

**Offering Guidance for Arab Women in the West in
Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and *Bird Summons***

توجيه النساء العرب في الغرب في روايتي الكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا
"المئذنة" و "استدعاء الطيور"

Prepared by
Mais Mousa Salah

Supervised by
Dr. Nasaybah Walid Awajan

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master's Degree in English Language and Literature**

**Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences
Middle East University
Jan, 2023**

Authorization

I, **Mais Mousa Salah**, authorise Middle East University to provide libraries, organizations, and even individuals with copies of my thesis upon request.

Name: Mais Mousa Said Salah

Date: 7/1/2023

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mais', with a horizontal line underneath.

Thesis Committee Decision

This Thesis titled “**Offering Guidance for Arab women in the West in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret and Bird Summons***” was successfully defended and approved on 14th –Jan. -2023.

Examination Committee Members:

Name	Workplace	Title	Signature
1. Dr. Nasaybah Walid Awajan	Middle East University	Supervisor	
2. Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Mahameed	Middle East University	Internal Examiner – Committee head	
3. Dr. Nisreen Tawfiq Yousef	Middle East University	Internal Examiner	
4. Dr. Hanan Mahmud Ibrahim	Al-Ahliyya Amman University	External Examiner	

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Allah for giving me the strength and patience to continue this journey and fulfill my dream of pursuing my master's degree in English language and literature. This journey would have never been accomplished without the presence of some precious people in my life, for whom I am thankful.

My most profound appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Nasaybah Walid Awajan, for sharing her time, effort, and wealth of knowledge and expertise with me. Her guidance made this journey easier and supported me along the way. Thanks to my instructors in the Department of English Language and Literature at Middle East University. I also extend my thanks and gratitude to my instructors at the University of Jordan during the B.A. journey. Special thanks go to the committee members for their contribution to the thesis.

Words cannot express my gratitude to my family, who stood by my side, and helped me in every aspect of this journey. I would also love to thank my father, who encouraged me to fulfill my dream and complete my studies. Special thanks to my mother, who instilled in me the love of English language and literature. She has always been an inspiration to me, even when things do not go as planned. I am grateful for my parents' assistance in shaping who I am today and for their unconditional love and support. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my beloved fiancé, who has been patient, understanding, and has given me all the support and motivation that I need.

Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to my parents, who instilled in me the value of education and believed that they were investing in me by providing me with the education I deserve. It is also dedicated to my siblings, who have always been loving and supportive. Additionally, it is specially dedicated to my fiancé, who has been encouraging and has endured my unsettled mood and constant stress throughout this period. Finally, this thesis is also dedicated to my nephew, Elias, who is the source of inspiration and joy for our small family.

Table of Contents

Subject	Page
Title	i
Authorization.....	ii
Thesis Committee Decision	iii
Acknowledgment	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
Abstract in English.....	viii
Abstract in Arabic	ix
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	7
1.3 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.4 Questions of the Study.....	8
1.5 Objectives of the Study:.....	8
1.6 Definition of Terms	8
1.7. Limitations of the Study	9
CHAPTER TWO: Review of Related Literature	10
2.1 Leila Aboulela’s Representation of Arab Women’s Struggle in the West. 10	
2.2 Leila Aboulela’s Representation of Arab Women’s Issues in the West and the Ways She Provides for Overcoming Such Issues in her novels, <i>Minaret</i> and <i>Bird Summons</i>	13
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology	21
3.1. Method.....	21
3.2 Summary of Leila Aboulela’s <i>Minaret</i>	22
3.3 Summary of Leila Aboulela’s <i>Bird Summons</i>	23
CHAPTER FOUR: Analysis	25
4.1 Leila Aboulela’s Representation of Arab women’s issues in the West and the Ways She Provides for overcoming Such Issues in her Novel, <i>Minaret</i>	25

4.2 Leila Aboulela's Representation of Arab Women's Struggle in the West and the Ways She Provides for Overcoming Such Issues in <i>Bird Summons</i> . ..	42
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion And Recommendations	63
5.1 Conclusion	63
REFERENCES:.....	68

**Offering Guidance for Arab Women in the West in Leila Aboulela's
Minaret and *Bird Summons***

Prepared by: Mais Mousa Salah

Supervised by: Dr. Nasaybah Walid Awajan

Abstract

The current study explores Leila Aboulela's literary representations of the issues that Arab women may face in the West in her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*. The study also examines the ways Aboulela represents for these Arab women to overcome the issues and challenges they are exposed to in the West. Both novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*, are analyzed through the lens of postcolonialism, and especially the views of Edward Said. The contribution of the current study lies in the fact that limited studies have been conducted on *Bird Summons* since it is considered a new literary work. Moreover, previous studies tackle each literary work independently, whereas the current research tackles both novels together. Furthermore, Aboulela's *Minaret* has been the subject of many studies, but little research has been done on how she embodies the challenges that Arab women encounter.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, *Minaret*, *Bird Summons*, Leila Aboulela.

توجيه النساء العرب في الغرب في روايتي الكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا

"المئذنة" و"استدعاء الطيور"

إعداد: ميس موسى صلاح

إشراف: الدكتورة نسبية وليد عوجان

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في القضايا التي تتعرض لها المرأة العربية في الغرب التي تحاول الكاتبة ليلى أبو العلا تقديمها في كل من روايتها، "المئذنة" و"بيردز سامينز". بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى عرض الطرق التي يمكن أن تساعد المرأة العربية للتعامل مع الحياة في الغرب في الروايتين. أجريت هذه الدراسة عن طريق تحليل الروايتين، "المئذنة" و"بيردز سامينز"، باستخدام نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار وخصوصاً بتطبيق آراء إدوارد سعيد. تكمن مساهمة الدراسة الحالية في كون أن رواية بيردز سامينز تعتبر عملاً أدبياً جديداً أجريت عليه دراسات محدودة وقليلة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن كل الدراسات السابقة تناولت كل عمل أدبي على حدة بينما يستعرض هذا البحث الروايتين معاً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الاستعمار، المئذنة، استدعاء الطيور، ليلى أبو العلا.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Arabs who live in the West usually face some obstacles and issues that sometimes relate to the negative images that they are known for. The assumed differences between the East and the West played a vital role in shaping and spreading some negative images and increasing the number of people who believe in these images. These stereotypical images that are known about Arabs increased after the September 11 attacks. The stereotypical images changed from Arabs being known as backward, uncivilized, and savages to Arabs being violent and terrorists. Gana (2008) states that after the September 11th attacks, Muslims and Easterners were represented as terrorists or at least linked to and related to terrorism and violence. According to Harb (2012), the September 11 aftermath had a huge impact on how the West view the East. Vilarrubias (2016) clarifies that, after the September 11 attacks, Arabs in general were described as terrorists, enemies, and an actual threat. Abdulla (2007) argues that even before the September 11 attacks, there was a false image of Arabs in the minds of Westerners. These false representations, especially after the September 11 attacks, encouraged many Arab writers to write back and negate those negative stereotypical images of Arabs. Abdulla (2007) and Sunier (2010) also state that although many Arab countries condemned the attacks, yet the Western media was unable to differentiate between Arabs, Muslims, and terrorists.

Said (1978) defines stereotyping as the process of enforcing and framing a false image on a particular group of people. He adds that the “Orient”, which is a term used to refer to the East, is a European invention that carries all the stereotypical images related to the East. The East, including Arabs, are seen as exotic, barbaric, and backward and are deprived of the real essence of their existence. This conflict and misrepresentations

emerged due to the huge gap between the two cultures. Some people still believe that the West is the center of the world and that all other nations are invaluable. Said (1978) states that the whole idea behind creating distinctions between the East and the West is to pave the way for the concept of superiority. In other words, the Orient is different and weak, and that is why the occident is strong and unique and is capable of liberating and dominating. Pickering (2015) states that stereotyping is the process of evaluating and representing others. It targets certain people and demeans or confines them.

According to what Said (1978) declares, the West managed to construct images of Arabs even before knowing or meeting them. Accordingly, diasporic writers decided to write back and raise their voices against inequity and help Arabs survive and fit in the West. Santesso and McClung (2019) argue that the main reason behind the appearance of different narratives after 9/11 was to respond to and address the misrepresentations of Arabs and Muslims. Furthermore, those attacks paved the way for more misrepresentations and more discrimination against Arabs and Muslims. The word “diaspora” is defined as “the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland” (Soanes and Stevenson 2006, p. 397). Diasporic Arab women writers of fiction, such as Leila Aboulela, Naomi Shihab Nye, Diana Abu Jaber, Mohja Kahf, and others, aim not only to represent Arab women and their struggle in the West through their writings, but they also aim to pass their experiences in the West. Furthermore, diasporic Arab writers rely on their writings to educate Westerners about the East. This is done by addressing the negative images that Westerners have about the East and Arabs in particular. Diasporic Arab writers also strive to portray an image that uncovers the reality of the East and refutes all the stereotypical images that revolve around it. Abdul Majid (2015) states that many Arab writers resorted to writing in an attempt to address and negate the stereotypical images that aim to tarnish Arab’s image.

These Diasporic Arab writers have always tried to create a bridge between the two cultures, the Eastern and the Western. According to Bhabha (1994), this is called hybridity, which can be defined as having or being related to two different cultures, and this is what leads to the concept of the third space. Bhabha (1994) believes that the Third Space is a metaphorical space that relies on the interaction between two or more different cultures to create a new space for thinking and belonging. In other words, it is a “sense of home” (p. 23).

Arabs in the West might face different sorts of issues and obstacles that are sometimes hard to overcome and deal with. These obstacles include discrimination, Islamophobia, unemployment, and raising children in non-Muslim communities. These are due to the stereotypical images that are associated with Arabs. The stereotypes about Arabs in general and Arab women in particular vary. Hansson and Henriksson (2013) state that women in the East are represented as victims of their families and colonial processes. Additionally, Arab women have always been represented as passive, obedient, and portrayed as weak figures, who need the support of male characters in their lives.

Literature and the media have played a vital role in shaping some stereotypical images targeting Arab women living in their home countries or those living in the West. Hansson and Henriksson (2013) also add that some Western agencies and organizations tend to generalize some images of Middle Eastern women and ignore all distinctions. In other words, a certain characteristic is generalized. For example, they describe all women as uncivilized and controlled while ignoring the fact that many Arab women are strong and independent. Altarabin (2021) states that sometimes news is written to persuade and not just to inform the public about a certain event that is taking place in the world. In other words, the news persuades and forces people to support one party over another.

Additionally, the Western media exposes the public to certain biases. For example, many western dramas that we watch on television, including series and films, misrepresent Arabs and Islam and give a negative image of the East. Mishra (2007) states that some Western media portrays Arab women as either belly dancers or weak characters who need the help of Western liberation to grant their rights and freedoms.

Western media aims to judge Arabs as a whole. Ridouani (2011) states that Arabs and Muslims are seen by the West as one entity, and individualism is ignored. To put it another way, all Arabs, regardless of their beliefs, behaviors, and actions, are seen as one without looking into what makes each one of them different. Furthermore, any act that is committed by a single Muslim or Arab influences the whole community. For example, all Arabs are seen as terrorists because one single Arab might have participated in a terrorist attack in the past.

Apart from the Western stereotypes and representations, some Arabs living in the West misrepresent Arabic culture and tarnish the image of Arabs in general. According to Ameri (2012), one of the biggest challenges that Muslims, especially Arabs, currently experience is the vilification of Islam, either by people who claim to be Muslims but commit unacceptable behaviors and terrorist acts or by the Western media that constantly works to spread negative images about Islam and Arabs.

Another obstacle that faces Arab Muslim women living in the West is the discrimination against Arab women in general and veiled women in particular. The veil, which many Muslim women wear, is prohibited in many Western countries and is seen as a tool to oppress women, an obstacle that prevents them from being successful and deprives them of their freedom. According to Young (2003), the West views the veil as a sign of oppression and a symbol of being passive and invisible. They claim that women

wear the veil to be invisible in the eyes of men around them. Zine (2002) clarifies that Muslim women wearing the veil are always portrayed as passive and naive, while unveiled women are portrayed as strong and confident. Al-A'bed (2017) states that many Arab women are accused of being controlled either by religion or by other male characters, and therefore, they are always represented as backward and ignorant. They believe that the reason for wearing the hijab is to stay under religious control. On the other hand, Mizel (2020) argues that some Arab Muslim women tend to wear hijab in the West as an attempt to build their identity and create a kind of social space for themselves. In other words, they think that Muslim women in the West are wearing the veil on purpose, and not just because they believe in it and have the freedom to wear it.

It is important to note that in many cases, women suffer harm not just from racist or male-dominated societies or deceptive media, but also from women themselves who underestimate their own power and who surrender to the stereotypical images that portray Arab women as weak and incapable. Additionally, women are sometimes harsh to other women. They generally tend to judge other women based on their appearance and religion. For example, Blakeman (2014) argues that some American women believe that Arab women wearing veils or any other sort of covering material are actually covering something they are ashamed of, like an imperfect body, an ugly face, or unhealthy hair.

One of the Arab writers, who try to reflect and present some of the issues that Arab women suffer from in the West, is Leila Aboulela. Ancellin (2009) states that in her writing, Aboulela tends to address and respond to different misrepresentations that target Muslims in the West, especially females. Aboulela is one of the diasporic writers who aimed to portray the sufferings of Arab women in the West. She also tries to show how these women are able to overcome these sufferings.

Chambers (2009) writes that Aboulela is a Sudanese writer who was born in Cairo in 1962 but grew up in Sudan/Khartoum. Her mother was Egyptian, and back in history, both Egypt and Sudan were colonized by Britain. Al-Asmakh (2009) states that Aboulela succeeded in grabbing the world's attention towards her writing by bringing the East and the West together and representing the struggles and the unusual situations that these Arab women might face.

