

**Acquiring Women's Strength in Leila Aboulela's  
*Minaret* and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in  
The Tangerine Scarf***

ماهية اكتساب القوة لدى المرأة في روايتي (المئذنة) لـ ليلى أبو العلا  
وفي (الفتاة ذات الوشاح البرتقالي) لمهجة الكهف

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for the Master's Degree in English Language and Literature**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**Faculty of Arts and Sciences**

**Middle East University**

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## Authorization

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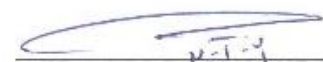
This Thesis titled, “Acquiring Women’s Strength in Leila Aboulcla’s *Minaret* and Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*” was successfully defended.

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## **Dedication**

My thesis is dedicated to my parents, who instilled the virtues of perseverance and commitment in me it is also dedicated to my dear husband, who is always a source of consistent encouragement and strives for excellence. In addition, it is specially dedicated to my backbone, my brothers and sisters, who made priceless efforts to help me achieve this work, and finally, to my daughter, who had been patient and tolerated her busy mother.

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**Acquiring Women's Strength in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and  
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**Abstract**

The study explores how Mohja Kahf and Laila Aboulela, as both diasporic Arab writers, represent their women characters as challenging the social norms against Arab women in the West in their novels, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Minaret*. It shows how Kahf surrounds Khadra with all kinds of support to improve her personality and create her identity as an Arab in the West. However, Aboulela deprives Najwa of all the factors that Kahf uses to support Khadra. Instead, Aboulela puts Najwa in different situations and experiences that help develop and enhance her personality and create her identity as an Arab in the West. This study aims to explore the factors, which helped Khadra develop her Arab identity in the West, represented by Mohja Kahf in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. The study also explores the factors, which helped Najwa develop her Arab identity in the West, represented by Laila Aboulela in the novel, *Minaret*. It also attempts to compare and contrast how each writer strengthens the protagonist as an Arab character in their novels. There is much literature conducted on each novel and each writer, but the contribution of the current study lies in the fact that both writers come from different regions in the Middle East. Added to that, each novel is set in a different context. Most of the studies conducted on the assigned works tackle each literary work independently, while the current research tackles both pieces together.

**Keywords:** Acquiring Women's Strength, *Minaret*, *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*.



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الدكتورة نسبية وليد عوجان

الملخص

تكشف الدراسة كيف تُمثّل كاتبان عرب الشتات مهجة كهف ويلي أبو العلا، بشخصياتهما النسوية التي تتحدى الأعراف الاجتماعية ضد المرأة العربية في الغرب وروايتهما كذلك، الفتاة في الوشاح اليوسفي والمئذنة. تظهر الدراسة كيف تحيط كهف خضرة بكل أنواع الدعم لتحسين شخصيتها وخلق هوية عربية منها في الغرب. لكن في المقابل، تحرم أبو العلا نجوى من كل العوامل التي تستخدمها كهف لدعم خضرة. بدلاً من ذلك، تضع أبو العلا نجوى في مواقف وتجارب مختلفة تساعد في تطوير شخصيتها وتعزيزها لخلق هويتها العربية في الغرب. كما أنها تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف العوامل التي ساعدت بطلتي مهجة كهف ويلي أبو العلا على تطوير هويتهم العربية في الغرب في روايتهما المئذنة والفتاة ذات الوشاح البرتقالي. تقارن الدراسة بين كيفية تقوية كل كاتبة للبطلة كشخصية عربية في روايتهما. يوجد الكثير من الأعمال الأدبية التي أجريت على كل كاتب وكل رواية، ولكن تكمن مساهمة الدراسة الحالية بأنها حاولت كل كاتبة إظهار الثقافة المختلفة التي تنتمي إليها حيث ينتميان إلى مناطق مختلفة في الشرق الأوسط، يضاف إلى ذلك أن كل رواية تدور في سياق مختلف. تتناول معظم الدراسات التي أجريت على الأعمال هذه بأنهم عمل أدبي مستقل، بينما يعالج البحث الحالي الروايتين معاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتساب القوة لدى المرأة، المئذنة، الفتاة ذات الوشاح البرتقالي.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Arab diasporic women writers play a pivotal role in demonstrating the actual image of Arab women in Western society. Arab women have been stereotyped and conceptualized by the West in a variety of ways, most notably in media coverage, and many other areas. Consequently, this has continuously had an impact on Western ideology. Therefore, many Arab writers were inspired to envision this misrepresentation in their writings to create a new image of Arab women in the West.

Edward Said (1978) is a well-known critic, who discusses many issues regarding the conflict between the East and the West in his book *Orientalism*. Said discusses the stereotypes of Arabs in general and Arab women in particular in Western culture. These stereotypes are continuously presented in the writings of Westerners who interpreted Arabs and Arab women without ever meeting them. Therefore, people worldwide, who read their writings, have created an image of Arab women based on the views of Western writers and generalized it as the reality of Arab women. These stereotypical images influenced Eastern culture in the Western world; Arab women were stereotyped as belly dancers, sex objects, imprisoned behind a

veil of powerlessness, and then these stereotypes were modified to Arabs and Arab women as being violent and terrorists.

The representation of Arab women by diasporic Arab writers was an important step in order to modify how Arab women are known in the West and to represent the same and real image of Arab women, although some Arab writers have done the opposite. This step was taken seriously because Arab women in the West really suffer and struggle from the West's prejudice. Amarah Abdul Majid (2016) argues that Arab diasporic writers aim to show how Arabs are affected when living in the West through literature, stating who the real Arab is, and who does not resemble the image that they, the West have about him/ her. They also try to negate the stereotypical images of the Arabs in general and Arab women as they defend them from these stereotypes. According to Al Karawi and Bahar (2014), Arab diasporic writers created a literary space where they could speak about their own experiences and be heard by the mainstream community, as they were and continue to be subjected to mistreatment and abuse at the hands of Westerners. They found it an effective method of communication and engaging with liberal Western societies, showing and arguing that many of them have been prejudiced and rejected by their Western environment.

Berrebah (2020) states that Western societies perceive Arab-Western women as marginalized and alienated in the Arabic community due to

Islamic patriarchal teachings, as known from media coverage and actions of other misrepresentations of Arabs. This has led Mohja Kahf (2001) to argue that Arabs who live in the West are viewed and perceived by these stereotypes.

On the other hand, Western women have been categorized as preservatives and civilized. The status of Western women changed after the feminism's movements. On the other hand, Arab women's status is inferior to the Western women's status in the West. This has led Arabs to create their own space, which is called by Homi Bhabha (1994) as "the third space" (p. 136). Bhabha (1994) discusses how Arab immigrants in the West are conflicted by identity issues when facing the world and living in Western societies. Any mixing between Eastern and Western cultures is referred to as "hybridity". Bhabha's "third space" applies to a balance between Eastern and Western cultural attributes in colonial and postcolonial literature. He claims that being an Arab in the West, he/she has to reach to a space, where he/she needs to balance between his/her Arabic culture and his/her new Western culture.

