



**The Depiction of Independence in Isabella Hammad's
The Parisian and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit***

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قدّمت هذه الرسالة استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير
فى اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية والترجمة
كلية الآداب والعلوم التربوية
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Thesis Committee Decision

This thesis entitled “**The Depiction of Independence in Isabella Hammad’s *The Parisian* and Leila Aboulela’s *River Spirit***”.

By Researcher: Lolita Makram Gabrah.

was defended and approved on: Monday 26 / 01 /2026.

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Authorization

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Acknowledgement

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Dedication

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Abstract

The relationship between the West and the East is fraught with tension. Due to their fundamental differences, neither has been able to adapt to or interact effectively with the other. Furthermore, the West's scientific advancements have enabled it to exert control over the East and attempt to erase its existence. This theme is something many Arab diasporic writers have sought to portray in their literary works. This thesis is a postcolonial study that examines the struggle for independence in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* (2019) and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit* (2023). It sheds light on two literary works by two authors, each with a distinct background and set of circumstances. This thesis investigates the theme of independence, a vital issue, through a presentation of the sacrifices made by the Palestinian and Sudanese peoples in their struggle for freedom. It examines how these two novels reveal the historical, political, and social contexts that shaped the struggles of these two peoples. Through a thematic comparison, the thesis demonstrates how the struggle for independence is portrayed in relation to the historical context of this era. These two novels are examined as historical literary works that reflect different points of view through the Palestinian and Sudanese experiences of gaining freedom and independence. This study shows the impact of colonialism on colonized people. Basically, the thesis considers these novels a valuable addition to postcolonial literature, as they offer important insights into the historical events of that period.

Keywords: Struggle, independence, postcolonialism, Balfour Declaration, Mahdist Revolution, Palestinian Crisis.

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الملخص

العلاقة بين الغرب والشرق محفوفة بالتوتر. فبسبب اختلافاتهما الجوهرية، لم يتمكن أي منهما من التكيف أو التفاعل مع الآخر. علاوة على ذلك، سمح التقدم العلمي للغرب بفرض سيطرته على الشرق ومحاولة محو وجوده. وهذا ما حاول العديد من كتاب الشتات العرب تصويره في بعض أعمالهم الأدبية. هذه الدراسة هي دراسة ما بعد الاستعمار وتهدف إلى دراسة النضال من أجل الاستقلال في رواية "الباريسى" لإزابيلا حماد (2019) ورواية "روح النهر" لىلى أبو العلا (2023). تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على عملين أدبيين مختلفين كتبهما مؤلفان مختلفان في بيئات وظروف مختلفة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في موضوع الاستقلال، وهو قضية حيوية، مع عرض لرحلة التضحيات التي قدمها الشعبان الفلسطيني والسوداني لنيل حريتهما. وتبحث كيف تكشف هاتان الروايتان عن الخلفيات التاريخية والسياسية والاجتماعية التي ساهمت في تشكيل نضال هذين الشعبين. من خلال مقارنة موضوعية، تكشف الرسالة كيف يُصوّر النضال من أجل الاستقلال في سياق التاريخي لهذه الحقبة. تُدرس هاتان الروايتان كأعمال أدبية تاريخية تعكس وجهات نظر مختلفة من خلال التجربة الفلسطينية والسودانية في نيل حريتهما واستقلالهما. تعكس هذه الدراسة وجهات نظر مختلفة من خلال التجربة الفلسطينية والسودانية في نيل حريتهما واستقلالهما. تُظهر هذه الدراسة تأثير الاستعمار على الشعوب المُستعمرة. وبشكل أساسي، تعتبر الرسالة أن هذه الروايات إضافة مفيدة ونافعة في أدب ما بعد الاستعمار لأنها تُقدّم أحداثًا تاريخية مهمة خلال تلك الفترة الزمنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النضال، الاستقلال، ما بعد الاستعمار، وعد بلفور، الثورة المهدية، الأزمة الفلسطينية.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

It is well known that occupation is one of the political facts that lead the great powers to capture the weak and to do their best to increase their influence. As Stephen Ocheni and Basil C. Nwankwo (2012) demonstrate in their article, *Analysis of Colonialism and Its Impact in Africa*, colonialism is the absolute, complete, and comprehensive domination of one country by another, with state authority under a foreign power's control. Colonialism has two main aims; the first is political domination, and the second is the exploitation of the colonized country. Colonialism began as a consequence of changes in the way of production in Europe, such as the rise of the Industrial Revolution. The need for raw materials led to colonization. The superpowers occupied the weaker ones to steal all their wealth, exploit their resources, outrage the glory of their people, and destroy their cultural and civilizational inheritance. The British Empire was the largest empire the world had ever known. Great Britain was described as “the empire on which the sun never sets.” It is worth mentioning that Britain had a massive influence on all small and big matters of the world, particularly during the 20th century (AL-Jashami &Khalaf, 2022).

The 19th century laid the foundation for Britain's interests in the Middle East, driven by the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the resulting increase in economic opportunities. One of the stated concerns of British policy toward the Sublime Porte was the poor conditions of Christians under Turkish rule, as well as the political and economic underpinnings of that rule. After the Crimean War, Britain developed a strong relationship with the Ottoman Empire. In addition to this friendship, Britain began expanding its

Empire by conquering the Middle East. After a series of events, the British Empire transformed from the guardian to the heir of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East (Kedourie, 1956).

When the Ottoman Empire began to collapse, the British came to the Middle East and struggled to preclude any other power from acquiring the Middle Eastern territories of the Ottoman Empire. Over the past three centuries, the British Empire shaped a series of provinces, territories, protectorates, and colonies. To control and impose its hegemony over these colonies, it enforced her culture on them. It did so to make its rule permanent. In the case of the Arab colonies, the British Empire sought to change and influence their culture through various methods, such as establishing British schools, magazines, newspapers, and organizations, and inviting educated and high-class individuals through scholarships. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the British faced some constraints because of the differences between Middle Eastern culture and British culture (AL Jashami & Khalaf, 2022).

Elizabeth Monroe (1958) states that, according to its economic and social interests and for the sake of its stability and hegemony, the British Empire became part of a vast conflict between European states over the Middle East. The British Empire had two conventional competitors, Russia and France. These two rivals also had strategies for the Middle Eastern regions. However, Britain had two policies; “to prevent Russian influence entering the Mediterranean and if possible, to avoid Russian control over the Black Sea straits and to keep French influence out of Egypt and away from the southern of the two overland routes” (p. 2.)

In the 19th century, the British Empire began its plan in the Middle East with the rule of Aden Wharf in 1839. This strategic location meant a lot to the Empire because it linked

the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. It was the first step toward Britain's goal. Aden, the eye of 'the Yemen', henceforward had an important role to play as South Arabia's eye upon this now more interesting outer world (Gavin, 1975). As we mentioned before, there was a wide struggle for the Middle East between the European States, especially between Britain and France. Egypt was the first to witness this conflict. Napoleon occupied Egypt for a short period (1798- 1802), but Muhammad Ali's self-governance defended Egypt until the British Empire's dominance. As an Ottoman governor, Muhammad Ali desired to westernize and moderate Egypt to be a different Middle Eastern Country 'Having secured his domestic front with the massacre of the Mamluks'. It is now apparent that "Muhammad Ali, in the spirit of Napoleon and with the aid of European know-how and expertise, embarked on his long, arduous and ambitious program of modernization" (Efrain, 2001, p. 28). However, because of the disturbance of the conditions of the country, Britain became dominant in Egypt in 1882.

Another occupied country, in the Middle East, is Sudan. From 1821 until the 1880s, Sudan was colonized by the Ottoman Empire. Then it was colonized by the British Empire from 1896 to 1955 (under British colonial rule administered from Egypt). The British drew arbitrary, casual boundaries to unite North and South Sudan, even though its people did not want to be united. These arbitrary borders integrated different people of different tribes and religions (Collins, 2008).

Egyptian-Ottoman rule was established in Sudan, with Khartoum as the governmental capital. Under the Ottoman Empire, Sudanese authority was incompetent and corrupt. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad Ibn Abdallah announced himself as the Mahdi, or holy savior, of Sudan. The Mahdi called for a revolution against Turkish rule and the improvement of Islam. This rebellion transformed into a national jihad which led to the

fall of Khartoum in 1885. During this struggle, the Mahdi's forces killed British Colonel Charles Gordon. In 1898, the Mahdist state fell to Anglo-Egyptian conquerors. Theoretically, Sudan was an Anglo-Egyptian colony from 1899 to 1955, but in fact, it was a British colony. The British began to lay an oriented commercial base, establish a British-style authority, and build social infrastructure. The British Empire tried to impose its dominance over Sudan from 1896 to 1898. Lord Herbert Kitchener led an armada up the Nile. Kitchener's invasion included the occupation of Omdurman and the devastation of many of the Mahdi's followers. For the next fifty years, Sudan was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Berry, 1983).

In fact, Kitchener's invasion didn't put an end to the Sudanese resistance to British colonization. During the British occupation, nationalist movements, religious revolutions, and rebellions occurred repeatedly. In response, British administrators confronted these rebellions in two ways: through military force to secure the British position and through development to bring the Sudanese under control. Yet every effort by the Sudanese rebellions was directed toward attaining their independence, which was achieved on January 1, 1956 (Berry, 1983).

After Egypt's de jure independence from Britain on February 28, 1922, Sudanese nationalists launched a movement for independence from both Britain and Egypt. On May 24, 1923, The White Flag League was established in opposition to the British government. This league was headed by Obeid Hag Amin and Ali Abdel Latif, who was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison on July 11, 1924. In response, about fifty cadets from the Military School in Khartoum protested the arrest of Ali Abdel Latif. On November 27, 1924, some units of the Sudanese military mutinied in Khartoum, but the British government suppressed the rebellion, and about thirty people were killed in the mutiny.

On January 25, 1947, the British government intended to prepare Sudan for self-government. On February 12, 1952, Egypt and Britain allowed the Sudanese to choose between union with Egypt and independence. Most of the Sudanese voted for independence. On January 1, 1954, the National Assembly convened, and Ismail Azhari, the head of The National Unionist Party, formed a government as prime minister on January 9, 1954. About 100 individuals were killed during the crisis. Finally, Sudan formally attained its independence on January 1, 1956 (Beshir, 1968).

As for Palestine, it is obvious that the conflict there is among the most enduring in the world. It is striking that, to date, there has been no radical solution to this crisis. The Palestinian people have witnessed many conflicts and acts of oppression throughout their history. Initially, Palestine was under Ottoman rule, then it became a British colony, and later it was subjected to Zionist invasion. The Palestinian sorry story began on Christmas 1917, when the British occupied Jerusalem. Let's start from the beginning. During the First World War, Palestine, which was under Ottoman rule, became "too much promised land" (Prince, 1946, p. 125). Britain and France declared that, in case of victory, Palestine would be under an international regime. The British promised that Palestine or parts of it would be included in an independent Arab state, but at the same time, the British government "viewed with favor" the establishment of a "Jewish national home" there (Woolbert, 1938, p. 343).

The official British mandate permitted and encouraged Jews and Zionists to establish settlements and Jewish immigration from all over the world to Palestine. In reality, the Arabs rejected Zionism and Western imperialism. Zionism was a Western colonial project aimed at dividing and controlling the Arabs, who, in turn, believed it had to be resisted. Indeed, the Palestinians resisted and revolted against the British Mandate and Zionist

Jewish settlement. Unfortunately, all of this ultimately led to the Nakba War of 1948, which ended with Israel's control over most of Palestine (Aruri, 2018). The British allowed Jewish immigration into Palestine, which had been banned under Ottoman rule. Immediately, Hebrew became one of Palestine's official languages, which caused an influx of Jewish inhabitants into the local civil service. All of this happened because of the publication of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917 by Arthur Balfour, who was then the British Foreign Secretary (Terry, 2017). As Edward Said (1979) explains in his book *The Question of Palestine*, Zionism denies the existence of Palestine and the Palestinians; therefore, they cannot be taken into consideration and are thus considered nonexistent. From this emerges the bitter truth: the Palestinian people are being replaced because the colonizers consider them unworthy, thereby necessitating a nominal power to control them. The result was the Balfour Declaration, which was unjust by all standards and oppressive to the Palestinians because it was issued by a European power for a non-European Palestine.

Terry (2017) states that:

Beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and ending with the recognition of the state of Israel in 1948, virtually all the steps undertaken by Britain were contrary to the international legal order she (Britain) had helped create. Palestinian Arabs suffered the consequences of British actions, which culminated in the creation of a new state (p. 188).

By the creation of this state in 1947, the British realized that they would not be able to fulfill their obligations, which, in the end, led to a violation of international law.

All of the above led to more than fifty years of occupation and human rights violations in Palestine. When Israel occupied the West Bank of the River Jordan 57 years

ago, during the 1967 'Six-Day War,' more than 100,000 hectares of Palestinian land were used for Israeli settlements. They destroyed about 50,000 Palestinian homes and structures to pave the way for 600,000 settlers living on the occupied land. Besides, Palestinian natural resources, such as water and agricultural land, were diverted for settlement use. They did all of this despite receiving legal information, unpublished at the time, that doing so would be unlawful under international law. In addition to violating international law, Israel's policy in the occupied Palestinian territory is prejudicial and has resulted in gross violations of human rights, unlawful killings, forced expulsion, collective punishment, arbitrary imprisonment, movement restrictions, and the exploitation of Palestinian natural resources (Amnesty International United Kingdom Section, 2017).

Beinin and Hajjar (2014) demonstrate that, as a result of the conflict between Palestine and Israel, many Palestinians became refugees. Many of them still live in the refugee camps established in 1949, and some Palestinians live in the diaspora outside their national homeland. The Palestinian people struggled for a long time to attain their freedom and independence. In December 1987, Palestinians began a grand rebellion, or intifada, in the West Bank and Gaza against the Israeli occupation. It was the first Intifada and included hundreds of thousands of people with no previous experience of resistance, including teenagers and children. "For the first few years, it involved many forms of civil disobedience, including massive demonstrations, general strikes, refusal to pay taxes, boycotts of Israeli products, political graffiti, and the establishment of underground 'freedom schools'..." It also included stone-throwing, Molotov cocktails, and the erection of barricades to impede the movement of Israeli military forces" (p. 8). During this period, Israeli forces killed over 1,000 Palestinians, including over 200 under the age of 16. Palestinian activists requested that the Palestinian Liberation Organization provide a clear

political program to guide the struggle for independence. However, the Israeli government refused this initiative and claimed that the Palestinian Liberation Organization remained a terrorist organization.

