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**Contextualizing Arab Women's Narratives in Postcolonial Literary Canons:
Reading Aboulela's *Minaret* and Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun***

**Thesis submitted to the Department of English in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctorate in Literature**

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Dedication

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved mother whose endless sacrifices have shaped me into the person I am today. You have been my role model, teaching me the values of hard work and resilience.

Special dedication may reach the soul of my father whose memory continues to guide me every day. I regret not having you here to witness this achievement, but I know you are watching over me with pride. Each academic step is a tribute to your legacy.

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To my beloved husband. Thank you for your patience, your presence when I needed it most, and for always reminding me of the importance of perseverance. This work is as much yours as it is mine.

This work is dedicated to my wonderful sons, Abdessamad and Riyad, who fill my life with love and purpose. While this journey has sometimes been challenging, you both have been my greatest motivation. This achievement is for you, with the hope that it inspires you to always pursue your dreams, believing that only with hard work and dedication, precious things are attainable.

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Abstract

Representation of Arab/Muslim women identities in postcolonial Anglophone fiction is a thriving field of study. With the aim of contributing to this area of research, this dissertation examines the literary strategies of two prominent Arab British women writers, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela, in negotiating postcolonial identity, cultural translation, and resistance to Orientalist representations. Grounded in postcolonial theory and translation studies, the current research conducts a comparative analysis of Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) alongside Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005). The study attempts to examine how Soueif's hybrid linguistic techniques and politically engaged texts reflect woman's postcolonial Egyptian identity, while Aboulela's religious-based narratives assert Muslim women's agency within Western secular context. Methodologically, the study combines close translational, linguistic, and comparative interdisciplinary approach to explore how the writers' narratives challenge both Western Orientalism and local cultural expectations. By moving beyond canonical East/West binaries and simplistic modes of hybridity, the writers' stance of cultural translation contribute to more nuanced postcolonial subjectivities within the context of Arab British literature.

Key Words: Postcolonial Women writers, Arab British literature, representations, hybridity, cultural translation, Orientalism.

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General Introduction

Postcolonial discourse grew out of the academic field of English literary studies and has gradually expanded to cover a multiplicity of spheres dealing with colonial history and experiences. The development of a literary approach to postcolonial criticism started as scholars investigated different aspects of postcolonial thought. Basically, most postcolonial theorists emphasize a study based on the relationships between the Western colonizers and the people they colonized.

Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak discuss postcolonialism from their specific Indian context, while Edward Said writes from middle Eastern surroundings. Their critics shed light on the enduring power imbalances rooted in the stance relations between the colonizer and the colonized. By the 1980's, the literature produced, particularly by writers from ex-colonized backgrounds, underwent significant advancement thanks to postcolonial endeavour which offered distinct spheres to read and compare literary texts.

This approach acknowledges different ways of producing and perceiving narratives that are not based on Western norms. Postcolonial discourse attempts to take the initiative inclusion of diverse cultural and literary forms moving beyond canonical Eurocentric standards that have dominated traditional literary criticism. By bringing in narratives from outside the Western centre, postcolonial studies forge navigating spaces to explore matters like exile, displacement, identity, and belonging.

Postcolonialism conceives that cultures are widely affected by the imperial process during the time of colonization to the present day (Ashcroft et. Al, 1994, p. 2). Against this background, postcolonial theory is an interdisciplinary academic approach that encourages cross-cultural discourse, which acknowledges postcolonial identities as shaped by various cultural, linguistic, and political landscapes.

As such, postcolonial studies refract new possibilities for comparative literature. For instance, in her influential book *Death of a Discipline* (2003), Gayatri Spivak initiates the concept of “planetarity” as an alternative to the widely used idea of “globalization”. Spivak suggests that expanding the ground for comparative literary studies would offer representations of subaltern groups who have approached “world literature” from non-Western perspectives (2003, p. 84-5).

This advanced inclusion has helped to represent new minority voices in literature, including those of Arab and Muslim who, as native informants, write about their own experiences from their unique standards. The Arab diaspora in the UK has grown due to multiple waves of migration promoted by colonial independence, postcolonial upheavals, and economic opportunities. The intersection of Arab and English literary traditions articulates a rich and multifaceted tapestry of postcolonial narratives. Arab British literature stands at the crossroads of colonial history, migration, and literary production.

The postcolonial condition has profoundly shaped both the lives and the writings of Arab British women authors. In the past few decades, the literature produced by Arab-Anglophone women writers has emerged as a significant medium for the negotiation of cultural identities. Their writings are deeply shaped by historical and cultural entanglements between the Arab world and Britain. These women writers navigate the complex terrain of transcultural identities. The current study examines the different perspectives through which Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela engage with postcolonial subjects.

Within this vibrant field, the works of Ahdaf Soueif, an acclaimed Arab British author, offer profound insights into the intersection of cultural hybridity, nationalism, gender, and personal identity. Born in Egypt and educated in both the Arab world and the West, Soueif concretely articulates transcultural encountering that shapes her literary narratives. Her novels *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999) firmly deal with the socio-political history of postcolonial Egypt, and tend to reveal the nuanced tensions between East and West, tradition and Westernized modernity, and women's private desires and public national aspirations.

Building upon the exploration of postcolonial Arab British women's writings, this research also draws inspiration from Aboulela's novel *Minaret* to further examine postcolonial identity and cultural negotiation through a distinctly spiritual lens. *Minaret* reflects Aboulela's own transcultural background. Born in Cairo to an Egyptian mother and Sudanese father, raised and educated in Sudan, and later relocated to the UK, makes Aboulela a divergent voice in articulating the complexities of cross-cultural belongings.

This research has been driven by a desire to forge a divergent investigation outside the homogenizing narratives that often define postcolonial literature, emphasizing the unique perspectives of the selected authors. The study seeks to critically analyse Soueif and Aboulela's literary portrayal of hybridity with particular emphasis on their metaphorical representation of women's national desire and religious faith as a site of postcolonial resistance.

By focusing on Soueif's national and cultural hybridity and Aboulela's religious and translational standpoint, the study aims to contribute to the growing field of Arab British Literature as mainly handled by women, revealing the diversity of postcolonial narratives. Against this background, this research is conducted to explore the complex identities and hybrid experiences of Arab women in the diaspora.

The study is also motivated by the nuanced ways in which Soueif and Aboulela negotiate questions of cultural belonging, hybridity and cultural translation. Their works open up discussions about the intersections of East and West, inspiring us to examine the ways Arab British women writers articulate their voices in the face of ongoing marginalization and stereotypes.

For postcolonial Arab British writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela, literary production becomes an act of cultural translation that transcends mere linguistic rendering to engage with more complex interplay of history, politics, religion, and identity. The research examines Soueif's novels alongside Aboulela's, framing them as a comparative paradigm. The comparison investigates the mechanisms and ideological dimensions of cultural translation in the writers' novels, focusing on their divergent yet complementary strategies.

This dissertation aims to explore the complex ways in which literature by postcolonial Arab British women writers responds to the tensions often framed as East/West conflicts. Rather than accepting these dichotomies as fixed or absolute, the present research argues that their narratives reveal a more nuanced engagement that both acknowledges and subverts the inherited legacy of Orientalist discourse as previously discussed by Edward Said.

Through *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif portrays Asya as a character who navigates cultural and geographical divides with a degree of acceptance and critical negotiation of the West. Asya's journey reflects some classical Orientalist motifs while also disrupting them. Consequently, Soueif articulates a determined representation of identity that refuses an integral Orientalist paradigm. Both Soueif and Aboulela invent fictional characters who engage simultaneously with their cultural heritage and Western surroundings in ways that resist easy classification of postcolonial subjectivities.

Throughout Aboulela's *Minaret*, the research attempts to address the gap in postcolonial scholarship by exploring the centrality of religious faith in shaping identity and cross-cultural experience among Muslim women. While traditional postcolonial theory has largely marginalized Islam in cultural negotiation, the narratives of Aboulela emphasize faith as a source of empowerment, belonging and psychological resilience.

It has been noticed that Soueif and Aboulela can stand as exceptional examples if compared to other postcolonial Arab British women writers. Their particularity lies in their distinct and nuanced paradigms to cultural translation and identity negotiation, which intentionally challenge both Western Orientalism and essentialist local cultural expectations. Unlike many writers who may adopt more well established strategies of "writing back" to colonial discourses or embrace hybrid identity as neutral middle ground, Soueif and Aboulela shape more complex, often contrasting literary and ideological techniques.

Therefore, the research is intentionally opting for a comparative literary analysis guided by the following observations: Soueif writes mainly in English but incorporates Egyptian Arabic dialect as a hybrid linguistic space that reflects fractured national identities and postcolonial tensions. Aboulela writes in English but infuses Arabic religious vocabulary and cultural markers, focusing on faith as a resistance against Western secular frameworks. While Soueif's narratives expose political instability and a declining nationalism; Aboulela's novel asserts religious identity as an alternative and non-assimilative mode.

Finally, both writers reject the stance of the translator as neutral, emphasizing agency, ideological investment, and power negotiation through translation. Leaning against these assumptions, the investigation requires the subsequent research questions:

1. To what extent does postcolonial theory account in capturing the narratives of Arab British writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela?
2. How does Soueif and Aboulela's hybrid fiction offer a counter-narrative to conventional frameworks of postcolonial literature and suggest a new paradigm for understanding Arab/Muslim women's agency, contesting rigid binaries of East and West narratives?
3. How do Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela display linguistic and narrative strategies of cultural translation to negotiate postcolonial identities and resist Orientalist representations of Arab/Muslim women in Western literary contexts?
4. In what ways do hybridity and untranslatability manifest in Soueif's politically grounded narratives and Aboulela's faith-centred stories, and what implications do these nuances have for articulating cultural translation as an ideological act?

To address the aforementioned problematic and research questions, the present study is guided by the following hypotheses:

The research suggests that Ahdaf Soueif's literary strategies are mainly informed by a particular use of hybrid language articulated by her female protagonists in their journeys of navigating between two different cultural spaces. More intensely, the study is aligned with the ways Soueif's novels reflect and critique the socio-political landscape of postcolonial Egypt by merging nationalism, gender, and identity especially in the context of remarkable historical events such as the 1967 defeat and its aftermath.

Thus, Soueif's fictional portrayal of private and political narratives may reveal that the postcolonial Egyptian experience is deeply marked by national distress and gendered resistance, where female protagonists grapple with the tensions between modernity and tradition as they negotiate their identities in the midst of local political upheavals. Drawing on hybridity, Soueif could destabilize essentialist binaries and articulate new possibilities for identity. Also, the private and political realm in her texts

are perhaps intricately intertwined, reflecting how national and political disillusionment are shaped by personal lives.

The research questions related to *Aboulela* would allow an exploration of the manners her female characters subvert Western feminist stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed, especially by presenting their agency as deeply rooted in spiritual devotion rather than political activism. This would also emphasize *Aboulela*'s unique position in the ongoing debate on romantic love as the ultimate form of personal fulfilment in the Western romance genre, contrasting it with her protagonist's spiritual devotion that transcends secular notions of love and identity.

Through this inquiry, *Aboulela*'s *Minaret* demonstrates that religious faith functions as the source of determined identities and psychological well-being for Muslim characters while navigating postcolonial diasporic spaces. The depiction of Muslim women in the novel articulates a nuanced hybrid interplay between religious devotion and gender roles that resists both feminists' critiques and Western stereotypes.

The research assumes that Soueif uses hybrid linguistic forms, such as Arabized-English, alongside political and feminist themes probably to create a layered negotiation of identity that resists Orientalist stereotypes. *Aboulela*, in contrast, foregrounds religious faith and symbols, such as hijab and hajj mainly in untranslated Arabic terms, likely to challenge Western secular assumptions and represent Muslim women's agency in different manners.

Accordingly, the study suggests the possibility that Soueif's narratives embrace hybridity as a site of political tension and fragmented identity, highlighting the difficulties of translating national and cultural complexities in a postcolonial context. *Aboulela*, on the other hand, rejects hybridity in favour of asserting untranslatability grounded in religious faith, articulating cultural translation as a divergent ideological act that resists Western secular assimilation. In doing so, both writers oscillate between a foreignizing and domesticating translation strategy, underscoring what Wail Hassan calls "Translational Literature".

Hypothetically, the research assumes that hybridity in the sample novels is manipulated through a deliberate oscillation between foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies, which both foregrounds the limits of cultural translation and resist reductive dichotomies of East and West. Through their nuanced narrative techniques, Soueif and Aboulela articulate ambivalent forms of national, ideological, and religious belonging, conversing dominant discourses of cultural assimilation and offering alternative archetypes of postcolonial transcultural subjectivity.

Soueif and Aboulela engage with cultural translation in ways that may challenge or extend the boundaries of postcolonial discourse. Their narratives exhibit the possibility to move beyond rigid binaries, developing representations that reveal more complex and multifaceted identities. In doing so, their texts expand the possibilities of postcolonial literature and reverse the enduring influence of Orientalist premise in contemporary cultural production.

This research adopts interdisciplinary approaches from postcolonial studies, translation theory, and feminist critique, to explore how the writers negotiate complex cultural, linguistic, and ideological terrains. The core methodological approach involves a close reading and thematic analysis of selected primary data sources consisting of Ahdaf Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, alongside Aboulela's *Minaret*.

The study builds on foundational translation theory, referencing to scholars like Susan Bassnett, Harish Trivedi, Tymoczko, Lawrence Venuti, and Wail Hassan. Also, the study employs a comparative framework to underline levels of convergence and divergence in the translation strategies and ideological stances of the selected writers. This method contextualizes their narratives with broader landscape of Arab British postcolonial literature, juxtaposing their distinct endeavour with hybridity, untranslatability, and Orientalism.

This investigation further considers narrative discourse analysis regarding the enduring impact of Orientalist stereotypes on the reception of Soueif and Aboulela's novels in both Arab and Western contexts. This involves reviewing major critical responses and writers' interviews to understand how institutional and canonical cultural forces shape the authors' translational practices and narrative choices.

In addressing the research questions outlined above, this dissertation is methodologically structured into four chapters.

Chapter one will seek to explore the preliminary theoretical frameworks for analysing Arab British women's literature, focusing on postcolonial, feminist, diaspora, and translation studies. These theories foreground a foundation for understanding the complexities faced by postcolonial Arab British women writers. The chapter will then highlight Bhabha's hybridity which allows these writers to critique both Western and Arab patriarchal structures. It will ultimately examine the cultural effects of migration through the metaphor of translation as a means of negotiating identities and ideologies.

The second chapter will concentrate on Ahdaf Soueif's postcolonial narratives, discussing how politics, nationalism, women's desire, and hybridity are represented in her work. Soueif intersects her female protagonists' personal journeys with Egypt's political history, positioning their private stories within the broader context of postcolonial nation-building and disillusionment. The characters' transcultural experiences, navigating between Egypt and England, tradition and modernity, and East/West divisions articulate their struggle to reconcile these tensions and forge a more nuanced identity. The chapter will end by contextualizing Soueif's exploration of hybridity and transculturation as central to her literary strategy.

As far as chapter three is concerned, it will mainly examine the role of religious identity in the narratives of Leila Aboulela. In particular, the chapter will emphasize the shift from Western stereotypical representations of Muslim women to a more realistic portrayal of religious experiences. Through a thorough study of her novel *Minaret*, the chapter will seek to examine the literary techniques employed by Aboulela to explore the theme of Muslim identity. In doing so, the chapter will thoroughly investigate how Aboulela's religious paradigm can alternatively be read within postcolonial, feminist, Western romance, and immigrant fiction.

Chapter four is set to be a critical reading of cultural translation in Soueif and Aboulela's narrative texts. It will mainly explore cultural translation as both a thematic and narrative strategy, framing the study into a comparative analysis. The chapter will be a critical attempt to investigate the writers' engagement with translation theory to

voice the complexities and tensions involved in translating culture, religion, and identity across different worlds.

**Chapter 1 : Intersecting Voices: Arab Women's
Writings and Postcolonial Thought**

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1.1 Introduction

Arab British women's literature has developed into a notable domain within modern postcolonial and diasporic studies, encapsulating the intricacies of migration, identity, and gender. The experiences of Arab women in Britain, influenced by cultural hybridity, historical dislocation, and intersectional challenges, have been articulated via literary works that contest prevailing narratives. Different scholars developed key academic perspectives on the works of Arab British women writers, examining their thematic preoccupations and literary strategies.

This chapter will examine the theoretical foundations necessary for comprehending the literary output of Arab British women. Postcolonialism, feminism, translation, and diaspora studies provide essential frameworks for analysing these narratives. The vast scholarship of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Leila Ahmed, and Stuart Hall will be utilized to demonstrate how Arab British women authors address matters of hybridity, representation, and gender-based oppression.

A significant element of this literary corpus is the convergence of gender and postcolonial conflicts. Western feminist discourses frequently neglect the distinct obstacles encountered by Arab women, presuming a universal feminism that fails to include cultural particularities (Mohanty, 1988). Leila Ahmed (1992) opposes this viewpoint, asserting that Arab women's experiences should be viewed through the dual lens of colonial influence and homegrown patriarchy (p. 165). Arab British women writers often underscore these conflicts, providing a sophisticated critique of both Western and Arab patriarchal structures.

Moreover, diaspora and migration theories offer significant perspectives on the writing of Arab British women. Stuart Hall (1990) characterizes cultural identity as a process of becoming rather than a state of being, highlighting the flexibility of identity development within diaspora populations. The psychological impacts of migration, nostalgia, and belonging are prevalent topics in the literature of Arab British women.

Relevant to Arab British women's literature is the premise of cultural translation. Postcolonial methods of translation have expanded the research domain in translation

studies to encompass themes of ideology, identity, power dynamics, and various anthropological and sociological investigative approaches. Postcolonial intercultural writing is analogous to translation, both in the writing process and in the characteristics of the postcolonial text, which frequently encompasses other linguistic and cultural frameworks. Herein, translation is perceived as an action that mirrors the reality it depicts, utilizing language as a potent instrument.

This process facilitates the negotiation of new identities, each from their unique vantage point, while acknowledging the impact of Orientalism on immigrant Arab writers. This leads to set Arab British women's literature to what Wail Hassan (2012) calls "Translational Literature".

1.2 Postcolonial Theory and its Relevance to Arab Women's Writing

Postcolonial theory emerged with the political independence movements that marked the second half of the 20th century and, as with any intellectual or theoretical movement, it is historically, politically, socially, and economically located. It is therefore necessary to understand colonial and postcolonial history in order to understand the history, present, and hovering futures of postcolonial thought. The West's oppression and colonization of Asia, Africa, and the Americas began with the so-called 'Age of Discovery' in the 15th century.

From that century to the early 20th century, European imperial expansion established outposts and colonies all over the world and set up systems of domination and cultural and social hegemony. Whether they controlled a country or simply influenced it, European nations saw their foreign adventures as civilizing missions, based on ideas of cultural, moral, and racial superiority. In Asia and Africa, colonizers brutally silenced local traditions and, whenever possible and necessary, created new cultures out of the intermingling of colonizers and the colonized.

Postcolonial societies inherited oppressive legacies that continue to influence their lives today. The history of nearly all colonized nations reflects the same pattern of exploitation and suppression. Asian and African countries, like those in Latin America, have been subjected to inimical foreign political domination for the last four hundred

years. In doing so, the Western colonizers not only restructured the native societies and traditions but also the sense of being different and being non-European.

There is an immense body of history, both political and social, that enters postcolonial academia through this trajectory. It is significant to realize how this repressed history is taken up with creative intelligence in the contemporary works of writers and filmmakers, interrogating the common folk as well as the dominant narratives of the colonial and postcolonial dispensations.

Colonial history is as much a formal subject of this postcolonial dialogue as it is in literature. Throughout both the philosophical and the literary underpinnings, the varied approach of this theory makes it attempt to unravel the complex process of negotiation, articulation, resistance, and compliance. As hedged with ambivalence, colonial history leads to the formation of postcolonial identities and politics.

1.2.1. Postcolonialism: Mapping Theories

Postcolonial theory critically examines the lingering effects of colonialism on formerly colonized nations. It interrogates how colonial power structures continue to influence political, cultural, and social identities. The theory was the outcome of the work of several writers such as Amine Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiango, Edward Said, Bill Ashcroft and his collaborators, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and others. Both the term and field of Postcolonialism have been subjected to thorough and extensive criticism from the perspectives of literary, political, and religions studies. Theorists take different views about this field of study.

The critical part of a definition of 'Postcolonial' concerns the prefix 'Post', which signifies two different meanings in one compound word. Several theorists have tried to address this issue. If it is read as a reference to temporal succession, the term post-colonialism applies to that which follows after colonialism.

However, if colonialism is defined as the way in which unequal international relations of economic political, military and cultural power are maintained, it cannot be argued that the colonial era is really over. Postcolonialism, in such a case, is then

frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept, meaning the time after colonization has ceased. Mishra and Hodge define postcolonialism as:

a neologism that grew out of older elements to capture a seemingly unique moment in world history, a configuration of experiences and insights, hopes and dreams arising from a hitherto silenced part of the world, taking advantages of new conditions to search for alternatives to discourses of the colonial era (2005, p. 378).

In his article, "Postcolonialism: what's in a name?" Ahmad Aijaz thinks that "the word 'postcolonial' was to be used increasingly not so much for periodization as for designing some kinds of literary and critical writing, and eventually some history writing" (Aijaz, 1995, p. 28). Time, then, is not the main difference between colonialism and postcolonialism. The latter is, somewhat, a critique of the former. For some critics, even "*Beowulf and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* could be read as postcolonial texts" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1).

In contrast, some texts that are written today during the so-called postcolonialism might be considered as colonial because "colonialism does not end with the end of colonial occupation" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 17). The main point here is that if Boehmer could consider *The Canterbury Tales* as postcolonial and Gandhi could read any novel written today as colonial, then time is not a necessary difference between colonialism and postcolonialism.

Some postcolonial writers like Aijaz Ahmad do not seem happy with broadening the meaning of postcolonialism to embrace *The Canterbury Tales*. He thinks "the fundamental effect of constructing this globalized historicity of colonialism is to evacuate the very meaning of the word and disperse that meaning so widely that we can no longer speak of determinate histories of determinate structures as that of the postcolonial state" (Aijaz, 1995, p. 31).

It might be probably important to consider culture as a field of conflict between colonialism and postcolonialism. Through colonialism the colonizers try to steal the land and colonize the mind of its people. Through postcolonialism, the colonized try to reclaim the land and de-colonize the mind of their own peoples. "Cultural representations", Boehmer writes, "were central first to the process of colonizing other

lands, and then again to the process of obtaining independence from the colonizer” (Boehmer, 2005, p. 5). Moreover, for Simon During (1993):

Cultures are even more worth fighting for than nations” because hierarchies of cultures seem to fix identities, whereas hierarchies of nations merely seem to belong to history and politics. Under this dispensation, an imperialist nation, competing with others, must regard itself as having a world-historical culture” (p. 139).

Differently said, colonialism is said to be considered a cultural threat in addition to a political or economic one. Postcolonial movements begin culturally and then move on to the other aspects. In *The Empire Writes Back*, the authors seem to avoid these pitfalls by extending the use of the term ‘post-colonial’ to cover “all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization until the present day” (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p).

In short, Bhabha views “postcolonial criticism,” as one that “bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (Bhabha, 2006, p. 245). Others, however, assume that it is merely a “shift from formal to informal empire” since “for the most part, the same (ex) imperial countries continue to dominate those countries that they formerly ruled as colonies” (Young, 2003, p. 3).

In addition to the colonizer and the colonized, there is the group of native informants. Being closer to the colonizers, the native informant, in Said’s words, “feel [s] superior to his own people” (1995, p. 323-24) and becomes like “the Antilles Negro [who] is more ‘civilized’ than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man” (Fanon, 1993, p. 26).

Those native informants may include politicians and intellectuals, among them writers, through whom the colonizer dominate the colonized after independence. Through the politicians, the colonial powers dominate the land and through intellectuals, they dominate the mind. As a result, the colonial challenge still exists and the postcolonial response is considered a necessity.

In this regard, the term “postcolonial” is disputed and the scope that the term describes remains a matter of dispute. This disputation has been caused not only by opposing scholars (Dirlik, 1994, p. 20) who have emphasised contradictions within the term, but also by postcolonial theorists’ conflicting perceptions of the concept itself. The related subjects and themes which postcolonial theorists have been concerned with are also diverse, distinct, and complex.

It contains both areas dominated directly by colonialism and colonial mother countries themselves. As regards time, the term postcolonial refers not only to the ‘colonial past’ but also the ‘postcolonial present’. According to Robert Young, the postcolonial delineates the results of colonialism’s ‘wake’ in the period that follows functional colonialism. In respect to subjectivity, the postcolonial critical approach tends to articulate the identity of the colonized and not of the colonizer as it is “dedicated to changing those who were formerly the objects of history into history’s new subjects” (Young, 2001, p. 10).

As a tool for criticism, postcoloniality maintains seeking for different theoretical perspectives to confront the contemporary ideological and social transformation let down by the colonial past. In this vein, Young (2001) conveys:

It is not simply a western or even metropolitan phenomenon, but the hybrid product of the violent historical interactions of the west with the three continents in historical, political, cultural and conceptual terms. Postcolonialism is neither western nor non-western, but a dialectical product of interaction between the two, articulating new counterpoints of insurgency from long-running power struggles that predate and post-date colonialism. (p. 68)

Postcolonial criticism derives its roots from the academic field of English literature, and later on, it has been developed to touch various disciplines all of which have involved colonial subject matters. The development of a literary approach to postcolonial criticism began with the examination and adaptations of a variety of postcolonial scholarship, held by various critics speaking from different texts and contexts.

Yet, most postcolonial theorists have focused on the colonial and imperial interactions between western empires and their colonies. Homi Bhabha's and Gayatri Spivak's India, and Said's Middle East, to name but a few, have paved the way for postcolonial investigations by discussing the uneven relations between the former coloniser and the former colonised. Relevantly, the field of literature witnessed significant developments during the 1980s. Such adaptive evolution took place due to the alternative 'postcolonial' possibilities for reading and comparing the forms and content between writings from authors of different postcolonial contexts.

Postcolonialism also opens the doors for diasporic writers to discuss new issues and topics. Among these debates, the themes of exile, displacement and non/belonging have been taken place in literary scene from various postcolonial backgrounds. Even though, some critics such as E. San Juan Jr. oppose postcolonial theory as they see that it cannot consider the multicultural mechanism of the ex-colonised world.

Others, however; still accentuate the investigative as well as the analytical spirit of this theory in a world of diasporas of the postcolonial related to massive waves of migration to the ex-coloniser's mother lands. Bill Ashcroft et. al. (1994) is among the scholars who support the potentials of postcolonial theory and clarify:

Post-colonial literary theory has begun to deal with the problems of transmuting time into place, with the present struggling out of the past, and like much recent post-colonial literature, it attempts to construct a future. The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing into an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognise cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation ... the strength of post-colonial theory may well lie in its inherently comparative methodology and the hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world which this implies. (p. 36)

Herein, what seems pertinent to postcolonial studies is its interest in different cultural and literary forms; beyond the Eurocentric standards of the acclaimed literary productions. By including different texts and contexts, from outside the metropolis,

postcolonial studies have then furnished comparative literary studies with different cultural/literary alternatives which admit distinct modes of producing literature.

Such postcolonial inclusion into the field of comparative literary studies forges different minorities around the world to write about their own experiences from their own perspectives. In Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (2003), where she prefers to use the term "planetarity" instead of the commonly agreed process of globalisation, and besides indicates that supplying the field of comparative literary studies with new approaches, can only help to better represent other subaltern groups who are equipped with non-western paradigms of "world literature" (p. 84-85).

As a method of literary criticism, postcolonial theory could also have its shortcomings. Some critics, like Benita Parry (1987), tackled this issue and discuss the limitations of the postcolonial theory. In her essay "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," Parry argued that postcolonial and Marxist discourses share some similar points with western discussions about the Other (p. 29). In contrast, postcolonial discourse has its specific manners to analyse the same issues when addressed in distinct and particular contexts. Thus, postcoloniality can be further developed to debate its issues in more innovative literary modes to engage analytically with more transnational and transcultural subjects and themes.

In this regard, the postcolonial perspective can be used as an academic medium that calls for cross-cultural communication to identify diverse postcolonial identities from different cultural, linguistic and socio-political systems. From the postcolonial perspective, the position of Arab/Anglophone writers represents dual landscapes. Bill Ashcroft et. al. (1994) considered 'postcolonial' as covering "all the cultures affected by the imperial process during the time of colonisation to the present day" because "there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" (p. 2).

1.3 Orientalism and the Construction of the Other

It has been widely reported that postcolonial theory and its explanation of contemporary structures of the West vs. East, have led to the construction and perpetuation of

Orientalism. Though, Orientalism has a long history for both cultures even before the term has been written in bold, however, it was in the early 1960's that Orientalism has become a much more volatile term. The word has accumulated a new freight of meanings through the works of such figures: Anouar Abdel-Malek, A. L. Tibawi, and Edward Said. Said's theory of Orientalism stands among the most provocative scholarship in this area.

In return, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) argues that the Western representations of the East (particularly the Middle East and Asia) are not objective but rather ideological constructions that serve colonial and imperialist interests. The concept of Orientalism refers to the way the West depicts the East as exotic, irrational, backward, and static in contrast to the progressive, rational, and dynamic West.

Accordingly, Edward Said demonstrates that the idea of the Orient is constructed by western writers, travellers and commentators – Orientalists – of particularly the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that the knowledge that these Orientalists have constructed gives a picture of the Orient, including Muslim culture, as twisted, backward and inferior. This knowledge, he proposes, has been fully at the service of the colonialist project, providing excuses for expansion and exploitation.

In Said's own words "Orientalism was the discourse by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (1978, p. 3)¹. This discourse, "supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics" (Said, 1978, p. 42).

Orientalism, as explained by Said, deals with the Orient by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (Said, 1978, p. 3). In short, the discourse of Orientalism is "a Western style for

¹ Said, in formulating his ideas about the discourse of Orientalism, draws on Michael Foucault's theories about discourse, on the relationship between power and knowledge and the idea of regime of truth, and on Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony.

dominating, restricting, and having authority over the Orient” (ibid). Consequently, it is especially the idea of Orientalism as a *discourse* that, according to critics like Robert Young, accounts for the success of Said’s *Orientalism* (Young, 2001, p. 308).