According to Chamber (2011), Aboulela does not strictly write for or target women but is aware that her writings and stories attract Western readers. Aboulela tries to clarify the problems that Arab women might face in the West. In *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*, the reader might find many lessons on how to overcome obstacles in the West and how Arab women can live there. In addition to that, this thesis attempts to explore how Aboulela represents the life of Arab women in the West and explore what Arab women go through either in their homeland or in a Western country far away from their society and its norms.

In Aboulela's *Bird Summons*, the three women are on a journey to Lady Evlen's grave. However, this journey can be seen as a spiritual one that made them gain experience and understand their identity and their significance in life in the West. Each character in *Bird Summons* has different traits and personality. In addition to that, each one of them has a different ambition and goal in life that she strives to achieve. This makes the reader absorb the idea that women have different strengths, ambitions, capabilities, and limitations

On the same line, Aboulela in her novel *Minaret*, reflects the issues and problems Arab women may face, and shows how they are able to defy these challenges. She portrays the Arab girl, Najwa, who needs to survive in the West on her own and the

obstacles that she faces. Thus, after losing her family, Najwa is forced to fight in order to be able to cope with living in the West. Throughout the novel, she manages to grow more confident, self-reliant, and strong. After certain circumstances in her life, she is able to acquire the skill of making her own decisions and choosing her path without the interference of others.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The current study explores Leila Aboulela's literary representations of the issues that Arab women may face in the West in her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*. The study also examines the ways Aboulela represents for these Arab women to overcome the issues and challenges they are exposed to in the West. Furthermore, this study focuses on comparing and contrasting between the issues that Aboulela reflects in each novel, and the ways she suggests for defying such issues.

1.3 Significance of the Study

There are a few number of studies and reviews that are conducted on Aboulela's novel *Bird Summons* since it is a very recent novel, such as the study of Arkhagha & Amrieh (2021), and the reviews of Viswanathan (2020) and DeZelar-Tiedman (2020). The current study tackles the novel with another work by the same author, Aboulela's *Minaret*. The contribution of the current study lies in the fact that limited studies have been conducted on *Bird Summons* since it is considered a new literary work. Moreover, previous studies tackle each literary work independently, whereas the current research tackles both novels together. Furthermore, Aboulela's *Minaret* has been the subject of many studies, but little research has been done on how she embodies the challenges that Arab women encounter.

1.4 Questions of the Study

The current study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the issues that the Arab women are exposed to in the West in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*?
- 2- What are the ways that Leila Aboulela suggests for Arab women to defy the issues they are exposed to in the West in her two novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*?
- 3- What are the differences and the similarities between the issues that Aboulela reflects, and the ways she suggests for defying such issues in each of her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*?

1.5 Objectives of the Study:

This study aims to:

- 1- Explore the issues that the Arab women are exposed to in the West in Leila Aboulela's both novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*.
- 2- Examine the ways that Leila Aboulela suggests for Arab women to defy the issues they are exposed to in the West in her two novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*.
- 3- Compare and contrast between the issues that Aboulela reflects, and the ways she suggests for defying such issues in each of her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Post colonialism: A branch of cultural and critical theory that was applied in an attempt to study and analyze different literary texts. It aims to question the colonizer's superiority over the colonized through focusing on the writing and reading of the colonized. Furthermore, it might also tackle the literature that was created by the colonizing nations and how it represents the colonized. (Mapara 2009).

Orientalism: Orientalism is a “style of thought” that relies heavily on the binary oppositions between the East (Orient) and the West (occident) and what makes them different. It can also be defined as a system of portraying and constructing stereotypical images that target the ‘other’ (Said 1978, p.10).

Hybridity: It can be defined as any sort of mixing between Eastern and Western cultures (Singh 2009).

1.7. Limitations of the Study

The results of the current study are limited to the time it has been conducted. The results are also limited to Leila Aboulela’s both novels, *Minaret*, and *Bird Summons*. The study and what it concludes with cannot be generalized to other authors, nor to their literary works.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

2.1 Leila Aboulela's Representation of Arab Women's Struggle in the West

The current section focuses on representing the studies that tackle Arab women's struggle in the West in Leila Aboulela's literary work and how she offers guidance for these women. As a start, García's (2019) study tackles the stereotypes and the idea of seeking fulfillment in the host land in Aboulela's *Elsewhere, Home*. She states that some readers, including many Muslim immigrant women, can relate to Aboulela's writings and learn from them. She adds that Aboulela adds numerous teachings and experiences to her works that make some women feel connected and understood because they share the same experience as the characters in the novels. In addition to that, Aboulela gathers the stories and experiences of different women with different issues and backgrounds.

According to García (2019), some of Aboulela's characters tend to set comparisons between their homelands and the host country. They show a sense of solitude and nostalgia towards their homeland and all that they have left behind. On the other hand, other characters show attachment to the Western community and lifestyle. García (2019) believes that in her work, Aboulela gives her women characters room for development and a chance to prove their validity in society.

Al-Asmakh (2009) states in an analysis of Leila Aboulela's novels, *The Translator* and *Minaret*, that the main character in both novels is a Sudanese woman trying to survive in a foreign country. She argues that by choosing a female Sudanese character, Aboulela is drawing upon her own experience while living in London at the age of 17. Al-Asmakh (2009) also states that most of Aboulela's literary works revolve around certain characters, aiming to discuss feminism and issues that females face every day.

Furthermore, she asserts that in most of her works, the female character starts by being unable to find her real identity and ends up with their empowerment.

Another study conducted on Aboulela's novels is an article by Al-Daraiseh (2020) in her study that tackles women's mobility and the journey narrative in some Arab women's literary narratives. She states that Aboulela's *Translator* tracks the journey of a female character 'Samar' who travels from Khartoum to Aberdeen. She argues that throughout the novel, the reader might find out that the personality of Samar is developing and that she is gaining the strength to fight and face all the surrounding negative conditions that she is experiencing, either in her home country or in the West. Al-Daraiseh (2020) adds that Samar learns how to live as an independent woman in the West while embracing her religion. She also learns how to be strong and face different oppressive stereotypical images that surround her as a Arab woman.

Englund (2020) tackles the concept of post migrant realities in Aboulela's *Elsewhere*, and *Home*. She states that many scholars are interested in Aboulela's fiction because it sheds light on the experience of migrants and Muslims in the West. She adds that in those stories, Aboulela aims to give an indication of what Arab migrants go through and experience. In addition to that, the collection also focuses on subverting stereotypical images that are related to African migrants. Englund (2020) states in an interview with Parssinen that Aboulela clarifies that in her writing, she noticed that over time her characters grew more relaxed in Britain. She adds that in later stages, the feeling of homesickness that they are experiencing starts to decrease day by day, and they start feeling like they are part of the place they live in. This is what Aboulela is aiming to build in the minds of her readers. Englund (2020) explains that most of the characters in Aboulela's work suffer from homesickness and struggle with their identities. However,

her writings mainly focus on the idea of returning either to their homelands or towards religion and faith.

Amjad and Albusalih (2021) discuss the question of hybridity and Islamic identity in Aboulela's novel *The Translator*. They state that Aboulela generally concentrates on Islam and traditions in most of her fiction works. Furthermore, in her works, Aboulela tends to portray an image of cultural hybridity that influences the lives of her female characters. They add that Samar, the main character in *The Translator*, is an embodiment of a faithful Arab Muslim woman who is capable of living and interacting with Westerners while preserving her Eastern identity, her values, and her religion. According to Amjad and Albusalih (2021), Aboulela tries to question Bhabha's claim that Easterners are unable to live in the West without deserting their values in her novel *The Translator*.

KOÇ (2014) studies the representation of British Muslim identities in Aboulela's *Minaret*. She states that Aboulela portrays the struggle and the experience of Arab migrants, which are enriched by her own experience. Furthermore, in her research, she tries to shed light on the concept of hybridity and the identity conflict that some of Aboulela's characters suffer from. On the other hand, some other researchers have criticized Aboulela's representation of Islam and Muslim cultures in general. For example, Ameri (2012) criticizes Aboulela's attempt to avoid dealing with the complexities and the wrong understanding of Islamic identities that some of her characters experienced. She sheds light on some important identity misunderstandings, although she does not deal with them or elaborate on them.

2.2 Leila Aboulela's Representation of Arab Women's Issues in the West and the Ways She Provides for Overcoming Such Issues in her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*.

Starting with the literature that tackles Aboulela's representation of Arab women's issues in the West and the ways she provides for overcoming such issues in her novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*. Many authors write about the struggle that the main character, Najwa, encounters in the West and how these issues help her to become stronger. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014), who conducted research that tackles the idea of the veil and identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* and how the veil is considered an obstacle that prevents Arab women from living a normal life in the West. They state that throughout the novel, Najwa faces several obstacles that are hard to overcome. The first obstacle that is presented is her father's fate. What Aboulela might be willing to suggest is that women should not surrender to the faults of their parents or anyone else. Furthermore, Aboulela wants women to learn how to overcome harsh situations that they are exposed to. In addition to that, Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) state that Najwa is forced later to work as a maid to support herself and earn a living.

Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) explain that Najwa encounters another obstacle further in the novel, which is Najwa's abandonment by her relatives and friends. who leave her to suffer on her own, and avoid her, claiming that she does not belong to their social class anymore, so they mistreat her. People from her past (in Sudan) start looking down on her because of her social and economic status, so Najwa is left out in a conflict between her past and her present, which are totally different. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) present an example of this mistreatment by mentioning the wife of Najwa's uncle, who is supposed to find her a proper job, but instead she makes her work as a maid and does not pay her much. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) also clarify that Najwa is on a spiritual and emotional

journey. In other words, she is on a journey towards self-understanding and identity construction. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) argue that Najwa changes from a liberal girl who wears short skirts into a woman who embraces religion, wears a veil, and understands all the consequences that accompany it. On the same line, Al-Karawi and Bahar believe that by reading the entire novel, the reader understands that there is a point of spiritual awakening that happens to Najwa that allows her to learn how to embrace religion as an identity. This spiritual awakening and new identity separate her from her previous life, faults, and connections. At the end of the novel, Najwa goes to Hajj, and this proves the previous idea that she embraces religion to end her own sufferings and discover her actual identity.

Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) also believe that Anwar's character has a huge impact on Najwa's life and teaches her some important lessons. He serves as a crucial part of her past and gives her a feeling of belonging to her homeland and to the easy days that she lived in Khartoum. On the other hand, Anwar and Najwa's brother Omar, serve as examples of non-religious characters, who are portrayed in a bad way and behave inappropriately. Through this, Aboulela reminds Arab women how religion can save them from committing sins or behaving inappropriately.

Rouabhia and Melaikia (2019) discuss "The sense of in-betweenness in Leila Aboulela's novel, *Minaret*. They tackle the obstacles and guidance that can be found in Aboulela's *Minaret*. Rouabhia and Melaikia (2019) state that the Najwa in *Minaret* faces a constant struggle in terms of identity and alienation, in addition to her sense of loneliness after losing her family. They argue that there is no one to support Najwa, and her boyfriend Anwar takes advantage of her. Due to these reasons, she takes on the responsibility of constructing a unique identity and developing herself after all that she

has gone through. To put it another way, Aboulela wants to clarify that sometimes women learn lessons after going through harsh situations and experiences. However, these lessons make them stronger and more mature.

Rouabhia and Melaikia (2019) also state that Aboulela succeeds in portraying an image of Arab Muslim women in diaspora, and she succeeds in bringing the East and the West together as well. She teaches Arabs that coexistence is achievable despite all obstacles. Additionally, she wants to teach Arab women that they are capable of living in the West on their own. Furthermore, they believe that this novel is written during the period of Islamophobia, where the image of Muslim women is loaded with negativity. This false image about Muslim women influenced their daily life in their homelands or in the West, due to this reason Aboulela wants to address this problem and offer solutions. They also add that Najwa is a victim of Islamophobia, as this can be seen in the scene of the bus when three Western men attacked and insulted her. She feels angry, humiliated, and unsafe. However, the “Islamophobic” hatred, acts, and abuses do not change her perspective on Islam or the veil. She continues to be strong in the face of all these harsh circumstances. In other words, through *Minaret*, Aboulela teaches women how to cope in a society that fears and accuses Islam of being a source of violence and backwardness.

In an attempt to explore some of the obstacles that Arab women in the West encounter and the guidance that Aboulela provides in her writings, Awajan and Al-Shetawi (2021) discuss and analyze some of Aboulela’s characters in *Minaret* in their research, “Empowering Muslims in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* and Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*”. They state that when Najwa travels to the West, she indulges in every kind of freedom and stays far away from religion or any limitations. However, she is unable to settle or be satisfied. They add that Najwa lives a liberal life but does not

understand that she is making mistakes until she commits adultery with Anwar. In other words, Najwa learns later that the ultimate freedom does not bring her any salvation. They also argue that at the beginning of the novel, Najwa is represented as an Arab woman who is lost in the West with no ties or anything to hold up to. However, she finds out that Islam can help and guide her in the West. Due to Islam, she is able to make friends and create her own community in the West. They add that Najwa becomes a strong woman when she forms a connection with her religion and understands herself better. In addition to that, both scholars argue that Najwa believes that her brother deserves to be punished by the Islamic law for all the sins that he commits and to prevent him from committing any new sins in the future. Aboulela wants to guide the reader by showing that abiding by the Islamic regulations helps individuals control their lives and behaviors. Through these ideas and incidents that occur in the novel, Leila Aboulela is also trying to stress the idea that Islam does not bring destruction or ruin lives; it helps individuals and controls their behaviors in societies. Aboulela wants to teach Arab women that they can embrace their religion, which will help them find their identity and salvation in the West.

In his study, “*Minaret: Islam and Feminism at Crossroads*”, Abdullah (2017) portrays how Islam teaches Najwa how to live in the West. He thinks that Islam, to Najwa, resembles a liberation force that frees her from society and patriarchy. He adds that, in a new country and a different culture, Najwa escapes towards Islam to find her own identity. She practices Islam to gain her freedom.

