

**Corpus Stylistic Analysis of Fadia Faqir's *Willow
Trees Don't Weep* and Leila
Aboulela's *Bird Summons***

تحليل الأسلوبية بالمتون النصية لرواية شجر الصفصاف لا تبكي
لفادية الفقير ورواية استدعاء الطيور لليلي أبو العلي

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Authorization

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late father, **Zuhair Al Safadi**, whose steadfast faith in the power of knowledge and his unrelenting pursuit of perfection have inspired me to continue to do so. His guidance, love, and support have been a constant source of inspiration for me over this journey. The principles he taught and the inspiration he still offers are his lasting legacies.

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**Corpus Stylistic Analysis of Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep*
and Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons***

Prepared by: Fadia Al Safadi

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Abstract

This study is a data-driven corpus stylistic analysis of *Willow Trees Don't Weep* and *Bird Summons*. It aims to uncover the authorial styles of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela through the analysis of the linguistic features employed by both of them depicting the characters within the two novels. The significance of this work is that corpus analysis provides frequency evidence of the language used in both novels, which provides an objective examination of such literary works. The study follows Sara Mill's (1995) model examining the word, sentence, and discourse levels. Several important conclusions are drawn from the comparative language analysis of the novels *Bird Summons* (BS) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (WTDW) about the authorial styles. The study found that both works have different narrative styles and thematic emphases, even though they deal with gender roles and the experiences of Arab immigrants. The examination of verb tenses also reveals the importance of the verb "be" in BS, which emphasizes character traits, and the frequency of "said" in both novels, which suggests distinct approaches to dialogue-driven narrative. All things considered, the painstaking analysis of language subtleties deepens our comprehension of how Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela weave their stories and offer perspectives from a variety of backgrounds within their personal experiences. More stylistic analyses using corpus tools may be employed, highlighting the importance of linguistic evidence to prove or refute opinions or hypotheses related to a literary work.

Keywords: Corpus Stylistics, Data-Driven, Authorial Styles, Willow Trees Don't Weep, Bird Summons.

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الملخص

تعتبر هذه الدراسة تحليلاً أسلوبياً للنصوص يعتمد على المتون النصية لروايتي *لا تبكي يا شجر الصفصاف* و *استدعاء الطيور* تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الأساليب الكتابية لفادية فقير وليلي أبو العلى من خلال تحليل السمات اللغوية المستخدمة من قبلهما لتصوير الشخصيات داخل الروايتين. يكمن أهمية هذا العمل في أن تحليل النصوص يوفر أدلة تعتمد على تحليل التكرار للغة المستخدمة في الروايتين، مما يوفر فحصاً موضوعياً لهذه الأعمال الأدبية. تتبع الدراسة نموذج سارة ميلز (1995) الذي يفحص مستويات الكلمة والجملة والخطاب. تتوصل الدراسة إلى عدة استنتاجات هامة من تحليل اللغة للروايتين حول الأساليب الكتابية. وجدت الدراسة أن لدى العمليين أساليب روائية وتركيزات ثيمية مختلفة، على الرغم من التعامل مع أدوار الجنس وتجارب الهجرة العربية. يكشف فحص أزمنة الأفعال أيضاً عن أهمية فعل "يكون" في رواية *استدعاء الطيور*، الذي يبرز سمات الشخصيات، وتكرار "قال" في الروايتين، مما يشير إلى نهج متميز للسرد المدفوع بالحوار. كل الأمور المعبرة، فإن التحليل المتأني لدقائق اللغة يعمق فهمنا لكيفية تنسج فادية فقير وليلي أبو العلى قصصهما وتقدمان آراءً من مجموعة متنوعة من الخلفيات ضمن تجاربهم الشخصية. يمكن استخدام مزيد من التحاليل الأسلوبية باستخدام أدوات النصوص لتسليط الضوء على أهمية الأدلة اللغوية لإثبات أو نفي آراء أو فرضيات تتعلق بعمل أدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل الأسلوبية باستخدام المتون النصية، تحليل معتمد على البيانات لا تبكي يا شجر الصفصاف، استدعاء الطيور

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

Corpus linguistics is commonly used for the examination of extensive text collections to discern language usage patterns and trends, encompassing lexical, grammatical, textual, and discoursal features within a given language (Leech 2014). This study aims to analyze language through corpus tools, specifically within literary texts, with a special focus on the stylistics of two literary works (Willow Trees Don't Weep and Birds Summons), with a particular emphasis on the authorial styles of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela.

Corpus linguistics emerged with the advent of personal computers in the 1990s. It entails the investigation of language concerning its social environment, often involving vast amounts of data stored as computer files. Corpus linguistics, like any research approach, comes with its set of advantages and disadvantages. Basically, it involves the study of extensive electronically stored language examples utilized in everyday communication. Moreover, it proves advantageous by saving time and effort for researchers dealing with substantial datasets. Considering the current study's emphasis on addressing context and structure, the researcher incorporates critical discourse analysis alongside corpus linguistics to address this aspect (Al Ahmad and Hussein, 2020).

Since this study focuses on the authorial styles, *Style* and *Stylistics* are considered as two main concepts needed to conduct such analysis. *Stylistics* is a common topic within the field of literary studies. On the other hand, defining styles

depends on various factors such as the author's choices which reflect their personalities, and the readers' perspectives on a particular text in a specific genre. Further, the term "style" is intricately connected to how language is utilized in a particular context, by a distinct individual, and for a specific purpose. Style refers to the type of linguistic expression found in poetry or prose, portraying authors or speakers who articulate the language (Leech and Short, 2015). An individual writer's style can be scrutinized in terms of objectives, sentence structures, word choices, and various types of figurative language. Consequently, the examination and analysis of style encompasses assessments of the writer's selection of words, paragraph structures, rhetorical strategies, and how these elements are employed (Leech and Short, 2015).

Corpus stylistics, on the other hand, a subfield of *Stylistics*, combines approaches from corpus linguistics and literary stylistics. It uses corpus linguistic tools to statistically examine style, with a focus on the relative frequency of textual elements. This study distinguishes between corpus stylistics and corpus linguistics, highlighting the importance of corpus analysis in uncovering textual subtleties and capturing an author's soul. The study of lexical frequency, attribution, interpretative stylistics, and language learning emphasizes the importance of corpus stylistics in comprehending literary texts (Abdulqader et al. 2020).

Again, the researcher focuses on the authorial styles of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela manifested in their novels, namely: *Willow Trees Don't Weep* and *Bird Summons*, respectively. Using corpus analysis, the study addresses critical problems regarding their literary methods. The study tries to reveal the complex

elements of the authors' writing styles by investigating linguistic choices, pronoun usage patterns, and the role of direct and indirect speech. Through a thorough examination of these issues.

According to Abdulqader et al. (2020), corpus stylistic procedures as instructions for conducting a systematic and rational examination of textual features. The study of authorial styles of Faqir and Aboulela's literary works extends beyond quantitative research, using corpus analysis to conduct a qualitative investigation of textual patterns. This approach uncovers more insights, allowing for a more in-depth study of individual texts and transcending traditional methodologies. The emphasis is on identifying trends in the works, highlighting the significance of qualitative investigation in corpus stylistics.

Corpus stylistic techniques provide good guidelines for examining and analyzing textual aspects in a systematic and rational way (Abdulqader 2020) . Corpus analysis is used in the study of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela's literary works, which goes beyond established methods such as quantitative analysis. It provides a qualitative exploration that reveals patterns used in the individual texts, delivering a nuanced insight that goes beyond the norm methodologies.

Corpus linguistics and stylistics seem to concentrate on opposing phenomena in the form-meaning domain, which makes sense given the primary focus of each study. Stylistics is a field that has been approached differently from different viewpoints. The meaning conveyed is different based on theories related to different activities in business areas, whether oral or written, different thought apparatuses and rules of language that produce variations of meaning in different ways. Thus, the concept of style is translated

linguistically in different ways to achieve a specific purpose, with the aim of capturing the meaning in a different way. Style, in general, is the use of different linguistic forms in the actual use of the language (Tariq, 2018). The different use of words in everyday utterances is the main theme of stylistics. The understanding of texts and expressions can only be supported by stylistics in order to then maximize the enjoyment of these texts.

Stylistics deals with various literary texts, spoken or written, dialogue or monologue, formal or informal, scientific or literary. The language of literature and the language habits of particular authors and their patterns of writing are studied and examined by stylistics, which is more concerned with the function of language and aims to understand the author's intention as well as the importance of the function chosen by a particular style.

This study conducts a Corpus-assisted Stylistic Analysis of Fadia Faqir's *Willow Trees Don't Weep* and Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons* to identify gender links between female and male characters in the two novels. The research aims to investigate the portrayal of gender relations in the works of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, both of whom are diasporic writers with literary renown. By examining the representation of gender in patriarchal countries through the lens of these two authors, the research hopes to address how they depict gender relations in their works. The research questions are focused on exploring and comparing gender portrayals in the works of Faqir and Aboulela, considering that both authors are writing from a diasporic perspective. The study's overarching goals are to analyze and compare the depiction of gender in the literary works of Faqir and Aboulela, given their diasporic backgrounds.

Corpus linguistics is normally employed to study a large collection of texts to identify patterns and trends in language usage relevant to several topics and themes such discourse analysis, lexico-grammar and gender representation. Therefore, it could help in

investigating how notions, such as gender, are expressed via language and artistic choices. The investigation might also look for discourse markers or rhetorical tactics used to express viewpoints. Overall, the purpose of this study is to shed light on the depiction of gender in the works of Faqir and Aboulela, as well as to add to the continuing discussion about gender representation in literature.

Several writers from diaspora, including Fadia Faqir, have used heroine in their works to portray their struggles in their works. She is a British Arab novelist who frequently writes on gender issues, identity, and culture. Her experiences as a woman born in Jordan before emigrating to and residing in the United Kingdom are firmly buried in her works, which give her the immediacy of a memoir. In 1990, she received the first Ph.D. in Creative and Critical Writing from the University of East Anglia. She has also written many books, including *Nisanit* (1988), *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name is Salma* (2007), and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2010). (2014).

The novel "*Willow Trees Don't Weep*" by Fadia Faqir is set in Amman, Jordan, where a patriarchal culture prevails, negatively impacting the lives of women. The story follows the main female character, Najwa, who navigates through a society where women hold subordinate positions to men. Najwa, raised by her grandmother Zainab and mother Raneen, experiences the challenges of living without her father, Omar, who left when she was three years old. The narrative unfolds as Najwa encounters various forms of mistreatment from a patriarchal society, including negative statements, stereotyping, psychological and sexual violence, as well as marginalization and subordination. With no male relative to protect, help, or defend her family, Najwa faces difficult situations alone. The novel sheds light on the struggles and injustices faced by women within a patriarchal cultural context.

On the other hand, Leila Aboulela, was born in Cairo in 1964 and spent her

infancy in Khartoum. She went around numerous places, including Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Scotland, where she began writing in English. She kept creating literary works like as short tales after going to England to further her studies: *The Museum* (1997), *Colorful Lights* (2001), *Somewhere* (2018), and *Home* (2018). She also writes several books, including *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2010), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), and *Bird Summon* (2016). (2019). The usefulness of the stylistic approach is demonstrated by a detailed analysis of literary texts. Therefore, corpus-assist stylistics, uncovering meanings and appreciating the values of literary texts through their different styles, by understanding the forms and techniques they try to use in their language to help in investigating how gender relations, are expressed via language and artistic choices.

Bird Summon is a novel tells the story of three Muslim women, who go on a road trip in the Scottish Highlands. It weaves together elements of the traditional pilgrimage narrative with a realistic account of the challenges of contemporary life. Creating a fascinating if not entirely successful amalgamation in which characters worry about cellphone service in one scene and are visited by a magical bird in the next.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the introduction of corpus stylistics as a significant tool for analyzing literary texts, there is a noticeable gap in its application to specific literary works written by individuals in various contexts and countries. This study attempts to fill this hole by doing a thorough **Corpus Stylistic Analysis** of Fadia Faqir's "Willow Trees Don't Weep" and Leila Aboulela's "Bird Summons." While corpus stylistics has inherent usefulness in illuminating authorial styles and narrative complexities, there has been a notable lack of such analyses for these

particular works. The selection of these novels is notable because of their ability to provide unique insights on Arab civilizations' experiences and issues, making them an ideal subject for scholarly research. The scarcity of previous corpus-assisted stylistic analyses of these novels emphasizes the critical need for this work to contribute to the current literature by filling this vacuum. Using corpus methodologies, the study aims to illuminate the stylistic features used by Faqir and Aboulela, encouraging a better understanding of their authorial styles and improving the broader field of corpus styling. This study aims to fill the gap in the application of corpus stylistics to literature and provide useful insights to the academic community.

1.3 Significance of the Study:

This work is significant because it investigates corpus stylistics in relation to Fadia Faqir's and Leila Aboulela's authorial styles. The study aims to fill a major gap in the application of corpus stylistics to literature by using corpus analysis to investigate linguistic choices, pronoun patterns, and the use of direct and indirect speech in their novels "Willow Trees Don't Weep" and "Bird Summons," particularly in the context of narratives and societies related to Arab immigrants. Through a data-driven approach, the research aims to provide useful insights into Faqir and Aboulela's distinct authorial styles, benefiting the broader discipline of corpus stylistics and improving our grasp of the complexities of language choices in literature. The study's findings are expected to lay the groundwork for future research in corpus stylistics applied to various literary contexts, emphasizing the necessity of qualitative analysis in unearthing the complexity of authorial style.

1.4 Objectives of the study

1. To explore how linguistic choices employed by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela contribute to their unique authorial style.
2. To study the use of pronoun patterns that emerge in both novels and how they contribute to the establishment of narrative perspective and authorial styles.
3. To shed light on how using direct and indirect speech patterns can convey characters' interactions and conversations.

1.5 Questions of the study

To achieve the purpose of the study the following questions were posed. The current study answers the following questions:

1. How do linguistic choices employed by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela contribute to their unique authorial style?
2. What pronoun patterns emerge in both novels and how do they contribute to the establishment of narrative perspective and authorial styles?
3. How using direct and indirect speech patterns can convey characters' interactions and conversations?

1.6 Limitations of the study:

This research focused on Leila Aboulela and Fadia Faqir and their novels: *Bird Summons* and *Willow Trees Don't Weep*. The findings cannot be generalized over all other writers and their works. The current analysis focused on examining the

authorial stylistic features using corpus tools. It could be beneficial to highlight other themes using different methodological approaches.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Corpus tools are software programs that allow critics to evaluate enormous collections of texts, whereas frequency analysis is the process of measuring the number of times specific words or phrases appear in a text. (McEnery et al. 2006)

Cluster analysis is defined as “a multivariate statistical technique that allows the production of categories by purely automatic means” (Oakes 1998: 95).

Collocation analysis is a linguistic approach that involves identifying and analyzing the patterns of word combinations that frequently occur together in a given language or a corpus. (Hoover 2003)

Concordance analysis entails compiling a list of all the terms and circumstances that appear in a text. These methods and strategies assist literary critics in gaining a greater knowledge of diasporic writers' topics, motifs, and literary techniques, as well as evaluating the success of their works. (Sinclair J.1991)

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

2.1 Review of Theoretical Literature

2.1.1 Style and Stylistics

Style is often discussed within the scope of literary studies. The definition of styles depends on several related factors as the author's choices to reflect their personalities, and the readers' point of view of a specific text in a certain genre. The concept of style can be traced back to the classical school of rhetoric, which considers style as a technique used by the author for persuasion and oratory. Thus, the term style is related to how language is used in a certain place, by a specific person, for a specific purpose. It is defined as "the linguistic qualities of a specific work" (Leech and Short, 2015, p. 11).

On the other hand, Oakes (2019) argues that the style refers to the kind of linguistic expression in poetry or prose that describes authors or speakers who speak or utter the language. A specific writer's style may be analyzed in terms of aims, sentence patterns, word choice, and figurative language type, among other things. Thus, the research and analysis of style involve tests of the writer's choice of words, paragraphs, rhetorical techniques, and how he employs them. Moreover, style can relate to both spoken and written language, as well as literary and non-literary forms.

According to Leech and Short (2015), style is the "dress of mind," and while the metaphor of style as some type of "adornment" or "covering" of idea or meaning is no longer available, it is nonetheless implied. The techniques of style

that flourished throughout the Renaissance period and allow the writer or orator to arrange his thoughts using types of (figures) that correspond to his way of discourse.

Lehman (1996) argues that the concept of style may be applied to genres, personalities, historical periods, or languages. Scholars who deal with Shakespeare's writings attribute them to him because of his style. One style corresponds to the Renaissance period, while the other corresponds to the Age of Enlightenment. In terms of language, German is generally stated to be distinguished by obscurity, but French is deemed to transmit clarity in style, therefore style may have different sorts of applications, according to this notion.

Within the field of applied linguistics lies the discipline of stylistics, which is interested in spoken and written language styles. It analyzes the lexical choices used and the syntactic structure in which language is employed. A certain style is created by these choices that affect the meaning. Therefore, stylistics investigates how authors produce effects through their linguistic choices and how readers perceive those effects. (Froehlich, 2015).

Further, stylistics deals with the language choices in literary discourse and varies from both literary criticism and linguistics. Stylistics links the two fields and hence serves an interdisciplinary purpose, to examine the relationship between language and aesthetic function to extract the artistic components based on the writer's linguistic choices (Bashiruddin, 2018; Tariq, 2018,).

Culpeper, Short, and Verdonk (2002) perceive stylistic analysis as "the toolbox" for the analysis of poetry, and it is ideally equipped to assist in exploring

the language of dramatic texts. It also demonstrates how much stylistic study of theatre differs from poetry or prose, such as when assessing foregrounding in poetry. It occurs as a result of the manipulation of grammar, words, and phonology in syntactic parallelism via linguistic organization, and is considered as the essence of linguistics. Stylistic Analysis plays an important function in identifying language traits.

In addition, Simpson (2004) argues that stylistics is a method of textual explanation that prioritizes language. Language is essential to stylisticians because the numerous forms, patterns, and levels that comprise linguistic structure are a key indication of the text's purpose. The text's functional meaning as discourse works as a gateway to its interpretation. Linguistic traits may not usually enhance text meaning, although they can occasionally help identify unique sorts of meaning.

The range of texts analyzed within the scope of stylistics covers literary and non-literary whether they are spoken or written. Even though stylistics focused on written texts, however, due to the new technological developments researcher are enabled nowadays to collect and analyze spoken data easily and effortlessly. Formalism theories served as the basis of stylistics which afterward adopted the structuralist approaches, nevertheless, the use of these theories was eclectic. However, the adoption of those theories established the descriptive framework which explains how the writer employs different linguistic choices, techniques, and methods to deliver the meaning. As a result of these developments, pragmatics and discourse analysis emerged as a branch of stylistics based on the analysis of

contextual factors (Ibrahim 2020)

Stylistics employs qualitative and quantitative analyses, where the former interprets texts based on models and theories suggested within linguistics. The latter is based on a statistical analysis of elements (linguistic or literary) in large bodies of electronically collected texts known as corpora to show the significant patterns used based on frequency analysis. Benefiting from corpus linguistics and its different tools, corpus stylistics has emerged as a sub-discipline of stylistics that aims at applying corpus analysis and tools, such as frequency, collocation, keyness and cluster analyses, to discover and highlight the relationship between the linguistics description and literary appreciation of literary texts, which can be collected, saved and retrieved easily on computers (Montoro, 2014).

2.1.2 Corpus Stylistics

Corpus stylistics, positioned at the intersection of linguistics and literary studies, has undergone significant development since its inception. Initially emerging as a tool for linguistic analysis, corpus stylistics gradually evolved into a robust framework for studying authorial style. In this literature review, we delve into the historical trajectory of corpus stylistics, tracing its origins, and highlighting key developments in understanding authorial style through linguistic analysis.

Corpus stylistics traces its roots to the broader field of corpus linguistics, which gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s (Sinclair, 1991). Defined as a structured collection of texts, a corpus provided linguists with a vast dataset for investigating linguistic patterns and structures. Early applications were focused on

language description and analysis, laying the groundwork for subsequent developments in corpus stylistics.

The shift towards stylistic analysis within corpus linguistics occurred in the late 20th century, with scholars recognizing the potential of corpora to explore literary phenomena (Hoover, 2003). Simpson (2004) notes that the integration of computational methods allowed researchers to quantify and analyze linguistic features in literary texts, marking the advent of corpus stylistics as a distinct discipline.

A pivotal development in corpus stylistics was the exploration of authorial style, enabling scholars to identify unique linguistic markers associated with individual authors. Burrows (1986) pioneered the use of multivariate analysis, introducing the concept of "Delta" to detect distinctive features indicative of authorship. This method laid the foundation for subsequent studies examining stylistic variations among authors within a corpus.

Methodological advancements played a crucial role in refining corpus stylistics. Computational tools and software, such as AntConc, facilitated the identification of stylistic features, enabling researchers to conduct large-scale analyses efficiently (McEnery et al., 2006; Eder et al., 2006). These tools allowed for the identification of subtle nuances in authorial style, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of literary texts.

Despite its successes, corpus stylistics has faced challenges and critiques. Some scholars argue that the approach oversimplifies the complexity of literary style by reducing it to quantifiable features (Stockwell, 2002). Additionally, issues

related to representativeness and sampling in corpora have been raised, emphasizing the need for careful selection and curation of texts (O'Halloran, 2005).

Contemporary corpus stylistics continues to evolve, with researchers exploring interdisciplinary approaches and incorporating insights from cognitive linguistics, psychology, and even machine learning (Oakes, 2019). The integration of diverse perspectives promises a more comprehensive understanding of authorial style and its manifestation in literary texts.

The trajectory of corpus stylistics, from its origins in corpus linguistics to its evolution as a powerful tool for studying authorial style, reflects its dynamic nature. Methodological advancements, coupled with an interdisciplinary approach, have positioned corpus stylistics as an invaluable resource for unraveling the intricacies of literary expression. As the field continues to evolve, researchers can anticipate further refinements in methodologies and a deeper exploration of the cognitive processes underlying authorial style (O'Halloran, 2005).

2.1.3 Corpus Linguistics

Corpus linguistics is a relatively new method to linguistics, having emerged with the introduction of personal computers in the 1990s. It is the study of language in relation to social environment. Corpus linguistics is often enormous amounts of data kept as computer files. Corpus linguistics, like any other research approach, has advantages and disadvantages. Corpus linguistics basically refers to the study of large amounts of electronically stored language examples that people use in everyday life (Al Ahmad and Hussein, 2020). Furthermore, it saves the researcher's

time and effort, especially if the researcher is dealing with big amounts of data. Because the current study is dependent on addressing context and structure, the researcher employs critical discourse analysis in conjunction with corpus linguistics to address this issue.

2.1.4 Gender and Language

Gender is the social relationship structure that focuses on the reproductive sphere as well as the set of behaviors that include reproductive differences between bodies in social processes (Connell, 2009). Moreover, beliefs that support the use of violence against women are consistently predicted by this factor. In terms of specific acts of violence against women, such as sexual harassment, date rape, and wife abuse, there are disparities in how violence is defined and perceived. Meanwhile, according to Glick and Fiske (2003), gender relations embrace and reconcile dominance with close interdependence while yet being susceptible to oppression and discrimination. The majority of men want intimacy with them, have subjectively favorable sentiments toward males, and idealize their "feminine" traits. In addition, women frequently face hostility when they deviate from established roles and are generally given a lesser status. These factors all contribute to ongoing inequality. So, the term "gender relation" refers to a complex, historically specific social structure that governs the relationships between men and women as well as their respective social status.

In addition, patriarchal culture is the primary reason why women are oppressed. It's because many people believe that men should hold the highest positions, have more power over women, and should be treated as inferior to them.