Said’s analysis of Orientalist discourse draws on various academic and non-academic sources. According to Said, Orientalism is a “colonizing knowledge” which generates a series of stereotypical dichotomies between a rational, democratic, humanistic, creative, dynamic, progressive, “masculine” “West”, and an irrational, despotic, oppressive, backward, passive, stagnant, and “feminine” “East”. *Orientalism* is, then, a discourse which enables the West to create, to manipulate, and to control the Orient.

The notion of the “other” and the inherent inferiority in that category is perpetuated on at least three levels. According to Said’s orientalism as an academic sphere of inquiry, it will still exist through the constructed concepts about the Oriental; related to this is the second part of the argument. That is, Orientalism is a way of thought based on the ongoing separation and highlighted distinctiveness between the East and the West.

Said argues that the construction of such a powerful image of the “other” has also strengthened European culture and identity “by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground itself.” (1978, p. 3). Therefore, the Orient is a space against which the West defines itself as distant exotic, and dangerous on the one hand, yet knowable and thus “conquerable” on the other.

Nonetheless, Said’s text (1978) has been taken to task and criticism by a range of critics. Several theorists agree with Said’s general framework but point out the shortfalls in its methodological approach. Some have complained that Said has over generalized about all Orientalists and the western discourse on the Orient over some two millennia.

Others have argued that *Orientalism* is a pessimistic work (Johansen 1990); some such as Albert Hourani (1979) have written of the necessity of locating Orientalist discourse in its historical context. Also, some critics have criticized Said for not specifying the characteristics of the Orient while critiquing the discourse of Orientalism.

However, as some other critics argue, in spite of some valid criticism, there is still a lot of truth in Said's critique of Orientalism.

The discourse of Orientalism needs to be criticized because orientalism is a kind of representation of Orientals by the West. This representation considers 'the Orient' as a knowable entity, produces a certain type of knowledge about it and takes this knowledge as the truth about 'the Orient'. In spite of the fact that all representations are 'flawed', especially because of differences in the cultural and the intellectual backgrounds Said (1978) states:

My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of Oriental essence – in which I do not for a moment believe – but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting (p. 273).

Mani and Frankenberg (1985) dismiss the criticism of Orientalism which asks for real definitions of 'the Orient'. Rather, they state that "Said's task ... is not to articulate the 'real' Orient but to elaborate Orientalism: the context in which a Western discourse about the Orient was produced, the intellectual traditions that fed it and its internal logic and consistency" (p. 186).

In other words, the central theme of *Orientalism* calls into suspicion the practice of giving truth status to the knowledge produced through Orientalist scholarship without considering the conditions under which this knowledge is produced. The central theme of *Orientalism*, unlike its methodology, cannot easily be challenged.

Such strong influence might be more concrete in the context of Immigrant Arab/Muslim writers, and it is at this level where Said, perhaps, has his determined predictions concerning the effects of Orientalism on writers coming from the Orient, whether they are Arabs or Arab Muslims. Concerning this issue, Edward Said writes: "because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action" (1978, p. 204).

This is because "no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought or action imposed by Orientalism,"

and because a “whole network of interests [is] inevitably brought to bear on ... any occasion when that peculiar entity ... is in question” (Said, 1978, p.3). Against this background, Orientalism according to postcolonial studies has profoundly influenced western writers, it meanwhile cannot be ignored by immigrant writers, since by writing in English they are defined and redefined by the premise of Orientalism.

1.4 Hybridity and Cultural Negotiation

The concept of hybridity was employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. It is a colonial concept, and then is a racial term as the hybrid presence called for cleaning division between colonizer and colonized through education, marriage and the notion of citizenship. Its contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines, yet it becomes prominent in popular culture as Bhabha's discussions traverse the development of hybridity rhetoric from biological to cultural illustrations in literature. Consequently, hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture to denote ‘intercultural transfer’ and the resulting forms of identity such a change generates

Hybridity also has its roots within three key terms including syncretism, *mestizaje* or *métissage* and creolization (Hiepko, 2002, p. 118). Syncretism describes the cultural mixing of the religious and musical traditions in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, as Hiepko suggests, in Afro-Cuban religion West African deities are “projected onto” Catholic saints (ibid). Creolization, however, is understood as a general process of “intermixing and cultural change that product a creole society” (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 58).

While the term *metissage* was first interpreted in the framework of racial thinking, it was later on revealed to denote the “mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities, or of texts which explore this condition” (Brooker, 1999, P. 120). As the focus of hybridity has shifted from biological and racial framework to linguistic and cultural areas, many discussions of the term relate it to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

For Bakhtin, hybridization is a process involving both linguistic and cultural aspects, and it emerges when different linguistic codes meet with each other (Bakhtin,

1981, p. 34). Bakhtin's use of the term indicates the implication of double-voice mixture of the authorial language with tracers or influences of the other language/voice with which it has dialogized. Bakhtin differentiates between 'intentional' and 'unintentional' hybridity.

For intentional hybridity, discourse is double-voiced where one voice deliberately ironizes and unmasks the other within the same utterance. In this regard Mikhail Bakhtin said that "intentional semantic hybrids are inevitably internally dialogic² [...] two points of view are not mixed but set against each other dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1981, P. 360). In the matter of unconscious or organic hybridity, "the mixture remains mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions" (p. 360).

In this view, Bakhtin's unconscious hybridity is a natural process in which one language or culture absorbs elements from the other without making any confusion about it, whereas intentional shock, change, challenge or disrupt through intended fusions. As a result of Bakhtin's ideas (1997), literary critics have sought examples of hybridity in the mixed expressions of 'post-colonial literature' combining Western and non-western genres, languages and literary forms (p. 5).

1.4.1. Hybridity as a Postcolonial Form of Resistance

Hybridity contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines. Yet it becomes prominent in popular culture as Bhabha's discussions traverse the development of hybridity rhetoric from biological and linguistic to cultural illustrations in literature. Consequently, hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture to denote 'intercultural transfer' and 'the forms of identity such a change generates. From this perspective, hybridity comes to be discussed in connection with such notions like transculturation, diaspora and in-betweenness.

² The terms 'dialogic' often refers to the concept used by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his work of literary theory, *The Dialogic Imagination*. Bakhtin contrasts the dialogic and the "monologic" work of literature. The dialogic work carries on a continual dialogue with other works of literature and other authors. It does not merely answer or extend a previous work, but informs and is continually informed by the previous works.

Hybridity has then become a master trope across several areas of cultural research, theory and criticism, and one of the most employed and criticized concepts in postcolonial theory. According to Ashcroft and his collaborators, “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the postcolonial” (1995, P. 183). Hybridity, for them, is a concept highly set within the postcolonial context.

Therefore, hybridity was adopted by postcolonial theory to indicate the transcultural forms generated from linguistic, political or ethnic blending, to challenge the existing hierarchies and binaries such as East/West and colonizer/colonized. In postcolonial theory, hybridity is seen as an alternative discourse which subverts principles like dominant culture and unique canon, and thus calls for a re-examination of power structures. According to Bhabha (1994):

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities, it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity [...] displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination (p. 112).

Bhabha (1994) writes of the importance of the “turning of boundaries and limits into the in-spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (p. 4). He then posits hybridity, as a form of in-between space which he terms “Third Space”, a space inherently critical of conceptualizations of original culture. In this regard, Bhabha (1990) writes, “For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘Third space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (p. 211).

Bhabha’s outstanding intention refers to the idea that ‘hybrid identity’ is formed in that intercultural space known as ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘liminality’. In similar situation, what Bhabha calls ‘Third space of enunciation’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37) denotes that the liminal space between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, migrants, and other post(colonial) issues go through a process that reshaped their fixed sense of identity. Hereby, Bhabha recasts the monolithic ingredients of race, class and gender in

terms of culture location via focusing on that border area, crossing and interstices settled in the in-between space.

1.4.2. Postcolonial Hybrid Identity: A Cultural and Linguistic Negotiation

In recent postcolonial studies, the idea of cultural hybridity is conceived as a positive chance for new international communication (Kupiainen, 2004, p. 192). Set in a postcolonial context, the notion of hybridity is closely related to the notion of identity including multi-cultural individuals, migrants and diasporic communities. One cannot speak about identity in a postcolonial context without referring to Bhabha's writings on hybridity (Keller, 2004, p. 60).

Bhabha sustains that any cultural identity in the contact zone of intercultural relations is constructed in a hybrid-transcultural space, or the one he calls the 'third space of enunciation' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34). By using the Freudian term *das Unheimliche* or the 'unhomely', Bhabha describes this 'third space of enunciation'. Because of homelessness generated by migrations made by colonialism, Bhabha from his part proposes that what is involved in the construction of hybrid identity is an "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world-the unhomeliness- that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12).

Hybrid or in-between people then occupy a displaced position which may incite a sense of dislocation and discontinuity in terms of space and time. This displacement articulates a 'hybrid identity' that is neither that of the colonizer nor that of the colonized, but an identity of an 'in-between' site that is historically contingent and specific. Hybridity shows cultural change and therefore identity changes both among colonizer and colonized.

For Bhabha, the hybrid is a product of colonial culture's inability to replicate itself in a monolithic and homogeneous manner (Catherine Keller et al, 2004, p. 61). This might be substantial when he says, "Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative, and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 107). Colonial authority is then a starting point for hybridity, and the third space is where authority is subverted. This is then put

against the premise that cultural identity can be a homogenizing force within colonialism.

According to Bhabha, “it is the ‘inter’- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between space*- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture (p. 37). Thus, identity is constantly in change and always unstable. This conveys that a given, firm and steady identity does not exist, but, instead, there is a continuous process of constructing and deconstructing identities. From this perspective, hybridity stands in opposition to the myth of purity, racial and cultural authenticity, of fixed and essentialist identity, embraces blending, combining, syncretism and encourages the composite, the impure, the heterogeneous and the eclectic (Guignery, 2011, p. 4).

Bhabha himself was inspired by writers who were in favour of hybridity; Salman Rushdie is one among the outstanding figures. When describing his novel *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie declares, “The Satanic Verses celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas [...] It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the pure” (1994, p. 394).

By doing so, Rushdie is opposing the very idea of pure and unmixed identities, and calls for more hybrid ones. Lowe further points out that the function of hybridity may vibrate between assimilation and resistance so that to find a third way between dominant and local cultures:

The materialist concept of hybridity conveys that the histories of forced labour, racial segregation, economic displacement and internment are left in the material traces of ‘hybrid’ cultural identities; these hybridities are always in the process of, on the one hand, being appropriated and commodified by commercial culture and, on the other, of being rearticulated for the creation of oppositional ‘resistance cultures’. (Lowe, 1996, p. 82).

In the light of increasing migrations and intercultural contacts in the postcolonial era, such notions as roots and national identity have then become questioned. This was illustrated by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), they have no secure roots

anymore which could fix them in place, in a nation or ethnic group; they, as a replacement, travel together with cultural routes which can carry them imaginatively or physically to different places into contact with different people.

1.4.3. Beyond Hybridity: The Limits of Cultural *In-Betweenness*

Hybridity is often seen as a contested and ambiguous concept that rejects complete and final interpretations. Rather than being a coherent and unified notion, hybridity embraces an ongoing range of ideas, themes, and concepts that may reinforce and oppose one another. Its divergent implications have generated significant debate over its meaning, use, and relevance. Consequently, critiques of hybridity largely stem from its inherent conceptual ambiguity and the fundamental disagreements about its interpretations.

When distinguishing between deliberate and unconscious forms of hybridity, Young observes that “Hybridity is [...] itself a hybrid concept” (2005, p. 21). He explains that intentional hybridity allows for an active confrontation of cultural differences and creates politically charged contexts where diverse traditions interact and challenge each other (2005, p. 22). In contrast, unconscious hybridity leans towards integration, aligning more firmly with the ideas of creolization and *metissage*; described as the nuanced blending of diverse cultures into a distinct new form (p. 21).

Through these interpretations, Young highlights that hybridity is a dual concept that simultaneously unites and preserves distinct elements (2005, p. 22). It exists in a state of contradiction. On the one hand, it is seen as disruptive and unconventional. On the other hand, it is also considered as widespread and ordinary. As Werbner remarks, hybridity is often praised for its ability to unsettle established norms, even if it is recognized as a common and everyday phenomenon (1997, p.1).

Conversely, this openness within the concept can result in unpredictable forms of exclusion and limitations. While hybridity is always grounded in the idea that all cultures are constantly merged, Peña points out that this universal approach actually imposes limits on the concept itself. As she overtly notes “precisely because of its

elasticity and open nature, the hybrid model can be appropriated by anyone to mean practically anything” (Peña, 1996, p. 12).

Henceforth, the two controversial paradoxes open the door for more critiques. Among the first criticism set against hybridity is then eluded to its generality or pervasiveness. This makes hybridity useless among different scholars. Werbner (1997) refers to the point claiming that because culture is always hybrid, then hybridity can be discarded and rejected when she writes:

All cultures are always hybrid [...] Hybridity is meaningless as a description of ‘culture’, ... Culture as an analytic concept is always hybrid [...] since it can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more or less coherent symbolic and social worlds (p. 15).

A different perspective suggests that hybridity often serves the interests of its advocates more than it fulfils its acclaiming purposes. This critique is echoed by several scholars. For instance, Freidman (1997) characterizes hybridity as a discourse of “moral self-congratulation” (p. 22). Along similar lines, Werbner also observes “Too much hybridity [...] leaves all the old problems of class exploitation and racist oppression unresolved” (1997, p. 27).

In other words, hybridity has been described as a backward-looking discourse that celebrates the talents and experiences of privileged intellectuals while neglecting the deeper social challenges faced by broader communities. In this context, Leila Ahmed (1995) warns that uncritical celebration of hybridity in a globalized world may just end up by supporting the very economic and cultural power structures that many critics claim to oppose (p. 12).

She mainly criticizes the way some intellectuals praise “transnational cultural hybridity” and the “politics of contingency” without much critical thought (p. 12). For example, companies and neoliberal systems often benefits from cultural diversity as it helps them sell products and spread influence across different markets. By emphasizing the positive sides of hybridity, thinkers may end by reinforcing the power of global capitalism.

In her own way, Van der Veer (1997) claims that “the hybridity celebrated in Cultural Studies has little revolutionary potential since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace” (p. 104). Despite all its positive claims, capitalism, racism, economic domination and other forms of imperialism are said to be inclusive in hybridity itself.

As stated before, the postcolonial concept of hybridity reverses the ideas of cultural purity and authenticity. Some scholars go further, stating that the notion of purity has never existed within their cultural traditions. Salman Rushdie, for example, argues that “it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw [...] the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 67). However, invoking the rejection of purity as a means to counter ethnocentrism has itself faced criticism within debates on postcolonial hybridity.

Building on this premise, hybridity can be seen as a concept strategically founded to preserve an uncontaminated Western authority, avoiding any external influential insults. Nikos supports this interpretation when saying that “hybrids were the negotiators who would secure a future free of xenophobia” (1997, p. 261).

Gilroy further contradicts the usefulness of the concept, assuming that “the idea of hybridity or intermixture presupposes two anterior purities [...] I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity [...] that's why I try not to use the word hybrid” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 54). Taken together, these critiques voice out that the discourse of hybridity may not adequately reflect social realities, but rather serves elite interests and relies on problematic assumptions of authentic purity.

Ashcroft argues that postcolonial writing typically presents hybridity as a strength rather than a sign of submission, stressing the dynamic and mutual nature of cultural interaction rather than simple domination and assimilation. He suggests that hybridity serves to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zones produced by colonization” (Ashcroft et al., 1999, p. 20). He suggests that it is a defining feature of postcolonial condition, helping to move beyond rigid binary oppositions, and encouraging new pluralistic models of cultural exchange.

While Bhabha highlights its significance in debates about culture, race, and identity, others remain cautious. Robert Young pointed out the racist legacy of hybridity. Spivak warned against the dangers of “triumphalist self-declared hybrid[ity]” of “the postmodern postcolonialist” for the “implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of *neocolonialism*” (Spivak, 2003, p. 36), all leaving the concept in ongoing disputed debates.

1.5 The Subaltern and Representation of the *Other*

In postcolonial theory, the concepts of the subaltern and representation have been central to discussions about colonialism, power, agency, and discourse. Several contributions of key theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Ranajit Guha explore how the subaltern is constructed within colonial and postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial theorists adapted this concept to investigate the challenges of representation and analyse the conditions of the colonized under the persistent structures of marginalization.

1.5.1. The Subaltern: Conceptual Foundations

Gramsci, an Italian scholar, developed the concept of the subaltern as part of his broader analysis of cultural hegemony and power. Gramsci's work is foundational for understanding and tracing the notion of subaltern. The term subaltern is then originated from Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), where it is referred to the subordinate social groups that are excluded from main hegemonic power structures.

Gramsci further investigates how such hegemonic forces sustain authority and control through cultural and ideological manners, preventing subaltern groups; as it is the case with colonized nations; from raising any political consciousness. In this vein, Gramsci voices that “The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. In reality, these groups have historically shown themselves capable of initiative only in times of exceptional crisis” (1971, p. 54).

Differently said, the writer sheds light on the inability of subordinate social class to maintain a continuous agency in front to hegemonic means of an ongoing control and dominance. Gramsci then demonstrates the difficulties subaltern groups face in

establishing a coherent and sustained political status. Their historical agency is often dismissed by the dominance of ruling groups, and when they contest, their resistance is recorded only in short fragments, filtered through dominant discourses and narratives.

Also, Gramsci intends to highlight certain means that would probably assist marginalized groups to build effective political institutions. He continues by stating that: "Subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up; only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination and that not immediately" (1971, p. 55). Herein, a perpetual political victory is almost difficult for subaltern groups since they are still oppressed by the dominating mechanisms of power imposed by ruling classes.

Antonio Gramsci's was fundamental for raising constant awareness among contemporary scholars and intellectuals and shaping a sustained horizon about hegemonic discourse and subalternity. His observation calls for serious investigations that will enable subaltern voices to establish a counter-hegemonic discourse to redefine their political and social conditions.

Gramsci's notion prefigures Gayatri Spivak's influential critique about the inability of the subaltern to achieve true self-representation and how the hegemonic representation often distorts their voices even when they resist. Therefore, it was Gayatri Spivak who brought the term into postcolonial debates. Spivak's seminal *essay Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988) underscores the notion of restrained resistance of subaltern groups, though momentarily destabilizing, do not constantly result in sustained systemic change.

1.5.2. The Subaltern: Limits of Representation

The representation of the subaltern as the Other has provided valuable insights into the histories and struggles of marginalized groups in colonial societies. Representation is a controversial issue in postcolonial discourse, as it combines two complex acts of depicting and speaking on behalf of others. The first act reflects re-presentation whereas the other involves political representation. In postcolonial theory, subaltern studies have even raised critical questions about the ethics of representation.

Eventually, the subalterns often end to find their voices mediated and silenced under dominant discourses. This idea leads Spivak to criticize several intellectuals, and she further problematizes their claim to represent subaltern voices. She interrogates the conditions of subaltern agency and voice, advocating for the subaltern's self-representation in knowledge production. When discussing the notion of postcolonial representation, Spivak (1988) contends:

Representation has not withered away. The intellectual's role in the field of hegemony is a persistent one. It is impossible for the subaltern to speak if they are spoken for by others who inscribe their own interpretations upon their silence (p. 104).

In this statement, Spivak unveils the hidden constrain that withdraws the subaltern from a meaningful expression faced to a hegemonic discourse because their voices are co-opted by elite intellectuals and institutions. She then highlights her arguments that intellectuals often reinforce hegemonic institutions rather than dismantle them. Spivak (1988) exceeds that silence and includes gender issues, claiming:

Within the effected itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow (p. 287).

Leaning on Gramsci's foundational critique of subaltern social groups, Spivak extends the concept by emphasizing female gender as a further axis of submission and marginalization. As Spivak brings women's subject at the core of subaltern silence discussions, she reinforces the argument that subaltern's agency is systematically erased within dominant epistemic structures. In doing so, Spivak points to the double suffering of women when it comes to agency and representation.

1.6. Postcolonialism and Translation: Rethinking Cultural Framing

Postcolonial translation studies have expanded the scope of translation practices to encompass issues of ideology, identity, and power relations, along with divergent sociological and ethnographic approaches to analysis. Postcolonial intercultural writing

is often equated with translation, both as a literary practice and as a reflection of the postcolonial text's inherent engagement with multiple linguistic and cultural systems.

In this context, translation functions as both an activity and a metaphor, shaping the world it represents through language as a powerful mediating tool. As a result, translation is not merely an act of traditional linguistic transfer but a process of negotiation within the complex intersections of cultures, ideologies, and power structures, particularly in the binary contexts of colonizer, colonized and Occident, Orient.

Translation studies have been dominated by Western researchers, often marginalizing perspectives from other linguistic and cultural traditions. Schleiermacher, in addressing the encounter between translation and the Other, proposes two fundamental strategies: a foreignizing approach, in which readers move toward the writer, and a domesticating approach, in which the writer is brought closer to the readers.

To illustrate this translation's case, he suggests that "a Foreignizing move of the readers towards the writer or a domesticating move of the writer towards the readers" (Schleiermacher, 1997, p. 230), describe the fundamental procedures regulating the relationship of self and other in translation. For Schleiermacher, every translation exists along this spectrum, reflecting the broader tension between self and Other that has shaped translation discourse (1997, p. 230).

Moreover, traditional translation discourses have long been constrained by the concept of equivalence, which seeks to establish relationships between the original and the target text while assuming the stability of the message's identity. However, postcolonial translation studies challenge these assumptions by problematizing the hierarchical positioning of the "original" and its "translation". In doing so, they critically reassess traditional binaries such as equivalence vs. fluency, source vs. target, and faithful vs. unfaithful, exposing their hegemonic ethnocentric underpinnings.

Herein, postcolonial studies have critically engaged with traditionally essentialist views of translation, particularly in relation to the "cultural turn" in translation discourses. This shift in perspective highlights the specific cultural and historical

contexts in which translations are produced. A key contribution of postcolonial scholarship has been its exploration of the intricate relationship between language and culture, especially within colonial and postcolonial contexts (Shamma, 2009, p. 185).

In the light of postcolonial intercultural encounters, translation plays a preliminary role in the experiences of transcultural writers. The understanding of translation in such literature reflects broader tendencies in translation studies, particularly those that have emerged and developed since the “cultural turn”. Considering the process of translation as a metaphor for postcolonial writing expands the scope of its scholarship, adapting from other disciplines such as history and sociology.

Postcolonial perspectives, which explore the complex and evolving nature of cultural identity formation, have proven to be instrumental in advancing translation research. This postcolonial endeavour is framed through Bhabha's work in introducing the concept of “translational culture” as a new framework for understanding cultural encounters. In this context, Bhabha highlights the constructive potential of translation in reshaping and redefining culture. Herein, Bhabha (2004) reveals the translation's potential to construct culture:

Culture is both transnational and translational. [...] the transnational dimension of cultural transformation-migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation- makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. The natural and unifying discourse [...] cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and invention of tradition (p. 247).

From Homi Bhabha's perspective, dominant cultural power is not fixed but rather dissolved and reconfigured within the “third space”, a space of hybridity that emerges through cultural translation. This notion suggests that cultural interactions do not merely reinforce hegemonic structures but instead create dynamic and negotiated meanings. Expanding on this idea, Doris Bachman-Medick asserts that translation itself is an ongoing process of transformation. She states, “due to the process of interpretation, where the ‘overlapping of cultures’ occurs can itself be a site of translation” (1997, p. 14).

In other words, cultural exchange is not a one-time act but a continuous process where meanings are reshaped through interaction. This perspective resonates with the argument put forth by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1999), who suggest that translation plays a crucial role in redefining cultural boundaries:

Translation does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum; it is not an isolated act, it is part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kinds of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries (p. 2).

Postcolonial writing, conceptualized as a form of translation, entails the articulation of one's socio-cultural reality through the mediation of a historically dominant language. Within this framework, translation is not merely a linguistic act but a site of negotiation, where cultures, ideologies, and power structures intersect and contend. Despite its commitment to critically examining disproportionate cultural relationships, postcolonial studies have faced substantial critique. In particular, the field's engagement with the intersection of language and culture within colonial contexts has been a focal point of such criticism.

In view of this, translation in postcolonial circumstances has been characterized as “an overarching metaphor for the unequal power relationship which defines the condition of the colonized” (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999, p. 12). More broadly, Bassnett and Trivedi assert that “colonialism and translation went hand in hand” (1999, p. 12).

As a counter-discourse to this notion of cultural translation, Mahasweta Sengupta, in *Translation and Manipulation* (1996), examines how metropolitan cultures impose specific expectations on representations of the formerly colonized (Shamma, 2009, p. 189)). These expectations dictate that postcolonial literary works conform to predefined images of “what an ‘authentic representation of that culture should be”.

Sengupta further argues that formerly colonized writers must adapt their work to translational norms governing the exchange between the colonizer's and the colonized's cultural spheres (Shamma, 2009, p. 189-190). Parry also critiques certain postcolonial readings for adopting “discursive violence” over material realities of colonial violence,

suggesting that antagonistic encounters are too often reconfigured as mere processes of dialogue, complicity, and transculturation (Parry, 2004, p. 4).

In a similar vein, Hall contends that postcolonial discourse “re-reads colonization as part of an essentially transnational and transcultural ‘global’ process” and compels a reconsideration of binary oppositions as inherently fluid, continuously troubled by the processes of cultural translation (Hall, 1996, p. 247). However, rather than signalling the resolution of colonial tensions, cultural translation arguably serves to perpetuate colonial structures, albeit in a more adaptable and insidious form.

1.7. Writing Back in Postcolonial Literature

The concept of *writing back* in postcolonial studies represents a critical literary and ideological response to the historical narratives imposed by colonial powers. Emerging from the broader discourse of Postcolonialism, writing back is a central literary medium implemented for encapsulating the ways in which writers from formerly colonized societies respond and challenge colonial narratives.

The phrase “writing back” was first conceptualized by Salman Rushdie (1982) and later solidified in by different postcolonial scholars. Introduced in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989), this idea highlights the literary and intellectual resistance of postcolonial authors who seek to deconstruct Eurocentric representations and reclaim their own histories, identities, and cultures.

They define this process as, “a counter-discursive strategy in which postcolonial texts interrogate and subvert the canonical texts of empire” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 7). This notion demonstrates how literature from postcolonial contexts actively responds to, revises, and dismantles the ideological structures imposed by colonial literature.

Bill Ashcroft stands as one of the foremost figures in postcolonial studies. His extensive body of work explores the mechanisms through which postcolonial writers reconfigure their cultural, linguistic, and literary landscapes, emphasizing the role of hybridity, language, and literary resistance in postcolonial discourse. According to Ashcroft et al. (2002):

Postcolonial texts do not merely attempt to counteract the ideological basis of colonial texts but rather engage in a nuanced process of transformation. They take the language, the form, and the structures of colonial discourse to subvert them for them (p. 16).

These lines capture that the act of writing back in postcolonial literature is an assertion of voice, identity, agency, and resistance. By reinterpreting canonical texts, transgressing colonial narratives, and reclaiming language, postcolonial authors disrupt the legacy of imperial domination and offer alternative perspectives.

1.7.1. Rewriting the Canon: From Margin to Text

Postcolonial “writing back” often involves direct intertextual engagement with classic colonial literature, rewriting or parodying it to expose their ideological underpinnings. A significant dimension of Ashcroft’s work of writing back is his analysis of how literature, language, and culture interact in postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial writers frequently engage in rewriting canonical European texts to challenge their ideological assumptions and reframe historical narratives from the perspective of the colonized.

Ashcroft examines the multiple manners adopted by diverse postcolonial authors to engage in a counter-discursive practice that reinterprets colonial narratives from their own exclusive postcolonial context. The idea is overtly highlighted, “Postcolonial literature does not merely reject the canon but reclaims it, re-contextualizing dominant narratives to expose their inherent biases and erasures” (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 102). Postcolonial African and Caribbean authors frequently employ the “writing back” strategy to challenge imperial narratives.

One of the most well-known examples is Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a perpetual to Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). Rhys reconstructs the story of Bertha Mason, the so-called “Madwoman in the attic,” giving her a voice and context as Antoinette Cosway, a Creole woman whose tragic descent into madness is linked to colonial oppression and racial tensions of the Caribbean.

As Rhys writes, “there is always the other side, always” (Rhys, 1966, p. 117), emphasizing the necessity of multiple perspectives in storytelling. Rhys subverts the

colonialist and patriarchal silencing of Bertha, presenting her as a marginalized and dehumanized female character mirroring Bronte's novel.

This representation encapsulates the essence of writing back, revealing the perspectives that were obscured or ignored in colonial literature. Consequently, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies how writing back serves as a tool for reinterpreting historical narratives and restoring agency to the silenced. J.M. Coetzee (1986) also reimagines *Robinson Crusoe*, highlighting issues of voices, power, and erasure.

Back then, Chinua Achebe employs this technique in his novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), he is often cited as a canonical example of writing back. Achebe criticizes the colonial depiction of Africa found in mainstream European literature, especially Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Achebe (1977) famously condemns Conrad's portrayal of Africa, stating that *Heart of Darkness* "projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (p. 788).

Through his challenging novel, Achebe offers a nuanced and dignified representation of Igbo society, reversing the racist claims of European literature. As Ashcroft (2009) spells it out, "The act of rewriting allows the silenced to speak, disrupting the authority of the colonial text and asserting an alternative history" (p. 126).

This approach of literary resistance enlightens the central theme of writing back; a concept that Ashcroft has extensively theorized. When criticizing Conrad's depiction of Africa, Achebe highlights, "The real problem is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster" (p. 788). This critique underscores how colonial literature often perpetuates racial stereotypes, necessitating a strong postcolonial response.

In the context of Arab postcolonial literature, authors often write to counteract the colonial erasure of Arab histories and cultures. Arab postcolonial literature has been deeply engaged in the process of "writing back" to colonial narratives, challenging Western representations of Arab identity, history, and culture. Arab postcolonial writers, in particular, employ various narratives strategies to dismantle colonial discourse. They engage in "writing back" through various literary techniques.

The postcolonial Arab novel and short story continue to serve as potent spaces for contesting dominant narratives and reshaping cultural identity in a post-imperial world. By rewriting history through fiction and critical scholarship, Arab writers reclaim historical agency. The significance of “writing back” is twofold: it serves as a corrective to distorted historical representations, and it re-establishes agency for postcolonial subjects.