Bouregbi (2021) tackles the idea of identity and cultural tension in Aboulela’s *Minaret*. He believes that Aboulela’s characters are different, and it is interesting to trace their development throughout the novel. He adds that most of the characters end up choosing a path that they did not choose before. Bouregbi (2021) adds that by the end of

the novel, Najwa is capable of learning from her past and constructing a new identity for herself.

Moolla (2021) argues in her research paper, “Her Heart Lies at the Feet of the Mother”, that Aboulela uses the character of Tamer’s mother to reflect that marriages do not happen without the consent of the mother. Najwa is in love with Tamer. However, his mother serves as an obstacle that prevents them from being united.

There are not yet enough studies conducted on Leila Aboulela’s *Bird Summons*, and herein lies the contribution of the current study. This section presents some studies and reviews that analyse *Bird Summons*. As a start, Arkhagha and Abu Amrieh (2021) discuss magical realism, faith, and identity in Aboulela’s novel, *Bird Summons*. They state that Aboulela highlights some important conflicts and issues that Arab women encounter in the West by relying on her personal experience as a Sudanese woman traveling to Scotland. They argue that in her writing, she guides other women on how to make decisions in the West while using the “Muslim logic”. This is presented in her narratives and in how her characters choose to act in the West. Additionally, the reason behind the journey of the three main characters, Salma, Moni, and Iman was to educate themselves and increase their knowledge that is related to the history of Islam. This can serve as a lesson that Aboulela wants Arab women to remember by emphasizing the importance of learning more about Islam and following in the footsteps of previous Muslim women who have made a difference.

Arkhagha and Abu Amrieh (2021) claim that the Hoopoe in the novel teaches Iman and the ladies a lot of important lessons that help in shaping their identities and developing their selves. They believe that Iman, in particular, is undergoing a process of adopting a new identity and existence by listening to the stories narrated by the Hoopoe or by trying

on different costumes that present different identities. In addition to that, Aboulela portrays an important issue that many Arab women face, this issue is being forced to wear hijab. Iman believes that she had no choice but to wear hijab when she was in her home country due to people's and society's expectations. Hence, at a later stage, she decides to take it off in order to reclaim her identity and get the chance to choose for herself. Through this scene, Aboulela reflects the idea that hijab should be a personal choice for Arab women rather than a habit or an imposed uniform. According to Arkhagha and Abu Amrieh (2021), Aboulela passes on another lesson by using the character of Iman. Iman is eager to know more and benefit from the stories of the Hoopoe. However, she is unable to interpret its language. Aboulela tries to refer to another obstacle that encounters Arab women in the West, which is the inability of some women to speak the language of the host country.

Englund (2020) tackles the idea of post-migration. She states that Aboulela's *Bird Summons* tracks the journey of three female characters who are on a quest towards self-realization. She adds that the characters are facing an issue with understanding and rediscovering themselves. In addition, they are examining their previous decisions and their consequences on their lives. Through this, Leila Aboulela is trying to guide Arab women on how to benefit from their journeys and how to make use of any available resources to develop and build their independent identities.

According to Englund (2020), one of the major conflicts and obstacles that most of Aboulela's characters suffer from is the feeling of being an 'other'. In other words, due to the fact that they belong to a certain nationality, they feel that they will never be able to fit in the West. She adds that Salma in *Bird Summons* is an example of these characters, who are suffering from the anxieties of being an 'other' or an outsider even within their

same families. The idea of “otherness” can serve as an obstacle that many Arab women encounter in the West, but Leila Aboulela wants to teach Arab women how to overcome this obstacle and live like any other normal citizen in that country.

Englund (2020) adds that throughout the novel, Salma clarifies that the gap between her and her children is growing. However, by the end of the novel, Salma was capable of overcoming some of her anxieties in terms of the distance between her and her British family members. Thus, she understood that by bearing these children, she is part of this country. What Aboulela is trying to build here is that she wants Arab women to understand that raising children in the West might be an obstacle. However, with kindness and understanding, this can be achievable.

According to Christine Dezelar-Tiedman’s review (2020) of *Bird Summons* in the Library Journal, she describes that the three main characters are suffering from personal crises. Each woman is facing a set of problems on her own, and due to their differences, they start to quarrel at some stage of the novel. She adds that by the end of the novel, Aboulela managed to add some unusual occurrences that forced the three women to confront their problems and choose their track.

In Yvonne Zipp’s review of the novel (2020) in the Christian Science monitor, she believes that the obstacles that the three women suffer from appeared at the beginning of the novel when Iman’s third husband left her while not being able to join her family in Syria. She adds that the reader is then introduced to Salma’s problem. She is married to a Scottish man and has Scottish children, who, according to Salma, look down at her. Salma develops a sense of longing for her home country, Egypt, and starts texting an old friend. Zipp (2020) also adds that the major issue that Moni suffers from is her disabled son and her demanding husband. She notes that it is obvious that this journey is not going to leave

the three women unchanged and that they are going to learn and develop. Al-Asmakh (2019) states that Aboulela describes the journey of a female character in the West and that the journey ends up being a spiritual one that makes them gain strength and internal power. Furthermore, it teaches them how to embrace their religion and develop.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1. Method

The researcher approaches two of Leila Aboulela's novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*, from the lens of postcolonialism. Additionally, the researcher relies on Edward Said's ideas on Orientalism and his views on the Orient (East) and Occident (West). Postcolonialism can be defined as a literary theory that deals mainly with literature produced in countries that were under historically under colonization or in colonizing countries dealing with the concept of colonization and the colonized people. This theory reflects how the colonizers' literature misrepresents the sufferings, experiences, and realities of the colonized in an attempt to support the colonizer's superiority while portraying an image of the colonized inferiority. Postcolonialism sheds light on the colonized people's efforts and attempts to regain what was stolen by the colonizer, including their national identities and their histories (Mapara 2009).

Edward Said provides the academic field with an amazing contribution by publishing his book *Orientalism*, which is valuable and beneficial to different people and scholars. He is considered a pioneer of postcolonial studies. Hence, his book *Orientalism* is considered a foundation through which the postcolonial theory developed and flourished. In his book, Edward Said talks about the East and the West and the relationship that they share. Furthermore, he addresses different stereotypical images about the Orient/ East and how they were constructed by the West in order to achieve certain goals. Additionally, he believes that the concept of the East and the West was not there naturally, but was rather construed and can be considered a man-made invention.

According to Said (1978), the relationship between the Orient (East) and the Occident (West) has always been controlled by the West. They played the main role in shaping terms, ideologies, and basic distinctions between both cultures. Edward Said believes the East is seen by the West as inferior, exotic, and backward. Whereas the West perceive and portray themselves as strong, educated, civilized, and superior. Said (1978) believes that westerners took on the responsibility to speak and act on the behalf of the Orient. Furthermore, the whole idea of Orientalism emerged from the differences between the countries and the concept of binary opposition that lead to discrimination and prejudice against the Orient. The differences are framed to create superiority over the East and justifications to civilize and dominate.

3.2 Summary of Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*

Minaret (2005) is the second book published by the Sudanese writer, Leila Aboulela. The main characters in the novel are Najwa, Omar, Anwar, Lamya, Tamer, and Doctora Zeinab. The novel traces the journey of the protagonist, Najwa, who is a young Sudanese girl. Her father was a government official, and this made her, and her family live a comfortable and luxurious life. In Khartoum, Najwa lives as an aristocratic, Westernized Sudanese who does not know much about religion or faith. She was a student at the University of Khartoum, where she meets Anwar and falls in love with him. However, after the civil war, everything changes. Her father is arrested and is sent to prison, and she is forced to leave everything behind and travel to London with her mother and her twin brother, Omar. Later, her father is executed, her mother dies, and her brother is sent to prison. Consequentially, she finds herself alone in the West.

In London, Najwa faces many obstacles and difficulties, which change her perspective on life, and as a result, she changes from a liberal girl to a religious and practicing Muslim and makes a group of friends at the mosque. Embracing Islam as a religion in the West makes her face discrimination and different issues that she manages to deal with. Additionally, as a consequence of being alone in the West, Najwa is forced to work as a maid to support herself and earn a living. After some time, Najwa meets her employer's brother, Tamer, and falls in love with him. They discover that they have many similarities, and Tamer proposes to her. However, their love story is not destined to continue and be fulfilled.

3.3 Summary of Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons*

Aboulela's fifth novel, *Bird Summons* (2019), tackles the journey of three women going on a road journey towards Lady Evelyn's grave. The three women leave all their obligations and responsibilities behind and decide to go on that journey. Salma, who is the leader of the group, organizes this trip and convinces her two friends to join her. She is married to a British convert but is secretly messaging her previous fiancé, Amir. Throughout the novel, she talks about her struggle to fit in the West and how she sees herself as an outsider even when she is around her own family.

The second character in this novel is Moni, a lady who has given up her career in banking and sacrificed everything to care for her disabled son, Adam. The reader is introduced later to the main conflict in her life, where she needs to choose between her son and her husband. Finally, there is Iman, who is a beautiful young girl in her twenties with three failed marriages. She left the war back in Syria and is struggling to stand on her own in London. She longs for freedom and to construct her own identity. In later stages, a sacred bird, the Hoopoe, visits the three women, and some unusual events begin

to happen. This is where the reader understands that their journey turned out to be a spiritual one that is meant to change the three women and examine their decisions in life. Throughout the novel, the three women encounter different obstacles and temptations that teach them different lessons.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis

This chapter aims at discussing the issues that the main Arab women characters encounter through their journeys in the West in both of Leila Aboulela's novels, *Minaret* and *Bird Summons*. Moreover, it sheds light on the ways that Leila Aboulela tries to present for these women to be able to defy the issues they are exposed to in the West.

4.1 Leila Aboulela's Representation of Arab women's issues in the West and the Ways She Provides for overcoming Such Issues in her Novel, *Minaret*.

Minaret can be described as a novel that allows the reader to explore life in two different parts of the world, Sudan and Britain, by tracking the journey of the main character, Najwa, who travels from her home country, Sudan, towards Britain following her father's imprisonment. Najwa's father was a government official, and after the coup in Sudan, he was accused of corruption and was arrested. Consequently, Najwa and her family were forced to experience exile and leave their home country in a hurry without having many other options or alternatives. Throughout the novel, Aboulela tries to represent how an Arab woman can survive in the West and the kinds of challenges and obstacles that she might face.

The first issue, introduced in *Minaret*, relates to the change of place and the comparison between the past and the present, in addition to the feeling of nostalgia that it evokes. Najwa moves from Sudan to Britain, which resembles a quick transitional period for Najwa that she was unprepared for. She moves to a country that is very different from hers in terms of culture, language, and inhabitants. In a blink of an eye, she leaves her home and luxurious life in Sudan to face exile and responsibility in Britain. The huge gap between Najwa's past and present allows the reader to witness and understand the mental challenges that Najwa is going through and the feelings of nostalgia towards her past that

she experiences. Murshed & Abdulqader (2020) state that the interaction between home and the host country creates a sort of negative effect and influences the mentality of immigrants. In other words, after moving to the West, immigrants start experiencing negative emotions that are triggered by the feeling of nostalgia towards their home country and their past in general.

Najwa is unable to comprehend all the changes that happen in her life. Additionally, she is unable to forget her past and adapt to her present, and this makes her suffer and creates an extra obstacle that prevents her from fitting in the West. According to Al-Samakh (2019), Najwa and her identity are torn between the past and the present. Shortly after moving to Britain, Najwa's father was found guilty, and as a result, he was executed. This resembles an actual turning point in Najwa's life. Najwa and her family understand that they are on their own in the West and have no one to support them. To make things worse, in later stages, Najwa loses both her mother and her brother; hence, she has to suffer on her own. Her mother falls ill and dies, and her brother, Omar, is imprisoned. When Najwa realizes how hard life is without her parents, she utters, "Did they know that I was flattened and small without them?" (Aboulela 2005, p.144)

In a sensitive transitional period represented by her journey from Sudan to Britain, Najwa must take on responsibility and stand next to her mother and brother in their harsh times. Although coping with such a hard situation, Najwa is able to support her mother throughout her illness and remains by her side until her mother passes away. Additionally, she also supports her brother and stands by his side despite the fact that she believes that he deserves to be sent to jail as a punishment for his sins. Awajan and Al-Shetawi (2021) argue that Najwa believes that her brother deserves to be punished by the Islamic law for all the sins that he commits and to prevent him from committing any new sins in the

future. Najwa believes that Omar needs to payback for the sins he commits against his mother when he mistreats and bullies her for the sake of getting money. He also needs to be punished for the sin he commits against himself by being a drug-addict. Despite her beliefs, she still commits to continuously visiting her brother in jail and providing him with all the support he needs.

All those issues that Najwa encounters make her reflect on her past in Sudan and draw comparisons between her past and her present circumstances in the West. This comparison leads Najwa to focus on the positivity of being in Khartoum and concentrate on what she longs for and lacks in the West. Through all of this, the researcher argues that Aboulela wants to provide the reader by showing that abiding by the Islamic regulations, helps individuals control their lives and behaviors, as mentioned in the previous example about Najwa's brother.

The nostalgic feelings and isolation are issues that many Arabs in the West encounter. The change of place and situations in the West triggers certain emotions that might force them to react in a particular way or make certain decisions. Najwa's suffering from these issues force her to make some bad decisions in the West, including her relationship with Anwar. Her decision to be with Anwar is shaped by feelings of nostalgia towards Sudan and the desire to be close to someone similar to her in terms of language and nationality. Additionally, considering the fact that Anwar is one of the limited Arabs that Najwa knows in the West, and because he is part of her past, Najwa trusts Anwar and follows him blindly. According to Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014), Najwa holds onto Anwar as the only connection she has to her past. Furthermore, the pleasant memories of being a student in Khartoum are only brought to Najwa's mind when she is around Anwar. To put it another way, Najwa chooses to stay with Anwar despite his terrible temper and

disrespectful treatment of her because she cannot let go of her past. She mentions that sometimes she does not feel safe with him because he always succeeds in belittling her and accusing her family. This is evident when Najwa says, “I could never feel entirely safe with him. We would be happy and chatting and then suddenly the conversation would twist” (Aboulela 2005, p.163). Najwa has to continuously explain herself when she is with Anwar, with no hope of him believing her. She once mentions, “ I didn’t like the way he studied me, as if I were a puzzle to be figured out. He never looked at me directly. He was always shifting his eyes, but not from shyness, it was something else” (Aboulela 2005, p.170).

