and know how to act in difficult situations. Consequently, drawing from their stories, Aboulela depicts portraits of young Muslim women who are religious and modern, and able to make their Islamic and migrant lives coexist. According to them, their hybrid identities do not only come from a nationality, an ideology or an ethnicity, but it embraces their Muslim identity as well. Therefore, as a migrant woman writer with a feminist hybrid consciousness, Leila Aboulela manages to convey a credible message of Arab Muslim woman's empowerment through the negotiation of her position and her role within both her native community and the host society.

III.2. The Rhetoric of Muslim Woman's Empowerment in Leila Aboulela's Narratives

In the last decade, within such a context of representation of Islam and Muslim women in the West, Aboulela's fictional writings, written in English and published in Western countries, convey a different story about Islam and about Muslim women. Her writings promote the spiritual dimension of Islam and focus on a deep devotional connection between her main female characters and the religion of Islam. Hence, writing about Muslim women identities has imposed itself in her literary texts.

Since Leila Aboulela's identity and her female characters' identities are generally gendered, Muslim feminism is a necessary tool, for her, in writing about Arab Muslim women. For Aboulela's Muslim protagonists and characters, Islam is the principle doctrine of their lives. They were born in

preponderantly Muslim societies, and they adopt Islam, but not just the patrimonial traditional form of it, but Muslim women, as represented in these texts, try to validate their understanding of Islam by engaging in discussion and negotiation of conceptions and ideas on what shapes the "true" Islam. Through the analytical reasoning and self-representation, they do not only find in their religion convenient solutions to their dilemmas, but also, they give different interpretations of the religious texts that are transmitted to convey patriarchal meanings and justify previous patriarchal practices.In these representations, they negotiate, within an Islamic frame, important issues that are connected to their lives such as motherhood, marriage, polygamy and female circumcision. In this essence, motherhood occupies a great space in Aboulela's writings.

III.2.1.Reflections of IslamicWomanism on Motherhood and Family Connections

Aboulela's texts discussed, here, further cast light on the experience of motherhood and dialogic family connections and how the Muslim woman as a mother plays an important role in home construction and family preservation. The centrality of home and family, however, can be explained as a consequence of Muslim female domesticity and its deep interdependence with motherhood. Therefore, the conceptualization of home as an authentic place of belonging and safety and as a space of rootedness and stability is fully able to grasp the significance of motherhood for the narratives' female characters' empowerment

Indeed, the concept of motherhood in Aboulela's texts is more nuanced. It is a highly symbolic notion that covers meanings of home, safety, protection and belonging, a space where dialogue, comprehensibility and communicability are regulated, but also, complicated. Aboulela's female characters' unique experiences and conditions have put them into domestic spaces where they seem to have to perform the role of mothers (being either migrant housewives or migrant domestic workers, foreign housewives or native ones). However, this is not their only role, which is also not inevitably experienced as unsuitable or oppressive, but can represent an opportunity to create a sense of belonging and home and forge for dialogic relations. This means that the protagonists take care of the children, do the dishes, clean and cook, either by themselves or with others, but do not definitely perform these practices as a burden or proceed these practices against their willingness; on the contrary, they perform these practices as a part of their motherhood duties and as signs of their needs to a home and a family.

They also engage in social relations, watch television, meet friends and approach their surroundings, and thus, performing their motherhood and connecting their roles within their families with their living spaces and surrounded environments.

The family, in Leila Aboulela's narratives is portrayed as a community that depends on two major concepts: motherhood and home. Therefore, it is not surprising that through employing the notion of motherhood as the decisive marker of constructing a family and keeping connections within home, she is insisting on the important role of the Arab Muslim woman. In *Minaret*, for the female protagonist Najwa, the sagacity of belonging to a family that relies solely on motherhood is underlined by the fact that her mother is the mainstay of the family and, thus, family membership is determined by the strong ties of motherhood. After her mother's death and the slow decline into lower-class life, Najwa feels a "hollow place" (Aboulela, *Minaret*135) inside her, echoing the hollow place she would sense at the sound of the *azan* and the call to prayer in Khartoum.Hinting at more deep-rooted problems facing her after her mother's funeral, Najwa mentions: "[a] darkness that would suck me in and finish me" (31). Consequently, the loss of her mother, who is all her family in her exile, has put her in an alienated place where she has to face the world without her mother's care. She also misses the support she used to have from her family in Sudan. She reminisces: "I would have liked to get married . . . I wanted to have children, a household to run" (124). Therefore, Najwa's main hindrance is that she misses the comforts of her old life within her family. These comforts that are not necessarily tied to a specific social or geographical place and that do not involve certain luxurious objects, but that include financial security, inspiring starts, and a secure future within a family. In general, Najwa lacks all these options such as new aims in life, the stability of a home and the companionship of people close to her.

Again in *Minaret*, Najwa does not just find herself alone without a companionship or a family after her mother's death, but after her only brother's imprisonment as well. For her, London symbolizes an empty space where her longing for companionship, friendship, and stability in her life intensifies. Najwa admits that "He [her brother] didn't understand that I needed her [Aunty Eva] company, needed to hear her gossip about Khartoum, needed to sit within range of her nostalgia" (143). Mainly, after the loss of her family, she expresses discomfort, insecurity and deep regrets about missed prospects such as her inability to go back to university and obtain an adequate education, and the impossibility of keeping

up with her intellectual and successful friends.She looks back to her past, to Khartoum and London where she used to be with her family and sheconfesses: “but it is not possessions that I miss. I do not want a new coat but wish I could dry-clean my old one more often. Wish that not so many doors have closed in my face; the doors of taxis and education, beauty salons, travel agents to take me on Hajj. . .” (2). But this future seems unreachable now and Najwa is ready to settle it with an alternate as a maid in other families’ houses.

Consequently, a temporary feeling of serenity and stability becomes attainable when Najwa starts helping out in her mother’s friend (Aunt Eva’s household). Najwa notes:

> To be with a family again, to be with one of my mother’s friends. Something opened up inside me. The need to be useful, the pleasure in being in her kitchen, in finding out where everything was kept, opening her fridge, putting the groceries away. She taught me that day how to stuff vine leaves, how to set a table, twist and fold a napkin just so. And when she went to shower and change, I put on Radio 1 loud, and enjoyed cleaning the kitchen. (Aboulela, *Minaret* 141)

In the aunt’s absence, Najwa takes over the kitchen, turns up the radio and enjoys herself, able to briefly claim this home as her own. This passage shows how simply by being in a domestic space, carrying out ordinary tasks and enjoying the company of her mother’s friend, Najwa experiences intense emotions and a strong sense of comfort that its effect remains even when that person is not present at home.

Later, Najwa tries to recreate thisfeeling of an alternative family by working as a maid in another Egyptian migrant family house. Because of the novel’s non-linear structure, it is on the first page that the reader meets Najwa, probably in 2003, as the second chapter heading reveals (63), as she is on her way to an interview for such a job on St. John’s Wood High Street. There, she is going to work for Lamya and Doctora Zeinab, Lamya’s mother, her actual "new employer" (65-79) with whom Najwa regulates the details of her new responsibilities as a maid and other work related matters. Soon, it is

manifested that this is not Najwa's first job as a maid; rather, at this phase in her life, Najwa is already an experienced housekeeper and has fully become proficient in this job.

Compensating her mother's absence and the loss of her family, Najwa starts a romantic relationshipin her employee's apartment with her employee's young brother, Tamer, who helps her regain her personal balance and self-awareness. Day by day, these family members become her new family and their apartment turns out to be the only home where she can construct new relations to replace the ones she has lost. Not only did her fascination with Tamer inspires her fantasies of having a family of her own, it also revitalizes her job and makes her endure Lamya's moods. In the novel, the meetings between Najwa and Tamer makes this issue very clear and their meetings rapidly turn into a comforting routine. Like the comfortable feeling of stability that Najwa grasps, when she performs household tasks in the kitchen or when she is in the mosque, the innocent practice of taking her employee's little daughter to the park grants Najwa a similar sense of stability and induces her to imagine what it would be like to have a family with Tamer this time. In Najwa's fantasies, "[they are] like a couple, a couple with a baby" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 110). Thus, according to Najwa, having a new family affords her an alternative sense of belonging.

Family in Aboulela's narratives, accordingly, is a sacred zone that demands allegiance by virtue of belonging. Aboulela presents family as a system of life through which the characters deal with everyday experiences and build new ties within both the old and new communities. In searching for a place where she can feel at home, *Minaret* protagonist's Najwa is only able to find it within her employees' family. She asserts: "It still takes me by surprise how natural I am in this servant role. On my first day as a maid (not when I worked for Aunty Eva-I didn't feel like a maid with her- but later when I started working for her friend) memories rushed back at me…,so that now, years later and in another continent, I am one of them"(83). In this sense, basing on how she describes her first day at work, Najwa enjoys being within a family even though she is invisible.

According to her, she would rather be the family's concubine, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, with life-long security and a sense of belonging (215) than going back to a life of loneliness and isolation. Therefore, repetitive acts like doing the dishes, cooking, washing, and ironing

soothe her and make her feel in a domestic space. These practices unveil a character that feels comfortable in being useful through routines and finding great pleasure in the soothing presence of a family even if this means performing the role of a servant or a concubine.Najwa clarifies:

> I know how deferential a maid should be. I take off my shoes and leave them at the door. I take off my coat, fold it and put it over my shoes—it wouldn't be polite to hang it over the family's coats on the coat-rack. I know I must be careful in everything I do; I mustn't slip. The first day is crucial, the first hours. I will be watched and tested but, once I win [Lamya's] trust, she will forget me, take me for granted. This is my aim, to become the background to her life. (Aboulela 65)

Eventually, Najwa's commitment, her vigilance to do everything right and to not slip, shows how important this job is for her and how being within a family matters deeply for her existence.

Additionally, Najwa is inspired to make a provision to this family whose members are themselves immigrants from the Arab world, Egypt and the Gulf states. Lamya is a Ph.D. student and a mother of a girl child, whose husband works in Oman and comes to visit every six weeks for a short vacation. Tamer, Lamya's brother who still attends the university, is a few years younger than her; and at that time many years younger than Najwa who should now be around thirty-seven following the novel's timeline. The fourth member of the household is Mai, Lamya's two-year-old daughter whom Najwa takes care of her besides her main duties of typical household tasks. This imagined 'motherhood relation' with her helps, Najwa gain access to her old self, ultimately get a clearer sense of who she is, navigate past and present experiences, open dialogic spaces in her new life and enact a sense of stability. However, this auspicious sense of stability may well have lasted had Najwa not started a romantic relationship with Tamer.

When Najwa's romantic relation with Tamer was discovered by his sister Lamia and later his mother, Doctora Zeinab, during one of Lamya's numerous parties, the sense of home, that Najwa enjoyed, soon shattered.The narrator narrates that Lamya happens to burst into Tamer's room in this very moment, and Najwa is given her notice (224).However, despite this unexpected ending of her employment and family belonging, Najwa is able to draw strength from this short-lived romance. Privileged by Tamer's mutual commitment to her, Najwa emerges as a stronger character with renewed

self-identity. In the novel, a discussion between Najwa and Tamer clarifies this issue: “Do you feel you’re Sudanese?' I [Najwa] ask him [Tamer]. He shrugs. “My mother is Egyptian. I’ve lived everywhere except in Sudan: Oman, Cairo, here. My education is Western and that makes me feel that I am Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So I guess, no, I don’t feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity. What about you?' I talk slowly. “I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I’ve changed. And now, like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim” (Aboulela, *Minaret*110). Consequently, this new situation promises novel possibilities so that on the condition that Najwa breaks off her relation with Tamer, Doctora Zeinab writes her a generous cheque that will allow her to fulfill her dreams; a promising opportunity that Najwa had not previously the possibility to achieve. The comforting feeling of home is, thus, replaced with the hope of being in a sacred place of pilgrimage and another compassionate place of belonging in the future.

In *The Translator,* family is also a relief for Sammar’s psychological instability. Aboulela describes her protagonist’s life after the loss of her husband in a car accident and her abandonment of her son in Sudan as: "Four years ill in a hospital she had made for herself. Ill, diseased with passivity, time in which she sat doing nothing. The whirlpool of grief sucking time. Hours flitting away like minutes. Days in which the only thing she could rouse herself to do was pray the five prayers. They were the only challenge, the last touch with normality, without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of day into night" (Aboulela,*The Translator* 16). In fact, the loss of her family, made the protagonist in a total case of despair, unable to continue her life as before. When she brought her husband’s body back to Khartoum, she had to accept a proposal of marriage that was made to her by an old friend of the family, Am Ahmed Yaseen, just for the sake of constructing a family even though this man is illiterate, older than her and married to two wives. Justifying the reason behind her acceptance, she informs her aunt Mahasen: “I want to get married again, I need focus in my life,’ and her aunt’s reply was, "Your son is your focus" (28). Hence, Sammar’s approval of this marriage proposal hints to her deep need to be within a family.

Motherhood, in *The Translator,* is also portrayed from different lenses to demonstrate its fundamental role within the family ties. The protagonist Sammar’s role as a mother is depicted differently in both parts of the novel. In the first part, Sammar is portrayed as an egoistic mother and this is mainly reflected in her cruel treatment to her son after her husband's death. She takes him back

to Sudan and leaves him in her aunt's house for four years. This act of abandoning him means nothing to Sammar, as if he had never been once a part of her. She hated him as if the death of his father was his fault: "Froth, ugly froth she had said that to her son, `I wish it was you instead. I hate you. I hate you" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 251). According to Sammar's way of thinking the son is replaceable, while the husband is not. The only thing that gives meaning to her life is a husband, without him she is inconsistent, with no identity and motivation. Sammar's shock makes her unbalanced and she wishes for his death, which is something against social and ethical norms. This reflects that the loss of her husband means the loss of the family as a whole. It is also more shocking coming from a 'religious woman' like her, since Islam asserts and promotes the role of mothers more than any other. But Aboulela furthers herself from any Islamic approach on mother-child relationship and how social values and traditions would consider her behaviour towards him, rather she insists on the psychological side of an Arab Muslim woman when she loses her husband. It is important that women make their own choices in life and have the freedom to choose their life style as long as their choices do not hurt or violate the rights of others. In this case, Sammar does not decide her life only, but also that of a child whom she is responsible for. Therefore, the mother-child relationship needs to be carefully investigated in this novel.

In general, the mother-child relationship is intricate to a given extent in this text though the writer justifies Sammar's behaviour from different angles. Therefore, it is difficult to advocate the mother's behaviour or to condemn it. When Sammar decides to return to Sudan to see her son after abandoning him for four years, she does not think of her new relationship with him and she definitely expects that Amir would accept her again as a mother.When she is in Sudan, the writer mentions how she faces her son and how he feels towards her. She describes her first meeting with her son: "The excitement of seeing Amir again, and he so cool, accepting her hugs and kisses as he would from the many visitors and relations who crossed his life" (Aboulela, *The Translator*139). Nevertheless, her feelings towards her son refreshed as soon as she met him and she started to indulge her motherhood within her family environment.

Furthermore, by suggesting this, the author emphasizes the stereotype that Muslim women cherish their families, especially their children. At the beginning, Sammar left her son in Sudan because

she was not able to be the mother he deserved. She felt that she was alone without a family, weak and lost after her husband's death. Once when she was with Rae, she reminisced her life in Sudan with her family and contemplated: "Tell him [Rae], she told herself, tell him of Mahasen and Tarig and Hanan. Mother, son, daughter. Tell him how you shrugged off your own family and attached yourself to them, the three of them. Made a gift of yourself, a child to be moulded... An obedient niece, letting Mahasen decide how you should dress, how you should fix your hair. You were happy with that, content..." (Aboulela, *The Translator* 253). Thus, as previously pointed out, Sammar submits to the exact discipline of the family and abandons love for sacred bonds of blood. According to the writer, this mother-child relationship regains its spark whenever a process of communicability begins and the mother redeems her role as soon as she starts dialoguing with her family.

In the second part of the novel, Sammar follows religion tightly to deal with her husband's death and to justify the abandoning of her son and re-marrying claiming that marriage is the half of religion.Consequently, she is eager to re-marry a pious man presuming that he is able to afford her the care and the safety she needs as a widowjust for the sake to unite with her son within a family. According to Sammar, family and motherhood are intertwined and unseparated components of her life and they are the basic cores of her society and her religion as well. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Paradise is at the feet of mothers"(Al-Azami 114) which might be the best example of reward in Islam toward motherhood. However, the mother-child relationship is a sacred one all over the world regardless of religious beliefs. Aboulela's protagonist, Sammar, appreciates women for their ability and desire to self-sacrifice and to live for others. Therefore, she is willing to sacrifice and live for a family when she imagines marrying Rae. She wishes to take care of him and his daughter, Mhairi and to bring her son, Amir, from Sudan to live with them as a happy family. Though she abandons him four years, she wishes in her imagination of her new family to live together and to mother Rae's daughter and her son again. The narrator describes her inner feelings as the following:

> She [Sammar] wanted to cook for him [Rae] different things, and then stand in the kitchen and think, I should change my clothes, wash, for her hair and clothes would be smelling of food. Mhairi could come and live with them, she would not need to go to boarding school anymore, and he would like that, seeing his daughter everyday, not

> having to drive to Edinburgh. And Mhairi would like Amir, girls her age liked younger children. She would be kind to Mhairi, …She would treat her like a princess. (Aboulela 252)

To this end, Sammar's mothering side has revived again as soon as her romantic relation with Rae flourished.

Motherhood is also portrayed in *The Translator* through Sammar's aunt, Mahasen, who is, at the same time, her mother-in-law. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes their relationship as ideal. Sammar used to tease Tarig that she loved his mother more than him by hugging her aunt, kissing her cheeks and putting her head on her shoulder (Aboulela, *The Translator* 10).Sammar admires deeply Mahasen because according to her she is a strong woman, a real leader and a perfect mother who is looking after her son (7).However, after Tarig's death and Sammar's return to Sudan, her relationship with her aunt completely changed because Mahasen accused her for her son's death. The narrator explains their new relationship as: "This was the Mahasen who now frowned when mentioning Sammar's name. 'That idiot girl" (10).Thereby, Sammar's mother-in-law deliberately humiliated her by forcing her to take care of her daughter Hanan's children, by doing the laundry for her and embarrassing her by putting her clothes in an unsuitable room. The narrator states that Sammar's clothes and belongings were in a separate room which had locked cupboards, crates of Miranda andsacks of sugar and rice (143). However, due to motherhood feelings, Sammar's disrupted relationship with her mother-in-law starts to thrive.

In contrast, this tense relation has been smoothed over the years that Sammar spent in Aberdeen so that thenarrator describes their first meeting after Sammar's second return to Sudan and depicts the mutual admission which had characterized their first encounter in the following way:

> Here in this house, in this language and this place, were all the memories. All that had been taken away from her. A photograph of Tarig when she had walked into the house for the first time….So young and confident compared to her. He did not know her anymore. The young man in the photograph did not know the Sammar who had lived alone in Aberdeen. The photograph made her cry, tears coming from the fatigue of the journey…When she cried her aunt and Hanan started to cry…Only after they had cried together did the

> awkwardness of their meeting begin to break, the years she was away. Only then was it as if reaffirmed that she was who she was, Amir's mother, Tarig's widow coming home. (Aboulela, *The Translator* 139)

At this moment in the novel, Sammar regains her membership within her family and son's life.

Additionally, family is also a social collectivitythat transgresses the individuality of the female characters in Aboulela's narratives, mainly through brotherhood ties. In her novel, *The Translator*, though Sammar'sonly brother Waleed cannot afford her the support she needs after her return to Sudan,he sets himself up as her guardian. When Sammar wanted to resign from her job, she went to her brother's apartment to write the letter of resignation. There, her brother apologizes to her: "I'm sorry, Sammar. I'm sorry that I'm your family left and I can't take you and Amir in…"(152).However, he interferes in her decision urging her to conceal her resignation and go back to Aberdeen (153) because he is not convinced by her argument that her life in her aunt's house will be better than her life in Aberdeen. He argues: "That's rubbish. Here you are handling Amir and Hanan's children. Didn't aunt Mahasen fire the maid as soon as you came back?" (150). Accordingly, brotherhood ties in Aboullela's narratives can be either constructive or destructive in her female characters' lives.

On the other hand, in *Minaret*, Najwa's twin brother, Omar, also fails in giving her the support she needs in her exile in London. He is an addict who puts his mother and sole sister into a dilemma of addiction that causes many troubles to them and leads to his imprisonment. Nevertheless, brotherhood ties can never be broken in Najwa's cultural and religious contexts. Therefore, she goes on writing letters to her brother in the prison though he never reads her letters or answers them. Najwa admits that yesterday she received a visiting order from the prison to visit Omar who is allowed to write letters to her, but he rarely does (Aboulela, *Minaret* 71). Thus, communication with her brother is not only disrupted and circumstantial; it also appears one-sided and unbalanced. This means that the ties to family, although still unbroken, are no longer characterized by an active engagement with the only member left of her family and these ties put much burden on her.

Consequently, this burden grows heavier in her employee's apartment, mostly when Lamia and her mother start to worry because Najwa becomes a very contiguous member of the family. As a result,

anxious about her new position and critical toward her religiosity, which they consider old fashioned, they do not understand her. In the party at Lamia's apartment, Najwa becomes conscious that for them the hijab is a fancy dress (Aboulela, *Minaret* 223). However, their positions change later and all three, Najwa, Lamia and the mother find themselves, despite their differences, fighting for a common goal, which is to take care of the child, Mai, and to forge for a dialogic space where they can interact. Therefore, in the upbringing of the child, each one of them brings her own personality and dialogic manner to raise the appropriate female in Europe and to construct the perfect family. Finally, *Minaret* ends with the image of the two women meeting and talking about their deal in the flat that was once Najwa's familial place. Their meeting is a return to a deep cordiality in the flat where each woman can express herself intellectually and emotionally.

Another short story that reflects the relationship of brotherhood is *Coloured Lights*. In her exile in London and in a journey on a bus returning home, the protagonist brings back her memories in Sudan and mainly the memory of the death of her brother, Tahar, in an accident in his marriage wedding; and how his sudden death affected deeply her mother's life and her life as well. She intrinsically confesses: "When Taha died I felt raw and I remained transparent for a long time. Death had come so close to me that I was almost exhilarated; I could see clearly that not only life but the world is transient" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 3). And for this, brotherhood ties are among the strong relations within the families of Aboulela's protagonists. They affect deeply their lives so that as they shape them, they are reshaped by them as well.

In the family saga novel, *Lyrics Alley*, the enclosed characters of the two stories that Nabilah and Wahiba embody prevent their relations from ever fully recognizing the modality of their family and what family as a concept may include. In the eyes of her Sudanese relations, Wahiba fully belongs by blood, whereas Nabilah is viewed as a stranger in the family though Nabilah and the reader know that this is only partially true. Whether Nabilah, as the Egyptian legitimate second wife of Mahmood Abuzeid and the mother of his children would qualify as a family member or not, the true nature of her belonging will be discussed in the course of the novel's plot. However, for Nabilah, her Egyptian identity emerges as a positive social element. In the course of the novel, she gains an insight into the incidental nature of family membership and comprehends that relationships are not naturally friendly, but are handled with comprehensibility instead.

Accordingly, though Nabilah is far from her Egyptian family, she manages to be a member of Abuzeid's family through engaging in dialogic relations with the members of this new family. Her first communicative bridge is constructed between her and Soraya (her children's cousin). The narrator describes this relation as the following: "Seeing them together, cousins separated by age among many other things, Nabilah could not help but think that blood was thicker than water. Her children were connected to this lady in a way she was not…For the first time since she came from Sudan, Nabilah acknowledged the magnitude of what was at stake and all that would be given up" (Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley* 285-286). Later, Nabilah, opens a dialogic space with Nur (her husband's son) after the tragic accident he endured in Alexandria and that caused him a total disability. She affords him the support he needs and travels with him to Britain where he undergoes a serious operation. The narrator also describes this relation as: "Nabilah felt a surge of fondness for him. They had become close, in London, and she missed him when they returned to Umdurman" (180). By the end of the novel, the writer hints to the combination of the two families: Nabilah's Egyptian family and Wahiba's Sudanese Family, living together in the *Saraya* and this notion, in its turn, implies that all separations can be erased through belonging to the Arab family or Islamic Ummah.

