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Muslim Women Oppression through Ahdaf Soueif's "Melody and "1964"

An Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the "Master" Degree in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Civilisation

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DEDICATION :

I dedicate this work to my family in particular :

My mother HAKIMA

Whose satisfaction is my great aim for her kindness and affection.

I would like to thank her for all the things she had done for me.

To my sister: Fatima Zohra, her son Mohammed El Habib.

To my grand-father: Mohammed

To my grand-mother: Yamina

To my ancles: Abdelkrim, Hocine, Aboubakr, Norreddine, Omar, Bachir and

Mustapha .

To my aunts : Samira and Nouara

To all my lovely cousins

To my closest and dearest friend in all these five years : Rabéà

To Master II promotion with whom I shared an enjoyable learning

atmosphere.

To all my friends and all whom I like, but I did not mention their names.

Nadia Ghermaoui

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to all my family members; particularly

To my loving parents for their endless support, patience and understanding. I

am honoured to have you as my parents. Thank you for everything.

To my beloved sisters Naima, Samia and my dearest brother Abdelhalim for

believing in me and giving me hope.

To my grand-mother Karima for her continuous supplications

I thank my uncles, aunts, cousins and all my friends for their encouragements

and trustworthiness.

To my closest and best friend ever Nadia who has always been by my side

throughout the five years. Thank you, wish you the best.

To all whom I like but did not mention the names. Please do not ever doubt

my dedication or love for you.

Rabéa Ghellaimi

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and "1964"**

General Introduction

Women's status is a complex issue and a hard-to-define subject. Around the world, women's status in each society and culture varies in different ways. In some societies, it improved gradually; while in others, it declined or remained unchanged.

Moreover, throughout history in every region of the world, there has always been discrimination between genders. Regardless the culture or the economic situation, women have always been oppressed either within their social contexts or from other societies. In particular, this is the case for many of Muslim women.

Therefore, for many years, Muslim women have been treated unfairly within their Islamic contexts and even in the European Societies. Indeed, the famous Arab writer Ahdaf Soueif has discussed the same issue in her short stories "Melody" and "1964".

Actually, this is the purpose of this research work which intends to shed light on the oppression of Muslim women, partly within their societies and partly under the European eyes, through AhdafSoueif's short stories.

Consequently few questions should be answered in this aspect:

- How are Muslim women treated within their Islamic contexts? And why?
- How do Europeans perceive Muslim women? And why?
- How does Ahdaf Soueif represent both issues in her short stories "Melody" and "1964"?

In order to find answers to these questions, our work has been divided into two chapters.

The first chapter is divided into two parts; one deal with the way Muslim women are socially perceived within their societies, includingthe rights and freedoms that Islam has granted them in education; economy; inheritance and property. This part will also discuss gender issues as male dominance and patriarchy. The end of this part will include an insight about reasons behind forced marriages. Then, other issues will be tackled, which are polygamy and easy divorce within Muslim societies.

The second part will be about the treatment of Muslim women in Europe; principally, the fact of being marginalized due to religious belonging, including the issue of the headscarf. Further, this part will focus on the way Muslim women are perceived in education and employment, undergoing some Islamophobic incidents, with some illustrations. Then, an important issue will be raised, which is related to the topic discussed; that is the representation of Muslim women in the European media.

The second chapter will analyse AhdafSoueif's short stories "Melody" and "1964", as they explain both issues raised in the first chapter, including a brief overview of both stories, and the main problems discussed such as polygamy and male dominance against Muslim women within their societies. On the other hand, this chapter will consider Muslim women oppression in Europe, mainly in education and their social discrimination.

To sum up the second chapter, some critics will be included on Ahdaf Soueif's writings, particularly on both short stories.

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1.1 Introduction:

The status of Muslim women is fairly said to be among the different and many topics of interest to non-Muslims in addition to the theme of their rights. The media portrayal usually describes "Muslim Women" as being oppressed and isolated because of Islam which shapes the misconceptions in the Westerners' minds. Thus, a lot of images and perceptions that non-Muslim people have on Islam are still very prejudiced; particularly Muslim womenwho, for many years, have been treated unfairly. In fact, the main reasons are related to Islam and Muslims in general, whom they are seen as terrorists. Particularly, Muslim women encounter problems with the majority of non-Muslim societies in Europe.

On the other hand, Muslim women are oppressed within their Islamic context, because of some Muslim men's behaviour that women are thought to be as such, and the main problem is that though Islam brought about liberation of women and improved their status, there still exist some who are badly treating their wives and daughters. In other words, they practice traditional customs under the name of Islam and thus women are mistakenly led to believe that the way they are presently living is the only possible way. Consequently, they are victims of gender inequality, forced marriage, polygamy and divorce. Yet, it is very important to add also that they are victims of themselves because many ignore their rights both as women and as wives.

Therefore, are Muslim women actually oppressed within their society, because of religion or is it a matter of cultural and tribal customs? And how arethey treated in European countries?

1.2The Social Perception

Initially, the position of the Muslim woman and the way she is perceived by an Islamic society is in fact the issue focused on in this part of study. Before all, women are positively portrayed in the Qur'an and the Hadith, also the Qur'an is the

only holy book in which women are often referred to side by side to men and both are supposed to be friends and partners in faith (Wadud, p 7).

To put it another way, these notable verses are just a few examples:

> The believers, men and women, are protecting one the other; they promote the right and ban the wrong, establish prayer, pay the poor-due, and they obey God and his messenger. As for these, God will have mercy on them. Certainly, God is Mighty. God has promised to believers; men and women, gardens under which rivers roll in, to dwell therein, and beautiful residency in gardens of everlasting felicity. Yet, the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God; that is the supreme felicity (Qur'an:9, 71-72)[1].

Then again, throughout the above verses it is shown that men and women are mentioned together and God equally reward both genders, for reward is dependent on one's actions and not on one's gender. Indeed, there is no supremacy of men to women.

Furthermore, the position of woman in Muslim societies and communities is a controversial topic, where women are regarded as oppressed since their society is based on gender inequalities. More than that, many scholars and researchers do not agree that Islam is that religion which pinpoints women's situation, because of the changes happening in the different Islamic regions and areas (Offenhauer, p1).

Accordingly, considering the current Islamic societies it is remarkable that almost all Muslims fail to distinguish between a cultural custom and a religious norm. Thereby, the cultural practices that are viewed as oppressive and unjust to women are associated to Islam, although such practices like: polygamy and child marriage in addition to other practices are not found only in Muslim communities (ibid, p2).

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[1] بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم "و المؤمنون و المؤمنات بعضهم اولياء بعض يأمرون بالمعروف و ينهون عن المنكر و يقيمون الصلاة و يؤتون الزكاة و يطيعون الله و رسوله اولئك سيرحمهم الله ان الله عزيز حكيم-71- وعد الله المؤمنين و المؤمنات جنات تجري من تحتها الانهار خالدين فيها و مساكن طيبة في جنات عدن و رضوان من الله أكبرذلك هو الفوز العظيم-72- صدق الله العظيم-سورةالتوبة-

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1.2.1 Rights and Freedoms

Islam dishonours and disgraces oppression in all its facets not only to women but to all humankind, and it is also a religion that treats women fairly; it gives them a role in society as it gives them rights and duties. Unfortunately, most women nowadays do not enjoy these rights even in the West, because people interpret things as they want them to be regardless to what God says and stipulates. In fact, the Muslim woman has the rights in many domains such as: education, economy, inheritance and property rights (Al Bukhari, 2007).

1.2.1.1. Education

Woman also is encouraged to seek knowledge as the prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) states: 'Acquiring knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim (male and female)". Both men and women are capable to learn, thus both are supposed to know before all about their faith and then about other subjects like politics, economy and social matters in order to promote good behaviour and stigmatize the bad conduct. Hence, women can participate in all discussions that concern society and are allowed to have diplomas and get jobs which suit them (Hasan, p 9).

1.2.1.2. Economy

Muslim women have the privilege to earn money, the right to own property; they can make legal contracts and manage their business earnings the way they wish. No one can claim on that, including their husbands. Yet, recent statistics have shown that economic women participation is very little as Baden said: "In 1975, women constituted 21.3 per cent of the labour force in Muslim countries and 36.6 percent of the labour force in non-Muslim countries" (p 23) and this is because many Muslims believe that women are not qualified and skilled enough to manage economic affairs.

1.2.1.3.   Inheritance and Property Rights

Westerners view the rule of inheritance in Islam as unfair and say that women are not treated equally as men because they inherit the half of their male counterpart. The Qur'an[2] justifies this in terms of men's obligations to support their women within and outside marriage. However, the way Muslims share the inheritance among themselves differ from one place to another, like for example in Bangladesh it is mostly renowned that a peasant woman does not request her father for inheritance from his estate however, she "exchanges it for the continued right to visit the parental home" (Baden, p12).