(Glick and Fiske, 2003), According to how they are described in the book *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, gender relations are divided into three categories in this study. The remaining three categories are male dominance, discrimination against women, and violence against women. Moreover, gender dynamics are depicted in this book in a number of locations, including Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and London.

The terms *genderlect* and *gender-related-language* are used to study similarities and differences between female and male language. Women prefer to use more color words like yellow, red and azure. Another characteristic of female language is that they tend to use milder expletives in contrast with men who tend to use a string tone. Women also show the tendency to use empty adjective as charming and cute to express their feelings. In addition, women prefer to use tag questions to express their opinions more than men. Female language is also characterized by using a raising tone to ascertain their opinions, even in declarative sentences. Moreover, according to Lakoff, female language is super-polite comparing to male language. Women also tend to use formal language (hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation). Further, women usually are less humorous than men, and that is reflected through the language they use. Thus, such differences in lexicon, grammar and pragmatics characterize female language as: “obedient, uncertainty and passive” (Gu, 2013, p. 249).

Gender comprises four categories: grammatical, lexical, referential and social. Many languages manifest gender grammatical distinction, which is crucial for grammatical agreement between the noun on one hand and the article,

adjective, verb and number on the other hand. For instance, in English it is normal to use “it” as the pronoun to refer to animals, yet they can be referred to using he/she if their sex is known. Lexical gender typically refers to words that imply the quality of femaleness or maleness such as mother, sister, son and girl. Whereas other words do not specify the sex of the referent such as person, citizen or patient. The only way to determine the gender of such lexical words is through the context. The referential gender is considered as verbal phrases that refer to non-linguistic reality (Gu, 2013).

A word's core grammatical and lexical function can be altered when idiomatic terms are employed to make it feminine, masculine, or neuter. The distinction in roles and personality traits associated with men and women on a social level is known as social gender. When there is no distinction between words classified as feminine or masculine from a grammatical or lexical perspective, it suggests that personal nouns are produced specifically in accordance with social factors. For instance, there are several higher class occupational titles in English, such as lawyer, surgeon, and scientist, which are typically referred to using the male-specific pronoun he. In contrast, low-status job titles like secretary and nurse will be referred to using the feminine pronoun *she* (Abdalgane, 2021).

2.1.5 Sara Mills’ model (1995)

This section discusses Sara Mills’s stylistic model (1995) which includes three mania levels: word, clause, and discourse. A word is referred to as a unit used to express meaning, which can be recognized by native speakers and writers (Crystal, 2003). Many words are used to describe and characterize women in

various ways, some of which are discriminatory and sexist. Mills (1995, p. 62) elaborated that “A statement is sexist if its use constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes”. Thus, a statement is considered sexist if it encourages oppression of women, and linguistic sexism is expressed through using generic forms of word: nouns, and pronouns. The most well-known instance of a generic pronoun is the pronoun *he*. It can be used to refer to both men and women in general, not just to a single guy and such case is considered sexist. Such generic use presents the male as an unmarked form whereas the female is a marked one. Such distinction led to discriminative actions against women within language and society (Mills, 1995). Another example of generic forms that are considered sexist is the term man and mankind, which can refer to both men and women. Moreover, it has been discussed that affixation is another syntactic device that contributes to sexism since some affixes lead to the perception that men are the norm and women are deviations such as mistresses, actresses, authors, hostesses, and stewardesses. Such affixes suggest that men and women are not equivalent because of the diminutive and negative connotations they denote.

While doing a corpus stylistic study at the word level, naming has a significant influence. By addressing someone by their first name, it indicates that the speakers are so close or friends or the same age. However, those with an unbalanced power relationship adopt distinct naming conventions. For instance, in schools, teachers refer to their students by their first names, but they are addressed by their title and last name. Men are typically referred to by their surname while

women are more frequently addressed by their names. Similarly, it is also usual in literature to refer to male authors by their last name alone (e.g., "Dickens" when referring to Charles Dickens) and to female authors by their first name alone (e.g., "Virginia" or "Virginia Woolf" when referring to Woolf). It is claimed that the reason behind using a woman's first name more often than her last name is due to the fact that after marriage, women lose their last names and are only known by their husbands' last names. When it comes to addressing titles, a woman's marital status is indicated by the usage of phrases like Miss and Mrs. A man's addressing term, Mr., does not indicate his marital status. Even though the title "Ms." is used to address all women, whether they are married or not, it has taken on a negative connotation because some people mistakenly believe that it primarily applies to young women, feminists, and divorced women (Ibrahim,2020).

The clause is considered to be a grammatical unit that comes between the sentence and phrase, yet it must have a subject-predicate construction. The role the clause plays is that it comprises the writer's choice of transitivity (who did what to whom), the metaphor and the underlying assumptions meant by the author. Some expressions such as proverbs convey demeaning meaning of women even if their meaning is not explicit. For example, "a woman's work is never done" "a woman preaching is like a dog walking on his hinder legs". In addition to that, binary terms are usually used by placing male terms before female terms such as "husband and wife". Metaphor is defined as "a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another" (Cuddon, 1999, p. 507). Ibrahim (2020) argues that metaphor plays a critical function in a feminist stylistic analysis as long as serves to

encourage conventional knowledge or to induce the reader to think in particular ways.

Transitivity, on the other hand, is concerned with the agent who acts the action upon whom. The importance of transitivity of the clause lies in reflecting the writer's ideology and power which are depicted through the writer's linguistic choices. Fowler (1991, p.71) adds that "transitivity is the foundation of representation: it is the way the clause is used to analyze events and situations as being of certain types." There are six types of transitivity proposed by Halliday. The first type is called the material process in which an entity (animate/inanimate) causes an event to another entity. Second, the mental process which is concerned with thoughts and feelings and experiencing the world. Third, the relational process that is concerned with having or being something as well as describing an entity for instance, "Jane is wise". Fourth, the behavioral process that describes psychological and physiological behaviors as breathing and dreaming. Fifth, is the verbal process which is the process of saying something such as "I said I wanted to go". Sixth, the existential process refers to the existence of someone or something which could be linguistically expressed by using "there +be". For example, "There was some cake in the fridge" .

According to the feminist stylistic model, the discourse level is concerned with the description of male and female characters in terms of their appearances, relationships with others and occupations. Mills (1995) argues that female characters are depicted described through their emotions and physical appearances as in "attractive" and "romantic" in contrast with the description of male characters

who are little described according to their physical appearance. They are usually described according to their strength, intelligence and wealth. Furthermore, women are often described in relation to others as being someone's wife, widow, mother, daughter and so on whereas men 's relations to others are not presented. Another important point to add is fragmentation of female characters are described by parts of their bodies which is considered linguistic sexism specially when men and women are not treated the same (Mills, 1995).

The current analysis adopts Mills' approach (1995) of stylistics. This toolkit is used to discover how gender is presented in "Willow Trees Don't Weep" and "Bird Summons", through detecting linguistic features. To do that, the two novels are analyzed at the level of the word by examining the occurrences of gender-specific pronouns. Analysis at the level of the clause is used to show how characters are represented and interact, and is carried out by examining the transitivity choices that appear in the two novels and ready-made phrases. Analysis of transitivity choices takes the form of a table in which the text is divided into simple clauses and for each of these clauses the process, its type, and participants are mentioned. Analysis at the level of the discourse investigates the description of male and female characters with respect to their appearance, relationship to others, professions, and fragmentation.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Ufot (2012) examined how the lexical and grammatical features of “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen and “The General's Wife” by Hume-Sotomi illustrate the dialectics of genderlectal linguistics. Both works are one hundred and seventy-eight years apart in time and culture, as well as in subgenre; the former is explicitly fictional, while the latter is in the faction subgenre. The analysis followed theories of feminine stylisticians such as Virginia Woolf, Sara Mills, and Deidre Burton as well as those of French feminists such as Jacques Lacan, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray as its theoretical foundation. As the study aimed to determine whether women's writing differs stylistically from men's writing as the norm or whether this is actually the case, the study concluded that "écriture feminine" is both distinctive and androgynous based on the data in both texts.

Shah, Zahid, Shakir and Rafique (2014) analyzed the novel “Mann o Salwa” by utilizing analysis of transitivity choices. They claimed that women are portrayed in Pakistani literature and society as weak, negative, distorted, obedient, and dependent. Their study aimed to determine whether female authors have been successful in changing the unenthusiastic, negative, and passive perception of women in Pakistani society or whether their writings are also influenced by social factors. Women's negativity and passivity have been addressed through analyzing the material and mental processes of female protagonists. The findings showed that female authors' writings are somewhat influenced by society where this analysis aimed to raise society's consciousness of changing women's images in literature.

Radzi , Nur and Musa (2017) examined how gender is represented in advertising language from the viewpoint of Mills' (1996) feminist stylistics. It analyzed the naming patterns at the word and clause levels, stylistic elements, and rhetorical tactics to

determine how much gender stereotypes are upheld or refuted. The results showed that pre-modifiers that serve as adjectives to characterize the cosmetic names predominate in the noun phrases. While the stylistic elements and rhetorical techniques used in cosmetic names show attributes that are stereotypically attributed to women, gender is also conveyed in several phrase forms in which women are not depicted in an encouraging way. Further, there is clear evidence that cosmetic names reflect gender disparities and the patriarchal idea of masculine dominance. This examination hoped to raise awareness and educating consumers to be more skeptical when interpreting advertising language.

Hussain and Jabeen (2019) conducted a research to determine the differences the male and female characters in Kamila Shamsie's novel "Broken Verses", following Mills' feminist stylistic framework. The researchers analyzed the novel on the word and clause levels. The findings showed that the female characters are different from men's characters in that additional information about their feelings, experiences, vulnerability toward men, and physical attributes is provided for them. Whereas the male characters are described according to their physical strength, personalities and attitudes. The study also demonstrates that at various levels of analysis, the novel consistently elevates the experience and consciousness of women. The narrative also highlights the widespread domination of men over women in numerous situations.

Rahimnouri and Ghandehariun (2020) conducted a feminist stylistic analysis of "the Fifth Child's". The analysis comprised the lexico-semantic components of narrative, gendered sentences, and components like metaphors and adjectives and their frequency. The study also discussed the dynamic of power in the relationship between David and Harriet. The novel's feminine views were also examined and explored through this research. The way Harriet's words and description convey her passivity, obedience, and reliance was explained using feminist stylistic ideas. In addition, this study examined the

grammatical and lexical elements of the "female sentence" to determine how distinctive and different female writing is from male writing. The results showed that Harriet is portrayed as a conventional, out-of-date, helpless, and subordinate woman. The reader is persuaded to feel sympathy for Harriet, who everyone holds responsible for giving birth to an unusual child who causes too much problems for everyone, while she accepts the domination of men.

Siregar, Setia and Marulafau (2020) conducted a feminist stylistic analysis in to analyze the language used to describe how men and women are portrayed In "The Sun and Her Flowers" by Rupi Kaur following Mills' approach. This study employed a qualitative approach, through interpreting and analyzing gender-specific words, phrases, sentences, and discourse. It was concluded that Rupi Kaur, the author, seemed that he wanted readers to comprehend his poetry in the same way that he experienced when writing it. Also, this study discovered that phrases that are gender-specific are typically utilized to refer to female gender.

Candria (2020) conducted a feminist stylistic investigation of religion in Nh. Dini's novel *La Barka*. To reveal sexist attitudes, feminist stylistics examines the contexts in which texts are produced and received, distinguishing it apart from other stylistic analyses. Feminist stylistics seeks to expose gender discrimination in both spoken and written (literary) texts. The analysis suggested that the book contains images of admirable women that were supported by the Indonesian New Order philosophy and patriarchal Javanese customs. Yet, there are also stereotypes of a good male characters; good fathers, husbands. Male characters are also depicted as being honest, assertive, independent, persistent, and tough. However, the author criticized religion of being sexist; women are not educated unless that education is required to be a housewife only. Another point is that it doesn't accepts women's needs as well as all religious leaders are men.

In his study, Gheni (2021) attempted to address issues of gender representation in stylistic analysis as well as how gender-related issues and messages are inferred from and revealed throughout the reading and interpretation of a text. Following the transitivity analysis, it was evident that transitivity patterns are employed as a tool to define ideational meaning, which involves the experiential awareness of the world, and to examine gender description. The results showed that there were nineteen processes of the selected romantic scenes, the female characters performed five of those processes whereas the male character displayed fourteen processes during his performance. Moreover, the female character appeared to be passive in her quality, decision, and being impacted or recipient actor, the man appeared to be the active participant agent who is aware and in charge of his behavior.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Sample of the Study

The current study analyzes the feminist linguistic features used in two novels (Bird Summons and Willow Trees Don't Weep) written by diasporic writers (Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela. Bird Summons (henceforth BS-corpus) and Willow Trees Don't Weep (henceforth WTDW-corpus) were compiled into a TXT file to be uploaded on AntConc. The size of BS-corpus is **80316 words**, whereas WTDW-corpus is **64159 words**.

3.2 Instrument of the Study

AntConc is a free, user-friendly software tool designed for corpus linguistic analysis. It is widely used by linguists, researchers, and language teachers for analysing textual data and identifying patterns and trends in language use. AntConc was developed by Laurence Anthony, a professor of applied linguistics at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. AntConc offers a wide range of features that allow users to explore language patterns and frequencies in large datasets. The software allows users to import text files or entire folders of text files into a corpus, which can then be analyzed using various tools and techniques (Froehlich, 2015). These tools include:

1. **Concordance:** This feature allows users to search for a specific word or phrase in the corpus and generate a concordance, which shows every instance of the word or phrase in context. This is useful for identifying patterns in language use, such as collocations and word associations.
2. **Collocation:** AntConc has a collocation tool that identifies frequent word pairs in a corpus. This feature is helpful for identifying lexical patterns and understanding

how words are used together in specific contexts.

3. Cluster/Cluster analysis: This tool allows users to identify groups of words that frequently occur together in the corpus. This is helpful for identifying themes or topics in the data.
4. Word list: This tool generates a list of all the unique words in the corpus, along with their frequency of occurrence. This feature is useful for identifying the most common words used in the data.
5. N-gram tool, which enables users to identify and analyze the frequency and distribution of n-grams within a given corpus. N-grams are sequences of n words that appear in a given text. For example, a 2-gram (also known as a bigram) would be a sequence of two words, such as "the cat" or "in the". An n-gram tool allows users to specify the value of n, which can range from 1 (unigram) to any desired value. The n-gram tool in AntConc can be useful for a wide range of purposes. For example, it can help users to identify patterns and trends in the language used within a given corpus. It can also be used to detect collocations, or commonly occurring word pairs, which can provide insight into the structure and meaning of the text.

AntConc is an important tool for linguistic analysis because it allows users to examine language use in a systematic and data-driven way. By analysing large datasets, researchers can identify patterns and trends in language use that might not be apparent from smaller samples. For example, AntConc can be used to analyze written and spoken discourse, such as news articles, speeches, and social media posts. Researchers can use the software to examine how language use varies across different genres, topics, and contexts.

3.3 Validity and Reliability of the Test

It is worth mentioning that the researcher will cooperate with another one of his colleagues to ensure the reliability of the analysis, by conduct the analysis individually and then the results will cross-checked jointly to solve the discrepancies detected.

3.4 Data Analysis

Corpus linguistics (CL) makes use of computer technology to analyze large samples of naturally occurring language, offers a better understanding of how language is actually used, regardless of whether it is regarded as a separate field of linguistics or simply as a methodology for linguistic research and analysis. Corpora are a crucial tool for understanding real language use. Because native assumptions about grammar and vocabulary usage aren't always accurate, corpus evidence tests these assumptions. Corpora also offer details about linguistic patterns based on frequency analysis in addition to information about the differences between spoken and written forms of language. Noting that corpus analysis depends on both quantitative and qualitative analysis is significant.

Frequency analysis is the most basic statistic method used in corpus linguistics, which is divided into: raw frequency that counts the number of instances of a certain word, item or phrase in a specific corpus. This type of frequency doesn't provide evidence about language use in a corpus. The second type is normalized frequency that refers to frequency in relation to other values in a corpus as a proportion of the whole. In other words, it refers to the frequency of the connector *unless*, for instance, in relation to the total number of words in the corpus. The current analysis employs the normalized frequency to show comparable results between both corpora under examination. Moreover, corpus analysis cannot only depend on quantitative analysis alone, but also on

providing qualitative analysis of the frequencies. In other words, researchers should look for logical explanations to high light people's use of specific linguistic patterns (Al Ahmad, 2021).

3.5 Procedures of the Study

- 1- Reviewing theoretical literature related to Stylistics, literary feminism and corpus analysis.
- 2- Reviewing empirical studies relevant to Stylistics, literary feminism and corpus analysis.
- 3- Selecting the novels for the study and conducting initial analysis of gender to check gender inequalities
- 4- Analyzing the selected novels by uploading the TXT files on AntConc to determine the size of each corpus.
- 5- Presenting and reporting the finding along with discussing them in light of previous research.
- 6- Listing references as per the APA style.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The analysis addresses the authorial stylistic feature by the writers of both novels under examination by employing corpus stylistics, exploring linguistic features at three levels: word, sentence, and discourse (Mills, 1995). This multifaceted analysis provides insights into the use of gender-specific words, pronouns, and collocates at the word level, the verb structure at the sentence level, and the relationships depicted between female characters at the discourse level.

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do linguistic choices employed by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela contribute to their unique authorial style?
2. What pronoun patterns emerge in both novels and how do they contribute to the establishment of narrative perspective and authorial styles?
3. How using direct and indirect speech patterns can convey characters' interactions and conversations?

4.2 Results related to the first and Second questions:

1. How are female characters depicted in "Willow Trees Don't Weep"? and 2. How are female characters represented in "Bird Summons"? **To answer the first two questions, frequency analysis is conducted, examining WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus.** The researcher used both raw and norm frequencies. Yet, norm frequency is used to show comparable results from two corpora of different sizes. Both are presented in the following section. Since the size of the two corpora are

measured in thousand words: WTDW-corpus is 64159 words and BS-corpus is 80316 words, the researcher used per thousand to show the discrepancies between both corpora.

4.1.1 Frequency analysis of gender-specific words

The table (4.1) presented below illustrates the frequency of gender-related words in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus, aiming to elucidate the similarities and distinctions in their utilization by both authors. The occurrences of gender-specific word usage in each corpus is displayed. It is crucial to note that these words have undergone lemmatization for precise normalization of frequencies.

Table (4.1). Frequencies of occurrences of gender-specific words in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

Word	WTDW- corpus		BS- corpus	
	Raw freq.	Norm freq.	Raw freq.	Norm freq.
Mother(s)	191	2.97	91	1.13
Father(s)	187	2.91	28	0.35
Woman(women)	134	2.1	72	0.9
Man(men)	130	2.03	64	0.8
Girl(s)	28	0.44	24	0.31
Boy(s)	13	0.20	57	0.71

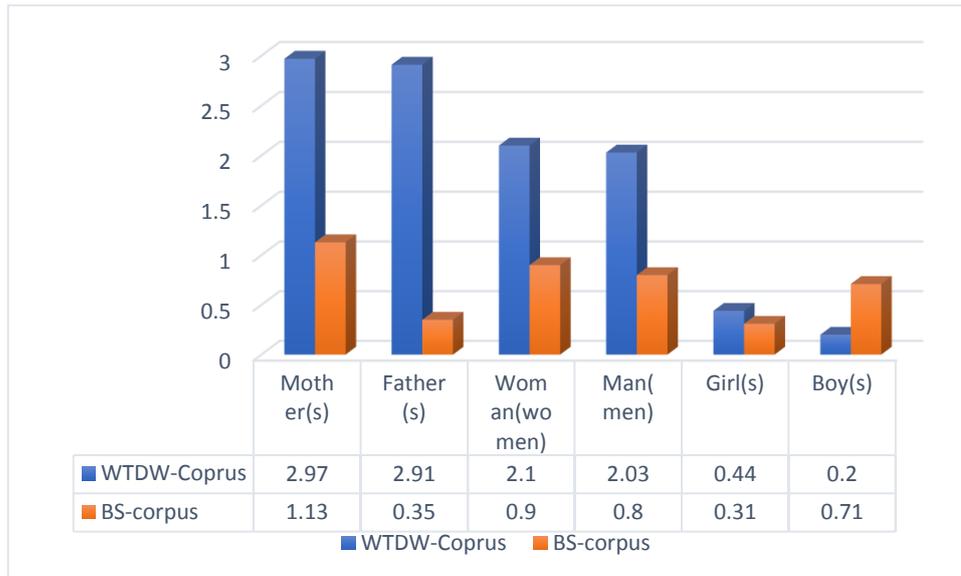


Figure (4.1). Norm frequency of occurrences of gender-related words in WTDW-coprus and BS-coprus

The illustration emphasizes the relatively rare occurrence of gender-related words in both corpora, underscoring a higher prevalence in the WTDW-coprus. Specifically, the term "mother" registered a frequency of 2.97 per thousand in the WTDW-coprus, compared to 1.13 per thousand in the BS-coprus. Similarly, "father" exhibited a greater frequency in the WTDW-coprus (2.91 per thousand) than in the BS-coprus (0.35 per thousand), indicating a more than twofold increase in usage in the former. Likewise, "woman" and "man" were each employed over twice as frequently in the WTDW-coprus (woman=2.1 per thousand, man=2.03 per thousand) than in the BS-coprus (0.9 per thousand and 0.8 per thousand, respectively). An analysis of the data related to "girl" and "boy" disclosed notably low frequencies.

These observed differences in gender-related word frequencies between the WTDW-coprus and the BS-coprus may be ascribed to diverse linguistic and

contextual factors. One plausible explanation lies in the distinct authorial style and perspective of contributors to the WTDW-corpus, potentially influenced by their unique experiences, beliefs, or thematic focus of their work.

4.1.2 Collocate Analysis

Related to the most frequent adjectives used with gender-related words, the results showed that the use of adjectives in both corpora is infrequent as the table (4.2) below illustrates.

Table (4.2) Frequencies of collocates with gender-related words in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	frequency
	WTDW		BS
mother	Mother	Mother	
My mother (141)	141	Her mother(25)	25
Your mother (9)	9	His mother(15)	15
		My mother(10)	10
Father		Father	
My father(109)	109	My father(11)	11
Your father (30)	30	His father(5)	5
		Her father(4)	4

Woman (women)		Woman(women)	
Old woman(24)	24	No significant results	
Young woman(6)	6		
Good woman(3)	3		
Man		Man(men)	
Old man(14)	14	Elderly(4)	4
Young man(11)	11		
Strange man(4)	4		

The comparison of collocate frequencies with gender-related words in the WTDW-corpus and the BS-corpus reveals distinct patterns that shed light on potential differences in language usage and cultural contexts. In the WTDW-corpus, the collocate frequencies with the term "mother" show a notable prevalence of possessive pronouns such as "My mother" and "Your mother," with 141 and 9 occurrences, respectively. Additionally, the collocates "My father" and "Your father" also exhibit relatively high frequencies at 109 and 30 occurrences, respectively.

The use of descriptors like "Old woman," "Young woman," "Old man," and "Young man" further contributes to the narrative. Conversely, the collocate

frequencies in the BS-corpus present a different distribution. The possessive pronouns "Her mother" and "His mother" are more evenly represented, with 25 and 15 occurrences, respectively, alongside the less frequent "My mother" with 10 occurrences. Interestingly, the collocates with "father" are less numerous compared to the WTDW-corpus, and there is a greater focus on possessive pronouns like "His father" and "Her father." The inclusion of terms like "Elderly Man" and "Woman (women)" in the BS-corpus suggests a broader exploration of age and gender categories.

The stylistic features of both novels can be inferred from the observed collocate frequencies with gender-related words in the WTDW-corpus and the BS-corpus. These features provide insights into the narrative tone, perspective, and thematic focus of each novel. In the WTDW-corpus, the high occurrences of possessive pronouns such as "My mother" and "Your mother" suggest a more personalized and intimate narrative style.