The status of Arabs and Arab women has negatively changed after 9/ 11. As a result, Western societies have focused more on and believed the stereotypes held about Arabs. Harb (2012) argues that the aftermath was a twisting point for the West's hatred of the East and Arabs. An article written

by Serup Gur (2016) encourages Arab women to overcome stereotypes and be part of the Western community by taking political and social roles to make themselves seen and heard. Gur (2016) adds that this idea has changed the lives of Arab women by dismantling stereotypes, speaking up for themselves, and showing who they truly are. One American scholar, Abdurraqib (2006), argues that Arab women should be able to express their Arabic identity and ask for their rights. Still, when these Arab women face reality, all they encounter in the West is aggression and hatred towards their racial and social background.

From Arab writers, who have influenced the Western mainstream about Arab women in diaspora, are Mohja Kahf and Leila Aboulela. Mohja Kahf is a Syrian American novelist, and poet, who moved to the United States at an early age; she grew up in the American Midwest and gained an education at prestigious universities. She has written *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and many poems as she teaches drama at Arkansas University. She was recognized and received prized awards for her creative non-fiction essays and the Hager Poems book as a poet. Kahf presented Arab American society as diverse and well correlated in discriminated states, especially after 9/11, as she tried to fight the essentialized misconceptions against them.

Laila Aboulela, a Sudanese English diasporic Arab writer lived, and completed her education in Sudan. However, she later pursued her master's

degree in the UK, an eye-opening experience of how Arab women are presented in the West. She started writing as soon as she was in school and tackled many issues regarding women's empowerment, Islam, modernity, and education. Sadia Abbas (2014) states that Aboulela is against the misrepresentations of Arab women and how they are undermined and stereotyped. Both writers have tried to give the actual image of the Arab women, who have been misinterpreted and stereotyped in the West. Their works reflect the struggles Arab women face when they want to engage with the outer world, particularly the West, as it always visualizes them in passive roles due to religious strictness. Arab women, in general, are trying to change their domestic roles to more critical roles in the Western community.

Kahf sheds light on the idea that Arab women are enlightened and determined to find their true path in life, independently of social and judgmental pressures. On the other hand, Aboulela presents unique features of Arab women that are undervalued as respecting their cultural and religious background in the diaspora and strengthening their identity as Arabs living in the West without negligence of their personal beliefs. Sarnou (2017) exclaims that Kahf reflects in her literary works that Arab women must fight to live a mentally and psychologically balanced life in a Western society that discriminates against and rejects them. They also must overcome their inner

conflict between Western society, cultural patriarchy, religious radicalism, and gender-based oppression.

The current study explores the social and emotional factors that affect Arab women in the West, as represented in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Aboulela's *Minaret*. Both novels discuss journeys taken by Arab women living in the West in different Western countries and contexts. They become empowered by self-experience and various surrounding factors. Kahf (2006) wrote the mentioned novel after September 11 to give a new image of the Arabs and fight the stereotypes that affected their way of living. She intended to document how Arabs have lived in America since the 1970s and beyond and how they are discriminated against and alienated—proving that discrimination had been rooted long before 2001.

*The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* is a novel that combines Arab American women's writing to engage both the Western and Arab reader, as Arami (2018) claims. Khadra is a Syrian American woman who lives in the American Midwest as an Arab woman, as correlated by her family and the Arab community. Khadra grows up in a religious family, which piques her interest in what goes on behind closed doors. Arami (2018) argues that after Khadra's displacement from her home country, she goes through an identity



crisis, where she could not be portrayed as American because she is categorized as an ultimate Other.

On the other hand, Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) is a novel that provides disparity to dominant Western discourses towards Arab women's experiences and identities. Najwa is a Sudanese woman, who has been challenged socially and economically to develop a hybrid identity that is modern in Westernized terms. Her journey takes forms from negative to positive and in-between experiences that Arab women usually encounter to shape a stylish, robust essence. Her journey starts through displacement and loss to convey meanings, and concepts that contrast stereotypes against Arab women.

## **1.2 Statement of the Study**

The study explores how Mohja Kahf and Laila Aboulela, as diasporic Arab writers, represent their female characters as challenging the social norms against Arab women in the West. The study shows how Kahf surrounds Khadra with all kinds of support to improve her personality and construct her identity as an Arab in the West. On the other hand, Aboulela deprives Najwa from all the factors that Kahf uses to support Khadra. Instead, Aboulela puts Najwa in different situations, and experiences that help develop and enhance her personality and create her identity as an Arab in the West.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

There is much literature conducted on both novel and each writer, but the contribution of the current study lies in the fact that both writers come from different regions in the Middle East. Added to that, each novel is set in a different context. Kahf's character, Khadra, lives all her life in the USA, depending on her family's love and support to become the woman she is. Whereas Aboulela's character, Najwa, struggles without her family's support and is alone in a foreign country, the United Kingdom. Most of the studies conducted on the assigned works tackle each literary work independently, while the current research tackles both pieces together.

### **1.4 Questions of the Study**

The current study answers the following questions:

1. What factors help Khadra develop her Arab identity in the West in Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*?
2. What factors help Najwa develop her Arab identity in the West in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the factors represented in Kahf's novel and Aboulela's novel?

## 1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Explore the factors which help Khadra develop her Arab identity in the West, represented by Mohja Kahf in her novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.
2. Explore the factors which help Najwa develop her Arab identity in the West, represented by Laila Aboulela in her novel, *Minaret*.
3. Compare and contrast how each writer strengthens the protagonists as an Arab character in their novels.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

There are three definitions of critical terms in the paper as follows:

**Postcolonial:** a term describing literary criticism based on cases of power, politics, culture, economics, or religion; all of these cases take the form of literature, composed by many authors worldwide. In other words, it relates to the idea of colonial hegemony (McEwan 2008).

**Hybridity:** Any mixing between Eastern and Western cultures is called hybridity. It applies more generally to colonial subjects from Asia or Africa who have sought a balance between Eastern and Western cultural attributes in colonial and postcolonial literature (Singh 2009). It describes the

construction of culture and identity under colonial antagonism and inequity (Bhabha 1994).

**Orientalism:** a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident” (Said 1978, p. 10).

### **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

The study is limited to the time period in which it was written. The study is also limited to the authors Mohja Kahf and Laila Aboulela and their literary works, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and *Minaret*. The research and its conclusions cannot be generalized to the other authors’ literary works.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **2.1 Theoretical Studies**

This chapter reviews previous works and studies related to the representation of Arab women in the West in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Aboulela's *Minaret*. This chapter first presents studies that discuss how the two Arab writers represent Arab women as challenging the social norms in the West in their literary works, and then it continues by tackling the studies that show how these Arab writers represent Arab women as challenging the social norms in the West in their mentioned novels.