In postcolonial literature, especially the one produced from the Arab world, the act of writhing back goes beyond being merely an intellectual act. Writing back rather becomes a vital necessity. By challenging the colonial perspective in their literary narratives, the postcolonial Arab writer reclaims control over history. This fosters a literature that aims to represent an identity shaped by the terms of native informants in opposition to dominant stereotypical texts.

Many Arab postcolonial writers have responded to colonial discourse through remarkable novels, plays, and essays that deconstruct stereotypes and reclaim indigenous voices. Tayeb Salih is a notable example of Arab writers who has actively written to colonial literature. Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) serves as a counter-narrative to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which portrayed Africa as a space of savagery and darkness.

Salih inverts Conrad's journey by portraying a Sudanese intellectual, Mustafa Sa'eed, who moves to Europe and subverts colonial power structures through seduction and manipulation. The novel challenges Western perceptions of the Arab-African subject, presenting a figure that, instead of being colonized, colonizes the European women he encounters.

As Salih writes, “I came as an invader into their very homes; a drop of position that penetrated to the depths of their being” (1966, p. 95). Here, Mustafa deliberately describes his presence in Europe using the language of colonial conquest, reversing the roles, and presenting himself as the agent of disruption rather than the victim of imperialism. Mustafa, unlike Conrad's African characters who remain silent or passive, is highly articulate, intellectually superior, and sexually dominant over European women.

This subversion serves as a metaphor for the impact of colonialism on the colonized mind, Mustafa, a product of British education and ideology, internalizes colonial structures of dominance and ultimately weaponized them against his Western counterparts. The act of writing history from the colonizer's perspective has long been challenged by postcolonial intellectuals. This offers a direct confrontation with these narratives, reframing colonial education as not just a system of knowledge but a tool of cultural.

Similarly, Hamour Ziada's *Shawq Al-Darwish* (2014) revisits the Anglo-Egyptian occupation of Sudan, challenging Eurocentric historical accounts by providing an indigenous viewpoint. Several postcolonial investigations highlight this counter-discourse by arguing that the colonized subject can primarily reclaim their sense of self in the postcolonial world through technical reconfigurations of the very notions of 'self' and 'other'. By reclaiming historical agency through fiction, Arab postcolonial writers subvert the epistemic violence of colonial narration of history.

For example, Salih critiques of Conrad's characterization of Africa acknowledges the Sudanese landscape to have its own agency and complexity. In contrast to Conrad's depiction of Africa as "an immense heart of darkness" (Conrad, 1899, p. 50), Tayib Salih presents Sudan as a deeply textured, historically rich land and whose people possess their own philosophies, desires, and internal conflicts.

Tayib Salih's *Season of Migration* is a masterful act of "writing back" to colonial literature. By reversing the colonial journey, critiquing orientalist fantasies, and exploring the fractured identity of the postcolonial subject. Salih crafts a narrative that is both a rebuttal to colonial discourse and a deeply introspective mediation on the challenges of decolonization.

His novel remains a cornerstone of postcolonial literature, offering a powerful exploration of how colonization reshapes not only nations but also the minds of those it touches. Postcolonial discourse underscores the importance of these literary interventions in decolonizing knowledge and reshaping cultural memory. As postcolonial theory continues to evolve, the act of "writing back" remains a vital tool for literary and cultural resistance.

1.7.2. Linguistic Resistance and the Reclaiming of Identity

Another crucial aspect of postcolonial “writing back” is the strategic use of language. Postcolonial literature has long engaged with language as both a tool of subjugation and a means of resistance. Language is one of the most persuasive instruments of colonial domination, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) asserts, “the bullets was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation” (p. 9).

The imposition of colonial languages, especially English, French, and Spanish, functioned as a key mechanism of control, rendering indigenous cultures and epistemologies subordinate. However, postcolonial writers have historically resisted that by reclaiming their linguistic heritage or by subverting the colonizer’s language from within.

In the postcolonial world, language serves as a site of contention where the hegemonic forces of colonialism persist even after their colonial independence. Ashcroft and his collaborators (2002) affirm, “the control over language by the imperial centre, its acceptance as the norm and the corresponding marginalization of other languages, was one of the primary means by which the colonial power maintained control” (p. 7). Colonial languages, thus, were not merely modes of communication but vehicles of ideological indoctrination.

Language as a tool of colonial domination, leads the colonized to become culturally and politically alienated. Frantz Fanon (1967) describes the linguistic alienation experienced by the colonized subject, noting that “to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (p. 38). He suggests that the imposition of the colonizer’s language results in a profound psychological inferiority complex in the colonized, who almost perceive their native tongues as inadequate or uncivilized. Fanon’s perception aligns with Said’s discourse on the colonial construction of the Orient as the inferior “Other” to reinforce European superiority.

According to Said “The Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action. Rather, it is a creation of the West, shaped by its discourse” (1978, p. 3). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o further expands the concept of writing back through his advocacy for decolonizing language. In *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), he critiques this phenomenon of colonial linguistic hegemony stating that:

Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orator and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world... The domination of people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized" (p. 16)

Ngũgĩ highlights how language is not a neutral medium but an instrument of ideological control. The erasure or suppression of indigenous languages disrupts cultural transmission and marginalizes entire communities within a colonial hierarchy. This process of linguistic colonization ensured that native speakers internalized Eurocentric worldviews, often at the expense of their indigenous identities. Ngũgĩ (1986) comments on the colonizer's language as a means of self-alienation:

The African writer who takes up the alien language as his literary vehicle betrays the struggle for cultural freedom. Every time he writes in English or French or Portuguese, he is contributing to the suppression of his own people's tongue, and hence, to the domination of their mind. The colonial education system is designed to erode our ability to think outside the European framework (p. 13).

While language has been a tool of oppression, it has also become a powerful means of resistance. Many postcolonial writers reject the imposed linguistic hierarchies by reclaiming and revitalizing indigenous languages. This recognition underscores the importance of linguistic resistance insisting that writing in indigenous languages is not only an aesthetic choice but also a political act.

Ngũgĩ himself abandoned English in favor of his native tongue, Gikuyu, advocating for linguistic decolonization. By using local languages postcolonial authors dismantle linguistic imperialism and reclaim their narratives authority. Ngũgĩ (1986) articulates this linguistic approval in *Decolonizing the Mind*:

I had to fight to retrieve my own voice. By writing in Gikuyu, I was liberating myself from the constraints of a foreign linguistic structure, reasserting my cultural identity, and restoring dignity to my people's language (p. 28).

Herein, the writer's transition from writing in English to his mother tongue Gikuyu was a deliberate political agency, reflecting his resistance to colonial oppression. This rejection of the colonizer's language is also considered as self-representation from a native informant and an identity empowerment supplied by internal cultural reflections. His works deeply underscore the potency of writing in local indigenous languages, reinforcing cultural pride and challenging linguistic imperialism.

Other writers, however, adopt a strategy of subversive appropriation, using colonial languages while infusing them with indigenous linguistic elements. Ashcroft's scholarship frequently interrogates the role of language in colonial and postcolonial discourse. In *Caliban's Voice*, he argues that "language is the most contested site of colonial authority, but also the most potent tool of subversion available to the colonized" (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 32).

He expands on the idea that postcolonial writers engage in linguistic abrogation and appropriation, rejecting the imposed norms of colonial language. This stance reveals the paradox of postcolonial linguistic strategy: while rejecting linguistic colonialism is ideal, practical realities necessitate engagement with globalized languages.

Recent investigations further support Ashcroft's claims regarding language as a battleground for power and resistance. Pennycook (2021) claims that "language, rather than being a neutral conduit for communication, is imbued with ideological underpinnings that reflect and reinforce historical power structures" (P. 24). Despite the colonizer's linguistic imposition, many postcolonial writers repurposed the colonial language for resistance.

Language is then a dynamic space of contestation where the subaltern can articulate new narratives with non-canonical ingredients. According to Canagarajah (2013), "postcolonial subjects do not passively inherit the linguistic frameworks of colonial rule but actively reconstruct them in ways that assert local agency and cultural specificity" (p. 67).

Spivak (1993) raises concerns about the complexities of linguistic resistance, particularly in the context of the global dominance of English. She highlights the

paradox wherein postcolonial subjects must often use the language of the colonizer to communicate resistance effectively. Ashcroft acknowledges this tension, advocating for a strategic approach wherein language is simultaneously adapted and subverted to serve postcolonial ends. Chinua Achebe (1975) defends the strategic use of English African literature, arguing that:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his own identity, a new voice that does not slavishly imitate the Queen's English. We must take their language and make it our own, infusing it with the rhythms and metaphors of our native tongues (p. 61).

Achebe's stance, like many other postcolonial writers, exemplifies his adoption of linguistic hybridity. Ashcroft's exploration of hybridity extends beyond theory into literary analysis. He observes that postcolonial writers do not merely reject European literary tradition, where language has a great portion, but rather transform them. As he remarks, "Postcolonial texts operate within and against the dominant cultural framework, appropriating its forms while simultaneously subverting its authority" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 78).

Ultimately, the postcolonial tradition of linguistic hybridity enables the writers to gain more space to tell stories from their standpoint and reclaim their hybrid identities. As discussed earlier, postcolonial hybridity has an inevitable involvement in postcolonial literature. Thus, postcolonial literature becomes an extension where linguistic subjugation is deconstructed through creative adaptation and reinvention.

Diverse postcolonial writers adopt linguistic hybridity as an empowerment medium. In *Imagery Homelands* (1991), Salman Rushdie supports the creative reworking of colonial English, voicing: "The Empire writes back with a vengeance... English is not an imperialist imposition to be denied but a tool to be seized and remade in our own image" (p. 17). Rushdie employs an exclusive blending of English and Hindu-Urdu expressions, creating a reflection of India's linguistic hybridity (Rushdie, 1981, p. 47).

Similarly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) plays with linguistic fusions to disrupt conventional syntax and incorporates Malayalam phrases, thereby resisting the canonical uniformity of English. In doing so; writers integrate indigenous languages, dialects, and oral traditions into English or other hegemonic languages. Such novels' structures embody what Bhabha (1994) spells out as the "third space," where cultural and linguistic hybridity contest perpetuate colonial binaries.

By the same token, linguistic hybridity is one of the most effective approaches embraced by Arab postcolonial writers to challenge colonial authority. The blending of Arab and colonizers' languages in postcolonial narratives serves to disrupt mainstream linguistic hegemony. Abdulrazak Gurnah, for example, is a Tanzanian British postcolonial author who writes in English but constantly blends words of Swahili, Arabic, and other native languages.

Arab postcolonial writers have engaged in this approach of writing back to subvert orientalist depictions and reclaim indigenous narratives. By incorporating Arabic phrases, untranslated Quranic references, and local dialects, Arab novelists create linguistic tropes to resist fully assimilation into the dominant colonial language and literary tradition. Through linguistic hybridity, historical re-imagination, and identity negotiations, they assert their own narratives and underscore the particularity of these literary interventions in decolonising knowledge and reshaping cultural memory.

Through code-switching and creolization, writers disrupt the power control of standard English, embedding their work within the rhythms and structures of their native speech communities. For example, in his novel *In the Mother Comes of Age* (1984), the Moroccan Driss Chraïbi blends Arabic and French, reflecting the hybrid linguistic reality of postcolonial Morocco. Inhere, the linguistic interplay adopted by Chraïbi serves as both a narrative device and a form of resistance against the monolithic authority of colonial languages. By doing so, the writer not only captures the dual cultural influences of his characters but also subverts the hegemony of French as the only acclaimed literary device.

Therefore, language in postcolonial literature can serve both as an oppressive force and a challenging medium of resistance. While colonial languages were imposed as

complex tools of both political and cultural domination, postcolonial writers have either appropriated them or rejected them to contest and redefine cultural identity.

Their works reveal a dynamic interplay between linguistic hegemony and defiance. Whether through the rejection of colonial languages, the strategic use of linguistic hybridity, or the incorporation of indigenous linguistic structures, postcolonial writers reclaim their identities and resist historical erasure.

As the postcolonial world continues to evolve, the linguistic approaches implemented in literature will remain an inevitable stand to the ongoing negotiation of identity, resistance, and self-representation. Contemporary scholarship suggests that postcolonial discourse exceeds beyond simple reversals of colonial texts to engage with broader issues of gender, transnationalism, and transcultural nuanced expressions. As new voices emerge, postcolonial writers continue to reshape the literary landscape, ensuring that the voices of the ex-colonized are heard and recognized in more global discourse.

1.8. Arab Women Writers: An Established Literary Tradition

Arab women's engagement with literature is an ancient tradition that predates the influence of Western literary forms. From the early days of Arabic civilization, women played a significant role in shaping poetic and literary expression. The journey of Arab women writers has evolved across generations, reflecting shifting social, political, and cultural landscapes.

From the early tradition of poetry and oral storytelling, where figures like Al-Khansa (7th century) found space for expression, to the intellectual awakening of the late 19th and early 20th centuries with pioneers like May Ziadeh and Zaynab Fawwaz, Arab women have continuously shaped literary discourse. Their writings demonstrate that Arab women had already established a strong literary tradition long before the 19th century, when Western literary influences began to permeate Arab societies. Rather than being passive recipients of Western literary forms, these writers built upon an existing rich cultural legacy.

The revival of prose fiction and modern novel in the Arab world may have been influenced by Western and colonial trends, but Arab women's storytelling traditions have always been a fundamental part of the Arab's literary and intellectual heritage. Each phase of this literary journey reflects the role of women in Arab societies, making their progress from silent observers to influential voices shaping both postcolonial and global literature.

1.8.1. Women's Literary Contributions in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Eras

Arab women's literary foundation can be traced back to pre-Islamic Arabia, where oral poetry was the dominant literary genre. During this period, poetry was not only an artistic literary expression, but also a powerful political and social medium. Women were active participants within the tradition, composing elegies, love poetry, and war songs that reflected their personal adventures and societal roles.

One of the most renowned pre-Islamic women poets was Al-Khansa (575-645 CE), whose elegiac poetry mourning the deaths of her brothers in battle became legendary. Her artistic work was widely respected by her contemporaries and later generations, with her poetry being included in classical Arabic literary anthologies.

She was praised by none other than the prophet Muhammad, who, according to literary historian Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "recognized her exceptional talent, elevating her status beyond that of mere court poet to a respected intellectual figure in early Islam" (*Woman's Body, Woman's Word*, 1991, p. 128). Al-Khansa's poetry was deeply personal yet universal, addressing themes of loss, grief, and the transient nature of life.

Beyond poetry, early Islamic history also records women's active participation in intellectual and political discourse, Aisha bint Abi Bakr (613-678 CE), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, was known for her extensive knowledge of Hadith (Prophetic traditions) and her role in shaping early Islamic jurisprudence. She was a cardinal narrator of Hadith and an influential figure in political debates. Elizabeth Fernea and Besma Bezirgan argue that:

Aisha's contributions to early Islamic scholarship positioned her as one of the foremost female intellectuals in the history of Islam, demonstrating that women's roles in intellectual life were not merely tolerated but valued (1977, p. 32).

Such early examples demonstrate that women's literary and intellectual contributions were not anomalies but integral to Arab cultural life. However, as Islamic societies evolved and patriarchal norms became more entrenched, women's public literary roles diminished, and their contributions were often marginalized.

1.8.2. The Arab Nahda (Renaissance) and the Revival of Women's Literary Voices (19th- Early 20th Century)

The Arab Nahda, or cultural renaissance of the nineteenth century, marked a turning point for women's literary and intellectual commitment. This period was characterized by a close contact with Europe, colonial influences, and internal demands of modernization and reform. Women's education became a major focus of reformist discourse, and as a result, female literacy rates gradually improved, allowing more women to engage in literary and journalistic endeavours.

By the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the first Arab women writers were literally active both in terms of writing and publication. The period between 1860 and 1920 was a testimony for the beginning of feminist activism in the Arab world.

Among the pioneers who portrayed the first generation, the Egyptians Aishah al-Taymuriyyah (1840-1902), and Malak Hifni (1886-1902) who is known as Bahithat al-Badiyah, the Lebanese Wardah al-Yajiz (1872-1924), and Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914), the Syrian Mariayana Marrash (1848-1919). These early Arab women writers, among others, still stand as a reference to contemporary feminist and literary studies because of their foregrounding contributions to literary production of that era.

This generation of Arab women writers had to struggle with complex cultural, social, political, and religious barriers. They began their discrete feminist activism from "within restricted circles, that is, in private homes or meetings of women's charitable organizations, the 'legitimate' gathering places for women in restricted societies" what

was later on called “invisible feminism” which was mainly centered in Egypt (Cooke, 1993, p. 444).

As a more daring step, they started to voice their preoccupations and concerns through journalism under male pseudonym then, by the late nineteenth century, women themselves founded journals and magazines³. This first generation of Arab women writers in the Middle East had pertinent achievements that form a crucial part of the thematic dynamism of both Arab feminism and literary theory and criticism.

Among the earliest feminist thinkers of this period was Zaynab Fawwaz (1860-1914), a Lebanese-Egyptian writer, who transgressed traditional gender norms by publishing extensively on women's rights, education, and social roles. In her groundbreaking book (biographical dictionary), *Al-Durr Al-Manthur fi tabaqat Rabbat Al-Khudur* (The Scattered Pearls in the Classes of Secluded Women), Fawwaz compiled biographies of notable women from both Eastern and Western traditions. She challenged the prevailing stereotypical belief that women were inherently less capable than men.

Fawwaz's sentiment aligns with her advocacy for women's education and intellectual empowerment. Her biographical dictionary was then an insightful reference through which she highlighted the achievements of numerous women writers, emphasizing their literary and artistic potentials when fuelled with educational opportunities.

Fawwaz also produced one of the earliest Arabic novels, *Husn al-Awaqib* (1899), in which she addressed the limitations imposed on women by the vaporized institution of marriage and family expectations. Marilyn Booth (2001) comments on her foundational literary manifestations, explaining:

Zaynab Fawwaz's writings were revolutionary not just because they advocated for women's education, but because they actively critiqued the structures of marriage, inheritance, and legal dependency that kept women subordinated (2001, p. 23).

³ For more detailed information about the rise and development of Arab women's journalism see Cooke, *Arab Women Writers* (46-9). See also Booth (2001, p.62-89)

Another outstanding figure of this period was May Ziadeh (1886-1941), a Lebanese-Palestinian writer who became famous for her literary salons in Cairo. She was one of the first Arab women to write literary criticism and is often credited with pioneering early feminist literary discourse. In one of her essays, she boldly stated: "A woman's voice is not an echo of a man's; it is a force of its own, capable of shaping thoughts, politics, and society."

In addition to journalism, the tradition of integrating new Arab women writers by already publicly acclaimed women was established. The connection between Arab women writers is said to constitute the "unseen feminist debates among women which actually preceded the male thinkers like Qasim Amin's" (Badran and Cooke, 1990, p. xxix). Such tradition of supporting each other for more visibility marked the first generation.

During the 1970's-1980's, Arab women writers "increasingly wrote introductions to each other's writings as well as critical reviews on essays [which reveals] a growing tradition of Arab feminist literary criticism." (Badran and Cooke, 1990, p. xxxv) Consequently, the first generation has led to forge forms of literary and intellectual dialogues between women in the Middle East as a first step for a further recognised literary criticism. These early female writers laid the groundwork for the full-fledged feminist literary movement that would emerge in the mid-twentieth century.

1.8.3. The 20th century: Feminist Literature and Nationalist Struggle

By the mid-twentieth century, Arab women's writing underwent a profound transformation, shifting from a moderate social critique to a deeply political and feminist discourse. As the Arab world grappled with wars, colonialism, and nationalist movements, Arab women's writing became explicitly political, reflecting the turbulent realities of the prevailing struggles.

Arab women's literature began to merge feminist themes with nationalist discourse, particularly in the Middle Eastern countries like: Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon. In doing so, women writers began to explore the intersections of gender, identity, and resistance in ways that were unprecedented in traditional Arabic literature.

Thus, the era was defined by three key socio-political factors that largely influenced feminist literature: The Rise of Nationalism and Anti-Colonial Movements, The Impact of War and Political Instability, and The Development of Feminist Consciousness.

During the second generation, Arab women writers played a dual role: they documented the struggles of their societies while simultaneously challenging the patriarchal norms that continued to oppress them. Their works became a literary battlefield, where the struggle for national liberation and gender equality unfolded side by side. The nationalist movements opened up a new space for women's participation in political discourse, both in activism and in literature.

This generation of Arab women writers began to be active between the epoch of 1920s and 1960s. Consequently, Arab feminist consciousness started to be visible through debates about gender issues and contentions for social change. Women of this period were able to speak louder than their predecessors, mainly because this era certified the rise of women's public movements in several regions of the Arab world.

A significant number of women writers took place. One comes across writers like the Lebanese feminist lecturer Nazirah Zeineddin (1908-1976), the Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan (1917-2003), the Egyptian essayist and human rights activist Durriyyah Shafiq (1907-1975), the Syrian writer Colette Khuri (b. 1937), and many others (Badran and Cooke, 1990, p. 1-30). As Majaj et al claimed, this "first public identification of Arab women as feminists coincided with the founding of the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923." (2002, p. xvii-xxx)⁴. Hence, up to the first half of the twentieth century feminism was primarily active in Egypt.

Among the pioneers who reflected feminist activism of this period, one can notice the Iraqi poetess, critic, and writer Nazik al-Mala'ikah. She was identified to be one of the early Arab women poets to introduce the free verse as a new literary device which

⁴ As far as this research work is concerned with two Arab women writers from the Middle East, one considers the onset of feminism in the region. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that while up to the mid-twentieth century women writers in the Middle East introduced a sexual revolution in literature, women from other Arab women countries such as Algeria, were struggling for more basic rights such as prearranged marriage.

was hugely adopted later as a genre (Cooke, 1993, p.449). She is even considered as the outstanding figure of Arab modernism for breaking the new ground of the free verse.

In Palestine, nationalist resistance became a dominant theme in women's literature. The Palestinian female writers like Samihah Khalidi and Fadwa Tuqan used poetry and prose to highlight the displacement, exile, and suffering of Palestinian women under colonialism. Tuqan's poetry, for instance, combined lyrical beauty with political urgency, as she did in her poem *Hamzah*.

Fadwa Tuqan's work was particularly significant because it combined personal pain with national grief, illustrating how women were not just bystanders but active participants in the Palestinian struggle. Besides poetry, which was the central traditional achievement of the first generation, the first half twentieth century's Arab women writers espoused new literary genres such as the novel and the short story which are considered a Western export to the Arab world of literature.

Adopting these external and novice genres, Arab women writers proclaimed a reinvigorated approach to their local feminist issues (Badran and Cooke, 1990, pp. xxx-iii). This was an initiation for a further rich and complex stage of literary theory and criticism of contemporary Arab women's writings.

One of the earliest feminist novelists of this generation, Layla Ba'albaki (1936), wrote against the backdrop of growing Lebanese nationalism. Her novel *I Live* (1958) shocked conservative Lebanese society with its portrayal of a young woman rejecting traditional gender roles, family expectations, and arranged marriage. In the novel, the protagonist declares: "I do not wish to be a servant in my father's house, nor a prisoner in my husband's. I will not live in the shadow of men, but in the light of my own will" (1958).

This rejection of patriarchal authority was a radical stance in the 1950's Arab literary scene, where women's voices were still largely controlled by male editors and publishers. Layla Ba'albaki's works were censored, and she tried in court for obscenity; a fate that would later befall several feminist writers in the Arab world.

Reflecting on the literature produced by Arab women of this era, Margot Badran (1995) observes, “the nationalist movements in the Arab world often relied on women’s participation, yet they failed to recognize them as equal partners in the struggle for liberation” (p.167). This paradox, where women were encouraged to join the national cause but denied personal freedoms, became a major theme in the twentieth century feminist literature.

This generation embodies a large number of Arab women writers who differ from each other in form and content. Some writers “have played an important role in changing the supposedly static conditions of the society into which they were born. They have been more active publicly than their ancestors in mediating conflicts within their own communities” (Zeidan, 1982, p. 288).

Despite such daring effort to shift their status first as women and authors, up to the mid-twentieth century Arab “women’s literary and intellectual endeavours had been overlooked, often dismissed, and sometimes committed to oblivion.” (Jayyusi, 2005, p. 5). Nevertheless, Jayyusi refers to Durriyah Shafiq as one of the prominent Arab feminists in the mid-twentieth century (2005, p. 15) who developed a sense of nationalist consciousness. This way Shafiq pierced the initial public connection between women’s liberation and the independence of the land under the sense of collective Arab nationalism.

Ghadah al-Samman (1942) is a Syrian-Lebanese novelist whose literary works were entirely influenced by existentialism and the Lebanese Civil War. In her novel *Beirut '75*, she portrays a female protagonist who seeks liberation from both patriarchal oppression and national political crisis, symbolizing the dual struggle for personal collective rights and freedom. Throughout the novel, the writer paints a haunting image of Beirut descending into chaos.

Al-Samman’s protagonists are often women struggling to survive in a world that offers them sanctuary, neither from war nor from societal oppression. In her work, *War’s Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (1988), Miriam Cooke argues that Al-Samman’s works represent “a feminist existentialism that exposes the fragmentation of both the individual and the nation” (p.56).

The second generation of Arab women writers were the first to introduce themes like the suffering of their people using new literary devices such as stream of consciousness. They made a step far from the traditional romantic issues of earlier writers and move towards deeper investigations of people's pain and distress.

Although these women writers introduced the first feminist-nationalist literary brand, little recognition was given to their efforts for they were almost monopolized to women's issues. Indeed, it was until the third generation that Arab feminists could be wielded to transgress the male hegemony of the literary field and their feminist narratives sought to acquire greater visibility and recognition.

1.8.4. Third Generation: The Development of Feminist Consciousness in Arab Women's Writings

From the 1960's until the present, the third generation covers a wide range of Arab women writers within and outside the Middle East. During this era, many authors from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Algeria had genuine engagement in the literary scenes.

To name but few, Nawal El Saadawi, Hoda Barakat, Assia Djabar, Hanan Al-Shaykh, Sahar Khalifah, Ahlem Mosteghanemi, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela. Majaj, Sunderman and Saliba, with their initiative collection in 2002 *Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, was the onset step to conduct Arab women writers to visibility and critical recognition.

Similarly, Sahar Khalifah (1941), a Palestinian writer, critical realism to depict the impact of occupation, resistance, and gender oppression. Her novel *Wild Thorns* (1976) explores how women navigate their roles in the Palestinian resistance while also fighting against domestic patriarchy. Therese Saliba (2002) states that these women authors "redefined feminist literature in the Arab world, positioning women not just as victims of patriarchy, but as active participants in both national and gender liberation struggles" (2002, p. 134).

In the narratives of the third generation, Arab women authors have systematically investigated feminist and nationalist issues using innovative literary approaches and techniques. Their writings are of crucial importance to feminism and postcolonialism in

the Arab world for they contribute to both the thematic dynamism and literary novelty. Accordingly, the third generation of Arab women writers, in the Middle East in particular, consolidated the inherited tradition of Arab feminism. In spite of Jayyusi's foregrounding claim that this:

Present generation of Arab women writers of fiction... is not rootless, nor do these writers lack a strong feminist background of writings in modern times to pave the way to a new consciousness of their possibilities and strength. (2005, p. 29-30).

Interestingly, Arab political and literary feminist activism became well established in the late twentieth century when women were provided by more political and social opportunities to voice their needs and desires throughout writings. The writers of this generation squeeze a distinct need to pass beyond the traditional feminist themes of opposing patriarchy. In fact, these women sought to strike a work which "is advancing away from dominant norms of taste and style towards a new literary future" (Kendall, 2000, p. 4).

This advance is traced in the manner the writers deepen the historical and political heritage of their literary productions by incepting new themes and approaches. Different historical and political events are intentionally reflected in the works of this generation. Later on, more nuanced themes (as will be discussed in the coming chapters) have been introduced encompassing discourses of modernity and cultural influence.

1.9. Arab Feminism and the Critique of Western Paradigm

Arab feminism has witnessed significant scholarly engagement, evolving from early postcolonial critiques to more intersectional and transnational frameworks. Recent contributions to the field have been expended to incorporate diverse methodological approaches and theoretical structures. Scholars such as Deniz Kandiyoti (1995), Anastassia Valassopolos (2007), Margot Badran (2009), Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), and Nadjé Al-Ali (2020) highlight the convergences and divergences in contemporary Arab feminist discourse.

They engage deeply with issues of agency, decolonization, resistance, and the intersection of religion and feminism. The evolving themes in the works of women

writers from the Middle East serves as a fundamental lens for tracing the progression of Arab feminism from its emergence in the nineteenth century to the present.

This development in Arab/Anglophone literature and criticism has been the result of several political, social, historical, cultural conditions in the Middle East, and the long struggle with the West. As early discussed, the development of Arab feminist literary discourse is connected to the different generations of contemporary Arab women writers. In her seminal piece, *Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and the Middle East Studies* (1996), Deniz Kandiyoti provides a comprehensive overview of feminist scholarship in the West and situates the literature on Middle Eastern women within this broader context.

Kandiyoti identifies three main waves in the maturation of feminist scholarship since the 1960s in the West: *Combating Androcentric Bias*, "Accounting for the Subordination of Women", and "From Woman to Gender" (1996, p. X). These phases mirror broader feminist movements that have shaped more global gender discourses.

In a similar context, Kandiyoti underlines three waves of Middle Eastern feminism: "Feminism and Nationalism," "The Rise of Social Science Paradigms and Developmentalism," and "Dialogues within Feminism" (p. 8). This framework provides a valuable lens through which to investigate the evolution of Arab women's writings, particularly through the contributions of three generations of Arab feminist discourse.

1.9.1. Arab Feminism(s): Divergent Reconstructed Identities

It should be made clear that what is called 'feminism' in the Middle East is "often associated in public discourse as a hybrid concept that somehow points to and implies foreign intervention." (Valassopoulos, 2008, P. 13). This inevitable Western interference within the concept could be simply exposed in the very fact of having no exact term in Arabic to refer to feminism (Abu-Lughod, 1995, p 22).

Badran and Cooke noticed that the term to denote feminism in the Middle East first coined in Bahithat al-Badiyah 1909's publication known as *Al-Nisaiyat*⁵ (1990, p. xvii). Later, variant terms have been used depending on the context. In 1923, the term *Nisa'i* was used in the Egyptian Feminist Union to demonstrate the feminist traits of their movement.

This ambiguity to use different terms in academic studies shows how much Arab feminism is a complex and hybrid notion. The word 'harem' for example is frequently used in Western and orientalist debates on the women's oppression in the Arab world (Ahmed, 1982, p. 524). In Arabic, *harem* is taken from *haram* that may be translated as "inviolable, taboo, sacred, sacrosanct, and holy" (Ba'albaki, 2001, p. 460).