The repetition of possessive pronouns indicates a focus on individual experiences and a potentially autobiographical or first-person perspective. This stylistic choice may create a sense of immediacy and emotional connection between the narrator and the readers. Additionally, the use of descriptors like "Old woman," "Young woman," "Old man," and "Young man" contribute to a vivid and detailed portrayal of characters, potentially enhancing the novel's immersive quality.

On the other hand, the BS-corpus exhibits a stylistic variation with a more balanced distribution of possessive pronouns like "Her mother" and "His mother."

This suggests a narrative style that incorporates multiple voices or perspectives. The inclusion of terms like "Elderly Man" and "Woman (women)" indicates a broader exploration of age and gender categories beyond individual familial relationships. This stylistic choice may contribute to a more inclusive and diverse representation of characters and experiences within the narrative.

The WTDW-corpus, with its emphasis on possessive pronouns and personal narratives, might aim to create a deep emotional connection between the reader and the characters, focusing on individual stories within the broader context of gender-related themes. Conversely, the BS-corpus, with its varied use of possessive pronouns and inclusion of broader gender categories, may seek to provide a more encompassing and diverse exploration of gender dynamics in its narrative.

Table (4.3): Concordance Lines of most Common Collocates with gender-specific words (my and your) in WTDW-corpus

shrunk. Our English teacher explained the phrase 'wild goose chase' as a fruitless, futile errand.	My	mother had died recently, my grandmother was in Mecca doing the pilgrimage, and I
teeth grinding. There must be something seriously wrong with me. I pressed my tummy gently.	My	mother had died of stomach cancer and her genes, embedded in my flesh, were
lather with a bar of soap and rubbed it into my hair. The last time	my	mother had bathed me, I was five. It felt intimate, but I had no

I crossed the busy road and stood under the arch of its main entrance, something	my	mother had cautioned me against. 'I lost my husband to religion, and I have
How did I end up here? Was there a way out? Can you soar solo?	My	mother had changed; you wouldn't recognise her if you bumped into her in

Table (4.3) displays the most salient feature in the WTDW-corpus which is the recurrent use of possessive pronouns, particularly "My mother" and "Your mother." These pronouns serve as anchors that bond the narrative to deeply personal and familial experiences. The stylistic choice of employing possessive pronouns reflects an intimate and introspective narrative tone, emphasizing the subjective and emotional connection of the narrator to the characters mentioned.

The repetition of "My mother" creates a sense of personal ownership and attachment, allowing the narrator to navigate the complexities of loss, familial relationships, and introspection. For instance, the recent death of the narrator's mother, the grandmother's pilgrimage, and the reminiscence of intimate moments like the last bath from the father at the age of five all contribute to a narrative enriched by personal reflection. The possessive pronouns act as linguistic markers of the narrator's emotional journey, inviting readers into a private realm of memories and self-discovery. This stylistic approach in the WTDW-corpus, as exemplified by the frequent collocation with possessive pronouns, distinguishes it

as a narrative that intricately weaves individual experiences, familial ties, and emotional landscapes.

Table (4.4): Concordance Lines of Most Common Collocates with gender-specific words (her and his) in BS-corpus

truly wanted, known she had wanted, was a baby. Was that too much to ask?	Her	mother had more children than she wanted, and Salma had all the children she
there was a suitor waiting to see her in the living room. ‘Hurry and change,’	her	mother had said in a voice that meant there would be no negotiation. ‘I
delighted the day she found out, online, that she had been born on a Thursday.	Her	mother had told her she was born on a Wednesday, but her mother must
smile. There were things she wanted – to be queen of her own household, to bring	her	mother over from Syria, to walk in expensive shoes. She listened to Salma’s
more complex negotiation than the present. Iman’s English improves. She works and can bring	her	mother over from Syria for a visit. But her greatest material success comes in

The prevailing use of possessive pronouns in the BS-corpus, particularly "Her mother" and "His mother," constitutes a significant stylistic feature that influences the narrative tone and thematic development. The recurrent inclusion of possessive pronouns implies a narrative approach that encapsulates a broader spectrum of characters and perspectives. In contrast to the more individualized and

personal tone found in the WTDW-corpus, the BS-corpus utilizes possessive pronouns to portray a collective or shared experience. For instance, the narrative unfolds with reference to desires and decisions made by "Her mother" regarding the number of children and familial expectations. This broader lens expands beyond individual reflections, offering a multifaceted view of familial dynamics.

The use of possessive pronouns in the BS-corpus further extends to encompass interpersonal relationships, such as Salma's aspirations and interactions with "Her mother." The portrayal of Iman's desire to bring her mother from Syria and her dreams of material success contributes to a narrative that explores interconnected lives and shared ambitions. Additionally, the inclusion of possessive pronouns like "His mother" in the context of medical challenges and familial responsibilities emphasizes a communal dimension to individual struggles.

Therefore, the frequent collocations with possessive pronouns in the BS-corpus signify a stylistic choice that embraces a collective narrative. This approach, in contrast to the more individualized tone of the WTDW-corpus, weaves together diverse characters and experiences, providing a comprehensive view of familial relationships, desires, and challenges within the broader thematic context. The stylistic features observed in the BS-corpus, supported by the provided concordance lines, underscore a narrative that navigates the intricacies of shared experiences and collective storytelling.

In addition to that, data analysis showed that adjectives are rarely used in both corpora. This lack of adjectives within the initial 100 words in both corpora

could carry significance, potentially reflecting an intentional stylistic decision made by the authors. Within the field of literary writing, the exclusion of adjectives in the opening passage suggests a focused emphasis on narrative pace, plot progression, and character actions, rather than a detailed presentation of descriptive elements. Moreover, such introductions of the characters are likely conveyed through their actions, dialogues, and unfolding events, enabling readers to naturally deduce personality traits and relationships.

This approach aims to evoke immediacy and reader engagement, prompting active involvement in character interpretation based on behaviors and interactions, without relying on explicit adjectival descriptions. Again, this technique also serves as a narrative strategy to build tension and curiosity, encouraging readers to delve deeper into the storyline to uncover additional details about the characters. In conclusion, the deliberate absence of adjectives in the first 100 words of both corpora appears to be a stylistic choice prioritizing action and dialogue over explicit description. This choice encourages readers to actively participate in character interpretation, fostering a dynamic narrative encounter.

4.1.3 Pronouns

In this section, an exploration of the findings related to the frequency of pronouns in both corpora is presented. Pronouns are significant linguistic markers that play an important role in characterizing relationships and highlighting narrative perspectives. Analyzing the frequency of pronouns provides valuable insights into the authors' stylistic choices, offering a deep understanding of how characters are represented, and relationships are portrayed within the unique literary contexts of

these two works. The figure (4.2) below illustrates the norm (per thousand) frequency of pronouns in WTDW-corpus and BS- corpus.

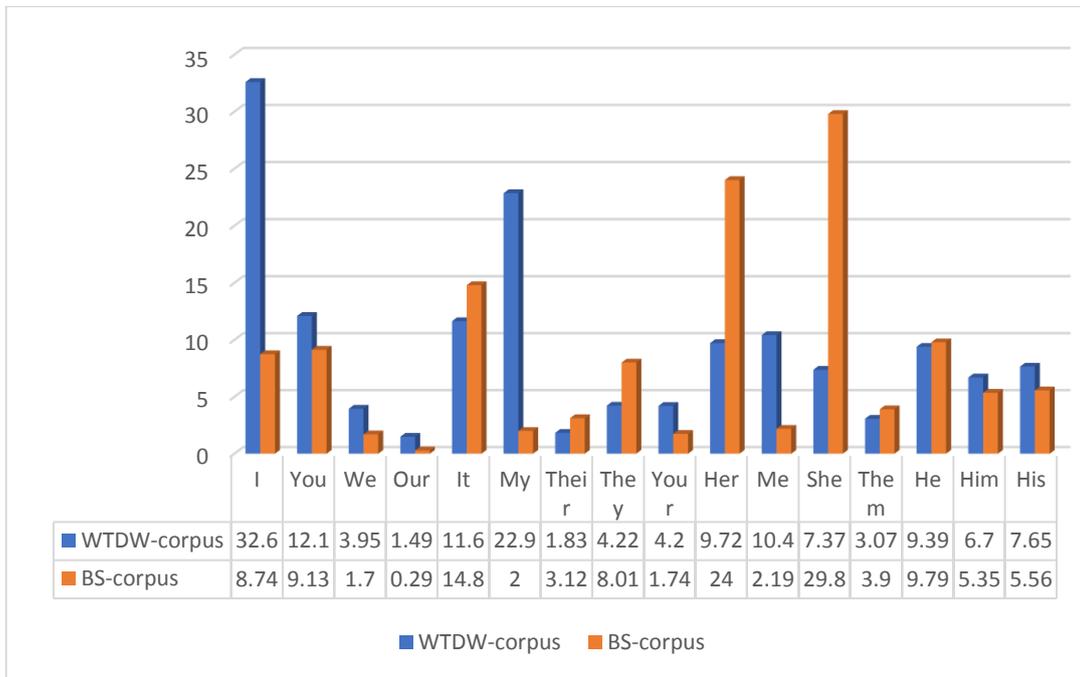


Figure (4.2): The norm frequency of pronouns used in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

The analysis of pronoun usage in both corpora provides valuable insights into the distinct stylistic choices made by the authors in shaping their narratives. In the WTDW-corpus, the frequent use of first-person pronouns, such as *I* (32.6 per thousand), *Me* (10.42 per thousand), and *My* (22.86 per thousand), underlines a deliberate stylistic choice that prioritizes an intimate and personal perspective. This stylistic decision aligns with the narrative focus on *Najwa*, the main character.

The high frequency of *I* suggests a strong emphasis on *Najwa*'s voice, creating a sense of immediacy and fostering a personal connection with the reader. The use of *Me* and *My* further reflects this personalized narrative style, inviting readers into *Najwa*'s inner thoughts and experiences.

In contrast, in the BS-corpus, the stylistic inclination is different, emphasizing a broader representation of characters through increased use of third-person pronouns, especially *She* (29.8 per thousand) and *Her* (24.01 per thousand). This aligns with the novel's focus on female characters, providing readers with an observant and objective view of their lives and experiences.

The higher frequencies of these pronouns in BS-corpus, compared to the limited use of first-person pronouns, suggest a narrative structure that leans towards external observation rather than internal introspection. Examining other pronouns, the WTDW-corpus displays a higher frequency of second-person pronouns *You* (12.1 per thousand) and *Your* (4.2 per thousand), reinforcing a direct and engaging narrative that involves or addresses the reader.

The increased occurrence of first-person plural pronouns *We* and *Our* in WTDW-corpus implies a collective or communal narrative element, contributing to a sense of shared experience and solidarity among characters or communities. Yet the frequencies of those pronouns are low in both corpora as seen in figure (4.2).

Therefore, WTDW-corpus displayed a more personalized and engaged narrative, involving the reader and emphasizing communal experiences, particularly through Najwa's perspective. In contrast, BS-corpus showed a broader perspective, particularly in its emphasis on female characters, contributing to a more observational and objective storytelling approach. The variations in pronoun frequencies provide a nuanced understanding of the authors' stylistic and thematic choices in shaping their respective narratives.

4.1.4 Verbs: Sentential Level

As mentioned before, adjectives are rarely used in both corpora which leads to a further examination of the ways followed to describe characters in both literary works. Thus, an investigation of verbs is required by centering attention on the verbs most frequently utilized in connection with gender-specific terms and pronouns. The results showed that the most frequent verbs in both corpora as Table (4.5) below displays are *Be* and *Said*. The verb *Be* is lemmatized to calculate the norm frequency of use.

Table (4.5). The most frequent verbs in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

Verb	WTDW- corpus		BS- corpus	
	Raw freq.	Norm freq.	Raw freq.	Norm freq.
Be	1765	27.51	3143	39.13
Said	123	1.92	420	5.23

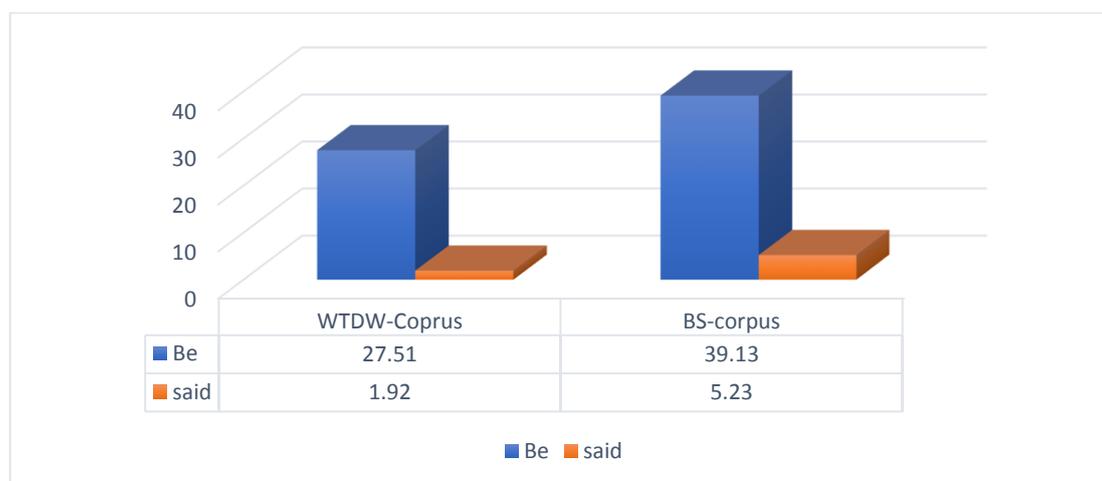


Figure (4.3). Norm frequency of most frequent verbs in WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

The verb "be" is often used in literary works to convey a state of being, identity, or existence, and it can play a crucial role in character descriptions. Instead of providing direct action, "be" is frequently employed to depict the qualities, attributes, or conditions associated with characters. In this context, a higher frequency of the verb "be" in a corpus may suggest a particular emphasis on character portrayal through their states of being or inherent qualities.

Examining the results from both corpora, table (4.5) indicates that the BS-corpus has a higher frequency of the verb "be" (39.13 per thousand) compared to the WTDW-corpus (27.51 per thousand). This suggests that in "Bird Summons," there is a greater utilization of the verb "be" for character descriptions, indicating a stylistic choice by the author, Leila Aboulela, to focus on the essence and qualities of the characters. The elevated use of "be" in this corpus may contribute to a more contemplative and introspective approach to character portrayal.

Thus, while the verb "be" is used to describe characters in literary works, the frequency of its usage can vary, and in the context of the corpora analyzed, the higher frequency in the BS-corpus points to a particular emphasis on character states of being and qualities in "Bird Summons." This choice contributes to the distinctive stylistic qualities and character exploration within each novel.

Moreover, the frequent use of the verb "said" in literary works, as observed in both corpora carries specific implications for narrative style and character interactions. In general, the prevalence of "said" in a text suggests a focus on dialogue and reported speech, indicating that the author is actively engaging in character interactions and conversations. The verb "said" serves as a neutral and

unobtrusive attribution for dialogue, allowing the characters' words to take center stage. This can contribute to a more immersive and dynamic reading experience, providing readers with a direct and unmediated connection to the characters' voices.

In the specific context of WTDW, where "said" has a frequency of 1.92 per thousand, the limited use of this verb may suggest a narrative structure that incorporates dialogue but places a greater emphasis on other narrative elements such as descriptions, reflections, or internal thoughts. The infrequent use of "said" might indicate a storytelling approach that relies on varied methods of communication and expression.

However, in BS, where "said" has a higher frequency of 5.23 per thousand, the elevated use of this verb points to a more dialogue-driven narrative. Leila Aboulela, the author of BS, may choose to rely on reported speech to convey character interactions and conversations, creating a storytelling atmosphere that is rich in direct dialogue and interpersonal dynamics.

In summary, the use of the verb "said" in literary works, including WTDW and BS, suggests a deliberate stylistic choice by the authors to emphasize character interactions and dialogue. The variations in frequency between the two novels provide insights into the unique narrative approaches adopted by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, shaping the reader's experience and engagement with the characters and the story.

4.3 Results related to Question Third: The Dynamics between Female Characters

To answer the third question “How do the authors use language to depict the relationships between women in the novels, and what insights do these portrayals offer into how women interact and support each other in different cultural contexts?”, a textual analysis of the dynamics between female characters is conducted.

Within a culture that is marked by strongly embedded stereotypes, a pattern becomes apparent in which a mother takes on a domineering position over her single daughter. In WTDW this was very clear throughout the relationship between Najwa the daughter and her mother Raneem. As the author mentions in the novel:

Najwa : I could not tell her what I really thought, afraid that she might flip and trash the kitchen the way she did a few years ago. I saw myself as different from what she had planned or envisaged for me, but I was her only child, what was left for her, so I kept my mouth shut and went to college.

The daughters may experience this imposition of power in several areas of their lives, including choices about marriage, careers, and social expectations. As a key character, the mother becomes the principal planner of her daughters' lives, influencing their attitudes and behavior to conform to social norms. Remarkably, this paradigm endures even after the mother passes away since a shift in power takes place. When the mother is gone, there is a notable transition when the grandmother assumes the role of leader without any difficulty. This shift

emphasizes how persistent cultural preconceptions are, as they continue to shape expectations and duties for single women across age divides.

The widespread impact of maternal figures highlights the significant obstacles that single girls encounter when attempting to negotiate the complex social dynamics of a patriarchal culture. As we found Najwa's Grandmother controlling her life after her mother's death:

Grandmother: 'Now your mother is dead, you have to go and look for your father.' 'You know how it is in Amman and particularly in this neighbourhood. Chaste women don't live on their own. Tongues will wag. You'll be ostracised, habibti. And you have no relatives. As they say, "Better a man's shadow than that of a wall.'

On the other hand, Leila Abouela in BS Presented the father as a dominating character when he obliged his son Ibrahim to break up with Iman no matter how much he loved her:

"My father is here,' he said. 'He is here with my mother and older brother..."

"The point is my father is now saying he'll cut me off. I have no choice. I have to divorce you."

In WTDW the father of Omar Rahman also dominated his dreams and stopped him of beginning a nurse as he wanted because the idea that nursing is a profession that only women do represent a deep-rooted gender bias in a society that is rife with stereotypes.

'My father said before he died, 'How can a man be a mumarida?'
adding the /t/ of the feminine marker to the word to exclude his
son. 'How can a man tend the sick, a woman?'

In WTDW the novel shows how all three women are from different Arab/Muslim countries yet they support each other and are united together through their ethnicity in a foreign country. Salma is an Egyptian Muslim woman in her forties, Iman a Syrian Muslim woman in her late twenties, and Moni is a Sudanese Muslim woman in her thirties.

Salma, Iman, and Moni's relationships unfold in a complicated tapestry of friendship and mutual support, tinted with an undercurrent of domination, in Leila Aboulela's engaging story. The trio, who are immigrants amidst the British culture, finds comfort and understanding in each other's companionship. Salma's assertiveness leads her to unintentionally take on a domineering role that goes beyond friendship and affects Iman and Moni's life in different ways.

The women's journey becomes a metaphorical investigation of personal freedom against the backdrop of a road trip to the Scottish highlands in commemoration of Lady Evelyn Cobbold, the first British lady to convert to Islam and make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Every individual has her unique psychological burdens, yet they are all connected by the need to flee. With her captivating demeanor, Salma not only takes command of the road trip but also turns into a hub for the others looking for clarity and freedom.

The partnerships are characterized by a sincere desire to support one another in overcoming psychological challenges, notwithstanding the dominance. Iman

and Moni discover a place for healing talks, discussing their different problems, and providing support in the shadow of Salma's influence. The captivating story skillfully negotiates the nuances of domination, friendship, and the common need for freedom, presenting an inspiring portrait of resiliency and camaraderie in the face of the difficulties faced by immigrants in Britain.

'Moni, upgraded to the front next to Salma, felt that she was in a position of strength. She turned and chided Iman while addressing Salma, 'She ran off down that slope as if she was chasing something.'

*'Needing a holiday. Going on holiday. All of these were expressions she had learnt from him and her co-workers over the years. The sense of entitlement. And now extending it to her two friends, **who on their own would not have gone on any holiday** and did not believe that they even needed a holiday without family members, especially without men. **Serving our children, our husbands, our parents – that's how our lives revolve.** Once in a while, though, we need our own space, our own break. Just once in a while. Watching Moni in the dim light of the cottage winning at Monopoly, **Salma felt good. She had taken Moni out of herself.'***

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the findings of the two research questions. It also attempts to explain and interpret the results in light of the reviewed literature. The chapter concludes with recommendations and suggestions for future research.

5.2 Discussion of the Linguistic Features, Pronouns and Verb Patterns Used by Both Authors in Willow Trees Don't Weep and Bird Summons: Uncovering Authorial Styles

The word frequency analysis of "Willow Trees Don't Weep" (WTDW) and "Birds Summon" (BS) corpora reveals notable differences in the occurrence of gender-related terms. In WTDW, words like "mother" and "father" are used nearly three times more frequently, and "woman" and "man" over twice as much compared to BS. These variations may be attributed to distinct authorial styles and perspectives, reflecting unique experiences or thematic focuses. The higher prevalence of gender-related words in WTDW suggests a stronger emphasis on exploring gender dynamics, aligning with the novel's thematic focus on female characters in a patriarchal culture.

Additionally, the analysis of adjectives associated with gender-related words exposes distinct patterns in narrative styles. WTDW employs possessive pronouns, creating a personalized and intimate narrative with descriptors like "Old woman"

and "Young man" contributing to a vivid portrayal. In contrast, BS features a balanced distribution of possessive pronouns and includes terms like "Elderly Man" and "Woman (women)," suggesting a more diverse exploration of age and gender categories beyond individual familial relationships. These stylistic differences offer insights into the tone, viewpoint, and thematic concentration of each novel. WTDW aims for emotional engagement with individual narratives against broader gender-related themes, while BS seeks inclusivity and diversity in its exploration of gender dynamics.

Both "Willow Trees Don't Weep" (WTDW) and "Birds Summon" (BS) corpora exhibit limited use of adjectives, prompting a closer examination of methods for character description. This prompts an analysis of frequently used verbs, unveiling the prevalence of the verb "be" in both corpora. Notably, "Bird Summons" employs "be" more frequently, indicating Leila Aboulela's stylistic decision to emphasize character essence and qualities, adding to a contemplative portrayal. Additionally, the frequency of the verb "said" in both corpora carries narrative implications. WTDW, with infrequent use of "said," may prioritize elements like descriptions or internal thoughts, while BS, with heightened use, adopts a dialogue-driven narrative, shaping distinct reader experiences with unique character interactions. These nuanced verb choices by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela contribute to the distinctive narrative styles in each novel.

The following table (6) represents a full comparison between both corpora in relation to frequency, collocate, and concordance analyses of gender-related words, pronouns, and verbs.

Table (6) Comparison between WTDW-corpus and BS-corpus

Linguistic Feature	WTDW-corpus	BS- corpus	Analysis
Gender-Related Word Frequencies	Higher frequencies	Lower frequencies	WTDW consistently exhibits higher rates, emphasizing terms like "Mother" and "Father" over twice as frequently as BS.
Collocate Frequencies with Pronouns	Pronouns indicate intimacy	Pronouns indicate diversity	WTDW uses possessive pronouns extensively, creating an intimate and introspective narrative tone, while BS employs them more evenly, fostering a narrative style that encompasses multiple voices.
Pronoun Usage	First-person pronouns dominant	Third-person pronouns dominant	WTDW relies on first-person pronouns for a personalized narrative, while BS uses more third-person pronouns for an objective portrayal of female characters.
Verbal Analysis	More use of "said" in BS	More use of "be" in BS	BS places a greater emphasis on the verb "be," suggesting a focus on character states and qualities, while the frequent use of "said" in BS indicates a dialogue-driven narrative.
Use of Adjectives	Rarely used in both	Rarely used in both	The deliberate absence of adjectives in the initial 100 words in both works emphasizes a stylistic choice prioritizing action and dialogue over explicit description.
Overall Thematic Emphases	Individual experiences in diaspora	Collective experiences in diaspora	WTDW focuses on individual experiences, familial ties, and emotional landscapes, while BS explores interconnected lives and shared ambitions within a broader thematic context.