#### **The Representation of Arab Women in the West in Both Mohja Kahf and Laila Aboulela's Literary Works.**

Both writers have had a pivotal role in representing the real image of Arab women. They influenced Arab women readers before Westerners and continue to create a new portrayal of Arab women in the West. This section will present studies that discuss their role in resembling authentic representations of Arab women. Most of the studies focus on issues that matter to diasporic writers and non-writers, such as identity, stereotypes, hijab, and empowerment.

One recent study discusses both writers' attributions in "Empowering Muslims in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*" by Awajan and Al-Shetawi (2021). Who investigate how two diasporic Arab writers feature Islam—arguing that Arab Muslims are empowered by Islam, as a religion that gives them the right to make crucial decisions away from any social norms and traditions. They show how both writers focus on Islam as the main factor that helps both protagonists survive in the West. Awajan and Al Shetawi (2020) also assert that Aboulela indicates that religion is an empowering tool for Arab women in the West, as it guides and protects them emotionally and socially. Along with guiding them wisely and creating distinct identities for Arabs in diaspora.

Moreover, Abdul Majid (2017) argues that Kahf displays a new image of an Arab woman, who does not abide by teachings and norms, but instead questions and searches for a life, where she can be heard and where she can live in the West, as if she is in an Arabic region.

In addition, Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) highlight how Aboulela fills the gaps in Western representations of Arab women in their study, "Negotiating the Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*." Their article is about applying liminality, and Bhabha's third space to create a balanced, yet religiously traditional identity.

While Ullayyan and Awad (2016) maintain a debate on how Kahf and Aboulela both represent Arab women in the West as they must resist the social norms against Arabs to continue their journey of self-discovery, both are governed by different conditions that shape their own experiences. The article investigates how the motif of the journey is vital in the works of Arab women in diaspora.

Like what Al Karawi and Bahar (2014) state on Aboulela's narratives, addressing the fact that veiled women are not muted, nor women are controlled by patriarchal norms; such facts are simply Western beliefs. In another study that reflects the stereotypical images, Djohar (2015), in a study titled "A Cultural Translator in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in The Tangerine Scarf*," argues that Kahf attempts to change the American view of the veil to be part of American culture, to modify the stereotypical image of Arab women in the West. This study attempts to bridge the gap between the American and Arab cultures by proving that Arab American writers can be cultural translators. They understand both cultures and can influence the boundaries between them.

Whereas Abbas, (2011) maintains in her study, "Leila Aboulela, Religion, and the Challenge of the Novel", that Aboulela is one of the female writers who documents her disappointments as an immigrant in Britain that discriminates against Arab women because of the held stereotypes against

them. In this study, Abbas investigates how politics influenced the relations between Arabs and Europeans through Aboulela's books.

Furthermore, a study by Churilla (2011) describes Aboulela as a modern female writer who is not European. She questions the linear notions of Western modernity and how she constantly switches time narration. The study is titled "Coming Home: Communities beyond Borders in Caryl Phillips' *The Atlantic Sound* and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*."

On the same line, Aladaylah (2018), in his study "Negotiating Narrative in Transcultural Spaces by Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*," maintains that Aboulela, as an Arab diasporic novelist, voices controversial issues, which immigrants confront when distanced from their home country. Moreover, how she tries to exhibit solidarity to those who struggle in diaspora that forces the human mind to question and negotiate culture and history. In her writings, she tries through cultural narration to convey the image of homeland to those who suffer from alienation and dislocation.

Mohja Kahf has been an important figure in changing the stereotypes of Arab women in the West through her writings; it has been witnessed how she presents moderate characters. She focuses on balancing the American lifestyle with their religious beliefs—directing her speech to various groups of potential readers and manipulating the evolving phenomenon that is the Western representation of Arab women. Abdul Majid (2016) suggests in a



recent study about “The Practice of Faith and Personal Growth in Three Novels by Muslim Women Writers in the Western Diaspora” that Arabs can survive in the West because of their faith in Islam.

On the other hand, Arami (2018), in a study titled “Encounter, Clash, and Confluence: Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,” argues that Kahf presents her female character as active and self-defining by using thematic and structural strategies to avoid being called a re-orientalist as she focuses on rebuilding, and reshaping the Arab American female identity.

## 2.2 Empirical Research

### **The Representation of Arab Women in the West in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Aboulela's *Minaret*.**

This section introduces studies discussing both novels demonstrating Arab women in diaspora and closely approaches female characters in Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, and Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*. It starts with a critical study investigating how Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* changes the borderlines between Arabs and Americans by voicing the struggles that affect relations between the two cultures. Sarnou's (2017) study under the title "Negotiating Meanings of Borderlands about Arabness, Americanness, and Muslimness: The Case of Najwa in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006)" explains how Kahf creates a journey of self-discovery. Khadra Shami, who experiences deterritorialization throughout this journey, tries to soothe her American-ness, Arab-ness, and woman-ness at an early age. According to Sarnou (2017), Kahf's novel affects the Western ideology about Arab women by undermining certain ideologies and images.

Likewise, Abdul Majid (2016) asserts that Khadra re-evaluates her life as an American Muslim and manages to break through the strictness of Islam imposed by her parents and the discriminated-upon society. In his study titled, "The Practice of Faith and Personal Growth in Three Novels by

Muslim Women Writers in the Western Diaspora,” Abdul Majid proves that religious beliefs and rituals are vital components in shaping the mature personalities of leading female characters in novels written by diasporic Arab writers.

Moving on to Hasan (2015), in his study “Seeking Freedom in the “Third Space” of Diaspora: Muslim Women’s Identity in Aboulela’s *Minaret* and Jan Mohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*,” about the representation of Muslim women living in the West and their multiple identities. Hasan claims that *Minaret* is a novel that symbolizes the idea of the struggles, which Arab women face when they live in Western countries. Their identity development can take longer due to sticking to a religious identity. Whereas, AlKarawi (2014) negotiate a crucial element that shapes Najwa’s identity in the West, which is seeking the veil to define herself. The study’s findings show that Arab diasporic women express themselves by embracing religious identities that blend East and West to reflect modernity.

Armi (2018), in a study conducted on Mohja Kahf’s novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, introduces the idea of identity being fixed and ossified as it shapes nationality and gender. Armi (2018) argues that Khadra transforms her personality to belong to a society that rejects her hybridity. Through her journey, she learns how to accept her heritage and takes pride in being an Arab American woman. As well as how she reflects on the Arab

American female's identity that transforms from passiveness to an active and self-defining subject.

Moreover, Awajan and Al Shetawi (2021) maintain that Najwa represents most Arab women who refuse to abide by Western stereotypes. Najwa chooses the path of faith wholeheartedly, without social pressures.