Najwa’s decision to stay with Anwar had some bad consequences because Anwar manipulates Najwa and uses her to fulfill his goals in the West, mainly by using her money and body. Although he knows that she is alone in the West with no support or family, he uses her money to complete his studies and leaves her with nothing but guilt and shame. Furthermore, he also commits adultery with her with no intention of marrying her in the future. Zidan (2022) believes that Anwar succeeds in using Najwa’s wealth and body for his own benefit and pays her nothing in return.

Being with Anwar does not erase the feeling of nostalgia and isolation that Najwa suffers from, especially when she understands that he does not intend to marry her and will eventually leave her. Later on, Najwa reflects upon her past and her life decisions and understands that Anwar and her past bring her nothing but destruction. She comes to a conclusion that it is important to find an alternative that can help her overcome her isolation in the West. Additionally, she becomes more aware that she needs to support herself and be strong. Abdullah (2017) states that Anwar triggers some spiritual feelings in the heart of Najwa and makes her want to be innocent and close to God.

Najwa confronts Anwar with the fact that she is changing and willing to become more religious, but he accuses her of being brainwashed by the people in the mosque. She addresses Anwar by saying, “I’ve changed, Anwar” ‘No, you haven’t. You’re just imagining. In the mosque, I feel like I’m in Khartoum again. It’s the atmosphere, the way people [...]” (Aboulela 2005, p. 244). The above quote indicates that being at the mosque gives Najwa a feeling of being at home. It gives her a satisfaction and a sense of acceptance that she lacks in the West. Furthermore, being part of a community resembled by her friends at the mosque helps Najwa overcome the feelings of nostalgia and isolation that she suffers from. She finds a space for herself, where she can easily fit and be accepted by others. By reflecting on Najwa’s past and present in *Minaret*, Aboulela presents Najwa’s experiences for other Arab women in the West to learn and benefit from.

The researcher claims that Aboulela may want to impart on Arab women some ways to deal with nostalgia in the West. She aspires to remind others that when deciding what to take from their past and what to leave behind, they need to learn how to be selective. The past is often preferable to the present, but when there is no chance for improvement, it serves no purpose to look back with regret. Despite having a stable and easy past, Najwa is not enslaved by a past she will never be able to return to.

Later on, Najwa decides to work as a maid in order to support herself and be able to survive in the West. Although she belongs to a rich family in Sudan, she understands that she needs to stop focusing on her past and start thinking of her present. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) state that Najwa is forced later to work as a maid to support herself and earn a living. Hence, Aboulela could be trying to remind Arab women that being strong and economically stable is a crucial element that helps them live and survive in the West. Lamya hires Najwa as a maid and a babysitter for her daughter, and through this, Najwa

feels a different kind of family-related nostalgia in her interactions with Lamya's family. After losing her family, Najwa is desperate to belong to a family to the extent that she once longed to be a maid for Lamya's family because working at their home gives her that feeling of belonging. Zidan (2022) states that Najwa wishes to be their slave as she desires to be reunited with a family and strives to have a secure and stable life. Najwa develops a strong affection towards their family, and this alleviates the feeling of alienation that she suffers from in the West. She gets to experience the beauty of being around a family again, after surviving alone in the West. El Mouti (2019) explains that Najwa's profession as a maid in the West benefits her more emotionally than financially, as it gives her a feeling of belonging to a family. In other words, although being economically stable in the West is important, yet overcoming the feelings of isolation and alienation is just as important.

Najwa envies Lamya because she sees in her what she fails to accomplish in terms of career, success and being able to make a family, saying, "I wish I were like her [...]" (Aboulela 2005, p. 237). The previous quote suggests that Najwa wishes to be like Lamya or at least have what she owns like good education, a stable career and more importantly, being surrounded by a family. In Britain, Najwa continuously tries to belong to a family. However, Anwar does not marry her, and Lamya's family does not accept her either, especially when she starts falling in love with Lamya's younger brother, Tamer. Najwa's relationship with Tamer can also be seen as a kind of nostalgia towards youth. She sees through Tamer her own youth; she even mentions that he reminds her of her past days when she was young and carefree. Through Tamer, Najwa remembers when she was a student at Khartoum University and had nothing to worry about, including money or support. Najwa is moved by nostalgia towards those small details and longs for the emotions she previously felt.

Later, when Tamer begins to resemble everything that Najwa needs, namely family, religion, and youth, she begins to fall in love with him. Tamer also restores her sense of importance, femininity, and worth after years of exile and rejection. Najwa begins to feel important in the presence of Tamer which is something that she lacks in the West. He sees her true self and what makes her special as an individual, rather than looking on how she looks or her role in society. He also views what make them similar like religion and origin instead of seeing what makes Najwa different.

By the end of the novel, and after realizing that Tamer's mother would never approve or bless their marriage, Najwa decides to give up on her dreams of marrying or belonging to a family. She accepts the money from Tamer's mother, leaves Tamer and heads back to her room, accompanied by her Muslim friend and the memories of her past. The researcher maintains that Aboulela aspires to advise Arab women in the West that having a family and getting married are not the only requirements for a happy life. She wants to remind them that sometimes life can be harder than we think, but we should always try to overcome the issues that life in the West introduces.

Another issue that many Arab Muslim women face in the West is based on their appearance, and this is also related to the issue of Islamophobia. Muslims became victims of numerous hate crimes following the 9/11 attacks, and social media helped in portraying Muslims in a negative way. Mahmudul Hasan (2018) claims that, following the 9/11 attacks, social media contributed to the creation of an image of Arabs as being outsiders and a threat to western security and safety. Additionally, Muslims, specifically women, are easily identifiable if they wear the Islamic attire characterized by the headscarf or abaya and this increases the risk of them being targets of hate crimes. According to Perry

(2014), veiled Muslim women are particularly considered desirable and attainable targets for hate crimes.

In *Minaret*, there have been several descriptions of attire and clothes and their effects on society's perception. In the novel's first chapters, there is a comparison between how provincial and capital girls' dress. Najwa dresses more liberally, wearing miniskirts and tight tops, as opposed to provincial girls, who favor *tobes* and scarves. It is evident that no matter where a woman lives or comes from, how she dresses is always judged. Najwa was unable to be friends with those females because of several sociocultural aspects, particularly her social class. She believes that she is liberal and more elite, and this prevents her from being friends with such girls. However, later on, Najwa confesses that she admires the modesty and grace with which provincial girls dress.

What Najwa experiences in Britain, and her new perceptions about Islam and people make her understand that she has mistakenly judged people, including the provincial girls and how they dress. According to Abu Awad (2011), Najwa's experience with exile and poverty alters her prior perceptions of the provincial girls' appearance and behavior. Whereas many other characters, like Najwa's friend Randa and Najwa's boyfriend Anwar, were critical of the way those women dressed and the things they believed in. Additionally, they formed a bad impression about practicing Muslims in general and the veil in particular by referring to them as backward people. Randa also accuses women wearing the Islamic attire of being retarded and backward, claiming that women wearing such clothes are unable to work or perform normal activities like others.

In later stages and after several awakening moments, Najwa decides to start wearing the *hijab*, pray, and visit mosques. She stands in front of the mirror and tries to put the *hijab* on, but her hair is resisting, and her curls are escaping, and when she sees her

reflection in the mirror, she utters: “I didn’t look like myself” (Aboulela 2005, p. 245). This suggests that she is making an effort to wear the *hijab* against her will and that she is still unsure about this decision yet. It was important to include this scene as it resembles the natural and healthy process of wearing the veil, which comes with full contentment.

Later on, Najwa tries the *hijab* again and wears her mother’s *tobe* and is satisfied with what she sees in the mirror. Stanecka (2018) claims that in this scene, Najwa is at last convinced to wear the hijab, and thus marks the conclusion of her journey to discovering the new version of herself. In other words, she is finally aware that wearing the hijab is something that she admires and wants to do willingly without any pressure or judgments. Additionally, she used to continuously feel insecure about the men gazing at her when she passes by the road. However, after wearing the *hijab*, Najwa feels protected from the eyes of those men. KOÇ (2014) states that after wearing the hijab, Najwa was satisfied with experiencing being visible and invisible at the same time. In fact, Najwa is invisible in the eyes of the gazing men who used to stare at her body but is visible in her own eyes.

Aboulela may be trying to deliver through Najwa that choosing to wear hijab is not an easy choice. A woman must feel content in order to wear the hijab appropriately; she should not be coerced into doing so. Later, Najwa starts behaving like other Arab women in the mosque and understands that she needs to be covered in public and can dress the way she wants in front of women or when she is alone. This can be understood when Najwa says, “I liked feeling covered, cosy” (Aboulela 2005, p.160). At the Eid party, Muslim women gather wearing different sorts of clothes, without the presence of hijabs or abayas.

Islamophobia is a challenge that Arab women in the West encounter. It exposes them to becoming targets of hate crimes and attacks. Najwa is attacked on the bus due to her appearance and what she wears. Najwa's hijab serves as a symbol of her religion and belief. Therefore, it makes her a victim of Islamophobia and hate crimes. The enormous differences between East and West in terms of their respective religions, ideologies, and cultural norms act as a kind of chasm that breeds prejudice, discrimination, and hatred. According to Abu Awad (2011), Najwa experienced hostility because of her religion and not merely because she is an Arab living in the West. In other words, her religion, appearance and mainly her head scarf, is what attracts hate crimes and abuse towards her. Rouabhia and Melaikia (2019) claim that Najwa wasn't just furious by the assault; the normalization of the situation simply made her shocked. She realizes that these kinds of abuses are normal and legitimate when she sees that the driver witnesses the attack but does nothing to rescue her. Abu Awad (2011) states that by choosing Islam as her religion, Najwa embraces the possibility of becoming a victim of hate crimes. Deciding to wear the veil in western countries, comes with some consequences that women need to endure, including hate crimes and discrimination, and this is what happens with Najwa. Despite the fact that Najwa's safety and security were threatened, this incident makes her stronger and more mature. Najwa decides to get out of this situation more determined and assured and refuses to surrender.

Aboulela might be attempting to raise awareness about a significant problem that many Arabs in the West encounter through this scene. She also wants to blame the silent witnesses, not only the attackers. Being passive in such a situation is just as awful as perpetrating the assault. In order to illustrate the differences in how people and society see Muslim women, Aboulela presents a character who experiences life in Britain both before and after wearing the veil. Before wearing the veil, Najwa was still an Arab

Muslim woman. However, she never encounters the same issues that she encounters after wearing the veil. According to F. Fiona Moolla (2021), London's streets became more dangerous and threatening to Najwa after she wears the veil and adopts Islam as her religion.

Aboulela is trying to show the reader that Islamophobia and hate crimes are products of the Western media, and as a result, they target Muslims based on the conventional perceptions that people have of them, such as their tendency to wear veils and be covered. Aboulela could be willing to advise other women that despite all the harsh conditions and issues, the need to embrace their religion and complete their journey. Additionally, hate crimes should not stop them or prevent them from seeking a better life in the West.

Another issue that is highlighted in *Minaret* is discrimination in the West. Throughout the novel, Najwa experiences unfair treatment based on how she looks, what she wears, or her role in society. The reader gains an understanding of how individuals begin to treat Najwa unfairly based on specific criteria by comparing Najwa's past and present. To begin with, Najwa suffers from discrimination based on her social class and economic situation. Her life has been impacted greatly after her father's imprisonment and bankruptcy. After losing all their fortune and because of her family's reputation, Najwa and her family practically lose most of their friends and relatives. Najwa once explains that they end up with very a limited number of people around them, including uncle Saleh and his wife, aunt Eva. This is apparent from her words: "Aunty Eva, had been a close friend of my mother, someone who, unlike many others, didn't withdraw from us after what happened" (Aboulela 2005, p.127). Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) state that Najwa was abandoned by her relatives and friends. Despite the fact that Uncle Saleh and his wife initially helped Najwa and her family, later on and, in light of the fact that

Najwa has neither a family nor money, Eva, her uncle's wife, decides to hire Najwa as a maid at her home rather than helping her find a proper job or a source of income and underpays her as well. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, they manage to take advantage of Najwa and do not treat her or pay her what she truly deserves. However, it is important to note that working at her uncle's business and at her aunt Eva's house marks Najwa's first step towards independence and self-reliance.

Working at Aunt Eva's house also helps Najwa overcome nostalgia and alienation by offering her a family and memories of Khartoum. Najwa even mentions that she needs Aunt Eva's gossip about Khartoum to help her overcome her nostalgia when she says, "He didn't understand that I needed her company, needed to hear her gossip about Khartoum, needed to sit within range of her nostalgia." (Aboulela 2005, p.144) Despite all hardships, Najwa is able to come up with something positive out of this incident. She experiences the feeling of being useful and earning her own money. Additionally, this helps her get more work opportunities in the West, and as a result helps her survive on her own. Najwa also tries to adapt to her new life and the standards that are pre-set regarding her new role. She believes that after being a maid, she should train herself to be different than others and more inferior compared to them, this is evident when she says: "I keep my eyes and head lowered like I trained myself to do. This is not my first job; I know how deferential a maid should be" (Aboulela 2005, p.65).

Najwa also experiences mistreatment and discrimination in her new job as a maid at Lamya's house. According to Lamya, her new employer, Najwa is nothing but a maid and inferior to her. Additionally, she never considers Najwa as equal to her or her family. She says, "She will always see my hijab, my dependence on the salary she gives me, my skin color, which is a shade darker than hers. She will see these things and these things

only; she will not look beyond them” (Aboulela 2005, p.116). The previous quote explains the discrimination that Najwa experiences from Lamya, who is unable to understand that Najwa is a strong and self-reliant woman who is trying to survive on her own in the West. KOÇ (2014) states that Lamya looks at Najwa as an obedient and ignorant woman who needs her salary to live in Britain. In her mind, she mistakenly creates a false image that portrays Najwa as a weak creature that needs her help and money to survive. Additionally, she ignores the fact that Najwa is being paid for the work that she does at her house, and this makes her eligible to get this money from Lamya. According to Rouabhia and Melaikia (2019), Lamya creates a stereotypical perception of Najwa. Furthermore, she judges her based on how she looks, her career, and what she wears. It is astonishing that both women are Arab migrant workers in the West. However, Lamya views herself as someone better and more powerful than Najwa.