Because the First Intifada failed to achieve its goal, the Palestinians staged a second uprising, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, in late September 2000. This uprising was far bloodier than the first. Israeli forces fired 1 million live rounds at unarmed Palestinians during the first three weeks of the intifada. Officials described this uprising as an “armed conflict short of war” and claimed that Israel has the right to defend itself against the "enemy entity" while denying that right to those stateless enemies. As a result, Hamas Islamic Jihad, and the Fatah-affiliated al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade began conducting suicide bombings and other armed operations. Most Palestinians still struggle for their independence, but in vain (Wilmshurst, 2012)

One of the Arabic authors, who tackled the theme of independence is Isabella Hammad. She is a British-Palestinian author, who grew up in Acton, West London. Her father is Palestinian from Nablus, and her mother is British- Palestinian. After undertaking a literature fellowship at Harvard University, she set out to complete her creative writing at New York University. Her writings appeared in conjunctions, The Paris Review, The New York Times, and elsewhere. She was awarded the 2018 Plimpton Prize for Fiction and the 2019 O. Henry Prize. She was a National Book Foundation 5 under 35 Honoree and received literary fellowships from MacDowell and the Lannan Foundation. She is currently a fellow at the Columbia University Institute for Ideas and Imagination in Paris (www.bookbrowse.com).

Hammad used the distinguishing features of historical novels to cut through the familiar separation and split of West and Nearby East, employing her protagonist in a rich

families' network, political schemes, and cultural exchanges, and carefully and lightly redesign the literary figurative expressions of home and abroad. Isabella Hammad is a tremendous talent, and her book is astonishing. In her "Always More Than a Place: A Conversation about Palestine with Isabella Hammad", Keija Parssinen(2012) points out that "Now Grove has given us Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*, a book that luxuriates in language and radiates intelligence. It is not a novel that zips along, nor does it tease you with cheap suspense. Instead, it calmly and elegantly, in its own time, unfurls its intricate, beautiful, and timeless story" (Parssinen, 2021). Her first novel, *The Parisian*, was critically acclaimed. *The Parisian (2019)* won a love story set amidst the political tumult of Palestine in the early 20th Century.

Leila Fouad Aboulela is a fiction writer, playwright, and essayist of Sudanese origin. Born in 1964 in Cairo to a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, she lived in Khartoum continuously until 1987. In 1990, Leila moved to Scotland with her husband and children. In 1992, she began writing. Writing is her primary career. It is worth stating that Leila is an outstanding and celebrated Sudanese writer, the first-ever winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing and a three-time nominee for the Orange Prize (the Women's Prize for Fiction) (Chambers, 2009).

It is well known that Sudan and Egypt were both colonized by Britain, but they had very different experiences under that colonial occupation. Because of being the daughter of a Sudanese man and an Egyptian woman, Aboulela's writing is framed by these experiences. Her writing is also shaped by her experiences of moving from Sudan to Scotland. She is considered an Arab, Scottish, and diasporic female author. She wrote six novels: *The Translator (1999)*, *Minaret (2005)*, *Lyrics Alley (2010)*, *The Kindness of Enemies (2015)*, *Bird Summons (2019)*, and, most recently, *River Spirit (2023)*. She also

wrote two short-story collections, the first is *Colored Lights (2001)* and the second one is *Elsewhere, Home (2018)* (Chambers, 2009).

Aboulela's fiction is extraordinary for its distinctive way of presenting Muslims' experiences. In most of her novels, Aboulela writes about Islam, hijab, and the complex identities of Muslim women. She is always interested in how Muslim women wrestle with cross-cultural experiences and how these experiences shape their identities as Muslim women. Aboulela always tries to depict Muslim women as effective representatives who practice their faith from their own beliefs, thereby resisting Western stereotypes about their suffering under a patriarchal religion. Another important feature of her writing is her conceptualization of Islamic feminism, through which she analyzes her Muslim female characters and represents gender roles.

In contrast to the above-mentioned, Aboulela's *River Spirit (2023)* was written in a socio-historical context. In *River Spirit*, Aboulela peels away the layers of Sudan's history under the Ottoman Empire, during the Mahdist War. It is about the Sudanese struggle for independence. *River Spirit* is set during the rebellious years of the Mahdist Revolution (1881-1898), which is considered Sudan's first nationalist movement. In *River Spirit*, Aboulela represents an impressive story of people who gained independence from alien rule through their sacrifice, ploy, and determination. Aboulela wrote this novel from the Sudanese point of view. By writing this novel, she adopted a different style, one that differs from her previous novels. A thorough reading of the novel reveals it to be a narrative of Sudan's eventful history, emphasizing faith and the struggle for freedom against oppressive colonialism through its use of multiple narrators and storytelling techniques (Suryamol, 2025). *River Spirit* by Aboulela and *The Parisian* by Hammad are works of contemporary literature. Both novels delve into historical contexts and personal

journeys, while also exploring distinct historical events and the political landscapes of their settings, regions, and cultures. It is clear that both novels are rich in historical context and offer a deeply human look at lives affected by the harsh forces of imperialism and colonialism. Both novels offer a deep vision of the struggle for identity and independence in the face of foreign rule. These two chosen works are set during periods of upheaval and colonial influence which shape the characters' lives and narratives. Each novel reveals the cultural heritage of its setting. They give the reader deep insights into the social texture and the traditions that represent and define these regions. The characters' stories in these two novels reveal extensive resistance against foreign dominance and the strength of individuals and communities in achieving their autonomy and cultural identities (harvardreview.org, theguardian.com).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research tackles the issues that attach to resistance, struggle, and independence within the postcolonial context as depicted in literature. It examines how the Palestinian and Sudanese peoples resist colonial powers and struggle to gain their autonomy. Independence is investigated through the journeys of the protagonists, Medhat Kamal and Akuany. By investigating Medhat Kamal (representative of the Palestinian people) in *The Parisian* by Hammad and Akuany (representative of the Sudanese people) in *River Spirit* by Aboulela through a comparative literature lens, this research examines how these different characters, regardless of their social and historical background, resist colonialism and struggle for liberation. The problem lies in explaining and recognizing how these characters embody the sacrifices made by these peoples to end colonialism. Both narratives provide examples of resistance and struggle by depicting the lives of these characters who experienced colonization.

1.3 The Significance of the Study

First of all, an extensive review of contemporary literature proves that the two novels tackled in this paper have received little scholarly attention, and the academic material discussing them is limited to single papers, brief study notes, and short interviews with the authors of the two novels. The same could be noted about the authors, despite their many awards. We do not have rich information about them. This may be because scholars have not specifically examined the themes of occupation and independence in these two novels. This study aims to examine and explore colonialism and its impacts on Palestinians and Sudanese, as well as their struggle for independence. The thesis presents this era and the behavior of individuals toward the political circumstances around them, so the paper hopes to bring academic attention to this presentation.

1.4 Questions of the Study

The study answers the following questions:

1. How are the themes of occupation, resistance, and independence represented in the chosen novels?
2. How do the characters of the two novels deal with the circumstances and the political events in their homeland? How do such political circumstances affect them?
3. What are the similarities and differences between these two novels, concerning the themes of occupation and independence?

1.5 Objectives

This study intends to answer the previous questions by:

1. Exploring the ways in which the themes of occupation, resistance, and independence are represented through the lens of colonialism.
2. Exploring how the characters interact with the political circumstances around them throughout the narratives.

3. Comparing and contrasting between the two novels in terms of the above-mentioned themes.

1.6 Definitions

Occupation

The phenomenon of occupation is currently defined as "the effective control of a power (be it one or more states or an international organization, such as the United Nations) over a territory to which that power has no sovereign title without the volition of the sovereign of that territory" (Benvenisti, 1993, p.4).

Resistance

Resistance against colonialism refers to the various ways individuals oppose foreign domination and seek to preserve their homelands, autonomy, and culture. Resistance can take many forms, including armed struggle and political and nationalist movements. It is an old form of political conduct rooted in opposition to foreign domination (Lilja, 2022).

Independence

This concept generally refers to the process of decolonization. It involves colonized peoples claiming self-determination, sovereignty, and the integrity of their national territory. This issue became significant after World War II, as many colonized countries struggled to gain independence, their full rights to determine their political status, and to pursue their economic, cultural, and social development (Camacho & Huseynli, 2023).

Orientalism

Orientalism is a way of thinking that depends on the opposition between the Orient and the Occident. According to Edward Said (1978), Orientalism is constructed through stereotypical images of the other, reflecting how the West views the East.

Stereotypes

Edward Said points out that stereotype is “a set of inaccurate, simplistic generalizations about a group that allows others to categorize them and treat them accordingly” (p. 26)

Postcolonialism

Elem Eyrics Tepeciklioglu (2012) believes that postcolonialism encompasses all the effects of colonialism in postcolonial countries and the peoples’ attitudes toward those effects. It has also been broadly used by many critics and writers to depict the struggle of colonized people to confront the political instability, social decline, and poverty which faced society during and after the occupation period.

Postcolonial Literature

In her “Postcolonial African Literature and The Identity Quest,” Cheriet (2015) declares that postcolonial literature is the literary works that cover the writing of the societies which were once colonized, during and after colonization.

Decolonization

Fanon (1961) declares that decolonization is a process through which the colonized peoples gain their freedom and become independent.

1.7 Limitations

This thesis is limited to the time of its writing, the authors, Leila Aboulela and Isabella Hammad, and the two chosen novels of their works, *River Spirit* (2023) and *The Parisian* (2019). The conclusion on the subject of this particular study cannot be universalized or generalized to other works that address the themes and topics examined. The outcomes of this research are limited to these two novels.

Chapter TWO

Review of Related Literature

This chapter showcases an overview of relevant previous research and evidence on themes and topics related to this paper, as well as research papers that discuss the two chosen novels from different perspectives, angles, and points of view, based on comprehensive research conducted while writing this paper. This section sheds light on previous literature related to these two novels, presenting the perspectives of earlier studies that address the idea of the struggle for independence in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit*. The theoretical studies examine how Isabella Hammad and Leila Aboulela tackle themes of occupation and independence, and how they represent Arabs in their literary works. The critical studies show how the two writers' representations of occupation and independence correspond in the selected novels.

2.1 Studies on Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*

According to Benfey (2019) in his "A Novel Whose Hero Is a Man Divided, as Is His Native Palestine," Kamal writes a letter to Janet while in Paris, before returning to Palestine, in which he states, "I belong here, as much as I belong to Palestine"(Hammad, 2019, p. 175). Upon Kamal's return to Palestine, he is referred to as the Parisian, he is treated as a foreigner "You are a European," said Burhan Hammad. "Look at you." (Hammad, 2019, p.202) indicating his emulation of France while simultaneously experiencing something different in his homeland. This suggests that he has two identities. In Paris, he transforms his identity in an attempt to appear Western. He speaks French, wears European clothes, and even becomes romantically involved with a French woman. Upon returning to his homeland, he behaves as a Palestinian but feels restricted and disconnected from it, revealing a crisis of belonging.

In her study titled “Mapping Spaces and Ideology in *The Parisian* (2019)”, Abdel Rahman (2021) notes that Isabella Hamad presents in this novel how a Levantine person lives in France. She discusses the identity crisis during a pivotal period marked by radical historical, cultural, political, and social changes between the First World War and the Second World War.

In "*The Parisian: An Epic Novel of Love and Loss in Palestine*," Marah points out that Isabella Hamad presents the idea of the Other and the Oriental, which Edward Said addresses. The French professor refers to Kamal as "the Oriental guest" and conducts a study of Medhat, portraying him as “a primitive Arab mind,” an insult that leads him to leave for Paris. Hamad mentions this idea in more than one event in the novel. Hammad also points to the erroneous preconceptions held by the West about the East, which, as Said explains in his book "Orientalism," are merely man-made constructs designed to reinforce the idea of the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the East.

According to Khoualed and Taiba (2023), Isabella Hammad explores themes of colonialism, independence, displacement, and identity. She also addresses Western stereotypical images of Arabs. Through the life story and experiences of Medhat, Hammad investigates and offers insight into the impact of colonialism on Arabs and the Middle East, how this impact shaped the lives of people who lived during that period, how Westerners see Arabs, and how Arab individuals are marginalized in Western countries. Hammad uses counter-narratives in her novel *The Parisian* to shed light on the stories of marginalized people. Through this technique, Hammad investigates the experiences of Arab diasporic people, challenges dominant stereotypes, and presents an accurate understanding of Arab identity

Through a thorough reading of the novel, we can notice how colonial power creates and shapes cultural expectations, how colonizers justify their exploitation of the colonized, and how colonizers impose their own expectations and values on the colonized. For example, when Medhat Kamal is sent to Paris to study medicine and to behave like a polite and educated man, his behavior and education must echo the colonizers' expectations and values. However, Medhat refuses these expectations, which is a form of independence and resistance against their oppressive rule. Instead, Medhat begins to examine and discover his own cultural identity and to accept his cultural heritage. Hammad also uses this technique (counter-narrative technique) in *The Parisian* to show how individuals in colonized countries use their voices to confront and resist oppression and violence. She sheds light on the strength and resistance of Palestinians in the face of the colonizers' injustice. This resilience is evident in Medhat's strength when he helps his friend's father, who is unfairly arrested by the French authorities. Without fear, Medhat writes to the French governor and speaks out in protest to save his friend's father, Abu Zayad (Khoualed & Taiba, 2023).

In her novel, *The Parisian*, Isabella Hammad explores binary oppositions across different situations as she tackles important topics about Palestine during the British occupation and Western stereotypes about Arabs. These stereotypes, on the one hand, cast Westerners as superior, educated, and civilized, and on the other hand, cast Easterners as inferior, uneducated, and uncivilized. Thus, these stereotypes have been shaped as binary oppositions. The plot of this novel revolves around Medhat Kamal, who goes to France to study medicine. However, he does not focus on his studies and falls in love with Jeannette, the daughter of his professor at the university, Doctor Molineu. In the end, after neglecting his studies, Medhat learns that his professor sees him as an Oriental and

uncivilized Muslim, and at the same time, his beloved rejects his marriage proposal (Awajan & Nofal ,2023).