As far as property rights are concerned, "women have the right to independence ownership and control of property"(ibid, p13). Any woman who is highly educated or even has an ordinary degree can exercise a given business outside home, yet in actual cases of recent years those rights are limited by domestic obligations and as a result these women are regarded as marginalized, shut-off and blocked.

1.2.2. Gender Issues: Male Dominance

There still exist some Arabs and Muslims who believe in man's supremacy and disgrace the importance of women's role in human life, though both men and women are created equal and God request each of the genders to fulfil specific duties in order to complement each other and gain order in their lives. Thanks to Islam, things are clearly explained; no one is superior to the other, however, there still exist some Muslims who misunderstand its real standards. Consequently, problems between the sides evolve.

As Quaid-e-Azam[3] said:

> No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you. We are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within four walls of

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[2] The sacred text of Islam divided into 114 suras (chapters), as the word of God.
[3] Quaid- the Father of the Nation and first governor-general of Pakistan, address to the Aligarh Muslim University Union March 10, 1944

the house as prisoners.I do not mean that we should imitate the evils of western life, but let us try to raise the status of our own Islamic ideals and standards (p02).

It is generally assumed that the Arab and Islamic world is originally and historically a strictly male-dominated culture; where male supremacy is the norm. Thus, even with the advent of Islam and the recognition of women's rights, there still remain those traditional elements of the earlier periods which undoubtedly affect male-female relationships in society.

Hence, Islam must be understood as a comprehensive, all-encompassing and all-inclusive religion. Unfortunately, most Muslims do not practice its real and true teachings andalmost all scholars agree on the point that the reason behind this is the influence of many cultural elements of other people through invasions or cultural contactthat those Muslims are behaving in such a way (Bryan, 2012).

1.2.3. Gender Inequality

It seems necessary to deal with some significant terms relating to this topic; gender, male dominance and patriarchy. Firstly, gender is generally defined as referring to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female and the relationship between women and men, girls and boys, in addition to the relationship between women and those between men. Secondly, male dominance a known topic is often found in the works of radical feminists and which is based on the difference between the terms: "sex and gender". Actually, while "sex" refers to biological status women and men are born, gender as it is stated above refers to how males and females are socialized differently (Baden and Reeves, p3).

In fact, the concept of patriarchy is strongly related to that of male dominance, since patriarchy is referred to in all languages and cultures as male dominance or male power over women. In other words, patriarchy refers to the total authority of the elder male in a family over the remaining members-particularly the females, as

Sultana comments: "Patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres"(p 02).

Feminists mainly use the term "patriarchy" to describe the power of the relationship between men and women. Indeed, it describes the various ways by which society discriminates women. Here are some examples:

A man who raises his voice while giving an argument and defending it without letting anyone else to take part in the conversation, especially women. His action should certainly be considered as aggressively patriarchal.

Furthermore, if ever a woman complains of sexual harassment in a particular context, they will not trust her because almost all men tend to deny such action. Thus, their reasoning should no doubt be regarded as "typically patriarchal" (Sultana, p 09).

1.2.4. Forced Marriage

Islam emphasizes the right of free will and consent within the human life, and Allah has ordained marriage for his creatures with which he has placed the blessings of comfort and mercy.

More importantly, God as well as his messenger; the prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him); emphasize the necessity of consent in a marriage. In other words, it is not possible to contract a legal marriage in Islam without the will of both the two parties. Though, there are some people in some parts of the world who require their children to marry against their will because of customs and traditions. Actually, these customs are not Islamic and no one can be obliged to marry someone else without giving consent. The Sahih al-Bukhari, one of the most revered sources of Hadith[4], amongst Islamic scholars, reports the Prophet Mohammed (PBUP) as saying: "The widow and the divorced woman shall not be married until her order is obtained, and the virgin girl shall not be married until her permission is obtained" (Ali, 2008).

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[4]The saying of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

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Indeed it is because of that category of Muslims who confuse between tribal customs and religion that forced marriage practice is frequently associated with the Muslim world in the western media and it exists largely in Pakistani society. In a forced marriage both parties are victims, not only the woman. Yet, since the wife is the one who is supposed to move in with her husband's folk, thus it seems preferable to concentrate on women's situation, because normally the woman is the one who would suffer; more than the man.

As it is maintained by Winther:

> both men and women are victims of forced marriages. In my thesis, I have chosen to focus on the situation of women. One reason is that is customary for the wife to move in with the husband's family, so that the consequences normally are greater for the woman than for the man (p06).

A forced marriage has been defined as one conducted without the consent of the two parties; where pressure or abuse are used. In other words, the term is applied to situations in which an individual is capable of giving consent however is threatened and coerced into marriage against his/her will. As it is already stated before, this phenomenon is much more practiced in the Muslim world even though in Islam, marriage is said to be a blessed contract between a man and woman and the consent of both is compulsory (Oonagh, p1).

More than that, it is necessary to make a distinction between a forced and an arranged marriage. An arranged marriage is a marriage set up by family members and sometimes it can be successful, yet it is no more arranged if both partners are under 18. A forced marriage on the other hand, takes place if one or both parties are unable to give permission (Zuberi, 2011).

Moreover, what is astonishing is that Muslims neglect all their religion's teachings and therefore help Westerners have a bad image of them and of their religion. In addition to that, in almost all Muslim societies women are not allowed

to choose their husbands and if they dare and get married, they will be killed in the name of honour of the family (Riaz, p 266).

Muslims are often accused of forcing their daughters into marriage, though according to Islamic law females must give their permission before getting married. As the prophet (PBUH) says:" The permission of virgins should be taken and their silence is their consent". One well-known story concerning the female's consent that a woman came to the prophet to tell him about her father who wanted to marry her off without her permission. The prophet suggests to cancel the marriage yet she said she wanted the marriage and she only wanted to confirm her right (Abu Ameenah, p 04).

Indeed, the forced married girl or woman is going to suffer following marriage because of the husbands' mistreatment and even of her family in-law in general. There are many examples of such oppressed girls especially in the Pakistani society where many families are immigrant and reside in the West. Though, they live there they keep on practicing their tradition over their daughters and sisters, whom many of them are murdered in the name of honour (Riaz, 264). However, the phenomenon is not limited to only the Pakistani society yet other Arab Muslim countries are also concerned. These are some examples:

*Sameen Ali, a thirteen years old girl living in Britain who goes in holidays to Pakistan where she is suddenly asked to wear red bride dress and forced to pronounce words after Imam. Her mother told her that she is marrying a man who is much older than her (ibid, p265).

*In Yemen, Wafa was married at 11-years-old to a 40 –year- who raped and tortured her. In addition to Fawzia, another 11 year-old girl who died during childbirth (Bearat, p7).

*In March, 2012 Morocco was shocked by the suicide of Amina Filali, a 16-year-old girl who was forced to marry the man who raped her. He remained a free man in

accordance with Article 475 of the country's penal code that permits a rapist to escape prison by marrying his victim. (Bearat, p9)

*On November13[th], 2013,Algérie-Focus, an online Algerian newspaper whose offices are located in Algiers and in Paris, reports on the case of a young 18-year-old girl from Jijel who took her life to evade a forced marriage. Besides, in the rural regions of Mostaganem, it is common for young girls to be married without their knowledge and against their will (IRBC, 2013).

1.2.4.1 Reasons behind Forced Marriages

Many reasons should be mentioned in this respect for forced marriages continue to exist until now in numerous places around the world, yet only among people who disregard and neglect the woman's right in choosing her own husband. Among these reasons are the following:

a) *Marriage; a Social Act and a Family Matter*

Several parents do not ask their children when they decide it is time to wed them. Generally, young girls are said to be much more concerned, however even young men are not given that freedom of choice. Therefore, those parents think it is their duty to choose husbands and wives for their children regardless to the concerned persons' opinions, because marriage is not only an engagement between a husband and a wife but it is between the two families.

b) *Protecting Young Women*

Forced marriages are also used because of security matter. Many parents want to have their daughters married just to make sure they will be protected with their husbands. They are afraid their daughters remain unmarried and thus unsecured.

c) Responding to a Religious Norm

Some Muslim families mistakenly think that marrying their children even if it is without their consent is a religious precept. In fact, those Muslims may use literal translation of the Qur'an statements as well as those of Hadith that is why they believe that forced marriage is a religious duty. Hence, they do not get the true meaning from the Holy Qur'an and it is that belief that raises a lot of confusion between cultural practices and religious principles (Winther, pp11-12).