Leila Ahmed (1982) critically attacked this connection between *haram* or forbidden and women in orientalist and Western translation. According to Ahmed this reference is a direct evidence that "it was women who are doing the foreboding, excluding men from their society" (1982, p. 529). For her, it is unfair to refer to Arab and Muslim women's oppression merely in their restricted boundaries.

It is controversial to conceive Arab women's issues from a Western feminist standpoint because of the very difference in social, political, religious and cultural contexts between the 'West' and the 'East'. Anastassia Valassopolos (2007) raises an impeachment against the application of feminism in the Arab world; as it is "yet another example of the 'West' interfering and meddling in the affairs of the 'East'" (p. 13).

She continues to accuse both secular liberals and Muslim women for using Western models which are not compatible in the context of Arab and Muslim women. This could easily present the East as a naïf fellowship of the West as it has been rooted in the inherited orientalist discourse. Sharing the same viewpoint, Malti-Douglas (1995) affirms that:

Any reasonable discussion of the applicability of an intellectual or political ideology in a non-Western context must consider not only feminism but other

⁵ In Zeidan's conceptualisation, Bahithat al-Badiyah initiates "a female literary identity in the Arab" by employing the term of *Al-Nisaiyat*. See Zeidan (1995, p. 85).

ideologies and movements as well. The most obvious of these is Marxism. While many Middle Easterners, notably neo-traditionalists, reject Marxism as foreign and irrelevant, most of those, both inside and out the region, who question the applicability of feminism, have no objections to applying concepts like class, imperialism, capitalism and exploitation to Middle Eastern societies (p.16).

Other critics, however, give broader space to feminism which can accommodate different cultures and political systems. Karen Offen (1988) provides feminism with its cross-cultural scope when she considers it as both an *ideology* and *movement*; something that can be adopted then adapted, and so that it can be applicable to different cultures (p. 120).

In similar context, in her article (1994) 'Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?' Mervat Hatem has sought a more positive standpoint of feminism be it Arab or Western, stating that she:

Seeks to develop an appreciation of the Western liberal ideal and its practice as well as the Egyptian transformation of both into something that reflects Egypt's cultural background and political challenges, this does not assume the superiority of the Western model, the inferiority of the Egyptian one, or vice versa. Examining both the external and internal critiques of liberalism is important for understanding the global, gendered discourse (p. 661).

Such kind of reconciliation between the East and the West is then taking place within feminist discourse, especially when some feminists' activists start to be aware of the total equality between men and women. Instead, they believe in a "rebalancing between men and women" (Offen, 1988, p. 152); because women themselves are not equal with similar and distinct experiences of uneven relationships within different historical and cultural contexts.

Offen (1988) emphasises this fact that "solidarity among women is based not solely on recognition of a common oppression but also, historically speaking, on a celebration of shared and differential experience as members of the same sex, the

childbearing and nurturing sex” (p. 156). This situation can be applicable to fit both the experiences of Arab and Western women. Henceforth, feminism; though originally is a Western tradition, can have its very specific and diverse contexts.

1.9.2. Arab Feminism, Nationalism, and the Postcolonial State

Colonialism imposed rigid gender hierarchies that often reinforced existing patriarchal structures while introducing new forms of oppression. As a theory, Postcolonialism has a crucial dimension in the examination of gender and feminism, which explores how colonial discourses shaped the construction of gender roles and how postcolonial feminism challenges both Western feminist paradigms and nationalist patriarchies.

As Anne McClintock (1995) asserts, “gender was one of the primary categories through which colonialism was both imagined and implemented” (p. 5). Postcolonial Arab feminism, in particular, is deeply intertwined with historical and cultural specificities, including the impacts of colonialism and the ways in which local patriarchies and Western hegemonies shape women's experiences.

Postcolonial Arab feminism, thus, challenges both Western feminist hegemony and local oppressive structures, positioning itself within the broader framework of postcolonial theory. As Leila Ahmed (1992) claims:

To assume that feminism is necessarily European is to erase the diverse traditions of resistance that existed in non-Western societies. It is to ignore the ways in which colonialism often manipulated gender discourses to justify its own rule and to dismiss the feminist movements that emerged in direct opposition to both colonialism and indigenous patriarchies (p .166).

Ahmed's critique evaluates the necessity of recognizing indigenous feminist traditions that predate colonial intersections. The colonial encounter brought about a complex interplay between oppression and resistance. The first wave of Arab feminism, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was closely tied to nationalist movements. Women's activism during this period was framed within the struggle for national independence and political reform.

As Badran (2009) notes, “Women’s participation in the nationalists’ movements of the Arab world was often motivated by a dual struggle: the quest for national sovereignty and the demand for gender rights” (p. 34). In 1882’s Egypt, the British colonialism signals the launching of nationalism spirit. Baron (1994) highlights the connection between nationalism and the beginning of Arab feminism in Egypt, which later spread to other parts of the Arab world, claiming:

The wave of nationalism was a convenient one for women to ride, arguing that all Egyptians had to be mobilized in the struggle for independence. Patriotism served those who might otherwise have been prohibited from a literary vocation... Using nationalism as an excuse did not confine [women writers] to this subject [that is, women’s patriotic duties]. Rather it gave them greater freedom to pursue literary and other endeavours (p. 41).

Here, many early Arab feminists were part of nationalist struggles against colonialism, seeing women’s liberation as integral to broader social and political independence. Patriarchal nationalist movements often positioned women as a symbol of cultural purity, relegating them to traditional roles while discouraging feminist activism as a Western cultural import. As Kandiyoti (1991) puts it out; “Women in postcolonial states are frequently caught in a ‘patriarchal bargain,’ where they must navigate between competing forces of nationalist expectations, economic survival, and gender-based oppression” (p. 438).

This dilemma is evident in many postcolonial societies where feminist demands for gender equity are sometimes dismissed as threats to national identity, matters that were also neglected in traditional postcolonial theory. Spivak writes, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (P. 93), exposing the logic that justified colonial interventions under the guise of women’s liberation.

Several postcolonial Arab women writers have highlighted how both colonial and indigenous patriarchies have oppressed women, calling for a feminist movement that is simultaneously anti-imperialist and gender-inclusive. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) states that:

The paradox of nationalism in the Arab world is that it has simultaneously mobilized women and constrained them. Women were called upon to participate in the struggle for independence, yet after liberation, many were relegated to traditional roles. Feminism had to navigate between nationalist demands and its own struggle for gender and justice (p. 768).

Such paradox is evident in numerous instances of Arab nations' history. During the Egyptian nationalist movement against the British Empire, women such as Huda Sha'arawi played significant roles in political activism, only to find their voices marginalized in the post-independence state. This cycle of inclusion and exclusion underscores the complex relationship between feminism and nationalist projects in the Arab world.

Colonial regimes used gender to construct binaries of civilization and barbarism, where indigenous women were often portrayed as either sexualized objects or passive victims in need of rescue. Mohanty (2003) further critiques Western feminist scholarship for constructing a homogenous category of the "Third world woman" as a perpetuated notion that ignores historical and socio-political particularities. She contends:

The image of the 'average Third World woman' is produced as someone who leads an essentially truncated life based on her being sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, and domestic. This, in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, and having control over their own bodies and sexuality (p. 22).

Mohanty's intention underscores the necessity of situating feminist struggles within the very specific historical and cultural contexts. Western feminism has historically focused on issues such as reproductive rights and workplace equality, often overlooking concerns central to postcolonial contexts, such as neo-colonial economic exploitation and political repression.

Similarly, Abu-Lughod (2002) challenges Western narratives of gender oppression, especially those that justify interventionist policies in the Global South

under the premise of women's liberation. In this regard, she thinks that "Instead of asking how we might 'save' others, we might instead ask what we might learn if we considered the forms of everyday resistance and negotiation that women already engage in within their specific cultural contexts" (2002, p. 789).

Consequently, Western colonialism has significantly influenced the literary techniques, genres, and themes explored by Arab/Anglophone writers, including feminist authors. The encounter with the West has given rise to a distinct literary trend, as Arab women writers have long sought to redefine their identities in relation to the Other (Badawi, 1993, p. 5).

Through this dynamic, postcolonial Arab women's literature has developed its unique style, maintaining its individuality while reflecting the grim realities shaped by various forms of colonialism. Henceforth, Western colonialism has introduced exclusive subject matters into Arabic literature, particularly for women writers, allowing them to depict what Badawi refers to as "concrete observable reality" (1993, p. 16).

Also, Moghadam (2003) illustrates how "Arab feminist scholarship during this phase sought to integrate women's issues into broader socio-economic development strategies, often aligning with leftist and socialist movements" (p. 112). A preliminary example of the trend is the emergence of state-driven policies in Egypt and Tunisia that aimed to modernize women's roles in society.

The Egyptian feminist Doria Shafik is a significant figure that overtly reflects the link between feminist activism and national development. She actively advocates for women's political participation and education. In similar circumstances, the Tunisian government under Habib Bourgiba introduced legal reforms, such as the 1956 Code of Personal Status, which significantly improved women's rights in marriage and divorce (Charrad, 2001).

Unlike the earlier phase, where women's rights were framed within nationalist rhetoric, this period witnessed the institutionalization of feminist concerns. Women's organizations, legal reforms, and literary campaigns gained prominence. However, Kandiyoti (1995) warns that this period also saw the co-option of feminist agendas by

state apparatuses, where “women’s rights were often framed as a means to achieve national development rather than as ends in themselves” (p. 33).

Despite increased educational attainment, women’s forced participation remains a significant challenge for them, facing structural barriers such as legal restrictions, cultural norms, and unequal access to education and employment. In a poignant observation, El-Saadawi (2007) states:

The oppression of women in Arab societies is tied not only to religion or culture but to economic and political structures that benefit from their subjugation. To achieve true liberation, economic independence is paramount, for a woman who controls her own financial resources controls her destiny (p. 23).

Accordingly, Joseph (2000) cautions, “the developmentalist approach often reduced women’s issues to mere indicators of economic progress, failing to address the structural roots of gender inequality” (p. 57). Consequently, Arab feminism during this period was thus characterized by a tension between state-driven reform initiatives and feminist activism.

It is against this background that nationalism is constantly debated as both a persisting and declining instrument to postcolonial Arab women writers. In the postcolonial era, complex questions have spurred confrontational discussions about national paradigms in the Arab world. From a literary standpoint, both postcolonial and contemporary writings by Arab women offer alternative perspectives that transgress conventional ideas of nationalism.

These early postcolonial feminist narratives rejected the notion of the nation as fixed and bounded entity. While theorists like Benedict Anderson describe the nation as “both inherently limited and sovereign” (2016, p. 15), postcolonial Arab women’s writings instead promoted a continual reimagining of the nation through unique portrayals of fluid, dynamic, and nuanced identities.

Arab women writers diligently resisted dominant national discourses by reconfiguring the concept of the nation as one marked by dynamic instability and shifting meanings (Yewah, 2001, p. 45). In the light of widespread disillusionment with

post-independence governance, postcolonial Arab women writers have reconfigured their creative endeavours as literary means to subvert, and indeed to deconstruct, any predominant signifier associated with the nation.

Arab women writers work to oppose hegemonic discourses on the nation, and have rather represented the concept as “having a shifting and unstable significance” (Yewah, 2001, p. 45). As many people were only disappointed by their aftermath rulers of independence, postcolonial writers “have turned their endeavours into weapons to challenge, indeed to deconstruct ... any signifier that could correspond to the nation” (Yewah, 2001, p. 45).

Henceforth, postcolonial Arab women's literature foregrounds alternative artistic paradigms for reconstructing identity, thereby subverting both local patriarchal nationalist narratives and Western hegemonic depictions within Arab/Muslim discourses. In portraying the national subject in this manner, these writers aimed to cultivate a distinctive convergence of conflicting national impulses: the preservation of cultural authenticity alongside the advocacy of Western modernization (Chatterjee 1990, p. 41).

Coinciding with the mid-20th century, this phase of Arab feminism was marked by the rise of social science paradigms and increased engagement with sociological, anthropological, and economic analyses of gender relations. The late 20th century and continuing into the 21st century is characterized by an increasing diversification of feminist perspectives and the rise of transnational feminist landscapes.

This feminist phase has witnessed more critical debates surrounding religion, culture, sexuality, and intersectionality. This diversification reflects broader dialogues within global feminism while also discussing local specific concerns. Al-Ali (2018) insists that “contemporary Arab feminism is no longer a monolithic entity but rather a space of contestation, where multiple voices; secular, Islamic, and transnational; engage in dialogue and debate” (p. 189).

Kandiyoti highlights that contemporary Arab women writers negotiate between tradition and modernity, often challenging Western feminist frameworks and contesting

patriarchal structures within their own societies. She then asserts that this phase is one of self-reflexivity of Arab feminism, where women writers are “engaged in a critical dialogue with both their local socio-political contexts and global feminist movements” (1995, p. 23).

This notion of contestation and paradox is evident in the narratives of contemporary Arab women writers, who deeply explore issues of body politics, exile, and postcolonial identity in nuanced manners. The period has then witnessed a resurgence of Arab feminist literary production, Nawal El Saadawi's works, for instance, have been critical in challenging both patriarchal and colonialist perpetuated depictions of the Arab/Muslim woman.

Mid-to-late 20th century writers like Hanan al Shaykh broke taboos, addressing themes of patriarchy, sexuality, and political oppression. A new generation of Arab women writers, like Leila Aboulela and Jokha Alharthi, blends tradition with modernity, crafting narratives that explore identity, migration, and feminism on a global scale.

This same division appears in Orientalist discourse, which confines Arab women to domestic roles while assigning men to public sphere. By portraying the national subject in a distinctive way, Arab women writers seek to forge a unique confluence of contradictory national and Orientalist impulses. Such evolving female identities depicted in the literary works of writers such as Huda Barakat, Ahdaf Soueif, and Leila Aboulela, navigate new themes of migration, religious identity, and female agency.

They serve as examples of the reconstructed identities often crafted by postcolonial women writers. In doing so, these writers develop a transnational within the discourse of feminism, exploring a sense of home and belonging that moves beyond narrow definitions of the nation. As Lamia Zayzafoon (2005) observes regarding pervasive Orientalist stereotypes of Arab and Arab-Muslim women:

The Arab Muslim woman is as a single ‘category,’ the Muslim Woman’ is an ‘invention’, whether in the Western discourse of Orientalism and Western psychoanalytic feminism or in the discourses of Arab nationalism and Islamic feminism in colonial and postcolonial North Africa (p. 35).

By drawing on diverse cultural, social, and literary techniques, Arab Muslim women writers reframe notions of home and belonging in ways that resonate with the postcolonial experiences of exile and migration. This approach helps them avoid being “hostage to the categories of Eurocentric thought” (Yegenoglu, 2012, p. 123) that are embedded in nationalist and Orientalist hegemonic frameworks. Therefore, the re-imagined nation they advocate is not a rejection of homeland origins but rather a transformation achieved through a renewed interpretation of the authentic elements of collective local identity.

The evolution of Arab feminism reveals its dynamic and multifaceted landscape. While early feminism was deeply tied to nationalism, later tendencies incorporated more engaging critical intra-feminist dialogues. The increasing intersectionality of contemporary feminism underlines the importance of contextualizing feminist struggles within specific, historical, cultural, religious, sexual, and political tropes. As recent scholarship continues to expand, it remains imperative to recognize the diversity of Arab feminist thought and its global implications. The rise of Islamic feminism, in particular, has introduced new paradigm-shifts in the discourse.

1.10. Arab British Women's Literature: Towards Diverging Cultural Expressions

The British literary scene has historically been dominated by Western voices, making the rise of Arab British women's literature a remarkable phenomenon. The emergence of Arab British women's literature has been a significant cultural and literary development since the 1980s. This body of literature is characterized by its deep engagement with themes of colonialism, postcolonial identity, migration, diaspora, cultural hybridity, feminism and the negotiation of belonging in the context of Arab and British cultures.

These narratives often challenge Western stereotypes about Arab women, address postcolonial concerns, and engage in transcultural dialogues. Arab British women's fiction is deeply influenced by historical, socio-political, postcolonial, and diasporic issues. Arab British women writers like Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, and Leila Aboulela

craft narratives that navigate the complexities of exile, transnational identities, and cultural negotiations.

Their prominence illustrates the growing impact of Arab British women's literature. The tradition has flourished due to the increasing presence of platforms such as *Wasafiri*, a British Arts Council-funded literary magazine that has provided space for marginalized voices within British literature. The magazine has enabled Arab British women writers to publish and gain recognition in a predominantly Anglo-Centric literary environment.

Susheila Nasta, the founding editor of *Wasafiri*, emphasized the significance of such platforms, arguing that "providing a space for marginalized voices is not merely an act of inclusion, but a reconfiguration of the literary canon itself" (Nasta, 2002, p. 78). The presence of these writers in British literary circles challenged traditional notions of British identity, fostering a new dimension to postcolonial literature. The establishment of *Wasafiri* in 1984 has been instrumental in seeking to diversify the literary landscape, offering a widely acclaimed Western platform for writers from postcolonial backgrounds to engage with the complexities of identity and representation.

According to Nasta (2012), "*Wasafiri* was founded on the principle that literature must serve as a bridge between cultures, challenging the monolithic narratives of British literary tradition" (p. 28). Accordingly, McLeold (2010) notes, "*Wasafiri* has provided an essential space for diasporic and postcolonial writers to explore themes of exile, hybridity, and belonging, allowing authors from diverse backgrounds to articulate their unique perspectives" (p.45).

Henceforth, the significance of this magazine extends beyond publication; it has fostered literary dialogues that encourage transcultural engagement, wherein the Arab and British literary traditions intersect in more nuanced ways. Nasta (2012) was even clear in voicing the crucial role of *Wasafiri* in promoting the works of Arab British women writers, and stating:

The goal of *Wasafiri* has always been to create an inclusive literary space where diverse voices, particularly those from colonized regions, can engage with and

critique dominant cultural narratives. Arab British women writers, among others, have used this platform to articulate their experiences of migration, identity, and resistance (p. 92).

By offering a dedicated space for literary expression, *Wasafiri* has contributed to the legitimization and recognition of Arab British women's literature. The magazine has also encouraged critical discussions on postcolonial feminism and the intersectionality of gender, race, and cultural identity in the literary field.

1.10.1. Arab British Women's Fiction: A Minor Literature within a Minor Literature

The formation of Arab British literature should be contextualized within the wider framework of Arabic literary traditions and the historical ties between Britain and the Arab world. Arabic literature possesses a profound and vast history that spans numerous centuries, evolving through distinct periods such as the Rashidun, Umayyad, Abbasid, Andalusí, and Nahda, each characterized by unique literary traits and advancements.

The Nahda, or Arab Renaissance, of the 19th century signified a notable resurgence in Arabic literature, distinguished by a neoclassical movement aimed at re-examining historical literary traditions and a modernist movement shaped by Western literary influences. This era witnessed the progressive substitution of Classical Arabic forms with Western counterparts, encompassing plays, novels, and short tales.

In this context, Arab literary works in English were rather limited until the 1980s, with only a few significant exceptions. Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964) is one of the early Arab British literary masterpieces, attaining cult status and remaining in circulation through reprints. Likewise, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960) achieved prominence via extensive translation and was reissued in 1990. These initial works established the groundwork for what would subsequently evolve into a more significant literary tradition.

The evolution of Arab British literature accelerated after World War II, as heightened Arab immigration to Britain led to an expanding corpus of work that explores the immigrant experience, minority identity, and cultural misapprehensions. This work

remained predominantly obscure beyond academic circles for decades, illustrating the suppressed status of Arab writers within the British literary domain.

Arab British literature, a subset of Anglophone Arab literary production, has garnered increasing studies over the past few decades. The emergence of Arab British literature is closely linked to patterns of Arab migration to the UK, influenced by historical events such as colonialism, economic opportunities, and political upheavals in the Arab world. Some scholars have traced the origins of this tradition to works by travellers rather than immigrants or descendants in Britain. This distinction underscores the unique trajectory of Arab British literature to other diasporic literary traditions.

As emphasized by Hassan, Arab British literature is “the work of immigrants and their descendants” (2012, p.158). By such designation Hassan attempts to show the work of immigrants as distinct to that of ‘travellers’ as discussed by Edward Said⁶. This latter, as Hassan thinks, referred to those narratives carried out by travellers rather than immigrant in Britain (2012, p. 157). In one of his compelling reviews of Ahdaf Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun*, Edward Said employs the term ‘Anglo-Arab Encounter’, where he sets the occasion to complain of the famine number of English-language novels written by Arabs.

Scholars debate the categorization of Arab British Literature within broader literary traditions. Arab British literature has been the subject of extensive scholarly discourse, with debates concerning its classification, thematic exploration, and linguistic nuances. Some argue it falls within postcolonial literature due to its engagement with colonial histories, while others frame it within diasporic literature due to its focus on migration and translational identities (Hassan, 2011, p. 180).

In *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British literature*, Wail S. Hassan (2011) posits that Arab British literature

⁶ An example which fits Edward Said’s designation is the work of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, a famous Arabic novelist, literary critic and translator of Shakespeare. He wrote only one novel in English, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960), about a Palestinian refugee who settles in Baghdad in the early 1950s. As for Waguhi Ghali’s *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964) which focuses on an anglophile Egyptian aristocrat living at the expense of a wealthy aunt and an Egyptian Jewish lover who takes him on a trip to England, after which he comes back to settle again in Egypt.

should be viewed through a postcolonial lens, as it “engages critically with the legacy of colonialism and its enduring impact on contemporary identities” (p. 160).

He also states that these narratives “challenge dominant historical discourses and offer alternative perspectives on colonial encounters” (p. 162), as it is the case with the concept of writing back that represents a great instance in postcolonial literature. Conversely, Nouri Gana (2013), in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*, contends that Arab British literature aligns more closely with diasporic literature.

Gana affirms that these literary narratives “navigate the complexities of displacement, cultural negotiation, and the construction of hybrid identities” (p. 5). He highlights that the diasporic experience is central to understanding the thematic depth of Arab British literature.

Arab British literature has its roots in early migration waves of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it gained visibility and prominence in the late 20th century with the works of Arab British women writers such as Ahdaf Soueif, Fadia Faqir, and Leila Aboulela (Hassan, 2011, p. 160). The period saw an increase in Arab migration to Britain, leading to a more pronounced literary presence. These writers negotiate their Arab heritage and British influences.

In this vein, Arab British literature is also considered to be labelled as a stance of immigrant narratives. Deleuze and Guattari classify immigrant narratives under the category of minor literature, which can itself be a subcategory within broader minor literary traditions. It is considered minor in relation to dominant literary traditions, classical Arabic or English literatures, and becomes a subset of minor literature when additional complexities are introduced.

Deleuze and Guattari define minor literature as one that “does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (1986, p. 16), where Arab British women writers can stand as an example of a minor within a minor literature. In other words, by adopting and writing in a dominant

language, immigrant writers create a distinct literary tradition that subverts conventional norms.

While writing in a foreign or dominant language is a defining characteristic of this tradition, other essential ingredients must also be considered. Deleuze and Guattari identify three foundational characteristics of minor literature: the deterritorialization of language, the connection between the individual and political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation (1986, p. 18).

First, the deterritorialization of language occurs when a minority writer appropriates a dominant language, transforming it through unique modes of expression, ideological positioning, and representation of his or her community. This process not only alters the language itself but also differentiates the writer from mainstream literary tradition, exactly as Arab British women writers intend to redefine themselves through their deterritorialized English use.

Second, the intrinsic political dimension of minor literature arises due to its marginal status, whether as Arab, as a woman, or as a Muslim. Thus, personal narratives within minor literature become deeply significant, as they carry the weight of an entire community's historical and political contexts. The third characteristic is perhaps the most addressed one in this research work. And it refers to the basis that "in it [minor literature] everything takes on a collective value". This means that:

There are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation ... that could be separated from a collective enunciation ... what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what or she does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 17)

However, these characteristics do not always fully manifest in Arab immigrant narratives. Hassan argues that "the fact that many writers accepted the basic tenets of Orientalism has had different consequences" (2012, p. 6). For instance, some writers reinforce the East/West dichotomy and the notion of oriental inferiority, which creates a sense of distance from their homeland. These writers may even "refuse to be seen as

representatives of an Arab American collectivity, embracing instead the collectivity of the American majority or the ideology of individualism” (Hassan, 2012, p. 6).

On the other hand, some writers actively reject Orientalism, though they do so in different ways. Some prefer not to engage in direct opposition and instead resort to literary silence. Others take a more assertive stance, rejecting the notion of Oriental inferiority by identifying with and defending an Arab immigrant collectivity. Still, some go further by rejecting the entire Orientalist dichotomy and, in doing so, embrace the representational burden associated with minor literature, particularly its second and third features.

Literature in English by women of Arabic descent residing in Britain or navigating between Britain and the Arab world constitutes a unique literary phenomenon. These writers are generally proficient in standard Arabic but opt to write in English for a range of personal, professional, and practical reasons. Their work produces a hybrid form that is neither entirely Arabic nor entirely English, articulating experiences of cultural liminality and transnational identity.

The narratives of Arab British women exhibit a distinct form of hybridity, setting them apart from the writing of Arab American women, which is frequently described as “hyphenated” rather than hybrid. This distinction underscores the necessity of acknowledging the particular socio-political contexts that influence these literary works.

This cross-culture interaction has led to what literary critic Wail Hassan refers to as “translational literature”. The notion of translational literature provides an effective framework for analysing these texts. Translational literature encompasses not only translated works but also literature that incorporates translation as both an aesthetic and political practice, engaging with the dynamics between languages, cultures, and literary traditions.

Arab British women's literature demonstrates this translational quality in multiple aspects. These authors frequently utilize English that has been “deterritorialized and metamorphosed to meet the cultural specificity of Arab women as writers who traverse worlds, cultures, and languages” (Shahnaz, 2014, p. 126). Arab British women's writing

represents a minor literature in that it involves a minority group using a major language (English) in ways that transform that language and connect individual experiences to broader political concerns.

Mengouchi Meryem refers to language deterritorialization as “an active transgression” since “it deconstructs boundaries between the minority and the majority groups” (2023, p. 47). In particular, the deterritorialization of English in Arab women’s texts allows for the expression of cultural specificities that might otherwise remain untranslatable. Many authors intentionally position themselves as cultural translators, facilitating the interaction between Western and Arab cultural contexts. Third, their narratives often focus on acts of translation, linguistic displacement, and cultural negotiation.

1.10.2. Aspects of Translational Literature

Originating from a background that encompasses both Arab and immigrant influences, translational writing reflects various facets of its primary Arab immigrant literary tradition. Nevertheless, given its unique emphasis and area of inquiry in both form and strategy, it diverts from a clearly defined translational literary trajectory that is simultaneously adaptable and demanding.

Hassan revisits this notion and clarifies that by “transnational literature,” he is not alluding to the entirety of immigrant writing, but rather, “strictly speaking, those texts that straddle two languages, at once foregrounding, performing, problematizing the act of translation” (Hassan, 2012, p. 32). He cites Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator* as a primary example of this category of “translational literature,” alongside two other works.

As a shared point of reference within Arab immigrant literature, such narratives contribute to the formation of cross-cultural identities. Nevertheless, by thematizing the processes of translation alongside their paradigmatic and ideological stances, these texts establish a standard for the most contentious forms of cultural translation, emerging as the most radical expression within immigrant Arabic literature (Hassan, 2012, p. 32).

Contemplating various perspectives, translational literature serves as a dynamic cultural and political endeavour that influences both its creation and interpretation. As Hassan (2012) put it:

Translational literature exposes the problematics of translation as an interpretive process in its attempt to negotiate the complex critical, institutional, and commercial grids that govern the selection, translation, publication, and marketing of Arabic texts in Britain and the U.S. More crucially, translational texts are positioned to resist the power differentials that influence the work of the translator and reproduce stereotyped cultural identities. In performing acts of cultural translation in the 'original' itself, translational literature at once problematizes the notion of the 'original' and stages what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the deterritorialization of language (Hassan, 2012, p. 33).

In other words, Translational literature appears to be more provocative as it addresses new issues that were previously excluded from the domestic literary canon. Translational literature is both transgressive and submissive; it must resist fixed dichotomies such as 'East' versus 'West' while also affirming certain established stereotypes. Secondly, in conjunction with its domestic cultural, ideological, and paradigmatic affiliations, it alters the 'original' to the extent that it can no longer be considered 'original.' It adopts and subsequently adapts the 'original'; for example, such narratives may "Arabize," "Africanize," or "Indianize" English (Hassan, 2012, p. 33).

Occasionally, this involves translating terms or phrases that lack an English counterpart. These narratives seek to convey the rhetorical aspects of the mother tongue, transferring not only meaning but also cultural-linguistic phenomena such as idioms, proverbs, and religious texts (e.g., the Quran and Hadith), which are imbued with culturally specific connotations.

Translational literature aims to convey the cultural properties of its language, specifically Arabic, often prioritizing cultural fidelity over fluency and immediate comprehensibility. This new brand of literature engages with a complex mode of translation, likely endorsing what Douglas Robinson refers to as "radical literalism" (Robinson, 1996, p. xi), or texts that highlight the boundaries of translatability, thus

entering the realm of 'Untranslatability'. Untranslatability is, however, a characteristic that has recently influenced some of its writings, such as those of Aboulela.

In this context, "untranslatability" is viewed more as a scheme or strategy than a drawback. Spivak asserts that although the rhetoric of any language might at times disrupt its logic, it is in the "jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing" that "a world is made for the agent, so that the agent can act in an ethical way, a political way; so that the agent can be alive, in a human way, in the world. Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation" (Spivak, 1993, p. 181). This indicates that translational literature considers translation as its pillar foundation, thereby complicating the process by incorporating native and local elements that results in the untranslatable.

1.10.3. Arab British Women as Cultural Translators: Hybridity, Displacement and the Transcultural Dialogue

In literary studies, the notion of cultural translation has emerged as an essential instrument for comprehending how marginalized authors formulate meaning in contexts where diverse identities and cultures converge. According to Said (1978) in *Orientalism*, the connection between the West and the East is frequently marked by an unequal power dynamic, with the West adopting a dominant role over the Orient. Arab British women writers challenge this dichotomy by interrogating, opposing, and reinterpreting prevailing cultural narratives, so establishing themselves as "cultural translators".