A recent study by Abu Baker (2021), who asserts that Najwa in Aboulela's *Minaret* suffers from a traumatic and sinful past, due to patriarchy and the loss or separation of her loved ones. As he also declares that Anwar influences Najwa's mentality about her need for love and care when she loses her loved ones. Nevertheless, when she realizes that what she does is sinful, she cuts off communication with him. She resorts to a place that does not identify her as a Sudanese, but as a Muslim woman who is there to be a better person. Aladayla (2018) stresses that Najwa is a transformative girl who accepts change as a result of experiencing transcultural spaces and self-negotiations, he also maintains that Najwa chooses freedom and the outer area of knowledge and motion. She realizes that the journey of the self must be undertaken to reach her potential future self,

Al Karawi and Bahar's (2013) study, "Negotiating Liminal Identities in Mohja Kahf's *the Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*," shows that Khadra has been exposed to different cultural and religious backgrounds to shape a strong identity to reach to a stage, where she defines herself by learning from her

experiences and her view of life. Similarly, in their qualitative research, Gani, Sulaiman, and Thalib (2019) discuss cultural factors and differences in the novel titled, “Cultural Analysis in Mohja Kahf’s *the Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*.” They state that Khadra struggles between the American lifestyle and her cultural background, which seems problematic in her youth, but not until she learns how to balance both worlds and create a unique identity from her.

Finally, Abdul Majid (2017) remarks on the importance of Khadra’s courage in making a personal understanding and approach to her life and religious practices in the West. As an empowering tool for Arab women rather than adhering blindly to appraisal concepts and cultural roots. Khadra, as she asserts, has developed a proud identity that reflects roots combined with modern tolerance and acceptance. Eventually, she reaches a maturity that allows her to be less judgmental and accept her new self and others.

This study demonstrates that Arab women in diaspora can achieve peace by initiating an identity that does not contradict their origins, but is Westernized. One that balances between East and West by reflecting on the characters of Kahf and Aboulela. Khadra and Najwa lead empowering journeys that inspire readers to walk their path. And by highlighting the importance of their journeys as they contrast misrepresentations of Arab women in the West. The study compares how both Khadra and Najwa reflect

Arab women in the West. They both live in different Western countries, and they encounter different situations that strengthen their self-confidence. The significance of the study lies in highlighting the importance of raising Arab women's issues living in the West, both novels are an eye-opening experience to many and resemble Arab women's life struggles nowadays.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Method

The researcher uses literary theory to approach the two novels, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Aboulela's *Minaret*. Post colonialism theory will be applied while reading the two novels. The researcher specifically relies on Edward Said's views on Orientalism, and how he discusses the stereotypical images of the East/ Orient vs. the West/Occident.

Post colonialism is a cultural and critical paradigm that has been used in the study of literature. It is concerned with the reading and writing of literature from previously colonized countries. Postcolonial theory can also be defined as literature created in colonizing countries that deals with colonization or the occupied population. Furthermore, the theory considers how colonizers' literature distorts the colonized experience and realities, inscribes colonized inferiority, and supports the colonizer's superiority. The colonized are increasingly asserting their existence and identity and reclaiming histories that have been lost or distorted as a result of colonialism's othering (Mapara 2009). Postcolonial theory has been recognized as one of several avenues to investigate "revisionism" rather than

the originating and foundational concept it once seemed to be (Bernard, Elmarsafy & Murray, 2015).

Young (2016) adds that the analysis of colonialism's and imperialism's cultural legacies makes up a postcolonial theory. Postcolonialism is the relationship between Europeans and the places they colonized and dominated. In addition, postcolonial concepts can be found in anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, political science, architecture, human geography, sociology, Marxist theory, feminism, and social and literary theory.

## **3.2 Samples**

### **3.2.1 Summary of Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf***

Khadra Shami is a Syrian American girl who moved to the United States at an early age and wore the hijab in school, creating boundaries with her community. Her parents moved to the States as Muslim missionaries and were part of the Islamic community. As she grew up, she started questioning who she was, especially after her failed marriage; she went on a trip of self-discovery. Separating herself from where she grew up, she began living independently in New York. She discovers limitations and differences between religions with new friends and encounters divergent backgrounds; she finally makes peace with who she is and accepts her identity as an Arab Muslim woman.



### **3.2.2 Summary of Aboulela's Minaret**

While Najwa, the Sudanese girl who flees her home country, as she seeks refuge from political issues after her father's execution, she loses her mother and brother, left alone without any source of help in a foreign country. Najwa lived all her life in Sudan in a privileged social class, from a naive rich girl to a responsible woman in England. Her journey is enlightening as it starts with a complete loss but shifts to faith and a steady pathway. Najwa was not accompanied by family and friends' support; even financially, she struggled and had to work as a house worker for a living. Inconvenient situations were put in her path to strengthen her personality and add wisdom to her sharp mind.

### **3.3 Procedures**

1. The researcher tackled the previous literature to decide on the title and ensure the shortage that the study would fill.
2. The researcher read the two novels through the lens of postcolonialism, explicitly applying the views of Edward Said.
3. The researcher went through the previous studies that tackled the representation of Arabs by both writers.
4. The researcher wrote the proposal.

5. The researcher provided specific evidence from both works on how both writers represent Arabs in a modern way.
6. The researcher integrated evidence with scholars' arguments.
7. The researcher reached certain statements to conclude with.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Analysis

#### **4.1 Laila Aboulela's Representation of Najwa Challenging the Social Norms against Arab Women in the West in her novel, *Minaret*.**

Leila Aboulela presents Arab women, who live in the West and tries to show how they struggle and challenge life in diaspora. This may be justified by the fact that Aboulela herself lives in the West and has suffered from being an Arab living there, as Abbas (2011) argues. She tries to present Arab women, who lives in the West and tries to show how she suffers there and what factors help her in overcoming the issues she has been exposed to. Najwa, *Minaret*'s main character, struggles as an Arab woman living in the West. She constantly tries to prove herself to others, because being marginalized for declaring otherness by apparel or actions. According to Hasan (2015), Arab women should make more efforts to challenge the stereotypes imposed by the orientalists. As added to that is his argument about Neo-orientalists portraying Arab and Muslim women as embracing Western freedom, and abandoning their Arab/religious identity, by adopting a secular lifestyle that reflects Western modernity. However, Aboulela shows another image of Arab women, who try to stand up for the obstacles, which face them in the West. Awajan and Al Shetawi (2021) comment on this point by stating that Aboulela proves through Najwa that Arab women tend to cling to their background heritage, as a result of the loss and rejection

they face, as an empowering tool for their identity and existence in the West. Aboulela shows how Najwa's life changes drastically when she moves from Sudan to the West. Najwa's personality changes from a naive-spoiled girl to a responsible grown-up woman. Living in diaspora has empowered and strengthened her. Aboulela has provided Najwa with different kinds of factors to empower and strengthen her. These factors, which are obstacles that are put in front of Najwa to guide her through life in the West. These factors are her life in Sudan, her early life in the West, her relationship with Anwar, her *hijab*, and Tamer and his family. In a thoroughly manner, these factors are discussed in the current section.