From Lamya’s perspective, being a housemaid deprives Najwa of her rights to possess a life similar to hers and prevents her from getting married to a member of her family, her brother, who is of a higher social class compared to Najwa. Additionally, although Dr. Zeinab is more polite, considerate, and has a good relationship with Najwa, she does not find it appropriate to allow her son to marry a maid that is older than him. In other words, people typically evaluate one another based on their occupations, ages, or appearances. Najwa is prevented from marrying Tamer just because she works as a maid at their house. Her social class and role serve as a pushing factor that makes his family stand against their marriage.

Although Najwa’s new role is challenging and full of disappointments and issues, she understands that she needs to work in order to be able to survive in the West. She has no problem in working as long as she can support herself. Through this, Aboulela shows

women how to overcome the harsh situations that they are exposed to. Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) state that Najwa is forced later to work as a maid to support herself and earn a living. Hence, Aboulela might be aspiring to emphasize that being strong and economically stable is a crucial element that helps them live and survive in the West. Additionally, Aboulela tries to draw Arab women's attention to the importance of securing a career, regardless of how hard or demeaning it may seem. In addition to that, she wants to pass on a message that there is nothing wrong with working as a maid as long as the woman can earn her living and support herself. She aspires to remind other women that, in some cases, they might need to make some sacrifices for the sake of surviving in the West.

The feeling of being lost and the lack of confidence are other issues that many women might experience in the West. Women should be proud of who they are regardless of how they look, what they do, or what other people may think of them. At the beginning of the novel, the reader might understand that Najwa does not feel proud or self-assured enough. She is constantly in a place where she has to defend herself or explain herself to others. Furthermore, Najwa is unable to identify who she truly is and what she wants in life. At the beginning of the novel, Najwa states that she wants to meet her parents' expectations by completing her education, getting married, and starting a family, which is the pre-set life routine for any rich woman in Sudan and other Arab countries. However, she never actually knows her goals in life or her ambitions without the interference of other people in these decisions. In Sudan, Najwa was a weak woman, to the extent that she adopts her parents' goals as her own without thinking about how she wishes her life to be. Moolla (2021) states that Najwa is an obedient character who expects life to take the natural course for anyone with her same standards without the need to think about a career or personal development. In addition to that, she even considers her studies and her days at

the university as a way to kill time until she gets married. In Sudan, Najwa continuously views her education as a route that she cannot avoid for the sake of her parents and society's expectations, rather than viewing it as something important and a source of strength. KOÇ (2014) states that Najwa believes that her life was already planned for her, so she did not need to consider goals to achieve or paths to take.

In many scenes, Najwa actually utters words like "I was invisible" (Aboulela 2005, p.37), "I don't know what I am becoming" (Aboulela 2005, p.151), which suggests that Najwa experiences the feeling of being lost and unable to determine who she truly is and what she wants in life. Due to Najwa's lack of confidence, she tends to talk and behave in a way that would satisfy the person in front of her, rather than expressing herself openly. Najwa is constantly submissive and weak in her relationship with Anwar, instead of expressing what she truly wants or believes in, she speaks what he wants to hear and even reads what he wants to know about. In addition to that, Najwa tends to believe what other people think about her without doubting their thoughts or trying to prove them wrong. Al-Samakh (2009) states that Najwa believes Anwar when he accuses her of lacking intelligence, which demonstrates her lack of self-assurance and confidence. However, due to the experience of exile that Najwa lives, she understands that none of her previous thoughts or inactions could have been possible in the West. As a result, she is forced to work, take on responsibilities, and plan for the future. Najwa reaches the realization that she needs to rely on herself and be strong in the face of all conditions. In addition to that, she starts viewing herself as a strong woman who is able to embrace her religion, earn her living and survive alone in the West. According to Awajan and Alshetawi (2021), Najwa develops into a woman who appreciates and embraces her religion, as well as a woman who is more self-assured.

The fact that Najwa consents to accepting the money from Tamer's mother further supports the notion that she changes and begins considering her own interests. In other words, she gives up on the dream of getting married, starting a family, and relying on a male character because she realizes that survival and maintaining one's dignity come before what society expects. Furthermore, Najwa finds herself in a circumstance she has never anticipated to be in: she is single, poor, and a devout Muslim living in London and this makes her feel proud that she was able to overcome all harsh situations. Aside from that, Najwa is able to forgive herself despite all the mistakes that she has previously committed, which makes her feel better about herself and her present. Koç (2014) states that Najwa is proud of who she is, regardless of the feeling of guilt that she sometimes suffers from.

This thesis argues that throughout the novel and through different scenes and incidents, Aboulela hopes to impart to other women that change and greater possibilities can only be attained if a woman has confidence in herself and accepts the choices she makes in life. Additionally, she might be willing to convey the idea that marriage and societal expectations are insignificant compared to what a woman genuinely desires. More importantly, Aboulela demonstrates to the reader that life can be occasionally surprising and forces individuals to pursue unexpected pathways that they need to complete until the end and not surrender. Through the incidents that Najwa deals with, it is evident that sometimes women might become disillusioned with their life's ambitions due to societal conventions and expectations. However, when a woman relocates to a different community, she begins to understand who she really is and what her priorities in life are.

The final issue that will be discussed in this section is the idea of freedom in western communities. When Najwa starts interacting with her new culture in Britain, she comes to the conclusion that she is free to do whatever she wants and that no one can blame or judge her. She understands that the British community does not adhere to the same standards and limitations that are in her home country. Furthermore, she realizes that she can make mistakes and behave in a way that she has never behaved before. Najwa starts comparing the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in Sudan and Britain. She says, “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? There was curiosity in me, but not enough to spin me into action” (Aboulela 2005, p.128)

According to the aforementioned quote, Najwa’s behavior in Sudan is constrained by social norms and expectations, but once she is freed from them, she begins to consider defying those expectations and acting differently. She makes it clear, nevertheless, that she wants to experience new things in Britain out of pure curiosity. Najwa’s relationship with Anwar is also different when they move to London. They begin experimenting new things simply because they are unable to do so in their native country. In other words, they were satisfied that they were breaking boundaries and going beyond the conservative society’s limitations. Furthermore, each culture comes with a set of different expectations and limitations, and curiosity drives people to explore new things, as it does with Najwa.

Even when Najwa commits adultery with Anwar, Najwa’s first thought is that no one will be scandalized if she becomes pregnant because she is beyond the restrictions that her society imposes on her. However, in later stages, Najwa realizes that the ultimate freedom brings her destruction, fear, and guilt, so she tries to change this by embracing her religion. According to Awajan and Al Shetwai (2021), Najwa learns from her own

experience that freedom is not what she sought from the beginning, it is religion and discipline that made Najwa find her salvation in the West. She understands that it is not society's restrictions that should prevent her from committing mistakes, but the realization that God can see her anywhere and that religion is her salvation.

Leila Aboulela might be willing to encourage women to absorb the necessity of being strong, self-reliant, and unbreakable regardless of all obstacles and hardships. The variety of issues portrayed in *Minaret* suggests that life in the West is challenging. However, the existence of solutions, also implies that problems can always be resolved. The novel ends with Najwa remembering her past and what she truly longs for. She recalls the voice of her mother, the care she received from her parents, and her jealous brother. This helps the reader understand that Najwa finds solace in her family's memories at the time of her adversity. Koç (2014) clarifies that the novel ends with an optimistic indication from Najwa that, despite all her hardships, and her fever, tomorrow is going to be a better day. Additionally, Najwa mentions that in her dreams, her mother gives her a spoon full of medicine, and this indicates that Najwa is still strong, she intends to use all her power in order to overcome any obstacles.

4.2 Leila Aboulela's Representation of Arab Women's Struggle in the West and the Ways She Provides for Overcoming Such Issues in *Bird Summons*.

Bird Summons is a remarkable piece of art that tackles some significant issues that Arab women in the West encounter in a very unique way. Throughout the novel, Aboulela incorporates many issues that Arab women may face in the West and provides some suggestions of how to overcome such issues. Nostalgia and comparing the past and the present are major issues that the main characters suffer from in this novel. This problem has distinct effects on them. Looking at one's past can sometimes be beneficial and destructive at the same time, which is why Aboulela might be trying to remind Arab

women of how to interact with their past in a way that would benefit them. To begin with, the whole novel revolves around the journey towards Lady Evelyn's grave. The three ladies decide to visit her grave as a way to show respect for a Muslim British woman. The idea of having a role model from the past and the struggle to reach her grave is a lesson that Aboulela aims to entrench in the minds of her readers. In other words, Aboulela wants to remind her readers that sometimes exploring the past and learning from history are crucial to developing one's present. Aboulela displays many scenes that illustrate how the past should be utilized to shape the present and the future. Aboulela also uses the hoopoe bird that communicates with Iman and narrate stories to her. The usage of this kind of bird is also significant, Aboulela is trying to include a bird that was previously mentioned in the Quran and history in her modern literature. Viswanathan (2020), in her review of *Bird Summons*, states that by using the hoopoe bird and the stories and morals it carries, Aboulela could be trying to create a bridge between the past and the present. However, Aboulela also focuses on the negative sides of dwelling on the past. In addition to that, she tries to widen the lens in order to provide different lessons through her main characters.

As a start, the novel begins by giving details about Salma's present and personality. Furthermore, the issue of nostalgia and comparing the past and the present are represented in this novel through Salma's character and behaviors. After marrying David, a British man, and moving with him to Britain, Salma starts experiencing the negative side of being married to a British man and giving birth to British children, alongside the disadvantages of living in the West. The reader realizes later that Salma's past haunts her for a period of time, and this is represented by the appearance of Amir, her ex-boyfriend, in her life. After years of settling in Britain with her husband and children, Salma starts contacting Amir. Furthermore, as she gets to know more about Amir's accomplishments in Egypt,

particularly those related to his clinic, she begins to doubt the decisions that she had previously made and considers how her life would have been different if she had stayed in Egypt and never traveled to Britain. In Egypt, Salma was near her family and in her land, she spoke a language that everyone there would understand and dressed in a way that is familiar to everyone. Additionally, when David was in Egypt and considering the fact that it was Salma's country, she was in charge of everything, like talking to waiters and buying tickets, to prevent people from charging extra money on David, simply because he is a foreigner. All of these details made Salma feel important. However, the case changes in Britain, where Salma starts experiencing being a foreigner, and this is what makes her long for her past and feel nostalgic towards her home and what she owned back there. Amirieh & Arkhagha (2021) argue that Salma experiences a revival of nostalgia towards home after contacting Amir. They also add that Amir reminds her of what she has left behind in her home country and her past in general. Consequently, this remembrance of the past forces Salma to compare her past with her present, which makes her unsatisfied and doubtful. To put it another way, according to Salma, Amir bears a resemblance to her past. After all those years, he makes her remember what she owned back in her home country and what she lacks in her present. In addition to that, when Amir addresses her as "Dr. Salma", she re-considers what she has truly lost by taking the decision to move abroad. Amir assumes that after studying medicine, Salma would undoubtedly become a doctor. However, this does not happen because Salma fails the medical exams in Britain and becomes a massage therapist instead. The fact that Amir becomes a doctor and Salma fails to do so, makes her feel unsatisfied about her life in Britain and long for her country and what she is offered there.

The feelings of nostalgia and the longing for home and the past that Salma experiences are the results of different factors, including society's rejection. Salma

believes that she is in a culture where she is not welcomed and is viewed as an outsider, which makes her life harder in the West. It is worth mentioning that social media and the news contributed to a certain negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims, and these representations became entrenched in the minds of the Western audience, causing Arabs living in the West to suffer. Ittefaq & Ahmad (2018) argue that the academic freedom is being exploited by activists and academics who use it to advance their political agendas and to incite hatred and prejudice against Muslims through different social media platforms. In the novel, Salma's husband, David, was unsatisfied with the news that he was watching about a politician stating that any non-native citizen should be deported from the country. David understands that these kinds of statements and incitements can serve as a brainwashing element and make life even harder for Arabs living in Scotland. Listening to such kinds of statements might influence the psychological health of Arabs living in the West and cause them to feel nostalgic towards their homelands, where they are treated equally and are not seen as strangers. According to Tahir Abbas (2010), Arabs are constantly stereotyped as producers of terrorism and violent crimes. Consequently, they are represented as a threat to the security of the West. It is also important to note that there have been continuous references to social media in this novel to illustrate its importance and influence. Aboulela might be trying to draw people's attention on the importance of differentiating between reality and what is posted or published. In other words, what we see on television and social media platforms about people, ethnicities, and cultures are not always true. Sawicka (2021) argues that what makes social media special and dangerous is that it allows users to share their thoughts and ideas with a wide range of audiences. Additionally, many people have a tendency to propagate lies that other people believe, which contributes to the spread of negative stereotypes and behaviors. Regardless of all that, by the end of the novel, Salma reaches a conclusion that

facing certain challenges, rejections, or sacrifices does not prevent her from completing her journey and acquiring a good life in the West. Aboulela could be willing to clarify that traveling abroad, comes with some consequences that individuals need to bear. In addition to that, she wants people to understand that in any culture, there are good and bad people and that Arabs should stop being anxious about being seen as outsiders in the West. At the end of the novel, Norma, Salma's British mother-in-law, was the one who rescued her from Amir, her Arabic ex-boyfriend. This can suggest that sometimes, Westerners tend to support Arabs and stand by their side. Speaking the same language and bearing the same nationality are not accurate indicators of a relationship's authenticity.