Cultural translation in Arab women's writing encompasses more than the mere linguistic conversion of texts. Language serves as a fundamental component in the process of cultural translation. In the realm of Arab-British women's literature, language functions as a medium for articulating cultural identity and as a domain where translation takes place. For these authors, the process of composing in English constitutes a translation in its own right, necessitating navigation through the cultural significances inherent in Arabic alongside the linguistic frameworks of English.

Sardar (1999) elucidates that cultural translation encompasses more than simple verbal transmission; it entails the negotiation of differences, the interpretation of cultural

practices, and the expression of an identity that resists straightforward classification. For these authors, cultural translation becomes an act of defiance and endurance. They utilize language not merely to express their own narratives but also to critique the broader socio-political challenges confronting Arab and Muslim communities in Britain.

The act of writing in English, while endeavouring to maintain the cultural and emotional significance of Arabic, embodies a negotiation between two distinct realms, mirroring the experience of navigating life amidst diverse cultures. Therefore, cultural translation involves navigating cultural contexts, mediating worldviews, and creating narratives that bridge experiential gaps. Arab women writers, particularly those in diasporic contexts, utilize cultural translation as a crucial method for expressing hybrid identities and contesting simplistic portrayals.

Arab British women writers frequently examine the concept of hybridity, a word introduced by Bhabha. Hybridity, in this sense, denotes the combination of two or more cultural identities, arising from migration and diaspora. In works like *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam and *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, the characters grapple with their Arab or Muslim ancestry while assimilating into British society. These authors employ hybridity to illustrate the intricacies of their characters' experiences, as they are concurrently part of two cultures yet fully belong to neither.

Reflecting the difficult debates of identity that arise in postcolonial and diasporic settings, migration and displacement have long been prominent themes in Arab British women's work. Often questioning preconceptions and reconstructing gender and ethnic narratives, many Arab British women writers explore problems of cultural hybridity, belonging, and faith.

Migration experiences require renegotiating self, heritage, and belonging in a context where dominant cultural discourses usually identify the immigrant as "Other", not only as travelling from one location to another. Recent developments in the discipline have exposed the complex ways in which Arab women's fiction supports more general debates of ethnic literature, postcolonial critique, and transcultural dialogue.

Arab British women writers often articulate experiences of displacement, negotiating between cultural traditions and the expectations of their host societies. The tension between cultural preservation and assimilation is a recurrent theme, highlighting the psychological and social challenges that come with migration. Such narratives underscore the importance of memory and nostalgia, as characters grapple with fragmented identities that exist within both their homeland and adopted country.

The process of identity construction in these fictional narratives is often dynamic, fluid, and evolving, resisting static and rigid definitions and instead embracing multiplicity. Maloul (2014) emphasizes that Arab British women writers challenge simplistic representations of identity, stating that:

Arab British women's fiction not only engages with issues of migration and displacement but also problematizes essentialist views of ethnic literature. These writers incorporate nuanced perspectives on faith, gender, and postcolonial legacies, making their works integral to both ethnic and mainstream literary criticism (Maloul, 2014, p. 78).

In this vein, their narratives provide counter-discourses to mainstream representations of Arab identity; particularly post 9/11, where Muslim identities are largely framed through the lens of security and suspicion. Arab British women writers subvert these dominant discourses by foregrounding personal and communal struggles and emphasizing agency over victimhood. By doing so, they challenge the narrative of the immigrant as a perpetual outsider and instead present identity as a space of negotiation and empowerment.

Maloul raised another crucial aspect of Arab British women's writing in relation to the depiction of Palestinian identity and the reconfiguration of masculinities within diasporic contexts. Palestinian identity, marked by historical dispossession and ongoing political struggles, finds resonance in the works of many Arab British women novelists.

This literature does not merely recount tales of loss but also interrogates the ways in which masculinity is reshaped in the context of exile and displacement. The figure of the Palestinian man is often situated between nationalist narratives of resistance and the

vulnerabilities imposed by diaspora. While explaining the matter, Maloul (2014) highlights the significance of these representations:

Palestinian masculinities in diaspora are often portrayed as fractured, oscillating between resistance and vulnerability. Arab British women writers deconstruct hyper masculine nationalist narratives, instead offering more nuanced portrayals that humanize male characters within the framework of displacement and longing (p. 112).

By subverting dominant nationalist paradigms, Arab British women writers contribute to a more inclusive discussion of identity, one that acknowledges both gendered experiences and political realities. The reconfiguration of masculinity in diasporic literature allows for a critique of rigid gender norms that often accompany nationalist discourses. Instead of depicting Palestinian men solely as figures of struggle and defiance, Arab British women writers offer a more layered representation, one that explores their emotional landscapes, vulnerabilities, and attempts to reconcile personal aspirations with collective histories.

Yucef Awad's work on *Cartographies of Identities* (2011) discusses how Arab British women novelists emphasize transcultural dialogue and ethnic identification strategies to construct diasporic identities. Beyond individual identity formation, these writers engage in cross-ethnic dialogues, prioritizing the shared experiences of different diasporic communities. Also, Arab British women's literature does not exist in isolation but rather in conversation with other postcolonial and migrant narratives.

By situating Arab identity within broader frameworks of displacement and resistance, these writers cultivate a literary space where transcultural solidarities can emerge. Therefore, Arab British women's narratives underscore the ways in which diaspora is merely presented as cultural loss but it is also about cultural exchange and reinvention. Awad (2012) explains that these narratives demonstrate the potential for transcultural solidarity:

Arab British women novelists employ narrative strategies that foster cross-ethnic identification, creating spaces where multiple diasporic voices intersect. By

weaving together diverse cultural experiences, these texts resist isolationist tendencies and instead promote a more interconnected understanding of identity (p. 63).

This emphasis on transcultural engagement underscores the importance of literature as a site for negotiating identity beyond rigid and stagnant ethnic categorizations. By aligning their narratives with other histories of migration, Arab British women novelists construct alternative cartographies of identity, ones that acknowledge shared struggles while respecting cultural specificities. This approach not only challenges ethnocentric literary traditions but also fosters an inclusive literary discourse that recognizes migration as a global phenomenon rather than a singular or monolithic experience.

1.11 Cultural Translation and Orientalism Contestations

As a theory, Orientalism has long been recognised as a foundational framework against which all Arab texts seek to enter the Western literary market. Several examples among academic commentators have reflected upon the role Orientalism has played in the reception of Arab women's texts in the Western literary scene. Such debates on Orientalism argue that this discourse is drawn upon by categories of 'expertise' rewriters. That it has shaped both the overall Western cultural discourse about the Orient and it thereby plays a significant role in reinforcing Western reader's echoes of expectation in relation to their reception of Arab texts.

Michael Foucault argues that knowledge inherently contains the power of constructing social consciousness. All forms of authority therefore use knowledge to build a schematic basis in order to evaluate and differentiate between issues and phenomena. In other words, they use knowledge to build the foundation of social thinking.

Clearly this power can threaten the stability of any given set of foundations. Any culture therefore imposes internal constraints upon its writers and thinkers to maintain the desired form of foundations. This degrading of knowledge to the service of authority in turn ensures the persistence and durability of a hegemonic system (Said, p. 328)

In *Europe's Myths of the Orient*, Kabbani argues that the topics relating to the East have never been free of prejudiced and heavily subjective interpretation by intellectuals. Reviewing the work of Western intellectuals who have written about the East from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, she assumes that even those who had a scientific background could not resist the temptation not to observe and emphasise aspects that they expected to see.

Referring to the works of Galland, she also asserts that "like many Europeans before him, he concentrated his attention on the manifestations of violence, often linked with sexuality, that were supposedly intrinsic to the East" (1993, p. 25). The way in which a culture "imposes" itself in this way can also be self-expecting in the same way that the media can engage in self-censorship.

In light of this analysis, Said defines Orientalism as "an enormous system or intertextual network of rules and procedure which regulate anything that may be thought, written or imagined about the Orient" (p. 93). This system was seen to dominate the Orient (Gandhi, 1998, p. 76). Said argues that this system has been formed over a lengthy period of time by travellers, translators and intellectuals who have had contact with the Orient, who have read its literature and who have written about their impressions. He argues that their writing has created not only knowledge but also "the very reality they appear to describe":

There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences (1992, p. 94).

Thus, he considers that the knowledge gained from books by imperial powers has enabled those travellers, translators and intellectuals to encounter and deal with the Orient. Topics that the Original Orientalist created and wrote about, for example, the mysterious, the sexual and distant other have attracted the attention of readers.

This has been recreated in later Orientalists' writing and has led the categories of expertise to adapt their behaviour in a way to reproduce those topics. In Said's terms,

such writings produce “a tradition or what Michael Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it” (1992, p. 94).

For Said, any apparent differences that exist between writers' views of the Orient are not to be explained by stating that those authors interpret the reality of the Orient in distinct ways. Rather, these differences are mainly in form or personal style of presentation, “every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability” (1992, p. 206).

Finally, relating the role of translation to the hegemonic role of Orientalism, Niranjana relates the West's interest in the Oriental theme in literary works to the imperialist obsession with the dark, exotic and unacceptable behaviour of non-Europeans: “translations reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonised, helping them acquire what Edward Said calls representations or objects without history” (1992, p. 3).

1.12. Domesticating/Foreignizing: A Space for Identity Negotiation

As cultural translators, some Arab British women writers attempt to draw their new literary path so that to claim a distinct cultural identity which at once affords them some artistic and ideological freedom; yet also imposes certain productive conditions. Former experiences of other Arab immigrant writers may too pave the way for those translational writers to settle on both ethics, *sameness* and *difference*, leaning on the power of Orientalism. This explains that in each case writers, through different ways, derive their authority from Orientalism (Hassan, 2012, p. 35).

On the one hand, Spivak declares that the translator must “surrender to the text” in order to “solicit the text to show the limits of its language” (Spivak, 1993, p. 181). Thanks to that surrender,⁷ the translator “earns permission to transgress from the trace of the other” (Spivak, 1993, p. 180). She equally claims that “The politics of translation from a non-European woman's text too often suppresses this possibility because the

⁷ It is here where the idea of untranslatability takes place

translator cannot engage with, or cares insufficiently for; the rhetoricity of the original” (Spivak, 1993, p. 180).

In some cases, this kind of translation forges or fabricates a text that reproduces the dominant ideology of the target culture like that of Orientalist representations of Muslim women. Through forgery and fabrication, the writer marks the endgame of domestication and the secular counterpart to sacrilege.

In Spivak's secular metaphor, translation becomes a sort of forgery when deviation from the letter of the original, which is the condition of translation, is not authorized by an ethics of “fraying,” i.e. “a disrupting, yet ‘loving’ rhetoricity that enters into the text’s self-staging rather than searches for synonym, [...]” (Apter, 2006, p. 102).

In a religious register, translation becomes sacrilege when it is performed without ritual sanction or when intentional desecration occurs. In doing so, Spivak's theory leans on an ethics of difference that takes the agency of the translator in the reform of cultural identities by subverting colonial and other hegemonic ideologies.

On the other hand, certain Arab immigrant writers adopt an ethics of *sameness*, going even to “fabricate the realities” they intend to describe in order to both conform to, and implicitly draw authority from Orientalism (Hassan, 2012, p. 36). Among other examples, the case Norma Khouri's *Honor Lost* (2003) is one of the texts that lean against the Orientalist premise. First published in Australia as *Forbidden Love* (2002), the memoir produced tremendous praise for its author for recounting the ‘honor killing’ of her best friend Dalia in Jordan.

However, some investigating journalists discovered that Dalia and other characters, places, and the events were fictitious and never took place. Steven Salaita devotes a chapter of his book *Arab American Literary Fictions* (2007) to the forgery and the scandal it generates that led Australian and U.S. publishers to retreat the book, where he writes:

Honor Lost is virtually unreadable. It is poorly written with hysterical narration and clichéd description. It is worse methodologically, relying not only on spurious information and falsified data, but also on every imaginable American stereotype

of Arab men and women. In a sense, the most interesting question *Honor Lost* raises is [...] how anybody read the book and actually believed it. I will have to argue that the book's believability [...] can be attributed in part to its appeasement of a long-standing cultural mythos in the United States and its ability to retroactively justify decades of aggressive foreign policy in the Arab world. *Honor Lost*, in other words, could be believed because its readers had already accepted its contents as true before even it had been written; had they not, it would have been impossible to write (Salaita, 2007, p. 88)

It has been noticed that Khouri's initial success contradicts with the general neglect of Arabic and Anglophone Arabic writers, suggesting that English-speaking countries' readers are "only prepared to accept texts that confirm what they already 'know'" (Hassan, 2012, p. 36). By doing so, such narratives as those of Arab women's oppression are eagerly received mainly because they confirm stereotypes that function to justify Western policy in Arab countries. As opposed to well-received texts that show an ethics of sameness, narratives that tend to cross discursive or ideological lines i.e. adopt an ethics of difference, are censored all together if they cannot be reshaped by editors.

Hassan illustrates this situation and says "In private conversation, many Arab American/British writers are all too eager to tell horror stories about press editors and marketing departments, but many of them are reluctant to write or speak publicly about their experiences for fear of antagonizing their publishers" (2012, p. 36). Consequently, a text that presents an ideological perspective different from the target culture must either be reshaped before publication or, in extreme cases, is completely disregarded. One instance of a frank suppression or censorship on the part of an unusual free-spoken editor has been recited in Gregory Orfalea's memoir, *Angeleno Days: An Arab American Writer on Family, Place, and Politics* (2009):

My second novel, *Mirage*, was set in 1936 Palestine and featured a marriage between an Arab and Jew in old Haifa. It was being taken around New York [publishers] by a fine agent named Elaine Markson [...] She said, "I want you to know I like your book very much, but I am not going to publish it." "Why?" I asked. "Because of who you are," she said. For a second I wanted to ask her, "Who

am I?" But I just sat on the phone, speechless, until she filled the silence. "Greg," she said, "If you were Jewish, this wouldn't be a problem. People would believe the book. But because you are who you are, nobody will believe it." [...] I have thought about this portentous conversation for a long time. Intermarriages in old Palestine between Jews and Arabs were not common, but they happen, as they do occasionally today in Israel... Freddy Freidman was basically saying she agreed with my presentation of this complex reality and attitude, but because I was of Arab background, I couldn't get it right. I was, by dint of who I was, perceived as unable to be fair. I was, de facto, an unreliable narrator (p. 221-22).

These two examples might stand as an illustration to a well-received *ethics of sameness* laid on confirming Orientalist representations and an overlooked *ethics of difference* attempting to narrate an Arab-Jew marriage. Though Khouri's work was artificially presented as a memoir, it has been praised as true; while Orfalea's still-unpublished novel was deemed unbelievable, even though it only claimed to be fiction.

Consequently, the irony in both cases is that the first affirms the dominant discourse on Arabs, and the second opposes it. Against this background, translational writers find it difficult to claim a domesticating or foreignizing scheme as both are neither simple nor straightforward alternatives.

After all, identity construction among Arab immigrant writers is always defined and redefined from a mainstream perspective (Western publishers, editors ...). And before all, with mixed feelings toward both the home and the adopted country, immigrant writers are sort of conflicted creatures. Therefore, Arab immigrant writers in order to secure their positions in the literary arena, they first tend to lean against Orientalism as a source of power. Yet they simultaneously tend to voice their cultural, ideological, religious, and/or political affiliations. In other words, Orientalism is the key that opens the door of recognition for those writers.

Under the premise of Orientalism and along the discursive array broadly defined by Berman and Venuti: domesticating (understood as conforming to, and thereby confirming, the prevailing representations of Self and Other, or 'East' and 'West') and Foreignizing (challenging reader's expectations, undermining stereotypes and idealized

self-images, and proposing what Venuti calls reformed models of cultural identity); translational writers negotiate assured stances.

Crucially for the two approaches is to trace an ideological project for each writer (religious profile for instance) more than only stand as a translation procedure or narrative technique. In spite of the fact that, they are all defined by the dominant discourse of 'Orientalism', Hassan (2012) returns back to the point and said:

Such interpretation is always conducted through the prism of Orientalism, a hegemonic frame of reference that cannot be avoided, and is always framed, whether explicitly or implicitly, by the politics of empire. [...] what those writers have in common is the existential fact of being immigrants who write in English, whose relationship to their readers is mediated by the dominant discourse of Orientalism that defines them in their adoptive countries, and who have found their position imposes limits on what they can say and how to say it, but also affords them a unique opportunity to act as cultural translators. (P. xii-4)

Henceforth, Orientalism is an unavoidable medium which sets the boundaries of both the production and reception of Arab immigrant literature. However, Orientalism standing between its hegemonic nature and the different ways of reacting against it is what gives to Arab immigrant literature its particularity.

1.13. Conclusion

The chapter has examined the essential theoretical frameworks for analysing Arab British women's literature, primarily relying on postcolonial, feminist, diaspora, and translation studies. The intersection of these theories provides the platform for understanding the complexities faced by postcolonial Arab British women writers as they navigate ambivalence and liminality between cultures. Debating Bhabha's concept of the "third space" underscores hybridity at the core of Arab British women's identity, and offers distinct models of resistance to the binary distinctions of East and West.

The role of gender in postcolonial discourse has also been elevated with Arab women writers to elaborate nuanced critiques of both Western and Arab patriarchal structures. Such narratives oppose the marginalization of Arab women in both spheres

and represent a voice for resistance through the subversion of dominant literary narratives. In addition to that, the application of diaspora theory showcases the psychological and cultural effects of migration, as well as the complex negotiation of belonging in the host land.

The concept of translation within postcolonial literature has been crucial in framing Arab British women authors as cultural translators. This metaphorical act of translation is not merely limited to linguistic rendering but extends to navigating identities, ideologies, and power relations. Against this background, the chapter has shown how these writers are reflecting both the political and cultural resistance to the enduring impact of colonialism.

After the theoretical exploration of the critical space occupied by Arab British women writers within the postcolonial and diasporic studies, the next chapters will focus on two prominent writers: Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela. Their literary works offer unique and diverging insights into the complexities of identity, migration and cultural negotiation, as well as the intersections of gender and postcolonial struggle.

**Chapter 2 : Between East and West: Negotiating
Hybridity, Gender, and National Identity**

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2.1 Introduction

2.2 Biographical Context and Literary Positioning

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2.1 Introduction

The investigation of Ahdaf Soueif's literary narratives is profoundly defined in postcolonial theory, a critical lens that scrutinizes the cultural, political, psychological inherited portions of colonialism. Postcolonial theory offers crucial insights into how Ahdaf Soueif navigates the intricacies of nationalism, cultural hybridity, identity formation, and cross-cultural encounters in her literature. These theoretical perspectives enable an examination of how Soueif's works destabilize biased Orientalist presentations, disrupt dominant narratives, and articulate new avenues for transcultural dialogue.

Edward Said's seminal text *Orientalism* (1978) provides a critical framework for looking at Soueif's interaction with Western portrayals of Arab culture. Said's concept of "contrapuntal reading" holds significant relevance in the analysis of Soueif's narratives, highlighting the necessity of engaging with diverse landscapes and voices in colonial and postcolonial texts.

Soueif's writings frequently reflect this nuanced approach by contrasting Eastern and Western cultural paradigms, and thus questioning the traditional monolithic representations of the Orient rooted in colonial discourse. For example, her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) creates a narrative that connects historical and cultural gaps, offering a first-hand depiction of Egypt's colonial history while also promoting mutual understanding between the ex-colonizer and ex-colonized.

The theories of "Hybridity" and the "Third Space", proposed by Homi Bhabha, articulate deeper insights into how Soueif's fictional characters negotiate through the transitional and liminal spaces between cultural divergences. In Soueif's fiction, hybridity transcends a mere thematic concern to become a stylistic literary feature. Her choice to employ a hybridised language, commonly known as "Arabo-English", illustrates the writer's cultural negotiation. Through the integration of Arabic idioms into English prose, Soueif challenges linguistic dominance and crafts a narrative project that interplays the diverse cultural experiences of her characters.

The fiction produced by Ahdaf Soueif endeavours to amplify marginalised perspectives, especially those of Arab women as they navigate patriarchal and colonial arenas. The female protagonists she creates frequently reflect the challenges and resilience of marginalised Arab and Muslim women, displaying their informed experiences to deconstruct Orientalist stereotypes and redefine their autonomous identities in transcultural settings. Arab British Writers, such as Ahdaf Soueif, artistically sculpts fictional characters that navigate complex transcultural landscapes and challenge essentialist notions of identity.

A central theme in the literature produced by these Arab British women writers is the exploration of constant hybrid identities constructed and reconstructed in the crossroads of Arab and British cultures. In the case of Ahdaf Soueif, this thematic investigation extends beyond personal identity to delve into broader issues of cultural representation and national belonging. Soueif's novels, particularly *In the Eye of the Sun*, exhibits Arab women's identity as inherently hybrid, creating a third space to subvert both Western colonial and Orientalist hegemonies, and local patriarchal boundaries

2.2 Biographical Context and Literary Positioning

Ahdaf Soueif is an acclaimed Anglo-Arab writer from Egypt. When it comes to modern postcolonial writing, she stands as a major voice whose literary narratives highlight the nuances of cross-cultural intersections, East-West connections, hybridity, and diaspora. Born in Cairo 1950, Soueif's life exemplifies the transcultural encounters that run through her writings. She spent her formative years in England while her mother was a PhD student at London University, then returned to Egypt.

Soueif earns her PhD in Linguistics from Lancaster University. This latter provided her by a unique perspective on Egyptian and British culture and shapes her literary endeavours. As both a professor at Cairo University and an Arab writer married to English poet Ian Hamilton, Soueif exceptionally stands as cultural mediator whose work emerges from concrete lived experience of moving back and forth.

Ahdaf Soueif writes novels that interpret British colonialism, the rise of Egyptian nationalism and reveals the complexity of cultures and politics of the colonial and postcolonial epochs. In return, her works represent themes that are related to her profile as an Arab diasporic writer in the postcolonial context. Soueif's narratives display one of the prevailing transcultural postcolonial realities that no one can describe with certainty who she/he is.

Since colonialism produced a mixture of cultures and identities, therefore "no one today is purely *one* thing" (Said, 1994, p. 407). Her dual cultural inheritance affords Soueif a genuine perspective from which to navigate the liminal spaces to traverse transitional East/West realms, allowing her to create fiction that resonates with reader beyond cultural boundaries. As Joseph Massad (1999) points out:

Soueif's writing investigates the possibilities of cultural dialogue as well as the politics of desire, both within and outside this dialogue... central to her investigations is the encounter of East and West, Arabic and English, and of men and women in an intercultural context (pp. 74-75).

As an Arab British writer, Soueif shares different literary and writing issues together with Arab feminists, authors who are writing exclusively in Arabic and, particularly, Muslim female novelists writing in English in the West. Anastasia Valassopoulos considers Soueif's fiction as one that merges history, politics, sociology and "weaves elements that are directly of interest to post-colonial critics" (2008, p. 30-31). Soueif's literary oeuvre encompasses the novels *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999). Both novels have been shortlisted for the esteemed Booker Prize and translated to twenty-one languages. She also published some short story collections including *Aisha* (1983), *Sandpiper* (1996), and *I Think of You* (2007).

Besides fictional literary works, Soueif has made substantial contributions to political and cultural discourse, with her critical pieces featured in acclaimed journals such as the *Guardian* and the *London Magazine*, further reinforcing her stance as a cultural mediator between Arab/Muslim and Western contexts. As an activist, the writer is then well known for her big interests in social and political human rights where the Israeli-Palestinian issue is on the onset of the list. In 1999, Soueif was nominated for the

booker Prize and in March 2010 she received the Mahmoud Darwish Prize as a reward for her supporting narratives of the Palestinian cause.

2.3 Ahdaf Soueif's National Approach and the Postcolonial Landscape of Egypt

By the end of the first World War, most Arab countries had fallen under the control of European powers, with some, such as Algeria (1830), Tunisia (1881), and Egypt (1882), having been colonized much earlier. Europe, once seen by many Arabs as a model of progress from the Middle Ages to modernity, was increasingly viewed as a source of oppression and exploitation, impeding freedom and progress and creating a sense of despair. Europe had become the feared “Other”; formidable yet oppressive.

The colonial and postcolonial socio-political history of Egypt overtly contextualize the narratives in Soueif's novels, offering concrete reference points for understanding the events documented in her literary texts. Britain's interest in Egypt was primarily driven by the country's strategic location. British policymakers understood that Egypt's occupation by any powerful nation would have significant consequences for Britain's position in India.

Following the near bankruptcy of Khedive Ismail's administration in 1879, Britain could not afford to ignore the potential risks of Egypt falling into anarchy or being exclusively occupied by France, which could destabilize the region. Moreover, there was the looming possibility of an Islamic uprising and the creation of a new Caliphate near Christian holy sites. Consequently, Britain officially took control over Egypt, making it part of the British Empire until its full independence in 1952.

Between 1883 and 1914, three British agents and consuls-general served in Egypt: Lord Cromer (1883-1907), Sir John Eldon Grost (1907-1911), and Lord Herbert Kitchener (1911-1914). Lord Cromer's period was mainly characterized by economic development, with little attention paid to improving social conditions for the Egyptian people. His policies led to increasing resentment to British rule. The affluent lifestyles of Europeans, particularly the development of exclusive suburbs and luxuries such as electricity in Cairo, were perceived as signs of British privilege.

These privileges were enjoyed by Europeans and the elite, while the majority of Egyptians experienced economic hardship and social inequality. Accordingly, the British-dominated civil service and business further alienated the Egyptian population.

The majority of workers, especially in the rural areas, were left at disadvantage as foreign goods flooded the market, undermining local production.

Egypt's industrial progress was minimal, and unemployment remained widespread. Even Egypt's most significant product, cotton, was traded under unfair conditions, with British officials purchasing Egyptian cotton at prices well below market value. British officers also exploited their positions for personal gain, with Lord Cromer profiting from cotton speculation.

The emerging industrial class in Egypt subjected to low wages and poor working conditions also grew increasingly disconnected. With minimal intervention from the British government to improve workers' rights, trade unions began forming between 1899 and 1907 to demand better wages and working conditions. Consequently, nationalistic sentiments, already on the rise during Cromer's rule, reached a peak in his final year, partly as a result of the Dinshawi incident, which remains one of the most infamous and unjust actions of British colonial rule in Egypt.

On June 11, 1906, a minor heated controversy with few casualties highlighted British racial arrogance and eroded support for their presence in Egypt (Cleveland, 2004, p. 108). In the village of Dinshawi, located near the Egyptian delta, British officers shooting pigeons for sport accidentally wounded the wife of the Imam.

The British response was swift and brutal. Around fifty-two Egyptians were charged in connection with the incident, with four sentenced to death, while others received severe punishments, including hard labour or public flogging. This event provoked strong sense of nationalism, leading to the formation of political parties that sought to protest British colonization and ultimately gain independence.

In 1907, two political parties emerged, providing a platform for expressing nationalist ideals. These were Kamil's National Party and the People's Party (Hizb al Umma). The Umma Party leaders were followers of the Islamic reformer, Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905). However, unlike Abdu, who focused on reforming Islam to align with modernity, Lutfi el-Sayed was more concerned with societal progress and reform. The Umma Party aimed for Egyptian independence, with Lutfi el-Sayed believing that

self-rule could be achieved not by confronting the British or the Khedive⁸, but through reforming Egyptian laws and institutions, as well as encouraging Egyptian participation in public life.

The National Party was considered “extremist” for calling the immediate withdrawal of the British, while the Umma Party was regarded as “moderate” due to its gradualist stance on independence from British rule (al-Rafii, 1939, p. 241). The British lastly recognized the growing strength of the nationalist movement.

For nationalists, women’s education was seen as a tool to foster loyalty, efficiency, and productivity serving the independence of the state. As their resistance to British rule grew, the educational system became a key battleground for articulating and contesting the nation’s identity, history, and future. The policies of Cromer and the British colonizer, however, revealed the superficiality of their claims to support women’s rights in Egypt.

Higher education opportunities were denied, and fees for primary education were raised; a policy that disproportionately hindered the education of girls. This was implemented despite widespread public demand for education for both man and women. The British colonizer sought to restrict Egyptian’s education to maintain Egypt’s status as a primarily agricultural society. Meanwhile, the Egyptian leaders, such as Cromer; believed that limiting education would prevent the rise of nationalism.

Reformers like Quasim Amin and Khediv Ismail viewed the emancipation of women as a critical aspect of modernization, necessary to subvert colonial narratives that justified its imperial control by labelling local societies as barbaric (Talhami, 1996, pp. 13-24). During the postcolonial period, the nationalist movement emerged as an avenue for Egyptian women to demonstrate their social agency.

The widespread involvement of women moved from the margin to the core of society. Women shifted their path from traditional patriarchal structures that shaped

⁸ Khedive, derived from the Persian word for “Lord” and roughly equivalent to viceroy, was first adopted by Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1867, when he served as the governor and ruler of Egypt and Sudan. It was later used by his dynastic successors (Goldschmidt, 2005, p. 44).

Egyptian society. This awakening led to the formation of two distinct perspectives on the progress of women: one advocating for the Westernization of society, and the other promoting Islamization.

In the Eye of the Sun by Ahdaf Soueif contextualizes the iconic involvement of women in the 1900's revolutionary demonstrations in Cairo. Such literary female considerations by the writer has a remarkable shift in Egyptian gender dynamics. It symbolizes the significant role feminism played in the Egyptian nationalist movement and marks a crucial step for Egyptian women in gaining a stronger participation in the political sphere.

More notably, women from various social classes and religious backgrounds united under the broader nationalist cause. The period from 1923 to 1936 is referred to as Egypt's "Liberal Experiment" (Cleveland, 2004, p. 196-200), characterized by internal struggles for power and efforts to forge national unity in the newly independent nation.

Following the adoption of the new constitution, Egypt held its first parliamentary elections in January 1924. The Wafd Party secured a significant number of seats, resulting in Zaghlul's appointment as Prime Minister. However, due to Britain's persistent economic interests, it interfered with and weakened the Parliament to safeguard its own priorities. Egypt's independence begins with the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936, which granted its sovereignty but allowed Britain to maintain forces the Suez Canal Zone. Despite this, full independence was not achieved until the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. The revolution, led by the Free Officers under Gamal Abdel Nasser, ends by the abolition of the monarchy and a shift in political power.

Nasser's foreign policy brought him into conflict with Western powers, Israel and conservative Arab regimes, particularly after he nationalized the Suez Canal 1956, leading to the Suez Crisis. Although Egypt was militarily defeated, Nasser emerged politically stronger and became an example of Arab nationalism. His influence grew, but was shattered by Egypt's devastating defeat by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967, leading to severe territorial and psychological losses for the Arab world.