According to Chadi (2021), *The Parisian* portrays the West as imposing its superiority on the East and ignoring the East's existence, as seen in the marginalization of Medhat in France because of his poor French, and in the moment when his professor, Doctor Molineu, told him that he wanted to humanize him. As a result, Medhat became convinced that he was inferior, which led him to imitate the Western lifestyle. These experiences enslaved Medhat to notions of civilization and freedom.

According to Yousef Abu Amrieh and Hayat Louati (2021), "things" play an important role in shaping the self-concept of diasporic individuals, as illustrated in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*. They shed light on how specific "things" help the protagonist perceive himself and determine his life message. They argue that these "things" are essential aspects in the development of the protagonist's identity and help readers understand what is happening to the protagonist during his/her experience of diaspora. By tracing the relationship between certain "things" and the protagonist, one can shape the idea of how diasporic experience affects and informs an individual's self-concept.

In *The Parisian* by Isabella Hammad, certain objects play a significant role in the development of the protagonist's self-concept. The novel also depicts Medhat's journey of self-discovery during the Palestinian struggle for independence in the wake of the British Mandate. During his journey to France, Medhat carries two important items: his father's watch and his own tarbush. Medhat always holds these two things delightfully for different reasons. Together, they represent the changes in his self-concept. The watch is a gift from his father, with whom he never had a close relationship. This watch forms a

close relationship between them. This watch for Medhat, means a great deal because it is the first motive to consider himself a worthy person. The watch is Turkish with Arabic ciphers, which indicates cultural hybridity and the politics of the Middle East during the Ottoman rule. The watch may also represent Medhat's first confrontation with modernity (Abu Amrieh & Louati, 2021).

The second thing that helped establish Medhat's ideal self is his tarbush. After a series of disappointing events in the house of Dr. Molineu, who considers Medhat his Oriental possession. He wants to humanize Medhat. It is a shattering experience for Medhat, who has made every possible effort to be recognized as a respected man of science. After this humiliating situation, Medhat takes his tarbush and wears it despite any frowns he might receive. This is a turning point in Medhat's life; he becomes a man determined to preserve his cultural identity. By wearing his tarbush, Medhat shows his resistance, bringing him closer to becoming a self-fulfilled human being (Abu Amrieh & Louati, 2021).

In her article entitled "The Role of Rocks in Defining Characters in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* (2019)", Awajan (2024) offers an insightful look at this novel. Awajan aims to explain how Hammad in this novel uses metaphorical allusions to rocks to give her readers an accurate and clear understanding of the novel's characters, Jamil, Fatima, and Medhat. Awajan tends to highlight the differences between the character of the novel's protagonist, Medhat, on the one hand, and the characters of Jamil and Fatima on the other. Awajan likens those who did not abandon their homeland in times of need to rocks, describing them as solid, strong, persevering, and steadfast in their principles. Conversely, she portrays Kamal as fragile, weak, and easily broken, like glass. Kamal leaves Palestine to study medicine in France. However, through Medhat's journey in France, it becomes clear that he is a fragile character, uninterested in anything of value.

While in France, Medhat appears solely preoccupied with his love for Jeannette, a love that continues to haunt him throughout the novel, even after his return to Palestine. Awajan continues to explain that Hammad's use of rocks and stones in her novel *The Parisian* is a means of highlighting the characteristics of characters who remain in their homeland and defend it until their last breath, as is evident in the characters of Jamil and Fatima. Awajan continues to illustrate that Medhat is indifferent to important events happening around him through a scene that brings him together with a French priest. The priest is known for his habit of moving among the rocks' characteristic of Palestine, rocks that could potentially be used by strangers to spy on Palestinians. Medhat interacts with this priest because he is from France, the country Medhat longs to return to and live in. This demonstrates that, as a Palestinian, he has no interest in his homeland's cause because he is isolated in his own world, which is infatuated with: France.

2.2 Studies on Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit*

According to Nawaz et al. (2024), Leila Aboulela, in her novel, *River Spirit*, depicts the status of Muslim women during a pivotal period in Sudanese history: the Mahdist War. This significant chapter of Sudanese history portrays the resistance and struggle of the Sudanese people to rid themselves of foreign rule, a struggle woven into a massive conflict between colonial powers and local forces. The novel is considered an important and valuable resource because it helps us understand the experience of Sudanese women during this violent historical period and how people suffered and made immense sacrifices to achieve independence.

Semmi (2023) explains that the novel *River Spirit* paints both an emotional and historical landscape. He asserts that Aboulela succeeds in immersing her readers in imagining the beauty of the Nuba Mountains in the 19th century, regardless of the

historical and political turmoil of that period. She allows the readers to feel at ease and connect with the breathtaking scenery, irrespective of whether they agree or disagree with the momentous events of that era. Semmi further highlights that the novel explores colonialism and the slave trade in East Africa, as evidenced by its events.

As Alsiefy (2024), points out, it is evident that Leila Aboulela, through her latest novel *River Spirit*, shifts from portraying her fictional heroines as examples of women's transformation from secular to religious life to a historical perspective rich with Sudanese political and historical events. Throughout this novel, she presents women in a different light, both in form and content. She portrays them immersed in historical events, actively participating in reshaping Sudan's political landscape. Aboulela depicts women engaging in political events as they defend their beliefs and the necessity of a righteous and virtuous Islamic society. Aboulela presents ideas that have been explored in discussions of Orientalism and Imperialism.

Mega Majumdar's review of *River Spirit* in *The New York Times* (2023) explores the hidden complexities of revolution, religion, and femininity. Reviewers noted how Leila Aboulela articulates the "excessive taxation," among other things, and the "injustice" people suffer under the Mahdist movement, which, stemming from the quest to rectify and the lust for power, had become "a new instrument of oppression".

Farah Bakaari (2023) argues that the novel retells this legendary episode in world history not to tell the story of the revolutionaries but to tell the stories of those tasked with carrying out their vision, those who confront them, and those who must endure them. The critic notes that the novel examines the problem of ownership and slavery through the story of Akuany.

“In Verdant, Green, Lush:” Aboulela’s Depiction Of The Nile In *River Spirit*, Al-Kurdi and Abu Amrieh (2025) explain that in her novel, "*River Spirit*", Leila Aboulela uses the river not merely as a representation of Sudan's natural environment, but as a character within the narrative, imbued with cultural, historical, spiritual, and political dimensions, thus pointing to national identity and belonging. Through her use of the river, Aboulela reflects how Sudan's environment and its breathtaking and distinctive landscapes lend the story a unique character, as seen in the relationship between the novel's protagonist, Akuany, and the river. Akuany finds solace and comfort in the river for the suffering and oppression she endures; she finds herself in the river, conversing with it, and it listens to her, healing her psychological wounds. Through this, Aboulela emphasizes the importance of the connection between the people and the nature of their homeland.

The events of the novel "*River Spirit*" take place during the Mahdist Revolution, but the narrative style that incorporates the river, which Aboulela uses in this novel, extends far beyond the history of Sudan. In this novel, the river represents the unity of Sudanese lands and its people, a unity that will remain immortal in the memory of history. The river here represents the map of Sudan, not its disputes and conflicts; it is what shapes the identity of the Sudanese people and simultaneously serves as the conduit between Sudan's past and present, linking past historical events to the formation of current culture and identity. Al-Kurdi and Abu Amrieh continue to explain their point of view, clarifying that Aboulela wants readers to hear the voice of the river, just as Akuany does. Because the voice of the river here carries with it the history of Sudan's struggle and the experiences of its people. It carries stories of survival, loss, and struggle, as well as optimism and hope for a better tomorrow. The river is spirit and life; without it, there is no identity.

According to Suryamol (2025), Aboulela's novel is a historical piece with strong evidence of the struggles of Sudanese people, including women, contrary to what the colonizer claims in its historical records. Through the events of "*River Spirit*", Aboulela seeks to combat the colonial claim that societies are merely archives and monuments. She further explains that Aboulela gives great importance to the historical rituals and practices of the citizens of these societies and how events are narrated through words that express these peoples. Upon delving deeper into this novel, we find that Aboulela emphasizes that national identity comes from the daily memories shared by people in their daily lives, not from political leaders or victories in wars. Suryamol (2025) concludes by saying that throughout the events of Aboulela's novel, we find that she gives a voice to the voiceless, meaning the women whom the West considers marginalized and oppressed in a patriarchal, male-dominated Eastern society. She continues, explaining that Aboulela, through the events of her novel, emphasizes an important point: that the struggle of the Sudanese people remains in everyone's memory and in history through vibrant cultural activities that demonstrate flexibility, strength, and continuity, and not through the records of the occupier. She thus affirms that this memory is a form of resistance.

Aboulela moves from battles and wars to memory and the events of daily life. Aboulela shifts from battles and wars to memory and the events of daily life. Thus, it becomes clear that she is attempting to tell the story of her people through the voiceless, the neglected, and the marginalized, rather than through the perspective of the national elite and those powerful empires. The language Aboulela uses in this novel is English, but she blends it with Arabic terms, Sudanese cultural metaphors, and oral Sudanese customs and traditions through the characters' stories. This is considered a form of decolonization. (Suryamol, 2025, p. 191-199).

On one hand, this research aims to describe how Isabella Hammad in her novel *The Parisian* (2019) skillfully, creatively, and professionally portrays the journey of the Palestinian people's suffering and their relentless struggle to end colonialism and achieve their most basic rights: freedom and independence. Based on previous studies, it is clear that this research fills gaps in the explanation of this narrative by analyzing it from a different perspective through a postcolonial lens. It seeks to illustrate how the Palestinian people have suffered for a long time and continue to suffer to this day. It depicts the British-Palestinian conflict and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, this study attempts to clarify Leila Aboulela's novel "*River Spirit*"(2023), from a different perspective, given that previous studies have not addressed the struggle for independence in this novel. Therefore, this study aims to illustrate how the Sudanese people struggle to achieve their independence. It also aims to demonstrate how Aboulela skillfully presents the history of her people's struggle against colonialism. Furthermore, in this novel, Aboulela attempts to show that injustice and oppression can be perpetrated even among the sons of the same nation through the Mahdist Revolution. This study has a different characteristic because, until now, there are few studies that analyzes these two narratives from a historical and political perspective by explaining the subject of the struggle for independence.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Method

This study tackles two novels; *The Parisian* by Isabella Hamad and *River Spirit* by Leila Aboulela, with the objective of discovering the literary depiction of the struggle for independence in these two literary works. It explores how each novel conveys its social, cultural, historical, and political context specifically concerning resistance and struggle. Through a meticulous textual analysis of the two works, the study sheds light on a crucial point: independence. This is achieved through a close examination of the journeys of the two protagonists, Medhat Kamal and Akuani, respectively. The study also illuminates how these two novels depict the lives of the struggling Palestinian and Sudanese peoples. It further highlights the significant contribution of these two literary works to postcolonial literature. *The Parisian* and *River Spirit* emerge from distinct geographical, political, and historical backgrounds. The study analyzes these novels through the lens of postcolonial theory, examining some issues related to colonialism, its devastating effects on colonized peoples, and the immense sacrifices these peoples make to achieve their freedom.

The researcher analyzes the two chosen novels through a postcolonial lens within the broader framework of colonialism. Moreover, the researcher relies on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, particularly his discussion of Western stereotypical images of the East, as well as the views of Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. In addition, the researcher approaches the two novels comparatively to draw an analogy between them, as they are written by two Anglophone diasporic authors and share a similar set of themes. Subsequently, the two novels have a lot in common, as they deal with the notions of occupation, resistance, and independence.

Postcolonialism can be defined as a literary theory that primarily deals with literature produced in countries that were historically under occupation, and which primarily addresses the concept of occupation and occupied peoples. Postcolonialism sheds strong light on the struggle of occupied peoples to achieve their freedom. It is clear that writers, especially novelists, are trying to present postcolonial concepts in order to offer literary interpretations of the impact of colonizers on the culture of colonized peoples and on their social lives.

Postcolonial theory is the theoretical approach used to examine the effects of colonization on Arab diasporic literature. It is also the method used to analyze the works of Arab diasporic authors in terms of how they present Arab diasporic identity. Through this discipline, authors confront the power dynamics of colonialism. This theory investigates the power dynamics between the colonized and the colonizers and the way in which these dynamics are reflected in the texts. It also examines how those authors use language and culture to create and explore narratives of identity (Khoualed,2023). It can be argued that postcolonial theory investigates the concept of Orientalism, which explains and describes the relationship between East (Orient) and West (Occident), a concept invented by the West to maintain control over the East.

In this aspect, Edward Said (1978) characterizes the notion of Orientalism in his book *Orientalism* as follows:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient, dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (p. 3).

Said (1978) acknowledges that Orientalism is a mode of thought rooted in misconceptions about the East and in the presumption of the West's superiority. As Said explains, "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of dominance, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (p. 5). Furthermore, Said points out that colonialism and imperialism have a profound and far-reaching impact on colonized peoples, affecting their societies, cultures, and ways of thinking, leading to transformation and loss of identity. Said explores the relationship between East and West and what they share. However, he also discusses the distorted images of the East and how the West fabricated these perceptions to achieve specific goals. Said asserts that the East and West are man-made constructs designed to establish Western dominance over the East for the purpose of exploitation. Said sheds light on the relationship between the East and the West through the lenses of dominance, description, authority, and influence, all of which are dependent on diverse Western stereotypes of the East. Said believes that these images were constructed to serve dominant goals and to assert Westerners' superiority by establishing inferior images of Easterners.

According to Sinha (2007), "postcolonial theory of literature is quite recent and analyses literary texts from a new angle" (p. 108). Guerin (2011) states that Postcolonialism is a literary theory that examines literature produced in "third world" countries, focusing on the historical period that defied colonization and on writers who engage with the notion of colonialism and colonized nations. Sinha (2007) demonstrates that postcolonial critics examine texts written during the colonial period as well as those written after it. Postcolonial critics are heavily influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx. Lenin said that colonialism is the highest form of imperialism.

In his book, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* (2006), Lois Tyson states that “[...] postcolonial theory offers us a framework for examining the similarities among all critical theories that deal with human oppression [...]” (p. 417). According to Tyson “[...] postcolonial criticism addresses the problem of cultural identity as it is presented in postcolonial literature, [...]” (p. 419).