In sum, forced marriages are totally unacceptable in Islam and those who argue with it in order to justify their actions; they do so for ulterior motives and reasons.

1.2.5 Polygamy and Easy Divorce

Polygamy is not found only in the Islamic law, but it is also not prohibited in religions such as Judaism and Christianity. However, Islam provides particular situations where polygamy should take place by contrast to the already mentioned religions.

According to Islamic laws, people may face many and different circumstances throughout the lifespan and polygamy may be the only solution for certain troubles like for example when women outnumber men. Therefore, from an Islamic perspective it is better for a man to have more than one wife than to seek the illicit relationships (Badawi, p 01).

The Qur'an presents only one very specific situation where a man is able to marry with more than one woman; as it is mentionedin the Quranic verse:" If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry the women of your choice, two, or three or four. But if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one"4:3 (Ghulam, p22). It must be said in this respect that to "this day however, polygamy continues to be practiced by some Muslims throughout the Muslim world, yet with less frequency than earlier times" (Bilal and Jones, p14).

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Polygamy, in fact, can be divided into two types: one is "polygamy"; meaning that the man marrying more than one woman, and "polyandry" where a woman marries more than one man. Along, in Islam limited polygamy is permitted whereas polyandry is totally prohibited (Naik, p1).

Among these two types, polygamy is by far the most widespread in the world particularly Asia and Africa among both Muslims and non-Muslims as well. The question raised here could be: why does polygamy hurt women? Before that, it is important to shed light on the reasons that lead women to entering polygamous marriages. Actually, one essential factor is financial dependence which is created from a lack of resources (poverty), and thus this may press on women to accept such marriages. Polygamy has a damaging and harmful impact on children as well as on women, in a way that when a man marries two or more women automatically, he will have a large number of children. Therefore, after his death those children and wives will compete for a small and finite deal of resources. They can even forget about brotherhood and use very aggressive ways in order to have the inheritance.

Additionally, pertinent sources have been studied to seek how polygamous family structures affect women's lives socially, economically as well as their well-being (Campbell, 03).

The Qur'an allows polygamy as a solution for certain social problems during the revelation. Well, that was the case centuries ago, but what about Muslims who practice polygamy today? Fairly, it is highly suspicious that most Muslims nowadays, who engage in polygamous marriages, do so for the sake of protecting the widow's children from unfair exploitation or any other woman. Islam as a religion admits the different needs and desires of the human in order to live in pairs. And as far as polygamy is concerned, it is practiced only in particular stances and not any man is free to have up to four wives because the woman in general is in opposition to having co-wives. Not only this, but also Allah-the creator of all

humankind- stipulate on men who like to marry up to four to deal with them all justly yet, it is a very hard task (Campbell, p11).

Even the Prophet Mohammed (PBUP) explains in detail how should polygamy be put into practice through his divinely guided life-style (Sunnah). Indeed, there are many conditions for polygamy such as:

a. *Capable to Provide Nafakah for the Wives*

Men in Islam are expected to be responsible of their households and that is why a husband is responsible to provide nafkah, whether for one wife or more. In other words, the husband must provide accommodation, food and all what is needed, thus he should be responsible in all ways as a husband so as he will not oppress his wives.

b. *Be fair to all (Four) Wives*

Here, fairness refers to the equal treatment of the husband towards his wives and he should not favour one than the other. Feelings and love cannot be included within fairness because it is outside of human control (Yasin, p9).

Subsequently, both parties should normally know very well what a polygamous marriage is before entering into it and how should each of them behave towards the other. Indeed, although we are living in the 21st century there still exist women who ignore their rights as women and more particularly as wives. Dealing with polygamous marriages, Muslim women tend to be unaware of their rights which make men ignorant of their responsibilities too. Consequently, many Muslim men are proud of claiming their "right" in polygamous marriages though Islam actually is in favour of monogamy rather than polygamy.[5]

Regarding divorce, the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) states:"The lawful thing which Allah hate most is divorce". It is important to say in this respect that divorce is another problematic area for women's rights in Islamic law and critics say that it

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[5]Zahra, Grant."On The Practicality of Polygamy".Altmuslimah.com. 2012. 24/03/2015. 14:14

is easy for the Muslim man to divorce his wife. However, many Islamic countries ban such divorce by putting strict laws and regulations (Hursh, p 264).

Actually, the family forms the basic building block of Muslim society and despite the many pressures it faces, the family remains strong. However, in the Muslim culture marriage is viewed as the union of the two families and it is up to the parents to arrange the marriage. Although, the Islamic law (Shari'a) emphasizes the consent of as the bride and groom, however the parents' coercion is stronger.

Indeed, because of these constraining traditional way of thinking such marriages do not last for long and thus, divorce occurs. Moreover, it is usually said that in Islam divorce is so easy, knowing that a man may just say to his wife "you are divorced" and it is over.

In effect, it is not the case and divorce is not easy at all and there are many conditions for it to be valid. In other words, to pronounce divorce is prohibited in many cases like when the man is in rage that he is not conscious of what he is saying, here divorce is invalid. This is based on the prophet's (PBUH) statement: "The divorce pronouncement is not valid at the time of seizure".

As regards marital frictions, man's dislike or dissatisfaction against his wife does not give him the right to mistreat or abuse her. That is why Islam favours reconciliation and peace between husband and wife if any troubles occur, however if it seems that there is no hope for their marriage to be made up, then divorce maybe inevitable.

In fact, it is important to be aware of the possible consequences of both polygamy and divorce since both have greater negative impact on women and children and lead to many social ills (Abu Ameenah, pp 8-9).

As consequence, the selfish attitudes of men leave a great deal of women in state of neglect and disregard, emotional distress and without comfort that Islamic marriage is supposed to provide.

1.3 Marginalization of Muslim Women in Europe

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In the European context, a central question arises, whether Muslim women feel well integrated in European societies or whether they are marginalized and alienated. Actually Muslim women received intolerant and prejudicial attitudes which result discriminatory practices, and reinforce social exclusion, as well as unfair treatment, due to the generalized image about Islam as a religion of terrorism (EUMC, p11).

Mohja Kahf says:

> The image of the Muslim women in European cultures has been a changing, evolving phenomenon. Some of the basic elements of her image congealed even before there were any Muslim women, because the representation builds on conventions of representing alien women (pagans, foreigners, Old Testament figures) already formed in European texts before the advent of Islam. Afterward, the emphasis accorded the female image in overall European narrative of Islam undergoes transformations as that narrative alters (p 4).

Thus, the dominant European picture of Muslim women characterizes them as obedient, submissive to patriarchal traditions and lacking any active power to change their conditions. This creates a false impression that the subjection of women is a specifically Muslim characteristic (Ansari, p16).

Moreover, most of the European world Muslim women face daily struggles for survival, from Libya to the Philippines, for those who move to the west, they are intensively checked at the border, continuously controlled, unfairly treated and even expectislamophobic murder (Cerretti, 2012).

In other words, some people in the west believe that Muslims are violent; their practices are opposed to European life styles. Obviously, Muslim women are totally concerned, and the European view about the veiled women is a permanent task.

1.3.1 **Religious Discrimination: Veiling**

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Without any doubt, the issue of the veil and the one of Muslim women oppression have been the most frequent topics in Europe and still then. In fact, in the European world, whenever a person of white European descent meet a veiled woman, he/she determines that she is a Muslim woman, and the veil very quickly emerges as the prominent topic of conversation. Thus, this scenario occurs everywhere; in trains; universities; even parties. Besides, most of the conversants ignore totally about Islam or Islamic culture and societies. They just base their claims on their prejudicial attitudes. Some of non-Muslim women would even say that they are thankful that they were not born in a Muslim culture. Moreover, veiled women of Muslim communities are suffering from the psychological consequences of these views (Hoodfar, p1).

Notably, the issue of the veil or headscarf has become debatable as it is seen as a symbol of female oppression and gender inequality, though there are different motivations of wearing a headscarf. On one hand, some of them are obliged from their family; some others wear it as it could facilitate younger women to gain a freedom of movement, otherwise the social expectations force them staying at home. On the other hand, some Muslim women wear the headscarf to declare their Muslim identity, as a religious duty. Further, Muslim women that are distinguished as victims of European oppression and discrimination connected to Islam, rather than particular ethnic cultural practices which put them aside. Accordingly, the most visible symbol of female Muslim identity is the headscarf, and at the same time a sign of gender inequality and social exclusion, ignoring its multiple cultural dimensions (EUMC, p41).