Despite attempting resignation, public pressure kept Nasser in power until his death in 1970. Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser, shifting Egypt away from socialism towards an open-door policy aimed at attracting Western investment. After the death of Abdel Nasser in 1970, an alternative neo-liberal programme of economic development was adopted under the control of the new president Anwar Sadat.

Frustration from political and economic stagnation pushed Sadat into initiating the October War of 1973, aiming to reclaim territories lost in 1967 and restore Egypt's honour. Although Egypt didn't achieve outright military victory, the war led to renewed negotiations and eventually the return of Sinai after a peace treaty with Israel. Sadat's policies, conversely, led to economic hardship, rising social inequality, and increasing influence of Islamic movements.

He attempted to suppress political dissent from both Islamic groups and Marxists, and ultimately fuelling further discontent and fundamentalist opposition to his regime. By these new regulations, the president Sadat aimed to adhere to the demands of the Western progress and eventually yearned to integrate Egypt into the global market by encouraging foreign investment. *In the Eye of the Sun* concentrates itself with this era in which significant changes in economic development, family and population regulations took place

2.3.1. The Articulation of Arab Women's National Identity in Soueif's Novels

Arab Women, in the postcolonial era, have emerged as symbols of national identity. Contemporary postcolonial literature often portrays women imbued with strong sense of nationalism, which is essential in constructing a female identity capable of various types of resistance. Arab/Muslim women, subjected to dual colonization by indigenous men and former colonizers, represent the complex arenas of conflict in East/West relations during national endeavours for liberation. Loomba (2015) assumes that women are symbols of national identity, explaining:

The assertion of gendered spiritual or inner core thus becomes the site for the construction of national identities across a wide political and ideological anti-colonial spectrum. The communities that are imagined by anti-colonial

nationalism often invoke a shared past or a cultural essence that is regarded as synonymous with religious or racial identity (p. 195).

The notion of “writing back” in postcolonial literature denotes the act of contesting hegemonic Western narratives that have historically dismissed non-Western cultures. Writing back involves a deliberate and conscious response to the colonial texts and ideas that have historically marginalized, misrepresented, and silenced indigenous voices. In this context, postcolonial writers seek to reclaim and rewrite history; offering a counter-narrative to the colonial discourses that often presents the colonized as passive and inferior.

Rushdie, along with other writers such as Ngũgĩ and Achebe, emphasizes the importance of postcolonial literature as a way to assert national and cultural identities that were suppressed under colonial control. Through their writing, these authors challenge the mainstream of Western narratives and provide new ways of seeing and understanding the colonized world.

Rather than concentrating on British imperial rule, Ahdaf Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) critiques the local postcolonial governments and regimes of Egypt. Throughout Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun*, the concept of writing back is mainly articulated for discussing the manners in which the novel addresses and reinterprets the histories, ideologies, and identities influenced by both colonial and local Arab/Islamist patriarchal frameworks. Soueif, in the novel, engages with this postcolonial project by exploring themes of dislocation, alienation, and the tension between tradition and modernity in contemporary Egypt.

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, female personal daily practices are tangled by colonial history and the nationalist struggles at the turn of the twentieth century. Several critics have analysed Soueif’s narrative through the perspective of postcolonial theory, frequently emphasizing how the protagonist, Asya, subverts Western definitions regarding her gender, her affinity to the Egyptian heritage, and her ongoing engagements with Western society and culture. The protagonist, Asya, embodies the tension between the Westernized, secular world and the traditional, and nationalist cultural heritage of her homeland.

Soueif's monumental debut novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) offers a profound exploration of nationalist issues in postcolonial Egypt. This extensive work, spanning nearly 800 pages and set between 1967 and 1980, chronicles the journey of Asya al-Ulama, a young Egyptian woman of privilege, as she navigates her emotional, academic, and personal growth amid significant historical circumstances. The novel delves into Asya's personal journey, yet nationalism serves as a crucial postcolonial contextual element that grapples the characters' experiences and perspectives.

Ahdaf Soueif divides her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* into ten long parts in order to be able to record this troublesome period for the Egyptian society faced to the radical and complex political planning. *In the Eye of the Sun* is a challenging narrative as the writer chronicles that political history exclusively via a young woman's voice. Soueif casted transitive political periods through the life of her fictional female character Asya al-Ulama from her childhood to adulthood in addition to her relatives and friends.

Each part in the novel is subsequently split over several scenes which chronologically radiate many details in the history of Egypt and other Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. Meanwhile, the writer sacrifices other connected scenes for puzzling out the complicated moments in al-Ulama family life. Henceforth, Soueif explores the aspect of nationalism as a persistent theme in the novel, shaping character's development, cultural identity, and the interplay between personal and political realms.

The historical context of the novel is essential for grasping its interaction with nationalism. The narrative commences just prior to the Six-Day War of 1967, covering a pivotal era in Egypt's history from the decline of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Pan-Arab nationalism to the presidency of Anwar Sadat. Soueif crafts a creative narrative approach, incorporating dated fragments throughout the novel, such as extracts from journalistic timeline in order to record remarkable political changes in Egypt and the Arab world. This literary device enables the writer to frame the characters' experiences within critical historical contexts, avoiding the pitfall of reducing them to mere vehicles for political commentary.

As the central character in the novel, Asya is set to experience the various stages of Egypt's national spirit, from the early days of the war, through its decline, to the transitional phase between Sadat's later years and Mubarak's rise as a president. In this context, the socio-political era that Soueif portrays in the novel presents a significant challenge to the revered national narrative, culminating in the collapse of national pride following Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel.

Therefore, Soueif's storytelling offers a historical perspective on the 1967 war with Israel and its aftermath. She crafts her fictional narrative during the era when Hosni Mubarak rose to presidency, reflecting on the profound historical event of the Arab defeat and the subsequent occupation of Sinai in 1967. This war significantly altered the social and economic fabric of Egypt and the broader Arab world. The main female character, Asya, experiences her formative years during the peak of Abdel Nasser's era, exclusively to witness her idol's collapse in 1967, after Egypt's defeat in the conflict with Israel. The defeat came largely to be known as the *Naksa*.

This journey illustrates the shared disillusionment of a generation whose nationalist ambitions were significantly compromised, framing the novel's exploration of nationalism not as a mere theoretical concept but as a tangible reality and dramatic lived experiences. The novel's central focus explores the impact of the decline of the national dream on Asya and her generation, a defeat that left many Egyptians, who had once believed in victory under Nasser, in a state of despair and confusion.

One of the central political themes that Soueif explores in her narrative revolves around the Egyptians' disappointment with the national dream and the aftermath, transitioning from the hope of the *Nahda* to the despair of the *Naksa*. As Nada Ayad (2016) comments on the beginning of the novel that "articulates one of the projects of the novel: to chronicle the effects of the shifts on the daily lives of ordinary Egyptians" (p. 57).

Initially, Soueif was eager to see the ambitious steps that Nasser's national project will provide to the country, particularly in the sector of education, health services, and electricity. However, during Nasser's regime, a politically "repressive climate" forced legitimate political parties to operate underground (Soueif, 1992, p. 25). *In the Eye of*

the Sun highlights Nasser's "concentration camps", the torture of both leftists and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the role of the Mukhabarat, the organization that turned against the people (p. 26).

Soueif elucidates her uncertainty about her political esteem to the president Nasser. This was the outcome of Nasser's socialism which worked on the suppression of popular political initiatives and democratic rights enforced by the police and military; that eliminated any independent political organizations, whether left or right-wing. Asya's paradoxical state takes place at the onset of the second chapter, more precisely in scene 11. While watching President Nasser joining the Festival Hall of Cairo University, Asya expresses her conflicting reflections. Asya dives into a set of questions about the disillusionment of future of the national spirit, stating:

"But what about the purges? Here: in this very university?" ... "What about the concentration camps? The torture of both the leftists and the Muslim Brotherhood?" I don't know. Maybe he never knew of it. How can one man know everything? What about Salah Nasr and the *Mukhabarat*, the huge intelligence organization that has turned against the people? What do I know of government? How do I know what he knows? He nationalized the Canal, he got rid of the British occupation, he gave us back our dignity – and at home, what about the clinics he's building everywhere? What about the high Dam? What about electricity for the peasants and land reform and education? He has to be a good man (Soueif, 1992, p. 63).

Soueif's novel portrays Nasser's persecution of any oppositional power including student and religious groups. Several parts of the novel criticize Nasser's leadership, mainly his decline of nationalism, noting his lack of attention to liberty (Soueif, 1992, p. 105-220-235). Her criticism of Nasser's authoritarian leftism contrasts with her portrayal of Sadat's alignment with the United States, which she comments on as an uncritical embrace of American interests, particularly regarding oil. While Nasser viewed leftist opposition and Islam as threats to nationalism, Sadat, according to Soueif, used Islamists to undermine the leftist opposition to his pro-American policies (Soueif, 1992, p. 472).

Drawing on Edward Said's perspective, Soueif reveals a deep interest in Egypt's historical trajectory, both past and present. Said notes that "appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present", delineating the complex relationship between past and present (1994, p. 1). He further explains that this is not simply a disagreement over what the past was, but rather an uncertainty about whether the past is truly gone (1994, p. 1).

Since neither the past nor the present can be fully understood in isolation, Said suggests that the colonial past continues to cast a shadow over contemporary history, and consequently over postcolonial and contemporary literature. In this regard, Soueif offers her own rationale for her deep focus on both past and present, while explaining to Hind Wassef that:

We Egyptians are invisible from our history. I don't know of this is particular to us as a people who have had so many wrenching in their history, so many waves of occupations followed by national resurgence then another occupation and so on. It is this that gives us this compulsion to go back to find out who we are. (Soueif, 1998)

In such statement, Soueif's claim about history and nation suggests that Arabs and Egyptians are inseparable from their history; what implies a requiring postcolonial self to embrace an identity that helps to "find who we are" (Soueif, 1998). In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif weaves a rich social and historical narrative of Egypt from 1967 to 1980; highlighting Arab women's growing awareness of the political changes sweeping their regions.

Through Asya, the female protagonist, who is raised in the early days of the revolution, the author recounts key moments from Egypt's modern history, particularly the period starting in 1967. In similar ways, history also overlaps Soueif's second novel *The Map of Love*, casting the beginning of the national spirit in Egypt during Nasser's regime and its aftermath. At the opening of *The Map of love*, Soueif includes an epigraph where she quotes part of Nasser's speech:

It is strange that this period (1900-1914) when the Colonialists and their collaborators thought everything was quiet – was one of the most fertile in Egypt's history. A great examination of the self-took place, and a great recharging of energy in preparation for a new Renaissance (*The Map of Love*, Epigraph).

The attribution of the epigraph at the very beginning of the novel hints at the historical context in which the story takes place. Through this epigraph, Soueif seeks to underscore the idea that though it was an era of apparent peace and calmness, on the contrary, it was defined by complex cultural and political ferment in Egypt. Therefore, *The Map of Love* casts a past that turns around the national project, when Egypt was still under the British colonization.

This past is told by the British widow lady called Anna Winterbourne. By the late second half of the nineteenth century and before the revolution takes place, Anna travels to Egypt where she falls in love with Sharif Basha al Baroudi who was in return an Egyptian aristocrat nationalist. Soueif then exhibits nationalism through different love stories, citing generational memories of her fictional characters in the course of Egyptian history. Susan Darraj (2003) comments on both the length and the historical scope of *The Map of Love* as:

a textual tapestry that weaves together several parallel love stories; the titles of the book's units ('A Beginning', 'An End of a Beginning,' 'A Beginning of An End,' and 'An End' hint at the epic proportions and tremendous historic scope of the tale to unravel (p. 101).

Through the eyes of Anna Winterbourne, the novel turns to the twentieth century, the present time of the storytelling. In addition to Anna, Soueif reflects on Egyptian history of social and political life by crafting three other polyvalent female heroines, Layla, Amal, and Isabel. According to King (2000) *The Map of Love*'s main focus is politics of Egypt to the degree Soueif sacrifices her characters and portrays them as politically engaged (p. 453). While conducting deep analysis of both novels, Joseph Massad (1999) reflects on the historical overlapping of time and dates in Soueif's text:

In the Eye of the Sun begins in medias res in July 1979 and goes back to May 1967, only to proceed chronologically again to April 1980. In doing so, Soueif is telling a story that is still happening. This is quite different from the way she sets up a dialogic of past-present juxtapositions in *The Map of Love* which begins with the present (1997) and then transports the reader into a series of back-and-forth temporal peregrinations between the last fin de siècle and the current one (p. 79).

Asya's life, therefore, coincided with the destroying defeat of the 1967 war and stretches up until 1979; a period which witnessed remarkable events such as the death of president Abdel-Nasser, the coming age of Sadat, the 1970's devastating crisis between Jordanians and Palestinians, and the Lebanese civil war. In addition to that, Soueif profoundly informs readers of local political problems of Egypt through Anna's Arabic and English newspaper articles and her detailed personal diaries. In one of her interviews with Joseph Massad, Ahdaf Soueif admits that history is the pillar of her novel *The Map of Love*, she goes on saying:

The Map of Love is quite different. The politics are there from the beginning, and possibly that's because I now see politics and history as central to our lives, and therefore I created a situation and characters to whom politics and history are central. Also, politics and history are very much parts of the novel – in fact are an essential part of the engine that drives it (1999, p. 84).

Henceforth, in *The Map of Love*, Soueif underscores the tensions within the Egyptian society. In doing so, she comments together on the issue of social classes in Egypt, the effect of capitalism and the different Islamic groups, and the East/West upheavals. In both novels, Soueif write historical narratives that suggest political boundaries of the nation of Egypt. Both narratives are marked by love stories that reflect and promote social and political change.

2.3.2. Private and Political Daily Experiences in Soueif's Narratives

Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* portrays the intersection between the representations of female private life and the broader historical context. The novel serves as a cross-

cultural narrative between Egypt and Britain, set during the years 1967 to 1980, exploring the intersection of historical and personal experiences. This exploration of the personal along with political contexts is inherently postcolonial.

The novel centres on the different journeys of the female protagonist, Asya, exploring her relationship and marriage to Saif. Asya's academic pursuits in England during the 1970's, and her return to Egypt in the 1980's is what frame the narrative structure of the novel. Henceforth, Soueif's perspective on nationalism is unique and nuanced in how she addresses the connection between personal identity and political occurrences.

Soueif's novel presents Asya's life as a metaphor for the national experience of Egypt itself, struggling to reclaim its identity in the aftermath of colonial domination. Asya's personal conflicts echo the larger struggle of a nation caught between the colonial legacy of the West and its local history, customs, and traditions. By weaving her character's personal conflicts with Egypt's broader political and cultural history, Soueif writes back to the colonial past, seeking to reframe the narrative from the perspective of the postcolonial subject.

In similar ways, *The Map of Love* navigates the trajectory of the history of Egypt. In this novel, Soueif juxtaposes the nationalist struggles of the early twentieth century with transnational discourses at the dawn of the twenty-first century. In here, the writer intersects the private with the public through two intercultural relationships coinciding with two historical periods.

The first is the marriage of Anna and Sharif at the turn of the twentieth century, and the second that of Isabel and Omar at the turn of the twenty-first century. This dual temporal narrative reveals how personal histories intersect with national and colonial histories, enriching the discourse on the female national identity in the postcolonial era. In *The Map of Love* history shapes the private lives of characters since it narrates the past mainly through personal stories.

More importantly, Soueif creates a strong allegorical correlation between the protagonist's private life and political conditions in Egypt and the Arab world as a

whole. Although the political events seem to disrupt the ongoing process of the narrative, it cannot be denied that they still constitute an inherent part of Asya's identity. To demonstrate how much the history of the nation along with historical facts and dates dominates the novel wholesale, Soueif even prefers to entitle all the chapters of her narrative using historical dates; from one to ten the chapters are named as follows:

July-August 1979
May-June 1967
October 1967-May 1968
August 1968-September 1969
July 1970-January 1971
August 1972-May 1973
October 1973-August 1974
December 1974-December 1975
July 1976-February 1978
Epilogue April 1980

In fact, Soueif's entire novel is built up around Asya's personal life in which her educational and professional sides are tangled with some historical events of the nation. The author employs different techniques in order to contrast the private life of her protagonist, as well as other characters, with the political elements in her narrative. One technique is used through a detailed description of events by putting them in proximity from different perspectives. This latter requires exclusive interruption of fictional sequences and replaced them by political events.

Moving back and forth, the writer provides the reader with a kind of flash backs from the centre of the war in Sinai, and makes him/her come back to the University of Cairo along with Asya's private life then back again to history and nation in order to narrate events 1967 till the death of the president Nasser in 1970. In several passages; from different locations, Soueif employs this technique; one example could be as follows:

"8 a.m.

The leadership of the front congregates at Bir Timada Airport in Sinai.

8.40 a.m.

Cairo, Heliopolis

‘Amer’s plane arrives at Cairo Airport and he and his chiefs can find no transport to headquarters except one very old taxi with a very old driver wearing thick spectacles. He drives them very slowly to the operations room in nearby Heliopolis.

8.45 a.m.

Sinai

Israeli planes finish attacking and destroying most of the Egyptian air force as it sits on ‘secret’ military runways. The runways too are rendered useless.

9 a.m.

Cairo, Giza

The morning session of exams begins at Cairo University.

9 a.m.

Cairo, Zamalek

Soraya Morsi phones her sister Lateefa to say that they can hear what sounds like bombs from the direction of Abbasiya.

Asya al-Ulama stretches, listens to the phone ring in the living-room, and decides to stay in bed for ten minutes.” (Soueif, 1992, p. 49-50)

Accordingly, Soueif uses another strategy; that of joining together the private with the political in order to show how strongly the political aspect is an integral component of the personal, social and cultural aspects of people of an ex-colonized nation. In the case of Asya al-Ulama, Soueif attempts to reveal the protagonist’s reaction; as well as her generation, to a vassal of political events that marked the private life of Arabs and Egyptians.

Such circumstances stimulate Asya's national spirit that pushes her to participate in the Civil Defence; an act that her mother has merely "refused to allow her to join" (Soueif, 1992, p. 55). At this level Soueif casts her new paradigm of national discourse where she creates a narrative that presents political events not merely to take the role of a historical informant, but rather to create new dichotomies which reveal power relations between nations and the private lives in the novel; that in return give birth to different power relations that exist in class divisions and gender relations in the era of the protagonist's generation.

The 1967 defeat can stand as a preliminary example of this merging the political with the private in the novel, as it coincides with Asya's university years and her meeting with her husband, Saif. The story begins in London in 1979, where Asya is caring for her cancer-ridden uncle, Hamid, promoting her to reflect on her childhood and the events of 1967.

Focusing together on state, public life, and private life, Soueif is writing after 1967 to echo a defeated nation and portray the pessimistic vision Arabs and Egyptians had towards the future. Contrary to other Arab women writers who wrote at the height of the national project; the period known as the *nahda* (1954-1960), Soueif wrote *In the Eye of the Sun* was written during the *naksa* (1967).

Soueif parallels Asya's private life with the events overlapping Egypt at that time, and she contrasts the protagonist's personal life with the public in order to demonstrate the critical situation after being depressed from national promise. The writer provides a scene where the protagonist Asya is deprived of the routine she is practically confronted to; discussing with her mother after refusing her to participate in any national organization, Asya expresses her frustration about that:

"We're always waiting, waiting, waiting to see what's going to happen. It's the reasonable thing to do. This isn't a game, this isn't theatre. This is a war.

'Exactly,' Asya has shouted. 'What more can happen? What is it we have to wait for? We have gone to war!'

“If everyone were like us nothing would ever happen. Everyone would just sit around with their books and wait to see “what will happen”, wait for things to blow over – wait for life blow over –” (Soueif, 1992, p. 55)

Moreover, *In the Eye of the Sun* illustrates the efforts to merge public and private spheres, exemplified by the moment when Asya’s internal struggles are often juxtaposed with the national struggles of Egypt. Such reflections occur in a scene where Asya highlights her relationship with her country, stating that:

Egypt was always there, always a presence at the edge of my thoughts, my desires, my dreams. It was never something I had to question. I just had to be part of it, to know it and to be known by it (Soueif, 1992, p. 45).

Asya’s words emphasize the profound connection between her personal identity and the nation of Egypt. Soueif posits that nationalism transcends external influence and becomes deeply embedded in the character’s psyche, fostering an affinity between the individual and the spirit of nationalism.

Therefore, this psychological link to the nation illustrates how nationalism, according to Soueif, is internalized within characters influencing their lives and experiences. *In the Eye of the Sun* thus explores both the emotional and political lives of Arab women, particularly those caught between Eastern and Western worlds, seeking to bridge the personal and political narratives, even as the task proves to be a challenging one.

Herein, the socio-political era Soueif writes about in her novel provides her with different contexts which end by tracing a distinct paradigm of the great national project. Soueif uses this technique in order to narrate events from 1967 until 1970 which delineated the beginning of a new era in Egypt; and this marked a new generation of Arab women writers. As the novel encapsulates the first real challenge to the national project, Soueif seems to primarily embracing the national allegory and Third-world postcolonial literature which emphasises the need of the postcolonial self to find out a new identity.

On the contrary, some critics claim that politics is not central to the novel since the complex political dynamics of Egypt and the Middle East do not deeply influence the story. This apparent separation, however, holds its own significance. By framing politics as both marginal and unavoidable, Soueif implies that nationalism functions as a pervasive postcolonial influence that crafts personal stories, even when it is not overtly recognized.

In here, Soueif foreshadows the ways in which national and political events penetrate and influence personal experiences, all while characters remain absorbed in their own individual matters. Valassapoulos (2008) consequently indicates that “political contexts disappear in the face of internal psychological struggles” (p. 124). In her discourse, Soueif adopts transnational approach that has at its heart the multifaceted social, economic, political, and historical issues that contribute to the understanding of the local Egyptian women’s resistance. As argued by Mohanty (2003):

Activists and scholars must also identify and re-envision forms of collective resistance that women, especially, in their different communities enact in their everyday lives. It is their particular exploitation at this time, their potential epistemic privilege, as well as their particular forms of solidarity that can be the basis for reimagining a liberatory politics for the start of this century (p. 236).

In this regard, Soueif uses Asya’s personal experience to underscore the intricacies of Egyptian identity within the particular framework of Arab nationalism. In the *In the Eye of the Sun*, the author raises important questions the exclusive manners used by individuals to form their national identity, especially Arab/Muslim women in postcolonial Egypt. Here, nationalism goes beyond its political and social impact and rather becomes an emotional and personal force. In the case of women, this struggle is intensified by the tension between their identities as women and their roles as national subjects.

2.4 Women’s Desire as a Site for Postcolonial Resistance

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, private lives of characters, especially Asya, are not only shaped by historical forces but also participate in a dynamic and fluid discourse. The

characters' individual experiences generate new avenues for voices that are marginalized, unheard, and misrepresented. The novel suggests that female sexuality serves as a site of resistance, creating a transnational anti-colonial space, while simultaneously engaging with the broader Palestinian struggle, where nationalist identities are intricately tied to migration and displacement.

In this context, when Soueif interlocks public politics and private desire, she acts to criticise a set of hegemonic discourses mainly, colonialism, feminism, nationalism, and Orientalism. In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif locates sexual desire and romance in a space that mainly “exists in a context of politics, history and geography all of which are intermeshed” (Massad, 1999, p, 74). Therefore, Arab/Muslim women have come to embody national symbols, local culture and religious significance, and cross-cultural representations.

Contemporary postcolonial literature often portrays women as deeply intertwined with the spirit of nationalism, which becomes an essential ingredient in shaping a woman's identity that equipped her with various forms of resistance. Soueif's fictional project is then made up through a combination of literary materials. As described by D'Alonzo, Soueif tends to employ:

Scatters fragments of the Egyptian nation literally all over the world, and amidst, political and sexual intrigues of Asya, the dispersed ruins always seem to appear – remnants which always function ambivalently between desire for wholeness (“identity”) and the recognition of the danger of monumentalizing history and culture (1997, p.118).

Women, having been doubly colonized: first by local men and then by former colonizers, embody the evolving struggles with East/West relations as national movements work towards liberation. Under the premise of liberating Arab women from the stereotyped uncivilized patriarchy of local culture, hegemonic colonial discourse used subtle sites to alter the meaning behind the national symbols. Al-Mahadin aligns with this view and even touches on the issues of sexual desire, stating:

Paradigms of regulatory power between East and West, thus, converged upon the docile body of the female. In other words, the female metamorphosed into a field of struggle between a local man who was intent on guarding his national identity and foreigner/coloniser conspiring to conquer and divest him off such identity by ‘emancipating’ the female body and ‘redeeming’ her status (2004, p. 25).

The novel *In the Eye of the Sun* serves as a prime example, among others, that seek to encapsulate Al-Mahadin’s view on the position of women in the case of East/West tensions in postcolonial settings. In this work, Soueif exclusively uses the language of the ex-colonizer as a tool of communication between her fictional characters. In doing so, Soueif decided to position herself to the culture of the ex-coloniser mainly through the linguistic signs where the signifier is the coloniser, whereas the signified is that of the colonised. The signified; as in many narratives produced by female Arab writers in the postcolonial era; is ambivalent and unstable embracing the in-between zone.

In this vein, Soueif relocates women’s sexual life in the third space that Homi Bhabha conceives as a ‘liminal signifying space’; an in-between sphere that is subject to a performative re-signification (1994, p. 212). The representation of Arab women’s bodies in such a daring and transgressive way highlights both the physical and societal boundaries placed on female individuals.

At the same time, it exposes the oppressive power of male domination. The oppression of Arab women can be attributed, on the one hand, to the colonized individuals who perpetuated patriarchal control, and on the other hand, to the colonizers, who reinforced their male superiority through the dominance of colonial discourse.

When reading *In the Eye of the Sun*, one is struck by the way Soueif skilfully blends postcolonial themes with the private, everyday lives of women. By merging these public and private realms in her novels, Soueif deconstructs and complicates both gender and nationalist discourses. Through Asya’s journey, the exploration of such discursive paradigms enables her to draw her own conceptions from her private physical and sexual experiences. In this context, Soueif tends to employ aspects of the nationalist-feminist literary framework to create a more complex space that intertwines politics, gender issues, and female sexuality. As Massad (1999) reflects:

The novel then diagnoses both the possibilities and limits of a cultural dialogue between the signifier and the signified. Such kind of cultural reconciliation is presented in the form of sexual desire as the discourse of sexual politics along with stereotypes about Arab women is one of the prevailing literary investments in the West. Ahdaf Soueif establishes the protagonist's desire around the settings of geography and culture, which are historically and politically connected to each other (p. 74).

Herein, Soueif overlaps distinct love and sexual stories which challenge various patriarchal rules and Arab expectations as well. As a transcultural exploration of women, the novel presents characters from diverse social cultural backgrounds within postcolonial Egypt. Whether liberal, conservative, or westernized, each character is designed to play a role in advocating for social and political change.

In addition to other approaches, Soueif partly adopts a feminist perspective to unreservedly speak for the sexual silence which continues to be considered as a taboo subject in the literature produced by women from an Arab/Muslim entourage. The complex hybrid heroine, Asya, is not feeling at ease with her husband's inability to copulate her desires.

Contrary to Asya's husband, Saif, transcultural encounters in the novel give rise to distinct possibilities of voicing female silence not only to deconstruct perpetuated sexual matters, but also to demonstrate nationalist identities that are shaped by immigration and displacement. Soueif as a cosmopolitan writer makes several discourses function in her novel.

One of the novel's chief profiles is that of personal emotions and political life in the Arab world and Egypt in particular, and this suggests the existence of the nation "through sentiments of national character or national identity" (Jonathan Rée, 1998, p. 87) along with postcolonial hybridity. Soueif joins the female national identity of her character and transports her to ambivalence where Asya settles in the in-between space and she privileges secular fundamentalism for re-constructing her identity.

Likewise, a central theme of the novel is Saif's impotence, a deeply concealed secret, which catalyses Asya's extramarital affairs and sexual explorations, including practices of masturbation. *In the Eye of the Sun* illustrates Saif's inability to express his sexuality towards Asya when she questions the role of sexuality in a couple's relationship: "Do you think it's possible for a couple to go on wanting each other for years and years after they're together" (Soueif, 1992, p. 197). For Asya's side, the cultural taboo surrounding sexuality prevents her from directly exposing that it is Saif's sexual condition that burdens her and causes her sadness and loneliness.

However, the societal construct of male sexual dominance ensures that Saif's impotence is kept as a secret. His refusal to acknowledge his impotence and confronting the source of his wound destroys his will to address or seek solutions. Even his mother ignores and downplays the issue. At several occasions, she treats it as if the wound does not exist, framing his condition as a form of loyalty rather than a flaw, stating, "He'll always be loyal to you, Asya. He'll carry you in his eyes and will always be faithful" (Soueif, 1992, p. 159).

Asya's deep psychological struggles caused by their unconsumed marriage is constantly recurring inside her reflections. This goes even to inspire her Master's dissertation, when she discusses the issue of "platonic love" (145). Asya's reaction to the indifferent behaviour of Saif towards his sexual negligence:

Could you? Please? Turn round and hold me?" Oh, sweetie, sweetie. Go to sleep. 'Please? Just for a minute?' And he would turn around, and big and solid and sweet-smelling, would hold her close for maybe five minutes, then he'd ask lightly, 'Is that enough? Can I go to sleep now?' And patting her hip or arm or whatever was nearest he would murmur, 'Good night, Princess, and he would turn over, and in minutes he would be a sleep. And she would lie awake and hold down the loneliness that threatened to turn into a full –blow panic. (Soueif 1992, p. 392).

Saif is emotionally devoid in his treatment to Asya. The postcolonial scholar Ania Loomba (2015) contends that such attitudes of indifference can ironically be traced back to colonialism. In the colonial encounter, the indigenous populations were often reduced

to non-entities in the broader colonial agenda. This indifference initially emerges among the Europeans who perceived the indigenous people as inferior and barbaric.

In time, these same people who have long been crushed under the weight of colonial brutality, they grew indifferent to their own degraded state. Saif could be one instance of those people who reflect the profound emotional numbness with which the colonisers embarked on their violent treatment.