“Homi K. Bhabha's Postcolonial theory involves analysis of nationality, ethnicity, and politics with poststructuralist ideas of identity and indeterminacy, defining postcolonial identities as shifting, hybrid constructions.”. “Postcolonial critics accordingly study diasporic texts outside the usual Western genres especially productions by aboriginal authors, marginalized ethnicities, immigrants, and refugees [...]” (Guerin et al., 2005, pp. 304-305).

In his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Frantz Fanon asserts that colonialism instills in the minds of colonized peoples the idea that they are inferior to the colonizers and even makes them believe it. Thus, Fanon emphasizes that the colonizers' actions drive the colonized to resort to violence as a means of self-expression and resistance. This violence, he argues, is the only way for the colonized to escape their perceived inferiority. In addition to what has been mentioned, Fanon points out that colonialism leads to many problems, including psychological ones. It causes a fragmentation of identity, leading to trauma and the ever-present, pressing question in the minds of occupied peoples: "Who am I in reality?" (p. 182).

Fanon also discusses the concept of decolonization after the Second World War and sheds considerable light on the complex problems arising from colonialism. In this respect, Fanon explains that "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power. The 'thing' colonized

becomes a man through the very process of liberation" (p. 2). Furthermore, he points out that occupied peoples undergo a complete transformation of their psyche after decolonization, explaining that "Total liberation involves every facet of the personality" (p. 233).

According to his book *Black Skin and White Masks* (1967), Fanon explains how colonialism negatively affects the psyche of the colonized, resulting in inferiority complexes and psychological problems that cause trauma. This includes the desire of Black people to become white, which in turn leads to a loss of identity and a feeling of being "the other." Fanon also clarifies the idea that colonizers reinforce the notion of a difference between whites and blacks, which in turn reinforces the Europeans' sense of superiority and the inferiority of others, emphasizing this point by saying: "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: It is the racist who creates inferior". (p. 93)

Postcolonial theory is used to examine the results and impacts of colonialism by analyzing the postcolonial world order. This theory established concepts that characterized this era. The era experienced different outcomes of the colonial experience, which became main themes in literary works. Postcolonial theory was developed to detect the conditions individuals were subject to during and after colonization. As a result of changes in the lifestyle of the colonial subject after colonization, postcolonial theory emerged. To summarize, due to the sociological, economic, and political effects of colonization, literature had to adopt a new theory to cover the up-to-date events (Chadi, 2021).

3.2 Concepts associated with postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory developed concepts that are relevant to the postcolonial era and the novel as well. Because the events of *The Parisian* (2019) and *River Spirit* (2023) are set during the period of colonization, it is necessary to define some postcolonial concepts that are related to the novels as follows:

Nationalism

Nationalism is the state of being loyal and devoted to the nation and the demand for an independent nation. It is the gathering of people under the authority of the same government (Chadi, 2021).

Colonialism

According to Ronald Horvath (1972), colonialism is a form of temporally extended dominance by people over other people, and in this way, it is part of the historical universe of concepts of intergroup domination, exploitation, persecution, abuse, and devastation. As Chadi (2021) notes, “colonialism means the state of getting or being under the control of somebody. It refers to the expansion of the Western powers to the East in the late four centuries. Colonialism includes the domination and destruction of the identity of the colonized subject” (p. 12).

Hybridity

In his book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (1994), Robert J.C. Young presents different definitions of hybridity across fields. He sees that hybridity can reverse the essential system of colonial dominance. According to Chadi (2021), hybridity is a blend of cultures formed through colonization. It is the "in between" culture, a mixture of the colonial, the pre-colonial subject's identity, and the identity framed through colonization.

Hegemony

In *Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci's Marxism* (1982), Valeriano Ramos Jr. states that the concept of hegemony first appeared in Gramsci's *Notes on The Southern Question* (1926), where it was defined as a system of class alliance in which a "hegemonic class" exercises political control over "subaltern classes" by winning them over. According to Chadi (2021), "Hegemony is the domination of one side on the other through influencing their beliefs. This term relates to imperialism in that it affects the colonized subject's culture" (p. 14).

Orientalism

Orientalism is a term that is concerned with Western stereotypes and prejudice towards the East. Edward Said in his *Orientalism* (1978) introduces the differences between East and West from the Westerners' point of view "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, and 'different'; thus, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (p. 38). "Orientals are inveterate liars; they are lethargic and suspicious, and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (p. 39). "There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominates; the latter must be dominated which usually means have their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another: Western power" (p. 36).

Diaspora

Diaspora is a concept that refers to individuals or a group of people who have left their homelands, share a common heritage, and maintain a shared memory. They always live in their "imagined homelands." They transmit their culture in their new habitat, the host nation (Giri, 2005).

3.3 Summary of Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* (2019)

The Parisian (2019) is a historical novel by the Palestinian-British Isabella Hammad. This novel marked Hammad's debut in the literary scene. In this novel, Hammad explores the theme of displacement. It depicts the widening gap between the East and the West and the stereotypical images of the East. Through different characters in the novel, Hammad reveals how dissimilarity is perceived as a sign of otherness and discrimination. *The Parisian* (2019) is filled with journeys across cultural, national, and linguistic boundaries and is concerned with negotiating and making borders during the Palestinian struggle for political clarity in the years preceding World War II. This novel centers on the life of a young Palestinian man, Medhat, who goes to France to study medicine. It also depicts Medhat's journey of self-discovery during a period when Palestine was struggling to establish itself as an independent nation in the wake of the British Mandate. Although the broader historical context is of national significance and importance for the Middle East, Hammad contrasts this with the personal histories of the novel's characters, especially the protagonist, Medhat, and his journey of self-discovery. Although Medhat is the main character, the third-person narration is threaded with the backstories of various characters.

The Parisian (2019) opens on a ship in 1914, midway through to France. Nineteen-year-old Medhat is leaving his home in Nablus, Palestine, for Montpellier, France, to study medicine. At the beginning, there is a scene on the ship that reveals Medhat's loneliness and dissociation from his own self and his surroundings. In Montpellier, Medhat lives with Docteur Molineu and his lovely daughter, Jeannette. Medhat falls in love with Jeannette, but he eventually discovers that he has become the object of Molineu's scholarly interest and that Molineu wishes to study him. When Medhat

confronts Docteur Molineu, Jeannette defends him (her father). Medhat wants Docteur Molineu to bless his marriage to Jeannette, but both Jeannette and her father refuse. After this situation, Medhat leaves Montpellier for Paris, where he studies history at the Sorbonne and engages in political conversations with other Arabs living there. After a few years, Medhat returns home to Nablus and tries to build the same life his father wants for him. First, he enters the family business, and later he marries a local girl, Fatima Hammad, who is from a family above his situation. The story moves forward several years to the early 1930s, when Medhat and Fatima have four children.

3.4 Summary of Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit* (2023)

River Spirit (2023) is a recent historical novel by the award-winning Scottish-Sudanese novelist Leila Abuela. This novel investigates the spiritual, physical, and emotional destruction resulting from colonialism, slavery, and religious division in Sudan in the 19th century. The novel is narrated in twenty-seven chapters, each headed by the name of a character. Some characters' chapters are written from the first-person perspective; others are written in the third-person point of view, as in Zamzam's chapter; and finally, the single chapter of Charles Gordon is written in the second-person perspective. The events of this novel begin in 1977. It narrates the story of the young girl Akuany (later Zamzam after slavery). After the invasion of Akuany's village and the death of her father, Yassin, a merchant from Khartoum, takes care of her and her younger brother, Bol. Nevertheless, Yassin decides to leave his father's trade and go to Egypt to study at Al-Azhar, so he entrusts Akuany and Bol to his sister, Halima. Nevertheless, Halima quickly sells Akuany to Nazli, the wife of the Turkish governor, for an attempted sum of fifty pounds. This is the first step in Akuany's long journey of enslavement and humiliation.

In the governor's house, Akuany, or Zamzam, witnesses firsthand the prejudice and injustice in society. She is treated like a toy by the governor's wife and eventually rejected, sold off once again to a Scottish painter named Robert. He moved to Khartoum to work at a boatyard and rediscovered his love for painting. Robert buys Akuany to paint a nude portrait of her. It occurs to her that if Yassin sees this portrait, he will turn away from her, so she wakes up horrified and tears the painting to shreds with a knife. This act reflects Akuany's desire to rebel against slavery. Her life becomes so wretched until she eventually returns to live with Yassin, who is hiding from the persecution of the Mahdi and his followers after refusing to acknowledge him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion and Analysis

This chapter discusses resistance, struggle, independence, and issues related to the occupation period of the Palestinian and Sudanese peoples in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian* (2019) and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit* (2023), respectively. Both novels represent the experiences of both peoples in their pursuit of independence. These experiences are woven into two distinct journeys of the protagonists in each narrative. As evident, each writer presents national historical issues in a particular style and under different circumstances and dimensions. This chapter examines how the narrative style in each novel reflects the voice of struggle and resistance against injustice and colonialism, how colonialism affects occupied peoples, and how these peoples revolt against aggression.

4.1 The depiction of resistance and independence in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*

Many writers address the Palestinian cause and all related issues in their literary works, shedding light on this complex matter through distinctive literary portrayals. Among these writers is Isabella Hamad, whose new novel, *The Parisian*, illuminates a significant historical and political period in the Palestinian people's history. The novel sheds light on a critical historical period in the East, particularly in Palestine, which ultimately led to the occupation of Palestine by the Zionists.

A comprehensive reading of this novel reveals that Isabella Hamad, through the events of its narrative, presents a portrayal of the most important issues related to the relationship between the West and the East. Hammad characterizes this relationship as a coin with two sides: colonialism and Orientalism. The novel reflects the injustice and

oppression endured by the peoples of the occupied countries of the Middle East, how the West views the East, and how the West fabricates false opinions about the East, and strives to convince both Easterners and Westerners of their legitimacy. Hamad portrays these themes through the journey of the novel's protagonist, Medhat Kamal, from France back to his homeland, Palestine, as well as through the narrative of the Palestinian people's struggle and resistance, and how they sacrificed everything precious to rid themselves of colonialism and achieve self-rule.

Hammad's novel *The Parisian* is not merely a personal story about someone traveling to a Western country and encountering racism; it is the story of an entire people during a critical and pivotal historical and political period. These people struggle for their independence, and through the events of the novel, we observe how colonialism shapes all aspects of the lives of occupied peoples. Hammad demonstrates in this novel how colonialism not only shapes the lives of peoples during the occupation but also negatively impacts them long after the occupation ends.

This novel is divided into three parts, through which Hammad presents many important critical issues. With her masterful narrative style, Hammad immerses her readers in the events as if they were living through them. In the first part, Hammad reflects on the relationship between East and West, how the West perceives the East, and how the West feels superior to the East, which it deems inferior, along with its misconceptions about the East, all through the journey of the novel's protagonist, Medhat Kamal, to France. Medhat's journey embodies the complexities a person faces when moving to another culture and adapting to new customs and traditions. It is as if Hammad, through this journey, tries to shed light on the problems people face when they are colonized. During this journey, Hammad weaves together important historical and political events

from this period in the history of Palestine and the Palestinians. Medhat travels to France for two main reasons: first, to avoid being conscripted into the Turkish army during World War I, and second, to study medicine:

At school, the Turkish boys were excited. But many wealthy sons of the provinces scrambled to avoid the barracks; the men of Haj Taher's generation paid a fee to evade conscription in the Ottoman army, but the rules had changed. Some young men in Nablus made use of a conscription loophole and married impoverished women from the villages; others hid in their family homes; others escaped to Europe. Jamil found employment as a military clerk in Constantinople and managed that way to avoid the front line, while the income from the Kamal store in Cairo was by now so plentiful that Haj Taher made plans to send Medhat to France (Hammad, 2019, p. 25).

While in France, Medhat is treated as an outsider with a primitive mentality that needs refinement and civilization. This is evident in the dialogue between Medhat and Dr. Molineu:

“Do you think I am not, you think I am uncivilized?” (Hammad,2019, p. 134).

“[...] I have been, was attempting, on the contrary, attempting to humanize you” (Hammad,2019, p. 134).

As a result of this treatment, he changes his study plans, leaving Montpellier for Paris to study history at the Sorbonne instead of medicine, a decision that later alters the course of his life:

“Thus, began Medhat's life in Paris. His days of medical study were behind him. He enrolled in the history course at the Sorbonne” (Hammad,2019, p. 154).

When Kamal leaves Montpellier and goes to Paris, he goes directly to Farouk, the man he met on the ship during his voyage to France. While living with Farouk, Medhat meets a group of young Arabs with political interests “The men around the room were

animated with discussion. Most Mid-hat recognized; all were Syrian Arabs” (Hammad,2019, p.161), “The Jarbawis, were among the founders of the Lebanese Alliance in Paris, a diaspora body that lobbied for French political support for the Lebanese nationalist cause” (Hammad,2019, p.161). When these young men meet, most of their conversations revolve around their occupied homelands, the violence their people are subjected to, and how they are striving to defend their countries' cause until they achieve complete independence and unconditional freedom "Our issue is independence," said Omar (Hammad,2019, p.164), "What 'khaleek shway'? They have just killed our best men. This is not being one of humanity. We are from the East, every one of us in this room, and we have suffered enough. Lazim, kuluna, rise up." "Using the same tools as our oppressors? (Hammad,2019, p.162).

These young Arabs are deeply connected to their countries and their national cause, even when far away as Omar demonstrate “No, we have to fight as a jama’a [...]” (Hammad,2019, p.162), unlike Medhat, who shows no interest in the events around him and is unaware of what is happening in his homeland. This illustrates that not everyone far from their homeland is necessarily indifferent to its problems; rather, it varies from person to person, as Hammad explains in the novel. These young men are united by their love of their homeland and their zeal to liberate their people from the oppression of colonialism. In contrast, Medhat is indifferent to everything except his personal desires, whether in France or in his homeland of Palestine.

In the second part of the novel, Hammad traces Medhat Kamal's life after his return to his homeland. Within this journey, important events in the history of the Middle East and the occupied Arab countries are woven. This new journey is a consequence of his time in France. Having abandoned his medical studies without telling his father, he is

forced to train in managing the family business and to marry the girl chosen for him by his grandmother, or else be disinherited. Through these events, Hammad illustrates that occupied peoples have no right to self-determination, which is now in the hands of the occupying power. This is what happens to Medhat; he does not have the right to determine his future plans, nor even his most basic right, which is choosing his life partner. Medhat faces many obstacles in his life as a result of his experiences in France. As shown in the conversation between Medhat and his father, Haj Taher:

“I – I would like to learn the family trade. [...] I am leaving your grandmother in charge of selecting a wife” (Hammad, 2010, p. 195).