As for Iman, a Syrian woman who escapes the civil war in her home country, and travels to Britain with her husband, she experiences a different sort of nostalgia. The reader gets to understand that neither her past nor her present are perfect, yet she sometimes gives hints that she feels nostalgic towards her home and family. Iman's past helps shape her identity in her present. By concentrating on what Iman has experienced in her life, the reader gets to know that she is still mentally suffering from trauma. She was denied the right to live as a normal child by experiencing civil war and being forced to marry at a young age. At the age of fifteen, Iman gets married to a man who was shortly killed by the government during the uprising against Assad. However, in order to escape the war and start a family, she marries another ambitious man and travels to Britain with him, only to end up divorced and homeless on the streets of London. During these harsh times, and whenever she communicates with her family in Syria, they ask her to stay in Britain and never come back, which triggers the emotion of exclusion and alienation in the heart of Iman. In Yvonne Zipp's review of the novel (2020), she states that regardless of Iman's beauty, she spends most of her life being left out, which makes her feel rejected

even from her own family. Although Iman understands the reasons behind her family's reaction and the harsh conditions that they are going through in Syria, she still believes that going back and being part of a family is still better than staying where she is. This indicates that what she is suffering from in the West in terms of alienation and nostalgia is as bad as being in the middle of a civil war in her home country. According to Amireh and Arkhagha (2021), Iman experiences some hard times being a Syrian refugee in Britain and feels rejected by her own family. To put it another way, Iman does not feel that she belongs to any country or family anymore. She feels excluded by both cultures, and this makes her experience alienation and nostalgia. What Iman experiences is similar to what Edward Said mentions in his books in relation to exile and displacement. According to Said (2000), an Arab in diaspora might feel like a prisoner who is unable to return to his home, and this is exactly what happens with Iman. She feels trapped in Britain with no hope of escaping. After getting divorced for the second time, Iman reflects on her past and previous traumas. She remembers her country before and after the war. She remembers how children used to play in alleys, the village life, and the cooking of women. However, war replaces all of that with bombs, pain, and fear. Iman believes that during the war, she was the wrong age, and this makes her suffer even more. She was too young to bear on responsibility but too old to get the care and attention that were reserved for children. Consequently, she believes that she is something unnecessary and is always excluded. In addition to that, she starts thinking of herself as someone invaluable for her country and people after acquiring the status of a Syrian refugee in Britain. Later on, she discovers that she can still be of use to herself and her family by being strong, working, and surviving in the West. By comparing Iman's past and her present, Aboulela wants women to remember that the West should never be seen as a place to escape harsh circumstances. She wants them to understand that in the West, they will need to undergo

a different sort of challenges that requires strength and patience. Additionally, through the character of Iman, Aboulela conveys a message that indicates that the past should never stop individuals from progressing. Although Iman's past was full of obstacles, she never quits trying.

The issue of nostalgia and comparing the past and the present is reflected differently in Moni's case. In the past, Moni was a successful woman who had a good banking career, a healthy body, and a balanced life. However, after marrying Murtada and giving birth to her disabled son, Adam, everything in Moni's life changes. She starts gaining weight, and gives up on everything she previously possessed, including her career and normal daily routine. She dedicates her whole life for the sake of her own child, to the extent that she forgets herself and her husband. In addition to that, she stops thinking of her future and is stuck with her present and with her son's condition. When Murtada brings up the topic of moving to Saudi Arabia, Moni refuses, claiming that staying in Britain is better for the sake of her child. Furthermore, she admits later that Murtada was right when he accused her of not considering their future, this is evident when she says, "Life was about getting through each day; it was no longer about futures" (Aboulela 2019, p.25).

Nostalgia and the feeling of being excluded leads to the idea of unity and the importance of finding a community. It can't be denied that sometimes unity is very important, to overcome alienation and nostalgia in the West. The three ladies are part of the Arabic speaking Muslim women's group, and this proves the importance of being part of a group that shares your same language or beliefs in a country where everything seems odd and new. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the idea of unity was examined in this novel, specifically, when the three ladies start to quarrel about their dissimilarities. Each one of them refrains from seeing her own flaws and spots the mistakes of the other,

which increases the gap between them and causes their friendship to crack. Salma and Iman blame Moni for disobeying her husband, Moni and Salma blame Iman for taking off her hijab and finally, Moni and Iman blame Salma for cheating on her husband and contacting Amir. To sum up, it is important to note that although the women were harsh to each other in terms of giving advice, they had good intentions to support one another. During their journey to Lady Evelyn's grave, the three women start encountering some magical occurrences that end in a magical transformation that each of them experiences and makes them understand the importance of friendship and unity. This magical transformation forces them to rely on one another to find a way out. As a result of the transformation, their relationship begins to mend. In other words, the transformation makes them realize that union, friendship, and support are important, especially in the West. By the end of the novel, the three ladies were able to survive only when they believed in unity. According to Amirieh & Arkhagha (2021), the three women were able to leave the forest and their anxieties behind when they decided to unite. Aboulela might be trying to guide other Arab women by showing them that collectivity and being part of a community are important in overcoming the feelings of exclusion and alienation. It also contributes to making life in the West easier and more bearable. Additionally, she wants Arab women to understand that friendship is important and that women need to support one another in the West.

Another issue that was represented in this novel was discrimination against Arabs in the West. Through the struggles of different characters, Leila Aboulela was able to resolve this issue in a very unique way. Different types of discrimination are introduced in the novel, like discrimination in terms of education, work, and race. It is worth mentioning that binary opposition can be considered as one of the important reasons that leads to discrimination against a certain group. Said (1978) believes that the comparison between

the East and the West encourages prejudice and discrimination against the East. Additionally, these differences were presented to create an image that portrays the East as an inferior entity and allow westerners to embrace their superiority over the East.

Discrimination in education was represented by the condition of Salma in the West. Back in her home country, she was acknowledged as a legitimate doctor. However, when she travels to the West, her academic credentials are no longer important or valid. As an Arab who graduated from an Arabic university, Salma was forced to undergo certain exams in order for the Westerners to approve and recognize her as a doctor in their country. After failing the exam, a couple of times, Salma eventually transitions from being a licensed doctor in her native country to working as a massage therapist in Scotland. This issue makes Salma feel worse and more excluded. Furthermore, she starts looking at the West as a place that buries her dreams and deprives her of her rights. Moreover, this makes Salma question the fairness of this culture and whether she belongs here or not. It is important to note that even Moni was skeptical about Salma's ability to provide her child with a professional massage simply because she is not British. She was unsure that an Arabic massage therapist would be qualified and professional, this can be noticed from the following quote: "Surely, Moni thought, Salma would neither be as professional nor as qualified as her British counterparts" (Aboulela 2019, p.30). The aforementioned quote suggests that people have the misconception that Westerners are more knowledgeable and skilled than Arabs and can do better in their jobs. El-Enany (2014) states that due to the European enlightenment and the advancement in science and technology in Europe, Arabs look up to Europeans with admiration. However, later on, Salma was able to prove to Moni that she was professional and trust-worthy and was able to deal with her son's condition. Although being a massage therapist was not Salma's dream, and she does not feel proud while doing it, by the end of the novel she discovers

that doing her job professionally and her ability to help people with the knowledge and skills she has eventually help her. When Norma rescues Salma, she tells her that she had previously helped her by giving her a free massage, which helps in relieving her pains and aches. Consequently, Norma wants to repay the favor that Salma once did, so she rescues her. Through this, Aboulela draws her readers' attention to the importance of valuing the work that individuals do. It is important that people feel proud of what they do. Additionally, although Salma failed to become a doctor, she managed to help people and earn their trust and gratitude, and this is what counts.

Murtada, Moni's husband, is another character who suffers from discrimination in the field of work. The novel starts by stating that when Moni first met Murtada, she describes him as a man full of ambition and dedication towards his job. However, this was not enough. He feels excluded and unwanted in the West, and makes the decision to move to Saudi Arabia in order to find a better job and a better opportunity to be around people who respect his religion, attire, and work. Furthermore, in his phone call with Moni, and when she asks him to return to Britain, he makes it clear that finding a job in Britain is not easy for an Arabic man like him. In addition to that, he believes that he and his family are seen as a burden on the NHS system that provides the medical care for Adam, and he does not like this feeling. Amirieh & Arkhagha (2021) state that Murtada feels inferior in Britain, and this is what makes him refuse to come back to the West and join Moni and his son. What Murtada experiences is an example of the kind of binary opposition that exists between the East and the West and the discrimination it creates. He has not been given the same rights or opportunities, simply because he is not a westerner. According to Staszak (2009), one of the major dilemmas that colonialism created is the duality of the "self" and the "other". In other words, the distinction between "us" vs. them creates endless issues of prejudice and discrimination against Arabs. Being an Arab in the

West makes Murtada suffer because he is not one of them and is an outsider to the westerner culture. On the other hand, Moni either prevents herself from feeling discriminated against or is indulged in caring for Adam to the extent that she would tolerate all those feelings for his sake. In Christine Dezelar-Tiedman's review of *Birds Summons* (2020), she states that Moni refuses to join her husband in Saudi Arabia for the sake of caring for her disabled son in Britain. However, at some point, she asks herself if Adam feels bad that he is the only "black" child in his nursery. This kind of incident indicates that sometimes some migrants are forced to endure and suffer discrimination in order to get a benefit in return, like medical care, money, or a safe place to live in. However, not everyone has the same tolerance for living in a place that constantly reminds them that they are seen as outsiders taking advantage of their land.

Arabs living in the West also deal with the issue of raising children in the West. There is a rift between parents and their children when a child is raised in a culture that is different from the one in which the parents were raised in. The reader of *Bird Summons* may learn that this issue is presented in two different ways. The first problem arises when both parents are of Arabic descent but reside in the West, while the second problem occurs when the parents come from two different cultural backgrounds. Majeed and El-Baqiry (2016) argue that Arab families migrating to the West might face different sorts of obstacles when raising their children abroad. However, it is crucial to understand their needs and provide them with the support they need.

Salma's personality and the way she interacts with her family exemplify this problem. Salma endures a period of suffering because she is married to a Scottish man and has British children. She can't figure out how to deal with them in the best way. In addition to that, she is continuously complaining about the deterioration of her

relationship with her children. She forces herself to believe that she is an outsider who is not welcomed in this society or this family either. In Yvonne Zipp's review of the novel (2020), she states that Salma feels that her husband and children might feel embarrassed by her because she is not British enough. She keeps making an effort to belong to this country in an attempt to strengthen her roots, despite her origins and language. In addition to that, Salma is afraid that one day her children will blame their father for choosing to marry an Arab woman instead of finding a woman who shares their language and culture. The feeling of being a stranger in the West, even in the presence of one's own family, can make a person suffer, and this is exactly what happens with Salma. She does not like the fact that there are a small number of similarities between her and her children compared to those similarities between the children and their father. She mentions that, although she comprehends every word they speak, whenever she walks into a room and sees her children talking with David, she feels that she does not understand a word they are saying. She continuously feels that her children and her husband resemble one unit and she is an outsider that cannot understand their jokes, speeches, or thoughts. Furthermore, she also has anxieties about whether her children will ever view Egypt the way they view Britain. It makes Salma feel bad that her children will never have the same memories that she has of Egypt.

To make things worse, Salma starts interfering in the decisions of her children, and this makes her relationship with them even worse. The fact that Salma was unable to pursue her dream of being a doctor in the West triggers Salma's emotions and makes her want her daughter to accomplish what she has failed to do. According to Roumayssa (2021), the discrimination issue that Salma experiences results in her being distant from her own children due to the fact that she is not giving them the freedom to choose what to study. By putting pressure on her daughter to follow in her footsteps and complete what

she has started, Salma seeks to reclaim what she had previously lost in the West. Abudi (2011) states that usually in Arab families, the mother-daughter relationship is strong, and both the mother and the daughter share many things in common. However, this is not the case with Salma's relationship with her daughter. The different cultures that they are raised in make the differences between them huge and creates many issues that prevent them from maintaining a good relationship. In addition to that, the concept of freedom might be different among various cultures. In Arabic cultures, it might be normal for parents to interfere in their children's lives. However, in Western cultures, this is not acceptable. Salma is struggling to understand that she needs to treat her children differently from how her parents treated her in the past, this can be noticed through the following quote: "They would not be subservient to her as she had been to her parents" (Aboulela 2019, p. 209). She is unable to understand that the cultural differences force her to reconsider her parenting style. Additionally, she believes that she sacrifices her life for the sake of her children, and it makes her feel unsatisfied that they refuse to obey her.

The distant relationship between Salma and her children makes her search for alternatives. She begins to practice motherhood on her younger friend Iman. Salma perceives a void in her relationship with her kids, but Iman fills it. She shares her same language, culture, and thoughts, and this makes Salma feel better. Furthermore, Iman gives Salma the indication that she will always need her help and her interference in her life. She is dependent on Salma and continuously needs her guidance. Roumayssa (2021) states that by guiding Iman and interfering in her life, Salma fills the void that her children have created. From the beginning of the novel, Salma was introduced as a control freak who enjoys being a leader. However, Salma undergoes a surgery that is performed by Amir, her previous boyfriend. This surgery makes her lose her muscles and transforms her into a flat individual that cannot move normally and needs the help of others to move

from one place to another. Salma's transformation is significant because it goes against her personality and makes her face her worst fear. From the beginning of the novel, Salma was always presented as the leader who gives orders. However, at this point, she needs her friends and their help to overcome this issue. Later, Salma comes to the realization that she cannot control anyone's life, not even her own children. Salma was also able to understand her mistakes with her children and with everyone else around her after the remarkable metamorphosis that she experiences. By the end of the novel, Salma was capable of recognizing her mistakes and confronting her anxieties. She understands that, regardless of whether her children belong to Britain or Egypt, they are still going to be her children who respect her. Furthermore, she finally understands that through her children, she is part of the Western culture and its history. Englund (2020), states that Salma understands that there is a binding connection between her and the country that she lives in, especially that her children carry this country's blood in their veins, and as a result, she is also one of them, regardless of her place of birth or the language she speaks. In addition to that, it can be argued that Salma was finally able to reach the "third space" that Homi Bhabha mentions in his writings. According to Bhabha (1994), the Third Space is a sort of a "metaphorical space" that depends on the combination of two or more different cultures and results in the creation of a "Third space" that can be called home. In other words, by the end of the novel, Salma was able to understand how to embrace both cultures and how to adapt and fit in the West.