From the beginning of their relationship, Asya and Saif seem to become deeply intimate, highlighting the dramatic shifts in both partners' views on sexuality. At its core, *In the Eye of the Sun* is indeed a romance that stretches across time and continents woven together through a distinctive historical structure. Under Asya's emotional premise, Soueif subverts the traditional British literary form of the "national romance", which often portrays the idea of nationhood and its imperialistic ambitions as a heterosexual love story. Asya's transgression is overtly articulated when her lover Saif refuses to consummate their sexual desires before marriage despite her insistent requests:

Please, Saif, I want you so-
 I want you too, Princess, but-
 "No. Please. Please I want you inside me-
 One day I'll come inside you-
 No. Not one day, Saif. Now. Please. You want me. I know you do. And I
 want you so much.
 And it's right, I know it's right-
 No, it isn't.
 She sat back. 'Why? Why isn't?'"
 Because we are not married.' (Soueif, 1992, p. 190)

In this passage, the sexual behaviour of Asya challenges the traditionally submissive role assigned to Arab women in a patriarchal society. In particular, the novel presents the upper-class Arab British characters within a context that critiques and subverts the dominant narrative of colonization, offering a complex exploration of love and power in a postcolonial world. Soueif's portrayal of gender deconstructs the usual binary

between mind and body by representing gender as fluid and uncertain. For example, the female Asya takes the initiative in the relationship, calling Saif to sexual intercourse before their wedding.

Asya's willingness to subvert and defy Saif's indifference, reframes the traditional national romance. This action reveals that sexual identity is merely a mimicry blending both masculine and feminine traits, not a fixed truth. In Beirut, Asya briefly considers being intimate with Saif when she remarks, "it is great to be sinful in Beirut" (Soueif, 1992, p. 176).

Contrary to Saif, Asya even expresses to him that she is not afraid of the societal judgment or the consequences of pre-marital sex. In a more daring incident, she is drawn to Saif, contemplating touching him, but then hesitates, wondering "...what would he think of her?" (176). The scene then shows Asya somehow restrained, bearing in mind that Saif is drawn back by societal norms.

Admitting to the Arab/Muslim norms, however, Saif's decline to Asya's sexual engagement exhibits the traditional sexuality defined by masculinity. Asya is determined to persuade Saif. The only thing that stops her is Saif's promise that, "all right, it'll have to be tomorrow" (p.190). For Saif, his wife Asya must keep her virginity submitting to the patriarchal dichotomy between woman as the body and man as the mind. Saif and Asya ultimately decide to wait until they are married. This hesitation to pre-marital sexual intercourse is reflected in El Saadawi's words:

An Arab man, when he decides to marry, will almost invariably choose a young virgin girl with no experience, imbued with a childish simplicity, naive, ignorant, a blind 'pussy cat' who does not have an inkling of her rights, or of her sexual desires as a woman, or of the fact her mind has its needs and should have its ambitions (2002, p. 77).

However, Soueif portrays sexual restrictions when Asya travels to Italy. Asya places her trust in a boy she barely knows. Her trip to Italy marks a turning point within her sexual considerations. There, she begins to push back against the limits of her culture by becoming involved with an Italian named Umberto. She agrees to go out with him and

arranges a place to be intimate, but only on the condition that she does not lose her virginity. The patriarchal social constraint is culminated in the failure of sexual consumption on the wedding night as narrated through the conscience of Saif:

... and she rolled over on her side away from me and curled up into a little ball and pulled the sheet over herself and lay there trembling. I lit a cigarette and lay on my back smoking and after a bit she uncurled herself and came to lie against my side and I knew that she was crying so I stroked her hair and she said she was sorry oh she was sorry. And after a bit, her face against my arm, she asked do you want to – do you think we – I just really did not know – and I said hush, it doesn't matter, it does not have to be tonight (Soueif, 1992, p. 285).

Through Saif's behaviour, Soueif vividly portrayed the dominance of masculine sexuality. For Asya however, Soueif interrogates men's desire to "own their women" believing that they own them physically and spiritually. This vision is voiced by Asya when she ultimately decides to leave Saif explaining to him:

It's just that... I was basically my parents' daughter and even before I got out of that – as much as one can ever get out – well, there was you. And I really feel that I need to be – free; (Soueif, 1992, p. 280)

Asya is continually seeking to re-construct her identity, she believes that the first step is to free herself from being a male-owned, even if this man is her father or husband. In this passage Soueif is somehow embracing Qasim Amin's feminist perspective in relation to modernized Arab women. He considers if women's bodies are liberated from the indigenous patriarchal oppression, the nation will transform to a developed independent country. The trajectory of women's liberation and modernity besides to a nation's development is reflected when Qasim claims that:

A woman's life will be controlled by her mind; she will be committed to him through the marriage contract. Her family will also realize that she is sufficiently mature to make her own choice. They will agree with that choice and she will not fear their anger or other people's criticism. When women achieve these changes,

men will know the value of women and will taste the pleasure of true love (2000, p. 80).

In her novels, Soueif partly embraces Qasim Amin's new woman model and nationalism. *In the Eye of the Sun* is a constant combination of female desire and the nation through different heterosexual relationships. Similarly, In *The Map of Love*, Soueif contests Western cultural hegemony in the unfamiliar love stories which nuance the cultural exchange between the West and Egypt. Unlike traditional presentations, Soueif's characters relationship between Lady Anna Winterbourne and Sharif Basha al-Baroudi, and between Isabel Parkman and Omar al-Ghamrawi, illustrate Westernized Egyptians and Westerners experiencing the Egyptian's cultural and societal manners.

The British-born upper-class woman, Anna Winterbourne, particularly stands as a character who subverts the colonial indifference that dominates her twentieth century postcolonial world. Anna's romance with the Egyptian Nationalist Sharif offers a compelling exploration of personal and political transgression. Soueif reverses the hegemonic profile of the colonized through her portrayal of Anna as sympathetic to Sharif.

Anna actively encourages her lover Sharif in his quest for national independence. Her act is considered to be rebellious against both her own colonial heritage and the social norms that would eventually keep her indifferent. Contrary to the colonized indifference, Anna rejects the emotional detachment, indifference, and "apathy among the upwardly mobile middle classes" (Nair, 2002, p. xv). Her support to Sharif stands as unprecedented to what society expects her to embody toward the colonized people and their struggles.

Contrary to Asya's transgression and Saif's impotence, Ahdaf Soueif portrays a more peaceful interaction between Sharif and Lady Anna Winterbourne. Soueif presents Sharif as someone who respects the Egyptian local traditions as he proves his control over his sexual desire despite Anna's Western openness. When she asks Sharif why he did not engage before, he replies: "It took every atom of strength that I had not to pull you into my arms... if I had let them they would have reached out for [you]" (Soueif, 1999, p. 285).

2.5 Soueif's Transcultural Narratives

Ahdaf Soueif, as an Arab British author, can be regarded as a transcultural writer since her works vividly portray the intersectional meetings of different cultures, especially in the light of colonial influence. In the selected novel, the fictional protagonist mirrors several aspects of Soueif's own life. Born in 1950 Cairo, Soueif, like her character Asya, attended Western schools and spent part of her formative years in England. Both, they eventually pursued academic careers as professors

Within the novel, Asya and her family serve as a concrete example of transculturation. In their case, the process is mainly shaped by British colonial rule in Egypt. Transculturation, however, has also led to class division within the inhabitants of the same country as it is the case with many characters in the novel.

For example, Asya's grandfather Ismail Mursi is originally from Saidi village with rural and peasant background. Ismail migrated to Urban Cairo at a young age, where he gradually adapted to two distinct cultural influences. The younger generation, including Asya's relatives, embraced Westernized education which eventually enables them to navigate the emerging hybrid cultural landscape of modern Cairo.

Effectively, Asya's Westernized socio-cultural milieu provided her with exceptional educational and travel scopes that would otherwise be hard to access for other girls, and even boys, from less privileged social class in Egypt. Through the invention of juxtaposed characters in her narrative, Soueif highlights the issue of class divisions and social arrangement in the Egyptian society.

2.5.1. Women's Education and Modernization in Egypt

Within the Arab and the Egyptian context in particular, modernization was mainly perceived through the assimilation to the Western educational paradigms and cultural framework. The focus on Westernization gave rise to a new category of intellectuals whose educational background prioritized scientific inquiry and rational thought. Under Muhammad Ali's reform as secular and liberal agenda, nationalism and modernity began to merge, women writers emerged, contributing to the evolving national narrative. Women found new opportunities for integration into modern society through education

that played a primordial role in raising an intellectual social class, including both men and women from different backgrounds.

The advocacy for women's emancipation in Egypt was supported by prominent male thinkers, such as Muhammad Abdu, Ahmaed Lutfi al-Sayed, Taha Hussein, and Qasim Amin. These scholars called for women's rights, with a particular focus on education and societal roles. Amin, frequently referred to as the "godfather" of women's liberation, published *Tahrirul Marah* (The Liberation of Woman) in 1899, advocating for women's rights, a claim which received both controversy and widespread influence and acceptance. His writings overtly advocated for cultural transformation to Western modernity, positioning the abolition of the veil as a pivotal reform.

The secular and liberal movements played a key role in shaping the development of women's participation in the national project in Egypt. This phenomenon divided the Egyptian society to two primary groups of thinkers: Secularists and Islamists modernists. Secularists advocated for the establishment of a unified national identity rooted in a shared Egyptian culture, transcending religious divides among all Egyptians. In contrast, Islamic modernists formulated their vision by integrating technological and educational advance with Islamic traditions.

Various attempts have been made by critics to delineate the modern condition, yet these efforts have disparate outcomes. Through her narratives, Soueif provides interpretations and application of the term modern within the context of the twentieth century Middle East from a female perspective. The concept of modernization frequently pertains to Western societies, filled with substantial cultural implications.

Connotations that encompass a linear trajectory of civilization from a state of ignorance, an embracement of Western notions of progress and development the assumption that other parts of the world remain less advanced; fact that ends in a dichotomous framework such as tradition and modernity, public and private, self and other, as well as East and West (Williams & Chrisman, 1994, p. 536).

Soueif's protagonist, Asya, exclusively experienced modern education, and she ultimately reverses traditional submission and passivity expected of her by society. The

entire novel is set to dramatize the effects of education both on the broader trajectory of postcolonial Egyptian society, more particularly, on the experiences of Egyptian women.

In her both novels, *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*, Soueif contributes to the construction of national narrative by highlighting the specific impact of modern educational policies on the minds and consciousness of her protagonists. A significant factor in this process is the writer's leaning against the backdrop of primordial eras in Egyptian history.

The educational system instituted during Nasser's regime was intended to be universally accessible and considered to be a fundamental right in order to foster a wide array of educated and intellectual citizens capable to contribute to the development of a modern Egypt. However, this was not the case during the presidency of Anwar Sadat, the era when Soueif writes her first novel *In the Eye of the Sun*. The unfulfilled national project leads to huge waves of expertise professionals to the Gulf.

This latter was the outcome of Sadat's "open door policy", promoting a capitalist economic framework that emphasized consumerism as a fundamental component of its economic strategy. In this new economic setting, education was increasingly perceived as a vehicle for personal growth, with several graduates choosing to work for foreign institutions that provide superior salary.

In pursuit of a vision of national unity, on the contrary, Nasser's educational policies sought to initiate a system of free education for all Egyptians in order to reduce the social inequalities that had long plagued the country. Nasser's educational policy has positive result on the advancement of the national project. Such educational reforms were implemented during a great part of Asya's life. Nasser's adopted educational system can be linked to that of Fitché, who considers education's main concern is not to pass down traditional wisdom, but to serve a political achievement. Fitché (1992) highlight his vision, when he says:

The purpose of education is not to transmit knowledge, traditional wisdom, and the ways devised by a society for attending to the common concerns; its purpose

rather is wholly political, to bend the will of the young to the will of the nation. Schools are instruments of state policy, like the army, police and the exchequer (p. 83-84).

In the case of women's education, however, they are educated only to serve educated men. Soueif echoes this idea in *The Map of Love* when Anna reflects the opposition of the British colonial power against the education of women despite their claim to westernize Egypt:

‘For Lord Cromer, I tried to interest him in what my Egyptian friends desire for the education of women and he said that if I knew Egypt better I would know that religious leaders would never agree to women being encouraged out of their lowly status, and he would not hear another word (Soueif, 1999, p. 248).

In similar way, schools in Nasser's era shaped children into individuals who meet the need of the nation and state policy. Relevant to Fitché's claim, Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* debates the aftermath of the national educational policies, discussing whether the process helped the students to take part in the national project or not. Leaning on this context, Soueif crafts a narrative, through her female protagonist Asya, that relates social and historical embroidery spanning from 1967's and 1980's postcolonial Egypt.

In her novel, Soueif critically examine the educational system focusing on the influence of Western culture on it. Egyptian women, from their side, actively set the Egyptian women's liberation to modernize Egypt. This discourse was different than Western feminisms since it has been exclusively launched for its Arab Egyptian context in order to defeat the British colonialism. Despite its particularity, Qasim Amin's feminist ideas have a big impact on Arab women to imitate western mode of liberation and modernization (2000, p. 80).

According to Qasim Amin, Egypt's development is based on several criteria; the onset of them is women's modernity. An inferior position of a woman leads to a backward nation (p. 72). Therefore, Qasim's feminist view has a keen relationship together with education, modernization, and nationalism. In his discourse, he mainly emphasizes the obligation for the education of women and their employment as

educators for national progress (2000, p. 27). Indeed, this knowledge of both West and East, Egypt in particular, provide this new class of elites with equipment to develop Arab and Egyptian nationalisms; which helped to challenge the colonizer's domination and control.

In her second novel, *The Map of love*, Soueif refers back to some pioneer women's activists in the history of Egypt, and points out on their contributing struggles for women's education. In one of the novel's episodes, Soueif portrays Anna as attending an organizing meeting held by those women's political activists such as Zeinab Fawaaz (already introduced so far in chapter one). While discussing issues related to women's status in Egypt, Anna interferes and clarifies to Sir Charles how conducive are their efforts:

They uphold the idea that a woman's first duty is to her family, merely arguing that she can perform this duty better if she is better educated. They also write article arguing against the enforced seclusion of women and point out that women of the fellah class have always worked side by side with their men folk and no harm has come to society as a result... And in all, I do confess, I found the company and conversation most pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of the life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor (Soueif, 1999, p. 273).

Soueif also highlights the ideological underpinnings of education, and she even exhibits a sceptical tone about the capacity of education to serve a tool for liberation. Indeed, the novel acts as a mature awareness of how the Egyptian elites reproduce the colonizer's attitudes toward modernization that mainly culminate in a Western mode of education. This is explored through Soueif's choice of her protagonist's family name as "al-Ulama" which could mean the intellectual or educated.

In Egypt, the encounter with Europe especially that with the British colonization marked social change in many aspects of life which later on introduced the concept of modernization in the Arab world. Different policies of modernization have been encouraged by noticeable elites who were educated on the basis of Western standards, and this lead to the emergence of a new social class known as secular urban class. The

elites enhanced the internalization of the Western culture together in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world.

In similar circumstances, Soueif is the result of different transcultural transactions. In her novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, the author (like the main character Asya) is an educated woman from the upper-class of Egypt. Therefore, Soueif shows several autobiographical episodes while she is retracting her personal transcultural experience with the Western culture. Asya, however, is not reflecting women from lower social classes who were not accessed to similar conditions. Indeed, Asya belongs to the exceptional “emerging elite groups” who “were Western-oriented, in part as a result of their education” (Altbach, 1995, p. 453).

2.5.2. Displaying Westernization and Class Divide in the Novel

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif draws upon her personal experiences to depict how Egypt’s upper middle class has absorbed elements of Western culture while continuing to live within an Arab and Muslim cultural background. Throughout the novel, Soueif considerably presents Asya as a product of an educated and privileged bourgeois social context, often contrasting her with characters from more traditional segments of Egyptian society.

While the story is firmly set against the historical background of colonization, the novel does not dwell on the negative aspects of this colonial legacy. Unlike the work of scholars such as Leila Ahmed, who foreground themes of national and colonial oppression in their literary analysis, Soueif offers a more nuanced portrayal that emphasizes cultural hybridity rather than a monolithic focus on oppression.

Leila Ahmad (2008) argues that in many postcolonial societies, the experience of being dominated or oppressed as a nation overshadows all other social dynamics like class struggle, or gender conflict. Because of this, intellectual and literary work from these social backdrops relies almost exclusively on national oppression since that is the central story that shapes everything, as explained by Ahmed Aijaz:

In fact, there is nothing else to narrate. For if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by relations of intra-national domination; if they are

forever suspended outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (First – world) and socialism (Second World); if the motivating force of history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on, but the unitary “experience” of national oppression,... then what else can one narrate but that national oppression (1992, p. 102).

Soueif in *In the Eye of the Sun* creates a multi-layered female character that saves her from being considered as a postcolonial writer who would be reduced to only being the *object* of history (Ahmed, 1992, p. 102). Instead, Soueif describes her novel as a classical narrative that focused on education, focusing that “history and politics come into it only insofar as they affect our protagonist and those around her” (Massad and Soueif, p. 83). Asya has several characteristics that opposes the kind of literature which lack “the motivating force for history” known as class formation and class struggle, and the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region (Ahmed, 2008, p. 102).

Accordingly, *In the Eye of the Sun* vividly portrays the urban-rural class divide within postcolonial Egyptian society along the contrasting experiences of two characters: Asya and Mahrous. Mahrous, a university peer of Asya, shares with her an academic path that includes both Cairo and English university. However, unlike Asya, he hails from a rural village and belongs to a lower socio-economic class. An issue that makes Mahrous experience intricate instances that would keep him feeling perplexed with his English class and later as a student while attending the same English university with Asya.

This disparity is evident in their divergent academic trajectories and their ability to adapt to Western settings. Mahrous’ background, rooted in a peasant mode of social class, serves as a foil to Asya’s urban and elite identity, thereby emphasizing her privileged status within a modern and Western-oriented social order. Mahrous occupies a marginalized position on the spectrum of transculturation, Asya flourishes, while Mahrous struggles.

At Cairo University, Asya recalls, in a moment of performance before her peers, a critical incident involving Mahrous in an English class. While attempting to participate, Mahrous is humiliated by the professor, who mocks the influence of his rural accent of English pronunciation, and then physically assaulted when he challenges academic orthodoxy by questioning Aristotle. Asya's reflection portrays Mahrous as a ridiculous character, out of place, and unfit for the academic environment that she and her peers occupy with more fluent and natural manner (Soueif, 1992, p. 157).

In another case, Mahrous joins Asya at the same English University. Under the supervision of Dr. Heatherington and his wife, whom he had previously met in Egypt, Mahrous finds some guidance and support, yet his adaptation to Western style remains challenging. Also, his rural, impoverished background creates a sharp contrast with Asya's cosmopolitan, Westernized identity, and further complicates his assimilation into British society.

His misinterpretations of Western cultural cues such as believing that all stores in a shopping centre constitute a single shop, or his misreading a smile as sexual interests, lead him to two arrests. On both occasions, Dr. Heatherington intervenes to have the charges dropped. The literary critic Halim Barakat (1993) has explored the issue of class divisions and how urban life in Cairo has come to resemble that of the West.

Barakat (1993) raised three classes in Arab societies: the dominant class or worthy bourgeoisie; the intermediate or petite bourgeoisie; and the working classes which are made up of peasants, workers, and outcasts (p. 87). From Barakat's claims, Ismail Mursi, the grandfather of Asya, could be acclaimed to resemble the bourgeoisie class division, because this category represented the landed aristocrats before 1952. Thanks to Asya's grandfather her members of family and she could experience the Urban-Westernized style of life.

Asya's mother, Lateefa, along with her Western-style education and affinity with the Western culture would become part of intellectual the elites of the upper-middle class, the reason why Lateefa had the possibility to travel to London and later to Kuwait. Petite bourgeoisie, on the contrary, is an in-between class category that tends to oscillate around both the upper and the working classes; including small landowners, small

businessmen, and academic professionals who can pass for both upper and middle categories. The case of Asya's family can be said to be part of this intermediate category as it can also be considered as a segment of the worthy-dominant bourgeoisie.

The working class, however, represents the subalterns of the Egyptian society among which are "workers, peasants, soldiers, the lumpenproletariat, servants, street vendors and peddlers, porters, the unemployed, outcasts, and others" (Barakat, 1993, p. 91). Such class divide, as shown by Barakat, created a break down with many social and cultural rituals in Egypt and in the Arab world as a whole.

Furthermore, Barakat forth goes his discussion to demonstrate how absorbing Western culture by different Arab societies, their integration into the new socio-economic system of capitalism, and the establishment of privileged Westernized cities have all encouraged an urban/ rural divide within the Egyptian society in particular. Herein, the system of transculturation in Egypt was the direct reason that leads to the class divide in which the urban westernized social setting controlled the traditional rural way of life.

Indeed, Soueif deeply communicates the issue in her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* as far as other narratives are concerned like in *The Map of Love*. While the rural life in the Arab world is devoted to an affinity with the village, land, and the deep sense of religion, the urban life is on the contrary marked by the postcolonial spirit of nationalism, socialism, and academic professionalism. Certain citizens from the urban Westernized socio-cultural milieu, Egypt in particular, even valorise liberalism and Westernization upon their Arabic/Muslim social backgrounds (Barakat, 1993, p 88).

As two characters' social and cultural disparities continue to persist later in the novel, Soueif highlights the connection between social class divide and devotion or withdrawal from religion. In one scene, Mahrous request to pray upon arriving at Asya's residence reveals a profound difference in religious orientation. Asya, embodying a secular, urban Egyptian identity, is surprised to realize she has never considered praying in the house, nor does she know the qibla. In contrast, for Mahrous, faith is central, a reflection of his rural upbringing, where religion often plays a more significant role in daily life rituals.

Soueif further emphasizes class divisions in Egypt within the same urban structure through the interactions with Asya. Included among these characters are individuals with Islamist's profile, family's domestic staff, and various peasants. Against this background, the writer explores the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism, highlighting the consequent tension experienced by secular segments in response to this social phenomenon.

In a conversation between Asya and her sister, Deena, Soueif explores the spreading Islamization in modern Egyptian society, especially its impact on youth students. As university professors, both sisters express their discomfort regarding the increasing prevalence of Islamic dress and the adoption of intolerant religious interpretations among their students. This disparity is overtly expressed in the novel as:

The girls who wear those horrible long pastel-coloured gowns, the gloves and the angled veil; they've screened themselves off entirely, held on to their privacy. They're preferable anyway to the halfway ones, the ones who wear the long gown but leave their made-up faces bare and deck out their *tarhas* with bits of ribbon and coloured braids – and yet how dismal it would be to think that it is for them and only for them that there will be forgiveness and great rewards. But that is what they think. They are certain of it. And there are so many of them in the university now. Of them and the young bearded men in short white *thobs*. And on the other hand there are girls in short skirts and tight trousers and amounts of make-up that no one would have dreamed of wearing ten years ago when Asya was a student (Soueif, 1999, p. 753).

This passage delineates two contrasting groups of women: one that follows the conservative Islamic dress code, exemplified by “long pastel-coloured gowns, gloves, and the angled veil”, and another that opts for more revealing clothing, such as “short skirts and tight trousers”. The initial group represents not only a rigorous commitment to dress code and religious practice, but also an idealized interpretation of feminine modesty embodying specific social and religious identity. A perception reflected by Soueif herself when she refers to Asya in the third person.

Conversely, the second group of women portrays the secular transformation occurring within Egyptian society. This urban modernized social class interrogates conventional ideas of modesty and represents the evolving cultural landscape in Egypt, where concepts of liberty are mainly prevalent among educated individuals. Moreover, Soueif emphasises that the emergence of Islamism in Egypt transcends mere religious or spiritual dimensions; it rather serves as a reaction to the social and economic inequalities frequently overlooked by the secular elite.

The superficial disparities of the physical characteristics expose the profound intricacies of personal identity where class, gender, and religion merge in more complex manners. This is reflected during the sisters' disapproval of fundamentalism, whilst Asya acknowledges that religious devotion provides the youth with a deep sense of identity that may help them navigate serious social constraints, and the impact of Western hegemony in Egyptian politics.

A more complex cultural dissonance emerges during a conversation between Mahrous and Dr. Heatherington. She attempts to normalize his feelings for a woman he encountered in Britain, suggesting that all people, even married women, experience such thoughts. Mahrous, however, is alarmed by this notion and begins to worry about his wife's fidelity back home. Concerned about Mahrous's emotional state and the possibility that he might abandon his studies and return to Egypt, Asya advised him to bring his wife, Maha, to England to help him stabilize and continue his PHD journey.

This entire episode stands in stark contrast to Asya's own journey in England. Although her first year was marked by loneliness, she ultimately adapts with relative ease. While Mahrous finds the university town overwhelming, Asya regards it as somewhat provincial. Moreover, whereas Mahrous is plagued by guilt over an imagined affair, Asya is engaged in an extramarital relationship with an Englishman, Gerald Stone. Through Mahrous' character, the author underscores not only the cultural and religious tensions between East and West but also the entrenched social and class divisions within Egyptian society itself.

Nevertheless, Asya's prestigious life which indeed delineates the colonial outcome of the process of transculturation within the Egyptian society is not the case of all the

rest of the characters alongside the novel. In addition to the character Mahrous, several other characters coming from the rural/lower social class struggle with their local pure identities which are not equipped with the transcultural experience, and this later would later on enter them in a set of cultural and social confrontations whenever the characters are to be faced within an urban Westernized context.

2.6 Soueif's Hybrid Narratives

The difference between hybridity and transculturation is merely subtle but also significant. While transculturation first intention is the focus on how the blending of cultures can lead to the creation of an entirely new culture, hybridity highlights the failure of colonial powers to completely eradicate the identity of the colonized through processes like syncretism and transculturation.

On the contrary, hybridity as explained by Bhabha, describes the evolution of a “third space,” where colonized people mimic aspects of Western culture but never fully become themselves Western. In this case, such mimicry does not only reflect the colonized culture, instead it transforms Western culture by adding new measures to it. What results from this intercultural process is what Bhabha calls “ambivalence”, or what transculturation theorists might describe as a new hybrid culture. It is an ambivalent culture that is neither purely that of the colonizer nor of the target colonized society.

Ahdaf Soueif may be considered among the outstanding Arab British women writers who explore a tendency to move beyond the trauma of colonization. Tylor highlights the transcultural model by emphasizing its recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of cultural proportions, while importantly showcasing the loss experienced by two systems in the formation of a new third culture (1999, p. 91-92). Unlike theorists who view hybridity as inherently tied to trauma, transculturation when taken as a theory of cultural circulation rejects the notion of a traumatic hybrid identity. Edward Said (2012) explains:

Soueif does not in the end fall for the East versus West, Arab versus European, formulas. Instead, she works them out patiently, and then goes with Asya, who is

neither fully one thing nor another, at least so far as ideologies of that sort are concerned (p. 410).

Soueif adopts this perspective as she represents an advance when compared to the concept of the hybrid as a figure that challenges colonial power through mimicry. Such a stance, however, confines the hybrid to an ongoing resistance against the colonizer, inevitably dropping it in the trauma of colonization. Conversely, transculturation as adopted by Soueif opens the possibility for her characters moving beyond traumatic rendering. As Soueif asserts in her interview in *Elif Journal*:

The best of the relationship and the richest part of the relationship is that which is friendly and explorative, too, and that is what in my work I think. I think this East/West cooperative relationship; we see it very much in personal relationships, the confrontational is in the political relationships” (Soueif Interview, 2010).

Ahdaf Soueif articulates a nuanced understanding of the dynamics inherent in East/West alliances. She suggests that beyond political tensions, there exists a fertile ground for personal connections. She delineates the break between the personal and political spheres, perceiving that while political relations often remain confrontational, transcultural private realm can offer a richer experience. Through this lens, the writer invites readers to reconsider the potential for dialogue and exchange.

2.6.1.Reconceptualising Soueif’s Model of Cultural Hybridity

It is worth mentioning that Soueif’s complex postcolonial identity is inescapable in front to her transcultural reality that is mainly made up by the colonial Western cultivation in Egypt. In her novel, Soueif prefers not to be locked in such a box but instead she transcends it in the different postcolonial contexts in order to access opportunities in terms of education, politics and professional career. Soueif celebrates the cultural diversity she grows with in her later work *Mezzaterra*, voicing:

Growing up Egyptian in the Sixties meant growing up Muslim/ Christian/ Egyptian/ Arab/ African/ Mediterranean/ Non-aligned/ Socialist but happy with small-scale capitalism. On top of that, if you were urban/ professional the chances were that you spoke English and / or French and danced to the stones as readily

as to Abdel el-Haleem. In Cairo on any one night you could see an Arab, English, French, Italian, or Russian film (Soueif, 2004, p. 5).

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif's protagonist, Asya, embodies the nuanced postcolonial identity that arises when a character navigates the demands of Western modernity alongside the traditions of her native culture. In the context of the decline of the national spirit, Asya's life in Egypt and her engagement with both Arab/Muslim and Western cultures serve as a lens through which Soueif overtly examines the lasting impacts of colonialism and underscores the complex realities faced by postcolonial generations.

Therefore, Soueif destabilizes the stereotypical notion that the relationship between the East and the West must be hostile and confrontational. Instead, through her portrayal of the different romance and love stories. In a deep and reflective moment along the *Thames*, Asya exposes how much Egypt and England's connection is not merely historically opposing forces, but sites of co-existing memories and meanings. During her moment of introspection, Asya contemplates the enduring legacy of British colonialism and its impact on the making of her identity, saying:

You cannot disclaim responsibility for my existence, nor for my being here – beside your river – today. But I haven't come to you only to take, I haven't come to you empty-handed: I bring your poetry as great as yours in another tongue, I bring you black eyes and golden skin and curly hair, I bring you Islam and Luxor and Alexandria and lutes and tambourines and date-palms and silk rugs and sunshine and incense and voluptuous ways (Soueif, 1992, p. 512).

In this passage, Soueif underlines the complex interplay between history and cultures, going beyond colonial oppositions. Aligned with her education in England, her academic profile as a university teacher of English literature, and her romantic journeys particularly with Western men, Asya stands as typical example of hybrid and transcultural postcolonial subject. Asya's Egyptian/national identity is constantly constructed as a mixture between different attachments such as: Western/Eastern, Arab/secular/Muslim, and African/European.

Despite the fact that the history is based on the exploitation of Egypt, Soueif does not focus on the negative aspects of the past. Alternatively, she recognizes that this shared history is part of her identity. In her *Mezzaterra*, Soueif even takes the example of her transcultural children to demonstrate the pertinence of colonial history in forming more complex postcolonial identities, transcending residual the East/West oppositions. Against this background, Soueif highlights the extent her children are influenced by the middle ground their mother continues to reclaim:

My children are half-Scots. Should I encourage them to forget their half? My half? Forget Arabic, forget their family in Cairo and Alexandria. Forget Egypt and the Nile and Fairuz and ‘am Ahmad in the grocery on the corner of our street. Should I plug them into MTV and save them? (Soueif, 2004, p. 106).