Thus, as Europeans view the veil, not as a symbol of identification, but a symbol of inferiority and belonging to a homogenous group, that is negatively stereotyped due to the media and other sources, Muslim women face discrimination in education and work.

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1.3.2. The Situation in Education

In a time when the European government feels strongly threatened by Muslim populations being terrorists, they actively respond to this stereotyped picture stuck in their minds, by prohibiting Muslim women to wear of hijab[6] or restricting women's right to dress the way they want. What is more, neither government nor media are interested in knowing the opinion of Muslim women towards such topics (Eren, 2010).

Therefore, Muslim student girls, mainly as university students in Europe receive daily incidents, such as verbal harassment, racial abuse and a range of subtle forms of institutionalised discrimination and favouritism, they even perceive Islamophobia.Yasmin (a Pakistani student) states

Early lectures and late lectures were very hard for me because I feel I have to think of my own security and my own safety, and there is a high risk of me being attacked and I face verbal abuse every day. …It's not to do with the colour of my skin, I don't think - it's only since I've been looking like a Muslim. The way I dress, that's what triggers it off (Tyrer and Ahmad, p 21).

Aisha (a Bangladesh student) adds

At university,my classmates perceive me As an alien on my course…. Like a certain, the Muslims on my course, like they are mainly guys and you can't really tell from outside if the guy is a Muslim or not, with me you can because I wear the hijab and I think they think they have got to behave different to me, like be on their behaviour even though they might be talking to girls out on the street and on the course, they won't want to speak to me because 'oh she's religious,stay away from her (idem)

In addition to the lack of special needs, as halal food for those who stay in the campus eating in university canteens, or as prayer rooms at universities

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[6] Head covering worn by Muslim women in public.

Furthermore, the limits of the institutionalisation of Islam in Europe have been tested most widely in the so-called "headscarf issue". Many European countries ; including France, Britain and Spain, have stated some laws impeding the wear of showy religious symbols in public places and schools in particular, based on internal rules of the central state that prohibit all elements of discrimination. For instance, in France, wearing an Islamic veil by a female pupil in school is perceived as a transgressive principle of secularism[7]. Hence, in 1989 and 1990 Muslim girls have tried to wear their headscarves in their classrooms, but in 2004 a law was passed preventing any religious sign in public school, likewise in Belgium. In addition, in Britain, Begum, a pupil at Denbigh High School was prohibited for wearing a jilbab[8], she was not allowed to attend unti she wore the official uniform (Triandafyllidou, pp 57-58).

Equally, Muslim women suffer from discriminatory behaviours in workplaces or even while seeking for un employment.

1.3.3 The Situation in Employment

The work of Muslim women is neglected in an environment where politicians rely on the weakness of Muslim women to create discourses and gain popularity; "Anyone with close experience of young Muslim women pursuing university degree, for example, is likely to discover that these women have professional and life aspirations that are highly similar to those of their non-Muslim counterparts" (Sharify-Funk, p 21).

In fact, there are large barriers to Muslim women graduates, seeking employment, due to the Europeans' perception and racial stereotypes, as less productive or under-productive. In addition, they face unequal university opportunities for work, regardless to religious and cultural diversity.

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[7] In France "Laïcité", the French understanding of separation of Church and State that stipulates that expression of religious beliefs should be kept private and not be articulated in public spaces such as public schools.
[8] A full length gown

> Jaihan declares "They [the media] sort of assume that Muslim women are just very docile, subservient, stay at home, don't have any external responsibilities". Mariam (a medical student in hospital) also reports her colleagues' saying: "why are you wearing that thing on your head, are you going to wear it into theatre?' The general misunderstanding about my faith and that really can have sometimes very negative manifestations and can make you feel a bit low" (Tyrer and Ahmad, p 30).

Hence, Muslim women employees suffer from a distinct lack of individual agency, to create alternative subjectivities. Some employers may seem hesitant about employing Muslim women, because of assumptions that they are only likely to be temporary employees, before getting married or having children.

Farida (a Pakistani student) notes:

> I have a Muslim friend who just recently graduated and she's a doctor and she wears the whole outer garment, which is thejilbabandhijaband stuff, and people look at her and they think she is a nurse. They don't assume that she could ever be the doctor. So these are, like the appearance straight away puts her into a category that has got to be of a lesser status in the degree than what she actually is, they want to place a lesser role upon her because they probably see her as a woman incapable of rising above (Tyrer and Ahmad, p 30).

Therefore, the wearing of hijab proves problematic in workplaces, schools, agencies, administrations…, almost everywhere. Some of them lose their jobs, others suffer from their colleagues "mouths draped" sayings, perceiving them as comical and bizarre. As an illustration, in Denmark, in 2005, the Danish Supreme Court decided that the prohibition of an employee in a supermarket for wearing the headscarf, did not amount to discrimination. Although this would affect Muslim women, it is not found as objectively justified.

Similarly, in Germany, 2004, the Federal Constitutional Court confirmed the right to forbid the headscarf or any religious symbol during work for Muslim teachers (EUMC, p49).

1.3.4 Some Islamophobic Incidents

Initially, Islamophobia held to mean discrimination against Muslims, as a religious group rather than as an ethnic minority. It is a result of racism, which is mainly non-physical, involving verbal comments, and negative attitudes, looks or behaviours, in universities; workplaces; markets…

Thus, partly because of hijab, Muslim women are more visible and liable to discrimination, and partly because they are considered as weak and less likely to fight back. As female Muslim students, they experience Islamophobia from their teachers or lecturers, such as reading racial representations of Muslim women in course texts, or from their classmates, and other non-Muslim students who live in the campus. Indeed, they face verbal abuse, harassment and racist questions at the university. Moreover, for fear of Islamophobicattaks on campus, female Muslim students avoid early and late lectures (Gilby, pp 23-24).

As an illustration, in Austria, a woman wearing an Islamic headscarf was abused when she was walking on the street, as "dirty sow"and "Turkish pig". Some threwmoney on her feet, others spat at her. In addition to another woman, who was kicked from a store, and punched in the face by the shop assistant. Another one was insulted by another woman telling her that she is a terrorist,a barbarian with no culture (EUMC, pp 71-81).

Further, in France, in December 2004, on the same month, there were two aggressions against a Muslim woman with a headscarf (idem).

Then, in Ireland, a 38 year old Muslim woman wearing a jilbab had her headscarf pulled from behind in a shop by some younger teenagers. Another woman in a job interview, was subjected to the interviewer comments saying to her: "you're

never going to get that job with that thing on"referring to her headscarf (EUMC, pp 71-81).

In Spain, in 2004, a man snatched the headscarf from a Muslim woman in Zaragoza, and some hair was pulled from her (idem).

Alternatively, all these European racist perceptions resulting in Islamophobic incidents were built typically via media representations.

1.3.5 The Representation of Muslim Women in European Media :

As stated before, The European media are not interested in knowing the opinion of Muslim women toward such representations, otherwise they do not publish or broadcast them. In fact, the images illustrating Muslim women are mostly negative. They are shown as submissive, obedient, subservient and lacking in confidence. In addition, the coverage is often generalised, depicting them in a highly distorted manner, regardless to their real status.

Actually, there are no rules or laws to direct such representations, though they have negative effects on Muslim women minorities. Some media created unwritten rules, such as; only Muslim women with headscarves have to be discriminated, since Muslim men lack the personal experience of wearing a head covering. What is more, some journalists are interested just on the beneficial side of their reports and representations. In other words, topics related to Muslim women wearing a headscarf, can be better sold than other motives (Zick and Heeren, p 17).

More importantly, the scarf or the veil or anybody-covering, is represented in the European media, as masks worn by terrorists, and evil doers in order not to be recognised, regardless its religious and cultural symbolism of chastity. Some claim that it has nothing to do with religious principles, but it is rather to cover their "ugly faces " (Ridouani, pp 3-7).

Thus, fabricated images describing Muslim women headscarf or any piece of cloth, become the disfavoured objective of the European media, they even nicknamed veiled women as "rag heads ". Indeed, these representations including

reports, articles, and movies figure Muslim women as uncivilized antagonist, harem maidens and dancers, obsequious domestics, too (idem).

In addition, European image makers cover them in black from head to toe, with lowered heads as uneducated, unattractive, sexual products totally naked, and enslaved beings to men. Other European painters or photographers and journalists try to disfigure Muslim women identity with distortive images, relying on their own imagination. Both, the sender (creator) or the receiver (viewer or reader) are participating in these stereotyped representations; the sender creates them with a total ignorance about the real status or the personality of Muslim women; and the receiver believes blindly those misrepresented physical portrayals or behaviours, due to the conflict with the Muslim world, where Europeans perceive Muslims as terrorists in general. Obviously, Muslim women are concerned (idem).