Moni's case is also related to the issue of raising children in the West. However, her case is different from Salma's, as Adam's parents are from the same culture. The main issue that arises from the situation is the conflict of interests between Moni and her husband. Murtada, Moni's husband, wants to relocate and move to Sudan. However, all that Moni can think of is her disabled son, so she refuses to obey him. Moni was oblivious

to the fact that she is part of a family of three people, not just her son and herself. Furthermore, this was the source of the majority of her problems. Richard Marcus (2020), in his review of *Bird Summons*, clarifies that, in Moni's journey to be a good mother, she forgets to be part of society or family. She pushes away her husband and friends and decides to suffer on her own. At the end of the day, Moni was unable to adapt to her son's condition in a healthy manner and devotes her entire life to caring for him. It is important to note, that although Moni is trying to be a good mother, she is still unable to adapt to her new situation and deal with it in a logical way. During one counseling session that Moni has, she is informed that the ideas that cross her mind in relation to self-harm are indicators that she is exhausted, stressed, and unable to adapt. In addition to the challenges of raising children in the West, Moni is also dealing with the challenges of having a disabled son as well. In other words, she has to deal with more than one challenge at the same time. She reaches to a realization that staying in Britain is the best choice for her child. Additionally, she keeps remembering the negative sides of living in an Arabic country and the hard time that she has when she travels to Sudan for a holiday. People in Sudan are unkind to Adam. Furthermore, the medical system there is corrupt and bad, and this makes her cling to the decision of staying in the West. Roumayssa (2021), states that due to the fact that the medical field is very developed in the West, Moni refuses to leave Britain and join her husband in Saudi Arabia. Later in the novel, the reader gets to know that Moni's main problem is sacrificing her whole life for the sake of her son. During the journey towards Lady Evleyn's grave, Moni begins to remember what she is capable of doing apart from her role as a mother. Very simple activities like running, singing, and having fun are basic activities that Moni lacks in her new life as a mother and a caregiver for Adam. It seems as though her body is transformed into a tool to help Adam and satisfy his needs only, this can be understood from the following sentence, "Her body was an

instrument for tending Adam, a piece of equipment for carrying, feeding and bathing him.” (Aboulela 2019, p.97)

Due to the fact that Moni’s son is different, she decides to isolate herself from society, friends, and even her husband. However, being different should not force people to isolate themselves from society. Arabs in the West have always been considered “different” and “other,” yet they should always try to belong and not isolate and surrender. Moni’s journey with the ladies is her first step towards adaptation and change as well. She accepts leaving her son in the nursery and spends some time with the ladies. However, whenever she tries to focus on her life, she gets interrupted by the needs of her son. Throughout the journey, Moni meets a small boy who looks like her son, Adam. She spends the entire trip looking and caring for him to the extent that she forgets to do anything else, and this marks her relapse. She accompanies him everywhere and shows him some pictures of her son; she admits that she does not like showing Adam’s pictures to anyone. She believes that no one likes Adam and feels proud of him, even his own family and grandparents. However, the transformation that she encounters serves as a lesson that she needs to understand. Moni is turned into a ball in the hands of Adam. This transformation serves as a reminder that she is wasting her own life entertaining her child and keeping him busy instead of actually helping him or helping herself or her family. Furthermore, a ball is round, meaning all its faces are the same, and it keeps rolling until it bumps up against a certain object. This can be applied to Moni’s personality, where she is floundering to find a way out. In addition to that, she is captivated in a loop that revolves around her child only, and she is unable to see, experience, or live anything else apart from being a mother of a disabled child. On the other hand, the transformation into a ball can resemble flexibility. Amirieh and Arkhagha (2021) clarify that Moni’s transformation into a ball represents her flexibility to adapt and indicates that her future would be better as a hybrid

migrant. This might serve as a sort of foreshadowing that Moni would be able to finally adapt to her new situation as a mother. Aboulela might be trying to guide Arab women on how to focus on their lives and be freed from any constraints. In other words, women should be more than just a mother, sister, or a support system to anyone. In addition to that, there is no harm in being both a good mother and a female who focuses on her life and personal achievements.

Being judged based on one's outside appearance is another issue that many Arabs in the West encounter. People constantly judge each other based on what they wear, whether they are Muslims or not. There are numerous references in *Bird Summons* to various clothing styles and their effects on people and society.

The theme of attire and costumes is perfectly rendered by the character of Iman and what she has been through. In her four marriages, Iman is always forced to change the way she dresses based on the man she is married to and what he favors. Previously, she was asked to dress like her mother or how other women in the village dressed; in her second marriage, she is asked to wear more religious clothes and in her most recent marriage, her husband tells her to dress like Salma. In reality, she is never in a position to decide what to dress or how to present herself. Later, Iman finds a cupboard full of different costumes, and each day she tries a new one. She believes that the costume she wears affects how she behaves and feels. Additionally, each costume has a unique set of behaviors associated with it. By trying on different costumes, Iman starts doubting and questioning the reasons behind wearing the hijab or dressing in a certain way. Being able to switch between costumes, styles, and behaviors gives Iman a feeling of being liberated and self-assured. Later on, Iman decides to take off her hijab when she understands that wearing the hijab was never her own choice. According to Koura (2016), Arab women in

the West tend to wear the hijab, assuming that it fulfills their religious identity. Additionally, wearing the hijab should resemble individuality and liberty by willingly choosing to wear it. Being forced to wear the hijab resembles the exact opposite, and it makes women believe that they are weak and obedient. After experiencing the beauty of freedom, Iman thinks that she no longer wants to be captivated by any limitations or social constraints. Amirieh & Arkhagha (2021) argue that taking off the hijab helps Iman be more self-aware and freer. Although taking off the hijab is not a way to represent freedom, to Iman it resembles her first step towards freedom by refuting what is expected of her and not what she actually wants. Taking off the hijab is not an easy decision to make, but when Iman decides to take it off, it is an indication that she wants to change into a person who is able to take a decision and be independent. Through all of this, Aboulela is attempting to remind women that costumes and attire do not define who we actually are. Furthermore, she is trying to pass on a message that women should never be forced to wear the veil. Wearing an abaya, a veil, shorts, or skirts is a personal choice that should not be turned into a way to categorize and judge women. She aspires to emphasize on the idea that forcing people into performing certain actions will eventually backfire.

Being lost and the lack of independence are other issues that were examined in this novel. It is important to note that in literature, Arab women have been portrayed in a negative way. According to Hansson and Henriksson (2013), Arab women are usually represented as weak and obedient. However, Leila Aboulela succeeds in taking this image to another stage where she shows the reader the development of Arab women from being weak to becoming strong and independent. From the beginning of the novel, Iman is described as a woman who is weak, lost, and needs the support of others to get her things done. Additionally, she is struggling with her identity and does not know what she needs in life. According to Erikson (1994), the process of immigration and leaving one's

homeland involves not only changing countries but also involves having multiple identities that are shattered between the host country and the homeland. Iman's immigration towards the West makes her question her identity and sense of belonging. However, the reader might note that Iman's trip to Lady Evelyn's grave is a journey toward self-understanding and identity formation. In her review of *Bird Summons*, Cosslett (2019) states that Iman is never given the chance to build her own identity, and it is always shaped and developed by patriarchal interference or by religion. It is worth mentioning that Iman's past is full of decisions taken on her behalf by others. She did not willingly choose to be married at a young age or wear the hijab, and she is never given the chance to choose on her own. When Iman was introduced to her first suitor, her mother says "no negotiations" (Aboulela 2019, p.19), which indicates that her views and opinions were worthless to her family. Additionally, Iman constantly relies on her beauty to secure new possibilities throughout her life. Viswanathan writes in her review of *Bird Summons* (2020) that Iman realizes later that her beauty is insufficient and would not allow her to gain a stable and secure life. Iman's goal in the West is to bring her mother over and help her escape the war in Syria, but she is unable to do that because she is waiting for others to fulfill her dreams and accomplish her goals. She believes that she needs to rely on a husband for both emotional and financial support. However, she understands later that relying on others is not enough; she needs to rely on herself in order to survive and help her mother. In the West and after three failed marriages, Iman is finally able to understand her identity and recognize what she truly wants and what she is capable of doing. She grows confident enough to stand in front of Salma and announce her independence when she tells her, "I want to be independent" (Aboulela 2019, p.207). By the end of the novel, Iman starts deliberately thinking about her independence and

future by searching for a job and thinking of ways to overcome her issues and accomplish her goals.

In addition to the concept of the lack of independence that Iman suffers from, Aboulela presented another issue by using the character of Iman. This issue revolves around the idea of getting to know the host country and learning its language. The reader understands later in the novel that Iman's English language is poor and this prevents her from interacting with people in the West. An Arab migrant in the West should not expect an easy life without learning the language of the host country. Although it represents an issue, overcoming this issue is considered a necessity rather than a luxury. Iman is visited by a hoopoe bird that tends to tell her stories, fables, and morals. Renfro (2020), in her review of *Bird Summons*, states that the Hoopoe bird weaves stories that combine both Muslim and Scottish cultures. This indicates that hybridity should be addressed by learning from both cultures and mingling in both rather than clinging to the individual's origins only. At a later stage, the Hoopoe bird decides to narrate the stories using his mother tongue and not the language that Iman understands. She notices that animals are understanding each other, but she is unable to figure out what they are saying. This situation resembles Iman's case in the West, where she is in a place where she can't understand the language. Arkhagha & Amirieh (2021) argue that this incident makes Salma aware that she needs to improve her English language skills in order to inhabit the place that she currently lives in. In addition to that, the magical transformation that happens to Iman plays a major role in her awakening. Iman is transformed into a weird creature that is a mixture of a mammal and a reptile. Throughout the novel, she keeps referring to nature as her salvation, but this transformation makes her a creature that is not known or understood. The transformation reflects Iman's own struggle with knowing who she really is or constructing a unique identity that is respected by others.

Furthermore, this transformation sheds light on Iman's issues and forces her to confront them. A plant, a creature, or anything related to nature might look nice, but this is not enough.

By the end of the novel, the three women had been able to overcome most of their issues and fears. The journey towards Lady Evleyn's grave makes them realize their flaws and fears and forces each one of them to confront those fears. Moni is able to go beyond the pre-set limitations that she had in mind in terms of her capability and body. She manages to walk further than she has expected and this might be an indication that she is willing to change, adapt, and be better towards herself and others. Additionally, despite all odds, Salma is able to reach Lady Evleyn's grave alone. This suggests that she is capable of reaching her goals in terms of belonging to Britain. Finally, although Iman does not reach Lady Evleyn's grave, she is able to understand how to be an independent woman by looking for a job. The "help wanted" sign that Iman sees at the hostel resembles a sign addressed to her that reminds her that she can be helpful and independent. Furthermore, she reaches to a realization that she can be feminine and strong at the same time.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion And Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

To conclude, Leila Aboulela makes an effort to broaden the focus and draw awareness on problems that Arab women might encounter in the West. Both novels depict Arab women's journeys to the West and the various kinds of challenges they are exposed to. The main characters in both novels had to deal with a variety of problems, starting with developing nostalgia for their native countries and drawing comparisons between their past and their present. The novels show different experiences with nostalgia and introduces ways to overcome it in a healthy way.

The issue of discrimination in the field of work and education is another issue that is presented in these novels. This issue is highlighted through the characters of Najwa, Salma and Murtada, who suffer from different types of discrimination and are not offered the same level of education or a position based on their race, ethnicity or religion. However, the author makes it clear that rage and dissatisfaction are not the appropriate responses to such issues. Both discrimination and nostalgia are problems that require logical and rational solutions. Additionally, both stories realistically depict the problem of raising children in the West. Leila Aboulela demonstrates to the reader how certain behaviors could widen the gap between parents and their children. Furthermore, the novels also discuss ways of overcoming certain issues and the consequences of certain parenting styles on the child and his parents.

Islamophobia is also one of the major issues that many characters in both novels suffer from. In the West, Islamophobia has resulted in many abusive attacks and hate

crimes against Muslims. Additionally, the author clarifies some reasons behind the spread of islamophobia and hate crimes in general. Najwa in *Minaret* was one of the victims of hate crimes. Her veil and the way she dress makes her a suspect and a target of these attacks. However, this makes her cling more to her religion and endeavor to embrace it even more. On the other hand, it can't be denied that this issue develops a feeling of rejection in the hearts of Arab migrants in general. The feeling of being a suspect makes Arab women's lives harder in the West. However, the novels demonstrate ways to overcome such issues. Aboulela succeeds in portraying the Arab Muslim women's struggle in the West. On the other hand, regardless of all the issues that Arab women might encounter in the West, the novels examine different ways of overcoming these issues and ways to maintain a strong identity abroad.

Through her fiction, Leila Aboulela was creative enough to impart other Arab women's experiences that her readers could find helpful. She managed to use her own experience as an Arab immigrant to create fascinating literary works that many other females can relate to and understand. Real creativity requires a strong imagination that can transform fiction into lessons that motivate and inspire readers.

The first advice that Aboulela portrayed in her novels was related to the nostalgic feelings that Arab women in the West might encounter. She inserts different live experiences that the reader can feel and sympathize with. Her aim is to portray to other women that regrettably reflecting on the past does not help in developing the present. In other words, women should concentrate on their present and leave the past behind. The first step of focusing on the present requires knowing more about the host country and its language and this is what Iman failed to do. Through the character of Iman, Leila

Aboulela wanted to guide Arab women and encourage them to learn the language of the host country in order to adapt and fit in the West.