In Aboulela's fiction, the large family is also the Islamic Ummah, which is made up of different members from different cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds or Muslim immigrants and converts to Islam. In *Minaret* and *The Translator,* converts are described as important membersof European Muslim new generation. These conversions to Islam, in fact, confirm the creation of the transnational Islamic community, which transcends national and ethnic boundaries. Futhermore, they assert that the re-positioning of religion in the public social sphere is a process carried out in the West as in the East. In *The Translator,* relying on her background, Sammarfunctions as a guide to Islam for Rae. She, as woman, leads a man to convert to Islam as if Aboulela wants to emphasize that the religious message can also be passed on through Muslim women. Sammar confirms that the first believers were mostly women and slaves and she don't know why, may be they had softer hearts (Aboulela, *The Translator*124).This passage reflects the important role of Muslim women both in their societies and in reshaping Islamic families. Already in the first part of the novel, Sammar asks her friend Yasmin if Rae could one day convert (21). By asking this question Aboulela wants to assure to the reader the reality

that conversion is an inevitable solution to their marriage dilemma. Therefore, Aboulela lets Rae (who has at last converted to Islam) confirm to Sammar who has to decide to leave Sudan if she should marry him: "Ours is not a religion of suffering [...] nor is it tied to a particular place[...]What I regret mostis that I used to write things like Islam gives dignity to those who otherwise would not have dignity in their lives, as if I didn't need dignity myself" (198-199). And for this, from the first pages of *The Translator*, Rae's character is surrounded with the issue of conversion to emphasize its importance in the romantic relation with Sammar and to highlight his role in the construction of the small family with her and the large family of Islamic community and, thus, hinting to the contribution of Muslim woman in constructing this Islamic Ummah.

Furthermore, Aboulela also speaks about converts in *Minaret*. In this context, Najwa explains: "Ali [her boyfriend Anwar's friend] intrigued me. I had got the impression from Anwar that the English were all secular and liberal. Ali was nothing like that, yet he was completely English and had never set foot outside Britain" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 241). And in another instance she informs Anwar, who is atheist: "It's interesting about converts isn't it? What would make a Westerner become a Muslim? [...] I think they're brave" (159). Also, Najwa grows extremely fond of Wafaa and her husband who, to her surprise, was English and blond and a convert (24).In bothAboulela's narratives women have taken on the traditional male role of convincing people to embrace Islam and to become members in their Islamic communities. In fact, according to Aboulela, families can be constructed through conversion to Islam and new family ties can also be woven within the Islamic Ummah.

The concept of the Islamic Ummah is also emphasised in Aboulela's narratives through Islamic solidarity among Muslim followers in the migrant surrounding. In *The Translator*, after the death of her husband, Sammar is helped by Muslim women who are stranger to her. Although Sammar is alone without her family in Scotland, when her husband dies, she is supported by unknown Muslim women who are strangers to her and who represent the larger Muslim family for her. The narrator clarifies:

> 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. [...] Now the presence of these women

> kept her sane, held her up. She went between them thanking them, humbled by the awareness that they were not doing this for her or for Tarig, but only because they believed it was the right thing to do (Aboulela 8-9).

This was also true for Aboulela herself. The women met at the mosque were her social world when she first arrived in the UK. In an interview, she thanks the sisters she met at Aberdeen Mosque and says: "they supported me and became my new family away from home" (Aboulela, July 2005). In this essence, these Muslim women, who have foreign names and speak different dialects, are the symbol of that decentralization of Islam that Aboulela hints to many times in her narratives. Also, in this novel, the support of Islamic womanism is manifested in her friendship with Yasmin (A Pakistani woman who lives with her husband in Aberdeen).Though they have different perceptions and ideas about their cultures and the Western one, both of them find themselves attached to each other and in need of each other to overcome their exiles and the feeling of need for their families.

In *Minaret*, Najwa also finds support within the large Islamic Ummah, mainly in the mosque with Muslim fellows. When Najwa finally decides to make the long postponed phone call to Wafaa, the woman who will accompany her to the mosque and integrate her in the Islamic ummah,she speaks her mind: "[t]he woman who had shrouded my mother. The woman who had phoned every now and then to speak to me across a gulf, my indifference making her voice faint, her pleas feeble" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 240). Further, Najwa explains: "My guides chose me; I did not choose them", and like the minaret "Wafaa materialize[s]" (240) as another fixed point of orientation as Najwa is searching for stability and belonging, and as a person to whom she "would always feel a connection . . . a kind of gratitude" (160). As a result, her relationship with Wafaa and other relationships at the mosque create a particular form of belonging for her.

In the mosque, Najwa meets and participates in an open and communal space of solidarity and safety, in addition to engaging in an opportunity for female bonding. Najwa demonstrates that when the mosque is crowded "sometimes there was hardly a place to sit and then we would all stand up to pray, and suddenly there was more space and the imam would start to recite" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 188). There again, for the first time in many years, Najwa feels at ease and allows herself to let go (177). She comes

across different groups of brothers and sisters, men and women, converts and non-Westerners, who are, to Najwa's satisfaction, separated during prayer. She also admires Shahinaz and her baby and appreciates her Syrian teacher Um Waleed with whom Najwa has started a relationship of respect and "love" (78). Additionally, she prays, fasts, attends classes and enjoys being with others who spontaneously accept her and with whom she feels herself at ease. She gains a strong feeling of security and solidarity with these women who will be her role models, guides, and companions, and recoup for the family and children she may never have. Consequently, their visits and persistent conversations are remedial, significant of what bell hooks has referred to as "sisterhood" (hooks 43). Even Nabilah, the protagonist of Aboulela's third novel, enacts family bonds within her husband's family and her mother's family again through these ties of sisterhood. The narrator states: "They were jolted against each other and became close, sharing thoughts and impressions. Life stood still; it was just the two of them, all the rancor and exasperation purged away, all the coolness of distance replaced by a sisterhood" (Aboulela *Lyrics Alley* 277). Thus, these vigorous emotional bonds that can transgress the obstacles of race, class, and ethnicity, are able to surpass the prevalent ideas of injustice or victimization and forge the way to new dialogic family connections.

As a result, Sammar, Najwa and Nabilah, as migrant Muslim women, empower themselves in their foreign contexts through family ties and dialogic connections in two different ways, not exclusive of each other. By family relations in her narratives, Aboulela emphasizes the possibility of having family support in a foreign country in different ways and suggests that these can be focused on in creating contact zones. Without clinging to an ideal, the author asserts the vigor of united efforts to create a place where Muslim women can use distinct feminist strategies to strive for their rights. Thus, the family presented by Aboulela is a new Muslim family; it is not the traditional constant and limited family that migrant couples bring in Europe from their homeland. It is something new that people experience and construct on different norms in the countries where they immigrate.

Generally speaking, the dominant markers among the Arab migrant Muslims are relationships that result in a wide range of family bonding. Expectations in Arab Muslim societies are that it is the family that provides stability, love and support for its members, whereas migration presents a challenge to Arab Muslim people, who must either cope alone without the support of their families or forge new

family connections within their new host societies. Firstly, the family composes the fundamental and the major provenance of constant support for family members' needs, being physical, emotional or financial. Secondly, family members may also gain support from friends and relatives during crises and hardships rather than having to cope alone. Therefore, within Arab Muslim families, the father is the spokesperson for the family and the maker of important family decisions, whereas women are the chief caregivers for children and other members of the family. Within these families, children are given great importance and both parents offer up all they have to ensure that their children's needs are well provided. Thus, for migrant Muslims, belonging to family is as important as belonging to their religion because their nationalities do not matter anymore, it is family and religion that bring people together, and more importantly, they empower them to demarcate their hybrid identities within their in-betweeness spaces.

III.2.2. Muslim Women's In-betweeness (-cultures) and the Negotiation of Hybrid Identities

The question of hybrid identity in Leila Aboulela's narratives is crucial and the identities of her migrant Muslim women are necessarily hybrid identities. Therefore, in addition to family, Aboulela's Islamic thought focuses on Muslim identity and culture as the two most powerful forms of social belonging. They are the most emerging elements in hybrid identity construction and the access to interculturality. And for this, they are sources of strength that empower Muslim women and foster their coexistence within Muslim communities and host ones. Hence, in Aboulela's fiction, the Muslim woman is, generally, represented almost always as a hybrid figure who seeks to bridge the gap between the socio-religious norms and modernity within her native community; or construct hybrid spaces in-between two different worlds or societies.

On a deeper inspection, it is noteworthy to state that migrant Muslim writers have helped make Muslim women's points of view visible. On the one hand, their writings help to configure and shape our understanding of Muslim women's hybrid identities and on the other hand, they help the reader to approach migrant Muslim women's diasporic experiences.Accordingly, Aboulela's texts are very contributory to better comprehending the re-positioning of hybrid identity in the lives of migrant Muslim women and their role in the dialogic process. In her writings, the author concentrates on the standpoint of migrant Muslim women who feel the need to re-position and re-represent their hybrid

identities in their lives. Therefore, Aboulela does not speak in the name of the unification of Muslim women; rather, she highlights important aspects to reconsider in Islamic worldview in Europe. Her major contribution is her potency to tell about the emerging of dialogue of cultures from a Muslim woman's worldview and make their voices heard because to find a voice that is heard is more significant for Muslim woman's autonomy and identity.

In the same regard, the same life of Leila Aboulela conveys that it is possible to conciliate Muslim women's backgrounds, modernity, and their empowerment through hybrid identity. Aboulela assures this claim: "My idea of religion wasn't about a woman not working or having to dress in a certain way. It was more to do with the faith", she said in an interview to the Guardian in 2005. Aboulela, herself, is a migrant Muslimveiled woman who was raised in a very advanced milieu in Sudan. Her grandmother studied medicine in Egypt in the 1940's, and her mother was a university professor in Sudan. Actually, it was in those years in London thatshe turned to a deeper commitment to Islam, went regularly to mosque and wore the *hijab*. However, her religious background and practices have not prevented her from becoming one of the most famed writers in English in the last years. More importantly, Aboulela is on the international cultural scene for several years, mainly, after the publication of her novel, *The Translator* (1999) that was longlisted for the Orange and the IMPAC prizes. Also, in 2001, she won the Caine Prize for African Writing for her short story *The Museum*. Therefore, through her hybrid identity and characters, Aboulela's writings get fame in Europe where Muslim women's writings, especially, those who wear the *hijab*, are mostly unknown.

In the same strain, the representation of Muslim hybrid identity in Aboulela's life, in some ways, resembles the representation of hybrid identity in her fiction. For example, as explained about the above extract, Aboulela appreciates Muslim hybrid identity for similar reasons to Najwa in *Minaret* where she enjoys the stability it brings into her life. Also, Aboulela, like her female protagonists, relates her hybrid identity to love, comprehensibility, communicability and enlarged thought. Such characteristics or elements, in various degrees, are present in both her novels and short stories. There are also similarities between representations of Muslim woman's identity and migrant Muslim hybrid identity in her literary texts, such as the elucidation of some popular misconceptions about Islam and misrepresentations about Muslim women's identities.

According to Aboulela's literary texts, Muslim hybrid identity, as these Muslim women see it and Aboulela depicts it and if it is understood and lived correctly, is a way of life that ensures the prosperity of humanity in this world and promises internal stability and happiness. Within Aboulela's worldview, everything that happens, good or bad, is a special experience for human beings and their sovereignty. The duty of every human is to learn from these experiences and contend to achieve the spiritual peace by developing one's gained abilities. By the same token, Muslim hybrid identity for those women is not an impediment that represses them and against which they revolt; but a guidance to negotiate their in-between worlds' position away from harm and corrosion. According to them, the solutions are not in Westernization, but in the beliefs and practices found in their own identities and cultural heritage. They feel that their owncultural and social resources, Muslim hybrid identity being the major one, are more than sufficient to solve their dilemmas and not only theirs, but also other people's in the world. In short, Muslim women's hybrid identities and Islam, far from being a violent religion or a burden that they have to erase according to Western representations, are considered as sources of power and salvation for these women. Therefore, since Muslim women are aware of their stereotyped images and the distorted image of Islam, their objective is directed toward self-improvement and self-empowerment.

Correspondingly, Aboulela presents narratives of complex negotiations of hybrid identity which is based on Islam for affirmation. This affirmation of Islam reflects her characters' authentic identities and creates, at the same time, for her female characters a hybrid space in which Western stereotypes have no signifying power and Muslim hybrid identity is advocated and incorporated into the new environment despite of the differences and the tension that exist between the two worlds (the homeland and the host country). According to Bhabha, the tension that exists between the coloniser and the colonised deconstructs the colonial discourse and reveals its falsified concepts and representations and confirms that these created identities are not fixed, but are in fact multiple, constructing hybrid identities. Therefore, part of the coloniser's identity is composed in relation to the identity of the colonised, which makes it not an independent but a hybrid one. Bhabha manifests in his argument the coloniser's need for the colonised and uses this notion to explain why in fact the West needs the East

(*The Location of Culture*34). Thus, Aboulela focuses, through her narratives, on the importance of hybrid identity in migrant Muslim women's lives.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to state that Leila Aboulela's narratives are included in the contemporary Muslim literature of migration that focuses precisely on the phenomenon of female migrancy and the correlation between migration and the negotiation of hybrid identity. Particularly, apart from their prevalent success in critical and literary circles, they take the female protagonists' actual experiences of migration, which in *Minaret* connects to the state of political refugeeism in Britain and, in the other narratives, refers to the state of migration as their central setting. They also prioritize these new spaces, foreground the in-between world's state as a central arena for the characters' hybrid identity formation; and negotiate between two different worlds and cultures. While not all her texts are set solely in the same setting or time, it is deeply clear, in fact, how the characters' migrant experiences are structured and in which conditions the negotiation of hybrid identities is taking place. These particular experiences and the practices associated with them are mentioned repeatedly and emphasized by Aboulela's discourse of hybrid voices that connect between two languages and two cultures.

Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* portrays a backdrop of stereotyped cultural images and post-9/11 Islamophobia. It diverges from *The Translator*, however, in the portrayal of a hybrid identity that emerges eminently in the female protagonist's sense of self. *Minaret* opens on an important confession, with the protagonist, Najwa, announcing: "I've come down in the world. I've slid into a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move. Most of the time I'm used to it. Most of the time I'm good" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 1). Marta Cariello takes these novel's opening sentences, to signal that this downward transitivity resembles a "traumatic interruption of time" (340), and, thus, explicitly reading the protagonist's migrant experience along the lines of self-loss as a result of "physical and spatial dislocation" (Cariello 340).On an instant level, Najwa is aware of her low circumstances and newly minimized social status (she now works as a maid in a migrant Arab woman's apartment and a nanny to her young daughter). More significantly, she has also endured an absolute loss of identity at the beginning of the novel which is clearly manifested through her romantic relation with Anwar and that reflects her identity disturbance. For Najwa, her enforced self-confusion and consequent denial of

origins as she once declares: "How many times have I lied and said I am Eritrean or Somali?" (Aboulela, *Minaret*71), have led her into hesitation and indecision; and made her unable to take a stand as she confesses in this quotation: "I become fragmented and deflated in discussions; I never know which point of view I support. I find myself agreeing with whoever is speaking or with the one I like best" (79). Moreover, in contrast to her unstable state, she perceives those around her as "unperturbed and grounded, never displaced, never confused" (174). In this essence, *Minaret*'s protagonist faces an overlapping state of confusion and instability in her migration experience that leads her, later, to the formation of her Muslim hybrid identity.

On the other hand, Najwa's tense relationship with her boyfriend during her first years in London manifests the depth and complexities of her hybrid identity. In a conversation with Anwar in an Ethiopian restaurant in London, Najwa expressesreluctantly her private emotions. She explains to him that she feels insecure because of who she was and whose daughter shewas (157). At this deep psychological crisis, she confesses that she avoids other Sudanese immigrants for fear that they might recognize her name that will always link her back to her "disgraced father" (134), as Anwar himself keeps on reminding her of this name. Further, Najwa is in deep loss in her displacement that seems the only shared element that she has in common with Anwar so that during the same verbal exchange, Anwar also mentions the subject of displacement and confirms that Sudan has the highest internally displaced population in the world. Therefore, being the only thing that unites them in their present situation, Najwa rearticulates Anwar's statement as: "you and I are displaced" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 157),without anticipating the problems linked to this response.At this moment, Najwa is temporarily unaware that their displacement issue is one of the diverse causes that affect their present lives and new hybrid identities differently. Anwar, a former prisoner and a victim of the Sudanese old political regime, was never part of the upper class; and, here in London,he regularly reminds Najwa of her privileged position. But in many occasions, hereassuringly explains to her that here [in London],no one knows their background because they are both niggers and equals (157). By this claim, Anwar clarifies how most Londoners may confuse race with ethnicity, assuming that Najwa (not wearing the *hijab* yet) and Anwar are black British, or simply black African foreigners. But more specifically, Anwar's opinions allude to the divergent perceptions of male and female migrancy. Unlike Najwa, Anwar faces various discomforts and troubles in London such as financial problems, the language barrier and the

racial gaze and all this implies that, in fact, Anwar suffers from estrangement and inequality.He assigns this feeling to his skin colour, not to his cultural patrimony or national backdrop. Najwa's turmoil's, on the contrary, the assault on the bus and her general discomfort originate from the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and religion rather than race; and are complicatedly intertwined with the experience of forced migration. Thus, all these conflated troubles contribute to her hybrid identity formation.

As the story develops, Najwa's hybrid identity becomes increasingly distinguishable in that the protagonist starts to be closer to her culture and know more about her religion in order to determine the course of her own life and construct her hybrid identity. In this sense, Najwa's hybrid experience is a journey back toward the negotiation of her past and present as well as towards confidence in faith and the belief that the godly power will supplant any human intervention. Commenting on the importance of the religious programmes in Arabic TV channels and her preference to them, she remarks: "[…] The religious programmes make me feel solid as if they are telling me, "Don't worry. Allah is looking after you, He will never leave you, He knows you love Him, He knows you are trying and all of this, all of this will be meaningful and worth it in the end. … This kind of learning makes sense to me" (98). It is obvious from this statement that Najwa's new-found faith enables her to negotiate for a hybrid identity that enables her to cope with the painful experience of exile and supersede her displaced life and her sense of alienation. Evidently, at the end of the novel, her process of self-definition and Muslim identity formation seems to be complete as Najwa declares: "I guess being a Muslim is my identity. … I just think of myself as a Muslim" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 110). Eventually, becoming a devout Muslim helps her erect her hybrid identity which manages to gather the shattering of what she considers being the constants of her life: family, social status and religious identity.

At the beginning of the narrative, when Najwa comes first to London, she is deprived of the stability that is induced by a sense of belonging.She urgently wishes for "[a] country that [is] a familiar, reassuring background, a static landscape on which to paint dreams. A country we could leave at any time, return to at any time and it would be there for us, solid, waiting" (Aboulela165). Therefore, Najwa's return to her Islamic background is also an act of self-protection and self-affirmation; a way of avoiding the dispersion of self that comes with the dilemma of migration. In a similar way, wearing the *hijab* protects her, not primarily from the male gaze, but from the dispersion of her identity. Najwa

professes that without it [*the hijab*], her nature is exposed (186). In Christine W. Sizemore's reading, the comforting and redemptive aspects of Najwa's hybrid identity are represented by the headscarf or *hijab* (70-83). According to her, the veil, as a visible marker of her religious identity and the mosque, that makes the wearer visible as a Muslim woman, restates Najwa's "separateness from London culture and her commitment to a Muslim identity…, in addition to representing the women's spaces in the mosque and the women friends she finds there" (Aboulela 80). In fact, though Najwa's reliance on her faith as the main part of her self-sense hybrid identity that can also be considered as a covering in terms of the narrative self-affirmation, faith provides a solid base on which Najwa can enact hybrid connections in her life. The female protagonist, Najwa, demonstrates to the reader various Muslim cultural values, concentrating mostly on women's issues, mainly the veil which persists to be a controversial and extremely sensitive subject of debate. Thus, Najwa's faith, in another sense, enables her not only to negotiate between two different cultures, but to overcome the tragedies of this migrancy experience.

Among these tragedies are racist experiences that Najwa undergoes to reinforce her hybrid identity and ability to be a dialogic participant in this new community. A passage early in the novel shows that Najwa has been, not just once, the victim of racism. The reader witnesses how three young men harass Najwa on a public bus, calling her names and spitting on her (Aboulela, *Minaret* 10). Already hinting at the interdependence of exile and exclusion, the incident is not given much weight in this passage. Najwa quickly passes over this horrid event, simply worried that she will now have to wash her hair. Nonetheless, this unpleasant moment is significant for the development of the plot as it affects how Najwa navigates around mis-representations and her Muslim identity. Estimating the prominence of the connection between identity and representation, it can be demonstrated that representation determines not only the perception and conception of a certain group of people by a certain audience, but also impacts the techniques that frame an individual's perception of self and the other. Thus, the public space of the bus is dissimilar to Regent's Park and the mosque; and "the feeling of being trapped"(80) in spaces like the busconsolidates Najwa's insight of protection and safety in other equally public, yet more cordial and safe places like the mosque.

In the same vein, Leila Aboulela concentrates on the veil as an important element of identity formation in her novel, *Minaret*. Therefore, she insists on how the novel foregrounds the feasible spaces of everyday life, especially, the mosque as the necessary requirement for the practice of religion and also the park as a meeting emplacement in the protagonist's environment that contributes to the creation of her hybrid identity. Sadia Abbas (2011) and Christine W. Sizemore (2008) also view the mosque as central to Najwa's negotiation of her hybrid identityAccording to their readings, however, it is not so much the mosque itself, as a material location and gathering place, than the mosque as identical with religion that takes on primary significance. Abbas regards the mosque merely as a symbol of Islam and religion, and as a space that offers access to these dynamic narratives and, therefore, to comfort, community and identity (70-83).For her, it is the mosque as a place of security and comfort that helps Najwa comes to terms with her hybrid identity and to overcome her "immigrant trauma" and "culture shock" (Abba 445). Hence, in Aboulela's novel, different places play important roles in her characters' lives and their identities' formation.

On the other hand, in *The Translator*, the negotiation of hybrid identity emerges at each stage of Sammar's life. She was born in Britain and lived there until the age of seven. At first, Britain was considered as her homeland and during her childhood there, her identity has not been fully completed because she could not grasp the meaning of home and identity at that age though identity is basically formed within home and family. Therefore, Sammar 's hybrid identity was negotiated at the beginnings of her life basing on two different meanings of home: one that she lives in and the other to which she belongs. Sammar belongs to a Muslim Sudanese family and she is raised in a different land. She confirms that home was a vague place, a jumble of what her mother said about it. It was a grey and white place like in the photographs of her cousins which arrived air mail (Aboulela *The Translator* 46). Indeed, her parents clings to their indigenous belonging, but for their girl child who has never seen her parents' homeland before, Sudan becomes her home only later when they move to live there with their family and relatives and her identity starts to be shaped according to this new environment that affects her identity in different ways: she is brought up as a devout Muslim woman who wears the Muslim dressing (*hijab*); she practices all her religious rituals and she embraces all the cultural norms of the Sudanese community. After that, when Sammar got married to her cousin Tarig, she was obliged to move with him to Britain again. In this stage, Sammar's life witnesses a turning point that affects again

her identity in the new host country, that is her home in the far past, where she has to live within a foreign society, especially, after the death of her husband.

Throughout the novel, Sammar, as a veiled woman and a widow living in Scotland, longs for a 'home' that is strongly linked to her authentic identity because Scotland is perceived as a place of exile. Accordingly, Sammar's return to her native 'home' is described in her words as: "to dissolve in Africa's sand" (10). However, The difficult conditions, there, push Sammar again to return to Scotland and urge her to negotiate for a hybrid identity through her work as a translator at Aberdeen University in order to adapt with this new situation. There, Sammar finds herself in-between two different worlds and cultures where mis-conceptions and mis-representations affect Muslim migrant people's life as Bhabha explains: " within this field of signification of cultural difference...and boundaries of cultures… meanings and values can be (mis) read or signs misappropriated"(*The Location of Culture* 50). Therefore, Sammar has to create a 'home'for herself and negotiate for her hybrid identity since her longing for native land is not geographical, but emotional, especially as her romantic relationship with Rae begins to flourish.

In both contexts, neither Sudan nor Scotland, in the middle of the novel, is Sammar's home anymore because both places do not afford her the sense of security and stability. In Scotland, she remembers Sudan and the narrator describes her ideas as: "she was heavy with other loyalties, full to the brim with the distant places, voices in a language that was not his [Rae] own"(Aboulela, *The Translator* 29), but she cannot distance herself from Scotland because it is Rae's home. This home is a contact zone that grants her the feeling of belonging to this land. At Rae's home, she feels that it is somehow similar to the home she would have had in Sudan because of the Islamic pictures and all the journals and magazines he owns about the Islamic Arab World. According to her, East and West meet in Rae's home and Rae, himself, makes her feel protected and safe in a culture that she used to feel alienated from. Among the magazines in Rae's house, she finds one that had pictures of different world maps. When she leans down to take a look at it, she remarks the flow of the Nile where she locates directly the life that she has been exiled from; reads the familiar names of towns and identifies herself with them (Aboulela, *The Translator* 25). No wonder, this setting helps her to re-define her belonging and to shape her hybrid identity.