Accordingly, all forms of European media misrepresentations or preconceptions about Muslim women, be it televised, printed or broadcasted, influence the European public in general; since they react negatively against Muslim women living in Europe who are affected victims in particular.

1.4   Conclusion

In sum, the religion of Islam is a religion that defends women's rights and stands up for their dignity. The misbehaviour of some Muslims including those who encourage men's superiority, force their daughters into marriage, favour polygamous marriages and take divorce at ease leads to the oppression of women. As a result, the woman though Muslim does not enjoy her rights and is viewed and views herself as oppressed and marginalized.

On the other hand, Muslim women under European eyes are oppressed; they are seen as terrorists, uncivilized, uneducated and submissive to men, lacking confidence or power to rule their own proper life. Thus Muslim women receive daily racial and discriminatory dealings. In fact, the headscarf or the veil ; as an Islamic symbol worn by Muslim women, forces islamophobic incidents against

them in education, work and even in public sphere, due to the European media

disfigurement.

Chapter Two: Literary Analysis of Ahdef Soueif's Short Stories "Melody" and "1964"

2.1 Introduction:

Regarding literature, many works have been written to examine the position of woman and here we are dealing more particularly with Muslim women suffering in their contexts. Among many Arab women writers;AhdafSoueif is oneofthemajor authors who is best known for her collections of short stories: <u>Aisha</u> and <u>Sandpiper</u>. She describes through her writings how women sacrifice their lives for their husbands. "Melody" is one example of the many short stories in which Soueif explores how and why the Muslim woman has to be obedient to her husband.

In addition to Muslim women oppression within their Islamic contexts, they are oppressed in the European non-Muslim societies. In fact, this is what AhdafSoueifseems to discuss in her short story "1964", dealing with the problems facing Muslim women in the European context.

Thus, how are Muslim women oppressed within Muslim societies? And how are they treated in non-Muslim societies, through AhdafSoueif's stories "Melody" and "1964"?

2.2 Soueif's Biography

Ahdaf Soueif (March 23, 1950) is an Arab Egyptian writer, who was born in Cairo. She spent about four years from her childhood in England while her mother was preparing her PH.D at London University. Then, in 1973, she returned to England to study for her doctorate in linguistics at Lancaster University. As Soueif lived on two cultures; Arabic and British, her work draws upon both literary backgrounds. She is married to the poet and biographer Ian Hamilton. She is theauthor of three collections; <u>Aisha</u> (1983);<u>Sandpiper</u> (1996) and <u>I Think of You</u> (2007). Further, Ahdaf wrote two novels; <u>In the Eye of the Sun</u> (1992) and <u>The Map of Love</u> (1999). In fact, most of her short stories and novels are based on her personal experience in life, about 20th female characters who encounter love and loss; western repulsion and cultural duality. Moreover, Soueifis a political and cultural commentator in English and Arabic. She wrote various essays and reviews which were collected in her book <u>Mezzaterra</u>(2004) and published in some famous

journals and magazines, such as The Guardian; Al Shoroq; Al Arabi; The London Magazine…etc. Recently, she wrote *Is Cairo: My City; Our Revolution (*2012*)* and *A Personal Account of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution.*Alternatively, Soueif is also a political activist. In particular, a supporter of the Palestinian causes. Therefore, she is the patron of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and the Chair of Pal Fest[9](Arab Women Writers, 2015).

2.3. Soueif's Short Story "Melody"

Asbeing an Arab Muslim woman, Soueif's writings largely focus on women's position within a society characterized by a patriarchal social system where family structures give prominence to the role of man. "Sandpiper" is one of her short story collections and it includes "Melody". The latter is a short story through which Soueif explores a Muslim woman's misery with a cruel husband.

2.3.1. A Brief Overview of <u>Sandpiper</u> and "Melody"

 "Sandpiper" is the name of the collection of short stories written by the Egyptian author AhdefSoueif. The main characters are women experiencing some sort of crisis in their lives, but they have the will to escape the way they look to the world as well as to themselves.

Soueif is of an Egyptian nationality, she spent her childhood in England, where she studied for her PhD in linguistics. She got married twice; the first time was to an Egyptian and the second to an English poet Ian Hamilton. Yet their marriage ended recently.

 It is fairly said that Soueif's marriage experience is one of her central themes in "Sandpiper" collection of short stories.

 This collection is all about common but very important events like for example births, weddings and divorce. The main characters are women coming from

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[9]The Palestine Festival of Literature was established in 2008 with the aim of supporting cultural life in Palestine, breaking the cultural siege imposed on Palestinians by the Israeli military occupation and strengthening cultural links.

different nationalities but sharing feelings of loneliness, isolation and loss. Many of them tend to hide their real sufferings from deep inside.

Soueif explores the lives of middle class and poor Egyptian women including the Muslim, Christian, Arab and Greek in addition to the lives of foreign expatriates; American, Canadian, Turkish, Black and White. As an illustration, the main character in "Melody" is a Muslim Turkish woman; Ingie; who is represented as a maid to her husband:"Ingie's husband (he wasn't her husband yet at that point, of course) he had enough one day so he packed up and went home and got himself a Turkish wife who would do absolutely everything for him…" (Soueif, 7)

The characters and their psychologies arise within the effects of all what surrounds them including culture, domestic and international politics, economy, society and above all desire and love.

As it can be seen, stories of Sandpiper are touching and homesick, they also seek Soueif's ability in giving her readers a sense of place and belonging. To put it differently, the short story Sandpiper sheds light on the challenges of cross-cultural marriages. The main character is a European woman who marries a man from Egypt and as it is assumed, Europe is culturally very different from Egypt and thus she regards herself as an alien because she is accustomed to western thoughts. Therefore, the woman's unfamiliarity with the cultural beliefs, customs as well as the language of the new land could ultimately destruct her relationship with her husband. (Sanjakdar, p3)

In "Melody", Soueif tells the story of a middle-class Canadian woman who lives in a Gulf Arab country since her husband works there. She describes her encounter with another middle-class Turkish woman Ingie whose husband works there too. Ingie's husband wants her to bear more children and actually she pretends to agree but in secrecy takes contraceptive pills. In fact, this shows that Ingie scares her husband and is unable to refuse something that she does not want to do, as it maintained by Soueif:"…well, anyway, Ingie's husband was on her to have a third and every month he waited to see if she had conceived and meanwhile

she's secretly on the Pill and hiding the strip among Melody's pants and vests and terrified that he should find out" (p9).

The Canadian woman on the other hand, wants more children however her husband has a vasectomy to make sure she will not trick him. Furthermore, though a westerner, she also suffers from her husband selfishness and their marriage was just a deal. In effect, she has got her only son Wayne. Accordingly, Soueifstates:"Wayne was the result of a deal I made with Rich", then she adds:"…while we were crossing France I got myself pregnant. He joked a bit about making sure it was a girl, but after Wayne came he really chickened out and went and got himself vasectomised so I could not nag him for another kid"(pp 8-9)

Through "Melody" the author portrays the conservatism of Muslim women and their position in their societies. The story is written in the first person singular (the narrator is Wayne's mother). As women, they are forbidden from many things while men are not, like for example women are not permitted to use the pool of the compound, it is used only by kids and men. For this Soueif writes:" We're not allowed to use the pool; us women, I mean. It's only for kids- and the men of course. They can use anything. And they do. Use anything, I mean." p3. Along, it is much more related with the narrator's neighbors "Ingie" and her daughter "Melody". Ingie is always keeping herself beautiful for her husband who is older than her as the writer says:"I thought it was a bit odd when I saw him: a great, big, tall man and obviously a lot older than her". In addition to this, her main interest is to cook and do everything for him. The narrator finds the way Ingie treats her husband bizarre and said she preferred reading a book rather than spending all the time in housework;" I mean housework and me are not best friends. I'd rather read a book" (Soueif, p7).

More than that, the tale describes how Muslim women devote their lives to their husbands, trying to satisfy them (laughing, dancing and cooking);" Ingie's main thing is laughing. Laughing and clothes and make-up and dancing. And cooking" (Soueif, p6) Even her daughter Melody tries to imitate her when playing with Wayne:"And one of Melody's favourite games is to sit Wayne down, get her

mother to put on some of that wailing, banging stuff, grab a scarf and start dancing for him". Further, the narrator speaks about the topic of education when she wonders about Melody's schooling and she says:" Now that's one thing I could never understand; why was the child never sent to school? She just kept her with her all the time" (Soueif, p4) Then, she asks Ingie about it saying:" …and I asked where her kid went to school because I had to decide on a school for Wayne and she said she had another baby, Murat, who was asleep upstairs just then, and she was keeping them together and teaching Melody how to read and write. She said, I like her with me" To put it differently, for Ingie there is no need to school and she prefers to keep her daughter with her even if she is not good enough in reading and writing.