Starting with Najwa's luxurious life in Sudan since her family belongs to the upper-class society. Her lifestyle can be described as lavish and super compared to the Sudanese simple community. She is offered the freedom to do whatever she wants, wearing short skirts and tight blouses, going to the club, and traveling with her friends. For her, "No dreams corroded in rust, no buried desires" (Aboulela 2005, p. 15). She knew financial freedom like no one her age knew. Her parent's role at that time of her life is passive due to their busy and socially complicated lifestyles. Her father an important political figure in the country spent his time career-wise, at the expense of neglecting familial or parental duties. On the other hand, her mother who does not occupy a good space in her life, as she spared time for charity work

being part of a criticizing social community, her mother affected passively on her character as she did not invest in directing her daughter's path as usually mother's do. Najwa's life in Sudan is poorly directed with wisdom and life instructions, which simply cannot prepare her for life in London, a basic factor that has strengthened her personality later. Najwa's social transformation formed an important factor, as she had been considered elite in a society that pays her tribute due to her family's name. Her weak character appears in many situations, such as accepting Anwar's criticism for her father's political role, surrounding herself with friends and relatives who drop her when she loses elite social class. Finally going through inner conflicts when encountering people who show real belief in identity and character, as feeling insecure when she meets with the provincial girls who wore modesty. Najwa takes life for granted in Sudan and spends it naively; little did she know that life would teach her strength, maturity, and wisdom in a hard way. Aboulela based her argument of empowering Najwa's character on this factor as it reflects her family's weak role in her gaining strength, indicating that Arab women are not usually supported nor abused by family ties as stereotypes show.

Moving to her life in London, from comfort to distress and safety to peril. The pampered and spoiled Najwa, who has been served with golden spoons starts losing everything gradually. She loses her country, her father and

financial security. When she, her mother and brother, Omar realize that they have become strangers in exile, their world falls apart. Najwa starts taking care of her sick dying mother and tries to warn her brother from an inevitable dark future, if he continues dealing with drugs. This stage empowers her passive personality and teaches her how to take care of herself, as a proactive step for the hardships waiting in her way. When her mother dies and her brother is sent to jail, she discovers that she is alone in a new place, which is different from her. Najwa here starts growing mentally and emotionally on a different level, as she starts independently living her life and experiencing the taste of Western freedom without social or familial pressures. As Aladaylah (2007) asserts, although she finds herself in dilemma and in a tragic situation, she exposes herself to feel the freedom of the outer space and new culture by describing her new life as “I felt silly sitting all by myself, self-conscious, it wouldn’t be done in Khartoum for a woman to be alone in a restaurant. ‘I am in London,’ I told myself, ‘I can do what I like, no one can see me.’ Fascinating. I could order a glass of wine. Who would stop me or even look surprised?” (Aboulela 2005, p. 128). It could be noticed from her words that she enjoys her freedom in London.

After losing her mother, and what happens to her brother, the only one who she trusts is Anwar, a former student in Khartoum University, who she develops emotions for while being a student in college. Therefore, she tries

to improve her relationship with Anwar who convinces her to live as a Westerner, without any restrictions. By allowing herself to be sexually active outside of wedlock, he compares her to other girls her age. As Abu Baker (2021) clarifies, Najwa, after the loss of her family, and the need to be loved, blindly believes in Anwar's words. However, Anwar uses this concept to strip off her money, confidence, and security. At this point, Aboulela allows Najwa to experience the Western thoughts of freedom and exposes her to the Western lifestyle.

Najwa loses financial and family security; as she reaches a point where she dreams of her parents' room, she remembers feeling safe and guarded by their love. This happens to her after losing her trust of Anwar. She comes from a place where she is elite, and having gone through her circumstances, her identity has been shaken. She is always daydreaming of her past as a child in Sudan and now she must bear alone in London. Al Karawi and Bahar (2014) argue that because her success in Khartoum depends on her family's name and father, she fails to disconnect this to her failure. Neither her upbringing nor her life in Sudan prepares her for that kind of life in London. She has never shown independence nor acquired its skills. Therefore, she first relies on Anwar for a sense of belonging and rootedness. It is crucial not to mention that Anwar, has played a significant role in losing her trust forming an important factor that will help her gain confidence and strength.

He undermines her character and abuses her mentally, emotionally, and physically. He would always encourage her to be modern and freely independent, wear tight skirts, and be sexually available to him. His rejection of religion and what he does with her drive her closer to the mosque. For Abbas (2011), when Najwa needs comfort, he offers harsh criticism and a lack of tenderness due to his political and atheist beliefs. It is at this moment that Najwa feels lost, but without proper guidance:

“I did not want to look at these big things because they overwhelmed me. I wanted me, my feelings and dreams, my fear of illness, old age, and ugliness, and my guilt when I was with him. It wasn't fundamentalists who killed my father; it wasn't fundamentalists who gave my brother drugs. However, I could never stand up to Anwar. I did not have the words, the education, or the courage. I had given in to him, but he had been wrong; the guilt never went away. Now I wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence. I yearned to go back to being safe with God. In my dreams, I yearned to see my parents again and be with them again. These men, whom Anwar condemned as narrow-minded and bigoted, were like AH, men who were tender and protective of their wives. Anwar was clever, but he would never be tender and protective” (Aboulela 2005, p. 242).

From the previous quote, it shows how Anwar fails to secure and offer her protection as he never takes their relationship seriously. Finally, Najwa feels sinful and ashamed of her relationship with him, despite the fact that



she is totally aware that no one cares about her shame, saying “I have changed, Anwar.... I am tired of having a troubled conscious. I am bored with feeling guilty” (Aboulela 2005, p. 244). This is another factor that has influenced Najwa and has made her stronger instead of weakening her and giving her the feeling of loss. Najwa then realizes that living as a Westerner cannot provide her with security, safety, nor stability.

What happens between Najwa and Anwar is what motivates her to wear the *hijab*. She has lost trust in everyone around her and reaches to a point, where *hijab* is the better protection for her. The significance of wearing the *hijab*, which Anwar mocks and undermines, is that when Najwa finds that it saves her from men’s gazes, who follow her whenever she shows her body, saying, “The builders who had leered down at me from scaffoldings couldn’t see me anymore. I was invisible and they were quite “ (Aboulela 2005, p. 247).