In another land, Leila Aboulela's *Lyrics Alley* is set between Sudan and Egypt as a novel of in-between worlds and the negotiation for hybrid spaces.This novel transcends the borders between the self and the other, between articulation and silence, between the centre and the margin as well as between the pure and the hybrid. It also refers to the intersection between story and history, between the fictional and the factual as well as between realism and fiction. *Lyrics Alley* is a postcolonial as well as a postmodern novel that is written in a distinct form deserving and demanding detailed analysis. More importantly, the emphasis on cultural exchange and hybridity in *Lyrics Alley* renders it a text that is similar to *The Translator* in its view on the nature of cultural difference and identity construction. In this text, Aboulela's female protagonist, Nabila, combines what seemed an irreconcilable cultural variance between Egypt and Sudan and the generation gap between the old and the new generation, especially, when they are stamped by the epithets traditional and modern. All the more, the hybrid identity, that emerges as a result of the fact, that the place of origin is remote, and the actual place is the only reality that exists, plays out a connection between the local present community and the culture of the country of origin. This connection can be often in the form of fantasies or transnational connectedness and cross-cultural links that bind the different characters with their families and the different communities elsewhere. This crossing point is presented as a highly problematic space in the sense that the novel is abundant with characters almost obsessed with searching for roots, and this search is divergently depicted as a narrative trace. Therefore, those characters are involved in experiences of migration and processes of hybridity to disclose their authentic histories and consistently define themselves in the course of long-established and transmitted cultural convention. Thus, their dilemmas of the in-between worlds are only resolved in hybrid spaces and dialogic contexts.

Eventually, in her short stories, Aboulela also links her protagonists' struggle for control over their lives to hybrid identity despite their complete belonging to Islam. This might explain the criticism that the endings of her narratives generate. In contrast to the novels, the tensions of longing and belonging in her short storiesare never resolved and, thus, leave enough space for many possible hypotheses. In conclusion, her texts can be seen as sites of transnational struggles over belonging and identity and between exile and nostalgia, which result into hybrid coexistence between past cultural values and present cross-cultural norms.

III.2.3. Muslim Women between Cultural Inheritance and Postcolonial Resistance

Resistance for many Arab Muslim women, mainly migrant Muslim women, means to resist Western misrepresentations of Muslim women before resisting patriarchal rules that govern their societies. For many Muslim women, resisting Western hegemonic discourse and patriarchal authority go together. Therefore, they have chosen to get back to religious values rather than embracing Western concepts of modernity. From this premise, Arab Muslim women's resistance confirms that owning a predominantly heard voice is fundamental for Arab Muslim women's empowerment. In most Arab Muslim women writers' texts, no matter what their feminist belongings are, women are regarded as controversial figures who strive persistently to bridge the gap between conventional, socio-cultural anticipations and contemporaneity. In postcolonial Muslim literature, the gap is widened not only to include the cultures of two different communities and two very different schisms: East and West, but also the gender stratification that Muslim women have to fight against.

Aboulela's narratives cast light on many intriguing points where cultural conventions, religious norms and practices intersect, exceptionally those related to Arab Muslim women's representation and gender discourses. Her narratives weave together intricate and paradoxical meanings that mirror some aspects of women's socialization methods at home, family and the broader society. More specifically, her texts enrich the discussion about Muslim women empowerment against the negative stereotypes and media-distorted images of Arab Muslim women as docile, mastered and silent. In this case, it is important to mention that Aboulela's literary portraits voice the gendered experiences of her female protagonists as being either migrant Muslim women living in Diaspora or native women within their indigenous communities and shed light on their persistent resistance against patriarchal practices and gendered positions. Therefore, it is evident for Aboulela's characters to be representatives of Muslim women in a world full of patriarchal rules and prejudices against Islamic creed in general and Muslim women in particular. Then, it can be said that they are, in their attempts to empower themselves, loyal to the very same religious principles they attempt to reinforce. Thus, the reader automatically notices that this religion is concerned with the most humane and sacred relationships, which in turn suggest that Islam is not, in fact, an oppressive and disgraceful religion.

Through Aboulela's narratives, the reader captures Muslim women's experiences of marriage and family, their relations with their husbands, boyfriends, friends, and employers and the construction of dialogic relations within their homelands or foreign countries. Throughout her novels and the collection of short stories, religious and social codes such as the veil, family connections, marriage and gender relations are used as dialogic grounds between East and West. Therefore, the novelist, very clearly, uses English to write for the Western reader to correct misconceptions against Muslims and Muslim women and answer back to the negative images spread throughout the media against Islam and Muslim women. Nevertheless, Aboulela also attempts to write narratives that do not clash with her background as an Arab Muslim woman. Therefore, she writes fiction that does not neglect traditional and religious norms; rather it insists on the emotional sides of her female characters and gives voice to the female volition for freedom and equality, insisting that this very same freedom and equality is compatible with their religious background. In fact, the religious discourse, in her narratives, emphasizes women's importance to the Muslim community and demarcates rules for women's adequate comportments. Consequently, her female characters are portrayed as followers and speakers on behalf of religion and the empowerment of Arab Muslim woman, thereby, they struggle against patriarchal institutions and gender misconceptions and refer to what are considered taboo subjects in their worlds. As a result, her female characters' behaviours and reactions are subtly mentioned as a confirmation to the repressive and restrictive practices which Arab Muslim societies place on women; and the resistance these women raise against these practices.

Leila Aboulela is undoubtedly a mature writer who has already written brilliant narratives translated into six languages andappreciated universally. Aboulela does not only describe observant women in her writings, but presents young Muslim women who use their Muslim identity and religion as resistant means. Sammar and Najwa are symbols of two different typologies of young immigrant Muslim women. If the first is in search of her hybrid Muslim identity and an Islamic worldview; the second is in search of total hybrid identification with the country where she has grown up. And for this, Aboulela's virtuous women are not submissive and subjected by men in the way that a certain collectivity would have them to be. Instead, both Najwa and Sammar challenge many stereotypes about Muslim women. They live by themselves in a foreign country and make their own choices. They do not have conservative families around them to control their behaviours or restrict their actions. Najwa and Sammar choose to attend classes at the mosque and wear the *hijab* on their own. Though in Europe no

one's gaze is focused on them, they choose to cover their heads and practice their religious rituals because they are convinced that those are the right things to do. They defend their convictions even against the men they love and with whom they share different ideas. In *The Translator,*even if Sammar's love for Rae is strong and deep, she is unable to cope with his needs and desires. She prefers to give up this love and return to Sudan, rather than compromising and renouncing Islam. Consequently, after a long personal conflict, Rae decides to convert to Islam and join her in Sudan to ask her to marry him. On the other hand, *Minaret*'s protagonist, Najwa, chooses to remain alone rather than proceeding with an incompatible relationship with Anwar because, in part, he is an atheist and she cannot stop the religious journey that has already started.

Additionally, Leila Aboulela's same life proves that it is possible to conciliate Islam, modernity, the veil and Muslim woman's empowerment. She said in an interview to the Guardian: "The character of the veiled girl occurs for two reasons. The first reflects the sudden choice of my mother to wear the *hijab,* just before 9/11. It was a personal choice, at a really hard time for Muslims. So, I started to think about it, because the *hijab* wasn't usual in our home. We had never considered wearing it before" (June 2005). Indeed, it was those years in London that motivated her to be deeply committed to Islam, to go permanently to mosque and to negotiate between her cultural inheritance and cross-cultural resistance. However, her religious belief and commitment did not restrain her from becoming one of the most famous writers in English in the last years. Accordingly, through her fiction, Aboulela, such as her female characters, manages to reach a wide audience and gets fame in Europe where most veiled Muslim women are anonymous. As a migrant Muslim veiled woman, Aboulela's literary resistance contributes significantly to the construction of the image of Muslim women in Europe and opposes, in fact, the marginalization of migrant Muslim women, giving voice to female characters who embrace Islam to empower themselves. Thus, Aboulela expresses the Islamic womanhood through dialogic discourses and multiple hybrid positions.

Through her female characters, Aboulela draws portraits of Muslim women who show the necessity of discussing their identities and women's agency for better understanding how women can and do empower themselves through dialogic processes and representations in contemporary Europe. Aboulela's narratives can be considered as an invitation to re-think some feminist analysis in order to open dialogic spaces to new discussions and interactions that reflect the changes that are in reality. In

fact, in ensuing of the emergence of these new Muslim women's identities, traditional feminist interpretation can remain linked to the binary terms of resistance and subordination. More importantly, for many contemporary Muslim women to turn to religion is not a return to the past; it is an expression of self-retrospection and individual and collective re-discovery. It is also a strategy of practicing modernity that does not exclude the participation of the modern Islamic self. In this sense, Saba Mahmood argues:

> Encumbered by the binary terms of resistance and subordination, and ignores projects, discourses, and desires that are not captured by these terms. Indeed, more and more women maintain that the way towards emancipation and the achievement of rights does not necessarily have to include accepting western feminist ideology, but can be obtained through the acceptance and re-interpretation of one's cultural tradition (15).

Lastly, these women embrace a new approach of Islamic womanhood that refutes, on the one hand, Western prejudgments about Muslim women's religious background, their preconceived submissiveness to men and the patriarchal paradigm of Muslim societies, and on the other hand, challenges the restrictive Islamic conservatism that prevents women from being visible in public surroundings.

Conclusion

This chapter investigates Aboulela's literature about Muslim women in the diaspora and assists Muslim and Western readers interested in researching authentic images of Arab Muslim women, who might not significantly comply with old-fashioned stereotypes and distorted media-images of Arab Muslim women. Its main objective is to examine the importance of Muslim women's empowerment discourse in transgressing patriarchal practices, gender perceptions and western hegemonic representations and forgrounding the cross-cultural dialogic props. Therefore, from a literary prospective and through the stories of Najwa, Sammar, Nabilah and the other characters of the narratives, we can look at the continual re-position and re-definition of the Muslim woman within her family and modern societies. This re-position of the revisited image of the Muslim woman and Muslim family in Muslim migrants' lives is one of the most challenging elements in the current process of cultural globalization and is a crucial part of a wider process through which Muslim women's roles in

dialogic family ties and cross-cultural connections re-enter the socio-cultural arenas, re-shaping the idea of Muslim hybrid identity and Muslim family.

This chapter also explores, explicitly, the experiences of Muslim female migrants and issues of marriage and family, and gender relations, as well as the veiling discourse and its impact on Arab Muslim woman's representation. The texts that are set predominantly in different contexts of different cultures are chosen to underscore the significance of these spaces for self-retrospection and self-empowerment of the female protagonists and to highlight their influence by these contexts. It is in these contexts where the protagonists live out their daily lives, negotiate their dilemmas and personal struggles, and come to terms with their condition of migrancy and dialogic experiences. These dialogic experiences reflect to some extent the author's personal background, her migrant experience and her Islamic upbringing and education that have affected the way in which she writes about Islam and Muslim characters as well as the way she perceives her Muslim women's' gender roles and representations. Therefore, we are reminded, through the study of these narratives, that we encounter a variety of dialogic cultural and religious experiences; and various conceptions of hybrid identity, which are intentionally announced within the narratives' main discourse as the prospect of volitional engagement to Islam. This variety refers to an intricacy for Muslim women's migrant experiences and their hybrid identities which has been dealt with critically.

This is also important when a narrative inquiry is applied in the analysis of the experiences and perspectives of Aboulela's female characters. Aboulela's narratives are probed as texts that question gender perceptions in Arab Muslim societies and foreign ones as well. Therefore, the impact of motherhood in family construction and dialogic relations is emphasized and the struggles which her female protagonists experience as a result of living in different cultures are discussed at length. Moreover, the veiling discourse that shapes the Arab Muslim woman life, especially in western countries, is well explored to contribute directly to a deep understanding of its impact on the lives of migrant Muslim women. Thus, this chapter outlines the life narrative of Aboulela's female protagonists, who are young Muslim women with an Arab heritage, living in-between two different cultures, languages, societies, and religions. Its main objective is to examine the importance of Muslim women's empowerment discourse in transgressing patriarchal practices, gender perceptions and western

hegemonic representations. Although the majority of Aboulela's narratives reveal the experiences of migrant Muslim women in diaspora, the depiction of their deep reflections on the values that they embrace as Muslim women are highly informative for understanding some of the dilemmas and complexities of the experiences of other women who are living in different part of the world. As a result, though Aboulela argues that many aspects of Arab cultural traditions limit and restrict her female protagonists' lives, she also acknowledges that Islamic values give them the comfort and strength to overcome their everyday life struggles and dilemmas. As such, it is hoped that Aboulela's narratives will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of issues related to the lives of both migrant and native Muslim women.

It is a truth generally acknowledged that Leila Aboulela's fiction describes the revisited Muslim woman's image and the emergence of the 'transnational Muslim family' from dialogicand hybrid perspectives. Her female protagonists, therefore, draw our attention to the necessity of discussing categories of hybrid identity and Muslim women's agency for a better understanding of how these women can and do empower themselves through Islam in contemporary European settings and elsewhere.They, eventually, invite us to negotiate the normative feminist assumptions about Muslim women's agency that gives rise to the academic literature about Muslim women in the diaspora.In conclusion, Aboulela argues in favour of Muslim woman's empowerment, motherhood and family connections. All this allows her characters to position themselves more freely within different communities and to forge for inter-religious comprehensibility through religious spirituality, which will be discussed in chapter four.

Chapter Four

The Inevitability of Religious Spirituality in Inter-religious Comprehensibility in Leila Aboulela's Narratives

Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to highlight the nuance differences between religious identity and religious spirituality or 'religiosity' as attached to the main religion, Islam, depicted in Aboulela's narratives. The exploration of religious identity and religious spirituality, mainly in these short stories: *The Boy from the Kebab Shop*, *Tuesday Lunch* and *Make your Own Way Home Alone*, is one of the key areas of focus in this thesis. The term religious spirituality or 'religiosity' is used to indicate the devotion and the strength of attachment to religious rituals, beliefs and practices because evidence suggests that immigrants become more religious in their new country than they were back home (Williams 1996) and the disorientation and stress caused by migration process can be a theologizing experience (Smith 1978). Also, migrants always find release and belonging in their religious identity than any other ethnic or national identity as Raymond Williams argues: "As one of the primary social identities, religion has the potential of replacing ethnic and national allegiances and forging social solidarities. Early immigrants at the turn of the century, hold fast to their parent's faith even as they forgot their parent's language"(qtd. in Ozyurt, 6). Accordingly, Leila Aboulela, who, like her protagonists, found Islam in the West, also confirms in an interview with Anita Sethi that her religious identity is more important than her nationality. She explains the importance of religion in her life as follows: "I can carry [religion] with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can easily be taken away from me" (Aboulela, June 2005). Therefore, this chapter determines the effect of religious identity and religious spirituality on the cultural and psychological sides of her narratives' characters, mainly when they are Muslim migrant women. In this essence, religion and identity are two intertwined elements in the construction of migrant Muslim women's personalities.

Generally speaking, identity has been one of the paramount topics of inquiry in cultural studies and postcolonial criticism, and a series of theories about identity have recently promoted. A concept of identity, as a united and constant combination, is no longer acceptable, particularly in what concerns the perspectives of poststructuralists who argue that identity now is conceived as 'becoming" rather than 'being', evolving, and always in a state of being re-constructed (Dillon

250). Therefore, religious identity is constructed and affected by religious principles and social norms. Linking to the social impact, Zine argues that representations are the basic social reflections of religious identity that also submits various "discontinuities, contradictions and opposing frameworks" (112). On the other hand, the impact of religious beliefs and principles is deeply manifested in religious identity formation that affects the lives of many people either positively as being a constructive power or negatively as a deconstructing power. In this sense, Bruce Baum argues that religious identity has a great impact on people's perceptions and representations. He confirms that it is a mistake to see religious and cultural norms, practices and identities as nothing more than expressions of oppressive power, discounting the meaning that these phenomena have for the agents who enact them (Baum 107). Actually, religious identity is the mixture of both religious and social norms and practices, and it significantly affects the individuals' ways of thinking and living. Thus, Muslim religious identity is a salient element in Muslim people's lives, mainly migrant Muslim women.

In ensuing, Islamic identity is a clear social and religious marker of migrant Muslims all over the world. Generally, Islamic identity is derived from the Quranic texts, Suna Hadiths and Islamic instructions. It can be said that its formation is based on two main linked parts: the external part that reflects Islamic practices and rituals and the internal part that touches the spiritual side of Muslim individuals. Basing on this definition, Zine debunks the claims that represent Islamic identity as a whole unity and challenges those anti-essentialist models of Islamic identity construction which divide it to the extent that it is deprived of spirituality and reduced to a social construction devoid of attachment to religious practice (114). Similarly, Amin Malek (2005) advocates for the importance of religion in the construction of Muslims' identities and he states:

> Religion-based identity may not be exclusive to Islam qua religion, for one might argue likewise about Judaism or Tibetan Buddhism. However, given the fact that Islam is the second largest religion on earth, tenacious, voluntary attachment demonstrated so pronouncedly by its adherents from diverse cultures and from different corners of the world is both solid and striking. (5)

In addition, Malak attributes a sense of spirituality to Islamic identity. He confirms that Islam, however one conceives it, commands affection even from its dissenters (152). Therefore, Islamic identity and spirituality occupy a wide space in Anglophone migrant Muslim literature, mainly in Leila Aboulela's narratives.

As a result, various explanations have been presented about the different reasons that led to the prominent emergence of religious identities and practices in Anglophone Muslim literature and how religious spirituality of migrant Muslim women is accentuated in their new environments and impacts their lives. For migrant Muslim women,performing religious rituals reflects the consistency between life in homeland and life in host country, thus creating harmony between the old and the new world.Likewise, prayers, ceremonies and rituals recur as they have always done and provide one with a familiar cyclical rhythm (Tiilikainen qtd. in Ozyurt 6). In addition to fulfilling spiritual requirements, religious spirituality can also provide psychological and social benefits for migrant Muslim women.It helps them not only to find peace and a flexible view of Islamic identity, but to overcome social isolation as well. Therefore, as immigrants define themselves in religious terms, their ethnic, national and racial differences become less problematic and diverse communities are brought together through shared worship (qtd. in Ozyurt 7). Indeed, religious spirituality and the dilemma of religious polarization prevail most of Aboulela's protagonists' lives and affect deeply their religious identities.

IV.1. From Religious Inflexibility towards Flexible Religious Identity

Aboulela portrays, in her novels, pious Muslim women as main characters that show a permanent consciousness of their religious identity and strive for religious spirituality.In other words, they manifest themselves deeply as Muslims and both intentionally and unintentionally live as Muslims. In an interview, Aboulela herself mentions this point, saying that, "I am interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith" (Aboulela July 2005).Therefore, at times, in depicting the religious state of Aboulela's characters, the idiom of religious spirituality might be more convenient than religious identity. The usage of such term can also be approved regarding the fact that her narratives generally probe the main characters' inner-sense in relation to Islam,

obviously independently of the social judgments of others and the external practices. In another interview, Aboulela refers to the same issue and asserts: "I want to pass knowledge about Islam. The knowledge would not only be facts but also the psychology, the state of mind, and the emotions of a person who has faith. I am interested in going deep, not just looking at 'Muslim' as a culture or political identity but something close to the center, something that transcends but doesn't deny gender, nationality, class, and race" (Larsen 250). And for this, Aboulela's narratives give grea timportance to their protagonists' religious lives.

In this vein, Aboulela's narratives portray the main characters' religious state and the prevalence of religion in their daily lives. In this way, the narratives depict Muslim identity for Muslim women as favored and central to their lives and existence, and far from being imposed on them. The main characters' religious identities even align the narrative logic of Aboulela's fiction to a religious one as Ghazoul puts it:"there is a certain narrative logic in Aboulela's fiction where faith and rituals become moving modes of living" (1). Wail Hassan, likewise, argues that the narrative logic of Aboulela's fiction "express [es] a religious worldview that does not normally inform modern literature" (310). Also, Aboulela's narratives emphasize the centrality of religious spirituality in the main characters' lives through portraying how religious logic or a religious dogma of cause and effect governs their lives. Aboulela articulates this notion in an interview by saying: "I want also to write fiction that follows Islamic logic. This is different than writing 'Islamically correct' literature-I do not do that. My characters do not behave necessarily as a 'good Muslim' should. They are not ideals or role models. They are, as I see them to be, ordinary Muslims trying to practice their faith in difficult circumstances and in a society which is unsympathetic to religion" (Aboulela, July2005). Again, in another interview, she depicts fiction that promotes Islamic logic as "fictional worlds where cause and effect are governed by Muslim rather than non-Muslim rationale" (Larson 4).This Islamic logic of cause and effect, which is a significant aspect of the characters' religious spirituality, is the direct reason behind the way Aboulela's main characters interpret the events in their lives.

In *The Translator*, the narrative indicates that religion and religious identity are important to Sammar, though it focuses mainly on the truth that it is only the flexible and self-reflexive commitment to religion that avails Sammar morally and spiritually and generates a purposeful

progression of her religious spirituality.In this regard, Sammar grasps the importance of cherishing spirituality over the symbols of religion and the over persistence on a stern definition of Muslim identity. However, the narrative also implies that Sammar'sreligious identity and the rituals of Islam, which identify Muslim from other religious identities, still hold a deep significance to Sammar. In this sense, Sammar feels an emotional commitment to her religious identity and the mores of Islam, an emotional engagement that does not clash with either her devotion to the spirituality of religion nor her preference of the flexible practice of religion. Actually, in reference to deep passion that Muslims feel for their religion, Malak (2005) argues:

> … living Islam is not merely a spiritual practice or theological adherence, but also an intellectual and emotional engagement … Islam's values of justice and generosity, of courage and creativity, endow it with endearing and enduring loyalty. This loyalty is one of Islam's hallmarks that many outsiders miss, misunderstand or misinterpret. (152-153)

Interestingly, this narrative demonstrates that the rituals and norms of Islam form an important part of Sammar's fascination for Islam. In fact, when Sammar is in her trip to Sudan, she hears *azan*, she remembers how in Aberdeen she sometimes trances herself into thinking that the rumble of the central-heating pipe was the sound of a distant *azan*, something that could transform her 'hospital room' in Aberdeen into a holy space. The narrator describes this scene as the following: "She had missed it in Aberdeen, felt its absence, sometimes she fancied she heard it in the rumble of central-heating pipes, in a sound coming from a neighbouring flat. It now came as a relief, the reminder that there was something bigger than all this, above everything. Allah akbar, Allah akbar[God is greater]…" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 145).In this way, the novel goes beyond the privilege of religious spirituality over religious practices and rituals. Rather, it presents the pleasures of spiritual experience through practical and ritualized religion.

On the other hand, the narrative, on various scopes, reveals that Muslim identity, though flexible from Sammar's point of view, still count for her; and the commitment that she feels toward her religious identity, rituals and practices is very important to her sense of religious self-

assurance. The reader, for example, learns that Sammar is used to pray alone in her apartment as well as at the university where she works as a translator. Sammar, on many occasions, complains that in Aberdeen she is unable to pray anywhere she wants, the way she used to pray when she was in Khartoum.The narrator describes the scene when Sammar once feels the need to pray; and she goes to the office at the university:

> On days when Diane [one of her colleagues] was not in, Sammar prayed in the room, locking the door from inside. … 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. (76)

Thus, despite all this privacy that surrounds her religion, Sammar is still strongly attached to it.

Moreover, even after the accident of her husband's death and the feeling of loneliness she has to endure without any support from her family, she no longer has the power to continue her life mourning alone because without the support of her religion, Sammar loses the stability in her life. Her prayers become her only solace in her exile.It is prayer that empowers her to sustain the pain of her husband's death, and only her faith that enables her to survive her depression. Describing this state, Aboulela writes: "She had been protected [by it] from all the extremes: pills, breakdown, suicide attempts. A barrier was put between her and things like that" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 115). The words, 'loss', 'breakdown' and 'suicide' explain Sammar's deep feelings of despair during the period of her husband's mourning and reflect the important role of religion in creating stability in her life again. Importantly, the narrator tells us that in this period, she is overwhelmed by feelings of tenderness, intimacy and security of being in God's company and care. Eventually, her involvement with religion in this period of her life, and later, is another level of refuge that religion provides.

On another occasion, the narrative poses Sammar in a position where she needs to justify her choice of being Muslim or why she strongly cares for her identity as a Muslim. At this stage of her life, she has, of course, distanced herself from her Pakistani friend Yasmin's notion: 'Muslims are better', and explains to her that being a Muslim is not just by birth; but it has a deep concern with how Muslims practise and present their religion. She believes that several secondary actions and practices serve to promote Islam as a way of her life. Consequently, against Yasmin's claims, Islamic rituals and practices are depicted as positive forces in Sammar's life. In this context, when one afternoon, she goes to pray in the small university mosque, "the certainty of the words [praising the Compassionate and Merciful God] brought unexpected tears, something deeper than happiness, all the splinters inside her coming together" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 74). Also, for the female protagonist, the articulation of religious beliefs is also a source of comfort so that when speaking to a fellow Muslim in Scotland, the narrator informs us that she enjoys talking in Arabic, words like *Insha'Allah*, that fitted naturally in everything that was said as part of the sentences and the vision (103). Hence, Islam is portrayed, in this narrative, as not only a package of beliefs; rather it is manifested in various rituals that create a perfect balance in Sammar's life.