The table (6) above shows a comparison between both corpora showing that the linguistic analysis reveals key differences in the use of gender-related words, pronouns, and verbs. WTDW uses gender-related terms more frequently, indicating possible cultural or thematic variations. Pronoun usage differs, with WTDW-corpus favoring first-person pronouns for a personal narrative, while BS-corpus uses more third-person pronouns for an objective view. Verb analysis shows BS-corpus focuses more on character states and qualities, using “be” more often, and favors dialogue-driven narratives, using “said” more frequently. Both works avoid adjectives in initial passages, emphasizing action and dialogue. These linguistic nuances shape the unique narrative styles of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, enhancing the reader’s exploration of diasporic themes in WTDW-corpus and BS.

It is important to mention that the researcher didn’t find other studies that utilized corpus tools, frequency analysis, collocate, cluster and concordance analysis, to analyze these two novels. Yet, the findings of the current analysis prove different themes depicted in *Willow Trees Don’t Weep and Bird Summons* as diasporic literary works.

5.3 Discussion of the dynamics between female characters

In the novel "Willow Trees Don't Weep" (WTDW) by Fadia Faqir, the dynamics between female characters are heavily influenced by the patriarchal culture they live in. The mother-daughter relationship between Najwa and her mother Raneem is characterized by a domineering position taken by the mother, who influences

her daughter's choices about marriage, careers, and social expectations. This pattern of power imposition is common in cultures marked by strongly embedded stereotypes. Even after the mother's death, the grandmother assumes the role of leader, emphasizing the persistence of cultural preconceptions.

Such results are compatible with Sarnou's (2017) analysis of Al Faqir's novel, reflecting on the female relationships in "Willow Trees Don't Weep", capturing a spectrum of emotions such as solidarity, conflict, and mutual support. Sarnou's (2017) discussed that Faqir, through the protagonist Najwa, delves into the intricate dynamics between Najwa, her mother, sisters, and community, each contributing a unique perspective.

Sarnou's(2017) analysis underscores the significance of these dynamics, revealing their impact on overarching themes of identity, belonging, and resistance within the novel, provides valuable insights into the complexities of gender dynamics and women's agency in the face of cultural traditions and patriarchal structures.

In contrast, "Birds Summon" (BS) by Leila Abouela presents a different dynamic where the father is the dominating character. However, the novel also explores the dynamics among female characters from different Arab/Muslim countries living in Britain. Salma, Iman, and Moni form a complex tapestry of friendship and mutual support, tinted with an undercurrent of domination. Despite the dominance, the relationships are characterized by a sincere desire to support one another in overcoming psychological challenges.

These novels provide a deep exploration of the dynamics between female characters in patriarchal cultures. They highlight the significant obstacles that women encounter when negotiating the complex social dynamics of a patriarchal culture, and the resilience and camaraderie they display in the face of these difficulties. The dynamics between mothers and daughters, and among female friends, are shaped by the cultural norms and expectations of their societies, and these relationships play a crucial role in the characters' journeys of self-discovery and personal freedom.

5.4 Conclusions

Examining the linguistic devices employed by Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela to portray female characters in a diasporic setting, the study focuses on a corpus-assisted feminist stylistic analysis of two novels, "Bird Summons" (BS) and "Willow Trees Don't Weep" (WTDW). The study is significant because it is the first of its type to provide frequency evidence of language usage at the word, phrase, and discourse levels using the model developed by Sara Mills (1995).

Moreover, WTDW and BS reveal different storytelling techniques and thematic emphases. Gender-specific keywords are more common in WTDW, suggesting cultural differences. Collocate analysis, on the other hand, reveals stylistic differences, with WTDW using possessive pronouns for individualized stories and BS using third-person pronouns for general viewpoints.

This examination of linguistic features improves understanding of how Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela narrate their stories, providing viewpoints from

various backgrounds regarding the diasporic experience. The study contributes to a greater knowledge of the difficulties surrounding the representation of female characters in diasporic literature by shedding light on the subtle choices made in language usage and offering insights into the author's narrative techniques, thematic preferences and cultural nuances.

5.5 Recommendations

The Researcher Recommends the following:

1. To conduct more studies on literary texts using corpus tools such as frequency, collocate, cluster and concordance analysis. Such tools can add scientific evidence on the explanation of those texts.
2. To incorporate stylistic analysis into pedagogical approaches when teaching literature, elevating the depth of learning through a more rigorous analytical process.
3. To undertake additional studies focused on the portrayal of female and male characters in "Willow Trees Don't Weep" and "Bird Summons," with a particular emphasis on analyzing how men and women are represented and interact within the narratives, supported by linguistic analysis.

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Appendix A: BS

in addition to the civil war she had experienced. Poor	girl.	In the garden, a bee buzzed in front of
her that Lady Evelyn must have come here as a	girl	in the late nineteenth century, as an adult in
rain jacket pulling at his father's hand. At the	girl	in flowery jeans, hopping from foot to foot, asking
is not a story about you. It is about another	girl,	who just happens to share your name. Iman had
Saudi Arabia. They have another baby, a bright wilful little	girl	who sparkles their life until Murtada announces that he
afford to give her the best of everything. But a	girl	backed by her father could not lose a fight.
the snowy part of the earth there was a beautiful	girl	called Iman. She had blue eyes and blonde hair . . . ?
contempt. A refusal to listen or understand. 'Stay put, my	girl.	Don't come back.' Iman's anger ebbed away
them. It was the right thing to do. The poor	girl	had nowhere else. At breakfast, Salma explained to them
the sound of the azan floating through the window. Little	girl,	loved as one of them. Carried and fed, clutching
Moni was too stunned to reply. The cheek of the	girl!	She thought Salma would say something, explain or take
fought him with all her strength. And the baby, a	girl,	was big enough to breathe, at least for a
introduced herself, she said she was a student volunteer. The	girl,	with angelic eyes and braces, smiled and chatted to
local Muslim community. He left the student halls, which – with	girls	in close physical proximity to beds they should not,
it or not, either. It was what the other older	girls	in my family were wearing. It felt natural that
her eye. A toddler held by a harness. Two little	girls	holding hands. Healthy, moving, standing, talking to their parents.
more beautiful. When the moon hid behind a cloud, the	girls	picked up what looked like fur coats from the
All in all there were twelve of them – boys and	girls.	Scattered now all over the place by the war
passed, and she gave birth to two boys and two	girls.	They were beautiful children, free-spirited and healthy. Everyone
them on. They were sealskins and, on wearing them, the	girls	transformed back into seals, lowered themselves into the water
hard knocks hit the men later in life, while vulnerable	girls	turned into venerable matrons who could do no wrong. '
played football in the street until they were tired out.	Girls	watched television with their mothers and all these children
had always been in tune with her body. Unlike other	girls,	who could be fussy, who disliked the smell of
recall the anticipation and how young they felt, like little	girls,	with all their strength and flexibility, with easy joints

tucked away at the loch with Salma and Moni. 'My	father	is furious,' Ibrahim said. She was taken aback but
to and fro, kicking pebbles out of his way. 'My	father	is here,' he said. 'He is here with my
you.' 'But I tell you everything.' 'The point is my	father	is now saying he'll cut me off. I
choice. I have to divorce you.' 'You can't . . . ?	father	is ordering me to do so. I have no
'My		
He insisted that we meet up alone. We did. My	father	was adamant that at that stage David wouldn't

them. His mother had just had a mastectomy and his	father	was in debt and struggling over the difficult sale
the time, his mother was having a mastectomy and his	father	was indeed taking his cousin to court to sell
s mother and a copy of the court case his	father	was pursuing. Bastard, she had thought, trying to bully
remember that day. She came to meet him behind my	father'	s back. She was tense. Amir spoke well. He
said. "All this talk of his mother's illness and	father'	s court case could be a lie." In the
little boy in a green rain jacket pulling at his	father'	s hand. At the girl in flowery jeans, hopping
of the piece of land which belonged to Amir's	father	and his cousins. The envelope contained proof to Salma
the arms of a whore. That's the image your	father	and mother would carry for the rest of their
strength of youth, he had cruelly killed the knight's	father.'	Chapter Ten When Iman took off her hijab, Salma
would not find this care in any other country. Her	father	closed his eyes. He had heard all this before.
the best of everything. But a girl backed by her	father	could not lose a fight. Salma instead was the
but you have no compassion. A direct command from her	father	demanding an immediate and urgent call. She called home
Moni. 'They take you for granted. They probably take their	father	for granted too. But both of you, and the
said he should go ahead anyway and speak to my	father.	He said he wouldn't do that behind his
her sincerity and resilience. Looking after Adam, Moni became stronger.	Father	of a disabled son, Murtada became weaker. He was
staff happened to be a long- time friend of my	father'	s. Uncle Emad's wife was my mother's
Amir behind his back. "Why should we believe him?" my	father	said. "All this talk of his mother's illness
she could be of help? 'I will speak to your	father,'	she said. 'Give me his number. I will go
to repeat the year, they stopped the grant and my	father	started paying—' 'Why didn't you tell me?' She
your passport. Pack up and take your son to his	father,	that's where you belong. 'Moni isn't your
need good weather for a kite. You also need your	father	to take you out. I would not be of
my mother. There were rows between my mother and my	father	when he found out that she had gone to
glowed from the screen. Her mother in national dress, her	father	with a grizzly chin as if he had skipped
was a copy of the medical record of Amir's	mother	and a copy of the court case his father
caravan, a long line of heavily laden camels, including his	mother	and brothers, went off without him. You see, the
it from early on, buried under the jam that was	mother	and carer. 'David's favourable circumstances drugged them. My
data. Now the wireless signal picked up messages from her	mother	and from Murtada. Missed calls too. The same reproach,
between myself and my mother. There were rows between my	mother	and my father when he found out that she
father is here,' he said. 'He is here with my	mother	and older brother . . .' She knew about this. It was
They did not explain to her why Moni was a	mother	and she was not. Why Salma had four and
We had even started to talk about getting engaged. My	mother	had already met him. The three of us went
he said, it was a bad time for them. His	mother	had just had a mastectomy and his father was
was a baby. Was that too much to ask? Her	mother	had more children than she wanted, and Salma had

could give birth to her grandson's aunt. Iman's	mother	had one child after the other every eighteen months.
see her in the living room. 'Hurry and change,' her	mother	had said in a voice that meant there would
online, that she had been born on a Thursday. Her	mother	had told her she was born on a Wednesday,
notes to the lectures he had missed. Because of his	mother'	s cooking, Salma's dress smelt of coriander and
large as an ostrich egg. It had belonged to her	mother'	s family for generations. The lights flickered and danced
of my father's. Uncle Emad's wife was my	mother'	s friend, so you could say that they were
believe him?" my father said. "All this talk of his	mother'	s illness and father's court case could be
to close. Iman became alarmed. She was attached to her	mother'	s jewel. It was a shimmering green diamond as
authenticated. There was a doctor's report on Amir's	mother'	s mastectomy. There was the registration of the court
a brown, furry bundle and took it down to their	mother.	She cried out when she saw her sealskin and
Murtada's point of view.' 'I'm already a single	mother,'	she said. 'Considering his input and interest.' 'I don'
will do everything I can to unite you with your	mother,'	she was won over. His immaturity was endearing, his
She had been so keen to demonstrate what a devoted	mother	she was, sharing her bed with Adam, keeping her
her – the unspoken assumption that she was the boy's	mother.	She wished that she knew his name so that
fantasies and get on with being a good wife and	mother.	She would stifle all Egypt, the Beloved nostalgia and
in-law,' she finally said. 'And don't expect a	mother-	in-law joke.' Moni laughed out loud. Iman smiled.
doesn't mean they don't notice,' said Salma. 'My	mother-	in-law loves a good gossip. She doesn't
the second one because her phone rang. It was her	mother-	in-law, Norma. 'Hi Mum.' She called her Mum
had been fragile. 'I want to tell you about my	mother-	in-law,' she finally said. 'And don't expect
and the ambition to live. Iman felt sorry for her	mother,	but her pity was tempered with anger. Anger at
his mother, not much different from her own flat and	mother,	but she felt an added closeness to him. Now
all I could imagine for myself was to be a	mother.	But that didn't happen and it's not
from herself and her problems. To be more than a	mother	of a disabled child, more than a full-time
bagpipes to be played at her funeral. She is the	mother	of Scottish Islam and we need her as our
be the same again. Today she was Padmé, queen warrior,	mother	of twins. With the cape around her head and
the Qur'an. Sometimes David explained things, or Norma, his	mother,	would answer one of her questions. Norma usually went
her. The next time, as their monster form developed, the	mother	would barely recognise her own flesh and blood. And
of a whore. That's the image your father and	mother	would carry for the rest of their lives. He
woods and forage as much as they wanted. A small	mother	could come across her daughter or son, call them
Britain. She was often unable to send her money. One	mother	could look after twelve children and decades later these

in her. But he hadn't known her as a	mother,	hadn't seen what pregnancy and sleepless nights did
described as poisonous wafting through the flat. For days, her	mother	hadn't spoken to her. It was as if
armchair watching television. But resting was not for Adam's	mother.	Her days were a variation of this walk, pointless
separate and part of her roles as traveller, writer and	mother;	her social position, her aristocratic breeding and contacts. Where
adults would fidget and struggle to look after that one	mother.	Moni continued to sit on the bench even though
a puzzle?' She would sit with him like that other	mother.	Moni was good at puzzles too, not just board
Iman's English improves. She works and can bring her	mother	over from Syria for a visit. But her greatest
to be queen of her own household, to bring her	mother	over from Syria, to walk in expensive shoes. She
Iman had a jewel, which she had inherited from her	mother.	The jewel was in a box and Iman kept
had married any other woman, she would have treated his	mother	the same way.' Moni raised her eyebrows, 'Given her
never performed an abortion before. Not even on a willing	mother.	This one fought him with all her strength. And
He was a man in love and she was a	mother.	This was a happy home. 'No,' she said. 'You
her resources, all her intelligence, were needed to be a	mother	to Adam and not let that role floor her.
investment that had backfired. Iman was unable to bring her	mother	to live in Britain. She was often unable to
heels voluntarily. It was true that, at the time, his	mother	was having a mastectomy and his father was indeed
to do, because she had promised her mother, because his	mother	was there in the background and even though she
long-sleeved T-shirt was irritating. But it was her	mother	who always supervised the seasonal shift in clothes. A
out now. 'Adam,' she said out loud. 'Come down.' The	mother	who had been leaning forward over her children's
with health scares and children leaving home, David losing his	mother,	a smaller car, holidays without the children. I can
used. Salma did not dare initiate a conversation with her	mother	about switching to summer clothes. She sat in her
so she could send it, through Western Union, to her	mother.	All this had ended or been a mirage. And
guard down, she could be more generous, more willing to	mother	another child, a sister for Adam or a brother.
enough caring for a disabled child without being a single	mother	as well. Try and see things from Murtada's
the cottage, but she avoided them. They were parenting magazines,	Mother&	Baby, The Green Parent. They did pique her interest,
the proper thing to do, because she had promised her	mother,	because his mother was there in the background and
d missed. Because she sat in the kitchen watching his	mother	cook, the dress afterwards smelt of garlic and coriander.
closed his eyes. He had heard all this before. Her	mother	cut her off. 'Listen here, you've been indulged
dress the way I do? Because that's how my	mother	dressed and the women in my village. Or that'
for her, that tapestry which recalled her husband and his	mother.	Gratitude should have held her in check, made her

the kitchen where she had just been sitting with his	mother.	He was ill, and she was carrying the notes
would no longer have any memory that she was their	mother.	Iman, though, was not losing her memory. When the
day ago. Her parents' faces glowed from the screen. Her	mother	in national dress, her father with a grizzly chin
mum' to Salma did not have the same meaning as '	mother'.	It was like 'babe' and 'hubby'; endearments that could
her intransigence. She would not forgive him for this. Her	mother	led the recriminations – a wife's duty is to
over the difficult sale of a piece of farmland. My	mother	listened to all that Amir had to say but
told her she was born on a Wednesday, but her	mother	must have got muddled up because of all the
brakes before everything crashed. 'They're all against me – my	mother,	my brother. There's no point talking to them.
was nothing particularly unusual about Amir's flat or his	mother,	not much different from her own flat and mother,
objective, with Moni self-righteous that she was a good	mother	returning to care for her son. Iman did not
no, what if he did not have influenza as his	mother	said but one of those deadly diseases they had
said to her whenever she phoned. 'You're envied,' her	mother	said. 'You're lucky,' her cousin said. So did
there were several people. Three teenagers were playing billiards. A	mother	sat on a tartan upholstered armchair while her children
with their Oscars and smiles. There were ice sculptures of	Mother	Teresa and Gandhi, of Princess Diana and Martin Luther
his cousins. The envelope contained proof to Salma and her	mother	that Amir had not lied to them. Yet Salma
went on, 'There were rows afterwards between myself and my	mother.	There were rows between my mother and my father
spoke to other creatures was not her language, not her	mother	tongue. Here, with the wind blowing, with the sounds
honey. Honey was a cure for burns. She remembered her	mother	using it when she scalded her hand while cooking.
himself on wild berries. They will make you sick, his	mother	warned, and she was right. The following day he
until they were tired out. Girls watched television with their	mothers	and all these children slept till noon. She peered

the television on at full blast, a singing competition. A	woman	in a nightdress was on the bed, tied up,
accompanied by touching or blowing. Iman told them about a	woman	in her village who was believed to have been
steal what didn't belong to her too – perhaps another	woman'	s husband. It had made her laugh that Amir
did not have anywhere else to go. Apart from the	Woman'	s Shelter, that is, and Salma would not do
t fully convince her. Prostitution and marriage. Man pays and	woman	serves. He houses, clothes and feeds her to get
different. The resemblance was superficial but understandable. Man pays and	woman	serves. He houses, clothes and feeds her to get
to do my Pilgrimage – I will be the first European	woman	to enter the sacred Cities – but it means that

the visit – to honour Lady Evelyn Cobbold, the first British	woman	to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, to educate themselves
late nineteenth century, as an adult in the twentieth. The	woman	who travelled in the Sahara and in Kenya would
into his bedding below deck with thoughts of that beautiful	woman	who was on the land human and in the
in me, no pride . . . He then said, ‘A poor, helpless	woman	can have a higher spiritual standing than the mightiest
was small. ‘You shouldn’t have fought him off,’ the	woman	chided. ‘You made him more excited.’ Iman pushed herself
was calm, without protest and this surprised Iman. ‘If a	woman	doesn’t have her own means, it could feel
it is not a reversal of destiny. Now, Salma the	woman	entered Amir’s room. She did not hesitate, she
legs were her legs, her lower body that of a	woman,	her feet human. She struck through the surface of
or mostly men, a letter she has just received. The	woman	is Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba; she is addressing
acre estate in the Highlands, but Lady Evelyn was a	woman	like us, a wife and a grandmother. She worshipped
would become another pretty face, another great body. One more	woman	on a screen. ‘No.’ Iman made a face. She
The story the imam heard was strange. An aristocratic Scottish	woman,	over ninety years old, had laid down the terms
Note In my favourite verses of the Qur’an, a	woman	reads out loud, to a gathering of men, or
wouldn’t have done. If David had married any other	woman,	she would have treated his mother the same way.’
a trustworthy source. In Sheba, the Hoopoe had found a	woman	sitting on a magnificent throne, ruling a prosperous nation.
in their hair, the pale, heavy-lidded face of the	woman.	The way she was holding her son, his feet
esteem dropping to zero. It would matter who this other	woman	was, what kind of rival. It would make a
wrong, but how many men are going to marry a	woman	with a disabled child? If you give up Murtada,
and years, he lived in fear. In fear that the	woman	would surface and report him, in fear that the

to be stopped or cowed by the Arabic Speaking Muslim	Women’	s Group and her assumption that a true leader
battle and lost. The next time the Arabic Speaking Muslim	Women’	s Group held their annual election, she would be
would be right after all, the others in the Muslim	Women’	s Group who had stayed behind. Visiting the grave
them, a couple. Instead of the whole trouble with the	women’	s group, instead of Moni and Iman. She missed
of myself? In her argument to the Arabic Speaking Muslim	Women’	s Group, she said, ‘We might never understand what
evolved from a day trip for the whole of the	women’	s group, to only the three of them but
four children, a job, a house, the Arabic Speaking Muslim	Women’	s Group . . . ‘If we were together now, I would
collections and the weekly meeting of the Arabic Speaking Muslim	Women’	s Group. The three of them moving together and
did. If her alternative to Salma’s house was the	women’	s refuge in the city, perhaps there was one
her help with Adam’s condition, and when the other	women	in the group had started pulling out of the
photo of which had caused such offence and made the	women	in the group stay away. Certainly, someone had tried
her friend. It surprised Salma that, out of all the	women	in the group, Moni was the one who ended