Actually, what is attractive in this story is Soueif's sharpness when she describes the blindness of the White Canadian woman to her own situation being oppressed with her husband as she is so busy noticing that Turkish counterpart's experience. Indeed, the narrator is astonished by Ingies's lifestyle and at the same time she shows dislike of such behavior:" The way these Muslim women treat their husbands just makes me ill. They actually want to be slaves". (ibid) Therefore, it is a very sad story about the death of the child Melody in a compound for Westerners. (Salem, 2010)

2.3.2 Muslim Women Oppression Within Muslim Contexts Through Soueif's"Melody"

As it is stated above, Soueif's short story collection "Sandpiper" explores the status of women sharing feelings of loneliness and oppression, yet each in her own context. "Melody" is one short story through which the author portrays the theme of oppression towards women. Two major concepts may be found in the story like polygamy and male dominance.

2.3.3 Polygamy:

In point of fact and as it is already mentioned, the phenomenon of polygamy is much more practiced among Muslims in different places around the world. In this

short story, the writer describes the life of a second wife named Ingie who has two children and whose husband is much older than her.

It is clearly shown throughout the story that the author criticizes the way Muslims live and as a matter of fact Ingie represents the lifestyle of the Muslim woman whose basic concern is to gratify their husbands' needs and do not care about their own needs and rights. Along with, after he got separated from his first wife the husband wanted to remarry again with a woman whom he can shut her up at home, and all her duty is to look after him and the children. Moreover, he simply left his first wife and finds for himself a new one, for this the author says:

"Anyway, Ingie's husband (he wasn't her husband yet at that point, of course) he had enough one day so he packed up and went home and got himself a Turkish wife who would do absolutely everything for him and then he brought her to this country where he could virtually lock her up while he made lots of money" (Soueif, p7)

Furthermore, there is no certitude whether he has divorced the first one or not:" We don't even know if he ever divorced his first wife" (idem), no one talks to him because he looks severe and harsh, however they could not realize how much rude he is until that terrible accident happened and he lost his daughter. As it is stated by the writer:" I mean, Elaine always said he was a bit weird but I never knew how weird until I heard all that stuff about the camera" (Soueif, p10)

Something may sound odd in a way that Ingie knows that she is a second wife and looks happy within such a situation like in: "And, laughing, she tells me that they (Ingie, Melody and Murat) are his second family" (ibid, p6) Here, the author does not tell only about man's selfishness but also about Muslim women's way of thinking and she criticizes them for they like to be obedient and slaves of their husbands. As the case of Ingie though she is his second wife, she does not complain, may be because she is convinced that it is not something bad and believes that being a woman she should marry and all her duty is to look after her husband and children.

Soueif also speaks about the husband's first wife-an American- with whom he has two boys and does everything for them. In other words, he must look after them and share his love, care and money between the two sons and those of the second family:"…Elaine told me he used to be married to an American woman and he'd lived in Denver for twenty years. They had two boys and he looked after them and did everything else as well" (Soueif, p6) In fact, that is why many Muslim scholars are not in favor of polygamy and say that it can be good only in exceptional cases because it has negative impact on children in particular who are supposed to be siblings, yet they are not together. Additionally, the first wife is actually very different from Ingie; for she is dependent on herself and is not kept at home to do the housework. With attention to this, the author states: "The wife worked and she had, like, a strong personality and naturally she wouldn't do anything in the house". (ibid, pp6-7)

2.3.4 Male Dominance

Actually, the story of "Melody" does not include only how polygamy is portrayed, yet it also deals with the dominant man who mistreats his wife. Soueif entitles her story "Melody" and it is the name of a character as well –the little beautiful girl- who is going to die in a terrible car accident. It is often said that Muslim men are controlling and strongly believe in women's inferiority though a woman is as vital to life as man himself and she is not inferior to him nor is she one of the lower species. Indeed, Ingie's husband is a Muslim man who after the loss of his beloved daughter turns into a monster and treats his wife brutally. The writer's critique about Muslims' bad behavior is depicted through the husband's reaction which is outrageous and offensive, he behaves as a fool after Melody's death as he films the road where the accident took place in order to make Ingie watch that film, and to make her feel guilty:" He came here this morning with a video camera, the father. He was taking a film of the road." Not only this, he also filmed his child as she was in the morgue:"And you know what he did in the afternoon, the father? He went down to the morgue, where they were going to wash the poor child and lay her out, and he filmed the whole thing" (ibid, pp 16-17) .

In fact, his behavior is shocking to the point that the author wonders how they let him take the film in the morgue. Then, she adds that:" they said the poor man was so crazed with grief it was better to let him do whatever he wanted. Besides, they're afraid of him; he's a big guy- and violent" (Soueif, p17). Therefore, after he filmed what he wanted and returns back home, he got Ingie to the living room and force her to watch the videos, as the author says:" He sat Ingie down and made her watch both his films: the one on the road and the one in the morgue. And then he made her watch the film of Melody's last birthday. He said what happened is her fault and she has to be made to feel it". (idem) In the light of this, Ingie is in fact experiencing oppression with a violent and cruel man. Along with, he locks her up at home and does not allow her to get out alone or to do anything else without his presence arguing that he can no more trust her and is afraid to leave –little Murat- with her:" …And she is not allowed to take little Murat out at all because he can't trust her to look after him." (idem)

It is necessary to add in this respect that this is not all what he did, however after ending the burial and funeral ceremony, he tells everybody of their relatives that it is Ingie's fault that their daughter died:

> He blamed Ingie to everybody back home and she wanted to stay on with her mother a bit but he brought her back because he wasn't going to leave little Murat in her care and because she had to be pregnant (ibid, p18).

Ingie does not react because he is the man and she is afraid of him, being a woman she is weak and voiceless, she cannot react as she believes she does not have the right to complain about his ill-treatment towards her. Therefore, it is clear enough that the author dismisses man's power over women and in the case of Ingie, the reader may have a lot of sympathy with her as Soueif could characterize her protagonist as being oppressed and suffering with a dominant husband.

Here, she shows the husband's brutality and cruelty who; as being a Muslim; is supposed to be still in such a situation and be kind and affectionate because death

is a calamity and serious ordeal and tragedy to everyone. Therefore, both are living deep sorrow after losing their only daughter Melody. In point of fact, Muslims' mentality does not match with their religion's teachings and Ingie's husband deeds can show that, for he tries to harrow and annoy her as much as he could, though her state was worse than his. She always weeps and talks about Melody:" I cannot believe. From yesterday I am thinking, she will come from here- she will run from there. I see her run. I still hear her cry 'Mama' ". (Soueif, p13) Indeed, she suffers double pain; because of her daughter's death as well as her husband's mistreatment. More than that, despite the fact that the woman is entitled the freedom of expression as much as man is and her sound opinions should be taken into consideration and should not be disregarded just because she belongs to the female sex, Ingie's husband does not care about her feelings and believes that she is guilty and thus she has to suffer.

Lastly, through "Melody", the author explores the Muslims' lifestyle and criticizes the man's behavior for it does not match with Islamic doctrine. Therefore, Ingie's husband represents the Muslim dominant man who ill-treats his wife, oppresses, and impedes her self-determination, independence and freedom.

2.4 Soueif's Short Story "1964"

AhdafSoueif's life was divided between Egypt and Britain. Indeed, most of her works were based on her personal experience on both cultures. Particularly, Soueifused to discuss women issues; as being oppressed, their child memories, weaknesses, life impediments and hopes. Thus, her short story "1964" would explore some of these issues.

2.4.1   A Brief Overview of <u>Aisha</u> and "1964":

Initially, the short story "1964" written by the Egyptian writer AhdafSoueif is included in her collection <u>Aisha</u> in 1983. In fact, <u>Aisha</u> is a collection of cultures and experiences that are grouped around the central figure, an Arab Muslim young girl named "Aisha". This collection includes short stories of life and love, marriage and death.Furthermore, not just Aisha's life, but the life of her friends, family and

lovers, from the contemporary urban settings of London and Cairo, to the tribal traditions of Egypt.