Another example of Sammar's attributing importance to the rituals of religion and religious identity, even after choosing a less rigid way of practicing her religion and deciding that religious spirituality is more important than its exterior manifestations, is how she still performs her prayers and fasting alone in her apartment. In the narrative,Sammar's feeling of serenity and spiritual peace is related to her being a religious devout woman who possesses a strong belief in Allah almighty. She confesses that she reproaches herself when she permits notions of luck to insinuate into her mind: "No . . . My fate is etched out by Allah almighty . . . To think otherwise was to slip down, to feel the world narrowing, dreary and tight" (71).The narrative, thus, highlights, particularly, through the use of free indirect discourse, the important role of Sammar's religious beliefs in consoling her at the most difficult moments in her life, as they give her the certainty that the all-merciful and all-powerful God is with her at all times. The narrator unveils to us how Sammar's mind, in strenuous moments, relates belief in God to eternity, stability and relief. She confidently declares that only Allah is eternal… Life is temporary and fleeting (9). Also, fasting *Ramadan* that is one of her religious practices is also portrayed as a release for her.

The narrator describes her feeling as: "This good feeling was because of Ramadan . . . A whole month free like that" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 175). In short, in *The Translator*, consolation, stability and happiness for the main woman character come through her religious practices. Therefore, the use of religious indirect discourse in this narrative has a great benefit in rendering the author's compassionate attitude toward the main character more visible, ever more assuring Sammar's delight in her religious belonging.

Certain points in the plots of Aboulela's narratives also seem to be designed to scrutinize the stereotypes about Islam. In *The translator*, the job attributed to Rae and his conversion to Islam can be read as a literary artistry in the plot to write back to Western discourses about Islam. Rae is an expert in Middle Eastern studies; Yasmin, intentionally, calls him an Orientalist, a term that Sammar is reluctant to accept and responds because Orientalists were bad people who distorted the image of Arabs and Islam. May be modern Orientalists were different (21). However, Rae, the Orientalist of *The translator* is an Orientalist with positive views toward Islam, presenting "a reversal of the Orientalism of the imperial past" (Nash 30). Rae, in fact, refutes the claim that Islam is a religion of terrorism and has written a book with the title of"*The Illusion of an Islamic Threat*". Therefore, through the character of Rae, it can be argued that Aboulela has used the space of her novel to create a role for him which is perhaps what she has always dreamt about,a 'New Orientalist' with empathetic views about Muslims. In other words, the character of Rae can be interpreted as the realization of a dream that there are New Orientalists who understand the dignity and value of Arab Muslim people in life. No wonder, as an author, Aboulela exerts the power to represent as she anticipates, offering a different interpretation to Muslim issues in the West.

In the same spirit, the narrative evolves through the investigation of the obvious dimensions of the polarity of being attached to religious identity and being simultaneously self-reflexive about it. The way Sammar's identity matures reflects that these dimensions can symmetrically exist in a dialogic relationship, a point that Sammar eventually appreciates with regard to her religious identity. In this sense, Hall (1992) also points out that identities can be possibly contradictory and engaged in dialectic processes. Towards the end of the narrative, the

female protagonist is portrayed as being at peace with the idea that revering religious identity and devotion to religious principles are not equal to religious intolerance so that she thinks of prayer and connection to God as "the only stability in unreliable life (Aboulela, *The Translator* 37). Aboulela herself also believes in this notion: "In my personal experience I have found religious people to be very interesting and positive-yet they are often depicted in novels as dull and harsh. I wanted to put my own experience in my fiction and pay tribute to the religious people who have enhanced my life" (Aboulela, July2005). Accordingly, her narrative criticizes the rigid view of religious identity and also hints to the possibility and eligibility of flexible Muslim identity. For example, Sammar praises *Sharia* law in this regard for its practicability so that the narrator clarifies her point of view as the following: "Sammar thought, as she often thought, of the four months and ten days (the *Sharia*'s mourning period for a widow) such a specifically laid out time, not too short and not too long. She thought of how Allah's Sharia was kinder and more balanced than the rules people set up for themselves" (69). In short,the protagonist's identity development, suggested by the narrative, is achieved through deconstructing constraints, allowing oneself to discuss the problems related to one's view of religion and thinking about them. Therefore, this flexibility is attained through adopting a self-reflexive position, challenging religious misconceptions and forging for a reconciliatory process.

One of Aboulela's intense concerns in her novel, *The Translator*,is the reconciliatory discourse between Islam and the West in the middle of the prevalent hate discourse. Through the concentration on the protagonist's Muslim identity, the author's narrative hints to the importance of religion in her life and in the dialogic process. Therefore, this narrative embraces a discourse that conveys a positive image of Islam.This image becomes more apparent by imputing the role of the translator of the Arabic texts to the native devout Muslim woman who, in addition to translating, gives information from her socio-cultural background to the Western man, Rae Isles. Sammar, the main character in *The Translator*, is originally Sudanese working as a translator in Aberdeen.She translates Arabic texts into English as part of her job, but the author implicitly hints to her role as a translator between the two cultures to which these two languages belong. Since Arabic is spoken by a wide range of peoples and articulates various cultures, and the same can be said for English, the two languages have become two different symbols that represent the East-West dualism, which is depicted in the text. However, as the novel proceeds, it becomes

obvious that Sammar's role is, in fact, intermediating between Islam and the West as culture is greatly affected by religious rituals.

Correspondingly, in the course of her work, Sammar meets Rae, a professor of Middle East studies at the University of Aberdeen, who is presented as an 'expert' on developing countries and Islam. He is very sympathetic to their different issues and he is able to understand them better than most Westerners. In this sense, Sammar becomes the translator and the direct source that provides him with the authentic information he needs about her world and religion. The information, given by Sammar in the novel, sometimes looks like a basic course in learning about Islam for non-Muslims, such as the time when Sammar is giving some explanation to Rae about the Quran (Aboulela *The Translator*126).This explanation which is a combination of information about the Quran and appreciation of Islam reflects the deep effect that this religion has on its adherents and even on other people who are interested to know about it. On another occasion, she is reading to Rae one of Prophet Muhammad's long sayings, defined as a sacred *Hadith*, which explains how God describes His relationship with human beings: "*Allah Almighty says: I am as my Servants thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of me…And if he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arm's length; and if he draws near to me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed*" (42-43; italics in original). The *Hadith* thatshe recites indicates the possibility of a strong personal relationship between Man and the compassionate God.According to her, God referred to in this *Hadith* is all too willing to accept the human if he or she makes the scant effort to maintain this relation. This *Hadith* entails deep spirituality attributed to the dogma of Islam that is included in the narrative. Subsequently, the two protagonists end up falling in love though their religious belongings keep them apart, as the need to convert to Islam is recommended for Rae by Sammar who cannot marry him only after his conversion.Thus, as the two characters grow closer to one another, the tension ceases and the reader anticipates a reconciliation, which eventually comes at the end of the novel. Eventually, the reconciliation between the West and Islam is achieved when Rae converts to Islam and he and Sammar decide to get married.

Inter-religious dialogue, additionally, enters the discussion in details given about Rae which suggests he is a good candidate for conversion, even when he rejects the idea at the

beginning of his career. He is portrayed in the novel as a man who has a great affection to Islam, a deep love for the Islamic world, an objective knowledge about Islamic dogma and considerable respect for Muslims and Arabs. He does not drink alcohol and likes the *hijab* that attracts him to Sammar, the Muslim woman, who makes him feel 'safe' (Aboulela, *The Translator* 51).He looks like Arabs, which though not a religious attribute, implies a harmony with Arab culture that is generally associated with Islamic tradition. Judging Rae, Yasmin claims: "That's his work, the field in which he is very highly thought of. But his interest, as far as I know, is just an academic interest.... That's the way they do research nowadays. It's a modern thing. Something to do with not being Eurocentric. They take what each culture says about itself so they could study all sorts of sacred texts and be detached. They could have their own religious views or be atheists..."(83). The reader is, thus, able to grasp the indications of conversion long before the character, producing a highly dialogical interaction.

Similarly, Rae's conversion to Islam, as depicted in the plot, can be interpreted as a strong example of writing back or as in Nash's words: "a subtle exercise in counter-acculturation" (30). Subsequently, it is not the Muslim woman who rejects or relinquishes her faith to marry the Western man; rather, it is the Western man who converts to Islam to marry the Muslim woman. Therefore, with Rae's conversion in the space of her fiction, Aboulela imagines reversing power relations between Muslims and European colonizers so that the missionary, in *The Translator*, is the Muslim woman rather than the Western Christian man (Steiner 23); and Islam, as a world view, is validated as it is approved of by a Western academic elite (Smyth 178). Hence, this mode of writing in Aboulela's works sometimes borders on a "direct form of *da`wah* or propagation of Islam" (McEwan 14).Nevertheless, this diffusion of Islam might not be deemed a complicated problem for most readers because Aboulela does not do it offensively, as McEwan puts it: "Aboulela does not exceed the limits and although she takes her religion seriously, she does it with pure moderation" (15). In this way, the polarized view between the East and the West is not fragmented; rather, the oppositional relations of power are, even if somewhat intense for some readers, reversed.

In *Minaret* too, the significance of religion and the preservation of religious identity are portrayed in the Muslim woman character and the bliss of religious experience. Therefore, the

preference of a devout life over a secular life has been suggested in this novel andreligious identity finds great importance for the female protagonist in the course of the novel.In fact, unlike *The Translator's* protagonist, *Minare*t's protagonist has not been a pious Muslim all her life, and her diversion to a religious woman only happens later within the course of the narrative. Najwa's Muslim identity evolves in the space of the novel, challenging many contradictions related to her identity.Since the narrative portrays a process of transformation from the non-practicing Muslim woman to the practicing devout Muslim woman, the plot has been provided in the narrative, even more than in *The Translator,* for contrasting the two different characters and highlighting the positive consequences of adopting a religious life on the protagonist. Therefore, the narrative emphasizes the story that the protagonist's experiences in the religious world are undoubtedly better.Accordingly, Chandrahas Choudhury confirms this notion:"although in a secularized world religion is treated like a lifestyle choice, in *Minaret* we are invited to consider religion … more like a necessity"(6). Notably, the religious and the sacred are never criticized in Aboulela's fiction; on the contrary, they are always revered.

As a point of fact, Aboulela, in *Minaret*, also focuses on four causes in relation to Islam that make experience with Islam or living a religious life a merit for her Muslim protagonist, making her life more normal and more endurable compared with the time when she was not devoted to her religion.firstly, the feeling of being a member of the Muslim believers community that Muslims enjoy; secondly, the sense of attachment to a compassionate protective God, which embracing Islam creates; thirdly the peace and security that practicing Islam can afford to Muslims' lives, and fourthly, religious spaces, especially the mosque that can be considered as a symbol of Muslim identity. In fact, the world of religion in *Minaret* is clearly linked to the mosque as the most important place where Muslims practise their religion and manifest their religious identity. The mosque is, thus, a place of arrival, after a longer journey in Najwa's life, where she is able to find a sense of rootedness and belonging.

By extension, the narrative probes the safeness that Najwa senses as result of the feeling of belonging to the believers community. This community emerges as a family for Najwa so that, on one occasion, in the mosque with them, she feels happy as she belongs there and she is no longer outside and defiant (Aboulela *Minaret*184). This feeling indicates that she no longer experiences the harmful sense of falling, which is symbolic of her involuntary dislocation in the

form of forced migration, in-between dilemma, and downward social transitivity.This was also true for Aboulela who encountered different women from various backgrounds at the mosque and they were her only social surrounding when she arrived in the UK. In an interview, she thanks the women she met at Aberdeen Mosque, saying: "they supported me and became my new family away from home" (Aboulea July 2005).These women, who belong to different social and cultural backgrounds and speak different languages and accents, are the symbol of Islam's de-territorialization that Aboulela frequently emphasizes in both her books. Therefore, unlike her boyfriend, Anwar who mocks Islamic practices and considers the*hijab* as backward and racist, Najwa considers Islam and the people at the mosque as familiar, sympathetic, and tolerant; and therefore, she often leaves the mosque "refreshed, wide awake, almost happy" (Aboulela 243). Hence, it is her personal choice to wear the *hijab* and to go to the mosque to pray that empowers her and intensifies her religious identity.

In Addition to this, Najwa's religious identity is also intensified, in this narrative, through attending Muslim religious spaces. Najwa spends a lot of time in the mosque, attending different rituals and classes held there. The narrative also presents these spaces as valid and important, mainly through having the main character comments on her and other people's sense of comfort in these placesThese spaces, as portrayed by the narrator, are not invalid zones; rather, they have great impacts on the people who attend them. Graham Howes observes that religious buildings can "serve as a psychological resource, and they can lead us to a deep wellspring of residual religiosity upon which we can therapeutically draw"(76). The narrator of this text also talks about the psychological effects of attending the mosque on the characters. Najwa herself acknowledges the outcomes of attending the sacred space of the mosque on one occasion as she confirms that few people are themselves in mosques and they are subdued, taken over by a fragile neglected part of themselves" (Aboulela *Minaret*2).Given the portrait of Najwa as a religious woman, that 'sacred hidden part' might be undersood as an aspect of a person's psyche that is based on religious spirituality. Najwa also is certain that the mosque protects her from feelings of sadness and depression; and when she is in the mosque, she realizes that this space has a unified impact on the mosque members, making them all feel safe and serene. For example, she enjoys the memory of the last ten days of *Ramadan* in the mosque, when she remembers that all of them were listening to the same verses, enjoying the same mood (187). Louis P. Nelson drawing on Edward Linenthal (2001) comments that sacred spaces are especially linked to the socio-political

identity of the adherents, rousing in them 'a sense of belonging'(2006: 6). Thus, throughout the narrative, the mosque, as a place of belonging, is an important place for Najwa who is a migrant woman in the West with no supportive family member around.

On a different note, the weekly lessons in the mosque are very important for Najwa since they help her comprehend how to conduct her daily life. She declares: "I liked the talks at these gatherings because they were serious and simple, vigorous but never clever, never witty. What I was hearing, I would never hear outside, I would never hear on TV or read in a magazine. It found an echo in me; I understood it" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 242-243).It is clear that many pages of *Minaret* are dedicated to the portraits of women's courses at the mosque. It is a central theme for Aboulela's protagonist who confesses: "It being a Monday, I have my Qur'an Tajweed class at the mosque...The ladies' area is empty when I arrive. It doesn't surprise me. Soon the others will come for the class, and later more sisters will come accompanying their husbands for the Isha prayer. I put on the lights and pray two rakas' greeting to the mosque. Then I roll my coat like a pillow and stretch out" (74). The mosque, in fact, is not only a place for praying, it is also a room for taking a rest and meeting friends with their children playing (75). In addition, the mosque also appears as a classroom where women can learn the Islamic history and doctrine, and practice Arabic in order to read the Qur'an in the original language in which it was revealed. Najwa clarifies: "The lesson has already started; everyone is sitting in a large circle. Um Waleed is sitting on her knees [...] She is someone else now, someone I love, my teacher, specific in everything she says, sharp and to the point. The Qur'an is open on her lap; she pulls her scarf over her forehead, and pushes back strands of the hair that have escaped. [...] The Tajweed class is my favourite" (78). Attending these lessons in the mosque transmit Najwa from her isolation to a social life.

Najwa also clarifies a similar unifying effect of attending the sacred space of the mosque, emphasizing that the inequalities of race, class and gender dissolve there. She demonstrates that all people feel equal there, as they are participating in similar religious experiences. She even introduces the discussions between her teacher and the women attending her lessons in the mosque as: "Um Waleed is a qualified teacher, with a degree in *Sharia* Law. Many of the sisters say that her other classes on Law and History are more interesting - they generate a lot of discussion and sisters, especially the young British-born ones and the converts, like to discuss

and give their opinions"(Aboulela, *Minaret* 79). Therefore, with the description of Najwa as modest and with her status as a visible veiled immigrant in London, the safe environment of the mosque seems to be the ideal possible place for her to socialize and enact bonds with others. In the mosque, she feels equal with everybody regardless of class and status because such issues are never asked about as Najwa explains that there was no need, they had come here to worship and it was enough (188). In short, these physical Muslim spaces, either mosques or created religious spaces, are introduced in the narratives, as important, particularly because of their possible positive psychological effects on the characters.

As a further matter, through the collection of her short stories *Coloured Lights*, Aboulela also depicts the importance of religious identity in the lives of her female protagonists.Her narratives reveal an attempt to reconcile Islam and the West in the middle of the current hegemonic discourses. The author focuses on the portrayal of Muslim women as the representatives of religious codes to reveal the centrality of religious identity in her characters' lives as well as the centrality of Muslim women's religion to a constructive dialogue between Islam and the West, emphasizing the notion that Muslim women are symbols of 'authentic' religious traditions. Through examining the narratives and female religious identities represented in these short stories, the discourse of love and interfaith reconciliation appears clearly as the most important theme. Her short story *The Boy from the Kebab Shop* is a story of inter-religious dialogue and inter-faith reconciliation. In this story, religious identity cannot escape being flexible or dynamic. Throughout the narrative, the reader sees how the Egyptian migrant female protagonist, Dina, is exposed both to discourses rooted in her British upbringing and to those rooted in her Islamic traditions. Dina is a second generation migrant woman, of an Egyptian mother and a British father. Dina’s tie to Islam was fragile and distant because she had never been to Egypt with her mother Shushu whose family had disowned her when she married a Scot (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 55). She starts to discover her religion in a kebab shop where "as an average British girl of seventeen, Dina had seen plenty of nudity but she had never seen a woman breastfeed a baby" (54). She also starts to integrate into the Muslim community in this shop: "She was not an outsider today, not a customer, but one of 'them', pushing open a private door, as if she were Samia, as if she was part of the family too" (62). In this way, the narrative determines the theme of inter-religious dialogue in a wider context and indicates that the main characters live in a polyphonic world and are submitted to different discourses and ideologies.

Other short stories that portray their female protagonist's religious identities and the process of inter-religious dialogue are *Tuesday Lunch* and *Make your Own Way Home Alone*. These two short stories are investigated together because they tell the linear story of the same protagonist: Nadia. The short story, *Tuesday Lunch* portrays Nadia's childhood, whereas; *Make your Own Way Home Alone*, follows Nadia's life through her teenage years. In the first short story, Nadia who is eight years old and still a pupil at school has ambivalent feelings toward people around her, especially at school. Aboulela depicts her protagonist's religious identity as being stable despite the contradictory circumstances that the female protagonist has to endure. Importantly, at the beginning of the short story, there is a scene which shows her evolving identity: "Nadia is eight and she can read now. She can read the menu for today, Tuesday, stuck on the door of the gym" (Aboulela, *Tuesday Lunch* 65). Nadia starts to scrutinize people around her: her Christian friend Tracy, her teacher Mrs. Benson and the lady who serves at the restaurant Mrs. Hickson and to identify their difference though she is not sure whether they are right or wrong, butshe is convinced that they are regular human beings and combine a complex of positive and negative qualities. The narrator describes her status within her school as the following: "These thoughts give her a feeling of pride; she is older now, she understands the difference, she can behave in a correct way and as a blessing, as a reward, blend with everyone else, not stand apart" (Aboulela 65). This difference is also manifested in her religious identity, mainly in *Tuesday Lunch* which is served at school and in which Nadia has always to make a choice not to have pork. According to her, Islamic religious beliefs and attitudes, eating pork is forbidden though she does not know the reason why these different people still have it. Therefore, she is also sure that these different, non-religious people, who still have some very appealing qualities like her Christian friend, Tracy, are important to her.The narrator also clarifies that Mrs. Hickson knows about the pork, so when it is Nadia's turn, Mrs. Hickson will give her the chicken with what Nadia calls her giant fork (66). Indeed, Nadia faces various paradoxes in the process of her religious identity formation.

Consequently, when one Tuesday, Mrs. Hickson is not serving out the meal, Nadia makes the wrong decision concerning her meal. When she is asked by a young woman: "pork pie or chicken"(67), Nadia hesitates and whispers: "I will have the pie" (68).This time the contradiction

in Nadia's behaviour turns her day to an anomalous one. Even her friend Tracy who used to have pie pork in her lunch, decided to eat Chicken Risotto this day as if to reinforce Nadia's contradiction: "Today, of all days, Tracy is eating the Chicken Risotto. And feels a sudden dislike for her friend" (Aboulela, *Tuesday Lunch* 68). The rootedness of religion in Nadia's personality is also manifested through the images that straggle into her mind during the meal: "The other children talk while they are eating, a normal day, a normal lunch hour. Yesterday Nadia was like them, but today the lunch break seems infinite, real, glittering" (68). It is interesting that in describing this experience, the narrator tells us that Nadia thinks of her mother who cares about affording *halal* food for her: "At home Lateefa buys *halal* chicken, travelling by bus every week to the Pakistani butcher in Finchly Road, and carrying one of them home…"(66). Thus, it is not easy for Nadia to separate herself from her Islamic life in which *hala*l food had a central place and to reject Islam, no matter what negative points she has noticed in her Muslim community.

Accordingly, in the narrative, Nadia needs a different interpretation of her religious identity. In this phase of Nadia's identity development, she questions the construction of her Muslim identity, emphasizing its unbalance all through, though striving to reshape it anew more strongly and with new dialogic items. Tenseness, intricacy, ambivalence and attachment, as debated in both narratives, are terms that help us define Nadia's relationship with her religion, Islam, as well. However, the introduction of the metaphor of Nadia's decision to have pork meat in her lunch explains the evolution and the transformation in Nadia's religious identitybecause this transformation also entails both consistent and gradual changes. Towards the end of the short story, Nadia vomits all the food she has already eaten at school, and thus, realizes that "bewitched pork pies, so that even when she wanted them, they, on their own accord, rejected her."(Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 72). Therefore, through her experience, Nadia finds out that religion tends to be like that, holding on to beliefs and perpetuating them. And it is so limited and constricted to believe that it is just out, and out is wrong; or always focusing on the outer forms over the inner sense and the fear-God side instead of love-God. Finally, she has to challenge the wrong side of religious practices and defend the positive doctrines of her religion, confirming that moments of epiphany contribute directly into the evolution of migrant Muslims' religious spirituality.

IV.2. Moments of Epiphany and the Evolution of Religious Spirituality

Before moving to the discussion of religious spirituality in the texts, I would like to mention that any engagement with religious spirituality or religiosity is important because religious spirituality in our modern, predominantly contemporary material times is either underestimatedor, as Griffiths observes, "represented as a relic of disappeared past and of outdated modes of knowing" (425).Therefore, any involvement with religious spirituality in literature should be dealt with earnestly, particularly since a sense of religious spirituality is still significant to many people. In this context, it is worth mentioning the author's own words. In this statement, she states: "When I write I experience relief and satisfaction that what occupies my mind, what fascinates and disturbs me, is made legitimate by the shape and tension of a story. I want to show the psychology, the state of mind and the emotions of a person who has faith" (Aboulela, July 2005). And so, religious spirituality is a central element in Aboulela's protagonists' lives even if it comes later in their lives after their epiphany moments.

In Aboulela's novel, *The Translator*, an important aspect that emphasizes the evolution of Sammar's religious spirituality is her moment of epiphany when thinking about her strong desire for Rae's conversion to Islam. When Sammar decides to get married again, the only hindrance between her and the man, whom she is in love, is religious belonging, and thus, this marriage cannot be possible only if the Scottish man converts to Islam. In her opinion, Rae needsonly to say the *Shahada* for the sake of marriage, for a time, this is all that Sammar seeks from him, even if he continues privately his apathy that makes her deeply sad. Prior to the event of his conversion, Yasmin declares that it would be a professional suicide because no one will take him seriously after that (Aboulela, *The Translator*21). Rae also anticipates the bemused reaction of his colleagues in case he converts to Islam as it happened to his uncle: "they think it's mid-life crisis" (192).Early in the narrative, Rae recites the fate of his uncle who travelled to Egypt to participate in the Second World War and converted to Islam; his grandmother told people that he was " 'missing in action' until she came to believe it herself" (17- 18). Such details confirm the system of values that determines the evolution of the protagonists' religious spirituality.

However, within the novel's value-system, a nominal conversion to Islam is disreputable, for it would derogate the religious theme. In this case, Rae must decline this approach, and he and Sammar are not able to get married only after he embraces Islam in heart and mind. Moreover, the proper conditions of this event also impose a change in Sammar through reconciliation and acceptance of the Other. Sammar confesses that she did not pray for Rae to convert for his own sake, all she wanted from him is to convert to be able to get married. Therefore, the notion, that a formal statement for his conversion will suffice, is rejected, and it becomes crucial to the development of the story that Sammar realizes that "If she could rise above that, if she could clean her intentions. He had been kind to her and she had given him nothing in return. She would do it now from far away without him ever knowing. It would be her secret. If it took ten months or ten years or twenty or more" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 171).After Sammar's epiphany, it is significant that Rae's conversion to Islam occurs very soon after her return to Sudan. Within short time of Sammar's religious spirituality evolution and the reformulation of her prayers, news arrives that Rae has converted to Islam. More importantly, the order of events implies that his conversion is somehow linked to the power of Sammar's spiritual prayers and religious devotion, an idea which gains force when Rae, himself, describes these events as miraculous: "at the end . . . it didn't have anything to do with how much I've read or how many facts I've learned about Islam. Knowledge is necessary, that's true. But faith, it comes direct from Allah" (191). Hence, the importance of Rae's conversion and Sammar's reviewed prayers are two cases of how the plot of *The Translator* is connected to a didactic discourse that emerges outside the text, but reckens its narrative development.