Progress and the fantasy worlds of George MacDonald. For the	women	in Bird Summons, the Hoopoe is a spiritual teacher
do? Because that's how my mother dressed and the	women	in my village. Or that's how my husband
was coloured by her own privileged upbringing. One in which	women	were gracious and men lauded for their largesse. One
off the branches, ripe and ready for plucking. But these	women	were poisonous, the slightest bit of their saliva or
proximity to jewellery could lead to a serious, debilitating disease.	Women	were warned to take off their rings and necklaces
be a step in the right direction, to focus on	women	and children would make her life easier. 'You told
the intention to heal, and one said no – only massage	women	and children.' 'You got the no answer first, I'
other Muslims? Sounds like an eccentric imperialist no offence . . . Then	women	started dropping out of the trip because their friends
Chapter One She had hired a coach, then when the	women	started pulling out after the anger over the photo,
Nathan heard about an island in which the trees bore	women	as their fruit. The women dangled off the branches,
garden. War should stay out of here. Shaking windows, wailing	women,	burnt skin, the terrifying gleam in the whites of
in which the trees bore women as their fruit. The	women	dangled off the branches, ripe and ready for plucking.
those with wings, who understood even more than all three	women	did what Iman's song was saying, who she
that. Never sat in a café alone. Back home, lone	women	eating in public were inviting attention, exposing themselves to
rituals, both religious and secular – the spiritual freedom that the	women	encounter is vast and beyond control. Acknowledgements Special thanks
pulpit while the monks ate their meals. Men deprived of	women	experienced the deepest thankfulness for the food on their
destination and the way became one.' In the morning, the	women	followed the Hoopoe down the mountain and across the
living that her own religion condemned. Instead men should love	women,	have children, beat the dusty track of work, profit
did not stop and greet her. He did not greet	women	he was unrelated to. He did not speak to
us could start a business together. A massage clinic for	women.	I have some savings that I can invest, and
village, the way it changed during the war. Indoors, the	women	kept their homes clean, washed and ironed their family'
estate. 'Sunday,' he said. 'Nae stalkin on Sundays.' The three	women	looked at each other. Saturday was the day they
just because the majority were against it. Many of these	women	lulled themselves into believing they were in Britain temporarily;
ancient wisdom and guidance. But his powers are limited. The	women	must make their own choices. Away from the city –
told herself. Everyone says so. Still plenty of time. Young	women	my age aren't even thinking of settling down,
her seat. Ibrahim had been opposed to this trip. Three	women	on their own gallivanting across Scotland – it was wrong
s. She found Iman without her headscarf indistinguishable from other	women,	one and the same. The special aura of vulnerability
walked at her funeral knew it and now the three	women	sensed it too in the gentle wind and the

s not about courage,’ said Moni. ‘Besides, you of all	women,	shouldn’t do this,’ said Salma. ‘You’re so
barber even when the children couldn’t go to school.	Women	sugared the excess hair from their legs and armpits,
them. The seals swam ashore, shed their skins and became	women.	This time the fisherman was prepared. He crept with
But she didn’t care. She became one of those	women	to whom things were clear-cut. Everything back there
trip with Salma. At first, he had said no, three	women	travelling on their own was not a good idea.
eat each other. Nor were they interested in the three	women	who were passing through. They could barely look up

solemn, arches after arches. But there were people around. A	man	and his daughter played ping-pong on a table
her do this, run after a total stranger, chasing a	man	and most likely giving him the wrong impression? Her
she live? Everyone had predicted she would marry a rich	man	and never have to lift a finger. Her beauty
next year, inshallah, you will be married to the right	man	and with a baby on the way.’ Iman shook
skin, the terrifying gleam in the whites of a young	man’	s eyes. Blood that was not menstrual, softness that
from a rucksack or a T-shirt, accompanied by a	man’	s short laugh. She waited for them to appear,
steal what didn’t belong to him – such as another	man’	s wife. She wrote back that she would steal
She would not stay. The fisherman pleaded. He was a	man	in love and she was a mother. This was
than he could jog. Iman caught a glimpse of the	man	in the red T-shirt. Mindful of what she
Salma used didn’t fully convince her. Prostitution and marriage.	Man	pays and woman serves. He houses, clothes and feeds
to each were different. The resemblance was superficial but understandable.	Man	pays and woman serves. He houses, clothes and feeds
sword and killed him. ‘You would think that the elderly	man	was innocent and unfairly killed. You would think that
attributes, wore them like she now wore these costumes. Every	man	was to be won over for favours or expedience.
boat just enough for them and their things. Mullin, the	man	who steered it, wasn’t interested in their misunderstandings.
the grave did not elicit surprise. ‘Another mile,’ said the	man	who was crunching the apple. ‘When you see the
s money belt was their son. ‘As for the elderly	man.	A long time ago, in the arrogance and strength
to her seat in the garden. Salma jogged after the	man	because he cleared a path for her. He was
reaffirmed. This could be his replacement, she thought. Not another	man	but a place made up of heather and hawthorn,
is not going to wait for you for ever. A	man	has his limits and he’s been patient enough.
Everyone expected a rich harvest and Nathan was a happy	man. ‘	His standing grew among the villagers. Not the usual
bird as a spiritual guide and metaphor for the perfect	man.	Its golden crest is a crown bestowed on him
could. ‘Mummy’s boy,’ she screamed. ‘You’re not a	man.	I’m hitting you and you’re not hitting
back. When he reached the waterfall, he found an elderly	man	making wudu in preparation to pray. “Where is my

have the right to walk the hills, rambblers' rights.' This	man	might think her foreign and ignorant, but she knew
reflex, the truth summoned forward by the authority of a	man	of God. 'I am a Muslim.' And where had
heading towards them or past them? Or was it a	man	running? A reddish-brown streak appeared through the dappled
tongue could only mumble. 'Let me see your hands,' the	man	said. Iman hid her hands behind her back. She
and, what was even more impressive, David was the only	man	Salma knew who was immune to Iman's beauty.
I haven't seen any money belt," said the elderly	man.	The knight drew out his sword and killed him. '
she found herself standing over an Ancient Egyptian coffin. A	man	whose skin was gold, with a large, heavy black
t do this,' said Salma. 'You're so attractive. Already	men	are all over you. What will it be like
Why not?' 'Don't take this wrong, but how many	men	are going to marry a woman with a disabled
But seriously, Salma,' said Moni. 'Aren't you uncomfortable massaging	men?	Are you even sure it's allowed, did you
I know I'm a fleck,' Iman interrupted. 'It is	men	who have the largest egos, the biggest heads, the
suspension bridge. They passed other climbers, couples and families, three	men	who talked among themselves in a European language. Salma
woman would surface and report him, in fear that the	men	would show up, in the fear that such a
heard them was struck down with a broken heart. Grown	men	would sob like babes and collapse utterly helpless. Too
reads out loud, to a gathering of men, or mostly	men,	a letter she has just received. The woman is
there was also a puppy, a spaniel, frisking around the	men	and the jeep. The dogs barked as Salma and
Iman and that situation lasted a good ten minutes, the	men	becoming clearer as they approached them. One of them
looked down at a clearing near a lake. They saw	men	busy constructing a building. They were dressed in clothes
night after all the patients and receptionist had gone, two	men	came in. You will accompany us, they said. We
and enquire when we get back,' she said. 'Those two	men	could give me a ride back in their car.
friends were who were married to Arab, African or Asian	men.	David gave her all the freedom she wanted. He
up at the pulpit while the monks ate their meals.	Men	deprived of women experienced the deepest thankfulness for the
again and no one would guess why. Later, when the	men	drove him back to his clinic, still polite as
no one in the world really has a choice. Even	men.	If you're born in a certain place or
was blocking the road, stationary but pointing towards them. Two	men	in hunting gear were leaning on the bumper. 'They
of their time and place. The hard knocks hit the	men	later in life, while vulnerable girls turned into venerable
own privileged upbringing. One in which women were gracious and	men	lauded for their largesse. One in which useful connections
an, a woman reads out loud, to a gathering of	men,	or mostly men, a letter she has just received.
You will bring the contents of her womb down, the	men	said. When he said no, they held a gun

they even needed a holiday without family members, especially without	men.	Serving our children, our husbands, our parents – that’s
the softening Iman induced in him, her usual effect on	men.	She wasn’t jealous. It wasn’t worth it.
a way of living that her own religion condemned. Instead	men	should love women, have children, beat the dusty track
of her head and husky voice. Even with her hijab,	men	smelt her from afar, looked longer at her, exerted
that she had fallen in love with it, making the	men	smile. Salma reminded Iman that they must keep going.
asset was her looks, her finest skill was in drawing	men	to her; zero qualifications, English language minimal. What sort
rising. They felt the sincerity that fuelled the manual work,	men	toiling to build what they might not live to
the husband before him and the one before him. Other	men	too, behind her back. And yet it wasn’t
their homes clean, washed and ironed their family’s clothes.	Men	went to the barber even when the children couldn’t
only seen in paintings and films set centuries ago. The	men	were not using any modern building technology and they
other predators. One day, they sensed the approach of fishermen,	men	whose intention was to draw their nets. The first
twisted and, looking back, they could no longer see the	men	with their car. They speculated about them. So, they

that’s not your name.’ Her voice was sharp. The	boy’	s expression, open and full of goodwill, changed to
a favour for me? Would you ask Mullin about the	boy’	s family?’ It was always a mistake to ask
scalpel and Moni was made smaller and smaller by the	boy’	s growing body. Iman was in a war zone
were giving her – the unspoken assumption that she was the	boy’	s mother. She wished that she knew his name
send me a photocopy of your passport,’ he said. ‘The	boy’	s too. It’s good news. I’ve passed
She would tell her that in her search for the	boy	she found the refectory and it was true, there
had eventually managed to buy. Moni started talking about the	boy	she had seen earlier but soon found herself running
t understand, insults in Arabic which he could. ‘Mummy’s	boy,’	she screamed. ‘You’re not a man. I’m
the same. Chapter Eight Moni walked around looking for the	boy.	She scrutinised every child she came across. It occurred
chair, he gave her a hug. ‘You are a lovely	boy,’	she told him. ‘The cleverest, nicest boy.’ His eyes,
banks drift past. She was searching for him. The little	boy	who had played ball with her, the one she
means to challenge him and get their rights. The young	boy	who ran off with the knight’s money belt
of gold coins. It was later found by a young	boy	who went to the waterfall for a swim. The
did not abort her mission. She would look for the	boy	and his family today, as best as she could.
make it official. But Salma had not seen the little	boy	and now it was too late, he had already
are a lovely boy,’ she told him. ‘The cleverest, nicest	boy.’	His eyes, brown and full of expression, kept her

actually not much different than when he had been a	boy.	His print on the household would be faint, his
at the rain that again kept her away from the	boy.	It did not keep him away though and on
not have been careless. Never mind. Here was this little	boy;	it was such pleasure to be in his company.
never left the loch. Moni held his hand. The little	boy	was balancing on the wooden climbing frame. ‘Look at
walked through the door. The memory made her smile. The	boy	was the best that the loch had offered, the
unconcerned about his safety. If Adam had been like this	boy,	able to walk and run and climb, she would
still not entirely comfortable. If it wasn’t for the	boy,	Adam, she would not have gone out at all.
But he would not have been as young as that	boy.	Adam. She must think of him that way. That
didn’t want to walk. She wanted to see the	boy	again. She left the cottage and walked in the
who went to the waterfall for a swim. The young	boy	could not believe his luck. He grabbed the money
walk to the other side of the monastery. Surely the	boy	didn’t live that far, otherwise Moni wouldn’t
the holiday. She lay on the grass and watched the	boy	drink the last of the juice. His lips changed
s fine,’ she said. ‘I’m looking for a little	boy.	He doesn’t talk. We see him on his
did not want to leave or keep searching for the	boy.	Here was peace and plenty, a connection to all
Adam’s world. Moni sat and stared at a little	boy	in a green rain jacket pulling at his father’s
boring – but only the things that would interest a little	boy,	like the ducks swimming alongside the boat. Maybe she
away and closed her eyes. When she opened them, the	boy	looked more substantial, as if he had moved to
to someone on the bank. Iman turned to see a	boy	picking up a ball that had rolled away from
contain this terrible growth one way or the other. Poor	boy,	poor boy. Yet he smiled when he saw her
out loud for all to hear. He was a good	boy,	respectful of the other children, giving them their space.
to contemplate their exits. Moni longing to search for the	boy,	Salma to text again – I’m not telling you
from his prayers. Leaving the shrine, he found a little	boy	selling fish. The fish were raw and not gutted,
could be seen further back, closer to the loch. The	boy	smiled but never spoke. He was not deaf. She
innocent and unfairly killed. You would think that the young	boy	stole what did not rightfully belong to him. But
the garden enjoying the fine weather. Moni watched as the	boy	stuck his tongue into the bottle and tilted his
happy to take on. Besides, she was baking for the	boy.	To thank him for the umbrella he had given
that it offended Moni. Her thoughts were of the little	boy	whose name she didn’t know. She stood up. ‘
him, but then she did. He was a beautiful little	boy,	with lively eyes and a mixture of chubby cheeks
one of them would dart across the grass and the	boy	would follow. She did not allow him to follow
terrible growth one way or the other. Poor boy, poor	boy.	Yet he smiled when he saw her as if
two years. All in all there were twelve of them –	boys	and girls. Scattered now all over the place by
corruption further eroding faith. They saw the abuse of little	boys	and the unlawful accumulation of wealth. They saw worldliness

song. The years passed, and she gave birth to two	boys	and two girls. They were beautiful children, free-spirited
now. His shoes are funny! But that's how little	boys	dressed in 1922. Every school holiday he would spend with
long ago. The workers and ladies; the gardeners and stable	boys.	It struck her that Lady Evelyn must have come
and closed the tap. She imagined a group of young	boys	kicking a ball, playing five-a-side. But they
too hot to play during the day. So, at night,	boys	played football in the street until they were tired
collecting money, debating whether the cut-off age for including	boys	should be eight or ten, and the next, the
one of the wings had been a boarding school for	boys.	The monks taught in the school and tended their
behind it was a pitch where a group of teenage	boys	were playing football. The empty, open-air tennis court

be tucked away at the loch with Salma and Moni. ‘	My	father is furious,’ Ibrahim said. She was taken aback
paced to and fro, kicking pebbles out of his way. ‘	My	father is here,’ he said. ‘He is here with
tell you.’ ‘But I tell you everything.’ ‘The point is	my	father is now saying he’ll cut me off.
no choice. I have to divorce you.’ ‘You can’t . . .’	My	father is ordering me to do so. I have
meet Amir behind his back. “Why should we believe him?”	my	father said. “All this talk of his mother’s
had to repeat the year, they stopped the grant and	my	father started paying—’ ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’
that. He insisted that we meet up alone. We did.	My	father was adamant that at that stage David wouldn’t
and my mother. There were rows between my mother and	my	father when he found out that she had gone
and some of them restrictive. They made me think about	my	own clothes. Why do I dress the way I
me, Salma. I want to answer to myself, to make	my	own decisions.’ ‘What decisions? You’re not making sense.’ ‘
in the car.’ ‘You’re throwing me out! Out of	my	own home?’ ‘It’s finished, Iman. I’ll transfer
new angle of attack from Murtada. You are oblivious to	my	own needs and deprivations. If you’re able to
we went to the Aquarium Grotto Garden and I bought	my	own ticket. It cost two Egyptian pounds. David had
what I want to do,’ said Moni, ‘but I need	my	own time. I don’t want you hovering over
something. I’ve changed. I do want to stand on	my	own two feet, like Moni says. I want to
What I wanted I got. He even stood up to	my	parents and took my side. That’s when things
was mother and carer. ‘David’s favourable circumstances drugged them.	My	parents discussed these things that you just said, they
or ‘they need me at the hospital’. Over the years,	my	parents forgot that I wasn’t a doctor. ‘You
Salma said. ‘For example, he didn’t want to meet	my	parents until he had met me first. He was
in a Moorish villa on a hill outside Algiers, where	my	parents went in search of sunshine. There I learnt
coming to an end and we moved here. Funny enough,	my	parents were shocked. They never expected him to leave,

I live a double life. I don't always tell	my	parents where I go.” It was easy to be
afterwards between myself and my mother. There were rows between	my	mother and my father when he found out that
My father is here,’ he said. ‘He is here with	my	mother and older brother . . .’ She knew about this. It
I dress the way I do? Because that’s how	my	mother dressed and the women in my village. Or
Amir. We had even started to talk about getting engaged.	My	mother had already met him. The three of us
struggling over the difficult sale of a piece of farmland.	My	mother listened to all that Amir had to say
I must call you something. You must have a name.	My	son’s name is Adam.’ They were on the
you another chance. Here. Now write your own name, not	my	son’s name.’ She handed him her phone. When
Pushing your husband away is wrong.’ ‘I am fighting for	my	son’s well-being. I should be applauded, not
undo things and I can’t. How do I pull	my	children back so that they’re little again? It
if she were hanging on every word. Salma went on, ‘	My	children have been nagging they want a dog.’ ‘Don’
and even though she had said to her, ‘Go in,	my	dear. Amir is still running a fever, he’s
that stinky phone in here,’ said Moni. ‘You’re hallucinating,	my	dear. I’m sorry to tell you this. The
to you from birth? I think you do.’ ‘Oh no!	My	family are too poor for diamonds or jewels.’ ‘You
not, either. It was what the other older girls in	my	family were wearing. It felt natural that at a
I remember that day. She came to meet him behind	my	father’s back. She was tense. Amir spoke well.
expatriate staff happened to be a long- time friend of	my	father’s. Uncle Emad’s wife was my mother’
word with care. ‘I’ve been thinking about myself and	my	future, wondering what I really want. For a long
called her by her Muslim name – Zainab. Your state is	my	future, Zainab, one day I will follow to where
I was admitted into the august presence in company with	my	host and his sister. When His Holiness suddenly addressed
to be in Rome staying with some Italian friends, when	my	host asked me if I would like to visit
and the women in my village. Or that’s how	my	husband of the time wanted me to dress. Each
made a face. ‘I’m not the one cheating on	my	husband or taking off my hijab.’ ‘You’re an
to draw their nets. The first fish said, “To save	my	life I will escape from here. I will make
not having any more children?’ ‘Isn’t this exactly what	my	life is like now?’ Moni gave a bitter laugh. ‘
It doesn’t mean they don’t notice,’ said Salma.	My	mother-in-law loves a good gossip. She doesn’
that had been fragile. ‘I want to tell you about	my	mother-in-law,’ she finally said. ‘And don’t
conscious, still curious. What do I look like now? In	my	new life, this life of freedom? A tree did
wouldn’t be counted on Judgement Day. I’m loving	my	new phone, she wrote in another message to her
adultery.’ ‘Up to your neck in disobedience instead.’ ‘I neglect	my	prayers for the sake of Adam. You don’t
my despair, but in time I forgot my Arab friends,	my	prayers in the Mosque and even the Arabic language.

I must eat,' said Salma. 'If I am to grow	my	strength again, I must have protein.' A chill ran
become – without dignity, inhuman and unable to speak. 'He took	my	strength instead of my virtue,' Salma said. 'That's
am not there, Moni. I am here, and I want	my	wife and son with me. It's as simple
is the same as the one before it,' he said. '	My	wife is Japanese.' 'Really? I didn't know.' He
not,' snapped Salma. 'They're ashamed of me. Ashamed of	my	accent, my background, my opinions. I'm losing them.
herself. Everyone says so. Still plenty of time. Young women	my	age aren't even thinking of settling down, let
has made this book possible. Continued thanks to Stephanie Cabot,	my	agent for over twenty years. Thank you to Vimbai
was to escape my governess and visit the Mosques with	my	Algerian friends, and unconsciously I was a little Moslem
you money. As soon as he's back giving me	my	allowance. I'll put money in your account.' But
good, much to my despair, but in time I forgot	my	Arab friends, my prayers in the Mosque and even
know who I am? If I had the use of	my	arms, I would be hugging you now. Please don't
Salma. 'They're ashamed of me. Ashamed of my accent,	my	background, my opinions. I'm losing them. Day by
the bottle from him. 'Be careful. Get a tissue from	my	bag and clean your face.' He wiped his face
I shouldn't have come with you. I will do	my	best tomorrow, I promise you, but I don't
put her in her place. 'I tried, Amir. I tried	my	best. The circumstances were against me.' 'Nonsense. You needed
do this?' Iman's voice was gentle. 'I'll try	my	best.' 'We can't not go,' said Salma. 'It'
lustre of my coat and the plump meat that covers	my	bones. I am the one most worthy of your
encounter is vast and beyond control. Acknowledgements Special thanks to	my	brilliant and gallant editor Elisabeth Schmitz. And to the
before everything crashed. 'They're all against me – my mother,	my	brother. There's no point talking to them. They
will leave you. I will take the ferry, get in	MY	car, MINE, as you seem to have forgotten, and
members of a family, each with their weaknesses and strengths.	My	children, she would say to others. Show photos of
said Moni. 'That's what I thought. Why add to	my	chores?' 'And don't forget having to renew your
and healthy. Please eat me. Look at the lustre of	my	coat and the plump meat that covers my bones.
purpose of her humanity. She had asked Salma once, 'Is	my	constipation stopping me from getting pregnant?' And Salma laughed
s why she has no qualms about wasting food. In	my	country it's the other way round. That's
struggling to hide her amusement. Salma, though, was visibly moved. '	My	darling, you are fine, you are fine.' She fetched
search of sunshine. There I learnt to speak Arabic and	my	delight was to escape my governess and visit the
Mustapha Superieur we left the villa for good, much to	my	despair, but in time I forgot my Arab friends,
You two are free to do what you like, but	my	duty as a friend is to caution you.' 'So
Me and him belonging together. His discomfort mine, his inability	my	duty. She should find Salma and tell her that
A big city,' she laughed. 'And you don't know	my	exact address.' 'There are two ways to get information,'
to grow. I can almost see you growing right before	my	eyes!' It was an expression, an exaggeration, but it

She said he should go ahead anyway and speak to	my	father. He said he wouldn't do that behind
the prayer for the return journey. Author's Note In	my	favourite verses of the Qur'an, a woman reads
Mayfair. If only the photographs had colour! 'Which outfit is	my	favourite?' Iman asked herself. She wasn't sure. In
this and resolve our differences, Iman.' 'You are oblivious to	my	feelings,' said Iman. 'You don't know me. If
more, but I do keep fit. Then I'm on	my	feet all day, always busy.' He understood straight away
felt vulnerable without them. The pebbles on the ground cut	my	feet, there were thorns, dirt and insects and little
was involved with someone else at the time. One of	my	fellow students in university: Amir. We had even started
to Toby. 'I was so pleased to get your letter,	my	first post since I left London which seems years
western sky. I am happy, thought Salma, sitting here with	my	friend. I am happy being of use to her,
sea. And I must do it alone and in secret.	My	friends will surely weaken my resolve. Their love of
faint contempt. A refusal to listen or understand. 'Stay put,	my	girl. Don't come back.' Iman's anger ebbed
learnt to speak Arabic and my delight was to escape	my	governess and visit the Mosques with my Algerian friends,
Seager. It is a blessing to have such supportive publishers.	My	gratitude to my wonderful editor at W&N, Jennifer
his fear and youth. 'Camel,' said the lion. 'You are	my	guest for as long as both of us shall
Iman moved closer to the Hoopoe. 'I accept you as	my	guide,' Moni said. 'I will go with you,' Salma
one single strand was enough to determine the length of	my	hair, its colour and texture.' Salma burst out laughing

the chance to be a doctor, the doctor Salma wanted	her	to be because she couldn't. At home, Salma
medical test, the hushed voices and days in hospital. For	her	to be buried in her beloved Egypt would be
with action and autonomy. Freed from Amir's need for	her	to be passive and secondary to him, she had
her sake, he was playing hard to get. He wanted	her	to be the one chasing him. He wanted her
it now, looking through a windowpane. It was unusual for	her	to be visually moved, to notice, to see. And
Man pays and woman serves. He houses, clothes and feeds	her	to get something in return. So what was the
Man pays and woman serves. He houses, clothes and feeds	her	to get something in return. Put love in the
she had driven them here and they were dependent on	her	to get them back. It was lame, she knew.
a bedroom with Salma's eldest daughter. Salma would take	her	to a lawyer to claim as many rights as
admiration of her friend was so great that she elevated	her	to a special status. Salma belonged to the healthcare
completely, hadn't put away her reluctance to return with	her	to the city. Better humour her this time. Let
but before she could turn to look, a force pushed	her	to the ground. She started to yell and kicked
as possible, but moving to a new place had forced	her	to adjust. The surprise of having to share with
you?' She did remember the stories, but did he want	her	to apply them to her life? She had never
but her own lack of confidence made it difficult for	her	to argue with Salma. Growing up in a family
cook his food. Soon he had her as he wanted	her	to be: loving, grateful and dependent on no one

done him an injustice. How poignant that Amir desperately needed	her	to believe him. How young of him. The following
her saviour too. Dumped by the husband who had brought	her	to Britain (not exactly dumped, but he had ended
picked the most ambitious. He was the one who brought	her	to Britain. Salma, Moni and Iman heading out. Salma
to her like that before, no one had ever asked	her	to choose. She had been thrilled at what he
and 'hubby'; endearments that could not be translated. Norma wanted	her	to come over and give her a massage. Her
continents apart. It was this sense of safety that allowed	her	to correspond with him. A confidence in herself. Now
time. And they came to her, they did not leave	her	to cry alone. Iman to comfort her and Moni
Iman shrugged. When the other two stared at her, wanting	her	to explain, she started choosing each word with care. ‘
more. She didn't want him to be ashamed of	her,	to feel that he had picked her up from
She must listen to Salma's voice, trying to reach	her,	to filter through what she had become. Iman. Iman.
behind her back. She did not want them to nurse	her,	to flutter over her. ‘Go away, leave me alone,’
had changed his mind at the last minute and allowed	her	to go on this trip with Salma. At first,
Iman now came and went without telling her, without urging	her	to join her, without checking up first on what
if she had reached her destination, Salma couldn't force	her	to keep going. They would all meet later at
this trip at all. It won't be easy for	her	to leave Adam.’ Salma hadn't thought of this.
sit even as others joined her at the table, expecting	her	to make way. She was thinking about Adam, imagining
to ask. How on earth had her parents ever allowed	her	to marry David? Salma smiled and said, ‘It was
night for him and teatime for her, he had asked	her	to phone him. It thrilled her of course, this
Moni played aggressively and played to win. It was getting	her	to play in the first place that had been
to go to university, was not exerting undue pressure on	her	to practise as a doctor. It was time to
wanted her to be the one chasing him. He wanted	her	to say sorry. She was sorry, and she was
flower in her hand. She was beginning to look around	her,	to see all that was beautiful and fascinating. To
and as much jewellery as he could afford, he taught	her	to speak his language and to cook his food.
because Iman was small, there was even less reason for	her	to stand out. When she whizzed past and waved
husband's treachery. The skin was glossy and alive, inviting	her	to step into it, to pick up the past
s first thought was that he had come to fetch	her,	to take her back so that she could meet
her beauty. It had not given her security or allowed	her	to understand herself. Beauty itself was a mask, a
He was showing off, that's what it was, bringing	her	to where he could be in an advantageous position,
she was a poor loser, huffing and grumpy. Salma allowed	her	to win, but Moni didn't. Moni played aggressively
Salma felt, again, the wash of sadness. Iman mattered to	her	and she had thought, and all the evidence pointed
not worried that she would sink. The water was washing	her,	and she had always appreciated cleanliness, enjoyed the smells
lay back on the grass. The sun shone directly above	her	and she covered her eyes with her arm. The