From her words, it could be noticed that she has reached to a point, where she feels satisfied and pleased. This is a revelation Aboulela urged to assert, as the *hijab* does free and protect women from sexual gazes when they are covered, she wears the *hijab* to protect herself. Therefore, she rushes to the mosque to restore safety and settle. The mosque and the Arab community has become a safe refuge from loneliness, loss and insecurity that hunt her in her new life. Aboulela asserts that Najwa discovers a new Arab

community in the Regent's Park Mosque, in which she finds for her disconnection from family and friends (Hasan 2015). Aboulela's protagonist Najwa, enters a new stage in her life when she decides to join the mosque's community who somehow offers her warmth and sense of belongingness that she has missed in a while. As Abbas (2011) maintains that Islam offers access to identity and peacefulness to its adherents. After being displaced, alienated from family and friends, and sin-stained from her relationship with Anwar, Najwa finds herself safe and relaxed with wearing the hijab, the Arab community and her new friends in the mosque. These factors have been offered by Aboulela and given as support for Najwa to be able to live in the West and overcome the obstacles. She has finally stood for her life's choices and decisions. This has also been mentioned by Awajan and Al Shetawi (2020). They state that Islam and hijab have empowered Najwa in the West.

Aladayla (2021) states that Aboulela wants to guide Najwa to horizontal change and the open space of freedom. Najwa finds herself experiencing a different type of freedom, but not the one she uses to hear about when she is in Sudan; the liberty that pushes the maids in her house to leave their beds and pray Al Fajar; the freedom of knowing all paths and choosing the one that brings her closer to her true identity and reality.

Churilla (2011) asserts that Najwa is offered stability by her religious identity more than nationality and homeland. In diaspora, immigrants tend

to cling to an identifying identity that does not require clarification from others; some choose a national identity, and others, in Najwa's case, a religious one. People need to belong to a particular group. As a result, identity can change and evolve over time and place; Hall (1996) contends that identity is fragmented and fractured, built across distinct positions, frequently intersected, antagonistic, and constantly transforming. Aboulela is reflecting on the concept of how Arab women in diaspora preserve their true identity despite broad Western rejection.

When Najwa approaches the mosque and starts practicing the religion, she begins feeling less isolated and more engaged with herself and the community around her. This experience gives her courage and security; her sense of belonging is restored after a long search for rootedness, saying that, "In the mosque, I feel like I'm in Khartoum again" (Aboulela 2005, p. 244). Since the beginning of the novel, Najwa has not been witnessed as she is and as she feels in this stage. She starts to reconnect the present with her old self, she reaches a stage in her life, where she starts to gain confidence by collecting the lost pieces of herself. Additionally, Al Karawi and Bahar (2014) describe Najwa's relationship with the mosque, arguing that the women at the mosque become her family over time. The mosque represents her new home and the community she has once lost. She says, "This is a happy occasion, and I am happy that I belong here, no longer outside, no

longer defiant” (Aboulela 2005, p. 184). She refers to the mosque by using the pronoun “here.”

Another factor that Aboulela has supported Najwa by to empower her and strengthen her in the West is living with Lamya’s family as a maid. When interacting with Lamya and her brother, Tamer, she becomes more mature and intelligible about her decisions. In their house she restores the feeling of being surrounded by a family, she works for them willingly as it helps her troubled soul to rest with comfort. She enjoys living with an Arab family and serving them Arabic food. She returns to self-negotiations when confronting Lamya, who treats her as inferior because of her veil, career, and religious lifestyle. Lamya is secular and lives a Western lifestyle. She looks down at Najwa for her social class, hijab or religious style and finally not being educated. She tries to humiliate her in different situations which has helped in shaping Najwa’s personality to be empowered and persistent.

On the other hand, Najwa becomes close to Tamer for their shared religion-based identities and personal interests. Alienated from British society, he finds Najwa a good company that shares and approves his religious views. Her relationship with him starts as a friendship and develops into a romantic one. She does not really have real feelings towards him, but nevertheless, she likes his attention, which fills her heart with joy and she

gains confidence in herself. She also enjoys helping him, taking care of him and serving him food. He maybe reminds her of her brother. Her negotiations with him strengthen her intellectuality, she enjoys being cared for especially that it is coming from a male figure. At this particular stage Najwa starts to determine her priorities and starts taking pride of her empowered character. Tamer plays a significant role in restoring emotional maturity to her character, the kind of emotional support that allows her to live her life with confidence and steadiness.

However, refusing to continue with him is the turning point in her life; it is when she finally realizes her strength in making accurate decisions and choosing a way that can provide inner security. Without male authorization and reassurance, she knows that connecting with God and herself is the key to success. As Hasan (2011) argues, Aboulela chooses to give Najwa a variety of choices. Still, “Najwa decides on the outer world, open space, the liberation of self, and the taste of freedom that allows her to be and evolve.”

Referring to the idea that Arab women base their lives upon a male provider, Najwa has been disappointed by every male figure that crossed her life, starting with her father, who fails in providing a decent life and his weak role as a breeder in her childhood. Then her twin brother, who spends his life in jail, Anwar, who has been an abusive figure, and Tamer, who has a childish

personality that she could not depend on—symbolizing a juxtaposition of the stereotype that shackles Arab women, needing a male figure to live and support her. Al Karawi and Bahar (2014) finalize their argument by stating that Najwa’s embracing faith symbolizes accepting her new character in London after being traumatized by loss and migration. This happens by offering individuality and empowerment to her personality that can never be taken away. Aboulela proclaims that faith and believing in oneself are the only empowering tools for Arab women worldwide.

The previous discussion shows the factors that empowers Najwa in diaspora. Aboulela chooses to deprive Najwa from certain support in order to reach a point, where she can guide herself and depend on herself in the West.

#### **4.2 Mohja Kahf’s Representation of Khadra challenging the Social Norms against Arab women in the West in her novel, “*The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*”**

The study is based upon the concept of Arab women acquiring strength in diaspora, and this novel has been chosen to reflect on the difficulties Arab women confront when living in the West. Mohja Kahf authored this novel to document parts of her life as an immigrant who has been ill-treated and alienated for her background, identity, religion, and origins (Al Karawi and Bahar 2012). Western racism and arrogance against Arabs and Arab women, mainly, are continuous and cannot be ignored nor transcended. Kahf tells the

story of the Syrian background character, Khadra, who moves to the USA with her parents before turning four. Her parents, Wajdy and Ebthaj, move to the USA to have religious freedom and work as religious missionaries. Due to the fact that Syria during that time of history suffered from an aggressive regime that executed practicing Muslims. Khadra's life becomes increasingly difficult when she starts to wear the hijab and is recognized as the *Other* in school. She starts being abused by her schoolmates, which intensifies her clinging to the religious identity she is raised to have. At this point in her life, she develops a sense of detachment from American society. In the following quotation, Khadra shows her feelings towards the area she grows up in,

“Liar, she says, pointing to the highway sign that claims, “The people of Indiana welcome you.” The olive-skinned, dark-haired young woman drives west on the old National Road” (Kahf 2006, p. 1).

Because of the suffering of the Arabs in the West, Kahf provides her main protagonist with factors that enable her to survive in the West. These factors are, her supportive family, her education, her husband Juma'a, and her trip to Syria and living independently away from her hometown. Khadra's journey is influencing as it was written to inspire Arab women living in the West.