Additionally, Sammar's religious spirituality is also manifested in her persistence in using Islamic expressions and recitations in her conversations. For almost every condition, Sammar answers with a Quranic recitation. These sayings and recitations usually have a releasing effect on her migratory experience, an experience that debatably has been interceded by the Islamic ideology that she has grown up with. The instances of the religious language, that Sammar naturally includes in her everyday speech and that manifest her religious spirituality, also support the poststructuralist argument that language that is transmitted to us, can importantly impact the formation of our experiences. In this sense, Stone-Mediatore argues: "the mediation of

language, ideologies and discourses do not diminish the importance or reality of the experiences for the people who have them" (102). Throughout the novel, Sammar is quite astonished to read what is written in a postcard that Rae's daughter has given to him: "Get well soon, Dad", the card said and it had a picture of a bandaged bear. Sammar found the wording strange without 'I wish' or 'I pray', it seemed like an order and she wondered if the child was taught to believe that his father's health was in his hands, under his command" (Aboulela, *The Translator*104). Whilein Sammar's belief, one's health is always related to God's volition. On another occasion, when Rae tells Sammar that her soup was the component that healed him, she responds that the only true healer is God: “Allah is the one who heals" (102). By reminding him of this truth, Sammar wanted Rae "to look beyond the causes to the First, the Real"(102). Accordingly, Sammar's religiousspirituality is depicted as being confidently convinced that her fate is determined by God and not by anyone or anything else: "My fate is etched out by the Allah Almighty, if and who I will marry, what I eat, the work I find, my health, the day I will die are as He alone wants them to be. To think otherwise was to slip down, to feel the world narrowing, dreary and tight" (74). Hence, Sammar's religious spirituality affects deeply her way of thinking and living.

In Aboulela's second novel, *Minaret*, the reader encounters, Najwa, the protagonist of the narrative, on the first page of the novel as wearing a veil, but the transition to the mosque and religious spirituality comes over many years after moments of epiphany. Najwa, the main character of *Minaret*, is a Sudanese woman who has lost her family and financial support as a result of political turmoil in Sudan, and now lives and works in London as a maid. After living a secular way of life both in Khartoum and in the first years of her life in Britain, she turns gradually to a devouted way of life as a Muslim woman, breaks her romantic relationship with her boyfriend, Anwar, and starts wearing the Islamic dress. She only finds peace of mind and a sense of belonging after turning to her Muslim religion at this fierce time in her life.At the beginning of her migratory experience, she starts to question her relations with her religious community and subsequently her religious faith. However, her moment of epiphany emerges as a starting point for her to start a spiritual journey which concludes in a much deeper faith than she had before.

Later, the shortcomings of Najwa's negotiation of her religious spirituality soon become apparent. In a point of fact, beyond her faith, she also attempts to find comfort on a more immediate, human level something that is not provided for by only her religious identity. In fact, she finds in Tamer, twenty years her junior and the devout brother of the woman she works for, a soul mate though their class and age difference remains the obstacle to their marriage. A romantic attraction develops between herself and Tamer, who is an average teenager, known by his good reputation in the Muslim community for being "committed to the Islamic movement" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 106). Though Najwa is aware of these contrasting sides of his personality from the start, she persistently contributes to the creation of his outward image as a faithfully devoted Muslim, rather than an adolescent. In a conversation with a friend, Najwa muses: "I can tell her about the way he leaves his bed unmade, the pyjamas he steps out of and leaves as a heap on the ground. But these are secrets" (106). In fact, it is his adolescent eagerness that attracts Najwa to him: "He flickers between soulful depth and immaturity. This flickering is attractive; it absorbs my attention"(197). In this sense, Najwa's attraction to Tamer contributes indirectly to her religious spirituality evolvement.

Similarly, in his relationship with Najwa, Tamer's behaviour suggests that despite his firm religious devotion, his emotional immaturity stamps him with an adolescent affinity in resolving his problems. When his sister discovers his romantic relationship with Najwa, his response is a spontaneous proposal of marriage. Also, Tamer indulges in romantic fantasies that reflect his debility and inability to face up the realities of life, and generally his resolutions are complete outburst and nostalgic yearning to the glorious Islamic past to escape the present.In a discussion with Najwa, he declares: "I don't want to think of the future-all the stupid studying I have to do. I don't even want to do my re-sits. … The two of us would go back in time. A time of horses and tents; swords and raids"(255). Significantly, Najwa judges his reaction for what it is, a way of boosting his self-image as a fighter for Allah's cause, and of revolting against his family and their academic aspirations for him. She knows deeply inside her that "This rebellion is half-formed, half-baked; it lacks a focus and a goal"(220). Therefore, while she has been remarkably sensitive about Tamer's immature reaction, it is only at this moment of epiphany that she acknowledges that she, too, has been deceiving herself, and she realizes that "[h]e is like someone else, a

common rebellious teenager"(254). At the end of the story, she is separated from Tamer, but she is not wrecked. By the money that she has recently received from his mother, she plans to engage into a religious spiritual journey to Mecca.

Another moment of epiphany that leads Najwa to her religious spiritual journey is the revelation of her religion's rituals. Allowing herself to witness this moment of epiphany results in her re-evaluating her religious views and the beginning of her religious spiritual evolution. At first, her trust that Islam represents more than her community represents in her life saves her from abandoning her religion for good. Although religion has always been an important part of Najwa's previous life, she never actively participated in religious rituals.In her previous life in Khartoum, she used to feel comfortable and pleasant in the religious activities around her, the men and women in their traditional Islamic clothing, the calls to prayer and the fasting.Despite of all these memories that she brought with her to London, she starts to miss the daily codes of Islam years later. It is in retrospect that she now begins to admire the comforting impacts of religion in her everyday life. She further recognizes that it is her own negligence and not the actual absence of religious tokens that makes Islam seem absent in her daily life in London. For instance, she is taken by surprise and, at the same time, utterly embarrassed and shocked that Ramadan could happen, could come round and she would not know about it (230) so that her boyfriend, Anwar, once, got a sarcastic laugh at Najwa's reaction to their 'Ramadan breakfast' (230). Thus, after this moment of epiphany, Islam has become a prominent feature of modern-day London and her life with new perspective and perception, and it is not until Najwa's previous world begins to collapse that she starts to actually explore religious spirituality that she will find and embrace later in her life.

Additionally, her mother's death and the imprisonment of her twin brother, Omar, are also effective moments of epiphany in her life. Only after these two events does Najwa eventually make the long belated phone call to Wafaa, the woman who will take her to the mosque and who will guide her to Islam:

> Wafaa took me shopping for my headscarves. [...] Back in her house, in her bedroom, with her daughters as audience, she showed me how to tie each one, what folding I needed to do beforehand, where to put the pins. [...] Where did she come from, this

> woman? It was her role to shroud my mother for her grave and teach me how to cover my hair for the rest of my life. She was a guide, not a friend. One day she would move away to another pupil and I would graduate to another teacher (246-247).

In this sense, Wafaa chose Najwa to guide her in her religious spiritual journey as Najwa explains: "My guides chose me; I did not choose them" (240), and like the minaret of the mosque "Wafaa materialize[s]" (240) as another fixed point of orientation as Najwa is searching for stability and belonging, and as a person to whom she "would always feel a connection . . . a kind of gratitude" (160). All the sacred practices and relationships at the mosque produce a particular form of spirituality for Najwa who encounters and constructs an open communal space of comfort, security and dialogue, in addition to grabbing an opportunity for female solidarity. Najwa notices that when the mosque is busy "sometimes there was hardly a place to sit and then we would all stand up to pray, and suddenly there was more space and the imam would start to recite" (188). There, she encounters a community of men and women, brothers and sisters, Westerners and non-Westerners, who are, to Najwa's relief, separated during prayer. No wonder, in the mosque, Najwa experiences a potent sense of community and female bonding with these Muslim women who will now be her guides and companions, and make up for the family and children she may never have.

Consequently, Najwa's life has already turned upside down and this new situation affects her perception towards her religion. Starting to reconsider her religious practices and rebuild her religious identity, Najwa goes through a spiritual process of self-discovery. Now that she no longer holds stiff views about religion, the narrative suggests that Najwa is more prepared to take the opportunities which enable her to redefine her relationship with her religion. Thus, the second phase of Najwa's evolution of Muslim identity involves her going through spiritual experiences, triggered by moments of epiphany that, as I will further explain below, a suspicious Najwa would impressively comprehend their significance. In this way, Najwa's religious spirituality is successfully accomplished in such a way that it maintains both its self-reflexivity and its deep spiritual and emotional connections to Islam. Thus, the narrative, through the description of this second phase of her life, also represents the other side of Najwa's religious identity, which reflects its intense transformation to religious spirituality.Interestingly, the narrative suggests that for the portrayal of this deep evolution of Najwa's religious identity, which is related to spiritual

moments, no other mode but a dialogic dogma can be embraced. In fact, it can be argued that though Najwa has begun a spiritual conception of religion through which preserving the rituals and cherishing the beliefs of the religious community are of high importance, she has opted,instead, for an individualistic concept of religious spirituality in which each person's unique understanding of religion and spirituality is estimated.

Additionally, Najwa thinks of her religious experience as dialogic mostly because through living an Islamic devout life, she can start a sacred relationship with God, whom she is not afraid of. To Najwa, God is the Almighty protector being with whom she feels secure.This feeling is particularly manifested in the narrative through her used language when thinking about God, a language that ever communicates intimacy and security. For example, while watching religious programs, she thinks that they send her a specific message: "Don't worry. Allah is looking after you, He will never leave you, He knows you love Him…" (Aboulela, *Minaret* 98). Also, she believes that reading the Quran is like communicating directly and intimately with God: "He is talking to us, aren't we lucky? We can open the Quran and he is directly talking to us" (185).Therefore, Najwa's attribution of specific attributes such as warmth, safety and protection to God is, also, apparent in this part of a sermon she invokes: *"... His mercy is in many things, first the womb, the rahim, he gave it part of his name, Al-Rahman- the All-merciful. It is a place we have all experienced. It sheltered us, gave us warmth and food… do you remember…?*"(247, italics in original). The reference to womb conveysNajwa's sense of her relationship with God as immediate and sacred.Therefore, other deep moments of epiphany are created for Najwa at the spiritual moments when she feels this affiliation and connection with God, granting her happiness that can easily substitute things she is deprived of in her worldly life. She mentions one of those moments of deep spirituality after she has been reminded of God's mercy in a sermon: "Sometimes the tears ran down my face. I sweated and felt a burning along my skin in my chest. This was the scrub I needed. Exfoliation, clarifying, deep-pore cleanse—words I knew from the beauty pages of magazines and the counters of Selfridges. Now they were for my soul not my skin" (247).Najwa's moments of epiphany, thus, contribute directly to her religious identity formation as well as her religious spirituality.

The religious experience of the protagonist in *Minaret*, as discussed above, is portrayed as dialogic and empowering.However, as I have mentioned, it is of great interest to reflect on this experience as being digressively constructed, but at the same time authentic for the person involved in this experience, referring, in this case, to the fictional character Najwa. In her personal experience, life without connection to religion is principally meaningless. Therefore, Najwa's strong religious spirituality is depicted in her system of logic and justification. It is identified in such a way that to her, modern reason is not the supreme sovereign, and it is God's will that governs everything. For example, one day in the house where she is working as a maid, the pearl necklace belonging to her employer, Lamya, is lost. At this moment, Najwa feels that she is suspected, even though her employer does not directly accuse her. Consequently, she starts her meditation: "I start to pray; the words tumble in my head. Allah, please get me out of this mess. Stop this from happening. I know you are punishing me because I tried this necklace on in the morning in front of the mirror. I put it round my neck and I will never do that again, ever" (Abboulela, *Minaret*113). When, after a few minutes, the necklace is found somewhere in the house, she feels that a miracle has happened and the finding of the necklace has not been accidental. She says: "This is the kind of miracle that makes me queasy. … My stomach heaves. I can lose this job easily. Rely on Allah, I tell myself. He is looking after you in this job or in another job" (114).In this sense, the text invites the readers to share, or at least sympathize with Najwa's view that the finding of the necklace at this time might be interpreted as a miracle. Thus, the reason-effect logic is not absolutely intruded in Najwa's religious life.

The narrative also implies that Najwa's moments of epiphany result in her eagerness to adopt a religious to a non-religious way of life because through religious mores and rituals she finds stability in life. She thinks of Western freedom, especially in relation to sexuality, as an "empty space" (175). According to Chandrahas Choudhury, Najwa "begins to head toward the world she has always yearned for, but never felt herself able to reach out to: the ordered way of life laid down by the Quran. The prospect of "being safe with God gives her a sense of direction and calm" (5). Dipika Guha also believes that one of the reasons why Najwa loves *Ramadan* and 'thrives' in this month is that for her during *Ramadan* "life becomes communal, regulated, disciplined and focused. Without this structure, life is fragmented" (20).Still the novel, through depicting how Najwa relishes this way of life, indicates that the committed way of life provided

by religion is convenient for her. Najwa's system of rationalization for the events that happened to her and to her family is also stemmed from the religious logic that relates these events and their reasons to the divine will. The disaster that has befallen her family, her father's execution, her mother's death and her brother's imprisonment are all, to Najwa, the results of their lack of faith and their disobeying God (Abboulela, *Minaret* 95). In other words, the novel displays a pattern of experience that seems authentic for some people, because of their specific religious identities and the religious discourses that originate from their beliefs.

Undoubtedly, in depicting how religious spirituality is omnipresent and predominant for Najwa, Aboulela portrays Najwa's reciting the verses of the Quran and daily prayers in different scenes. For instance, when Najwa is happy about something she says *Alhamdullilah*, when she wants to wish for something she says *Insha'Allah'* (74), and when she is afraid of something she recites some verses of the Quran, such as: "*I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak*" (80) which is recited by Muslims when they feel scared. More importantly, it can be stated that the rootedness of her religious spirituality or her spontaneous repetition of religious sayings on various occasions is not a normal process as it appears; rather it is her religiosityand her religious mediatory language that induces Najwa to respond to different situations in the words of religion. Hence, this religious way of life is the one that is presented as convenient to the devout Muslim woman, Najwa, who is portrayed as being in her safe zone when she adopts this type of life.

In general, Aboulela's characters' religious spirituality is also manifested in communal religious prayers, rituals, and ceremonies that are mediums of confirming their religious identification and belonging. The representation of the Islamic spiritual self is offered in various ways in her texts. One way is the frequent reference to the rituals and symbols of the religion of Islam, such as the daily prayers, the verses of the Quran, the fasting of *Ramadan* and *azan* (the call to prayers of Muslims). Also, religious people's spiritual moments are most often initiated at times when they perform religious rituals or focus on religious symbols. In this context, it should be mentioned that, in our current times, the very presentation of religious spirituality in contemporary literary works can be considered as a way of highlighting the idea that it is still an essential part of the lives of many people.

Nevertheless, in these narratives other techniques of rendering religious spirituality as significant have also been used. In many cases, the portrayal and endorsement of religious spirituality happen at the same time such as in the narratives of Najwa and Sammar. Their way of thinking,living and feeling their identity as Muslims clearly interprets how Islam is a central feature in some Muslim women's lives and a religious framework that shapes their beliefs. This belief stands against the Western ideology and Western representations imposed on them with which they cannot chime. Najwa's religious spirituality in *Minaret* is depicted as similar to Sammar's, as vigorous and all-encompassing in such a way that it impacts all facets of her life, considering the words and expressions she uses in her daily discourses. The manifestation of this religious system of Islamic logic in the religious consciousness of the protagonists, in *Minaret* and*The Translator*, is a variation on the realist novel's ideological system of religious discourse.Needless to say that any theological evaluation of the fictional characters' views here is not one of this thesis' priorities, as this thesis primary interest is a literary analysis of these narratives. However, it can certainly be claimed that these narratives discuss the idea of any exact resemblance between religious practices and the experience of religious spirituality, and suggest a kind of flexibility for inter-religious interaction.

IV.4. Inter-Religious Dialogue against the Threat of Islamophobia

In predominant contemporary Western representations, including various media images and fiction-narratives, both the Islamic religion in general, and Muslim women in particular are often denigrated and stereotyped.In many such representations Islam is presented as a backward and terrorizing religion, and Muslim women are introduced as either its victims or oppressed members. This tendency in the representations of Islam and Muslim women has been, of course, obviously exaggerated following the terrorist attacks of September, 11th, 2001. Writing back to these stereotypes, Aboulela's narratives portray the lives and religious identities of Muslim women who are neither victims of Islam nor fugitives of this religion, but eagerly attached to their faith.

Accordingly, various literary texts and discourses have reflected, for centuries, the West's clash with Islam and the Islamic world. In Western perspective, Islam has been considered to be the enemy, whether this is mentioned directly or indirectly. The West, on the other hand, has

been perceived as a threat to Islamic beliefs and traditional values.These conflicts between East and West are still prevalent today as they did in the past, but take different forms and ways. The West has taken on its shoulder the Islamic nations' 'liberation' which has been manifested in various forms and claimsSome of these claims are the liberation of Muslim women from their patriarchal societies and their oppressive religious values, which has been considered as the direct reason for their 'uncivilized traditions'. In *Covering Islam*, Said points out:

> I have not been able to discover any period in European or American history since the middle Ages in which Islam was generally discussed or thought about outside a framework created by passion, prejudice, and political interests. This may not seem a surprising discovery, but included in it is the entire gamut of scholarly and scientific disciplines which, since the early nineteenth century, have either called themselves collectively the discipline of Orientalism, or have tried systematically to lead with the Orient. (23)

From Said's quotation,it is clear that the Orient and Islam were represented in Western discourses as an object for inquiry, study and hegemony so that through the vast scope of literature and historical corpus covered, Said investigates the textual representations which draw an imaginative geographical distinction between the two cultures, East and West. He also demonstrates how rhetorical figures and digressive images were used by the West to represent the East and how Western will to represent and speak for the Orient is related to its strong desire to attain power. In doing so, he induces and explores Michel Foucault's concept of knowledge and power to involve the Orient, explaining that knowledge is linked with the exertion of power. As a result, according to him, knowledge about the Orient, as it is produced and manipulated in Europe, significantly assists the West to hegemonize and overpower the Orient.

Generally, Western assumptionsascribe the 'backwardness' of the Arab Muslim World to Islam and consider it as the West's true enemy due to religious, cultural and social divergences between the two civilizations. In *Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington claims that the underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. Rather, it is Islam, a different civilization whose people is convinced of the superiority of their culture and is obsessed with the inferiority of the Other's power. He states that the problem for Islam is the West, a different

civilization whose people is convinced of the universality of their culture and believes that their superior power obliges them to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West (49).Bhabha also confirms that colonial discourse, like any other discourse, is based on signification of cultural difference (66). According to him, colonial discourse is managed by promoting contents linked to the subject. The word 'Arab', for instance, normally signifies a person living in the Arab world. But the term in Western media has another meaning connected to it in addition to its literal meaning. These significations are that of a terrorist, backward person, and lazy Muslim (Said, "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals" 67). Likewise, 'Arab woman', in Western media, implies the veiled, oppressed and backward woman who needs to be emancipated; while in the Arab World the Arab woman denotes traditions, religion, and the honour of the nation.

Correspondingly, being a migrant Muslim veiled woman, Aboulela's awareness in writing fiction about the daily lives and experiences of Muslims lies in the eagerness to correct misunderstandings and misconceptions existing between the two worlds, mainly about Muslim woman, and to negotiate for dialogic spaces between the two schisms.After all, literature is an important universe for discussing, destabilizing or challenging prevalent modes of representation and colonial discourses. Through her writings and characters' experiences, Aboulela tries to cross borders and construct dialogic bridges between "us" and "them". Thus, her literary writings deconstruct oppositions of ideas, cultures, languages and religions, and grant a podium where different perspectives on Western cultural hegemony can be debated.

Aboulela's texts, thus, deconstruct the term Islamophobia that was reinforced by the negative stereotyped images of Islam and Muslims. In fact, the problematic use of the term 'Islamophobia'in literature reflects that this term appears to suggest that there is something within Islam to be feared and that this fear is not subject to criticism (Siraj 2009). Further, a widespread concern about more persistent cultural forces, such as the power of the media that tells people what to think about Islam, was frequently raised. Therefore, Anglophone Muslim writers, among them Leila Aboulela, are very eager to portray the negative images of Muslims and Islam spread in the mass media. They consider that the media reports a disparaged image of Islam that actively contributes to experiences of religious discrimination so that the potential impact of negative

portrayals of Muslims and, particularly, the focus on terrorism is raised repeatedly. Among the discourses disseminated by the media about Islam and Muslim woman is the representation ofthe visible pious Muslim as adopting extreme views. In addition,in the Western widespread stereotypical paradigms, Islam is depicted as a patriarchal, backward religion with abused rules against women. In this essence, it becomes urgent for Anglophone Muslim writers, such as Leila Aboulela, to debunk these images through their narratives.

Striving to demonstrate how these fictional texts can be read as counter-narratives, aiming at writing back to the hegemonic monolithic representations of Islam and Muslim women, Leila Aboulela focuses on the ways in which particular narrative techniques highlight migrant Muslim women's complicated experiences. Since her narratives depict the lives of Muslim female characters in the West, the investigation of her texts is especially concerned with the exploration of the tensions and contradictions of women's Muslim identities in Western countries, and addresses Western people's interests and prejudices in their encounter with Muslim women (Ancellin 9-11).Finally, regarding that various distorted images and aspects of Muslim women's identities and experiences in dominant Western representations, it is worth noting that a subversion of Muslim women's stereotypes paves the way to the compatibility of Muslim women's hybrid identities with their religious beliefs.

For Aboulela's Muslim protagonists and Muslim characters, Islam is the organizing principle of their lives. They were born in predominantly Muslim societies, and they practice Islam, but not just its classical traditional form, they attribute to it a modern flexible touch. Therefore, migrant Muslim women, as represented in these texts, try to evince their understanding of Islam by participating in the negotiation and configuration of perspectives and ideas on what formulates the 'true' Islam. In these representations, they negotiate within an Islamic framework issues that are connected to their lives such as their Muslim identities, veiling and family relations.

Similar to Anglophone Muslim writings, Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* is set against a backdrop of vilified cultural representations and post-9/11 Islamophobia. This novel is distinguished by the way in which Islam emerges eminently in the female protagonist's sense of

self. It does not involve a stereotypically 'Western emancipatory tale'. Becoming a devout Muslim is the protagonist's clinging to what she considers to be the constants of her life: her Islamic religion and homeland. While in London, she lacks the stability that comes with a sense of belonging and says:

> In Queensway, in High Street Kensigton, we would watch the English, the Gulf Arabs, the Spanish, Japanese, Malaysians, Americans and wonder how it would fell to have, like them, a stable country. A place where we could make future plans and it wouldn't matter who the government was- they wouldn't mess up our day-to-day life. A country that was a familiar, reassuring background, a static landscape on which to paint dreams. A country we could leave at any time, return to at any time and it would be there for us, solid, waiting. (Aboulela, *Minaret* 165)

Consequently, Najwa's embracing of Islam is also an act of self-representation and self-protection, a way of avoiding the diffusion of self that comes with the dilemma of migration. In this sense, Najwa's manifestation of her faith can also be read as a defensive action for her religionin terms of narrative self-affirmation. Hence, faith provides her with a coherent narrative that conveys a sense of belonging where, otherwise, seems to be obscured.

Confirming the positive image of Islam, Aboulela presents this religion as a system of life, through which the characters deal with everyday life and build a new community in Europe. In searching for a place where she can feel at home, Najwa is only able to find it in Islam in the UK, as Aboulela did. Indeed,the Islam that she embraces in Europe is a completely new faith that she was not acquainted with in Sudan. Najwa asserts: "We weren't brought up in a religious way, neither of us. We weren't even friends in Khartoum with people who were religious [...] Our house was a house where only the servants prayed" (I95). However, a mosque in secular England is where she learns more about Islam, and it is a group of women from all over the world, who lead her to approach her religion. In this country, their nationalities do not matter anymore,it is Islam that unites people and for many Muslim people it is their religion that determines their own main identity, not a nationality, an ideology or an ethnicity. When Najwa's family crumbles, some of the mosque's women help her day by day in the name of Islam. These foreign women emerge as her new family and the mosque becomes the only place where she can find a new

community to replace the one she has lost. In fact, Aboulela conveys to the reader a new perspective of Islam as a new religion that people find and adopt in the countries where they immigrate, it is not the supposed fixed and restricted Islam that men and women bring in Europe from their homeland.

In *The Translator*, the positive image of Islam is also reinforced through representing it as a mediator between different characters. The Muslim veiled woman, Sammar, exploits her knowledge of both languages: Arabic and English for translation and makes use of her binary cultural skills for the benefit of helping Rae and approaching him. In this novel, Aboulela lets Rae confesses: "No one writing in the fifties and sixties predicted that Islam would play such a significant part in the politics of the area. Even Fanonhad no insight into the religious feelings of the North Africans he wrote about. He never made the link between Islam and anti-colonialism. When the Iranian revolution broke out, it took everyone by surprise. Who were these people?" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 109). However, though some political events are mentioned in *The Translator*, they do not figure highly inthe progress of events or the psychological makeup of the characters because the main aim of this novel is to reconcile the Western World with Islam.