larger than the pain, bigger than her anger. It flooded	her,	and she passed out. Even then she could see
that Salma was chatting too much. The sea was calling	her	and she speeded effortlessly towards it. She wanted to
s best not to look right or left.’ This confused	her,	and she started asking why, how come, how did
was not a natural at board games. The rules confused	her,	and she was a poor loser, huffing and grumpy.
least an explanation. She told them about how Murtada wanted	her	and Adam to join him. Iman said, ‘You must
her interest, but she was worried that they might distress	her	and aggravate confused feelings about Adam. Since seeing him
she wanted was the sea. There it was, spectacular beneath	her,	and all she had to do was sing in
Beloved nostalgia and buckle down. But instead, Iman was abandoning	her,	and Amir had come all the way for her.
mother, but her pity was tempered with anger. Anger at	her	and anger for her. If having all these children
bird did not need clothes. She was submerged now. Above	her	and around her, soft granulated soil. Her feet touched
At first, she had not judged him good enough for	her	and assumed she could do better. It was his
who was immune to Iman’s beauty. This anomaly fascinated	her	and boosted her self- esteem. ‘Iman needs to become
to get him. She would have just taken him with	her	and bought the first thing he pointed out. How
trail. She started to call out, ‘Iman, Moni.’ They heard	her	and came to where she was. The three of
her daughter’s wedding, carry a grandchild, book tickets for	her	and David to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. Hints
and meet you at the car.’ Salma was disappointed in	her	and for her. Moni had come so far, walked
are no boundaries. It is one and the same between	her	and him, between who he is, familiar and unfamiliar,
defended Moni, pointing out the generous gifts she had given	her	and how she spared no expense on Adam’s
turn back, to retrace her steps. Iman didn’t want	her.	And if Amir did, enough to travel all the
be twelve in total not eight. Challenging but doable for	her	and Iman; too much to ask of Moni. ‘Is
a mother to Adam and not let that role floor	her.	And in the meantime, she let herself go. Weight
did not leave her to cry alone. Iman to comfort	her	and Moni to say kind words. Salma had always
bags containing her belongings were on the seat next to	her	and on the floor. This was what Ibrahim had
a ‘miss you already’. There were no phone messages for	her	and only a few inconsequential emails. On social media,
the building ahead of her. She closed the gate behind	her	and ran the last few steps to the entrance.
because he wasn’t as polite as David, he contradicted	her	and said, ‘Nonsense. You are. We graduated in the
her, she raised her voice. ‘Adam.’ He smiled down at	her	and started to walk down the stairs. When he
skin permeated by the breeze. She pulled her jacket over	her	and that simple action, of drawing a cover over
hold on to, but still she struggled. The distance between	her	and the other two grew until it became too
it was Moni, reduced and distorted. Iman came close to	her	and their eyes met. ‘Where is Salma?’ Moni said.
melt and his freedom would be complete. He swayed towards	her	and then suddenly tugged his chains away from her
Iman and Salma would not be far. They would find	her,	and they would help. She could depend on them. ‘

she protected the forest and everyone in it. They needed	her.	And this sniper had been a scout. There would
first gentle and overpowered by Ibrahim barging in to hurt	her	and throw back her things, but now as she
or squat or wash. All that fuss. Other animals sniffed	her	and were satisfied that she was genuine. Insects buried
Put love in the equation. He gives because he loves	her	and would give regardless of whether services were rendered
The choice was either to wear these new costumes or	her	own clothes. It seemed a long time since she
clothes. It seemed a long time since she had worn	her	own clothes. She wondered how Ibrahim would react if
only to find that he was further away. It was	her	own breathing she was hearing, the contrast of cold
was just the three of them, Salma decided to take	her	own car. She had fought a battle and lost.
you think?’ Every massage therapist contemplated becoming self-employed. Choosing	her	own clients and her own hours. But Salma was
wished she was not wearing this ridiculous cowboy hat. In	her	own clothes, with her ordinary hijab, she would have
would not have failed to visit the east coast of	her	own country. Once again Salma felt a closeness to
a grandmother. She worshipped as we worshipped, though she kept	her	own culture, wore Edwardian fashion, shot deer and left
forest trails were graded by difficulty and time. Left to	her	own devices, she would have opted for the longest,
Amir’s flat or his mother, not much different from	her	own flat and mother, but she felt an added
as their monster form developed, the mother would barely recognise	her	own flesh and blood. And they, well into becoming
it’s imprinting itself on us.’ Iman could not believe	her	own fluency, how she was talking and the other
her best friend. None of them wanted her back. For	her	own good, of course. But still, it felt, at
therapist contemplated becoming self-employed. Choosing her own clients and	her	own hours. But Salma was surprised by Moni’s
smile. There were things she wanted – to be queen of	her	own household, to bring her mother over from Syria,
no expense on Adam’s treatment. Iman was unconvinced but	her	own lack of confidence made it difficult for her

Appendix B: WTDW

Leave my wife out of it!’ To our disappointment, the	girl	was dissected covered in a sheet. The lecturer waved
poppies. You were wrapped in a long shawl. A young	girl	was playing behind you in the distance. Was it
to send two of you to the other hospital. A	girl	was stabbed by her brother and her family didn’
Najwa, my daughter, must be nine by now, a beautiful	girl	with curly hair and captivating hazel eyes. And, as
next to Hani, behind a poppy field, smiling, a young	girl	with shaggy hair in the background. A few green
remembered you’re a Muslim. Marriage before gobbling up.’ The	girl	with the dimples smiled. ‘You aim high, sister. You
in the distance. Was it cold? Who was the young	girl?	And why was Hani holding a rifle but you
do with the body.’ Hani had never seen a naked	girl	before. He choked. Two hours and a few cups
in a green shawl, waved to us. Who was the	girl	biting the end of her veil and smiling at
neighbour’s son, who wouldn’t get married to a	girl	brought up in a house without men; Andy’s
had a golden sheen. ‘Who’s hot?’ ‘You know who,	girl.	Don’t muck me about.’ ‘Oh! Him! Good enough
I washed my face and opened the door. ‘You silly	girl!’	Elizabeth force-fed me an English breakfast: fried eggs,
and a few mud houses in the distance. A young	girl,	head covered in a green shawl, waved to us.
kind. ‘Zakir, I am looking for my father.’ ‘A beautiful	girl	like you with no father! Gosh almighty!’ ‘Yes. And
children of the neighbourhood were heading to the swings. The	girl	next door wore her new clothes, white frilled socks
to her and handed her the money. ‘Nine thousand.’ ‘Good	girl!’	One has to learn to soar solo,’ I said
was dissected covered in a sheet. The lecturer waved the	girl’	s heart in the air. It was small, encased
hand and rubbed my forearm with antiseptic cream. ‘You silly	girl!	You could’ve broken your wrist.’ * Two weeks later,
saqhib,’ they repeated. The women suppressed their laughter and the	girls	and boys ran towards me, encircled me and poked
women, in brightly coloured burqas, suppressed their laughter and the	girls	and boys ran towards me and encircled me. ‘You
one or two breeze-block houses and a mosque. Veiled	girls	and boys in dirty shalwar kameez and embroidered caps
dinners of chicken and rice, cracked jokes with them about	girls	and sex, even watched films with them. Then I
high in carat and dark. If I were like other	girls	I would be shopping for a set with my
perfume and sweat hits you when you enter. Loud music: ‘	Girls	Just Want To Have Fun’. And there was uncovered
the early-morning trip to work. I walked by the	girls’	school, the grocer, chemist, rotisserie and clothes’ shops to
with a sign over the door in Pashtu and English:	Girls’	School. An American soldier paced up and down outside.
or feet, thrown human parts to dogs, dug out dead	girls.	There was nothing they could do that would even
as a volunteer in a charity that builds schools for	girls. ‘	This thumb is sore.’ I wanted to stroke it,

and the farmers gesticulated in anger and relief. The old	woman'	s eyes shone with tears. * We arrived at an
the first glance, but the second look at a strange	woman'	s face was a sin and the imam tried
off; a medic pressing a white cloth mask to a	woman'	s face; Underground tunnels blown up, their wires and
It was soft, sweet and aromatic. I squeezed the old	woman'	s fingers and nodded my head. I felt hemmed
veil. Men around here are not used to seeing a	woman'	s hair.' Amani turned her head and darted an
this wretched morning. It was a cold morning. The old	woman'	s teeth chattered as she did her ablutions, prayed,
silent, people might get suspicious.' 'Strict Muslims believe that a	woman'	s voice is awra and must be kept hidden.
decided to stay and eavesdrop. Their English was perfect. A	woman	with arched brows and dimples wore a leopard veil. '
her walking through that cell door: a tall, majestic young	woman	with curly hair cascading down her shoulders. She would
pulled the veil down to hide my fringe. An old	woman	with hennaed hair ushered me to the women's
a tree with light green leaves that looked like a	woman	with her hair down, rather than tied up in
I treat my late wife well? She was a good	woman	with one shortcoming: her desire to keep things as
innocent people.' 'Me?' 'Not you; you. Your people.' 'Was that	woman	with the burnt face responsible for killing people God
hot in his black kurta.' The veil of a younger	woman	had a golden sheen. 'Who's hot?' 'You know
held his head with both hands, the way that young	woman	had done in the café in London, and kissed
message at the grocer or the barber. Perhaps the American	woman	had licked his brains off and he decided to
strong, her arms muscular and her jaw set. The old	woman	had wrinkled skin, but bright, youthful eyes. The floor
his son. 'How can a man tend the sick, a	woman?'	I answered him using a sentence I had heard
chest, refusing to have any physical contact with a strange	woman.	I bowed. 'As-salaam alaikum lur Sheikh Omar Rahman
fluttering in my hands like a sparrow, into a cruel	woman?'	I will never know because I was never there.
fresh air, laden with the scent of wild flowers. A	woman	in a burqa offered me tea. A whiff of
next to a Pakistani soldier, two farmers and an old	woman	in a burqa. My mother, who went out of
organ system. What makes your heart stop – not a beautiful	woman	in a short skirt, as Hani would say. The
perfumed. Why would someone like him want to take a	woman	like me out? Unless he was after something. Perhaps
good. I might end up alone here.' 'Not an attractive	woman	like you, surely? You'll be swept off your
shone in the light of the lamp. 'I am a	woman,	like you.' Gulnar held her head in the kitchen. '
He seemed puzzled. He must be wondering why an Arab	woman	was interested in ethnic Pakistani music. I had to
The farmers walked away, carrying the wooden chest. The old	woman	was met by a turbaned old man. He took
them in her house, Gulnar embraced and welcomed them. The	woman	was nimble and jovial, her face amiable, manners graceful,
dies. Shameful.' 'Shameful?' 'No one would get married to a	woman	who lived on her own.' She laughed. 'That's
the stairs and into the coach by the veiled young	woman,	who promised to take care of her. The sun
Tree I sat next to a veiled, middle-aged Pakistani	woman,	who spoke perfect English. She explained to me that

then called Gulnar, who was busy chatting to an old	woman,	and began jabbering in Dari. Gulnar excused herself and
swore under his breath and started the engine. The old	woman	and the farmers gesticulated in anger and relief. The
closed. I couldn't see the eyes of the old	woman,	but I could smell her delicate perfume, the scent
Black Magic chocolates.' 'I loved her. She was a good	woman,	but too wound up.' 'Is that enough of an
was instructed to go through a metal detector, then a	woman	guard padded me down. I blushed when I was
He gave me my bag and waved me through. The	woman	guard who'd searched me led me to another
sacks of flour. In one room, a grief-stricken old	woman	held a leg and rocked. I had to find
in folk music. My hand was sweaty when the old	woman	held it, slipping me a sherbet sweet. The driver
niceties, 'Salaam! Allah ki taraf, kharid, khada ki mahabat.' A	woman	holding a yellow voucher was pointing at what looked
barking, a baby crying and the snoring of the old	woman.	Holding your photograph against my chest, I imagined you
there were shelves on both sides full of books. The	woman	sat down. I went to the kitchen and pointed
I waited for that kind lady to return. An old	woman	sat leaning on the wall, repeating her prayers, but
Where have you been hiding?' 'Hiding!' 'Is it a married	woman?	A street hooker? A belly dancer in a club?' '
picked up my phone and pressed Andy's number. A	woman	answered, laughing. Someone was tickling her. 'No!' she objected. '
Bile, bits of food and coffee grains gushed out. The	woman	came and handed me a bottle of water. It
I'd arrived here, I hadn't seen a single	woman	eat in public. It must be frowned upon. I
his eyes darting around. My stomach retched again. The old	woman	gave me a sprig of mint. I chewed it. '
phone, scrolled down and rang Andy. 'There's a young	woman	here. Her name is Najwa. She's in a
Good?' I asked, ignoring Abu-Bakr's advice. The old	woman	joined her thumb and forefinger in a circle, indicating
to this darkness.' He urged me to sit down. The	woman	kissed me on both cheeks. 'Are you Hani's
could describe my love for you. A photo of a	woman	lifting a baby, swaddled in a white and green
and went out flushed, sweaty and shaky. An old English	woman	looked at me. 'Are you all right, love?' 'I
my own tears? Would I ever soar solo? The old	woman	objected, raising her arm from under the burqa. I
you, you filthy raghead.' 'They'll shag you like a	woman,	on arrival.' 'Hope they lynch you, you scumbag.' 'They
fill the air. A man shouted abuse at a crying	woman	outside my window: 'Fuck you! Bitch!' My body responded
tea later, the body arrived. It was of a young	woman,	perhaps thirteen or fourteen, with multiple stab wounds. The
them. 'Amani!' I cried and could not hear myself. A	woman	pointed at the hills. I couldn't see through
So sorry.' No tears. The drought was back. 'Yes.' 'Good	woman,	really.' 'Yes.' 'Like a mother to all of us.'
neck like a noose, and spat on it. The old	woman	reappeared waving my passport in the air. I wiped
a dark room with built-in seats. A grey-haired	woman	reclined on one of them. She looked up. 'Peace
about his plans. Not today. Is he seeing a married	woman?	Returned home early to have my mother-in-law'
turbulent. I sat on a bench and watched an old	woman	scatter seeds for the pigeons. Even the animals are

I adjusted my chador and walked in behind the old	woman.	She entered, kicked off her shoes, greeted the veiled
morning. Splitting headache, sulking wife, screaming baby and an old	woman	snivelling in the kitchen. How did I find myself
her trembling hand. 'Thank you.' Gulnar was a soft-spoken	woman,	so I was surprised when she looked through the
woman. She entered, kicked off her shoes, greeted the veiled	woman	standing at the back in the makeshift kitchen and
black, stepped out. The priest mopped his brow. A young	woman	stood by the door, tall, back bent, in a
to cover my hair and held my breath. The old	woman	stuck her leathery hand out from under the blue
Muslims wherever they find them.' 'Like me?' 'Yes. The old	woman	told me. You don't know how to pray.' '
and pepper?' 'Grey hair.' The sun was setting outside. A	woman	took the ice-cream cone out of her baby'
heard it clink-clink on the floor. A thin, tall	woman	walked in, her orange burqa trailing behind her. When
pizza just outside the door of the café. A black	woman	wearing tights, a bra and many necklaces, with micro
tearing the blastopore and intestines. "He is crying like a	woman."''	Weeks later, he was released by one of the
car. 'Allahu akbar!' the passengers cried in unison, including the	woman,	whose voice is supposed to be a taboo. The
being watched? I choked on the pistachios. Who was this	woman?	Why was she acting as if she knew me?
fidget or smooth my trousers. I must stand like a	woman	without a care in the world and keep smiling
the Metro carriage. I sat next to a veiled Asian	woman.	Would I look suspicious sitting next to her? If
in a club?' 'No.' 'Did you sleep with that American	woman?' '	Yes. We went to a cheap downtown hotel. She
war.' The video was a compilation of scenes of Muslim	women	and children being attacked by Western or Soviet soldiers
round somehow. Birds of prey circled above me, calling. Children,	women	and elders waved to me then recited the funereal
desire'. It was open, secular, civilised: music, lemon chicken stew,	women	and free love. I kind of understand why my
and drove him away. Blond men kissed the hands of	women	and seemed courteous and caring. And, here in Afghanistan,
knowledge of the native tongue. Where were the farmers, the	women	and the children? And what if he stopped the
I felt as if we were trespassers. There were no	women	to be seen. The aroma of green tea, flavoured
to set. I washed three teaspoons and waited for the	women	to finish. I gave them the spoons and pointed
it. One of the old men gave permission for the	women	to get closer. One in a pink embroidered burqa
of the population of England tarred.' 'Is it OK for	women	to live on their own?' 'Yes. Not a problem.' '
day is nigh!' I chose it simply because not many	women	are allowed to become nurses, whores in the eyes
he would find one in a boîte de nuit. Western	women	are always in nightclubs. It was dark inside the
you going to safeguard the sharaf, the honour of our	women?	Are you Muslims? We must protect them and establish
their ears and chins, framing their tanned, cracked faces. The	women,	in brightly coloured burqas, stood behind them, chattering and
and embraced me. 'Good to see you, my friend.' The	women,	in brightly coloured burqas, suppressed their laughter and the

pedlar had told my grandmother in her broken Arabic that	women	in that part of the world were modest, discreet
keen on organising everything, including my underpants. I calmed the	women	of the house and went to sleep, dreaming of
t allow me to wear a veil, like the other	women	of the neighbourhood, figure-hugging clothes were also banned. ‘
in that house, something this city would not tolerate. Only	women	of ill repute live on their own without a
the misty glass of the bus heading to Mecca. * The	women	flocked in burqas in all the colours of the
could find to my normal diet. A group of veiled	women	flocked into the café, arm in arm, chatting and
to be driven in a van to the local cemetery.	Women	were not allowed to go there, but she insisted.
to celebrate. My grandmother told me that Muslim men and	women	were not supposed to eat in public. They were
Fun’. And there was uncovered flesh, yards of it, and	women	with ample hips swaying on the dance floor. I
house, looking for weapons, and kick both the men and	women	with their boots. A G.I. begins shooting. ‘I
did things in this country? Did men lose interest in	women	after they had slept with them? Or he might
in this house, it will be so shameful. Only loose	women, ‘	ahirat, live alone. You belong with your father.’ I
In one of the videos, entitled ‘Infidel Dogs Abusing Muslim	Women’,	American soldiers enter a house, looking for weapons, and
channel. ‘Torched Planet’, more like. Nothing was spared: old men,	women,	children, cows, dogs, cats, grass, trees. The elders decided
He wagged his finger. ‘Shoo! It’s prayer time. No	women,	chit-chat or nonsense.’ ‘Please.’ ‘Shoo!’ He raised the
the queue again. He fingered his trimmed moustache. ‘Not many	women	come here on their own like that to get
it is in Amman and particularly in this neighbourhood. Chaste	women	don’t live on their own. Tongues will wag.
a-b-e-t-h’, written with white roses. Two	women,	dressed in black, stepped out. The priest mopped his
put my jacket on and left the house of wailing	women.	Drowns in an inch of water. She gets frazzled,
I offered my wet trousers to Gulnar. Ten years without	women –	except for the odd ugly nurse, foreign correspondent or
instantly and flung them on the floor. ‘How do veiled	women	function under those? Honestly! And the heat is overbearing.’
at school. She was teamed up with three other old	women	going on pilgrimage. The daughter of one of them
my lashes, but my eyes were still dry. ‘They good	women.	Kind to us.’ She held my hand. I shivered.
a good mood. He spoke about his love of American	women:	lean, toasted like wholewheat bread, legs long and up
by their fathers or husbands, and on the other loose	women	like me. I crossed it towards the aeroplane. No
hedges, the high metal gates, the closed shutters? Half-naked	women?	Men in tuxedos smoking cigars? Somebody was playing the
local internet café, a space out of bounds for chaste	women.	Only men went there, to sit in front of
was this ‘Miss’? And how come there were so many	women	preachers teaching religion all over the place? My mother
him. Their’s is a joyless house, with three shrivelling	women	rattling about in it.’ My heart fell, banged against
An old woman with hennaed hair ushered me to the	women’	s section. I went to the toilet, washed my

his daughter?’ I nodded. ‘Why aren’t you in the	women’	s quarter?’ ‘L-Looking for a toilet,’ I stammered.
yogurt and bread. We sat around the tray. The Afghani	women	said, ‘Bismillah,’ then ate. I scooped up some rice
the café shouted, ‘Oi! Scarecrows! Camel heads! Go home!’ The	women	seemed accustomed to this. Unperturbed by the abuse, they
wheels made such a racket that the old men and	women	sitting on the steps around a statue of a
time. I sniffed the air and thanked Allah for creating	women,	such miraculous beings. If only we dedicated our lives
salaam alaikum lur Sheikh Omar Rahman saaqhib,’ they repeated. The	women	suppressed their laughter and the girls and boys ran
bad reputation although most of the screwing is done by	women	teachers.’ The class is held at the back of
into two had been drawn. On one side lived honourable	women,	those protected by their fathers or husbands, and on
involved with a foreigner. Perhaps he didn’t approve of	women	travelling without an escort. But I went to Afghanistan
and try to get married to an immigrant worker! Loose	women	would settle for less than indigenous men. The garbage

was hard because my grandmother had cautioned me against looking	men	in the eye. I typed a letter in English,
warm, against mine. The pedlar had cautioned me against looking	men	in the eye. ‘Always cast down your glance! Men
and beautiful. ‘Your granddaughter must hide her flesh! Never look	men	in the eye: an open invitation to trouble.’ ‘I
I paid him the thirty pounds and left the shop.	Men	in the old country never looked at you openly
the engine. Our house began shrinking as we drove off.	Men	in long white robes and kaffiyehs counted on their
the high metal gates, the closed shutters? Half-naked women?	Men	in tuxedos smoking cigars? Somebody was playing the saxophone,
the Houses of Parliament, Ben Nevis, and a group of	men	in white playing cricket on an immaculate lawn. ‘How
bridge. The wheels made such a racket that the old	men	and women sitting on the steps around a statue
fizzy drink to celebrate. My grandmother told me that Muslim	men	and women were not supposed to eat in public.
enter a house, looking for weapons, and kick both the	men	and women with their boots. A G.I. begins
looking men in the eye. ‘Always cast down your glance!	Men	are easily encouraged.’ My gaze went against her advice.
also on the list of forbidden things in our house. ‘	Men	are predators and they’re wired to betray you.’
the slums of the capital. The unclaimed bodies of dead	men	are sold to medical staff and students for a
the cloth bag and slipped it below my breast. The	men	were asked to get out of the car first.
he so cold with me? My grandmother had said that	men	were predators. ‘You must not give yourself on a
top and drank. Its coldness and sweetness was so refreshing.	Men	were stealing glances at me. The journey hadn’t
Arabic, to spite him. Our guests were mainly suited foreign	men. ‘	What do they do?’ ‘They’re journalists, arms’ dealers
Islamic rules and travelling alone in the company of strange	men?	What if his heart was made of flint, as