> Apart from being a girl's name, with all the resonance from Arab-Islamic history, 'Aisha' contains the root 'aish, life. The whole collection of short stories is in fact a call for life, a new life, after various lives married in distinctively gendered ways: the disillusion of married life…Aisha is about an Arab woman, struggling not only to survive, but mainly to carve out a place of her own -- a concern that shapes Soueif's later fiction as well. The whole matter hinges on East/West relations, years after decolonization. The idea is less to write back to the "empire" than to indulge in self-representation, thus inevitably resorting to values that may seem at first to be Western but which in fact transcend geographical boundaries (Trabelsi, 2003)

"1964" is a short story from "Aisha"'s collection written by the novelist and political commenter AhdafSoueif.

Indeed, in "1964", Soueif recounts the journey of Aisha, an Egyptian teen, during her relocation from Egypt to London, based on Soueif's personal experience as a Cairo-born young woman, who moved to England as a teenager with her parents. Aisha was discriminated against, by her ignorant English peers and teachers, in her secondary school, due to her Muslim Egyptian background; she was seen as uncivilized, rustic and strange. In other words, she was unwelcomed in the European culture. Thus Aisha felt inferior and could not keep pace with her new life in London (Paper Masters, 2015).

2.4.2   Social Discrimination

Through Aisha's eyes, AhdafSoueif leads the reader to inspect the theme of discrimination and isolation. In fact, Aisha in "1964"has been presented as aforeigner, who seems to belong to nowhere, as she was a Muslim teen; she was not accepted in the European Christian culture.

Aisha's new British friends were the Vicar's children. They live down the road where Aisha lives. In fact, they took her to the church. At the beginning, Aisha was delighted, thinking that she was accepted among her new friends as a Muslim girl, and praying together. She was listening to the Vicar's sermon speaking "in our city today we find increasing numbers of people who come to us from far places; from alien races, alien beliefs. There are some of those among us tonight" (Soueif, p32). Thus, Aisha felt that the Vicar meant her, referring to Aisha and her people as aliens. At the same time she felt alone among her new friends, as she did not belong to a European Christian civilization. What is more is that the vicar wanted from her to become a Christian, without any respect to her religious belonging as a Muslim "Should any person in this congregation wish to join with us in the love of Jesus Christ"(idem). Hence, Aisha on a second felt herself Suffocating, knowing that she was the one referred to; being the only non-Christian (Muslim) girl among the Vicar's children "I could not swallow. There was no doubt in my mind that he meant me" (idem).

The fact that Aisha felt alienates, from both setting and people, she decided to stay alone, never go with the Vicar's children again "Mercifully, it did not happen... I had been-however unknowingly-betrayed, and I knew I would never go out with the Vicar's children again" (idem), and to return back to her own world, where she was influenced by fictitious characters "I loved Maggie Tulliver, Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary and understood them as I understood none of the people around me" (ibid,p29), Aisha was feeling that she was a heroine in her mind, belonging to that world more than the real one, which would put her away. Accordingly, through the experience with the Vicar's children, Aishaunderstood that the world she dreamt about was not founded yet. She returned back to the present, feeling hopeless and lonely, since people around her stereotyped her religious belonging(Islam).

Thus, Aisha was marginalized, she heard discriminatory and hostile statements from her new British friends "we find...people who come to us from far places; from alien races, alien beliefs" (idem); the Vicar and the Vicar's children,

whom they based their representations on their own stereotyped imagination, rather than the real status of a Muslim girl in particular, and Muslim women in general.

2.4.3 The Situation in Education

Actually, <u>Aisha</u>'s short story "1964" represents the way a Muslim woman is stereotypically perceived within the European educational context.

Aisha's parents were educated people. Thus, they sent her to a comprehensive school girl in Putney, partly to carry on her studies, and partly to be more integrated with her new life; making new friendships. In fact, this was Aisha's second adventure after the Vicar's children. When Aisha arrived to the comprehensive school, she decided to hide her religious belonging (Islam) for fear of being rejected a second time "I wasn't about to declare myself a Mohammedan, or even a Muslim" (Soueif, p34).Then, Aisha met her new British school-mate Susan, who asked firstly about Aisha's origin. Indeed, when Aisha answered: "From Egypt" (ibid,p35), Susan had a preconception about Egyptians as uncivilized; "That's where they have those pharaohs and crocodiles and things…D' you go to school on a camel? D'youlive in a tent" (idem).

Though Aisha was from an educated family and a good English speaker, trying to clarify her answers for Susan, who was totally wrong "I knew they were speaking Cockney and I was speaking proper English. But surely I was the one who was right" (idem). Further, Susan stereotyped Aisha's Muslim society as being polygamous and poor "How many wivesdoes your father have? He don't have ten, then? D'youhave bags of money?" (idem).

Moreover, she did not respect Aisha's Islamic principles "D'you have a boyfriend? D'youkiss him?" (Soueif, p36). Therefore, Aisha again felt prejudiced and alienated, as an outsider (a Muslim) in a Christian school, due to Susan's stereotyped representations with a total ignorance, which strengthened Aisha's exclusion and separation" Socially, school was a disaster. The white girls lived in a world of glamour and boyfriends to which I had no entrée" (ibid, p37). In addition,

the dark girls;living in a ghetto world, were looking at Aisha as being unfriendly "The black girls…regarded me with suspicious dislike" (idem).

Besides, as Aisha was good at English language, she could answer to almost all questions of her teacher, the thing that did not satisfy her class-mates

> "Mrs Brathwaite…booming out, The Egyptian gets it every time. It takes someone from Africa, a *foreigner,* to teach you about your native language. You should be ashamed. At first, I was proud…But as the hostility grew I realised I had made another mistake " (Souief, p37).

Consequently, Aisha felt alone by the repressed atmosphere in her school, and she sought refuge in the library" then, slink off to the library. There, hidden in a corner, holding on to a hot radiator uninterrupted by cold blasts of air or reality"(ibid, p38), or in the corner café, where she used to listen to music through the juke box "Music was magic to me...My secret bursts of life at the corner café sustained me, but at school things got steadily worse.The atmosphere in English became intolerable" (ibid, p39). Even more, her school-mates marginalized her on the St Valentine's night "we joined some girls from my class for a while but conversation was awkward and we ended up standing alone by the wall" (ibid, p 41). Again, Aisha felt alone and hopeless" Time pass as I hung on waiting for something to happen while the evening slowly crumbled away and the stars went out one by one" (idem).

A week later, Aisha withdrew; she did not want to go to school anymore, because of her British friends' discriminatory treatment, based on prejudices. Despite her parents' disapproval, she decided to stay in her own world, far from the real world "I knew now there was no hidden world, no secret society from which I was barred, there was just-nothing" (idem). She stayed at home reading books and watching the television" Every morning..I would draw up my father's large armchair in front of the television, as well as preparing for her exam; "I spent my

fifteenth year in a lotus dream, sunk in an armchair, throbbing to the Stones, reading erotica. And I passed my exam" (ibid,p43).

Alternatively, Aisha's British school- mates mocked her Muslim faith, and made reference to an uncivilized culture, in addition, to uneducated, strange and less important element, if not an enemy.

Hence, all these racial images make Aisha's isolation and disappointment complete, and pushed her to prefer the fictional world than the real European one which saw her as an *alien.*

2.5. A Critical Perspective

The narratives produced in English by Arab women authors; who are western immigrants, are widely recognized by western critics, and are of interest to many academics and researchers.

Indeed, DalalSarnou(2014) finds an increase of interest that have been marked in the last few decades, in the English literary works produced by Arab females writers whom she describes as Anglophone and hybrid. Interestingly, Sarnou views that these literary works, mainly novels and short stories, have brought more recognition and visibility to the Arab woman whose identity is perceived by the European readership as being different and complex, because of her portrayal in the media, as well as the books of early orientalists (p4).

The contemporary Arab British author AhdafSoueif is one among many other Arab writers who immigrated to Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century. She began from her adopted home to write about her own encounters with otherness and based her narratives on the conflict between her own identity and that of the new country and which deal with the inner struggle between the old and the new cultural traditions. She makes her position clear in a collection of critical essays she published in 2004 entitled Mezzaterra. Since she is a postcolonial and Muslim Arab writer whom she spent many years in England, it is argued that:

"The purpose of her writings is to focus on the portrayal of Arab-Muslim society and its striving for modernization in a globalized world. She formulates this objective in the context of a specific understanding of culture, cultural identity and intercultural relationship"(Sindelarova, p 9).

She even explores various towns, different communities as well as individual points of views in order to open a Kaleidoscopic window that gives the reader a vivid impression of how the occupation and its ramification have affected every aspect of people's lives.

It is generally said that Soueif's fiction emphasizes much on Arab British identity and on Arab British relations as well in the post-colonial period. Therefore, it is more postcolonial than ethnic literature and there is much more concern with Orientalist representation of the Arab world.