Khadra, in her early adulthood, appears powerless to reconcile her religious, Syrian background, and the American culture in which she has lived her entire life. Abdulmajid (2016) argues that Khadra's spiritual practices distanced her from the broader American society. She is taught to be cautious of Muslims who do not share similar beliefs, and in response, she maintains a lonely childhood caused by her negative attitude towards people. Khadra is pushing people away in her early years because she could not tolerate differences in faith or origin; she is in denial about herself and others. All along her journey, her family shows support, which paves the way for her empowerment. Khadra starts vulnerable due to many reasons but she learns to be empowered mainly from her parents' role in her life. Their role has been inspiring and thoughtful. They guide her through maturity and strength with patience and wisdom. Such as when they used to let her wear her own choice of outfits, then they stood next to her in her decision to wear the hijab. Later on, they support her through her marriage, then divorce, and abortion. They used to argue about her decisions but in the end, accept and respect them. Her brother played an important role in respecting her decisions, by not interfering in her life; he actually is a motivating force for her, as he wished nothing but happiness for his sister. In all her life stages, her family is considered the source of power and faith for her. Not to mention how she is inspired by her mother and father as strong individuals, who choose their own path willingly



after fighting for their religious freedom by moving to the States, which is a big risky step that means living and expecting the unknown. But they have always stood as strong supportive parents, whom she can always lean on even in the darkest days. Her family's trust has been a factor that helped her reach her true potential and strength. Her life has been blessed by their influence, suggesting a new image of the Arab mentality in Western societies.

Over the years, Khadra learns to be more tolerant, especially after she gets married and chooses her own dowry from her husband, Juma'a. Their marriage starts bright but later fades away due to their different cultural backgrounds and interests, they used to argue about Khadra riding the bike to school as it is not part of his cultural background for a girl to ride the bike in public. Juma'a wanted her to move with him family in Kuwait and make a family there but she refused in favor of continuing her education, their different lifestyles increased the gap between them; "I can't go on in this marriage without killing off the 'me' that I am" (Kahf 2006, p. 242).

At this point of her life she learns to devote her energy to her character and own strength. She could follow the traditions that says a wife should be obedient to her husband and follow his path, as many Muslim scholars assert and encourage doing, mentioned in Sijistani (2008) who says that wives should be obedient to their husbands and follow their commands out of

religiousness and how AL Quran and Hadith have encouraged. However, she chooses herself and her education over marriage. Jumaa's role in Khadra's life is vital as he allows her to live independently far from her parents' house, which leaves a good taste in her mouth for a free future life. He is a good man to her and does not abuse her, which is an important factor in her empowerment and self-confidence. Here Kahf writes to invert the typical picture by allowing Khadra to choose divorce from her Kuwaiti husband, in response to his refusal to divorce, Khadra demands her religious right, which is Kholo's referring to woman divorcing her husband. Many scholars have approved it and Shaykh Al-Uthaymeen (1999) has contributed saying that there is nothing wrong with her seeking divorce, but she should return the dowry she received from him.

Kahf's primary goal while building Khadra's character is to let Arab immigrant girls relate to Khadra's experience of developing a hybrid identity and lead them to empowerment in a society where they feel lost, detached, and alienated. Kahf allows Khadra to learn her rights and take them even if they are against her family and community's will, to refer to the idea that the West has stereotyped Arab women as powerless, right-less, and domesticated in a patriarchal society, as Sornou (2017) exclaims.

Khadra's family reflected modernity by undermining cultural stereotypes that cannot represent Arab women. Such as letting her go her own way after getting divorce, as it sounds critical for many Arab societies. Kahf's reflection on this idea was influential, paving the way for Arab women to be open-minded and present their beliefs in a modern and moderate manner. By laying out these principles, she encourages Arab immigrant societies to be courageous in confronting Western culture while pondering cultural ideas carried on their shoulders, which in many cases are meaningless and obstruct the way to empowerment. Similarly, Sarnou (2017) declares that Kahf's purpose in the novel is to free people from oppressing regimes, free Arabs and Muslims from discriminating societies, and free women from a patriarchal society. Throughout the book, she suggests how Arab women could find a border zone that can balance their strict religious backgrounds and the secular communities they live in.

One of the most influential factors for Khadra is her education. She is religiously educated, which has been a positive reflection in her life, which encourages her to take her rights. Khadra is a woman who uses knowledge to make good decisions. Her knowledge and deep understanding of Islam and her surrounding society guides her ambitious path. Part of Khadra's knowledge is her knowledge of religion, which allows her to discover its ease and tolerance among its adherents. Abdul Majid (2017) argues how Khadra

starts her approach to understanding Islam as she adopts different ideological perspectives. Consequently, being raised with strict Islamic beliefs eventually leads her to tolerance. Khadra's identity changes after taking her first step towards education, and her approach to Americanness, Arabness, and womanness creates a unique identity for her, as Sornou (2017) adds.

Another major factor of empowering Khadra is her trip to Syria. She learns to accept other differences and beliefs. This trip brings her back to her roots that empower her entity by teaching her to show hybridity with pride rather than shame. This trip has influenced her consciousness as she learns stories about the women in her family and how they fight to gain their rights to choose their path in life. Hence, she learns that her mother is a strong woman who chose her path and walked it with courage, regardless of the obstacles. With a heart full of inspiration, Khadra goes back, appreciating her origin and eager to pursue dreams.

“She knew by the time she crossed the Atlantic that she was headed home if there was any home in the world of worlds. She loved the country of her origin and found that something in the soil there, in the air, in the layout of streets, and the architecture of buildings answered a basic need in her and corresponded to the deep structure of her taxonomy” (Kahf 2006, p. 313).

Subsequently, Khadra's relationship with the veil, Hijab evolves and changes after the trip; it takes her time to realize its significance. As Arami (2018) argues regarding her relationship with the hijab after her trip to Syria, she starts wearing it with pride being part of its heritage, by showing it off as she makes peace with who she is at last. It used to be a barrier between her and American society, which expresses religious determination. During her early school years, Khadra takes religion and hijab as big parts of her identity, wearing only dark colors due to the rejection she encountered in school for expressing her religious identity. Nonetheless, everything changed after she travels to the Middle East, where she begins to see religion and identity in new ways, along learning tolerance in expressing beliefs and cultural differences. She takes off her dark hijabs and starts wearing a tangerine scarf that reflects her journey of deterritorialization in the West as an Arab practicing Muslim woman. AbdulMajid (2016) asserts that Khadra redefines her identity by going beyond borders of selfhood and recreates her American Muslim personality.

Symbolically, the tangerine scarf expresses a new phase in her life as she starts creating original approaches to life. The color stands for offering a moderate image of the Arab woman she has become. Adding to that Arami (2018) claims that she wears a tangerine scarf symbolizing the development of herself, her mother, and her home country. Khadra knew when to wear the

hijab and when to take it off, but most importantly, she is proud of her hijab and appreciative of her roots, saying “How precious is the heritage! A treasure fire cannot eat” (Kahf 2006, p. 313).