mother's advice nor my grandmother's warnings about predatory	men.	Andy held me as I rocked in bed. Relaxed
married to a girl brought up in a house without	men;	Andy's rejection; over my half-sister, who was
She shouldn't run out like that, without a veil.	Men	around here are not used to seeing a woman'
one is a tough nut to crack." At night, two	men	came in, broke a bottle and stuck it up
enhanced prisoners and serious offenders. What did criminals look like?	Men,	clean-shaven, in T-shirts and jeans, fluorescent belts
wash.' I listened for your voice among that of the	men	conferring again outside. She held my fingers and pressed
hours debating Azzam's fatwa with Sheikh Muhammad. Many young	men	decided to join.' 'Join what?' 'Global jihad, of course.
eyes and shredded her stupid doll. 'You're lying. Arab	men	don't sew and stitch.' Gulnar's silhouette pressed
Rahman?' They gesticulated and dismissed it. One of the old	men	gave permission for the women to get closer. One
upon you. Natural laws of extension. Sad that the young	men	had to die. Afraid of the random arrests of
about my father.' 'Your father is the most honourable of	men.	He carried my son over his shoulder for miles.
get hurt.' So the sermon today was about truth and	men.	I shrugged my shoulders, leapt over the canal and
how to tend my father and drove him away. Blond	men	kissed the hands of women and seemed courteous and
that the way people did things in this country? Did	men	lose interest in women after they had slept with
and was turned down. 'They're afraid that the young	men	might end up in training camps.' An attractive man,
their wedding date, May 1981, were engraved on the gold. Muslim	men	must never wear fineries, like gold or silk, and
desires and wishes'. I tensed up whenever I heard the	men	outside confer then disperse. I thought I heard Ashraf
the cool shade of the building, panting. One of the	men	pointed at me. 'What does she want?' The mosque
lips plump and violet. 'Lower your gaze! Don't let	men	see the colour of your irises! It fans the
borders of China. Also, brought up in a house without	men,	she wouldn't know how to show my son
immigrant worker! Loose women would settle for less than indigenous	men.	The garbage collector seemed always clean and kind. I
go home now. The server is down.' Suddenly all the	men	turned and ogled me. I buttoned up my mother'
out the same rituals together with a large number of	men.	Under the influence of proximity, you think that you
hell because your wife is not a Muslim.' Brainwashing young	men	used to be my job, but suddenly I can
café, a space out of bounds for chaste women. Only	men	went there, to sit in front of the computer
me. We have been stopped on the way by armed	men,	who belong to as many factions or armies as
facilitated our journey, wrote us glorious references: They are righteous	men,	with strong belief in Allah and regular observance of
their channel. 'Torched Planet', more like. Nothing was spared: old	men,	women, children, cows, dogs, cats, grass, trees. The elders
On the plane to London, I sat next to a	man	with blue eyes and funny ears. I thought the
wall. The next day, at breakfast, Ed – a young, troubled	man	with blue eyes and ginger hair – came and sat
old man pointed at one of the counters. A bespectacled	man	with grey hair and a moustache greeted me. When

one of you when you were young and dashing. That	man	with grey hair, wrinkled skin, rough hands was supposed
off. My second abandonment was easier, for I am a	man	with a mission now. We took a taxi to
young men might end up in training camps.’ An attractive	man,	with dusky skin and dark, glistening hair, looked up.
stood face to face with my fate. A masked, turbaned	man	with narrow eyes pointed his rifle at me. I
old and ornate. I sat to catch my breath. A	man	with short ginger hair, blue eyes and a beard,
olive trees. The interview was brief. The owner, an old	man	with shrewd eyes, had one look at me and
in the middle of deserted fields, alone with a strange	man	in a foreign country, which I’d entered on
and parked it next to the shoe-repair kiosk. A	man	in a shalwar kameez, a so-called Arab Afghani,
the Town Hall in Dewsbury at four p.m.’ A	man	in a striped suit was sitting next to me,
Mango Market, King Faisal Street, 1984. Then him with a young	man	in a tight shirt, with Afro hair, bushy moustache
aware of the tic in my right cheek. * An old	man	in a wool cap, long shalwar kameez shirt, an
either English, American or Indian. The policeman asked the bearded	man	in front of me something. The answer made him
billowing plastic bags and chips. Pigeons feasted on it. A	man	in sunglasses, talking on a mobile phone, followed me.
queue was long and wound around the barriers. An old	man	in uniform directed and ushered us to this counter
to sit in that chair and think of you, the	man	who broke her mind. And on the two stairs
What do you mean?’ ‘What changed you from a Westernised	man	who loved jazz, to a ... ?’ ‘Life, death, other people.’ ‘
It sounded right coming out of the mouth of the	man	who named me. I wiped the tears with the
rarely laughs and he gets tired easily. The carefree young	man	who sang Olivia Newton-John’s songs has disappeared
the kitchen. How did I find myself here? Me – the	man	who wanted to walk around the world? On foot,
between the man I hoped I would become and the	man	I finally became. Did I treat my late wife
what I have done. There is a schism between the	man	I hoped I would become and the man I
life, I was alone in a bedroom with a strange	man.	I invited him to sit on the only chair
palms were sweaty and my shoulders knotted. Who was this	man	I was going to meet? Would I be able
white crochet cap covered his bristly grey hair. Was that	man	my father? He paled, stood and inspected me. Hair
holding me: strong, dark, cracked with protruding knuckles. An old	man.	My father? My heart leapt out of my chest.
old.’ When he laughed, I had a glimpse of the	man	my mother had fallen in love with, the one
He got up, left his booth, took hold of the	man’	s arm and escorted him away. He returned flushed,
You could not see their eyes behind the visors. The	man’	s friends pleaded with the officers, but they shoved
And you have no relatives. As they say, “Better a	man’	s shadow than that of a wall.”’ ‘He’s
courteous and caring. And, here in Afghanistan, a real American	man	stood before me. I had never seen anything like
still there, paid the driver and got out. A handsome	man	stood behind the reception counter. I asked for a
on my way. What’s the big deal?’ A uniformed	man	stood by the entrance to the London Underground. So
we born flawed? Did I change? From a naive young	man	to a medic, then a wolf, who cannot howl
my thigh. I wished I could go with this kind	man	to his village and forget about it all, yet
miles on my own, had wine and allowed a strange	man	to touch me. ‘Fine.’ We went to the counter

began to grow. I walked into her house a free	man	and left a prisoner, shackled, my hands tied behind
Impossible! There was no resemblance between the weather-beaten older	man	and the young one with curly hair, fringe tucked
chest. The old woman was met by a turbaned old	man.	He took her case. She adjusted her burqa, turned
must have sensed my fear. 'Your father, Omar Rahman, good	man.'	He wouldn't mention my father before raping me.'
s in prison in the UK.' 'In prison? A gentle	man	like him?' 'Yes. He also has a family in
your life.' 'And don't ever initiate contact with a	man	like that again! You might get hurt.' So the
woman in a short skirt, as Hani would say. The	man	sitting next to me raised his arm to give
double-decker going around the corner looked at her. The	man	sitting on the next table said to the young
to my horror, my hair brushed the face of the	man	standing behind me. Growing up in a 'house without
married. The floodgates would open.' They giggled. A scruffy young	man	standing outside the café shouted, 'Oi! Scarecrows! Camel heads!
of good.' 'Good.' She put her anorak on. 'Can you	man	the castle? I need to go shopping.' 'Man the
Can you man the castle? I need to go shopping.' 'Can you	Man	the castle?' 'Take care of things for me.' 'Yes.'
I rang the number Abu Alaa had given me, a	man	answered, then the cross-examination began. 'What did you
door. When I opened it, it clinked and an Indian	man	appeared. 'What can I do to help you? Charles,
graduate. My father said before he died, 'How can a	man	be a mumarida?' adding the /t/ of the feminine
Would he use force? I'd never seen a naked	man	before. Were they hairy, like animals? I overheard my
face, I shuddered. The trousers, shoes and hair of the	man	behind the counter shone in the electric spotlights. Spending
the Identity and Passport Service in the west side. The	man	by the gate asked, 'Why are you here alone?' 'I
steady them. He was the last to enter. That old	man	couldn't be my father! I stood up and
dangling all the way to the rails; a shocked, bloodied	man	emerging from the station, coughing. Then some C.C.
with a green sheet, must have been of a poor	man	from the slums of the capital. The unclaimed bodies
Amani wept in the kitchen. Ashraf kissed me. A masked	man	gave me the sewing kit full of lethal data.
Or this Andy? What's the big deal? Then the	man	greeted a friend and went into a shop. I
of my suitcase, about to get up. The ginger-haired	man	held my arm. I tried to release it, but
meet? Would I be able to trust him? A young	man	helped me put my suitcase in the Metro carriage.
cough!' 'Is that good?' 'Yes. Soothing. Listen to your old	man!	He's a "doktor".'
When he'd finished, he wiped his mouth. 'Your old	man	is kind.' 'My old man?' 'Your father.' 'How old
I don't know.' 'You don't know. He good	man.'	Last time I saw him, I was three. I
my male guardian's permission and drunk in public. The	man	minding the kiosk smiled. 'Sahtain! To your health! Did
teeth. I laughed. 'My name is Andy. Andrew. It means "	man".'	Najwa. It means "a secret conversation or whisper".'
do so, using bulldozers. On the firing range, a ruddy	man	'How
and encircled me. 'You too, "Sinan".'	man	nicknamed 'The Hyena' began shouting, 'Grip the rifle! Lift
The broken	man	of ten years ago is no more. The compound
women sitting on the steps around a statue of a	man	on a horse, eating chips, got annoyed. People watched

face and the thought suddenly stiffened my spine. The old	man	pointed at one of the counters. A bespectacled man
speak. Keeping a diary is the act of a small	man –	poor, subjugated, powerless. I spill ink and dreams on
full, derelict factories, lakes, tower blocks and overflowing rivers. A	man	ran after a child in a playground, picked him
sound of my insides splintering would fill the air. A	man	shouted abuse at a crying woman outside my window: ‘
by mistake or design? Did my parents want me? A	man	stopped his car next to me. ‘Psst! Psst! Come
their fathers, mothers or grandparents to say goodbye. A young	man	stowed suitcases full of clothes, ihram drapes and food
to the word to exclude his son. ‘How can a	man	tend the sick, a woman?’ I answered him using
no corpse to dissect. ‘We were promised a freshly dead	man	this morning, but the van is stuck in traffic
towards them. ‘As-salaam alaikum, doktor,’ they repeated. A young	man	translated what an elder said. ‘We’ve heard so
right?’ ‘Yes.’ Who was this Andy? Was he an honourable	man?	Where was his house? What if he had lied
You’ve grown, Najwa! May Allah grant you a good	man,	who’ll cherish and protect you!’ The setting sun
upwards and then fallen down here and there. An old	man	without a turban, his grey hair and beard covered
wiped his mouth. ‘Your old man is kind.’ ‘My old	man?’ ‘	Your father.’ ‘How old is he?’ ‘He must be

four. I pressed the locket against my palm, rubbed my	father’	s wedding ring, which I wore on my thumb,
of a famous piece of classical music. I rubbed my	father’	s wedding ring, still on my thumb. Zakir came
bag hanging around my neck, fingered the pendant and my	father’	s wedding ring, then rested my head on the
some change, five thousand Jordanian dinars, two gold necklaces, my	father’	s wedding ring, my half-sister’s letter, a
shoes and sweat filled the airless space. I put my	father’	s wedding ring, two locket necklaces, watch, money and
your girlfriend?’ ‘I loved her.’ ‘So?’ ‘No.’ I twisted my	father’	s wedding ring around my thumb. ‘Prison was strange:
from our neighbour in Amman – in suitcase, lockets around neck,	father’	s wedding ring on thumb, grandmother’s shawl in
guns and signalled for us to stop. I hid my	father’	s photo in the cloth bag and slipped it
hand in the hidden pocket of the abaya, pulled my	father’	s photo out and placed it on the desk
Osama,’ Hani’s father said. They didn’t know my	father’	s whereabouts, but they agreed to give me a
a way out. If I asked the imam about my	father’	s whereabouts, he might give me a clue or
She took off her veil, cut her hair, packed my	father’	s clothes, Qur’ans, books, prayer beads, aftershave, comb
have showered her with your love. The apple of her	father’	s eye could cry freely. Her tears spurt out
almond-shaped eyes, slightly crooked nose – but I had my	father’	s generous lips and curly hair, which was the
so many hanging around the house.’ I shook Hani’s	father’	s hand, kissed his mother and left. Clasp the
stood still, suspended between my mother’s science and my	father’	s magic. The visiting room had one window and
I put it in my pocket. It might jog my	father’	s memory. The nightdress, which she was wearing when

on the light, dusted the suitcase and unzipped it. My	father’	s prayer shirt was at the top. With trembling
Najwa, daughter of Omar Rahman. I am looking for my	father.’ ‘	I am not sure I believe you. I watched
sat up. ‘It’s fear, daughter of mine. Losing your	father,	I began to build barriers to protect myself from
clues, photos, documents – anything that would help me construct a	father.	I climbed up to the loft, switched on the
friend.’ ‘How did you recognise me?’ ‘You look like your	father.’	I composed myself. He led me to the bench
Only loose women, ‘ahirat, live alone. You belong with your	father.’	I dreamt about him walking through that door, kneeling
in the bedroom and refused to eat or drink. The	father	I had imagined was young and filled me with
my home on a wild goose chase, searching for a	father	I hardly knew. I drank some water, wiped the
needed a pee badly. Then I remembered you, my traitor	father;	I imagined finding you and spitting on your very
tear her shrouds. ‘Najwa, Allah willing, you’ll find your	father.	I know how much that means to you.’ Her
charged per passenger. If I was going to find my	father,	I needed every penny. The smell of bread preceded
as the reason for the visit. To look for the	father	I never had. ‘What is the reason for your
hands around my ribcage, to be safe in your shadow. ‘	Father,’	I said to the dusty curtains, as if you
dawned on me what her letter implied. ‘Where is my	father?’	I shouted and ran out of the house without
that enough of an excuse, Father?’ My tongue faltered over ‘	Father’.	I showed him the wedding photo, my mother’s
last to enter. That old man couldn’t be my	father!	I stood up and the guard, who was watching
pointed his rifle at me. I froze. ‘Are you my	father?’	I twisted my hair into a knot and stuck
and close all accounts.’ * When I went to visit my	father,	I was full of cold. With his beard shaved,
guilty until proven innocent. Did they all know that my	father	was a convicted criminal? The house was square, with
of his aftershave and the sweat of fear, probably. My	father	was a coward. My middle was hollow, as if
her away from killing herself. My parents were absent: my	father	was away and my mother was drugged most of
my grandmother. She got up and held me tight. ‘Your	father	was handsome and he had the most beautiful eyes,
the door as if protecting itself from an earthquake, my	father?	Was he apprehensive about meeting me, afraid to be
was unlocked and opened. Ed had told me that my	father	was in a wing for enhanced prisoners and serious
away. People thought that I belonged to everybody because my	father	was not around to protect me. I stood panting
the numerous gates, then arrived at the visiting centre. My	father	was sitting in the far corner. He seemed thinner
to the nearest hospital. It was too late.’ ‘So my	father	was with him when he died.’ ‘That was difficult
perhaps heartless? In four years, he turned from a normal	father	and a husband into a vagabond. Was he a
betray you.’ She didn’t know how to tend my	father	and drove him away. Blond men kissed the hands
the fire, watched us eat. I told Jane about my	father	and how he had left us when I was
the lavish bedrooms. I would have had a mother, a	father	and perhaps brothers and sisters. Here, fathers didn’t
way from Britain.’ I was there to look for my	father	and she was distracting me with chit-chat. ‘Do

of Death, Islamic Jihad, A for Allah, The Ideal Muslim	Father	and Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan
I was probably an orphan, a daughter without a guardian	father,	and there were no meetings or arrivals for me.
stories about him.’ ‘What stories?’ ‘He doktor, saved life.’ ‘My	father	is a doctor?’ ‘Yes. Doctor Rahman. Save friend life.’ ‘
marriage material,’ his father said, ‘because, rumour has it, her	father	is a drug baron somewhere on the borders of
to travel to Pakistan, you’ll be in trouble.’ ‘My	father	is away and my mother is dead.’ He hesitated,
believe you. Did you grow out of a tree?’ ‘My	father	is away, my mother is dead and my grandmother
It’s good to see you again, Miss Rahman. Your	father	is better and is looking forward to your visit.’ ‘
for.’ ‘Truth hurts? Try not having a clue where your	father	is most of your life.’ ‘And don’t ever
I am here to ask you about my father.’ ‘Your	father	is the most honourable of men. He carried my
strong, dark, cracked with protruding knuckles. An old man. My	father?	My heart leapt out of my chest. I turned
him, masha Allah.’ He smiled, revealing chipped front teeth. ‘My	father ...’	My heart stopped. I cleared my throat, coughed and
is dead, you have to go and look for your	father.’	My father, Omar Rahman, who walked out on us
interested in ethnic Pakistani music. I had to find my	father.	My grandmother had advised me to look frivolous and
still standing to attention and ready to shoot. Not my	father.	My ribcage collapsed with disappointment, pushing all the air
but too wound up.’ ‘Is that enough of an excuse,	Father?’	My tongue faltered over ‘Father’. I showed him the
and bit the inside of his mouth. ‘Where is my	father?’	My voice quivered. He swallowed. ‘Your father, Sheikh Omar
hearsay. After the massacre in the mountains of Afghanistan, my	father,	who was a medic, carried Hani all the way
was my grandmother, who was doing the haj, and my	father,	who was probably hiding in a cave somewhere in
the tasteless liquid. I was gripped by anger with this	father	who was supposed to protect me, provide for me,
clouded by anger and fear. I was livid with my	father,	who had forgotten all about me. If only I
behind your ear, your sideburns and full lips, the cruel	father	who had left me when I was only three
salty, dripped down to my lips. I wept over the	father	who stood before me, a convicted criminal; my mother,
October 1986, when I was three. That was the year my	father	had abandoned us. I opened it gingerly. Each chocolate
T-shirts, underwear, books, notes, the Qur’an that my	father	had given me before he died, which had sentimental
Afghanistan.”” Finish the job? Judging by the decimated buildings, my	father	had probably been blown into pieces already. If he
the right to accept or reject a visitor and my	father	had refused ‘point blank’ to sign the permit. Ed
a dress for her naked doll, finishing the job my	father	had started. * Darkness. A blast lit up the house,
beaten. ‘He can’t be my dad.’ ‘It’s your	father.	He is a mujahid.’ ‘A mujahid?’ ‘Yes; he is
cap covered his bristly grey hair. Was that man my	father?	He paled, stood and inspected me. Hair frizzed up,
ve come all the way from Amman looking for your	father.	He promised to help organise this surprise visit.’ ‘He
which was the way Andy had referred to his late	father.	He seemed hesitant. ‘I don’t know you from
desk in front of him. ‘I am looking for my	father.’	He stood up. ‘You’re Omar Rahman’s daughter.

issuing passports. My grandmother had insisted that I wear my	mother?	s best teaching suit and the cheap material absorbed
sitting in the garden in what used to be my	mother?	s chair, her head in her hands, crying. I
under the chair to pack later. * The smell of my	mother?	s cheap perfume clung to everything. I began packing
like a king in the mountains of the Himalayas.' My	mother?	s chin quivered. She was still in love with
the way to her neck, soaking her knotted veil. My	mother?	s coffin was made of plywood – the cheapest my
curtain.' 'No; I found it in "your" suitcase after my	mother?	s death.' 'I am sorry she's dead, Najwa.'
up, a low-cut top or tight jeans. But my	mother?	s ghost skulking in the room would be offended
she'd said. I must go back to sweep my	mother?	s grave.
hand. I shuddered. A shadow must have walked over my	mother?	s grave. 'Thank you.' I was tense and I
faltered over 'Father'. I showed him the wedding photo, my	mother?	s hair gathered to one side. Then I got
London traffic.' He offered me my suitcase. I shook his	mother?	s hand. 'Najwa, my mother.' 'Please, call me Jane!' '
Amani, who was not the centre of attention and whose	mother?	s hands were rubbing me, twisted her lips in
wearing a tracksuit and trainers, packed a bag, kissed his	mother?	s head as she was doing the Morning Prayer
tap-tapping on the floor fanned the embers in your	mother?	s heart. She would unhook all the curtains and
the men turned and ogled me. I buttoned up my	mother?	s jacket and walked out, tainted and with little
the sky. 'If it doesn't cost that much ... ?' My	mother?	s job was not well paid, yet she saved
across were the ones I saw on television. Without my	mother?	s knowledge, I used to stay up late to
goose-pimpled you all over. No Islamic funeral! were my	mother?	s last words, but my grandmother ignored her wishes.
the brass. 'Ever Ready!' 'Yes.' I looked down at my	mother?	s modest shoes, which she had allowed me to
me, have anything to do with me?' She put my	mother?	s photo back in the box and spread the
would that cost?' 'Sixty piasters, more or less.' 'Without your	mother?	s salary, we have to be careful.' 'By the
and a black nose. I stood still, suspended between my	mother?	s science and my father's magic. The visiting
box: my grandmother's Ottoman coins and jhumka earrings, my	mother?	s set, my two rings and pendant with turquoise
the kitchen. I could hear her snivels intermixed with her	mother?	s soothing words and the mmmwwa of kisses. Amani
secrets of your heart, the way they X-rayed my	mother?	s stomach and found the lurking tumour. By now
hair tied, back straight and uncomfortable in one of my	mother?	s suits. The gate was open so I walked
mouth. She sucked at it as if it were her	mother?	s teat. It showed thirty-six degrees. Normal. If
hands. Three weeks later, I converted.' I was shocked. My	mother?	s words were imprinted in me. Why would anyone
seriously wrong with me. I pressed my tummy gently. My	mother	had died of stomach cancer and her genes, embedded
phrase 'wild goose chase' as a fruitless, futile errand. My	mother	had died recently, my grandmother was in Mecca doing
and rubbed it into my hair. The last time my	mother	had bathed me, I was five. It felt intimate,
stood under the arch of its main entrance, something my	mother	had cautioned me against. 'I lost my husband to
Was there a way out? Can you soar solo? My	mother	had changed; you wouldn't recognise her if you

the same angle, although it had been months since my	mother	had died. She used to sit in that chair
I wanted to thank him for what he and his	mother	had done for me. They'd glued me back
he laughed, I had a glimpse of the man my	mother	had fallen in love with, the one in flared
photos out of my bag, studied the one Hani's	mother	had given me and compared it to the one
the 'caramel caress' in the Black Magic box, which my	mother	had hidden in the suitcase in the loft for
visit?' He pushed his glasses up. My English, which my	mother	had invested so much in, evaporated. 'Reason for visit,
worms. The chocolates were past their expiry date, but my	mother	had kept them, clinging to a memory until it
Our religious neighbour ran out barefoot, but head covered. My	mother	had refused to have anything to do with her,
hair and sat down on one of the cushions my	mother	had scattered in the garden. She used to arrange
dulcet language, similar to that used in Indian films. My	mother	used to borrow videos from the local shop and
His irises were the colour of dark honey, which my	mother	used to buy from a gypsy. I smiled. He
pyjamas off and stretched on the now-wet sheets. My	mother	used to have similar fits. She called them 'longing
a slab of concrete, heavy over my chest, as my	mother	used to say when she couldn't go to
uphill struggle, as if I were climbing Kilimanjaro, as my	mother	used to say. It had all been an arduous
daughter – may Allah forgive her – destroyed or hid them.' My	mother	used to spray the garden with water even in
clouds stretched beneath us like teased cotton wool, which my	mother	used to stick in her ears before going to
by the pot of geraniums and the plastic chair my	mother	used to use was still under the jasmine. My
abaya and flung them on the sofa, there where my	mother	used to writhe in agony. 'I made you lemon
tray towards me. That term of endearment sounded familiar. My	mother	used it once or twice. I had a sip
mouth. She was breathing. I called her, the way my	mother	used to: 'Mama Zainab, are you all right?' She
taxi driver came to collect us on Friday morning. My	mother	was still alive and had filled a wooden chest
neighbour, who was never allowed into our house when my	mother	was still alive, to wash her and perform religious
to mention; you know – a foster kid.' 'Foster kid?' 'My	mother	was a heroin addict and they gave her methadone
sentence. 'Flowery words, then life knocks you.' 'Grandma!' 'If your	mother	was alive, she wouldn't have approved.' She coughed
shaped scar at the end of his left eyebrow. My	mother	was called Raneen and my grandmother is Zainab.' I
My parents were absent: my father was away and my	mother	was drugged most of the time. Now she was
outside, '7/7 London Bus Bombing Survivor Overcomes Fear!' * Overcomes fear? My	mother	was not lucid for long and spoke very little.
s prayer beads, which she showed me once when my	mother	was out, had thirty-three beads. She said that
half of the door, which was open. Was that my	mother?	Was she standing outside by the rose bush, waving
slip down. 'Fix that elastic, will you!' 'It's me,	Mother.	I am losing weight.' That was it. My grandmother
this damned door.' Elizabeth sounded as resolute as my late	mother.	I dragged myself out of bed, stood in front
not for the darker skin, I would pass for my	mother.	I flung it around my shoulders, wrapping myself in