The third part, which is the most important part, is a historical epic of the Palestinian people, uniquely crafted by Hammad. It weaves a narrative that counters many Western claims about the East and recounts the sacrifices made by Palestinians—men, women, children, the educated, and farmers, as evident in:

“[...] there is an uprising. We are led by the glorious fellahin” (Hammad, 2019, p. 461).

In this part, Hammad highlights the role of women in the struggle against colonialism and their influential role in the Palestinian cause. She also delineates the contributions of farmers and the equally vital involvement of children. Furthermore, Hammad sheds light on the resistance and struggle of the Palestinian people, alongside some Arab nations, against the brutal British and Zionist aggression and occupation. Each character crafted by Hammad in her novel *The Parisian* holds importance in relation to the narrative events. Every character has a designated role to fulfill.

In his book *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues that the West holds misconceptions and a flawed understanding of the Middle East, grounded in cultural and social stereotypes.

He further clarifies that these erroneous Western views stem from Oriental studies that perpetuate the notion that the East is different from and inferior to the West. This, in turn, justifies many forms of dominance over the East, including occupation and imperialism. Said adds that the West's sense of superiority leads it to act as if it is a dominant power over the Middle East and the Arab peoples, a point Isabella Hamad emphasizes in her novel. As mentioned above, during the First World War, the protagonist of the novel, Medhat, leaves his homeland, which was then under British mandate and Ottoman rule, as the latter was nearing its end, and travels to Montpellier to study medicine after experiencing occupation there. Unfortunately, when Medhat travels to France, he experiences a different kind of occupation and racism, as it is obvious when Patrice Nolin says about Medhat, "It's the Arabian man" (Hammad,2019, p. 55). Moreover, when Carl Page talks to Medhat, saying "[...] You are the famous Oriental guest. Well then, what's your take on this, as an Oriental?" (Hammad,2019, p. 57).

Midhat suffers from immense disappointment simply for being from the East. He is psychologically oppressed and occupied. Medhat suffers greatly as an Arab. Everyone looks at him as an outsider and an inferior. This makes him feel inferior and far less than any Westerner, a sentiment reflected in the thoughts that come to Medhat's mind: "Perhaps it was only the idea of him. The idea of a person who so exceeded him in virtue, as well as in intellect, and in manner and culture, and even in appearance" (Hammad p. 119). Hammad also shows that occupied peoples are treated from this perspective even in their own homeland, as is evident in the dialogue between Pere Antoine and the English policeman Major Hodges: "[...] On the Jewish side we all know who's who. The Arabs are a bit different" (Hammad,2019, p. 311).

Because he is an Arab, Medhat is considered uneducated, naive, and uncivilized, and therefore Westerners, represented by the host family, their relatives, and acquaintances, must "civilize" him. This was one of the false pretexts used by colonizers to justify their colonization of Arab countries. This is reflected in Hammad's section on the study conducted by Dr. Molineu on Medhat: "The Effect of a New Language Learned by a Primitive Brain" (Hammad,2019, p. 130). Medhat faces numerous forms of discrimination simply for being Arab, a fact revealed when he discovers the study, which portrays him as primitive merely because he is from the East. In this regard, it becomes clear that Medhat is treated not as an Eastern person but as an object, and that he is the "Other" because he is not a Western individual.

According to Benfey (2019), Medhat is a split personality. While in France, he tries to act like a Frenchman, but upon returning to his homeland of Palestine, his life changes, and he finds himself trying to play a different role. However, from the researcher's perspective, Medhat, in both cases, is a character with no goal other than his own personal comfort, which is clearly demonstrated by his ignorance of the political events unfolding around him. This is further illustrated in the dialogue he has with a group of young Arab activists in Farouk's apartment in France:

"Wallah, I don't know," said Bassem Jarbawi. "You know? They have They are killing us. Like the Armenians."

"Who have they killed?" said Midhat

"You didn't read the paper today?" said Yusef Mansour, a Maronite Christian from Aley with an ivory moustache. "Midhat, you have to start reading the paper."

"Another round of executions, nationalists," said Hani. "Twenty-one Syrians hanged in Beirut and Damascus."

"People from Palestine, habibi," said Faruq. (Hammad,2019, pp.162-163).

This dialogue makes it clear and proves that Medhat is a person with no role.

According to what Muhammad (2016) mentions, the Israelis are not only content with controlling Palestine and the Palestinians through acts of violence, arresting them without cause, and brutally torturing them under the pretext that they are terrorists, and by accusing and arresting Palestinian children, but they also steal all of Palestine's resources:(Muhammad cited in Awajan 2024): "The Zionists are very bad. They want the land."(Hammad,2019, p.320), "[...] the British Zionists hurrying on the storm of progress with a thrill in their voices" (Hammad,2019, p.282).

From this, it becomes clear that the primary target of the occupying Israelis is the land of Palestine. They covet it and dream of controlling it. Therefore, they resort to violence to defend their right to their land, which is a form of resistance and self-defense. When the Palestinian people use violence, they never intend to harm or injure others:

"We must resist all of the Jews," he said. "Even our own Jews, the ones we have here." (Hammad,2019, p.206).

The colonizers claim that they colonize these countries for the benefit of the Arab people, to liberate them from ignorance and backwardness, and to free their women from the oppression they endure in a patriarchal society. This is the second misconception about Arabs. Through the events of the novel, Hammad exposes the falsehood of these claims, as Sister Marian points out: "Every father in Nablus seems to want his daughters to learn history, and do you know why? To make appealing wives. Nabulsi men like good conversationalists" (Hammad,2019, p. 454). Hammad demonstrates that women attend school, study various subjects, read poetry, play music, and learn many aspects of life, such as etiquette and sewing, as we can see through the character of Sahar, Hani's wife. So according to Hammad Palestinian women are educated not because to attract men but

to participate in the resistance against colonialism. In one of her letters to Hani, Sahar tells him that she studies geography, history, literature, and English, and that she loves reading stories and novels. In another letter, she tells him that they take sewing lessons and attend a concert in the courtyard (Hammad,2019,pp. 382-383).

So, it is obvious that most Arab women are educated, civilized, and cultured which qualifies them even to participate in the political field. They participate in significant political matters, joining men in resisting occupation and demanding independence. Hammad sheds light on the role of women in the struggle against aggression, showing how they participate in organized marches in protest against the Balfour Declaration, demanding the annulment of the British Mandate and the departure of the Zionists from their homeland. They participate in committees that discuss the problems of Palestine, and some of them even travel to Western countries to discuss their homeland's cause. This is what Hani tells Medhat with pride, because his wife Sahar is one of those women who defend the Palestinian cause:

And they threw their veils back," said Hani, reciting the story to Medhat, "like this, and they told him, we are going to march, we are protesting the Balfour Declaration and the maltreatment of Arabs. What does the Commissioner say-he says, I'll stop the protest by force if I have to (Hammad,2019, p. 386)

Cars before, cars behind, the pavements on either side crammed with police officers. The women streamed past Damascus Gate in a honking convoy, screaming slogans from their opened windows. At each of the foreign consulates five women exited the foremost vehicles and walked as one to deliver their memoranda. By half past six, the hot red sun descending, the formation of cars splintered into banners that fluttered apart through the city towards their neighborhoods and towns and villages (Hammad,2019, p. 387).

Through this, Hammad reveals two important points. She confronts the Western stereotype that Arab women are oppressed and marginalized, and she simultaneously clarifies her central theme of the novel, which is resistance for independence.

Fanon (1961), in his remarkable work *The Wretched of the Earth*, explains the negative impact of occupation on the psyche of occupied peoples and how this leads them to use violence to liberate their homeland. Colonialism, as an act of violence, not only negatively impacts the psyche of adults who understand the meaning of occupation but also impacts children. Hammad exemplifies this through her portrayal of Ghada Kamal. Despite being a child, Ghada suffers from the violence that surrounds her, which Hammad depicts in young Ghada's fascination with funerals and the sounds of wailing. Children of Ghada's age typically engage in play and move from place to place in pursuit of happiness. However, Ghada joins gatherings behind the funerals of Palestinians who are killed in the violent colonial attacks. "Ghada Kamal loved funerals. When school finished at three o'clock she listened for the sound of drums, and if passing out through the school gates she heard them-even faint, far-off-she would follow" (Hammad,2019, p. 476). Through this, Hammad highlights one of the most significant effects of colonialism on the psyche of occupied peoples.

In this regard, Fanon elucidates that occupation constitutes a system of control and domination that dehumanizes the occupied peoples. This perspective is further supported by Raja Abdul Rahman, who emphasizes that colonial powers must treat inhabitants as human beings and accord them full rights, stating, "Yes, I speak for myself. I am not Christian, Muslim, Turkish, French, Chinese, or any of these things. I am just one among humankind" (Hammad,2019, p. 161). Additionally, Fanon affirms that the struggle for independence and freedom often manifests as violence, which underscores its

significance at this stage: “A crowd of Arab men had appeared in the grove below. They carried a motley array of weapons—full rifles, kitchen knives, some sharpened sticks. In an instant, they raced up the slope and separated to scramble over the rocks” (Hammad p. 449). Fanon further posits that colonialism is fundamentally an act of violence: “[...] A group of soldiers were nudging rifles into the ribs of fellahin who held their arms in the air as their bodies were searched. [...] A soldier in shorts and helmet was patting one of the Arabs all the way down to his shoes” (Hammad p. 528). Consequently, resistance and getting rid of it will also be done through violence. This is what Hammad refers to in the events of her novel: “[...] The rebels, bihuttu stones in the road, the army car, phut, stops, English come out, and then from the hills the fighters shooting down. Some rebels died, [...]” (Hammad, 2019, p. 484).

Fanon states that, “at the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force, it frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (94). Occupied peoples, including the Palestinian people, do not initiate their defense of their homeland through violence but rather through negotiations, which often produce no results. This is exemplified in the conversation between Hajj Hassan Hammad and Hajj Taher, when Jamal Pasha, the Turkish governor, seeks to arrest Hajj Hassan merely because he demands changes in the country's conditions: “We never asked for independence,” said Hassan. “We are the Decentralization Party. We ask only for reform” (Hammad, 2019, p. 141). Therefore, they resort to violence not to incite riots or induce chaos but to assert their rights, defend their land, and uphold their principles of self-determination and self-governance. As Hammad declares, “The negotiations between Faisal and the French that Hani had described in his letter to Medhat were soon public knowledge. So were the outbreaks of violence in the hinterlands. Agitation rippled into Palestine, and people in the coastal cities were

photographed with placards saying: 'PALESTINE IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF SOUTHERN SYRIA,' and 'NO ROOM FOR THE ZIONISTS IN PALESTINE. "Violently suppressed by the British," wrote the reporter. "All rallies have now been banned" (Hammad,2019, p. 285).

Fanon further expounds that the struggle of these peoples extends beyond mere political conflict to encompass psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. Violence is not perpetrated with the intent to induce chaos or anarchy; rather, it is a response to the occupation, oppression, and injustices endured by the occupied peoples. This is what Hammad illustrates through the events depicted in her novel, *The Parisian*. Hammad points to some aspects of colonialism in Palestine, thereby illustrating the profound impact of colonialism on the region and its inhabitants. "[...] they were strung out on the dregs of their resources, grain stores ran low, Nablus was hungry" (Hammad,2019, p. 501). The novel predominantly takes place during a period when Nablus, representing Palestine, is subjected to successive occupations. Hammad also references some acts of oppression and injustice inflicted upon the people of the city, simply because they denounced colonialism and expressed their rejection of any foreign power ruling them.

As a result of the circumstances and events experienced by occupied peoples, a desire for violence arises. This sentiment is accompanied by a vigorous revolutionary zeal that compels them to make many great sacrifices in their quest for liberation from colonial rule. The colonial powers subject the occupied peoples to brutal torture and severe violations. "News of British violence gusted through him and flowered out as anger. Images remained: he saw the policemen flogging student protesters on their bare buttocks in a line outside the mayor's office. Peasant women being searched for arms on the roadside and lewdly gestured at. A house demolished, the family holding their belongings

beside the soldiers on the hillock, forced to watch as their home exploded” (Hammad,2019, p. 503). These experiences led these people to rise and begin their revolutions against the colonizers, thus initiating acts of violence as a form of reaction. This is evident in the incident involving Nebi Musa in Jerusalem, which is regarded as one of the most important turning points in the novel. As a consequence of Jamil Kamal witnessing the killing of people and their blood staining his clothing, the trajectory of his life underwent a profound change. This turmoil serves as the primary catalyst for his emergence as a revolutionary and political activist. As Hammad elucidates, “Ever since he first saw death at the Nebi Musa riots sixteen years earlier, Jamil had longed to be doing. That pair of dirty corpses still lay in his memory. The moment he bore the weight of that dead Arab aloft, and the still-warm blood soaked into his jacket, was a tremendous, altering moment. With a great slow force over subsequent months this experience gradually changed Jamil's sense of responsibility. And finally, now, the time for witnessing and suffering, of debating in assemblies and composing memoranda, was over” (Hammad,2019, pp. 502-503).

In this context, Awajan (2024) explains that Hammad, through this event, attempts to draw a comparison between the characters of Medhat and his cousin Jamil. Midhat appears cowardly, hesitant to confront the current events, unlike Jamil. Because Medhat appears as a docile character, he abandons his cousin and takes a taxi home, leaving him to face these bloody events alone. This demonstrates that Jamil resists the occupation without fear, even at the cost of his life:

A taxi careened up the road. Midhat whistled, waved, and from the backseat breathed: "Nablus."

"We have to take the long route," said the driver.

"Mashi, take the long route."

He shut his eyes and rested against the leather. Honks, shouts. His breath became regular: he would sleep. On the red of his closed lids, Jamil appeared. Jamil, dropped into a pool of bodies (Hammad,2019, p. 300).

“Jamil had a black eye and his lip was cut, the collar of his shirt dark with sweat and dirt” (Hammad,2019, p. 302).