Therefore,the focus on Islam as the main representative of the East and Eastern women cannot be denied and the reality that the author uses female voices grants the narrative a potent tone. One of the principle female voices, in this novel, is Sammar who constitutes a major part of this representation because the narrative initiates reconciliation through her relationship with the Western male protagonist, Rae. In addition to this, the novel is very didactic in terms of portraying religious and cultural values. The novelist emphasizes in a defensive manner on the notion that Muslims are not abnormal people and they have the right to practice their religion according to their own socio-religious values and norms.She also admits the persistence of the East/West clash, but provides a dialogic Eastern/Islamic perspective between the three major characters in the novel: Sammar, the main character, is simplistic, traditional and committed to Islamic values, whereas Rae is a 'sympathetic' Orientalist who plays an important role in explaining Islam and Islamic rules as an expert in Postcolonial Studies and the Arab World. The third character isYasmin, a British born Pakistani who represents the persecuted colonized through articulating dissatisfaction to Western values. To this end, though these three characters

belong to different cultures, they share the same interest in promoting Islamic values and the positive side of Islam.

In this content, Aboulela creates the character, Rae, in order to challenge Western prejudices and misconceptions about Islam. In *The Translator*, Rae, with his good understanding of Islam and the Arab World, is differentiated to function as a reversal to Western beliefs concerning Islamic values and acknowledge the good nature of Muslims.Rae has admired Islam since his childhood. At school, he wrote an essay entitled "Islam is better than Christianity" influenced by his uncle who went to Egypt with the British army during the Second World War and converted to Islam there. Though his uncle was rejected by his family and society, Rae did not fear to tell the truth about another religion. He informs Sammar and Yasmin that he got expelled from school because he wrote that essay (Aboulela, *The Translator* 17). Consequently, since the title of Rae's article is loaded with suggestions and implications that suggest religious hierarchy meaning that Muslims are 'better' than Christians, he was dismissed from his school. However, Rae does not give up his views and later he becomes a scholar in postcolonial theory and Islamic studies. He starts learning a lot about Islam as a religion and studying it carefully untill he becomes aware of all its details.

Relying on his knowledge, Rae manages to separate his own identity and objectivity from what he knows and reads so that his admiration for the Arab World and Islam is only due to his numerous visits to the region and the fact that it is his field of study. For these reasons, Rae, in the narrative, becomes the 'perfect' character to mediate between East and West and inform the Western reader about Islam and the Arab nation. He explains his point of view as: "The good thing," he said, "… the Qur'an itself and the authentic *Hadiths* have never been tampered with. They are there as they had been for centuries. This was the first thing that struck me when I began to study Islam, one of the reasons I admire it" (108-109). Therefore, Rae is not stereotypical as he does not reflect the image of the 'ideal' WesternerHe appreciates Islam and defends it, and he empathizes with the Arab World and its traditions and comprehends them. He does not consume alcohol and he even looks like a Turk or Persian.These fanciful characteristics make Rae a main character created for attaining the image of the ideal colonizer subject for the purpose of reconciliation. Consequently, Rae, as a British man who represents the West and

Sammar as an Arab Muslim woman who represents the Muslim East, engage in a romantic relationship that is supposed to determine and conduct this dialogue of reconciliation. And for this, because of the two characters, Rae and Sammar, and their romantic relation, *The Translator* has been described as "a dialogue of civilizations" (qtd. in Hassan 182).

Correspondingly, Rae and Sammar assume the role of mediators between two different worlds and cultures. Their romantic relation functions as a tool to bring both cultures to a meeting point and to promote for "religious dialogue". This dialogue in *The Translator* is mutual though it follows a didactic manner. Sammar takes the responsibility of acquainting the reader about Islam and the Arab World, while Rae takes the role of confirming Sammar's religious beliefs and teachings, studying and detailing them from an expert's point of view. Therefore, Aboulela's portrayal of Rae and the Western culture are too schematic to serve the aim of the novel. Even when she introduces the character of Rae as an Orientalist, she describes him as a good one and disregards the negative meaning of the term. In thissense, the novelist seems unsympathetic with Edward Said's claim that Orientalists approach reality from a political lens and confirm that the framework of this reality reinforces the differences between the familiar West and the exotic East. This vision created and, then, served the two visualized worlds: Orientals lived in their world and 'we' lived in 'ours' (Said, Orientalsim 49).

According to Sammar, Rae is a modern Orientalist, who has knowledge about the Arab World and professional political opinions about East and West. He is different from the "old Orientalists" because he never shows an inherited fear of Islam, nor enmity towards Islamic societies and this is reflected in the title of his book "*The Illusion of an Islamic Threat*" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 5). He also looks like Arabs and behaves like them too. Sammar clarifies to the reader that Rae looked like he could easily pass for a Turk or a Persian. He was dark enough…Here with others, he looked to her to be out of place, not only because of his looks but his manners (6). Therefore, because of his familiar look and knowledge about Islam, he is not surprised by anythingshe tells him about the world where she comes from. In addition, Rae defends Islam and the Islamic world against misunderstandings and stereotypes andcalls for an end to the deception that Islam is a threat to the Western civilization. He insists that: "...it [Islam] is not the biggest threat facing the Western world. If we look at real terrorist damage, Muslim

extremists have caused much less than the IRA, the Red Bride, the Baader-Meinh of gang, the-Basque separatists ETA....." (Aboulela, *The Translator* 7). Therefore, through Rae and Sammar and their dialogic romantic relation, Aboulela confirms that Islam is the only way towards liberty and security, and it is the only religion that makes people stronger. Sammar informs Rae that Islam would be good for him, it will make him stronger (208). Thus, in this novel, Aboulela defines Islam, praises it and shows its importance to Arabs and the rest of the world.

On the other hand, though *The Translator* claims Muslims' superiority and Islamic faith, and on many occasions, advocates the coloniser's thesis that 'we are the best', it does not deny the possibility of inter-religious comprehensibility. It shows that Muslims have privilege over Europeans whether Christians or secular. In this narrative, Sammar explains to Rae the difference between the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, though it is supposed that an expert on Islam has already this significant knowledge:

> A sacred Hadith is, as to its meaning, from Allah the Almighty; as to the wording, it is from the messenger of Allah, peace be upon him. It is that which Allah the Almighty has communicated to His Prophet through revelation or dream and he, peace be upon him, has communicated it in his own words. Thus, the Qur'an is superior to it because, besides being revealed, it is Allah's wording. (41-42)

Also, Sammar continuously emphasizes Arabic religious terms such as Allah, *Hijab, Masjid, Maghrib,* and*Mmasha' Allah* indicating differences stemming out between religions. However, to make the balance and give a real image of the self and the other, Aboulela portrays the superiority of Islam,but in many times, she compares Britain and Sudan and, on each occasion, she reinforces the superiority of the former and the inferiority of the latter.This is obvious in the portraits that the novelist selects to describe Scotland and Sudan: "And though Sammar had come from rain and a rich city of the First World, the meagerness of this place was familiar. Shabbiness, as if, the sun had burned away the lushness of life and left no room for luxuries or lies" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 145-146). Hence, the narrative's dogmatic dualism is also implied in its depiction of different spaces, with Islamic Sudan described as a place where religion forms a natural part of daily life, and Scotland is depicted as a developed secular place, where religion is a strictly personal matter.

Through the stories of Najwa, Sammar and the other characters of *Minaret* and *The Translator*, we can explore, from a literary prospective, the persistent re-location and re-definition of religion in modern societies. This re-positioning of Islam in the public social sphere is one of the toughest challenges in the current process of cultural globalization that widens the scope for religious concepts to be included in the political domains and re-formulates the idea of modernity. Aboulela's narratives depict subtly the emersion of this transnational Islamic approach. As my investigation has shown, both *The Translator* and *Minaret* portray female protagonists who counter their immigrant experience of exile in intercultural space by developing strategies of compromise and resorting to an expressively practicality that honestly acknowledges comprehensibility, reconciliation and dialogue. And both novels juxtapose these female achievements with male figures, who subscribe to cross-cultural world-views and interfaith comprehensibility, which result in marriage proposals.

As a further matter, the novels assert the possibility of a narrative reconstruction of the dialogic self and suggest that the quest for religious comprehensibility is not a defective one. They also shed critical light on the assumption that the destabilization of self, that the migratory experience entails, can be overcome through Islam as an empowering element and an act of agency for them. In that religious space they find their own voices to prove their way of thinking and living.More importantly is that with the main characters' return to Islam, the narratives diverge from the victim path or the fugitive from dominant representations. The narratives, however, come very close to the midway fugitive model, only to go in another direction far from those distorted images. They show that though the main characters' understanding of their religious identities is transformed in the course of the narratives,they finally remain committed to their religion. In this sense, in spite of their many challenges with the negative images of their religion and doubts about their commitment to Islam, it is impossible to ignore the important role that religion plays in their lives.

Another feature, related to writing back, that these narratives clarify,is the exploration and illumination of some Islamic issues, which are frequently misconceived in the West. These explorations, in Aboulela's narratives, usually appear in the form of a dialogue between the main characters and other characters. All Aboulela's Muslim characters are committed to their Islamic belief, and Rae as an expert in the field, manifests Islam as a source of safety and power to all

human beings. They insist that Islam can be modern and tolerant so that this is portrayed, in the narratives, to refute misconceptions that Islam is oppressive, primitive in its dogmas and sets against the modern 'civilized' world. Thus, by employing such references, the author strives to restore her Islamic identity in the face of Western prejudices against Islamic cultures.

A major commonality among Aboulela's narratives is the general criticism of the misunderstanding of Islamic message. They are critical of 'Fundamentalism' in the Eastern countries and the materialism of the West, and condemn the propaganda of Islamic terrorism, as well. In a conversation between Rae and Sammar, who is going to work as a translator for an anti-terrorist project in Egypt, Aboulela lets the two characters express their views about terrorists: "There is something pathetic about the spelling mistakes, the stains on the paper, in spite of the bravado. There are truths butthey are detached, not tied to reality...' 'They are all like that.' 'You get a sense of people overwhelmed," she went on: "overwhelmed by thinking that nothing should be what it is now.' 'They are shooting themselves in the foot. There is no recourse in the*Sharia* for what they're doing" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 26). Also, when Sammar interviewed, later in Egypt, one of the terrorists, he burst one of his convictions in her face: "Western men worship money and women. Some of them see the world through dollar bills, some of them see the world through the thighs of a woman" (156). Nevertheless, Aboulela rejects those terrorists' conceit and clings to the notion of inter-religious dialogue.

Conversely, Aboulela's aim is not to evoke Arabs' great history. She, otherwise, focuses on the relation between Islam and the West and the great principles of Islamic religion. She employs Islamic history and values to debunk the distorted images spread in the West such as the image that Muslims are 'uncivilised', 'barbaric', and with no moral standards.In many indications throughout her narratives, the author strengthens the positive image of Islam as a source of social justice and emancipation. In *The Translator*, Sammar quotes the *Hadith*: "The best jihad is when a person speaks the truth before a tyrant leader" (200).The author uses this *Hadith* to correct Western understanding of *jihad* as a 'terrorist' and fundamentalist Islamic doctrine assigned to combat the West. She emphasizes that *jihad*, incompatible with what is conceived in Western media, is a valid and noble act if applied in a correct way. Sammar also discusses this *Hadith* with Rae whom she encounters in Scotland, indicating that learning about Islam has nothing to do with being in a Muslim country. According to her, the West is a place where one can learn not

only Western cultural norms, but Islamic values, too. By the same token, through her writings, Aboulela attempts to highlight that Islamic religion is a rational way of life rather than an extremist religious framework of fundamentalism.Therefore, she insists on bridging the interstice between her characters' different religions through inter-faith reconciliation.

IV.5. Transgressing Religious Polarization through Inter-faith Reconciliation

Earlier in her novel, *The Translator*, the author portrays Sammar as a mediator character between two different worlds, cultures and religions. This portrait is strongly accentuated by the comparison between the two female characters: Sammar and Yasmin. By opposing these two characters' views, Aboulela tries to emphasize the possibility of bringing together two different schisms despite the differences and pre-conceptions that exist between them. Yasmin, as the opposite character to Sammar, appears to articulate notions that shape certain perspectives about the West,insisting on its difference from the East. This character is depicted, in the novel, as the spokeswoman for 'Islamic World' countries in a voice full of the refusal of the Western Other. Despite her contempt for anything Western, Yasmin lived all her life in the UK. She always privileges Muslims than non-Muslims and has a habit of making general judgments emphasizing binary oppositions like 'we' and 'them', where 'we' means the whole of the 'Islamic World' and its people. For example, she always confirms: "We are not like them" or "We have close family ties, not like them" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 11). Again, when, once, she hears one of the secretaries in the department worried about her weight, she comments: "Our children are dying of hunger while the rich count their calories!" (260). In this quotation, Yasmin impeaches the ethics of the Western society by a direct comparison between the Self 'Islamic World' and the Other 'West'.

Therefore, against Yasmin's biased role, Sammar's mediator role is sharply stressed in the novel. She is obviously described as the reconciler who tries to overcome the differences that exist between her and Rae and between their different worlds despite the negative influence that Yasmin has on Sammar's attitudes and opinions.For this reason, Yasmin seems to perform the role of the 'negative side' of Sammar who speaks on her behalf. This 'negative side' that Sammar has to challenge and overcome to reach the aim of dialoguing with the Other.Yasmin rejects the colonial system and is not able to transgress the boundaries between colonised and coloniser, as opposed to Sammar who struggles to cross the cultural boundaries and reconcile religious

binaries. Throughout the novel, Yasmin voices her indignation about Sammar's intention to marry Rae. In any case, she expresses her opinion: "You're leaving in few weeks' time... if I were you, I'd avoid him like the plague till then. Go home and maybe you'll meet someone normal, someone Sudanese like yourself. Mixed couples just don't look right, they irritate everyone" (Aboulela, *The Translator* 83). This quotation, thus, suggests that Yasmin's character reinforces the challenge that should be heldfor the purpose of reconciliation that the narrative strives to achieve.

A further note to mention is thatYasmin refutes all Western claimed objectivity and equitability, which is based on a colonial viewpoint. Judging Rae, she claims:

> That's his work, the field in which he is very highly thought of. But his interest, as far as I know, is just an academic interest.... That's the way they do research nowadays. It's a modern thing. Something to do with not being Eurocentric. They take what each culture says about itself so they could study all sorts of sacred texts and be detached. They could have their own religious views or be atheists. (83)

In this case, Yasmin is the voice for those who reject the coloniser's culture and find the western norms intolerable. She insists on her opinion: "... someone like him is probably an agnostic if not an atheist. The whole of the department are atheists. These people are so left wing, 'religion is the opium of the people' and all that" (82). As a result, this fanatic character emphasizes the reconciliatory role of Sammar. Through this character, the writer hints to the notion that despite the truth that there are people who hinder the process of dialogue, transnational reconciliation can be achieved and inter-religious dialogue can be reached.

Additionally, in the collection of her short stories, *Coloured Lights*, Aboulela also embraces a dialogic perspective. The four main characters in these narratives: *The Museum, The Ostrish, Makes your Own Way Home Alone, The Boy from the Kebbab Shop* are respectively: Shadia, Sumra, Nadia and Dina. *The Museum's* main character, Shadia, is a Sudanese girl who pursues her studies in England. She lives most of her teenage years in Sudan and later, she goes to London as a student and stays there. The theme of the coloniser's superiority is demonstrated in this story through her relation with a fellow British student, Bryan. During their visit to a museum in London, Shadia discovers that the representation of Africa in this museum is undertaken from the coloniser's superior perspective that boosts the stereotypes and the distorted images of Africa. Shadia informs the reader: "Here was Europe's vision, the clichés about Africa:

cold and old" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 102). Therefore, in a counter-narrative process, Aboulela reverses this relationship.

At the beginning of the story, the relationship between Shadia and Bryan is depicted as one of superior self over the Other, and the narrative portraysa 'strange' Western man and an Eastern Muslim woman who avails from him in the classroom.In fact, Shadia judges Bryan and treats him like the inferior Other, revealing proudly his deficiencies to denote that she is superior than him and to insist on her supremacy. In her arrogant ways, Shadia attempts to induce herself and Bryan of her superiority in everything: her country, manners, religion and family. She overtly declares: "The Nile is superior to the Dee. I saw your Dee, it is nothing, it is like a stream" (97-98); and proudly adds:" My father' is a doctor, a specialist, and my mother comes from a very big family. A ruling family. If you British hadn't colonised us, my mother would have been a princess now" (97). In contrast, Bryan is perceived as 'immature', 'silly' and a 'gullible boy' (89-97) to justify Shadia's claim of superiority. With all these misconceptions towards the Other in her mind, Shadia is shocked by his Western style, his long hair and silver earring. Therefore,she condemns him and his culture and perceives him as inferior to her, even in the use of native language: "She [Shadia] spoke English better than him!" (96). Eventually, both characters tries to prove the superiority of one over the other till their visit to the museum that gives them the opportunity for a dialogic reconciliatory relation.

Accordingly, despite these differences and clashing views between both protagonists, Aboulela suggests a reconciliatory trend. At the beginning, Shadia takes a defensive position to secure herself from any effect or emotional unbalance and colonial misrepresentations in the museum. Therefore, when Bryan cuts his hair and takes off his earring in a reconciliatory step to satisfy Shadia, she considers him as an idiot for doing so: "this is just for me, he cut his hair for me…you wouldn’t believe what this idiot did!”(95). Also, when Bryan calls her princess,he manifests his interest in her religion and treats her modestly, but Shadia has only one view of him as a colonizer who menaces her national and religious identity.Therefore, she considers herself a traitor when she accepts his invitation to the museum because he is aBritish man with European attributes and it is prerequisite to avoid him. She expresses her feelings: "No sleep for the guilty, she should have said no, I can't go, no I have too much catching up to do….Perhaps she was like her father, a traitor. Her mother said that her father was devious. Sometimes Shadia was devious"

(Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 99). This reflection reveals that even meeting him is aburden for her because he made her feel confused and unsafe. Consequently, Shadia restrains her feelings by clinging to her origins and traditions in order to stand against any foreign impact she might obtain from him. She is eager to make him detest and avoid her so that she can defend her prejudices against him,. She says: "in the West they hate Islam," and "Europeans had different rules, reduced, abrupt customs. This is an attempt for the suppressed to suppress, and the suppressor to pay back" (99). Also, when Bryan says, "Ma' dad's a joiner."...Shadia thinks to herself, "Fareed [Shadia's fiance] hired people like that to work on the house. Ordered them about" (96). In this sense, the master-servant relationship is reversed in this narrative to claim the superiority of the colonized over the colonizer.

Nevertheless, one of the essential matters to mention in this narrative is that the moment of epiphany in Shadia's life occurs during her visit to the museum where she finds herself in confrontation of a distorted image of Africa. There, she starts crying and explaining to him: "They are telling you lies in this museum…Don't believe them. It's not jungles and antelopes. It's people. We have things like computers and cars…I shouldn't be here with you. You shouldn't talk to me" (Aboulela 105). However, the English student, Bryan, who introduces Africa to Shadia in this museum, sympathizes with her and initiates a dialogue with her: "Museums change; I can change" (105), but the narrator clarifies the protagonist's reation as: "He didn't know it was a steep path she had no strength for. He didn't understand…If she was strong she would have patiently taught him another language, letters…She would have showed him that words could be read from right to left. If she was not small in the museum, if she was really strong, she would have made his trip to Mecca real, not only in a book" (105). Thus, the rhetoric of Arab Muslim woman's empowerment, in Aboulela's narrative, is an inevitability to represent herself and confront the distorted images about her, her culture, religion and country. It is a stipulation to construct dialogic bridges with the Other.

In the short story, *Tuesday Lunch*, the development of Nadia's identity is set up through both its linear and gradual recounting in the pragmatist approach, and through abrupt and intense transformations, represented in the short story through various dialogic experiences. The gradual development of Nadia's identity,as she lets herself judge her religious identity and her Muslim community, is depicted by the linear pragmatic style.The narrative demonstrates that as Nadia

grows older, she is able to understand the differences and to see the fractures in the rigid shell of her parents' perspectives and her communal religious world. The narrator declares: "She is older now, she understands the difference, she can behave in a correct way and as a blessing, as a reward, blend with everyone else, not stand apart" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 65). Therefore, Nadia gradually finds out that the discriminative ideology she has grown up with has made her lose a great deal in life. On another occasion, the narrator also leads the reader into Nadia's thoughts when she reaches a new awareness, and feels how wrong she and her family have been in excluding others from their life.

Accordingly, in *Make your Own Way Home Alone*, the narrator follows Nadia's life to her adulthood and depicts to the reader her friendship with her British Christian friend, Tracy, the daughter of a divorced secular family. When Nadia visits her best school friend in the nursing home after her abortion, the unfamiliarityof the house and hostess disturbs her and simultaneously affords her another experience of perceiving beyond the boundaries of her parents' world: "Nadia lied to her parents to be here. Of course,what could she have told them? Long ago Lateefa unwittingly bestowed glamour on Tracy, making her friendship even more desirable. Lateefa said, that girl Tracy is no good. Don't be her friend any more" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 74).It is at this point that the narrator tells us that Nadia's transformation is inevitable and imminent so that he comments by saying:"In Nadia's life there are crumpled notes which she picked from a waste-paper basket. A smile of recognition, more than a year ago, across the aisle of an aeroplane. Plenty of dreams. All this she keeps from Tracy lest the spell be broken if she utters any words. Her dreams turn to drivel before Tracy's patronizing eyes" (79). Nadia's visit to Tracy is the beginning of a long journey of her self-discovery beyond her parents' restrictions. In the meeting that happened between Nadia and Tracy in the nursing house, Nadiais portrayed as undergoing pain and distress without being able to identify the causes of her suffering. Seeing her friend after such a terrible incident,Nadia seems to mourn the loss of human interrelations that she needs through her commitment to a discriminative ideology stemmed from religious inflexibility. Tracy addresses her: "Your parents are awful, Nadia. You're not allowed to do this, to do that. They are so inflexible" (79). Lastly, for the adoption of a discursive critical perspective of Muslim identity, the narrative concentrateson Nadia's flexible religious identity as opposite to her rather previous static identity, which is adopted by her family and surrounded community.

In short, it has been argued that both short stories' representation of Nadia's linear development of her religious identity is an explicit demonstration of the problems arising from the perpetuation of the arbitrary practice of religious identity. At the beginning, both narratives show thatNadia is neither faithful to herself, nor able to communicate with people who belong to different religious backgrounds. However, this is not the absolute picture of her Islamic identity and practice of Islam, as the second short story shows that Nadia's experience is different. In this narrative,her flexible identity is seemed to be possible because, in contrast to her family members and most of the people in her surrounding, she accepts and appreciates differences. It is at this stage, which is a turning point for her that she aspire to turn her back on her family, her community and their whole fanatic value system. Therefore, the following statements suggest that, in spite of these variances, she strives for re-evaluating her beliefs and not abandoning them for good. The narrator immediately explains her feelings during her visit to her friend, Tracy: "She felt guilty at such thoughts, quashes them down. Reminds herself of friendship, digs deep sympathy for Tracy. Yet, she is aware of the superfluity of her presence. She is out of place in this room…Why is she here then, flaunting the need of visiting hours? Why hasn't she gone home already? She is, in a strange way enjoying herself" (Aboulela, *Coloured Lights* 79-80). In fact, though a part of Nadia denies the presence of the different Other, the other part of her accepts them and enjoys their companionship.

These feelings of enjoying herself in a different place and with different people provide the first stage of inter-religious dialogue for Nadia and the beginning of her abandonment of all the contradictions that dominate her childhood life. In passing judgments on her Muslim community of her childhood, we see that she is unable to reach any final inferences when judging it because though she intensely loves her religion, religious symbols, religious convictionsand religious community, it perceives them critically. Therefore, as one of the final representations of Nadia’s religious identity, we see her as possessing a flexible religious identity that enables her of dealing with her dialogic migratory experiences. At the end of the narrative, Nadia is portrayed to be accepting of and at peace with this flexible identity that paves the way to her acceptance of other people with even different beliefs; and whom she has become aware not to judge because of their variances, but to cherish because of their humanity. Thus, the narrative, variously and on different occasions, manifests its inclination to the flexibility of religious identity.

Eventually, it is argued thatAboulela's main characters are portrayed in ways that attract the sympathy of the reader. Therefore, the creation of sympathetic characters, which cling to the depth of religious spirituality, can be considered as an important novelistic device for confirming many positive ideas about Islam as a religion introduced in the narratives. One of the techniques employed to create sympathetic characters is focalization[5].Most of the narratives' protagonists such Najwa in *Minaret* and Sumra in *The Ostrich* are the localizers as well as the narrators of their stories. In other words, the stories are presented from their perspectives.Also, in *The Translator* and *The Museum*, the female protagonists Sammar and Shadia, respectively are external focalization narrators, who are able to access the inner lives of the main characters. However, both types of focalization provide the occasion for the reader to dive into the characters' thoughts and feelings and facilitate the connection with them.