Abdulmajid (2016) also asserts that this move reshaped her perspective on life and emotions, corrected her vision of static identity as being impossible, and taught her to evaluate differences. All throughout her journey, Khadra is shown to be independent and in control of her life, but that would not have happened without the support of her parents, the surrounding community, and appropriate education. Kahf has granted Khadra suitable conditions to empower and enlighten her path. Kahf insisted on creating a solid character in Khadra, who starts shaky. Still, when she experiences life with knowledge in her mind, faith in her heart, and family in her back, she becomes ten times more empowered and undefeated—indicating that Arab women tend to develop hybrid and proud personalities, which can stand and blend in any culture.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter presents the study results and answers the proposed questions in Chapter One of this study. It also gives recommendations to reveal other issues of Arabs represented in Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* and Laila Aboulela's *Minaret* from the lens of Postcolonialism.

### **5.1 Conclusions**

#### **1. What are the factors that help Khadra develop her Arab identity in the West in Mohja Kahf's novel *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*?**

Khadra's Arab identity in the West has been developed with the help of several factors that Mohja Kahf has exposed her to. She accomplishes a strong sense of belonging to the community she grows up in and the background culture she is raised to have. These factors form a vital role in tracking her character's change throughout the novel, indicating the importance of these factors in empowering women, especially those living in diaspora. Through her journey of living in the States far from her home, Mohja Kahf shows how to obtain a hybrid personality that preserves one's heritage and evolves in modern society. Her wisdom is shown through Khadra's steady steps in life, which indicate that she intended to guide Arab women struggling to balance different cultures and backgrounds.

One of the significant factors Kahf gives Khadra to develop her Arab identity in the West is education and knowledge. Knowing her religious rights empowers Najwa in her crucial decisions. Kahf allows her to make decisions that soothe her vision of life—such as her divorce, abortion, traveling, and living independently. All these experiences would not have happened if she had not had previous knowledge of these rights and learned how to apply them. Khadra represents the struggles Arab women confront living in the West. Therefore, she has simple desires, but the way she fights for her rights is controversial and inspiring for Arab and foreign readers. Another important factor is her ability to travel back to Syria and her heritage. This trip teaches her to respect her roots and reflect on them in her daily lifestyle. Khadra, on this trip, maintains the Arab identity her parents raise her to have, but some things need to be lived to be understood, such as roots and identity. It took her a long time to dismantle the upbringing concepts she has blindly followed in order to reclaim them through real encounters and experience. Khadra returns proud of her heritage, religion, and, most importantly, her difference. She learns to accept and respect changes and differences among people.

Last but not least, her family's role in respecting and accepting her decisions that may oppose their personal opinions under the pretext of offering protection. Nevertheless, Khadra's parents reflect tolerance and



amenity when dealing with Khadra; they have an inspiring role in her life, as they trust her decisions and open her path to empowerment. Kids who do not enjoy the privilege of supporting parents cannot fully believe in themselves, and their shaky personalities cannot be hidden. Therefore, Khadra needs to return to her hometown and gain their blessing and affirmation. Without their love and support, her strength and change will falter.

Kahf's novel is a guidebook for all those who struggle with maintaining their Arab identity amidst confusion and dispersion. Khadra's daring spiritual journey teaches us morals to learn and carry through our daily lives. This novel proves that self-empowerment is not a recipe nor an overnight change; instead, it is a life journey that starts when the decision to improve is taken and lived by, a safe life tactic that saves time and proves a success.

## **2. What are the factors that help Najwa develop her Arab identity in the West in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*?**

In Laila Aboulela's *Minaret*, Najwa has to go through challenging hardships to shape her personality and develop a confident Arab identity. Aboulela intends to deprive Najwa from all sources of support to challenge Western stereotypes against Arab women.

Najwa gains strength and empowerment in a revolutionary, primarily way, since the novel has been written during a critical period. By repealing generalizations against Arabs, Aboulela uses her voice to speak for those

Arab women in diaspora, who struggle with discrimination and bias. Najwa is first deprived of her home country, social status, and family; then, her world fell apart, not realizing where the path leads her. When she starts to experience weakness and loss, clinging to any source of support that could save her from the dispersion she has faced, she meets with her boyfriend, Anwar, who makes the road harder yet closer to her destination.

This loss paves her way to becoming a new version of herself; she figured out her need to be found and saved from misery and loneliness after living a life with ultimate freedom. Najwa finds spiritual fulfillment in the the hijab and in the mosque. Najwa is saved by referring to spirituality, religion, and being with the Arab community. She chooses an Arab identity as a life savior and takes pride in how hard her journey has become and how she reached to the person she is destined to be. Aboulela has woven a masterpiece to remind those women that having an Arab identity in diaspora is powerful. Moreover, reaching the point of taking pride in it is a road full of thorns yet rewarding. Encouraging and challenging women to be stronger than the defeats, they encounter in their daily lives, as they fight for a greater cause, which is making this world free, kind, and accepting.

### **3. What are the similarities and differences between the factors represented in Kahf's novel and Aboulela's novel?**

Those two writers are chosen carefully as they originate from Arab countries that do not enjoy powerful influence in the region. Both writers live in two different Western regions, with many differences in culture and lifestyles. Therefore, the factors that are used by each writer are different. Kahf and Aboulela wrote those novels to speak up about painful experiences they have encountered. The two writers have placed the identity struggles of their characters as an actual representation of the challenges faced by Arab women due to societal rejection. Khadra and Najwa initiated an Arab identity after being lost in Western societies that rejected their differences. They both fought for their rights with the help of religion on their side to reflect on the idea that religion arms and does not impede or obstruct. The factors each writer presented to empower their characters are revolutionary and symbolize concerns about the stereotypes drawn to Arab women in the West. Indeed, each writer chose different factors reflecting complicating concepts such as family oppression, patriarchal societies, and religion-based oppression. They both chose to define family relations and their effect on Arab women's empowerment in a different matter, both were non-oppressive families yet their roles were different. Khadra enjoyed full support and guidance from her family, while Najwa suffered a lack of support and alienation. Which both resulted positively in their

empowerment. Another important factor that affected their paths is education, lack of education in Najwa's situation pushed her to find self-empowerment, while Khadra's knowledge and the good education she received influenced her decisions and the faith she gained in her character. Kahf and Aboulela's representation of their women characters reflect the modernity Arab women should reach in their identity building, also as a way of introducing the Western reader to a new version of Arab women's characters.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

1. More studies should be done on how Mohja Kahf presents Arab women's identity in diaspora and how they can overcome hybrid obstacles.
2. More studies should be done on how Laila Aboulela reflects on the importance of developing an Arab identity in the West.
3. More studies should be done on both works as they reflect the importance of religion and spirituality in guiding Arab women's paths.
4. More studies on Laila Aboulela's works should be conducted on the role of Arab women in the West.

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