Frantz Fanon emphasizes a crucial point: the essential condition for any nation's existence is its freedom, thus affirming its place among nations. Therefore, occupied peoples must resist and revolt against oppressive colonial powers to attain their freedom. Such resistance often involves acts of violence, which should not be interpreted solely in the literal sense. Freedom cannot be achieved without revolution, and this inevitably entails some acts of violence. Fanon points out “national liberation and the renaissance of the state” (Fanon 244). This means that true freedom for these occupied peoples extends beyond political independence to include the establishment of a vibrant state characterized by national consciousness and culture; a nation endowed with the right to self-governance and self-determination. This is the essence of decolonization.

Moreover, the novel is richly populated with revolutionary events that pave the way for the Palestinian national movement. This is evident in Jamil and Basil's profound sense of responsibility towards their homeland, as Hammad demonstrates, “Jamil and Basil considered themselves crossover figures. Crossed between town and country, Nabulsi and fellah, strike and rebellion [...]” (Hammad,2019, p. 501), and “Among other notables, Jamil and Basil were original members of the Nablus Strike Committee when it first convened in April. They still helped coordinate with committees in other towns [...]” (Hammad,2019, p. 502). The national movement is not confined to educated men;

peasants actively participate as Fatima tells Medhat, “Yes. There is an uprising. We are led by the glorious fellahin” (Hammad,2019, p. 461). Women also partake in the movement, with many sacrificing their lives defending their homeland's cause, a fact Antoine recounts to Medhat in the hospital.

“How many are dead?” said Medhat quietly.

I couldn't tell you. Many. Probably many more have gone unrecorded. It has not been a bloodless revolution. Did you hear about the battle at Anabta? Dawn till dusk. Several women were martyred (Hammad,2019, p. 549).

Through the events of the novel, we observe that the Palestinian people resist colonialism and try to end the occupation, even though they know very well that their capabilities do not allow them to wage war. This is what Hammad explains in more than one part of the novel. This is evident in the conversation between Haj Taher, Medhat, and Jamil.

They wanted Palestine to fight for independence on her own (Hammad,2019, p. 252).

“We aren't strong enough to threaten anyone. The Europeans will always have better armies. If you're violent and you're also the weakest party, I don't think that works out well” (Hammad,2019, p. 252).

“But Palestine is tiny,” said Jamil. “I don't see how we can fight without Damascus” (Hammad,2019, p. 253).

“They will win,” said Nuri. “One way or another they will win. Don't you see? Your little armed force getting ready around Nablus is not an army. It's not a real army” (Hammad,2019, p. 521).

The Palestinian people, represented by the people of Nablus, fervently struggle for independence and freedom because they are convinced that what is taken by force must be reclaimed by force. Therefore, they make many sacrifices. As mentioned before, the

novel "The Parisian" is a series of sacrifices, both past and ongoing, made by the Palestinian people in their resistance against colonialism and their pursuit of self-determination. Through a deep reading of the novel, the reader notices that sacrifice extends beyond bloodshed; many other forms are also evident. The novel shows that Palestinians relinquished their comfort and refrained from utilizing electricity solely because the company responsible is English, as it is mentioned in the text: "The lack of electricity in Nablus had, like many things, a political basis. More than a decade ago the council voted to boycott the Electric Company, a Zionist enterprise backed by the British. This abstinence from electric light remained a point of pride" (Hammad,2019, p. 400). On another occasion, Umm Taher affirmed her solidarity with the electricity boycott: "Ya Allah," said Um Jamil, gliding in with hot coffee on a tray. "It would be better if we just got the electricity." Um Taher sucked her teeth. "Ta'awun," she said to her stitches, pulling the needle like a violin bow and rotating the fabric. Cooperation: it was now one of those words even ladies in their eighties could recite with an air of righteousness (Hammad,2019, p. 422). Another example is Jamil's sacrifice of the idea of marriage and establishing a family in order to defend his homeland's cause: "Jamil was unmarried, and had devoted the last fifteen years of his life to the "Cause," rallying support for a boycott of the Mandate and its institutions" (Hammad,2019, p. 392). Hani Murad is another sacrifice; he is arrested because he defends his homeland's cause and achieves independence, therefore, he leaves his pregnant wife alone.

As mentioned previously, the Palestinian people transitioned from Turkish to British occupation. Then in the winter of 1917[...] the Ottomans lost Jerusalem to the British [...] Turks had retreated to Nablus and were establishing their new stronghold for northern Palestine inside the walls of her old city [...] A year passed before the British finally ousted the Turks and seized Nablus (Hammad,2019, p. 146).

At the Ottomans' overthrow, the streets of Jerusalem had flooded with revelers, and the citizens danced and whistled and cut down the telegraph wires to take home as trophies. But in Nablus the reaction was quite different. There the crowds gathered outside the municipal hospital, that symbol of Nablus's modernity, not to support but to protest the British capture of Jerusalem, and the Nabulsi had chanted their way to the temporary Turkish encampment to display their fervent displeasure. Although the city was a center of Arab nationalism, her citizens still feared the defeat of the Empire. The known was better than the unknown, they said uneasily; the Ottomans had been bad, but who wasn't in a time of war? And besides, in those Turkish garrisons their sons were half the soldiers. And in addition, Balfour had made his declaration: Nablus guessed what the British had planned for them, and they were afraid (Hammad,2019, p. 147)

However, the British occupation was far worse, resulting in numerous disasters that the struggling Palestinian people continue to face. The most devastating of these disasters, the effects of which are still felt today, is the Balfour Declaration, which permitted Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. Jewish immigration to Palestine occurred in waves. Between 1882 and 1903, approximately 35,000 Jews immigrated and settled in Palestine, establishing agricultural projects. Their plan was to buy land from farmers and other agricultural landowners at very low prices. Because the British occupation abolished the Islamic courts that resolved agricultural land disputes, Haj Hassan Hammad was forced to sell his disputed land to the Jews for a price far below its actual value “[...] the British were preventing Islamic courts from dealing with land disputes, even though they had not yet set up their own judicial system [...] A year later, in November 1919, a representative from the Jewish National Fund visited and offered to buy the land immediately for ninety thousand pounds” (Hammad,2019, p. 234). Acquiring these agricultural lands in this way constitutes a new

war being waged against the Palestinians. “The Jews in England, do you know how much money they have? They have an empire. They've started colonizing here, they're messing with the peasants in the north, that's why there's no money-it's all going to the Jews. You can say it's the war” (Hammad,2019, p. 206).

Regardless of the fact that Jews pose a new threat to the Palestinians, some believe that the presence of Jews in Palestine and the purchase of these lands will make the economy flourish, as Raja demonstrates, “the Jews are good agriculturalists. You know? They might be a boost to the local economy” (Hammad,2019, p. 164).

A second group of nearly 40,000 immigrated between 1902 and 1914. However, their agenda was the establishment of Zionism in Palestine. “As for Palestine-The Zionist program is trouble for everyone,” that is what Hani mentions in his letter to Medhat (Hammad p. 259). Hammad expresses this notion through “British Zionist hurrying on the storm of progress with a thrill in their voices” (Hammad,2019, p. 282). Between 1919 and 1923, the third group, numbering approximately 40,000 Zionists, immigrated and settled in Palestine. With the increasing number of Zionist immigrants and their acquisition of land, it becomes clear that deliberate plans and a project are being implemented in Palestine that includes all Arabs, which is what Hani refers to in his conversation with Omar “We know what empires do. They are hungry. The muthaqafeen in this country, at least, they see Zionism as a project to make, you know, make the Arab world this European thing” (Hammad ,2019, p. 164).

The fourth group of Jewish immigrants, numbering around 80,000, came from Poland between 1924 and 1928. The fifth group of Zionist immigrants, fleeing Nazi Germany, numbered approximately 300,000 between 1929 and 1939. The Palestinian people have tried and continue to try to resist the Zionist occupation in various ways.

They have made many sacrifices and concessions, but to no avail. The Zionists do not want to make peace with the Palestinians but want Palestine for themselves. This is what Hammad underlines and points to through the conversation between Father Antoine and Randa, one of the women who gives him information about Nablus. “Some people say, let's give the Jews something.” She sighed. “Others say, you give them something, you'll give them everything, and we'll have nothing. Because in England there are many Jews. And the Mandoub esSamme, the new Palestine governor, is a Jew. So, it will be a Jewish empire” (Hammad,2019, p. 329).

4.2 The depiction of resistance and independence in Leila Aboulela’s *River Spirit*:

It is known that Leila Aboulela, as a novelist, tends to highlight the importance of the hijab and religious rituals in the lives of Muslim women living in Western countries. She is one of the diasporic Arab women writers who represent Islam differently in her works. As Said Abbas (2011) notes, Islam in her writings is depicted as offering “comfort, community, and access to identity.” In her novels, Aboulela always tries to show the differences between practicing and non-practicing Muslims and how their lives differ. According to Yousef Awad (2012), Aboulela portrays religion as a motivation through which her characters obtain their relief, which helps them communicate with others. Some of Aboulela's novels deal with feminism and all matters concerning women, but within a religious context. Most of her female protagonists go through numerous difficult and harsh circumstances, leading them to seek refuge in religion. However, the situation is completely different in her novel *River Spirit*, which deals with the history of Sudan and its people’s struggle against colonialism to gain their freedom and self-governance. Through the events of this novel, she also addresses the role of women, but in a different

way. Here, women are portrayed as fighters for freedom and independence, both for themselves and for their country.

It is worth noting that Aboulela's *River Spirit* (2023) is considered as one of the most important historical fiction novels, as it explores not only themes of imperialism and independence but also culture and identity. Through a close reading of this novel, we find that it captures the history of Sudan during the Mahdist Revolution through the eyes of its characters. This captivating and evocative narrative transports its readers from their reality to the heart of Sudan. The presentation of resistance and independence in *River Spirit* is illustrated through vivid storytelling, a complex theme, and well-developed characters. In this novel, she portrays the meaning of freedom for colonized peoples through the events of the story. She depicts what freedom means to the different characters in the novel, each according to their own beliefs and vision of its meaning.

Amany Abdelrazek-Alsiefy (2024) points out that Aboulela's *River Spirit* (2023) is a new domain that depicts a critical period in Sudan's history. Through the interwoven and overlapping events of this novel, we can observe that two factions are striving for independence: the self-proclaimed Mahdi and his followers, who seek to rid themselves of Egyptian, Ottoman, and British rule, and the people of Sudan, who strive to resist colonialism and the false Mahdi and his followers to obtain their freedom. Furthermore, we also have the story of Akuany (Zamzam), whose desire is independence and liberation from slavery. Zamzam is a real Sudanese character, as Aboulela points out in her novel *River Spirit*. Aboulela says, "I found Zamzam in the Sudan Archive of Durham University, in a bill of sale and in a petition concerning a runaway slave girl who stole an item of clothes from her mistress" (p. 310).

River Spirit is considered a significant turning point in Aboulela's literary life, as it marks a distinctive departure from her previous novels, which usually explore religious themes through the suffering of her protagonists in the West. When we seek to clarify this turning point, we must refer to Aboulela's previous literary works to differentiate between the main themes (Chambers, 2009).

In her literary works, Leila Aboulela demonstrates an Islamic feminist consciousness which sheds light on the rights and status of Muslim women. Some of her novels center on the "sense of in-betweenness" or "cross-cultural encounters," the state experienced by a diasporic migrant torn between two cultures, one the country they immigrated to and the other their homeland. This is evident in *Minaret* (2005). In this novel, Leila Aboulela portrays the protagonist, Najwa, in her ongoing struggle to find her true self and in her loneliness and alienation in London and even in her homeland. It is clear that Najwa's unstable and declining conditions, along with her wavering personality, contributed to the formation of her personality. On the other hand, in her *River Spirit*, Aboulela presents Rabiha, the first character we encounter in the novel, as a woman of exceptional character despite the harsh circumstances she endures. She appears determined and resolute in her decision to rescue the Mahdi and his followers from the campaign led by Rashid Pasha, the governor of Fashoda: "The governor of Fashoda is on the move, intend on annihilating the Mahdi once and for all" (Aboulela,2023, p. 1).

Rabiha emerges as a fighter who defies the constraints of her environment to achieve independence for herself and her people, "With each last breath, she is a rebel, striving to become more than an obedient wife" (Aboulela,2023, p. 10), believing that Muhammed Ahmad ibn Abdullah is the awaited Mahdi. Rabiha leaves her home and family at night, rushing to the village where the Mahdi is located to warn him of the trap set by the Turkish

governor to eliminate him and seize control of Sudan. Rabiha sacrifices her life for her country, and it is considered that she changed the course of the Mahdist Revolution through her actions, “She is Rabiha, the woman from Kinana changed the course of a revolution” (Aboulela,2023, p. 10). This refutes the Western claim that women are marginalized and weak. Through her actions, Rabiha is able to save the Mahdi and his followers, a form of resistance against the Turkish occupation. With this act, Rabiha altered the course of the Mahdist revolution, which is destined to end at the hands of the Turks. However, thanks to Rabiha's perseverance in reaching the Mahdi and rescuing him from this predicament, the revolution achieved success in most of its phases.

Here, Aboulela presents women in a completely different way, as explained by Nawaz, et al. (2024), who states that the novel “River Spirit” describes the lives of women during harsh war conditions and how these conditions make rebellious women who participate in revolutions to gain independence. Nawaz goes on to say that the novel *River Spirit* illustrates the role of women in resisting patriarchal authority, militarism, and rigid religious doctrine. This is clearly demonstrated in what was previously mentioned regarding Rabiha's actions to save the Mahdi and his followers. This is what Akuan also does when she tries to defy the constraints of slavery when she tries to escape from the governor's house to be with Yassin, thus defying all customs and traditions without fear of the punishment that awaited her if she was unable to escape with Yassin. This is considered a type of struggle to gain independence, self-independence. There was a north to Khartoum and a south to her village:

There were routes to the White Nile, the Sobat River, streamers, boats, riverways, and small villages all dotted along the river. She paused to take all that in, to breathe the possibilities. Of making it on her own, free and away (Aboulela,2023, p.66).

Akuany tries to free herself from slavery and wants to gain her freedom and independence. She waits for Yassin at the place he will travel from so she can escape with him and save herself, but Yassin refuses and tells her to return to the governor's house until he pays the money that must be paid to the governor in exchange for her freedom. She goes home to receive her punishment for running away. Through this situation, Aboulela illustrates that the people of a nation cannot liberate their homelands unless they themselves are free.