Another reason that allows for the description of the characters as sympathetic is that neither of the characters is represented as perfect, nor none of them is depicted as weak, dishonest or inhuman. The mature Najwa, for example, always treats other characters with respect and modesty, even though she disagrees with many of their ideas about her, her family and country. Similarly, Sammar always works selflessly and responds to the call of duty for other people, both in her job as a translator and in her volunteer work for the illiterate program. Sumra also attempts to construct a dialogic bridge with her husband and to bring their different views to a meeting point despite the differences between them. These are just few examples that uphold the claim that sympathetic characters are the main elements in Aboulela's defense of Islamic identity in her narratives.

Conclusion

As a Muslim veiled woman writer, Leila Aboulela, is influenced to varying degrees, by her Muslim culture, and thus, it is necessary to consider the portrait of Islam in her writing. Her cross-cultural writings also involve a deep significance of inter-religious dialogue since they create contact spaces between secular and Muslim religious discourses. The use of the term Islam

[5] Focalization: "refers to the view point or perspective from which the narration is told, positioning narrative voices. Who may or may not be characters in the story, in relation to events and to each other. We can, therefore, regard focalization as an aspect of 'tenor' in a text; that is a way of constructing interpersonal meanings that indicate relations and attitudes among the participants inside and outside the narrative events."(Fulton, 2005:111)

in her writing refers to her personal commitment as a Muslim author to her religion and her Islamic culture. As a result, we find authentic interpretations of Islam and various religious values in her literary texts. Although Aboulela portrays the tension of the cultural and religious interstices in her texts, she allows a resolution of the conflict through inter-religious comprehensibility and the refutation of Islamophobia. This tenseness, which stems from the pressures of religious binarism forces in her literary works, informs the reader of much of the cultural differences and various religious choices of which Islam is but one option in a wide mixture of choices. Thus, Aboulela's texts bear the signs of such reconsiderations of comprehension of various religious aspects and translations of true religious values when people are confronted with religious beliefs that are different from their own.

The question of religious identity in Aboulela's fiction is a critical issue. Her texts are very constructive for better understanding the re-positioning of religion in the lives of Arab Muslim women, mainly migrant Muslim women, and their roles in the intercultural and inter-religious dialogic process. The author concentrates on the viewpoint of Muslim women who feel the urgent need to re-position religion in their lives and re-construct their religious identities. Therefore, Aboulela does not speak in the name of the unification of all Muslim women; however she offers important elements to think about Muslim women's experiences in Europe so that her literary texts can help to contextualize and better our understanding of migrant Muslim women's dialogic experiences. Her main contribution is her ability to tell about the emergence of the dialogue of cultures and religions from a Muslim woman's worldview. Accordingly, through her writings, Aboulela makes us hear Muslim women's voices because to find a voice, which iseffectively heard, is essential for Muslim women's empowerment, agency right and the refinement of their religious identities. Thus, as many Muslim writers literary works, Aboulela's narratives help make Muslim women's private world to be considered and appreciated.

In addition, Aboulela's narratives, selected for this study, by offering transparent sight of the characters' experiences with religious identity and religious spirituality, also open a window on the notion of the universality as well as the particularity of Muslim women's religious experiences. Religious identity and religious spirituality that the main characters, belonging to diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds, experience in these narratives sound familiar to Muslim and some non-Muslim readers. Non-Muslim readers in their spiritual moments might

have experienced the same moments of epiphany, the same feeling of being protected by the divine care and the same feeling of happiness, experienced by Aboulela's characters in their spiritual moments, as depicted in the narratives. Similarly, in these narratives, the verses of the Quran, the space of the mosque, the sound of *azan*, or other distinctively Muslim norms and rituals, are what generate such feelings in the Muslim characters, thus making their experiences specifically Islamic.

In conclusion, this chapter shows that together these texts present a nuanced variety of challenging experiences that the characters undergo as a result of being involved in certain different religious spaces and certain romantic relations that generally lead to inter-faith reconciliation. It examines the impact of religious identity and religious spirituality on migrant Muslim protagonists' inter-religious dialogue. Therefore, the positive portrait of Islam that comes out of Aboulela's narratives has several facets. Her texts are not only the voice of Islam, but they are concerned with some authentic interpretations of Islam. More than a portrait of didactic Islam, her fiction is concerned with difficulties and opportunities of being Muslim in contemporary Europe and reflects Muslim women's dilemmas of living in-betweeness.Aboulela's narratives, discussed so far in this chapter, variously write back to popular Western perceptions about Muslim identity and experiences. Each of them, with a distinctive topic, focus and style, probes some dimensions of Muslim woman's identity and experiences that are little known to non-Muslim readers and inspiring for Muslim readers. In fact, these fictive texts contribute to the interpretation of what may appear, to many Western people, to be stagnant representations about pious Muslim women's lives. The permanent representations in all these fictional works, however, are the deep belief of the characters in the spiritual value of Islam.Indeed, Aboulela's narratives prove how a Muslim woman can be deeply committed to Islam and deeply feel happy in her life.They strongly suggest the compatibility of Muslim women's estimation of their religion and religious identity with giving importance to their national identity. At the same time, they explore the possibility of being a true adherent to Islam and a critic of specific perspectives about this religion. These perspectives held by even devout Muslim women empower them to construct flexible religious identities that pave the way to inter-religious dialogue.

General Conclusion

The present research begins with an attempt to define Anglophone migrant Muslim literature that has been at the front position of imaginatively portraying Muslim migrants' transitivity, exile, identities, family disrupted relations and religious spirituality. More importantly, it focuses on representing Muslims' migration, in all its complexity, and negotiating a great variety of different experiences and possibilities. The study also argues that though Muslim migrants' experiences may involve various negative attitudes and misinterpretations, Anglophone migrant Muslim literature shows, otherwise, that migratory experiences hold many more positive meanings to migrant Muslims' lives. Their displacement from the homeland to another country does not entail a complete disconnection with their roots and past, or prevent them from creating new living spaces. On the contrary, it empowers themto forge new bonds, participate in newconstructive experiences and establish dialogic individual relations that join together and become visible in hybrid spaces. In this essence, Anglophone migrant Muslim literature envisages radically new possibilities for migrants to append new attachments to their dislocated environments.

Accordingly, in recent years, a new wave of Muslim literary works has invaded the Western world. This increasing number of works written by Anglophone migrant Muslim writers has received even more attention since the tragedies of September, 11th, 2001, as Western readers seek to understand the Arab Muslim world and the 'Arab Muslim mind', in particular. In this respect, Anglophone migrant Muslim literature becomes, especially, important to Western readers because it avoids the need for translation, balances between East and West representations, speaks directly to English-speaking audiences about the 'Other' and portrays an authentic image of the Muslim world. Therefore, theliterary works of these writers have altered the socio-cultural and literary landscape, and thus, influencing the content of Anglophone Muslim literary expression. In this sense, with so much Anglophone Muslim writings being published in the last decade, and with more on the horizon of this literary genre, it is appropriate to review its most important discourses, reflect on its general themes, and consider its future directions. By and large, Anglophone Muslim writers bring to their literary texts new themes that reflect their migratory experiences, in-between worlds' lives and hybrid identities. In fact, their texts, which are considered as dialogic narratives, fuse the Eastern and Western cultures together and translate one of their most prominent themes, which is Muslim hybrid identities, that play a centralrole in the global cross-cultural dialogue.

It is a truth generally acknowledged that Anglophone migrant Muslim literature has become nowadays, one of the branches of contemporary Postcolonial literature. Accordingly, Anglophone migrant Muslim writers give much importance to these two themes in their works: They write about their previous life in their native lands and they depict their present experiences in the host Western country. Therefore, aiming at a cross-cultural encounter and inter-religious dialogue, these authors transgress both transnational borders and intercultural barriers through subverting the ideas of identity uniformity and Muslim homogeneity, and focusing on the different ways of representing hybridization and globalization. Therefore, the works of Anglophone migrant Muslim writers that are published in the West reflect their lives in their homelands as well as their new lives in the Western countries. The findings of this study, consequently, reveal that those migrant Muslim writers use English as a language of expression and writing to introduce their authentic traditions, cultures and customs to foreigners, and write back to Western hegemonic discourses in a subtle way. Since most of the Arab Muslim cultural elements are not intelligible and comprehensible for foreigners, these writers proceed to hybridization in their works and focus on a dialogic process in the description of their characters' lives and experiences. It is also important to mention that as migrant Muslim writers think in their own language and write in the language of the 'Other', they reflect some of their ideological, cultural, social and religious backgrounds in their works and, thus, mirror the credible stories of their societies and nations.

Undoubtedly, Anglophone Migrant Muslim Literature, in particular, envisages radically new possibilities for migrants to attach a sense of belonging and connection to their new lived spaces. To illuminate these possibilities, specific narratives from Leila Aboulela's writings have been selected. They are related to the main theme of this research and restricted to specific time frame and geographical locations because this literary genre known as 'dialogic narratives' has recently widened its scope to include various literary texts and other cultural products. It is worthy to mention that Aboulela's narratives are obvious examples of literary texts that are classified as belonging to Anglophone migrant Muslim literature since they are concerned with migration, transitivity between two different countries and third spaces. Aboulela, herself, being one of these Anglophone migrant Muslim women writers, is really a mature writer who portrays in her fiction the migratory experiences and the exilic feelings endured by migrant Muslim women. Therefore, the three main locations in Aboulela's texts are embodied in Sudan, Scotland and Egypt which are depicted as both dislocated spaces and, at the same time, contact zones and hybrid spaces. To this end, through the exploration of Aboulela’s narratives, it is demonstrated that the author emphasizes the roles of her narratives' female

characters in opening dialogic spaces and weaving hybrid relations from the perspective of female characters in various contexts.

By the same token, Aboulela's desire to write her texts in Britain and express herself in English originates from her migratory experience. As a result of this experience, she finds herself in a position where she struggles against hegemonic discourses that privilege the West as the best and devalue the Muslim world and Muslims. While in Sudan, Aboulela was aware of this dichotomy, but after leaving her country and residing in the West, she becomes more exposed to the ideas and methods through which hegemonic Western discourses, mainly the Orientalist discourse, work. In Sudan, she was in a literary prestigious position that appeals to her literary concerns and made her avoid explanations about her Islamic identity; whereas in the West, she found herself in the position of the Oriental or Muslim female Other, and her Westernized upbringing and university education in London hardly ever became visible to Western eyes, just because she wears the *hijab* that makes her Islamic identity visible. In addition, as a migrant Muslim writer who lives in an in-between space, this type of life imposes on her various difficulties which are manifested in her works and translated into obvious themes of immigration and its specific effects on migrant Muslim generations in Western societies. Therefore, the writer's ambivalence inherited from migration has to do with her double vision of two different cultures, languages and worlds.

Primarily, Leila Aboulela's literary texts are, to some extent, concerned with geographical and subconscious transitivity. Therefore, it was so important to bring notions such as journey, dreams, memories and nostalgia as literary strategies in the analysis of such texts. Generally, critics refer to the characters' subconscious journeys in the texts written by this author as a literary strategy for transitivity, but they also hint to the actual journeys that set the conditions for the production of such texts that are clearly influenced by and influencing migrant Muslim literature and Muslim travel literature as well. Therefore, it is also important to notice that the themes of these texts are also read as giving us attitudes and impressions about the perception of the Muslim migrants' journeys, their transitivity and in-between spaces in general. As a result, these journeys offer these works their specificity and local color among the canonical works of literature since these texts are entirely different narratives set in-between different contexts.

Aboulela's narratives are also partly romantic narratives to guide the reader to such interconnections which have always existedamidst the polarizations between the two worlds in the past and present. These polarizations, that have been reflected in the oppositions of 'Self' and 'Other', East

and West, and Muslim and 'Secular', have deeply affected Leila Aboulela on two sides. The first side is her personal life and migratory experiences, and the second side is the lives and experiences of her migrant Muslim characters that have been always found between two different worlds and cultures. Therefore, the results of this study show that, through her narratives, Aboulela conveys to the reader the message that the building of dialogic bridges happens when people occupy contact zones and promote their hybrid consciousness.

In this vein, Leila Aboulela's texts, probed in this thesis, do not only tackle transitivity as a superficial concept, instead, they dive deeply into the dilemmas of the migrants' transitivity and the relationship between their old and new occupied places. More explicitly, the migrant protagonists, in these texts, construct a sense of belonging to their diasporic contexts which vary culturally and geographically. This sense of belonging can be manifested either as a positive feeling entailing a sense of home and stability, or as a dilemmic sentiment that requires a way of discovering and adjusting. In each possible status, the sense of belonging stems from specific places that help these migrants feel safe and accept their new surroundings with their various dimensions, being cultural, social, psychological or other dimensions. It is in such places that migrants shape social connections, friendships and communal relations. And it is in these same places that they navigate their daily lives, negotiate their homesickness and longing for their motherlands, and indulge their personal memories that contribute firmly to their stability and adaptation to their new environments.

In Aboulela's narratives, migrants ascribe their belonging into their new geographical and cultural context by bringing the left behind homeland closer by hallucinations, dreams and memories that open up possibilities for new circumstances. Through their dreams and memories, her protagonists continually flash back to distant locations in their homelands and previous events in their lives. Therefore, the language used for describing such places and feelings, and the stream of consciousness technique, that is variously used to articulate these nostalgic moments, are also similar in all the narratives. The poetic language and the sensory memory which Aboulela uses in such nuanced details, serve to bring the far places closer. Subsequently, these sensory memories and nostalgic moments are not only a context of the past, but they obviously situate the characters in a particular present. In all these cases, the new places emerge not only as belonging locations in migrant individuals' lives, but also as bases of aspiration that stimulate their experiences to merge and reshape their identities to become visible in these specific new places. As a result, there is a connection, which is so much part of a postcolonial context, between the current domicile of migration and the past remote home.

Responding to that connection, Aboulela proposes a new notion of home in her texts. Though she describes nostalgia in her texts as melancholy throughout distances and disconnection between places and times, she repeatedly reminds the reader that finding a meaning of home and belonging is possible even in foreign terrains.According to her, home is a spiritual feeling of belonging rather than a geographical place, and thereby, she insists on the importance of left behind and remembered territories that help shape the characters' sense of self-discovery, self-assuredness, and identity re-formation in an alien setting. On that account, she illustrates, through her fiction, how these elsewhere lands offer an atmosphere for evaluation of the secular values and the understanding of Western modernism as well as the assessment of the migrants' authentic beliefs and their past lives in their native lands.

On the whole, this study is not a mere demarcation of Muslim women's migratory experiences and their complex dilemmas in foreign contexts; rather it sheds light on a specific angle that was so far neglected in studies about Anglophone Muslim writings, which is migrant Muslim women's hybrid identities and their dialogic roles in cross-cultural and inter-religious dialogues. Therefore, reading between the lines of Aboulela's selected texts in this thesis reveals, firstly, that their main focus is writing back to Western hegemonic discourses about Islam and Muslims, mainly migrant Muslim women, through re-representation of Muslim women, revisiting the distorted image of Islam, the challenge of negative stereotypes and the refutation of Islamophobia discourse; and secondly, they dealwith Muslim women's experiences within their indigenous communities, mainly their struggle to maintain family relations, generational gap-bridging, fighting against patriarchal practices and negotiating between history and contemporarity. Additionally, Aboulela is well known for her fiction that stands in defense of Islam and Muslim women and translates events of an African past into the present, where these events combine with Muslim women's recent experiences in the host country, offering the reader glimpses into multiple worlds and cultures. Hence, Aboulela's writings express her Islamic womanism through multiple discourses and various speaking positions.

Correspondingly, within this thesis, a range of essential and significant points are highlighted. Paying due regard to Leila Aboulela’s literary works, this thesis critically investigates her narratives that open wide windows on both Muslim women's experiences, their representations in popular Western discourses, and the stereotyped image of Islam as a patriarchal and violent religion in dealing with women. In this context, Leila Aboulela adopts feminist thoughts to defy patriarchal practices and defend Muslim women’s important positions in various contexts. Through her writings, she manages to debunk Muslim women's inferior representations, to challenge the monolithic descriptions of Muslim

women's identities and to reveal the complexities of their identities and experiences. Therefore, the strength of these narratives lies in the nuanced descriptions, which revisit the de-familiarized British life and the reversal of power relations between the main characters, where the empowered Arab Muslim woman challenges the negative stereotypes and forges dialogic relations with the 'Other'. In fact, the narratives create a 'feminized space' in which they question Western cultural imperialism and write back to Western vilified discourses, but also seek to define a dialogic Islamic discourse that enables Muslim women protagonists to find a modern Islamic frame to their lives.

In this same regard, Aboulela's characters negotiate the promises of a Westernized life versus their acceptance of their under-estimated images. They insist on their Islamic identities and self-representation in order to be involved in western life, but not as assimilated British citizens, but as Muslims with powerful flexible hybrid identities and distinctive dialogic efficiencies. To this end, these texts provide a range of possibilities of the dialogic inter-religious bridges that narrow the distances between the two binaries and reject the Islamophobic view presented by the reports that stigmatize Muslims as extremists and Arab Muslim women as the victims of an oppressive religion. Thus, this study can be considered as a modestcontribution in the field of studies of fiction written by a Muslim woman, from a feminist lens, about migrant Muslim women experiences and their representations.

For the purpose of this study, the ways in which the emergent body of Aboulela's texts deals with the change in the scene of dominant representations around Muslim women are explored. Such representations mostly focus on a diverged conception of their oppression and victimization by the patriarchal restraints and/or the emancipation propaganda from such restraints through moving to the West and adopting Western values and lifestyles. These simplistic representations have become more intense when considered in the context of post September, 11th terrorist attacks and concerns about the rise of Islamic extremism. In fact, by way of comparison and contrast, I focused on Leila Aboulela's narratives which adopt new critical interpretations about Muslim women's images and identities, especially the discourse of Arab Muslim women empowerment and the rational concerns of the role of religion in their identities' formation. However, these narratives' focus on Muslim woman's empowerment discourse, aims at destabilizing patriarchal domination and shattering the propaganda of Western emancipation.

Clearly, a globalized discourse about Muslim women's emancipation has emerged in recent years. This has propagated the precisely enclose image of Muslim women as the veiled oppressed victims, mainly migrant Muslim women. Therefore, Aboulela's narratives portray the importance and the function of religion in migrant Muslim women's lives, especially in the public sphere in Europe, and serve to rebut the propaganda of the exportation of freedom and democracy to the Islamic world. Nevertheless, Aboulela's writings do not speak in the name of all Muslim women, they just add Islamic voices and perspectives that make European readers more familiar with female paths in an Islamic framework; and show how Muslim women play a prominent role in this process. By reaching a wide public and not only specialist readers or scholars, her narratives have the benefit of letting Europeans, Muslim and non-Muslim, come to terms with the choices of Muslim women who have been disgraced and misrepresented after September, 11th attacks.

But more important is the fact that the investigation of Muslim women's representations in Aboulela's narratives reveals that these representations continue to reinforce the mainstream stereotypical views about the victimhood of Muslim women. It also illuminates that the Orientalist discourse is still persistent in such contemporary representations and other literary productions. Therefore, for the sake of this research, it has been argued that although some of these texts hint to the negative experiences of some Muslim women, these experiences need to be assessed critically because their promote dominance and prevalence suggest that the discourses that prevail them shape the dominant understandings about Muslim women. In this way, a major commonality among Aboulela's narratives is the representation of Muslim women's religious identities and experiences as complex rather than monolithic. In this sense, each narrative emphasizes one of the aspects of Muslim women's identities, not usually depicted in dominant Western representations that generally restrict them within gender stereotypes.

Similarly, this thesis contributes to the ongoing discussion around Muslim women's gender representations, gender roles and gender identities. It focuses, mainly, on Aboulela’s portraits of Muslim women's gendered identities and their contemporary literary representations in the West. The findings of this study disclose this growing area of Aboulela's texts that aim to explore some key factors in Arab Muslim women's gender perceptions and the factors influencing the construction of their gendered identities. However, as the thesis was completed, Muslim women's gendered identities are still firmly embedded in many Western representations, and these epithets still intensify the complexities of their migrant experiences and lives. Therefore, further research is needed in this area,

particularly because migrant Muslim women's lives are highly diverse since they are specifically impacted by their locations within various nationalities, ethnicities and classes

It is also worth mentioning that although this thesis does not directly deal with Muslim women's struggle against patriarchy and gender inequality, that is to say, it is not a dedicated feminist research project, it can still be considered that these literary explorations are based on the premises of feminism. In fact, this research is interested in a more extended version of Islamic feminism, a feminism that accommodates the commitments of displacement, Islamic family and religion as integral to Muslim women's identities, and attaches a great significance to the perception of devout Muslim women. In this sense, Aboulela's works, introduced in this thesis, are about Muslim women who take pride in their cultural, ethnic and religious identities and reject both patriarchal practices and Western feminist hegemonic attitudes toward them. They call for a Muslim feminist consciousness and the refusal of the 'Western emancipatory tale' that promotes Muslim woman's victimization and oppression.

Accordingly, this deep investigated study also has its limitations. Its main focus is Muslim women's representations, their hybrid identities and dialogic experiences in various cultural contexts with brief hints to Muslim men's representations and experiences that are, of course, inseparable from those of women, and thus, it remains a research field for investigation by other researchers. These narratives that are rich with various themes can also be criticized from a different singularly feminist point of view by other researchers in order to examine the extent to which these texts succeed in portraying authentic images of Muslim women, migrants or locals, and their roles in constructing hybrid identities and cross-cultural dialogic bridges.

Another point that is tackled in this thesis, which is worthy of note, is that challenging Western hegemonic discourses in these narratives, through debunking the falsified images and the negative stereotypes is not certainly a mere reactive action. Rather, in order to counter the vilifications and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims, the narratives do not just unveil the falsification of these images, but they also show the most positive elements of Muslim communities. Aboulela's narratives do not dehumanize those narrow-minded Muslim people who represent Muslims and they do not portray a black-and-white or a perfect picture of Muslims. Her narratives, on the contrary, through focalization and other narrative techniques, including free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness, which allow the readers' engagement and even sympathy with the characters and their inner thoughts, represent Muslim people as complex human beings with their wickedness and

goodness. Therefore, in these literary works, an important feature of challenging the stereotypes involves humanizing the stereotyped person without resorting to idealization. Such humanization of Muslim communities is in line with the theme of the possibility of the direct attachment of the importance of Muslims' identities and experiences to the critique of Muslims' stereotypes and distorted images. Indeed, Aboulela's narratives are perhaps the clearest response in this regard because, throughher protagonists, she robustly questions the validity of such representations and definitively rejects them.

Earlier in her narratives, Aboulela also challenges other stereotypes about Muslim women, especially the stereotype as being the 'exotic Others'. Against this image, her texts introduce migrant Muslim women as familiar in spite of their devotion to their religion and the complexities of their identities and experiences. They strictly show that these women's identities and experiences are compatible and reconcilable within Western societies where they still forge identities that negate neither their religious nor their national orientations. Indeed, Aboulela's narratives offer more nuanced depiction of Muslim people's co-existence in the West. Thanks to these works, we hopefully get a Muslim women's worldview unknown to most Western people and get along with private and public lives of Muslim women who have multiple affiliations and who are devout and modern at the same time.

As a further matter, through these writings, the reader follows the Muslim women's important issues, mainly as they negotiate issues of marriage and family, their engagement in social relations and sharing professional and domestic spaces, all of which takes place in their homelands or in a foreign country. It is also through these writings that these inhabited places are depicted as ordinary places of home, not as inherently oppressive ones as have been pictured by Media distorted discourses and stereotypical gendered pictures. Moreover, these apparently inhabited places emerge as multi-dimensional spaces with various meanings. They are depicted as safe places for Muslim women who occupy them and ascribe them soothing and empowering effects that help them establish a personal sense of home and belonging within the foreign land. Hence, these new inhabited places manifest as novel domestic spaces, individual achievements, dialogic memories, religious practices and flexible identities that attach these women to their new environments. As a result, Aboulela's narratives unveil the authentic image of the veil migrant Muslim woman and her strong attachment to her cultural and religious backgrounds.

Additionally, the narratives selected for this study refer to another set of realities and discourses in relation to Islam and Muslim women. They portray Muslim women's commitment to Islam and, atthe same time, their eagerness to live fulfilling lives with flexible hybrid identities. In fact, these texts, as I have attempted to show, challenge the dualistic discourse about Muslim women and imply that cherishing Muslim identity is compatible with Muslim women's choices and self-satisfaction. Again, they suggest that being devout Muslims also affords women a sense of their religious belonging and reflects that caring for their Muslim dogma is adequate with being devout citizens in a secular state. They depict the complementarity between the affection of Muslim identity and their self-reflexibility about their religious identity and its effect on their way of life. Lastly, they explore that individual commitment to Islam and the possibility of a rationally-based interpretation of religious perspectives is compatible.