in her ear. She is soft and malleable, unlike her	mother.	I have a good wife, who cooks, cleans, takes
notes on the bed and began crying. Najwa joined her	mother.	I put my jacket on and left the house
and almond crunch. Did my father give them to my	mother?	I unwrapped one and it crumbled in my hand,
which sprang out here and there, would have appalled my	mother.	I walked past the bakery, police station, school, the
grow out of a tree?’ ‘My father is away, my	mother	is dead and my grandmother is too old to
and rearrange them to make it look homely. ‘Now your	mother	is dead, you have to go and look for
ll be in trouble.’ ‘My father is away and my	mother	is dead.’ He hesitated, stamped it and passed it. ‘
That’s lovely, that is.’ ‘Glad you like it.’ ‘My	mother	is famous for her apple pie.’ ‘What’s that?’ ‘
phlegm into his handkerchief. She spat blood this morning. ‘My	mother	is getting worse.’ ‘I am sorry, Najwa. May Allah
pleaded. His shoulders slumped and he rubbed his ear. ‘My	mother	is going to France soon. You need to find
folded it up and put it in my duffelbag. My	mother	would have been proud, but would my father, whoever
sure it has evaporated by now.’ ‘No problem.’ My secular	mother	would have been proud of me. My fundamentalist father
each layer with sugar and soaked them with coffee. My	mother	would have added chocolate, butter and pistachio nuts – her
was so embarrassing I broke out into a sweat. My	mother	would run her hand over her uncovered hair. ‘It’
excitement. Whenever a football fell into the flower bed, my	mother	would stab it with a knife and throw it
is impossible; that is why most spinal surgeries fail. My	mother-	in-law was squatting outside in the walled garden,
older self – was it better than this unfamiliar companion? My	mother-	in-law was asleep when I kissed her head.
I kissed her again. ‘Go back to sleep, most beautiful	mother-	in-law in the world!’ She sucked her tooth,
seeing a married woman? Returned home early to have my	mother-	in-law’s signature dish: bulgar wheat with ground
of fabric. A few weeks after the death of my	mother,	the imposer of rules and regulations, I had been
college?’ ‘I took time out to take care of my	mother.’	The perfume of camphor essential oils was overpowering. ‘Will
My grandmother had told me that I looked like my	mother –	the same almond-shaped eyes, slightly crooked nose – but
glasses up. I was about to call her ‘Andy’s	mother’,	the way we did, then hesitated. ‘Jane. It smells
one of the lavish bedrooms. I would have had a	mother,	a father and perhaps brothers and sisters. Here, fathers
do. It smelt of soap, jasmine essential oil and you,	Mother.	A perfectly shaped tear gathered at the corner of
A rattle. She held my grandmother’s shoulders. ‘Thank you,	Mother.’	A wheeze. ‘Najwa, sweetheart.’ Dawn was breaking. We sat
letting people down? Not only had you abandoned me, my	mother	and grandmother when I was three, you’d created
house.’ I shook Hani’s father’s hand, kissed his	mother	and left. Claspig the photo, I went to the
Grandma, I imagine us on a beautiful ship – you, my	mother	and me – sailing through azure waters towards the sunset.
My father didn’t love me enough to stay, my	mother	died of cancer and grief, my half-sister was
prematurely trust them. You eat your breakfast talking about your	mothers	and their style of frying eggs or making rice

Tsharrafna ... Pleased to meet you.' It was disrespectful to call	mothers	by their first names. She smiled and directed me
boxes. Who lived in them? Were they proper families: fathers,	mothers,	children and perhaps grandfathers or grandmothers? Were they happy?
was parked by the roadside. Families gathered around their fathers,	mothers	or grandparents to say goodbye. A young man stowed
waved me off. When we arrived, I joined the queue.	Mothers	with whining babies, fathers, reluctant teenage sons and grandmothers

photographs and checking a small screen. He haggled with the	boy,	who now held a jar of honey. The boy,
the boy, who now held a jar of honey. The	boy,	who was probably used to seeing 'insects', was unfazed.
boy hobbled by me, his hair long and dishevelled. Another	boy	hit his crutch and he fell. I helped him
by date on a packet of biscuits, a one-legged	boy	hobbled by me, his hair long and dishevelled. Another
past few months ran through my mind's eye. The	boy	next door rejecting me because I was the daughter
the bazaar with his machine gun. People ducked. The young	boy'	s white crocheted cap was on fire, his wheelbarrow
with a neck as wide as the waist of the	boy	trying to sell him vegetables. He seemed out of
stood tall and cocky next to your friend, Hani; a	boy	with his cap on fire, crying for help; the
brightly coloured burqas, suppressed their laughter and the girls and	boys	ran towards me and encircled me. 'You too, "Sinan".'
repeated. The women suppressed their laughter and the girls and	boys	ran towards me, encircled me and poked my rucksack,
two breeze-block houses and a mosque. Veiled girls and	boys	in dirty shalwar kameez and embroidered caps kicked a
now the trains had stopped travelling to Damascus. Even the	boys,	who used to play on the arid land, had
stab it with a knife and throw it back. The	boys	would chant, 'It's all right. We don't

I bit my lower lip and handed him the papers.	My	grandmother had told me to keep quiet about my
butter, touched my hair and shook their heads in wonderment.	My	grandmother had told me that I looked like my
front of the mirror and stuck my furry tongue out.	My	grandmother had told me that hedgehogs pointed their spines
and embraced me. I filled my nostrils with his smell.	My	grandmother had told me about the locusts invading Palestine
set with my future husband, not skulking like a thief.	My	grandmother had advised me to keep checking for nosy
in ethnic Pakistani music. I had to find my father.	My	grandmother had advised me to look frivolous and flutter
for the sound of our chewing. 'My name is Edward.	My	grandmother had a crush on the king. Everyone calls
rain after me.' 'He was talking about love.' 'Precisely!' If	my	grandmother had been with us, she would have asked
and pulled the quilt over my head. Her photograph, which	my	grandmother had blown up and framed, gazed down at
bed. I began examining my shirts, skirts, trousers. The shawl	my	grandmother had bought from the Pakistani pedlar was already

when you're speaking to guests!' It was hard because	my	grandmother had cautioned me against looking men in the
shoulder and arm had cramped and I couldn't move.	My	grandmother had heated olive oil and massaged them, whispering
attention of the civil servant in charge of issuing passports.	My	grandmother had insisted that I wear my mother's
Peshawar jotted on it, the money in the cloth bag	my	grandmother had made for me and a letter. 'All
a white jasmine and a honeysuckle at the far end.	My	grandmother had planted one by the steps leading to
of acidity, kept burping as she chewed the fresh mint	my	grandmother had prescribed. I could tell that she was
a proper goodbye. Why was he so cold with me?	My	grandmother had said that men were predators. 'You must
harm me? 'Knowledge sets you free or imprisons you forever.'	my	grandmother had said. I'd rather know. After tossing
men? What if his heart was made of flint, as	my	grandmother had said? Would he reject me? Did he
on the calculator. 'I'll give you five thousand dinars.'	My	grandmother had sucked her last tooth, a gesture that
I took a deep breath and began counting trees, something	my	grandmother had taught me to do whenever I was
She prohibited religion and all its manifestations. 'It doesn't.'	My	grandmother was bent over the sage, her back crooked,
the present. * The aroma of rich food filled the house.	My	grandmother was cooking my favourite dish: aubergine and lamb
as a fruitless, futile errand. My mother had died recently,	my	grandmother was in Mecca doing the pilgrimage, and I
poppy seeds, aniseed, almonds, pistachios and yogurt. And I thought	my	grandmother was into spices. When we stopped to refuel
out, tainted and with little information on Mazar-e-Sharif. *	My	grandmother was sitting in the garden in what used
the Martyr's Mosque. He spewed out nonsense for hours.	My	grandmother was standing by the gate looking at the
his hand to his chest. When I went back home	my	grandmother was waiting for me, wringing her hands. 'What
water, its surface reflecting the stars, dotting the night sky.	My	grandmother said that knowledge might set you free or
visit?' Intense eyes. 'Tourism. I am interested in traditional music.'	My	grandmother said that they would let me through if
was when you were probably twenty: sideburns and flared trousers.	My	grandmother said that it was two years before you
offered to come with me, but I turned him down.	My	grandmother said that you had to go through birth,
words, deeds, texts, symbols, jewellery or dress in this house!'	my	grandmother said and twisted her lips. Needless to say,
middle was clean and set. 'In the name of Allah,'	my	grandmother said and began serving the rice and stew.
walnuts. 'So tasty!' 'I cook the apples with brown sugar.'	My	grandmother is a great cook.' 'You must miss them.'
late mother? 'Family? 'My mother died six months ago. Cancer.	My	grandmother is doing the haj.' 'Oh, Allah! Lucky grandmother.
tree?' 'My father is away, my mother is dead and	my	grandmother is too old to leave the house.' He

of his left eyebrow. My mother was called Raneen and	my	grandmother is Zainab.’ I showed him the photograph, locket
it in the loft and forbade me from mentioning him.	My	grandmother told me that whenever someone knocked on the
with flour sat on the platform in their underpants smoking.	My	grandmother told me that my father would come home
Him standing in a hospital by a patient’s bed.	My	grandmother told me that he studied nursing at college
kiosk and bought a bottle of fizzy drink to celebrate.	My	grandmother told me that Muslim men and women were
and I could smell the dust gathered in the corners.	My	grandmother advised me to approach the subject gently. ‘Thank
martyr’s mother.’ ‘Long life to you and your children!’	My	grandmother advised me to fill my mouth with sugar
deserted too and I wouldn’t console or hold her.	My	grandmother advised me to follow my gut feeling. ‘It’
and curdled like cheese. It fermented inside your guts. Although	my	grandmother kept it clean, the house began to smell
my mother used to use was still under the jasmine.	My	grandmother kept it at the same angle, although it
possible.’ During the taxi journey, my mother seemed asleep and	my	grandmother kept wiping her tears with the end of
back together. I wanted to say that I was sure	my	grandmother would be eternally grateful to them and that
was a bunch of gypsophila, or ‘baby’s breath’ as	my	grandmother would call it, which I’d picked from
my heart itched and I couldn’t scratch it’, as	my	grandmother would say, describing her love for my late
never been to the dentist in his whole miserable life.’	My	grandmother and I were dropped by the mosque and
behind me, travel back to my country, take care of	my	grandmother and keep her alive as long as possible.
how it was: me in my pink Minnie Mouse pyjamas,	my	grandmother in her flannel nightie and my mother in
my shoulders, wrapping myself in it. The pedlar had told	my	grandmother in her broken Arabic that women in that
him than us.’ My mother gathered up her thinning hair.	My	grandmother sucked her last tooth. ‘Some say he got
every day. ‘And the smell. I can’t bear it!’	My	grandmother sucked her last tooth. ‘Tzzza! Who would complain
being carved out, as if by the special sharp pipe	my	grandmother used to empty the courgettes and aubergines before
in and out of my nostrils and gargled the way	my	grandmother used to in secret, afraid to be spotted
and fragrant. There must have been cardamom in it, which	my	grandmother added to everything: rice pudding, chicken, coffee and
borrow videos from the local shop and watch them with	my	grandmother again and again in floods of tears. ‘Everything
track my forged visa and throw me in jail? Was	my	grandmother all right? Was she still alive? Our house
Compassionate, the Merciful,’ she would have gouged out her eyes.	My	grandmother arranged for her coffin to be carried to
symbols, classical music grew on me. I wrote letters to	my	grandmother as I listened to Classic FM. I liked

Allah! Where are you?’ ‘In England.’ ‘Are you OK?’ ‘Is	my	grandmother back?’ ‘She’s fine. Worried sick about you.
hadn’t even cried at her funeral; I had left	my	grandmother behind; I had allowed my half-sister’s
Are you all right?’ I nodded. A dog sniffed me.	My	grandmother believed that their saliva was impure and that
a hairband for me and went home. When we arrived,	my	grandmother brewed some tea, added fresh sage and poured
and she’d be happy to give me a lift.	My	grandmother cautioned me against giving information to strangers. ‘Thank
My mother’s coffin was made of plywood – the cheapest	my	grandmother could find in the market – and the number
white liquid that was supposed to kill the malignant cells.	My	grandmother counted her prayer beads and snivelled throughout the
scooped up some rice with my right hand, the way	my	grandmother did sometimes. Although there was no meat in
I had no option but to find my father. If	my	grandmother died, I would live alone in that house,
ran my fingers over the linen tray cover. So delicate! ‘	My	grandmother embroidered napkins. She made me collars.’ ‘How wonderful!
I visited them, Hani’s family sent me a letter.	My	grandmother found it in the geranium bed one morning. ‘
for her to go to the clinic for treatment anymore.	My	grandmother gasped and covered her toothless gums with her
single. Don’t be like me!’ A fit of coughing.	My	grandmother got up and sat next to me. That
No Islamic funeral! were my mother’s last words, but	my	grandmother ignored her wishes. She asked our ‘religious’ neighbour,
s me, Mother. I am losing weight.’ That was it.	My	grandmother insisted on taking her to the doctor. * The
her hands towards the divine. ‘Yes.’ Lucky indeed. Unlike me,	my	grandmother knew who she was, where she came from
up. When it arrived, breakfast was almost identical to those	my	grandmother often prepared for us: toasted pitta bread, thick
naked man before. Were they hairy, like animals? I overheard	my	grandmother once say, ‘When it’s up, they cannot
if not in this life then the next.’ ‘God willing!’	My	grandmother praised Allah in the background as I gave
wearing the earrings I had just sold. I looked away.	My	grandmother ran her fingers over it. ‘I have lost
and streams. How lucky they are! Jordan is dry and	my	grandmother rebuked my mother for spraying the plants with
dish of chicken and potato in the oven. One morning	my	grandmother saw her pyjama trousers slip down. ‘Fix that
It’ll come out of your wages.’ ‘That’s fine.’	My	grandmother should be back from the haj. I rang
mother made sure that I knew very little about religion.	My	grandmother sneaked in some surats and sayings in her
of clothes, ihram drapes and food in the lower hold.	My	grandmother stood on the pavement in her long jilbab
to find a job to make ends meet and help	my	grandmother take care of her. Her friend, the local
I too stuck up for him? Our ‘religious’ neighbour told	my	grandmother the whole story. His family married him off
scattered on a cloth to dry, a cushion used by	my	grandmother to rest her feet was by the pot

in the chair next to her bed, watching over her.	Her	head was bald and blotchy, her nose blocked with
tight.’ I undid the buttons of her nightgown. She opened	her	eyes and looked at me. Her lashes were grey. ‘
for me.’ At that moment, I could have gouged out	her	eyes and shredded her stupid doll. ‘You’re lying.
her pain, she relaxed her grip on the quilt, opened	her	eyes and smiled. The warmth of her bloodshot eyes
Noon Prayer, which was normally transmitted from Mecca. She opened	her	eyes and when she heard the melancholic voice of
be nineteen by now. What would I do to see	her	eyes again and stroke her hair? If there were
garden, snipping parsley, her grey hair gathered in a scarf,	her	eyes beady, face wrinkled and fingers bent with arthritis.
grandmother, in her white pilgrimage clothes, lying in bed with	her	eyes closed. She had saved up to have the
your father. I know how much that means to you.’	Her	eyes filled up. I could not shed a tear.
and looked at the barred window. My wife was asleep,	her	eyes rolled behind her shut lids; her teeth ground
adjusted her burqa over her head. I could almost see	her	eyes through the embroidered boring holes. ‘What your name?’
empty flower bed and looked over her shoulder. I handed	her	the books one by one: The Islamic Caliphate, The
although she had lived next door for years. I gave	her	the key and asked her to take good care
on the double-decker going around the corner looked at	her.	The man sitting on the next table said to
never made it to Mecca. My mother wouldn’t give	her	the money to go. The white sheets covered her
How much?’ I sat down next to her and handed	her	the money. ‘Nine thousand.’ ‘Good girl!’ ‘One has to
she who drove my father away, not religion. I gave	her	the suitcase and left. My clothes were in a
the veiled young woman, who promised to take care of	her.	The sun rose and its light gleamed on the
from her dead grandfather. I was too apprehensive to hold	her.	The toothless dayah said, ‘You must hold her! Say
my palm against her mouth. She was breathing. I called	her,	the way my mother used to: ‘Mama Zainab, are
is she?’ ‘She sounds fine. The trip to Mecca did	her	the world of good.’ ‘Good.’ She put her anorak
It’s not easy.’ ‘No.’ He hesitated, then said, ‘Tell	her	I asked after her.’ ‘I will.’ ‘You never know,
Grandma had made. I smoothed it and tucked it around	her. ‘	I couldn’t lose you. That would have unravelled
it, and over my stepmother, whose daughter’s death unhinged	her.	I cried over my grandmother, who had lost her
at the back. Nothing. I tried again. Should I call	her?	I found a hole. When I stuck my hand
She didn’t believe in Allah for him to cure	her. ‘	I have to take her to the doctor tomorrow
If she were alive I would have hurled myself at	her.	I ran to the bedroom, jumped into bed and
No.’ He hesitated, then said, ‘Tell her I asked after	her.’	I will.’ ‘You never know, one day she might
that we could only dream of. Hani is obsessed with	her. ‘	I wonder what blonde hair feels like.’ ‘It’s
and had no right to be here. If I were	her,	I would report me to the police. I bought
Allah for him to cure her. ‘I have to take	her	to the doctor tomorrow for her chemo.’ ‘Fine, but
losing weight.’ That was it. My grandmother insisted on taking	her	to the doctor. * The doctor arranged something called a ‘
she saw me and patted the quilt. Cancer had reduced	her	to a few bones, rattling in a loose skin

exhausted, finally went to sleep on my shoulder. I put	her	to bed. My wife was crying in the kitchen.
better come quickly.’ Then he rang the cleaner and asked	her	to come pronto to clean up ‘this mess’. * Andy
Morning Prayer and left. He didn’t even wait for	her	to finish worshipping Allah. ‘My son, we’ve not
I took the suitcase to our religious neighbour and asked	her	to give the clothes to the poor. ‘The Miss,
impolite. * The doctor said that there was no need for	her	to go to the clinic for treatment anymore. My
door for years. I gave her the key and asked	her	to take good care of the house. She squinted
regrets most. I picked her up, ran my fingers through	her	hair and checked her cranium, fingers, ribs, vertebra, clavicle,
Her father, suited and perfumed, ran down the steps, stroked	her	hair and gave her some money. She kissed his
from Ed began. ‘He speaks about you all the time.’ ‘	Her	hair dark, spiky and her skin olive. Najwa is
with light green leaves that looked like a woman with	her	hair down, rather than tied up in a ponytail
if you bumped into her in the street. Most of	her	hair had fallen out and she had cracks by
by the door, tall, back bent, in a dress suit,	her	hair tucked under a black cap. ‘Her niece.’ Anka
lurched up. She seemed tired, eyes bloodshot, skin flushed, but	her	hair was coiffed, shirt ironed and buttoned up, and
with curly hair cascading down her shoulders. She would put	her	hand on my back. Just that. And my lungs
would follow: a heartbreaker with Hazra eyes. She would put	her	hand on my forehead and all my inner turmoil
eyes closed and mouth open. She looked surprised. I held	her	hand as I listened to her breathing and the
his ear, wiped his hands against his shirt and held	her	hand carefully, as if she were made of porcelain.
Why do you want to write in Arabic?’ She slipped	her	hand into her shalwar and produced a sheet of
I broke out into a sweat. My mother would run	her	hand over her uncovered hair. ‘It’s lonely standing
and now I will ...’ Her chin quivered. ‘I could stay.’	Her	hand was swollen and stiff in mine. ‘No, you
is getting worse.’ ‘I am sorry, Najwa. May Allah cure	her!’	She didn’t believe in Allah for him to
head in her hands, crying. I wrapped my arms around	her. ‘	She didn’t have much life. Did she?’ ‘I
loft for twenty-five years. They were so precious to	her	she couldn’t eat them or let them go.
Swiss clock and studying at college is too much for	her.	She cried into the vegetable soup. I held her,
my touch. Ignoring her coldness, I wrapped my arms around	her.	She finally wiped her tears with the kitchen towel. ‘
out. Maybe it is simple. With no father to protect	her,	she must have felt unsupported and became a psychopath,
including an untouched box of Black Magic chocolates.’ ‘I loved	her.	She was a good woman, but too wound up.’ ‘
of the guilty. My heart splintered. How could I give	her	a hug now? I could stitch garments for her
the morning. Before I dozed off, I decided to give	her	a hug tomorrow and make a dress for her
and that she could not read. It must have taken	her	a long time to write this with her stiff
d carved some money out of my budget and booked	her	a pilgrimage package with one of the local tour
was burnt and the other turned to ice.’ I got	her	a plastic chair and put it next to the
the UK. Mr Bell, my English teacher’s friend, sent	her	a postcard of it when he visited the Scottish
ached from dragging my suitcase, and sat down. Elizabeth pushed	her	finger into her buttoned-up collar. ‘You must be
looks like the cat that ate the cream.’ Elizabeth stuck	her	finger into her shirt’s neckband. ‘He’s in

She pushed her glasses up, wet her lips and stuck	her	finger into her collar to loosen it. 'Correct.' 'Do
cheeks flushed and she doesn't stop crying. She chews	her	finger frenziedly. My wife, the organiser of our lives,
you a gypsy beggar?' 'No. I am Najwa.' She stuck	her	finger in her ear and shook it. 'Najwa?' 'Omar
cricket on an immaculate lawn. 'How glorious!' She had run	her	finger over the writing on the back. The newspaper
bourguignon. I hope you like mushrooms.' Andy's mother wiped	her	hands against her apron and pushed her glasses up.
perfect brows, almond-shaped eyes, crooked nose and generous lips.	Her	hands are like a newly-burst vine leaf, tender,
for we have another spare.' 'Shut up!' She would press	her	hands over her ears. The sun set, marking the
I shouted. She beat her chest rhythmically. 'Amani is dead.'	Her	hands shook when she received her daughter's severed
cosmopolitan and secular of environments. She was always on edge,	her	hands shook, chin quivered, eyes wandered. I could not
doing the haj.' 'Oh, Allah! Lucky grandmother. Congratulation!' She raised	her	hands towards the divine. 'Yes.' Lucky indeed. Unlike me,
just a small villa with a lovely garden.' She sucked	her	last tooth. 'Tzza! So the lion turned out to