Aboulela points out the negative effects of postcolonialism on Sudanese culture and politics. Aboulela describes Sudan's fragmented postcolonial culture and illustrates the deplorable state of Sudan and its people, showing how colonialism instilled a sense of unhomeliness or unbelonging in their homeland. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha (1994) explains, "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can unhomey be easily accommodated that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (p. 9). All of this leads to the crucial point that Najwa's unstable psychological state stems from her isolation and unbelonging even in her own land, as well as from her hybrid culture, ultimately results in a crisis of cultural identity. As L. Tayson states, "to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself, your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee" (qtd. in Alireza Farahbakhsh and Rezvaneh Ranjbar p. 107).

In *River Spirit*, Aboulela clarifies the severe effects of colonialism through the events of the first chapter, which revolve around Akuany, whose country was invaded. As a result, she loses her father, her home, and everything she owns. Worse still, she is forced to leave the river, which she considers her unique identity and the place to which she belongs. From here, she begins to feel a sense of alienation, "The river was [...] the

spirit of who she was. The place kept her safe when they raided the village” (Aboulela, 2023, p. 11). This is confirmed by AlKurdi and Amireh (2025), who state that Aboulela's use of the river here is not merely to express its role as a source of water or a geographical feature, but rather to represent life and spirit. For Akuany, it is a source of safety and protection; her love for this river alone saved her from being in Malakal during the invasion, thus saving her from capture and being sold in the slave market.

This is a consequence of colonialism and the brutality inflicted upon Sudan and its people by Gordon Pasha, “He had been seconded from the British army to the Ottomans, appointed by the Khedive in Egypt.” Gordon Pasha represents British and Turkish colonialism and its savagery in depriving Sudanese people of their human rights and trading them as slaves, according to Dr. Ajay Sahebrao Deshmukh, “[...] the most significant negative effect on the colonized was inhumanely behavior towards native people. The native people were treated in a slavish manner in which people were sold and bought like slaves. [...] This type of European treatment let people to experience different type of feelings, a feeling of pain and inferiority because they lost their dignity and their identity” (p. 1091). Gordon Pasha burdened the Sudanese with ever-increasing taxes, “People were taxed and they were taxed and they were taxed” (Aboulela, 2023, 27). As an inevitable result, the people began searching for a way to rid themselves of this exploitative colonialism that had seized their wealth and burdened them with taxes. They turned to the Mahdi and joined forces with him to overcome this aggression, “Expected Redeemer, the promised Mahdi, who would pull them all out of their misery, who would bring justice and peace to the world after it had been filled with tyranny” (Aboulela, 2023, p. 15). The Mahdi is a religious scholar who claims to be the awaited savior who will restore justice before Judgment Day. He gathers a massive army of people resentful of Turkish and Egyptian rule and calls for jihad. The Mahdi advocates revolution against

Turkish and Egyptian rule, demanding the abolition of exorbitant taxes and the achievement of independence. He succeeds in capturing many Sudanese cities and eliminating the Turks. He continues in this way for a time until his personal ambitions overcome him.

In her novel *River Spirit*, Aboulela deliberately avoids religious themes and instead explores the historical issues facing Sudan resulting from colonialism. She mentions one of the turning points in colonial Sudanese history: the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. During this battle, an Anglo-Egyptian military force led by Lord Kitchener captured Dongola and began advancing southward to seize Omdurman, seeking revenge for what had happened to Gordon and Hicks.

Still, Omdurman is somewhat gloomy these days I will confess. Everyone worried and mistrustful. The English, under Kitchener, have taken over Dongola, and the speculation is that they are intent on advancing south. They want to take vengeance for what we did to Gordon and Hicks (Aboulela, 2023, p. 299).

They succeeded, capturing Omdurman, destroying the Mahdi's tomb, exhuming his remains, and separating his skull, which they kept, as the Mahdi's followers had done to Gordon. They threw the bones into the Nile and killed approximately ten thousand of the Mahdi's followers:

The whole building destroyed. And that was not enough for them. The Mahdi's body was dug out and dismembered. To copy Gordon's death, his skull was detached and preserved while his bones were thrown in the Nile (p. 306-307).

From the lines mentioned previously, it becomes clear that Aboulela draws a comparison between two different types of colonialism: colonialism by foreign powers and internal colonialism by a group belonging to the same country. Neither is different from the other. Both begin by claiming to want what is best for the country and to save

its people, but end by exploiting the people of that country and robbing them of all their possessions, including their freedom.

Salha explains all of this in two letters she sent to her son, Rustom, and his stepmother. In these letters, Salha describes the dire situation in Omdurman and Khartoum after they were captured by the Anglo-Egyptian forces. She recounts how the forces advanced on Khartoum and seized it as well, raising British flags alongside Egyptian ones. She also details how they took control of all the provinces that had been under Ottoman rule, only to be liberated by the Mahdi and his followers. She explains that they got rid of the Turks because, in the Mahdi's view, they were infidels, and now the non-Muslim British were ruling them. However, she anticipates that they will attempt to sow discord between the Sudanese and the Egyptians:

Then on Sunday, the British flag was raised in Khartoum alongside the Egyptian one. For the very first time, the khedive's flag is overpowered now by the other one. Britain is now sovereign over all Ottoman lands that had been under Mahdist rule. This is what we Sudanese have unwittingly brought upon ourselves? We got rid of the Turks, branding them infidels; now we are ruled by the British who are not Muslims. They will drive a wedge between us and Egypt (Aboulela, 2023, p. 307).

In *River Spirit*, Aboulela explains the cruelty of the colonizer in an unconventional way. She illustrates this cruelty through the Orientalist painter David Roberts' portrayal of Zamzam as he paints her nude portrait. This is before the Heck's campaign, in which Roberts was to be involved. Roberts continued painting for a long time, and it was expected of her to endure this period without complaint, as it was an honor for her to be painted by a European artist:

From the moment she entered his house to the time he left with the Hicks expedition, forty-eight hours later, Roberts worked like he had never worked in

his life. Hour after hour, barely stopping to eat and sleep (Aboulela,2023, p. 160-161).

Zamzam often complains and refuses to sit as Robert wants, so he ties her to the chair, repeating that he is not a bad person but that she forces him to do this:

He did not want to be cruel to her, he did not want to hurt her, but when she would not sit still as he wanted her to sit, he tied her to a chair [...] He disliked her for bringing out the worst in him (Aboulela,2023, p. 161).

Despite this suffering, Robert wants her to show him gratitude and appreciate his great efforts in painting her. When Zamzam sees her nude portrait, she spits on it. Robert slaps her, then resumes drawing:

When he showed her what he had done, expecting her to appreciate and understand, to share in this venture, to be part of this endeavor He slapped her he could not help it and started again. Ungrateful, did she not understand what was at stake. [...] He was not a cruel person, but she must understand the necessity of all this (Aboulela,2023, p. 161).

He intends to give Zamzam her freedom, but only after he finishes the portrait, after taking advantage of her: “He could free her once he was done with her” (Aboulela,2023, p. 160).

In this situation, and in an indirect way, Aboulela depicts what colonizers do in the countries they occupy: restricting their people's freedom, exploiting them in the worst possible way, and plundering their wealth. Then the colonizers try to convince these countries that they colonized them for their own good: to raise their status, educate their people, and civilize them. The colonized people should be grateful, as it is an honor. The painter's attitude towards Akuany /Zamzam illustrates this point. When Robert buys Akuany, he believes he has acquired her and that she has become his personal property,

which he can do with as he pleases. At the same time, he believes he is doing her a service and that it is a great honor for her to be painted by him.

The events of *River Spirit* take place in Mahdist Sudan at the end of the 18th century. It takes us to the heart of Muhammad Ahmad's rebellion against foreign rule in the region during this period. As a result of the discord and division among Muslims, Muhammad Ahmad declared himself the awaited Mahdi. Ahmed Muhammad sent a telegram to Ra'uf Pasha, the governor at the time, declaring himself the awaited Mahdi, while he was discussing the matter with Sheikh Amin al-Darir:

Muhammad Ahmed claims that his position has been mandated directly by the Prophet Muhammad in a dream and that anyone who doesn't believe in him will be purified by the sword (Aboulela,2023, p. 36).

And in front of them all he said that I was his viceroy on earth, that I was the Expected Mahdi. He told them that whoever doubts me has disbelieved Allah and His Prophet, whoever does not support me is an infidel. (Aboulela,2023, p. 74).

Then he began his rebellion against British, Ottoman, and Egyptian rule, which held sway over Sudan at that time, as Musa, one of his followers, tells us: "Rebellion rose in me. Why should I budge for that Turk? Why should a foreigner order me around?" (Aboulela,2023, p. 47).

The laws of the Turks no longer applied to us (Aboulela,2023, p. 85).

[...] Where they want us to be is under their feet. But we will not bow our heads to them nor to any other foreigner. We were not created to be lowly (Aboulela,2023, p. 180).

Although Aboulela does not explicitly use religion in her novel *River Spirit*, the Mahdi appears as a religious figure at the beginning. He outlaws the slave trade and

establishes laws to protect women, but his true nature is later revealed. The Mahdi begins to deprive women of all their rights and imposes his own version of Islamic law, applying punishments according to his whims. Furthermore, he deprives the Sudanese people of a comfortable and peaceful life. The Mahdi is a unique kind of colonizer—an internal one—who exploits the most beloved and relatable aspect of the people's lives: religion. When the Mahdi attempts to win over the tribes, he begins with his charming smile and eloquent, persuasive speeches, delivered through religious rhetoric: “[...] to listen to him preach, entranced by his manners and compassionate smile, pierced by his words” (Aboulela, 2023, p.2). He starts preaching and encourages people to abandon secular life and embrace jihad. Aboulela explains that the reason many tribes rallied around the Mahdi was that they found in his company a source of hope and protection, a consequence of the injustices they suffered at the hands of the Turks and Egyptians: “Expected Redeemer, the promised Mahdi, who would pull them all out of their misery, who would bring justice and peace to the world after it had been filled with tyranny” (Aboulela, 2023, p.15).

All the violence, religious divisions, and struggle against colonialism are seen through the eyes of the characters of the novel, both men and women, from different social classes and ethnic backgrounds. These people were divided into groups. The first group supports the Mahdi and sees him as their salvation from colonialism. When Ahmed Mohammed declared himself the awaited Mahdi, he began attracting people with his sweet words, interesting speech, kind smile, and promises to save them from the injustice inflicted upon them, deliver them from the tyrannical Turkish rulers, and free them from the burdensome taxes. Therefore, many people followed him, believing him to be the awaited Mahdi, and obeying his commands. Examples of these include Musa, the son of the knife maker, Halima, Yasin's sister, and her adopted son, Ishaq. “Different tribes,

different temperaments, varying degrees of faith, but we were all fighting under one leadership, against the same enemy” (Aboulela,2023, p. 127).

The second group opposes the Mahdi's ideas and considers him an imposter. They were certain he was not the Mahdi because his appearance was marked by specific signs; therefore, they did not join him and tried to resist him in every way possible, but to no avail. This is evident in Yassin's resistance to joining him and his confrontation with him, in which he asserts that he is not the awaited Mahdi. As Yasin declares:

I am thrown at the feet of the Mahdi. No, I will not call him that, not even if he is the de facto one. I will call him by his true name, Muhammad Ahmed. I am thrown down in a heap to easily kiss his feet, to beseech for my life and profess my undying faith. When I make no move to do so, I am dragged to the side, cast out of the illustrious gathering (Aboulela,2023, p. 136).

Sheikh Amin al-Darir's refusal to issue a fatwa mandating that all Sudanese join the ranks of the alleged Mahdi and declaring that Ahmad Muhammad was the awaited one is also evident. The third group joins the Mahdi not because they are convinced of his message but out of fear of his tyranny and injustice. This group includes Ismail, Yassin's friend, who was forced to swear allegiance to the Mahdi out of fear for his life. Furthermore, Salha, Yassin's first wife, joined the Mahdi out of fear for her life and that of her husband, Yassin, whom they believed had been killed by Musa. As a result of this fear, she sent her son Rustom to live with his father and his new wife, Zamzam. After the Mahdi's death, the British destroyed his tomb to deter any other Sudanese from rebelling against British rule.

Aboulela's use of the character Akuany, later renamed Zamzam, is highly significant. She represents Sudan as a nation by focusing on Zamzam, a unique and innovative approach. Through Zamzam's life journey, Aboulela explains Sudanese history. She

begins by describing Akwani's peaceful life in Malakal, where all Zamzam cares about is the river and the language she hears as the water flows. Her life is then upended by an invasion of her village, which results in her father's death, the village's destruction, and the capture of young boys and girls to be sold in the slave market. Consequently, she and her younger brother, Bol, leave the village with Yassin, a merchant acquaintance of their father:

Yaseen buried their father and took charge. Akuany and Bol were his responsibility now (Aboulela,2023, p. 14).

I used to barter with her father down south..." "Her father supplied me with the best gum, may Allah have mercy on his soul (Aboulela,2023, p. 25).

From here, Zamzam embarks on a journey of hardship, injustice, and oppression. This mirrors what happened to Sudan: a peaceful country characterized by its natural beauty and stability, until it was occupied and began its journey of colonialism and tyranny, as Gabriel R. Warburg mentions in his *Some Social and Economic Aspects of Turco-Egyptian Rule in The Sudan*: "Between 1821 and 1885 most of the area constituting the present Sudan came under Turko-Egyptian rule. The annexation of the Sudan to Egypt was undertaken in 1820-1 by Muhammad 'Ali, the Ottoman Wali of Egypt, and was completed under his grandson, the Khedive Ismail, who extended this rule to the Great Lakes in the south and to Bahr al-Ghazal and Darfur in the west. In the history of the Sudan, this period became known as the (first) Turkiyya." After Akuany and Bol leave their village and go with Yassin to the village of Al-Ubaid to his sister Halima, he entrusts them to her care:

And though Halima had made promises to her brother-to care for Akuany as if she were one of the family, to honor her as an orphan should be honored-when the time came, Halima could not protect her (Aboulela,2023, p. 27).

Unfortunately, Halima does not keep her trust. She adopts Bol, changing his name to Ishaq: “I want to keep the boy, the merchant’s sister said” (Aboulela,2023, p. 21).