When Soueif first started to write fiction, she conceived herself as Egyptian and Arab, not an Egyptian British or Arab British writer. It is also said that her way of writing is similar- to a high extent- to that of Yusuf Idris and TayebSalih. These are major novelists who wrote about sexual mores and gender politics in Egypt and Sudan during the 1960s. In fact, this theme is found in almost all of Soueif's works, including the two short stories: "The Wedding of Zeina" and "Her Man". Soueif can be identified both as a modern Arab-Muslim and postcolonial writer since she is an Anglophone novelist born in Egypt. She is much more concerned with cross-cultural issues; her works are firmly established in the spheres of the Arab-Muslim literary canon as well as in the international scope of postcolonial literature (Hassan, pp159-160).

Moreover, many critics wonder about Soueif's literary identity in the postcolonial literature; in other words it is not an easy task to determine whether she belongs to Arab-Egyptian or to British postcolonial literature. With the attention to this, Sindelarova states:

Soueif has often maintained that her creative and personal identity does not pose any further questions because she is an Egyptian who merely happens to write in English. And yet, it is not possible to agree totally with her approach for it is never a simple question of deciding about one's sense of belonging (p 15).

Furthermore, considering Soueif's narratives it can be found out that they are not influenced only by British authors such as Charles Dickens and Georges Eliot. Rather, Soueif's works also match with former Arab writings like those of Mahfouz and Saleh, in addition to the representatives of feminist literature in Arabic like Nawal as-Sa'adawi, Fadia Fakir, Hanan al Shaykh and more. Therefore, Soueif forms a complementary part of contemporary Arab literature and feminist writing since she concentrates mainly on female characters and formulates their concerns and aspirations, whilst projecting obstacles to their hope within a conservative thinking (ibid, 16).

The Sandpiper is a collection of stories that reflect Soueif's attitude towards the Arab governments and their political systems and she aims also to tell about the Arab Muslims who do not admit women independence and do not recognize their rights. It is generally said that the genius of Soueif's writings is that she conveys a strong sense about women's need for open line of communication and equal recognition without a clearly and openly feminist fanfare (Bland, p 99).

AhdafSoueif's considered as a British Arab writer whose works created certain literary and cultural bridges between different spaces. Accordingly, in her first collection Aisha, she gathers two worlds (Britain and Egypt), two cultures, two languages and two consciousnesses.

In addition, as AhdafSoueif's "Aisha" discussed discrimination and alienation of Arab Muslim women being marginalized by Europeans, as Brahimi(2014) argues:

The alternative new portrait of Aisha draws her as a liberated woman demystifying her image as a stereotype. Aisha discovers

new visions and perceptions of herself and the other. This investigation will highlight Aisha's encounter with pertinent elements in the narrative respectively character, mainly male, time past and time present, besides space. These encounters will first confirm Aisha's old portrait and then allow the sketching of a brand new one (p2).

Further, as AhdafSoueif lives in two different cultures, speaking two different languages, Areeg (2015) says:

Soueif, who lives in the West and writes in English, is thus more straightforward when identifying herself with feminism. That is because writing in a language other than one's mother tongue is more liberating; for, English allowed Soueif and her conscious feminist narrative voice to infiltrate taboo terrains (p15).

Moreover, the literary theorist Edward Said (1983)**;** whose essays have often focused on the cultural representations, being the basis of orientalism (the Western perceptions of the East), sees that Soueif's personal experiences cited on her first collection "Aisha" are written with a high level of intelligence and consistency:

Aisha is the central consciousness of these eight stories. They form a cycle of experiences, from childhood to marital estrangement, to death; the lives of friends, relatives, lovers, family retainers intersect with hers…Soueif is perhaps uncritically attached to the idea of making each story build to a final, usually clever 'point…The stories' coherence derives from the Egyptian subject-matter, which is neither eroticised nor submitted to explanatory or ideological explanations (p1).

Particularly, the story "1964"as a "product of a partly Islamic and native upbringing" (idem).

Accordingly, some well-known journals have appreciated Soueif's collection Aisha; for instance Victoria Glendinning says:

Aisha is AhdafSoueif's first book and to say it is promising is to understate the case: it is highly accomplished. Aisha is further evidence of the fact that some of the most confident British fiction is being written by people of mixed cultures.

Isabel Raphael adds that 'There is lively, lucid writing here, vivid description and sharply observed dialogue'.

The famous journal *The Times* states that it is 'A highly unusual and richly impressive first novel ... The author weaves a circle round us thrice with the touch of a born sorceress. One awaits her next with great expectations'.Overall, Christopher Wordsworth joins in with his comment and argues that: 'The writing is deft and patient, the understanding of this trickiest of narrative forms is sure and rarely off-target' Edward Said, London Review of Book" (Amazon, 1996)

More than that, Ahdaf Soueif works vary while expressing her emotions "Her anxiety reflects a more anxious world; we are lucky to have her voice in it, sometimes romantic, sometimes pleading, but always burningly committed to truth and justice" (idem)

Above all, the Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif has been positively reviewed according to some famous critics. She has successfully defended women issues in both Arabic and western cultures throughout most of her works.

2.6. Conclusion

Soueif's short story 'Melody', which tells the story of a woman whose daughter dies, her husband accuses and mistreats her after the incident, is a good example that shows the Muslim woman suffering with the controlling and firm husband.

Moreover, Ahdaf Soueif;in her short story "1964", wants to expose the stereotyped picture stuck in the European minds, for a Muslim woman, resulting in her alienation and exclusion. Indeed, Via Aisha's experience in Britain, Soueif presents the mistreatment of a Muslim woman; mainly the religious and educational   perception.

General Conclusion

The research paper dealt with the oppression of Muslim women in Muslim societies as well as of those living in Europe. The topic concerns Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular and it is one among the most frequent subjects in the contemporary period. Indeed, the issue of Muslim women receive different viewpoints and critical perspectives from many scholars; both Muslims and non-Muslims; authors, politicians and critics.

In the first place, in the two short story collections: *Sandpiper* (1996) and *Aisha* (1983) the Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif concentrates on women's social, economic, political and inner troubles. She presents her main characters – women-as being lost, depressed and weak because of their cultural customs and society's norms in particular. Therefore, they believe they are inferior to men and submissive to them. Additionally, the way the Muslim woman lives in her own context and that one she lives in Europe is found in Soueif's different short stories, for as being an Arab Muslim woman she writes about women and the Muslims' misbehaviour towards women. She describes, as well, those Europeans who insult and mock Muslim women because of their clothing.

Furthermore, women are granted rights to various fields like; education, economy, inheritance and property rights, however many of them find obstacles to get such rights as they are living in a male dominated society where patriarchy is the norm. Such society does not respect and welcome women's rights and just disregard their ability to learn, work and succeed in several domains. The phenomenon of forced marriages is also found in Muslim communities which refers to the marriage of a man and a woman without their consent or without the consent of only one party, though Islam insists on marriage with satisfaction. Certainly, there are numerous reasons that lead to such marriages as for example; those who believe in marriage as a social contract and no more than that, and those who want to wed their daughters just to protect them, in addition to many other reasons.

The research includes on the one hand a phenomenon found not only in Muslim societies but also in non-Muslims, too. It is polygamy. This latter means that men can marry up to four wives which is also much practiced within Muslim contexts. It

no doubt hurts women's feelings and leads to marital troubles. On the other hand, divorce is also one problem that Muslim women face though Islam disfavors it for its negative consequences.

Muslim women living in Europe suffer marginalization in the way that they are not welcome among Europeans because of their religion in addition to the way they dress. As the Muslim woman goes out with a veil in public, the Europeans show religious discrimination throughout their behaviours and believe that veiling is a result of gender inequality. They also face the evil of discrimination in schools and when asking for employment which leads to some islamophobic incidents. In other words, women who cover themselves cannot learn comfortably and have no right to get a job. In fact, the media portrayal of Muslims and Islam is the main reason that helps those westerners to think about Muslims the way they do. Using invented and fake images they could frame the worst person and call them "Muslim".

"Melody" the short story gives the example of one Muslim woman dependent on her husband who is already married and has a family.He controls her especially after their daughter's death. The other short story is "1964" where the protagonist Aisha- a teenage girl- is going to face discriminatory deeds in England and whose classmates mock her being a Muslim girl.

In sum, Muslim women do not suffer only external discrimination, since they suffer internal discrimination as well. As long as they are mistreated by their Muslim counterparts, they are no doubt mistreated by the non-Muslims too for Muslims are not giving good impression about themselves and their religion. Therefore, non-Muslims confirm their ideas and assumptions about them in addition to their fake articles, movies and reports.

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