Aboulela also delivers a crucial lesson that is linked to attire, costumes and outside appearances. She clarifies that the way that people dress has always been judged by others and is considered a way to categorize and label people. However, this should not be the case. In *Bird Summons*, Aboulela uses the character of Iman to demolish this image and remind people that attire and costumes should never define who we are. Aboulela wants to remind the world that they need to stop judging Muslims for what they wear and to start seeing them for who they really are.

Aboulela also strives to impart an important lesson in the minds of her female readers, which is linked to male-dominated societies. She was able to introduce examples of how women are capable of surviving in the West without the need for a male character in their lives. In addition to that, she also managed to give examples of how sometimes the interference of a male in a woman's life might bring her destruction, pain, and misery, and this can be noticed from the stories of Najwa and Iman in both novels.

Last but not least, the novels end by the idea of unity. Through that, Leila Aboulela is trying to guide Arab women in the West, that unity is sometimes important to overcome certain issues in the West including the feeling of nostalgia and exclusion. On the same line, Leila Aboulela wants to guide other Arab women that although unity is important, yet independence is also crucial to being able to survive in the West. She wants women to understand that they are capable of making a difference and that they should not always rely on others or wait for them to accomplish their own goals.

3. Compare and contrast between the guidance that Leila Aboulela represents in both novels.

As mentioned earlier, both novels serve as an extension to what Arab women encounter in the West and the guidance and pieces of advice that the author is trying to provide her readers with. *Minaret*, provides the reader with suggested lessons from the perspective of one main character and what she encounters in the West. However, in *Bird Summons*, the reader is exposed to more than one character and is able to trace their development and spot the lessons behind each incident that they encounter. The guidance in *Minaret* revolves mainly around the new life that Najwa is experiencing in the West compared to her previous luxurious past. Through *Minaret*, Leila Aboulela aims to encourage women to stay strong regardless of what happens around them. Additionally, it can be noticed that the sole idea is about individualism and how to maintain a strong identity in the West.

Furthermore, in this novel, Aboulela tries to guide women to survive on their own in the West. Whereas, in *Bird Summons*, the case is different because the idea of unity is introduced. While *Minaret* demonstrates how one woman may survive in the West on her own, *Bird summons* illustrates how women's unity can help in overcoming harsh situations in the West. It is noticeable that the three ladies relied on each other to gain support and be able to survive and adapt abroad. In addition to that, *Minaret* portrays general issues that any Arab migrant might suffer from like Islamophobia. However, *Bird Summons* tends to dig deeper and deals with more controversial topics like raising children in the West, social media and discrimination.

The guidance in *Bird Summons* is also different because it focuses on families' issues in the West and not just individual issues that certain people might encounter. The reader is introduced to different families and different issues that those families encounter. It tackles different issues like health care, marriage, divorce, hybrid identities and many

other issues that requires guidance to overcome it. Arab migrants in general are in need of this kind of guidance that can help them endure a new experience like migration, and this is what Leila Aboulela sought to achieve in her novel *Bird Summons*. In both novels the reader is able to come up with important lessons but *Bird Summons* can be considered as a more advanced fiction that aims to guide and support women abroad.

5.2 Recommendations:

1. More studies should be done on how Leila Aboulela's style of writing has changed.
2. More studies should be done tackling the role of *hijab* and religion in the West
3. More studies should be done on the role of the magical transformation and its significance on the character's identities in *Bird Summons*.
4. More studies should be done about Arab Western women's strength and limitations in both novels.
5. More studies should be done on the role of unity and sisterhood in *Bird Summons*.
6. More studies should be done tackling the theme of reality vs. appearance in *Bird Summons*.

REFERENCES:

- Abdulla, R. A. (2007). Islam, jihad, and terrorism in post-9/11 Arabic discussion boards. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(3), 1063-1081. <https://doi.org/10.1111>
- Abudi, D. (2010). *Mothers and daughters in Arab women's literature: The family frontier*. BRILL.
- AL- A'bed, M. (2017). *Deconstructing Western Feminism: Modern Eastern Women from an Arab Feminist Perspective* [Master's thesis, Middle East University]. <https://meu.edu.jo/libraryTheses>
- Al-Asmakh, S. (2009). *Politics of Identity in Multicultural Settings: A Literary Analysis of Leila Aboulela's Novels, The Translator and Minaret*. <http://amalalmalki.com/journal/>
- Ameri, F. (2012). *Veiled experiences: Rewriting women's identities and experiences in contemporary Muslim fiction in English* [doctoral dissertation, Murdoch University]. Murdoch University Research Repository. <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/10197>
- Ancellin, K. (2009). Hybrid Identities of Characters in Muslim women fiction post 9-11. *TRANS-*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.344>
- Arkgha, L., & Awad, Y. (2021). Faith, identity and magical realism in Leila Aboulela's *Bird Summons*. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 12(4), 115.
- Awad, Y. (2011). *Cartographies of Identities: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers* [PhD Dissertation, The University of Manchester]. The University of Manchester digital repository. <https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk>
- Awajan, N. (2018). *Cultural trends in contemporary diasporic Arab women's fiction* [Doctoral dissertation, The university of Jordan]

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture (Routledge Classics) (Volume 55)*.

Routledge.

Blakeman, H. (2014). *The Muslim Veil in America: A Symbol of Oppression or Empowerment?* [Honors Thesis, University of Maine – Main]. University of Maine digital repository. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/honors/150>

Chambers, C. (2009). An Interview with Leila Aboulela. *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 3(1), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cww/vpp003>

Chambers, C. (2011). *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Cosslett, R.L. (2019, April 12). Three Muslim women embark on a Scottish pilgrimage in a tale that combines religious insight and Celtic myth [review of the novel *Bird summons*, by L.Aboulela]. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/>

DeZelar-Tiedman, C, (2020). “Fiction.” *Library Journal*. p.77.

Driss Ridouani. (2011). The Representation of Arabs and Muslims in Western Media. *RUTA: Revista Universitària De Treballs Acadèmics*, 3, 7–15.

El Mouti, S. (2019). *Orientalizing and Occidentalizing: Identity, Place and Displacement in Lela Aboulela's Minaret*. pp. 1-11

El Ouardi, F., & Sandy, K. (2019). Third World Women Representation in Western Feminist Discourse: A Critical Study. *Arab World English Journal for Translation and Literary Studies*, 3(1), 127–135. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no1.10>

El-Enany, R. (2014). *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction*. Routledge.

- Englund, L. (2020). Toward postmigrant realities in Leila Aboulela's *Elsewhere, Home*. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. <https://doi.org/10.1177>
- Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity Youth and Crisis*. WW Norton.
- Fard, S. (2016). A Short Introduction to Literary Criticism. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 328–337.
- Fatima, M., & Rouabhia, S. (2019). *Muslim Arab Women: The Sense of In-betweenness in Leila Aboulela's Novel Minaret* [Master's dissertation, University of Guelma]. University of Guelma digital repository. <http://dspace.univ-guelma.dz>
- Fazel, A. A., Sarmad, A. A. (2021). The Question of Hybridity and the Possibility of Retaining Islamic Identity in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*. *Multicultural education*, 7(3), 30. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4569126>
- García, S. (2019). *Confronting stereotypes and seeking for fulfilment in the host land: an analysis of Muslim female characters in Aboulela's Elsewhere, Home*. [Bachelor's thesis, University of the Balearic Islands]. University of the Balearic Islands repository. <http://hdl.handle.net/11201/152511>
- Hansson, J., & Henriksson, M. (2013). *Western NGOs representation of "Third World women"* [Bachelor's thesis, University West]. University West repository. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash>
- Harb, S. (2012). Arab American Women's Writing and September 11: Contrapuntally and Associative Remembering. *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, 37(3), 13-41. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mel.2012.0044>
- Hasan, M. M. (2015). Seeking Freedom in the "Third Space" of Diaspora: Muslim Women's Identity in Aboulela's *Minaret* and Janmohamed's *Love in a Headscarf*. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 35(1), 89–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080>

- Idriss, M. M., & Abbas, T. (2011). *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam* (1st ed.). Routledge-Cavendish.
- Ittefaq, M. & Ahmad, T. (2018). Representation of Islam and Muslims on social media: A discourse analysis of Facebook. *Journal of Media Critiques*, 4(13), 39-52. <https://doi.org/10.17349/jmc118103>
- Koç, N. (2014). *Representation of British Muslim identities in Leila Aboulela's Minaret and Nadeem Aslam's maps for lost lovers*/ [Master's dissertation, Middle East technical university]. Middle East Technical University digital repository.
- Koura, F. (2016). Hijab in the Western Workplace: Exploring Islamic Psychotherapeutic Approaches to Discrimination. *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Science*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.15640/jpbs.v4n2a7>
- Majed, H. (2012). *Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Sunderland]. University of Sunderland digital repository. <https://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/3739/1/Majed.pdf>
- Majeed, K. & El-Baqiry, J. parenting in a new culture: raising Australian born children of Arabic background effectively. The northern migrant resource center. <https://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/publicationsandresources>
- Majid, A. A. (2015). *The practice of faith and personal growth in three novels by Muslim women writers in the Western diaspora* [doctoral dissertation, Monash University]. <https://doi.org/10.4225/03/58b64e9075b69>
- Marcus, R (2020, March 3). The arc of self-discovery [review of the novel *Bird Summons*, by L.Aboulela]. *Qantara.de*. <https://en.qantara.de/node/39289>
- Mishra, S. (2007). “Liberation” vs. “Purity”: Representations of Saudi Women in the American Press and American Women in the Saudi Press. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 18(3), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170701490849>

- Mizel, O. (2020). The Voice of the Hijab: Perspectives towards Wearing the Hijab by a Sample of Palestinian Female University Students in Israel. *Athens journal of social sciences*, 7(4), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajss.7-4-2>
- Moolla, F. (2021). Her heart lies at the feet of the mother. *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 27(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.36615/ajgr.v27i2.1044>
- Moore, K. M. (2007). Visible through the Veil: The Regulation of Islam in American Law*. *Sociology of Religion*, 68(3), 237–251.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/68.3.237>
- Nouri, G. (2008). In Search of Andalusia: Reconfiguring Arabness in Diana Abu-Jaber's Crescent. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 45(2), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cls.0.0018>
- Perry, B. (2013). Gendered Islamophobia: hate crime against Muslim women. *Social Identities*, 20(1), 74–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.864467>
- Renfro , Y. P. (2020, May 6). This moving meditation on gender, religion, and culture is overwhelmed by bloated magical realism. [Review of the novel *Bird summons*, by L.Aboulela]. *Washington independent review of books*, <https://www.washingtonindependentreview>
- Roumayssa, H. (2021). *Minor Literature Between Collective and Individual Voice in Leila Aboulela's Bird Summons (2019)* [Master's dissertation, Guelma University]. Guelma University digital repository.
<http://dspace.univguelma.dz/jspui/handle>
- Said, E. W. (1978), *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Said, E. W. (2002). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Santesso, E. M. M., & McClung, J. E. (2019). *Islam and Postcolonial Discourse: Purity and Hybridity*. Taylor & Francis.

- Sawicka, Z. (2021). From the Fight for Independence of Arab World to the Lack of Freedom – A Short History of Arab Media on the Example of Egypt. *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 25(2), 548–560. <https://doi.org/10.17846>
- Soanes, C. & Angus, s. (2006). *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press.
- Stanecka, A. (2018). Veiling and Unveiling Fears in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret*. *Civitas Hominibus Rocznik Filozoficzno-Społeczny*, 1(13), 73–81. <https://doi.org/10.25312>
- Staszak, J. (2009). Other/Otherness. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Oxford, Elsevier, vol. 8, 43–47.
- Sunier, J. T. (2010). Styles of religious practice: Muslim youth cultures in Europe. In H. Moghissi, & H. Ghorashi (Eds.), *Muslim Diaspora in the West. Negotiating Gender, Home, Belonging* (pp. 125-139). Ashgate.
- Vilarrubias, M. (2016). *Post-9/11 Representations of Arab Men by Arab American Women Writers* [doctoral dissertation, University of Barcelona]. Universitat de Barcelona Digital Repository. <http://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/handle/2445/101707>.
- Viswanathan, S. (January 2019). “Adult Fiction: General Fiction.” Booklist: p.34
- Zidan, A. (2022). Islamic feminism and the concept of hijab: a study of Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret*, *International Conference for Social Sciences and Humanities*. Boston: Harvard University. (PP.31–44). Humanities and Social Sciences Review.
- Zine, J. (2002). Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 19(4), 1-22.

- Zipp, Y. (2020, February 18). In 'Bird Summons,' three women go on holiday – and not the relaxing kind. [Review of the novel *Bird Summons*, by L.Aboulela]. *The Christian science Monitor*, <https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Book-Reviews/>
- Pickering, M. (2015). Stereotyping and Stereotypes. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, 1–2.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663202.wberen046>
- Altarabin, M. (2021, September 15). *The Routledge Course in Arabic Business Translation / Arabic-English-A*. Taylor & Francis.
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003170846/routledge-course-arabic-business-translation-mahmoud-altarabin>
- Mizel, O. (2020). The Voice of the Hijab: Perspectives towards Wearing the Hijab by a Sample of Palestinian Female University Students in Israel. *ATHENS JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 7(4), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajss.7-4-2>
- Mapara, J. (2009). Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Zimbabwe: Juxtaposing Postcolonial Theory. *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 3(1), 139.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jacob_Mapara/publication/228427362_Indigenous_Knowledge_Systems_in_Zimbabwe_Juxtaposing_Postcolonial_Theory/links/0fcfd5118b5cb8cc37000000.pdf
- Singh, A. (2009). Mimicry and hybridity in plain English. Lehigh University, 8. 1-16.
- Taha Al-Karawi, S., & Bahar, I. B. (2014). Negotiating the Veil and Identity in Leila Aboulela's Minaret. *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, 14(03), 255–268. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2014-1403-16>
- Awajan, N. W., & Al-Shetawi, M. F. (2021). Empowering Muslims in Leila Aboulela's Minaret and Mohja Kahf's The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.21.1.7>