“Halima is bringing up her brother as her own child” (Aboulela,2023, p. 24). and changes Akuany's name to Zamzam, then sells her to Nazli Hanem, the Circassian governor's wife. Thus, Zamzam officially begins her new life as a slave:

“He tracked down the family and tossed them the money, wrote out a bill of sale and had it witnessed. This was how Akuany started her new life. Officially enslaved” (Aboulela,2023, p. 54).

Because Nazli Hanem is forced to live in Al-Ubaid with her husband, the governor, far from her family, she always feels lonely and homesick, and as a result, she is always bored. Nazli Hanem is very cruel, and because of her constant boredom, she treats Zamzam like a doll:

“Akuany became Nazli Hanim's girl. The governor's wife was bored and homesick. She was miserable”, “[...] Be patient, my darling Nazli," the governor had said to her. “We won't be here for long. It's a mistake. I'm doing everything I can to get us out of here” (Aboulela,2023, 45).

This is precisely what happened to Sudan as a nation when the Ottoman Empire occupied it. Sudan officially became an occupied territory, marking a new chapter in its history. There is a deeply symbolic scene in the novel. In Nazli Hanem's house, when Zamzam looks in the mirror, she does not recognize herself. She thinks the girl's image in the mirror is another girl from her village. She does not realize that it is her own image that appears in the mirror:

“Akuany found a girl from her village. The girl also had a nose ring and shoulder-length braids. Akuany smiled and the girl smiled too. Akuany reached out to touch her and the girl did that too. Suddenly with a shock Nazli Hanim was behind the girl, cackling and screeching and she was behind Akuany, too, at the same time.

Both girls squealed”, “It's you, fool,” screeched Nazli Hanim. “In the mirror.” She hooted with laughter (Aboulela,2023, p. 54-55).

This illustrates the situation in Sudan before and after the occupation. This image shows the change that has occurred to Zamzam. While the change appears to be for the better, the underlying reality is that she has become a slave. Similarly, in Sudan, the colonizer tries to convince the people that he will improve the country's situation. However, in reality, he will plunder all its resources, as Gabriel R. Warburg (1989) states:

The new Turkish rulers levied heavy taxes on the population and, unlike their predecessors, demanded payment in cash or slaves. Private landownership and cash crops, largely based on agricultural slavery, were a natural result of this policy. By the end of the nineteenth century, individual landowner-ship extended over several provinces - with property rights transferrable to inheritors. Moreover, the Turks required export commodities such as ivory, gold, gum and primarily slaves. Since taxes were assessed in cash, it was up to the young Sudanese middle-class to satisfy the Turkish tax collectors. “Tax-delinquent land could be appropriated outright by anyone “who stepped in to pay - not its market value - but merely the sum in arrears” (p. 773).

From here begins Zamzam’s suffering, moving from house to house and from one owner to another, coinciding with the colonization of Sudan and its transfer from one colonizer to another: the Ottomans, the Egyptians, and the British. Even her own people showed her no mercy, as clearly demonstrated by Halima's sale of her for a price. The same pattern repeated in Sudan when the Mahdi and his followers seized power; they began to oppress their own people, imprisoning and torturing those who refused to join them, destroying their property, and humiliating them.

The character Salha is also significant. Salha is a beautiful, educated, and cultured woman who articulates herself eloquently. She is organized, possesses a strong and confident personality, and embodies a distinctive character, the kind of woman Zamzam wishes she could have been. Through Salha, Aboulela shows what Sudan might have been like had these historical events not transpired. By contrasting Zamzam and Salha, both Sudanese women who are part of Sudan, the difference between Sudan during the colonial period and the Sudan that could exist in the absence of these tragic events becomes evident. Salha was educated and had never experienced violence or physical abuse; her emotions were safeguarded, and her body was valued. She was beautiful and maintained her beauty because she had never been corrupted or sold. This is the perception Zamzam held when she saw Salha, Yassin's wife, and this is what Zamzam had always dreamed of.

Her words were clear and round. There were qualities in her that Zamzam had never seen before. This was how a free woman looked and spoke, having grown up safe in a father's house and then moved to that of a trustworthy husband. All through life, she was protected and held firm. A virgin on her wedding night, chaste afterward, luxuriant in modesty, never whipped, never violated. Bowing only in prayer, eyes downcast only over books and ink (Aboulela).

Another character that Leila Aboulela skillfully employs is Musa, one of the Mahdi's followers. Through Musa's character, Aboulela highlights a crucial point: the misuse of religion within a historical context. Through the actions of the Mahdi and his associates, including Musa, who serves in the military wing of the Mahdi's army, Aboulela demonstrates that, under the banner of religion, the Mahdi and his followers committed numerous transgressions forbidden by Islam, claiming they wanted to liberate Sudan and its people from the cruelty and brutality of occupation. Through the Mahdist Revolution,

Aboulela explains how the Mahdi's movement, initially opposed to brutal aggression and the occupation of Sudan, is corrupted by personal interests and desires, leading to the imposition of an authority that subjugates individuals and their rights. Aboulela clarifies that the Mahdi's leadership is built on authoritarianism, considering anyone who disagrees with him a blasphemer and an infidel. She continues to shed light on the Mahdist Revolution, noting that while it initially aimed to rectify injustice, it quickly transforms into a new tool of oppression, injustice, and tyranny. The Mahdi punishes those who refuse to join him, imprisoning them in inhumane conditions and forcing some into marriages against their will, practices forbidden by religion. The emergence of this movement also leads to divisions among the Sudanese people, between supporters and opponents, resulting in animosity among Sudanese: as Mega Majumdar (2023) points out, “[...] the Mahdi’s movement born out of a quest for correcting greed for power, turned into a new instrument of oppression”.

Colonialism encompasses not only the occupation of a weak country by a powerful foreign power but also an internal occupation, perpetrated by a group that attempts to impose its laws through force and coercion, as in the case of the Mahdi and his followers. They oppress their own people and seize their property solely because they do not pledge allegiance and obedience to the Mahdi. This represents an additional manifestation of colonialism; however, the most insidious form occurs when the attackers and robbers are one's own countrymen:

He gave me the responsibility of leading raids through the Nuba Mountains. These raids sometimes troubled me. I would charge my horse through a hut, swipe away with my sword chunks of straw, sneeze as dust fell on my face. I would gallop over meager possessions, bedding, cooking pots-simple, poor villagers, not government forces, not infidel foreigners but people like us. All because their leaders did not accept the Mahdi,

would not swear allegiance to him. But this was not a time for wavering. I did as I was told (Aboulela,2023, p. 192).

The preceding quote illustrates that the Mahdist revolution, cloaked in religious garb, transformed into a revolution driven by personal ambitions and desires, far removed from true faith. It demonstrates how the allure of power breeds greed, leading individuals to engage in practices alien to religion and reminiscent of those perpetrated by colonial powers. Through this quote, Musa reveals that the Mahdi tasked him with leading offensive campaigns against the Nuba Mountains to seize the property of impoverished and vulnerable villagers, solely because their leader refused to accept the Mahdi as a savior or to pledge allegiance. This underscores the revolution's deviation from its national objectives and its prioritization of personal whims. Clearly, the Mahdi and his followers were consumed by a lust for power. The Mahdi commanded, and the rest were expected to obey—a fact Musa acknowledges in the final line of the quote.

In a remarkable quote mentioned in one of Salha's letters to her son Rostom Aboulela, the series of sacrifices made by the sons of the occupied homeland for the sake of independence is shown: "We are an independent country. That is the result of all the bloodshed. I might have mixed feelings about the methods used to achieve this, but one can never defend foreign occupation. Independence is natural and just" (Aboulela,2023, p.293). Through these simple yet eloquent words, Aboulela clarifies that although independence is a legitimate right for all Sudanese, they have made immense sacrifices and shed much blood to reach this pivotal stage in their lives as free people. Despite independence being their right, they are striving with unwavering determination to rebuild their country, even at great cost. This demonstrates nothing less than their profound and sincere love for their homeland.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter illustrates the concluding statements in Isabelle Hamad's *The Parisian* and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit*, and how these two writers address the political and historical issues of their homelands.

5.1 Conclusion

This study examines the concepts of struggle and independence in two distinguished literary works: Isabella Hamad's *The Parisian* and Leila Aboulela's *River Spirit*. The discussion employs some concepts of Postcolonialism. In her novel *The Parisian*, Isabella Hamad presents a vivid picture of the impact of colonialism on colonized peoples and how it produces violence. Hamad draws this picture through the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom and liberation from colonialism. She employs Edward Said's concepts of Orientalism to explore how the West views the East and its sense of superiority.

As the novel shows, while in France, Medhat Kamal is treated as an uncivilized and naive person in need of civilization. He is treated as an outsider and feels inferior for being an Arab, so he tries to overcome this by attempting to live like a Westerner. Medhat Kamal speaks and thinks in French, acts like a Westerner, and even falls in love with a French woman. Moreover, it does not stop there; when he returns to his homeland of Palestine, he behaves like a Westerner to the point that he is nicknamed "Al-Barisi."

Hammad also presents Fanon's concept of violence in this novel. Fanon asserts that colonialism is nothing but an act of violence that must be met with violence, and that what is taken by force must be reclaimed by force. Fanon explains that the violence resorted to

by occupied peoples is merely a tool they use to express themselves, rid themselves of colonialism, and gain their freedom. This is what we observe while reading the novel: revolutionaries and rebels resort to some acts of violence in order to achieve their independence. Hammad illustrates this through the incident at Nebi Mosa.

Hammad also discusses the impact of colonialism on the psyche of occupied peoples, which she portrays through Ghada Kamal's love for funerals and the sound of wailing. Hammad further shows how these peoples strive to rid themselves of colonialism, not only to gain political independence but also to build a nation that enjoys its own cultural and social autonomy.

Hammad also employs counter-narrative, a technique writer uses to challenge misconceptions about oppressed peoples and give voice to the voiceless. By using this technique, Hammad highlights the status of women in Arab countries and their role as active members of society, contrary to the common perception that they are oppressed and marginalized. In this regard, Hammad shows how women participate in political life and play a role no less important than that of men. Hammad clarifies this point through Sahar's political role.

Through the events of her novel *The Parisian*, Hammad sheds light on a very serious issue, which is the Jewish settlement in Palestine. She explains how the Zionists are trying to control Palestine, clarifying that they have their own agenda. They seek to seize Palestinian land and displace its original inhabitants. This is evident in Jewish purchases of agricultural land and in the production of Nablusi soap.

The novel *River Spirit* marks a turning point in Laila Aboulela's literary career, as it represents a unique departure from her usual style. In her earlier novels, Aboulela explores themes of religion and the veil, depicting her heroines' journeys from secular to

religious life and their search for security and peace through religious practice. This is evident in the novels *The Minaret* and *The Translator*. Aboulela also discusses in her earlier literary works the stereotypical perceptions woven by the West about Islam and Muslims, the oppression and injustice Muslim women face in a patriarchal society, and the forced wearing of the hijab, which the West associates with terrorism.

In her novel *River Spirit*, Leila Aboulela presents the history of the Sudanese people during a specific historical period. Through the events of the novel, Aboulela weaves together the history of Sudan during the Turkish and Anglo-Egyptian rule, with a magnificent description of Sudan's enchanting nature. This is evident in her descriptions of the mountains and the river. Through reading this novel, readers feel as if they are experiencing the events firsthand, as if they are in Sudan itself.

In this novel, Aboulela presents the Sudanese history during the Mahdist Revolution through the journey of the protagonist, Akuani. Ahmed Muhammad Abdullah claims to be the awaited Mahdi, demanding that all segments of Sudanese society follow him to form a strong front capable of resisting the Turkish and Anglo-Egyptian occupations. The Sudanese people are divided between those who support the Mahdi, those who oppose him, and those who support him out of fear of his brutality. From this point, events begin to escalate. Through Akuani's journey from a free woman to a slave, Aboulela draws a vivid picture of Sudan's transition from one colonial power to another.

Although this is a historical novel in which Aboulela recounts significant events in Sudanese history, mentioning the names of historical figures, she does not neglect her female characters, presenting them in an unconventional way. In this novel, Aboulela portrays women deeply involved in the political sphere, showing them defending their opinions and contributing to the defense of their Muslim community. Among these

women is Rabiha, whose appearance is limited to the opening pages of the novel. Rabiha appears determined to carry out her beliefs, which include rescuing the Mahdi from the hands of the Turks. She believes that by doing so, she is preserving her community, as she sees the Mahdi as the hope for a better future and a Sudan free from colonialism. Rabiha rescues the Mahdi, thereby changing the course of the Mahdist movement.

In this novel, Aboulela presents the sacrifices made by the Sudanese people to rid themselves of colonialism. Through the Mahdist Revolution, Aboulela introduces the theme of religion in a markedly different way. Here, she shows how the Mahdist Revolution, which cloaked itself in religion, deviated from its goal of liberating the country from colonialism and achieving independence. The revolution began to transform from a protector of the people into an instrument of their oppression. This movement emerged to rid the people of exorbitant taxes, but instead it began to plunder and rob them. This is what Musa explained when he said he was ordered to attack and rob people.

From this point, opponents of the Mahdist movement began to express their anger at what was happening, and the Mahdi and his followers began to punish all who did not join them with imprisonment and torture. Among these people was Yasin, who tried hard to oppose the Mahdi. The Mahdist movement did indeed succeed in getting rid of the Turks and all the British commanders, which led to large-scale military campaigns.

The situation continued as before until the Mahdi fell ill and died. From that point, power waned, and personal ambitions took hold, ultimately leading to the British occupation of parts of Sudan. British soldiers began by demolishing the Mahdi's tomb, exhuming his remains, severing his head, and throwing the bones into the Nile to spread terror, control Sudan, and prevent any of its people from rising and demanding independence.

5.2 Recommendations

Further studies are needed on the novel “*The Parisian*”. These studies must be grounded in the reality of occupied Palestine and the Middle East. In addition, more research is needed that reflects the devastating effects of colonialism on occupied peoples, employing postcolonial theory and the concepts developed by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon.

Further studies are also needed to examine the theme of the struggle for independence in the novel *River Spirit* and how occupied peoples resort to violence to gain their freedom. Further studies could also connect colonialism and violence. I mean here the connection between colonialism and the reaction of the colonized to obtain their freedom, which the occupier considers acts of violence.

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