The results of this study also show that how Leila Aboulela's narratives represent the rootedness of Muslim women's religious identities and how these women choose the religious trend over the secular way of life. Through highlighting how a religious way of life affects these women's lives positively, these choices themselves are considered as important clues of writing back to the discourses that expose Islam as a violent religion imposed on Muslim women or marginal to Muslim women's lives. Therefore, in this thesis I attempted to show other, more direct ways, through which Aboulela's fiction counters dominant discourses on Islam, Muslim woman and Muslim communities. As to the point about writing back in Aboulela's novels, her narratives write back at different levels, including paratexts, delicate characterization, dynamic plots and the creation of alternative images of Islamic symbols. An important part of her fiction can be referred to as a self-conscious counter-narrative. Thus, the religious epithet is so prevalent in Aboulela's works that in many cases descriptions other than writing back suit what the narrative does. However, it is apparent that Aboulela's works still write back to Western hegemonic discourses since the religious episteme, integral to her work, is represented in preference to the secular epistemology.

Accordingly, this thesis follows Aboulela's migrant Muslim women who struggle to reconcile their new migratory experiences with increasingly devoted religious values in the foreign contexts. The Muslim migrant's turning to religion in face of alienation features clearly in Aboulela's narratives since, as a Muslim woman, she perceives Islam as a positive space for personal growth. According to her, Islam provides migrant Muslim women with an identity with which they can negotiate a space of theirown in an often different environment. For some readers, the promotion of religion as the vehicle

for cross-cultural understanding might not be convincing as it leaves little room for negotiation. However, Aboulela remains firmly within an Islamic world view, focusing on the idea that religion offers support to migrant Muslim women in their foreign contexts. Her texts suggest that faith relates directly to the emotional and psychological security of her characters as it is a part of their everyday lives. For her characters, the repetition of religious rituals with the added dimension of faith, asserting that God will be always by their side, provide the migrant with solid comfort. For Aboulela's protagonists, these simple rituals function as self-conscious dialogic moments so that in the absence of religious rituals and the community of believers, the migrant feels isolated and lost within the foreign community. As a result, Aboulela's perception of this religious community is explicitly positive and, according to her, communal expression of faith creates belonging and opens a space for inter-religious dialogue. It is, therefore, not surprising that Aboulela stresses the role of religion as the solution to the disorientation of migration and, as she sees it, the beliefs of co-existence in Islam will ensure the cohesiveness of the migrant Muslim women's dialogic relationships.

Interestingly, this dissertation demonstrates how these multiple portraits of Arab Muslim female identities are positioned into hybrid spaces and dialogic zones, at an intersection of a complex intertwined web of national, cultural, ethnic, class and gender relations. These multiple portraits underline the challenges that contemporary migrant Muslim women face in their daily lives and their unremitting efforts to forge new positive cross-cultural and transnational bonds. As shown before, whether in 'authentic' or ’re-visualized' portraits, these challenges reflect women's paradoxical positions in their respective societies and foreign ones. As 'bearers of traditions' and at the same time 'agents of modernity', Arab Muslim women are conventionally expected by their societies to interact, to differing degrees, with their national, cultural, religious, social affiliations as well as preserving them, whereas in Western societies, migrant Muslim women are expected to adjust to the cultural norms and values of the host country and transcend the boundaries of their traditional values. Consequently, linked to the concept of border-crossing, an array of intercultural and inter- religious interconnections has been investigated in Aboulela's narratives and the socio-cultural tensions in which these interconnections developed and still developing are also emphasized through her characters various voices.

The major contribution of the present study is also the claim that Aboulela's texts help render Muslim women recognizable to Western and non-Muslim readers, who presumably constitute a good percentage of the readers of her fiction. Through debunking some distorted images and under-estimated perceptions of Muslim women's identities and experiences, her narratives highlight that dark angle in

Muslim women's lives. As a sharp response to those vilifications, Muslim women are portrayed, in her texts, as familiar, rather than as 'exotic Others' and as powerful, modern and pioneers as opposite to weak, traditional, and backwards labels. Significantly, these women are presented as familiar to Western readers in these texts in spite of the fact that they are not perceived as fully involved into Western contexts. Therefore, the texts insist on the possibility of preserving their distinct qualities as devout Muslim women and being simultaneously recognizable to Western readers. Also, Aboulela's aim is achieved through pointing out, in her texts, to different aspects of Muslim women's lifestyles and worldviews in an attempt to help readers empathize with her characters who shares different experiences from the readers' own ones. Eventually, although the texts variously and to different degrees mobilize Muslim women's identities, this mobilization results in stressing their compatibility, rather than their irreconcilable differences. Hence, migrant Muslim women's experiences, in these texts, are laminated by significant dialogic meanings.

Aboulela, further, manipulates specific key narrative techniques that help her achieve the simultaneous critique and humanization of the Muslim characters in her narratives. Through the use of the special focalization of characters, she manages to convey an accurate description of her characters and various events of her texts. Focalization in her texts is multiple and alternating between different characters; but, the main focalizers in her narratives are the female protagonists. Also, with free indirect discourse, her narrators report the characters' preverbal words and feelings using their own idiolects and expressions. Then, through focalization and this special narrative mode, the reader is given an access to the thoughts and feelings of many characters without having the authorial voice to interfere and comment on them directly. In this way, different groups with different ideologies are allowed to appear without the narrative’s explicitly supporting or condemning any of them. At the same time, the capacity of free indirect discourse to show both the dialogic and the implied empathetic attitude of the author toward the characters, highlights the narratives' multi-layered depiction of the characters. Therefore, Aboulela's narratives introduce a variety of Muslim people, especially women, who all, from the devout character to the non-practicing one or almost secular, cherish the Islamic identity. Eventually, these narratives grant strong voices to those characters to express and re-represent themselves as not narrow-minded Muslims or extremists or terrorists. Instead, they are Muslims with flexible views and dialogic pacific discourses.

In general, I have argued in this thesis that Aboulela's narratives implicitly subvert the dominant negative discourses about Islam and Muslims. They deconstruct the racist ideology that sets a

monolithic Islam in contrast to the West or the Eurocentric concept of the exotic Other. Therefore, they embody a different discourse that emphasizes the central role of Islam in Muslims' lives, especially for Muslim women as being empowering and supporting for them. Through the representations of the characters' positive experiences with their religion, the narratives provide a strong support for the argument that Muslim identity is not vacant. Rather, from practicing and observing perspective, they are devout Muslim characters depicted as satisfied with their way of life and religion. These characters, with their experiences and worldviews, have the right to exist, to be appreciated, recognized and respected. Comprehending their way of life and attitudes means accepting the idea that there are many ways of being in the world, each important in its own way.

In this vein, the results of this research reveal that hybridization and the dialogic discourse are prevalent in Aboulela's texts. Though Aboulela's narratives are written with instances where the identification between-worlds status remains dilemmic as long as it swings between personal interest and socio-cultural membership, the writer's appropriate dialogic strategies and various forms of hybridity are strongly linked to concepts of third space, contact zone, hybrid identity and representation. In this sense, her writings tell stories of displacement, exile, in-betweeness and instability of people who are in a constant search for roots, but, at the same time, by gliding away from national bias, ethnic stratification and religious fanaticism, her texts open various possibilities of transnational border-crossing,inter-religious dialogue and cross-cultural exchange.

Accordingly, this study reveals that Aboulela’s dialogic narratives play an important role in today's cultural exchange. At one, they popularize Arab Muslim culture to non-Muslim readers through creating hybrid spaces for the different dislocated characters in foreign societies, and forging dialogic relations within both native and foreign communities. They also contribute to the dialogue of cultures through their dynamic plots, dialogic spaces for inter-cultural and intra-cultural relations; and the deconstruction of negative discourses of clash of civilizations, ready-made prejudices and the hegemonic discourses of East/West dualism. Therefore, she contributes to the dialogue of cultures and creates hybrid spaces in-between worlds and cultures respectively, in spite of all the underlying tensions. For this reason, through these literary works, Aboulela argues that the gaps between dichotomies can be bridged if misconceptions and incommunicability are erased and a space for dialogue between the two worlds is opened. It is through cross-cultural encounters, third spaces, hybrid identities and communicability that the author creates dialogic situations where new relationships between characters from different backgrounds become possible. She also demonstrates, through these

situations, where communication exists across seemingly unbridgeable boundaries, that people might be more embraceable of diversity than society at large seems to expect. Thus, the main contribution of these writngs in the worldwide literary scene is the negotiation of a range of challenges to bring the opposite cultural and religious binaries to a meeting point.

On the whole, this thesis focuses on a selection of Leila Aboulela's works, and argues that, due to their intense involvement with the Islamic religion and spirituality, they create inter-religious dialogic relations almost unprecedented in English literature. I argue in this thesis that the selected novels and short stories can be described as Islamic dialogic inter-faith narratives in the larger space of Anglophone Muslim literature because they represent Muslim spaces and inter-faith relations in a range of different dialogic ways. They relentlessly validate the spirituality of their female characters and argue for an inter-religious dialogue through religious reconciliation and the challenge of Islamophobia. In fact, these creative and expressive writings also contribute to the world's inter-religious dialogue as they call for the erasure of inter-religious misunderstandings, and the promotion of inter-religious comprehensibility and tolerance.

Consequently, Aboulela's sense of flexible religious identity and religious spirituality can be located in an in-between framework. Her narratives eloquently speak of the need to open up to different cultures and environments in a way reminiscent of Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Their explicit demand for hybridity, cross-cultural dialogue is strongly felt in her writings. However, itis crucial to perceive that apart from cultural exchange, Aboulela also writes in favour of inter-religious reconciliation that focuses not only on religious compromise and comprehensibility but also draws on religious spirituality. Through her texts, in other words, runs the more or less explicit belief in a humanism that overrides the particularities of religious difference. While it may seem a paradox, the apparent contradiction can be reconciled by once Aboulela's obsession with the intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is given the critical attention it merits.

Generally speaking, I hope that the reader leaves this reading experience with the desire to reconsider contemporary Anglophone Muslim women writers' texts through a transnational hybrid and dialogic lens. Through this lens, this dissertation demonstrates how the relationship between 'centre' and 'margin' , which is prevalent in European academia and literary criticism in various forms, such as gender discourses, representations, religious identities, political ideologies, becomes fully problematized in the works of Anglophone Muslim writers . The chapters of this thesis, by focusing on

the significance of the in-between spaces , hybridity and dialogue in Aboulela's texts, assert the possibility of co-existence of the diverse and multiple cultural divides and the ultimate fading away of hatred discourses in contemporary Anglophone Muslim women's writings.Thus, it is my double hope that the reader will accept this thesis results that Aboulela's fictivewritings and their attribution to both so-called 'Postcolonial literature' or 'migrant Muslim Literature' forge dialogic relations and hybrid contexts through their figurative language.

In concluding this thesis, it can be said that Anglophone Migrant Muslim Literature inevitably arises from migrant Muslims' lives and experiences. Belonging to this type of literature, Leila Aboulela's narratives are mirrors that reflect the authentic image of Migrant Muslim women and their struggle in their exiles.The journey through her fiction reveals migrant Muslim women's transitivity between multiple worlds and cultures and the depth of their socio-cultural and religious dilemmas.Thanks to these works of fiction, such as Aboulela's, migrant Muslim women's dialogic experiences and hybrid identities are brought closer to both Muslim and non-Muslim readers. Nevertheless, the subject of migrant Muslim women's hybrid identities and dialogic experiences is still an opened field of research for further investigation and study by otherwriters.

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Appendices

Appendix One

Biography of Leila Aboulela

Leila Aboulela is a Sudanese writer who writes in English in addition to an MSc and an MPhil degree in Statistics from the London School of Economics. She was born in 1964 in Cairo, Egypt and raised in Khartoum, Sudan of an Egyptian mother (who was the Sudan's first-ever female demographer) and a Sudanese father. She was brought up and educated in Khartoum in a private American school and she graduated from the University of Khartoum in 1985 with a degree in economics.

The economic crisis in Sudan and concern for her growing family led Aboulela to move to Britain in her mid-twenties in 1987 and live in London. There, she attended the London School of Economics and obtained her degrees in statistics. In 1990, Aboulela and her family moved to Scotland,where she lectured in Statistics and worked as a part-time research assistant.For many years, she lived in Aberdeen, which is where she becomes an avid reader and started her writing career while looking after her children. It was also there where she started to wear hijab which becomes an indication of Leila's comfort with overt expression of her faith and beliefs which are so interwoven into her characters and narratives.

Living in exile inspired Aboulela to begin writing her stories in 1992. These stories were first broadcast on BBC Radio and published shortly thereafter. Later, she has written several short stories, including *The Museum*(2001), which earned her the first-ever Caine Prize for African Writing. Her first novel, *The Translator* (1999), was long-listed for the Orange Prize for Fiction and shortlisted for the PEN/Macmillan Silver Pen Award. Her second novel, *Minaret*, was published in 2005. She has also written several radio play broadcasts, including *The Mystic Life* (2003) and *The Lion of Chechnya* (2005).Her third saga family novel,*Lyrics Alley*, was published in 2011. Aboulela moves with her husband who works on oilrigs between different countries: Egypt, Jakarta, Dubai, London, Aberdeen and Doha between 2000 and 2012. She currently lives in Aberdeen with her family.

Appendix Two

Synopsis of *The Translator*

Leila Aboulela's first novel, *The Translator*, has been long-listed for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Awards 2001, the Orange Prize 2000 and short-listed for the Saltire Prize. It has been translated into Spanish, German, Dutch and other languages. The plot of the novel centers on a love story between the female protagonist, Sammar, a young Muslim veiled Sudanese widow living in Aberdeen, and the male protagonist, Rae Isles who is a twice-divorced Islamic scholar and an open-minded Scottish academic in the Middle Eastern Studiesand Third World politics. Born as an intellectual and spiritual relationship in a diasporic context, Rae and Sammar's romantic story develops between Scotland and Sudan, and tells of the meeting of two different cultures, which concludes with Rae's conversion to Islam.

The first part of the novel portrays the female protagonist's life in Scotland where she was born. When she was seven, her Sudanese parents, who hold a British nationality, decided to return to Sudan with her and her brother (Waleed). It is there where she met her cousins Tarig and Hanan, the children of her paternal aunt, Mahasen. She eventually marries Tarig and returns to Scotland once more with him to pursue his studies in medicine, and they have a son called Amir. After Tarig's death in a car crash, Sammar was obliged to return to Khartoum to bury him. There, Sammar is accused by her aunt and mother-in-law, Mahasen, for the death of her son because she forced him to buy the car to escape the British weather. In order to avoid this turmoil, Sammar has to leave her only son in Khartoum with her auntand to return to Aberdeen alone. During this time, she is employed as a translator in Rae's university department in Aberdeen and day by day, a life-changing love relationship starts between them. Though their love is reciprocated, they have a problem because Rae is not Muslim, and for Sammar, this marriage is possible only if he converts to her religion. After his initial refusal to convert, Sammar goes back to Khartoum where she lives in her in-laws' house with her son and works to gain her living. Eventually, the novel comes to a close after Rae's conversion to Islam and his arrangement with Sammar to get married and come back to Scotland.

Synposis of *Coloured Lights*

The book is a collection of thirteen short stories, it was first published in 2001 under the title of the first short story *Coloured Lights.* But each story has its own plot independent of the other stories.The collection includes: *Coloured Lights,Souvenirs, Visitors,The Ostrich, The Boy from the Kebab Shop, Tuesday Lunch,Make your Own Way Home Alone, The Museum, Majed,Baby Love ,' Something Old, Something New', Days Rotate, Radia's Carpet.*Most of the short stories in this collection, then, are an important example of alternative representations of Muslim women's experiences and dilemmas in a Western and native contexts. The narratives work to persuade readers that the female protagonists' self-understanding and self-development to a great extent depend on their coming to terms with their hybrid and flexible religious identities. Aboulela, thus,foregrounds, in these short stories, the Muslim identity of the female protagonists and shares many of the qualities of the other novels, such as writing back to dominant discourses about Islam and exploring different aspects of the religious identities of Muslim women.

However, it can be argued that The *Museum* is the most famous one and the most complex of all her short stories.Aboulela was awarded the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000 for this short story which went on to be short-listed for the Macmillan/Silver PEN award. Along with a depiction of Africa in a European museum for both African and non-African people, a more critical engagement with Muslim migrant communities and Muslim women's identities than the other short stories, so that criticism and empathy go hand in hand in representing Muslim and African issues.This short story is challenging to read with two main characters, differing points of view, representations and historical backgrounds. It is best read as a story of interconnecting histories, ambitions and dreams.

Synopsis of *Minaret*

Leila Aboulela's second novel *Minaret*(2005) follows the spiritual journey of a young Muslim woman and her journey with her family from her home in Sudan to London. In this novel, Aboulela writes the story of Najwa, another Sudanese woman who is the daughter of a high government official and an upper-class family and who grows up in Khartoum in a privileged secular and Western environment.

In 1985, when sheis nineteen years old, she is forced by a military coup that leads to her father's arrestment and execution, into political exile to London where she settles with her mother and her twin brother, Omar. In this new city, her life changes radically after a series of terrible events (her mother's death for leukaemia, and her brother's imprisonment on drug charge). Finding herself alone without her family, the female protagonist faces a new life far from the comforts of her privileged childhood and secular education, and therefore, she supports herself as a maid caring for the children of wealthy Arab families.

Though this upper-class Westernized Sudanese woman's dreams were to marry well and raise a family, the men with whom she falls in love, her atheist ex-boyfriend Anwar, before, and the Egyptian religious Tamer,the younger brother of her employer, later, are not able to give her the new family she needs. Consequently, in the loneliness of her exile and the struggle to establish a new sense of identity, she turns to religion, wears the *hijab* and Islam becomes the only relief to her sudden difficulties and great solitude. Through her growing faith, she discovers a new community, a new peace and an unexpected power to deal with her everyday problems. Written with directness and force, *Minaret* is a lyric and insightful novel about Islam and an alluring glimpse into a culture Westerners are only just beginning to understand.

Synopsis of Lyrics Alley

Leila Aboulela's third novel, *Lyrics Alley*, set against a political backdrop of a 1950's Sudanand a country on the brink of change as British rule nears its end. It is inspired by the stories about her uncle, Awad Aboulela, told to her by her father during her visit toSudan and while spending some time with him.Itbeautifully depicts the life of a son of an affluent Sudanese family,who becomes a well-known poet in Sudan after an accident that causes him a total paralysis.

The novel recounts a family saga about the story of the Abuzeid family which is a wealthy, powerful clan, but it struggles between the traditions of the past and present modernization and the transition from a colonized country to an independent one. In this novel, Aboulela unveils the rich and complex world of a Sudanese patriarch who presides over a household containing two wives (Wahiba and Nabilah), various nieces, four children all living in a new world full of patriarchal paradoxes, gendered identities and modern ambitions. She also portrays the coexistence of tradition and modernity through Mahmood Abuzeid's two wives who embody the country's past and future: his first wife, Waheeba, represents traditional Sudan, believing in the evil eye and living in her *hoash* (open-air courtyard), whereas his second wife, Nabilah, with her sophisticated dress and suite in the villa, represents the urbane Westernised future that Sudan embraces.

However, after his son Nur's accident, they become equally matched and by the end of the novel, when Waheeba rises to the challenge of caring for Nur and supporting his literary gatherings, she becomes indispensable and proves that modernity and tradition coexist. Rather than a cultural sob story, the novel is, on one level, about human aspiration. All the characters are striving for a better life, as they see it. They all have to make decisions about what to sacrifice and compromise on, and their decisions affect the other characters. On another level, Aboulela offers the warmth and deep meaning of Muslim family life, and of Islam's great usefulness in individuals' lives.

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"تجارب حوارية: مناقشة تجارب النساء المسلمات ومعضلات الانتقال والعائلة والروحانية الدينية في روايات ليلى أبو العلا"

الملخص:

يعد الأدب الإسلامي المهاجر الناطق باللغة الإنجليزية مجالًا غنيًا للمعرفة حول المسلمين بشكل عام وحياة النساء المسلمات المهاجرات بشكل خاص. في الواقع، يعتبر هذا الادب مصدر رئيسي لدراسة تجارب النساء المسلمات المهاجرات. انطلاقا من عمق معضلات الانتقال و العلاقات الاسرية المضطربة والروحانية الدينية التي تعيشها النساء المسلمات المهاجرات، يناقش البحث الحالي التجارب الحوارية للمغتربات المسلمات في روايات الكاتبة السودانية ليلى أبو العلا التالية: المترجمة (1999)، المئذنة (2005) وزقاق الأغاني (2011) ومجموعتها القصصية المعنونة الاضواء الملونة (2001). وقد تجسدت مفاهيم الحوار والتهجين والفضاء الثالث في هذه الاطروحة لتسليط الضوء على الحالة البينية للبطلات وكيفية اعادة تشكيل وعيهم الهجين. من خلال الأحلام والذكريات والحنين، تم تصوير انتقالهن بين عالمين مختلفين للإشارة إلى الانتقال عبرالحدود، والروابط الحوارية، والجسور الحوارية البناءة بين الثقافات. وعليه ومن خلال اعتماد منهج تحليلي نقدي نوعي يرتكز على منظور نسوي إسلامي ونظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، يناقش هذا البحث تمثيل النساء المسلمات المهاجرات و خطاب التمكين الذي ياكد على هوياتهن الهجينة و ادوارهن الحوارية داخل الفضاءات البينية. كما يفتح افاقا جديدة لنضالهن ضد التصورات الجنسانية و الممارسات الابوية و خطابات الهيمنة الغربية التي تصورهم كضحايا مضطهدين لثقافتهم ودينهم. وردا على هذه الخطابات، تفضح ليلى أبو العلا في رواياتها خطاب الاسلاموفوبيا وخطاب الحجاب، وتؤكد على امكانية الحوار بين الاديان مع تبني هوية دينية مرنة.

كلما ت مفتاحيه: الحوار الثقافي – الانتقال - الهوية الهجينة – المساحات البينية - الروحانية الدينية

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Expériences dialogiques : Négociation des expériences des femmes musulmanes et les dilemmes de la transitivité, de la famille et de la spiritualité religieuse dans les récits de Leila Aboulela."

Résumé :

Anglophone migrant Muslim literature has become a rich field of knowledge about Muslims in general and migrant Muslim women's lives in particular. Indeed, it is a major source of investigation of Muslim women's migratory experiences. Starting from the depth of migrant Muslim women's dilemmas of transitivity, family distrupted relations and religious spirituality, the current study is an examination of Muslim women expatriates' dialogic experiences in the Sudanese author Leila Aboulela's novels: *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) and *Lyrics Alley* (2011) and her collection of short stories entitled *Coloured Lights* (2001). The notions of exile, dialogism, hybridity and third space are embodied in this thesis to highlight the female protagonists' inbetween states and the reshaping of their hybrid consciousness. Through dreams, memories and nostalgia, their transitivity between two different worlds is depicted to hint to their transnational border-crossing, dialogic connections and constructive cross-cultural bridges. Consequently, by adopting a qualitative critical analytical approach based on an Islamic feminist perspective and postcolonial theory, this research work discusses migrant Muslim women's representations and the empowerment discourse that stress their hybrid identities and dialogic roles within their interstitial spaces and open new avenues for their postcolonial resistance against gender perceptions, patriachal practices, and western hegemonic discourses that distort their image as being victims of their oppressed culture and religion.Writing back to these discourses, Leila Aboulela debunks, in her narratives, the Islamophobia and the veiling discourses and emphasises the possibility of flexible Muslim identity and inter-religious dialogue.

Mots Clés : Dialogue culturel - Transitivité - Identité hybride -Espaces interstitiels - Spiritualité religieuse.

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Dialogic Experiences: Negotiating Muslim Women's Experiences and Dilemmas of Transitivity, Family and Religious Spirituality in Leila Aboulela's Narratives."

Abstract:

Anglophone migrant Muslim literature has become a rich field of knowledge about Muslims in general and migrant Muslim women's lives in particular. Indeed, it is a major source of investigation of Muslim women's migratory experiences. Starting from the depth of migrant Muslim women's dilemmas of transitivity, family distrupted relations and religious spirituality, the current study is an examination of Muslim women expatriates' dialogic experiences in the Sudanese author Leila Aboulela's novels: *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) and *Lyrics Alley* (2011) and her collection of short stories entitled *Coloured Lights* (2001). The notions of exile, dialogism, hybridity and third space are embodied in this thesis to highlight the female protagonists' inbetween states and the reshaping of their hybrid consciousness. Through dreams, memories and nostalgia, their transitivity between two different worlds is depicted to hint to their transnational border-crossing, dialogic connections and constructive cross-cultural bridges. Consequently, by adopting a qualitative critical analytical approach based on an Islamic feminist perspective and postcolonial theory, this research work discusses migrant Muslim women's representations and the empowerment discourse that stress their hybrid identities and dialogic roles within their interstitial spaces and open new avenues for their postcolonial resistance against gender perceptions, patriachal practices, and western hegemonic discourses that distort their image as being victims of their oppressed culture and religion.Writing back to these discourses, Leila Aboulela debunks, in her narratives, the Islamophobia and the veiling discourses and emphasises the possibility of flexible Muslim identity and inter-religious dialogue.

Key words: Cultural Dialogue - Transitivity - Hybrid Identity – Third spaces - Religious Spirituality.