More particularly, in *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya’s profound combination of her Egyptian/national identity and her deep affinity with English literature creates a space where cultures intersect, producing what Bhabha called a “third space” of cultural negotiation. As such, Soueif raises one of the intriguing questions on the state, asking for reconstructed identities. According to Amin Malak (2000), Ahdaf Soueif attempts to transgress the prevailing misconceptions of women’s identity when she decides to merge “the private history of a woman and her family with the political history of the nation” (p. 146).

It is visible through the novel that Soueif is deeply devoted to English literature as she constantly echoes her deep analysis and reflections of outstanding canonical texts such as, George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The novel intricately weaves English literary tradition into its fabric, and technically employs them to engage with and subvert colonial and local discourses. The novel’s epigraph, taken from George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, sets a hybrid tone and perspective for the narrative:

At the beginning of her novel, Soueif decides to quote the iconic realist nineteenth century English novel, *Middlemarch* by George Eliot. The writer attempts to create a dialogue between English literature and Egyptian history, offering a more nuanced representation of political and cultural intersections. Indeed, she does so through a generous inclusion of epigraphs, character development, and the novel’s structure.

Soueif even called *In the Eye of the Sun* as Egypt's *Middlemarch* in an interview with Wassef:

When Soueif finished, she ran a word count and found that it was 312,000 words long, “the same length as *Middlemarch*,” she says proudly. And indeed the novel, which weaves a social and historical tapestry of Egypt... has been called “Egypt's *Middlemarch*” (Interview Wassef, “Ahdaf Soueif: The Unblushing Bourgeoisie”).

Soueif's devotion to the English literature is also present in her later novel *The Map of Love*. She incorporates English literary traditions and uses them as a technique to both explore and critique colonial past and intercultural postcolonial existence. Basically in *The Map of Love*, fictional characters interact and speak with other fictional characters in well-known English texts such as Dorothea Brooke. The novel, therefore, engages with English literature mainly through alluding to intertextual references and the epistolary form that echoes Victorian Literature.

As far as history is widely concerned in the novel, Soueif also espouses the English tradition when she creates characters who are deeply engaged with reading and writing in English. This later, reflects the constant impact of British colonialism and its perplex entanglement with personal and national histories. Going back and forth using the epistolary structure with letters and journals as a means of communication, *The Map of Love* is structured around two narratives. The first romance between Anna and Sharif takes place in the early twentieth century; whereas the second is narrated through the American Isabel Parkman and the Palestinian American Omar al-Ghamrai in 1997.

Soueif's later novel *The Map of Love* similarly articulates transcultural journey straddling between two cultures. Like *In the Eye of the Sun*, it is a postcolonial national romance in which love stories open up a common ground for cross cultural communication among its characters, regardless of their nationality, race, class, and religion. The novel is mainly told from the perspective of three female characters coming from different social cultural milieu: Lady Anna Winterbourne; already introduced so far, Amal al-Ghamrawy, and Isabel Parkman.

During her first visit in 1900, Lady Anna Winterbourne signals the birth of two transcultural hybrid love stories. After decades, in addition to Anna and Sharif' eleven years of marital relationship in Egypt, their daughter Isabel Parkman falls in love with Amal's, Omar al-Ghamrawy, in New York. Amin Malak (2005) addresses the paradoxes and cultural conflicts created in the postcolonial Egypt. He particularly comments on the ways Soueif navigate the issue through her fictional characters, saying:

The task is not to deny conflicts or paradoxes, but to accept, comprehend, and even when possible to fuse them ... in one sense, the roots of these paradoxes seem to stem from the ambivalent affiliations to Arab-Muslim cultural ethos on the one hand and to acquired intellectualism on the other (p. 132).

Early back, when Sharif falls in love with Anna, he was partly restrained to such cross cultural relationship reflecting the coloniser/colonised dichotomy. Indeed, Sharif along with his strong nationalist spirit is afraid that he would blame Anna because of her colonial and national origins. At this level, Soueif prepares the ground for a "third space" to make this cross cultural relationship to take place. This happens when Layla, Sharif's sister, comments on a successful transcultural marriage:

Madame Hussein Rushdi is a Frenchwoman. "There's a difference." So I asked innocently, "A difference between what?" "A Frenchwoman and Englishwoman – in our circumstances," he said. "Ah, but you always said we should judge people as individuals," I said, "not as examples of a culture or a race." So one should go with one's own feet looking for trouble?" he asked. "I think in this case," I laughed, "trouble has come looking for you." "Thank you, my sister," was all he said (1999, p. 243-244).

Moreover, before getting married to Anna, Sharif faced constant internal and external barriers, wondering what this relationship would lead him to. Conversely, Soueif hints several instances that represent this intercultural marriage as intricate and challenging. Zeinab Hanim, despite her sympathy, dares to tell Sharif how much intricate is this engagement for Anna from both sides, saying:

‘For her, her whole life will change, her people will be angry with her. And the British will shun her. And even if they soften, it will be difficult for her, as a young wife, to visit them or receive visits from them. She will be torn off from her own people. Even her language she will not be able to us-’ (Soueif, 1999, p. 281).

Previously, Sharif was married to a traditional Egyptian woman; however, he conceives their marriage as downfall as she was not the type of women he believes is suitable for him. As the prevailing aristocrat intellectual men of his era, Sharif considers a westernized or even an English woman would be the best choice for him. While reflecting on his first marriage, in a discussion with his mother; Sharif loudly expresses the impossibility to live with a woman who “has no key to” his “mind and does not share” the cultural concern (p.151). He goes on explaining to his mother that he seeks to marry a woman with different cultural aspirations like the English Anna:

Mother, have mercy. Where would I have met and Egyptian woman to love her? Yes, I see them at family occasions, but to sit with one and talk to her – can this happen? ... I need my partner to be someone to whom I can turn, confidant of her sympathy, believing her when she tells me I’m in the wrong, strengthened when she tells me I’m in the right. I want to love, and be loved back – but what I see is not love or companionship but a sort of transaction of convenience sanctioned by religion and society and I do not want it (Soueif, 1999, p. 151-280)

In so doing, by concentrating on her female protagonists, mainly Asya, Anna, Amal and Isabel, the writer illustrates how Egypt grapples with questions of cultural identity, the enduring impact of colonialism, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. Through the private experiences and inner conflicts of these women, Soueif’s narratives offer a nuanced portrait of a society in transition, where the struggle for self-definition is both a personal and national endeavour.

2.6.2.Linguistic Hybridity and the Challenge of English

One of the distinctive characteristics of the novels written by Ahdaf Soueif is her use of linguistic hybridity. In her linguistic approach, Soueif exclusively integrates Arabic

words, phrases, idioms, names, and cultural references into mainstream English fiction. This linguistic hybridity mirrors the cultural hybridity of her fictional characters while also challenging linguistic hierarchies between East and West. The use of an Arabized English is a direct challenge to canonical English literary norms, “a system having its goal the illumination of one language by means of another” (Malak, 2005, p. 132).

Several parts of *In the Eye of the Sun* cover the stance of linguistic hybridity. One episode can stand as provocative when Asya attempts to translate or explain an Egyptian famous song about the visit of President Nixon to Egypt by Sheikh Imam. The explanation of Egyptian culture in the English language, however, is not of that easy process. The writer even devotes many pages in order to approach the adequate meaning, showcasing the cultural gap between Arabic and English.

In such instance, Asya manages to employ some explanations in English, encompassing Arabic colloquial words, which would probably lead to sameness in English to her guests. This incorporation of Egyptian dialect and cultural references creates what have been termed Arabo-English. Malak even compares the writer’s linguistic strategy to Salman Rushdie’s creation of Indianized dialect of English (2005, p. 132). In the following passage, Soueif artistically transports the dialect of Egypt into an Arabized form of English:

‘Sharraft ya Nixon Baba,

Ya bta’ el-Watergate-...

‘Well,’ says Asya, ‘as I said, he says, “You’ve honoured us, Nixon Baba – “Baba” means “father” but it’s also used, as it is used here, as a little of mock respect - as in “Ali Baba”, for example – that’s probably derived from Muslim Indian use of Arabic – but the thing is you could also address a child as “Baba” as an endearment – a sort of inversion: like calling him Big Chief because he’s so little – and so when it’s used aggressively – say in an argument between two men – it carries a diminutivising, belittling signification. So here it holds all these meanings. Anyway, “you’ve honoured us, Nixon Baba” – “You’ve honoured us” is, by the way, the traditional greeting with which you meet someone coming into your home – it’s almost like “come on in” in this country. So it functions merely as a greeting and he uses it in that way but of course he activates – ironically – the meaning of having actually “honoured” us (Soueif, 1992, p. 496).

Throughout the different connotations of the word “Baba”, Soueif points on the complex process of rendering cultural meanings from Arabic into English. Nevertheless, Asya succeeds to find common ground to make the meaning possible. As a challenge to the East/West dichotomy, Soueif is showcasing that transcultural dialogue can take place. The writer tends to clarify that though the cultural gap is stuck in the middle, the resulted space is “not negative but positive in its effect. It presents the difference through which an identity (created or recovered) can be expressed” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1989, p. 52).

Soueif frequently reflects on the English language’s role in both colonization and transcultural communication. This linguistic strategy followed by the writer transforms English from vehicle of colonial dominance into a common ground of hybrid cultural encounter. As theorized by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989), it echoes the postcolonial practice of “abrogating and appropriating” English.

Many critics have evaluated Soueif’s linguistic combination of Arabic and English. Radwa Ashour discussed the impact of such linguistic processing in fictional

literature, and says: Vocabulary, proverbs, wise sayings and linguistic devices are disseminated into the foreign language, bringing with them soothing of the soul of the nation and the culture (1993, p. 265). The linguistic transculturation adopted by Ahdaf Soueif is intended to a leading mutual understanding and dialogue between Arab Egyptian characters and Western English or French ones.

In *The Map of Love*, for example, characters like Amal al-Ghamrawi are the engine that creates linguistic hybridity while explaining Arabic language rules to Anna and Isabel. Amal who constantly reads Anna's English language diaries, often reflects on the power and limits of English stating: "English... was the language of my education, the language of reason, of the mind, Arabic was the language of emotion, of the soul" (Soueif, 1999, p. 44). After Isabel retained the Arabic alphabet, Amal attempts to deliver lectures to her. One striking moment of Amal's tentative to make things easier for Isabel, she code switches English with Arabic; taking words examples that have more than one meaning:

Everything stems from a root. And the root is mostly made up of three consonants or two. And then the word takes different forms... Take the root q-l-b, qalb. Qalb: the heart, the heart that beats the heart at the heart of things. Then there's a set number of forms, a template almost that any root can take. So in the case of "qalb" you get "qalab": to overturn, overthrow, turn upside down, and make into the opposite; hence "maqlab": a dirty trick, a turning of the tables and also a rubbish dump. "Maqloub": upside-down; "mutaqalib": changeable; and "inqilab" a coup...Every time you use a word, it brings with it all the other forms that come from the same root (Soueif 1999, p. 81-82).

Throughout Amal's detailed explanations, Soueif demonstrates that the roots of one word can express different meanings when used in different contexts. Though the process seems intricate and complex, Soueif ends by showcasing that Isabel will retain the word and its meanings. That way, Soueif attempt to establish cultural dialogue between East and West, exceeding colonial and historical barriers. Similarly, Anna and Zeinab Hanim in the novel transcend language constraints.

Notwithstanding, the English used in Soueif's narratives is no longer the language of the colonizer, it is rather a transcultural medium of the hybrid identity constructing, political reclamation, and cultural negotiation. As Soueif explains:

I think this is the base, really, of the sometimes "different" English I write. That I need to fashion English that will express an Arab reality. I found English an extremely hospitable and wonderful language. The interesting thing also is that often my bilingual (Arabic/English) readers tell me that when they read my characters' dialogues in English, they can hear it in their heads in Arabic. (Soueif, 1998).

Soueif's reflection on her use of English can carry the meaning, feeling, and cultural nuances of her transcultural and Westernized background. Rather than seeing English as a restrictive or alien language, she finds in it enough space to be reshaped. Soueif portrays how language can be adaptable, especially in postcolonial contexts where different cultures interact. Indeed, Soueif is not simply translating Arabic into English, but also creating a hybrid language that carries both form and spirit of Arabic even while using English words. Also, her language becomes a bridge between East and West. More interestingly, Soueif pushes the boundaries of what English literature can be.

2.7 Conclusion

Throughout the chapter, the investigation of Ahdaf Soueif aimed at highlighting that politics, nationalism, sexuality, and hybridity intensely constitute her postcolonial narratives. Particular to her novels, Soueif intertwines the characters' personal journeys with the broader political history of Egypt and the Middle East. Soueif's novels include direct headlines and epigraphs from considerable events, covering different periods in and around Egypt. Going back and forth, Soueif positions her female characters' private stories within the context of postcolonial nation-building and conflicts.

The private experiences of her protagonists can serve as a clue to larger socio-historical, cultural conditions where the characters' love stories become tightened with history and nation. Put it in that way, Soueif underscores that personal identity of her female Westernized and educated characters cannot be separated from national identity

in the postcolonial context. In doing so, Soueif includes sexuality within the private spheres of her characters, especially Asya's different romance stories. It is worth mentioning that Soueif does not write about sex mainly because of its symbolic meaning in politics and culture.

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, her female sexual desire becomes allusion for domination to both colonizer and colonized, and between women and men, representing a transgressive subversion of hegemonic local patriarchal and colonial powers. Leaning against Asya's personal life along with historical events, Soueif explores a multifaceted portrait of Egyptian women that resist both Orientalist stereotypes and colonial simplifications.

Meanwhile, Soueif's protagonists navigate between Egypt and England, tradition and modernity, between East and West. As they travel between these spaces, they experience the postcolonial sense of being at the common ground of in-betweens. Their transcultural journeys can be read as a struggle to forge a nuanced identity that accommodates both the Egyptian heritage and their immersion in English literature and Western cultural embrace.

Ahdaf Soueif as an Arab British woman writer finds in transculturation and hybridity a literary strategy to voice her thoughts about the postcolonial intersections of politics, nationalism, history, social class, gender, modernity and tradition. Throughout the chapter, it is assumed that the most convenient way to situate Soueif's Egyptian political and social literary project would be in her characters' hybrid identities.

**Chapter 3 : Aboulela's Narratives: Towards a New
Paradigm Shift in Postcolonial Literature**

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3.1 Introduction

While most leading voices of postcolonial discourse come from Muslim backgrounds, the significant role of religion in these contexts has often been neglected (Keller, 2004, p. 35). Thinkers who critically examined colonialism from the Arab world such as: Albert Memmi from Tunisia, Frantz Fanon from Algeria, and Edward Said from Palestine; largely did not include religious dimension into their analysis. Since the Enlightenment, the secular has been privileged, frequently casting spiritual and theological concerns as minor, and thereby incompatible with modernity.

The secular orientation within postcolonial theory has arguably widened the gap between academic discourse and the daily lived religious realities of postcolonial societies. Consequently, Arab British writers like Leila Aboulela uniquely address such significant interval between the theoretical preoccupations of Postcolonialism and the interpretive faith-centered interests existing in the middle ground of East and West encounters.

The writings of Arab British Leila Aboulela offer compelling illustration of this debate in practice. Aboulela's two first novels are deeply informed by her transcultural journey and her developing Muslim faith. Throughout the chapter, understanding this background is crucial to appreciating the writer's exploration of identity, faith, and displacement. Contextualizing *Minaret* (2005) within Aboulela's postcolonial, cultural, and political contexts enrich the investigation of the novel's intricate exploration of identity, faith, and migration.

Throughout the chapter, it would be revealed that Aboulela, as an Arab British immigrant writer, deals with core themes in postcolonial literature like identity and cultural negotiation. Her writings, however, are deeply informed within the spiritual level of Islam revealing how faith provides solace and identity in the face of alienation. Such portrayals underscore the limitations of secular and Western-based postcolonialism that overlooks how religion shapes postcolonial subjects.

3.2 Muslim Voices in Postcolonial Discourse

Postcolonial theory, though influential, has been widely debated for its Eurocentric and secular based approach. Some argue that Islam has actually benefited from the ideas of postcolonial theory from its first inception. Early influential thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said laid the ground for postcolonial perspectives, and many of their subjects resonate with Islamic thought.

For example, Fanon speaks out powerfully against issues of racism and colonialism, and he calls for freedom and equality revealing how colonialism destroys people's minds and spirits. From his side, Edward Said emphasized the unfair ways colonialism affected cultures including Islam, and exposed the stereotypes and bad images it created. Together, Fanon's psychological paradigm and Said's firm cultural critique aimed at helping ex-colonized people to regain their liberation from within, a conception that fits with Islam's own resistance to Western domination.

Fanon also highlighted this connection, noting that in the Arab world, the fight for national independence went hand in hand against colonialism (1997, p. 95-96). However, the alliance between Islam and postcolonialism was confused after Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was published. The text caused disagreement among Muslims and was and is still seen as attack on Islam. The confusion extends since Rushdie is considered as a postcolonial writer, and because influential critics like Said defended the novel while ignoring Muslim opposition.

Such an act makes Muslims feel betrayed and many writers like Said appeared accomplice with a discourse that undermined Islam. This tragedy leads Muslim intellectuals to question whether postcolonial theory is able to support Islam or it is ultimately shaped by Western biases. Malak refers to the "oddness" of the relationship in his book *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Malak voices out the postcolonial neglect of Islam:

it is odd that 'postcolonial theory' cannot offer insights about the activism of Islam, despite the fact that one of its seminal texts, Edward Said's *Orientalism* ... is prompted and permeated by a challenge to the colonial representations of Islam as

biased constructions whose corrosive corollaries are discernible today in multiple insidious fashions across diverse domains of power (Malak, 2005, p. 17).

The limitations of postcolonialism in relation to Islam are discussed by Majid in his article "Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair." It seems from the title that the postcolonial support given to Rushdie's novel is the motivation behind his article. He informs us:

Gayatri Spivak, Akeel Bilgrami, and Edward Said were, for example, among the postcolonial critics who strongly protested Khomeini's fatwa on Rushdie, exonerated Islam from such 'bigoted violence,' and reaffirmed their 'belief in the universal principles of rational discussion and freedom of expression' in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* (17 Feb. 1989, A38) (Majid, 1996, p. 8).

He contends that although Islam is a major part of the Rushdie affair, postcolonial critics' knowledge of Islam is limited. For example, "Spivak, who had defended Islam against intolerance, had not read the most central text of Islamic cultures [the Qur'an]" (9). According to Majid, the stance of Akeel Bilgrami is no better than Spivak since his "reading of Islamic identity ... [as a moderate Muslim] is precisely what the modern Orientalist discourse has been doing and continues to do to this day" (1996, p. 12-13).

The postcolonial critics' lack of Muslim knowledge accompanied by their expertise in western knowledge affects postcolonial theory. Majid believes that "postcolonial theory transforms itself into a discursive gesture that is simultaneously informed and co-opted by the very assumptions of western humanism it questions in the beginning" (p. 11). As a result, postcolonial critics like Spivak and Said, "appear unsettlingly unreliable to many Muslims" (9-10).

Therefore, scholars like Amin Malak, Anouar Majid, Wail Hassan, and Hasan Majed have raised concerns about the limitation of postcolonial frameworks in understanding the cultural and religious dimensions of non-Western societies, especially Islam and Arab identity. In the wake of the Rushdie affair, they began to critically reassess the limits of postcolonial theory mainly within its attitudes towards Islam. According to Majed:

The role of Muslim intellectuals should not be limited to critiquing postcolonialism's secularism, but should extend to the practice of postcolonialism with the intention of incorporating into it a major component of the identity and the native cultures of many areas in the non-Western world (2014, p. 97).

Hasan Majed believes that Muslims should not simply criticize postcolonialism for its secular orientation but also actively engage with it to reshape it from within. He believes that studies seek to empower colonized people, they must be open to hearing their religious and Muslim interventions. In view of this, Majed proposes that Muslim intellectuals could contribute to a new divergent form of postcolonialism or a Muslim postcolonialism that integrates religion as a central ingredient of cultural identity.

In his article *Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application*, Wail Hassan highlights how postcolonial theory is firmly Western in its roots and it is urgently needed to be re-examined. He assumes that postcolonial theory raised of four European ideological schools; Marxism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, and feminism (2002, p. 47). Hassan suggests that postcolonial theory, because of these Western influences, can conversely fall into the trap of repeating colonial patterns through neocolonialism and Eurocentric ways of seeing the world (p. 46).

Expanding his analysis, Hassan indicates that postcolonial theory can sometimes be even more critical than colonial discourse itself (2002, p. 46). He asserts that while the theory attempts to reverse Western ways of thinking, it likely ends by putting Africa and Asia in worst conditions than the old colonial framework. He puts it "Indeed, in its very attempt to challenge Western epistemology, postcolonial theory homogenizes Asia and Africa in subtler ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse (p. 51).

He also writes: "in its narrativizing of the 'postcolonial world', postcolonial theory – derived as it is from western secular anti-humanism – is in no better position to offer any deeper insights into the Arab world's 'cultural wars' than the western media, since those wars are fought over the interpretation of Islam, not its decentralization or deconstruction" (p.56).

Thus, For Hassan postcolonial theory has clear limits in the way it tackles issues related to Islam and the Arab world. He ends up by saying: “postcolonial theory needs to theorize its own limits and its own horizons” (p.60). Thanks to such insightful critics, postcolonial theory begins to reconsider its perspectives in relation to Islam.

3.2.1.Revisiting Religious Identity in Postcolonial Literature

Within a postcolonial framework, addressing religious identity presents significant complexities. Scholars have noted that postcolonial literature and criticism, which are primarily concerned with answering back to the colonized, have largely overlooked the role of religion. The marginalization of religion from postcolonial criticism has been largely attributed to its exclusion within cultural studies.

As Viswanathan (1998) explains, cultural studies tend to prioritize secular and materialist perspectives, making the process inadequate to meaningfully with religious tendencies (p. xiv). In the same vein, Mishra and Hodge (2005) state that because there has been a separation in the enlightened state between “the secular and the religious where the latter is seen as a primarily personal affaire, while the great passions of modernity are played out in the secular domain” (p. 392).

Malak underlines the significant lack of postcolonial theoretical fields that properly address religion as a conceptual and literary dimension. He juxtaposes this absence with the prevailing emphasis on themes such as race, gender, nation, migration, and hybridity (Malak, 2005, p. 16). In his insightful work *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, Malak underscores this negation as a discursive issue while arguing that religion is an insightful essence in the representation of postcolonial dynamics (p. 17). He also attributes the marginalization of religion to the secular Euro-American status that defines the boundaries of postcolonial discourse (p. 17).

From their side, Mishra and Hodge also identifies the limitations of postcolonial theory in addressing religion, assuming that for a more relevance of postcolonialism, it must engage more deeply with religious matters and other counter-modern elements often excluded by colonial frameworks (2005, p. 391). Drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), Mishra and Hodge suggest that postcolonialism should “let newer, generally subaltern, post-colonial historicised surface, replete with those life-practices or forms...

that [have] hitherto consigned to what we may call a non-rational nativism” (2005, p. 395). Anouar Majid especially believes that, “post-colonial theory’s lack of attention to religion is most evident when it comes to Islamic culture” (2000, p. 17). Differently said, it is Islam that is mostly ignored in postcolonial discourse.

3.2.2. Muslim Women's Identities in Postcolonial Literature

Since the colonial era, Western narratives have investigated in Orientalist representations of Muslim women as silent and oppressed figures. Yet, this biased casting has never gone unchallenged. Many postcolonial authors, including Muslim women themselves, have deeply responded to unidirectional and stereotypical portrayals. Writing in both mother languages and Western tongues, they refuse the constant perpetuation of women as passive victims. Instead, their literature celebrates Muslim women as articulate individuals who recognize patriarchal injustice and stand active to rewrite it.

These literary works have, then, transgressed the dominant image of Muslim women in two ways: at one level is a Muslim woman who sees and talks about the problems of women in her society; at another level, is the depiction of a fictional character that refuses to remain silent. Some of the more well-known of these writers in the West are Nawal el Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi and Assia Djebar⁹, whose major works have dealt with women in Muslim societies.

However, most of the literary works by these women are said to be Muslim women's struggles against patriarchal and colonial forces. In other words, the thrust of the works are anti-colonial and/or feminist, in the main understanding of feminism as upholding the rights of women against the rule of the patriarchs. Also, in many of the studies on these works, the label of ‘Muslim’ has been taken as a cultural attribute, and

⁹ Nawal el Saadawi is an Egyptian feminist writer, activist and psychiatrist. Some of her important works of fiction are *The hidden face of Eve: women in the Arab world* (1977), *Women at point zero* (1979), *The Fall of the Imam* (1987). Fatima Mernissi is a Moroccan writer and sociologist. *Dreams of trespass: tales of a harem girlhood* (1995) is a memoir by her. Some other important non-literary works by her on the subject of Muslim women are *Beyond the veil: male-female dynamics in modern Muslim society* (1987) and *The Veil and the male elite: a feminist interpretation of Islam* (1991). Assia Djebar is an Algerian novelist and film maker. Her most important works of fiction in French are *Les Enfants du nouveau monde* (1962) and *L'Amour, la Fantasia* (1985).

a Muslim woman in them is to be understood as a woman from a Muslim background and culture.

Although these postcolonial texts by Muslim women have subverted the depiction of Muslim women as passive and silent, they have not brought Islam as an involving part of their discussions. In Western discourse, there is an enduring portrayal of Islam as the main cause to the oppression of women. Thus, these postcolonial texts addressed Islam as a cultural background, but did not engage with Islam as the religion that preserves women's roles and rights. As Leila Ahmed claims that a central part of colonial discourse on Islam has been:

that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies (Ahmed, 1992, p. 152).

Significantly, these literary works by Muslim women have not reversed canonical Western biased claims about Islam. Critics like Kahf (2006), conversely, state that some of these writers even reinforce Western stereotypes by simply recasting what Western readers know and expect about Muslim women in particular. In their works, writers like Saadawi even majorly criticize Islamic laws as they see them as patriarchal and oppressive.

In their case, belonging to a familiar Muslim background of reading public, Muslim identity is, perhaps, taken for more granted. Therefore, the religious identity of the characters does not stand out as important compared to their issues like of that women's oppression. Yet, these figures are still referred to as Muslim women.

Therefore, the intersection of Islam, postcoloniality, and literary expression becomes more pronounced after the event of 9/11. Anglo-Arab writers in the West have increasingly used fiction to challenge the hostility directed to Muslims. The literature produced presents Muslim characters as finding strength in their faith to overtly subvert negative stereotypes and asserts a more positive Muslim identity.

3.3 Aboulela's Religious Narratives

Although only few postcolonial literary or theoretical works directly address Islam and religious identity, this does not imply that religion anymore influences people's lives. In contrast to many assertions of modern and postmodern thinkers like Fredrick Jameson, who believes that this world is "effortlessly secular" (1991, p. 378), religion remains a significant part of contemporary existence. John A. McClure states that "Jameson ignores the persistence here in America and around the globe of all of sorts of religious traditions" (1995, p. 142). Similarly, Mark R. Woodward contends that "even in the most modern societies religion does not disappear" (2002, p. 82).

Moreover, Mishra and Hodge argue against the pejorative neglect of religion highlighting that "religion is a key lived experience, arguably one that touches more than most" (2005, p. 392). Baum similarly stresses the significance of religion in many people's lives and states that it is wrong to see religion and cultural practices and identities as forms of oppressive power while ignoring the worthy significance these aspects hold for the people who engage with them (2004, p. 10). For many Muslims, likewise, religion is an important aspect of their identity. As Amin Malak claims:

Religion-based identity may not be exclusive to Islam qua religion, for one might argue likewise about Judaism or Tibetan Buddhism. However, given the fact that Islam is the second largest religion on earth, tenacious, voluntary attachment demonstrated so pronouncedly by its adherents from diverse cultures and from different concerns of the world is both solid and striking (Malak, 2005, P. 5).

Strikingly, Malak describes Muslims' relationship with spiritual, theological, and emotional, saying, "Islam, however one conceives it, commands affection even from its dissenters" (2005, P. 152). He emphasizes Islam's values of justice, generosity, and creativity, which endow it with "endearing and enduring loyalty", loyalty that, as he says, "many outsiders miss, misunderstood or misinterpret" (2005, p. 153). In doing so, Malak seeks to reveal the covered veil of Islam; its spiritual and faithful which calls for the people's well-being.

In her novels; *The Translator*, *Minaret*, and *Lyrics Alley*—and a short story collection, *Coloured Lights*, Aboulela consistently addresses the complex issue of Islam, especially in Western contexts. In *Lyrics Alley*, though with a more political profile, she incorporates religion to highlight the persistent misunderstandings between Islam and the West. Islam is in a constant presence in Aboulela's narratives driven by the desire to weave Islamic faith into fiction.

3.3.1. From Memoir to Writing Fiction

In her narratives, Aboulela explores what it means to maintain faith in a modern, secular world. Because Islam is a global religion and the modern world is largely secular, her writing thus bridges East and West. Meanwhile, many scholarly works and popular publications about Muslim issues continue to be produced in the West. Life narratives and popular fiction focusing on Muslim women and Islam have found a broad audience there, with memoirs and popular works on these topics becoming bestsellers.

It is not just the memoirs of Muslim women that sell well. Sales of memoirs in general are thriving, perhaps particularly as a result of their claim of authenticity and their fulfilling the reader's "desire for facts and truth ... promised by the autobiographical pact" (Whitlock, 2007, p. 111). Despite its popularity and its role as a significant source of knowledge about Muslim women's lives in the West, the memoir genre may still be considered as a continuation of traditional Orientalist representations.

Keshavarz refers to these memoirs as "New Orientalist Narratives" because of their close resemblance. She asserts that such narratives, similar to those of the past, tend to "simplify its subject", openly favour "a Western political and cultural takeover", and replicates "the totalizing – and silencing – tendencies of the old Orientalists by virtue of erasing ... the complexity and richness in the local culture" (2007, p. 3).

There is certain affinity between the genre of memoir and fiction, especially the genre of realistic novels, as it could be seen in some aspects of the writer's life rearticulated in her narratives. Even the mini-biographies on the covers of the novels imply some similarities between the authors' lives and those of their characters. In so doing, Aboulela represents a new dimension to Scottish identity, as evidenced by her

essay, "Barbie in the Mosque," which appears at the head of one hundred contributions to the anthology, *Being Scottish: Personal Reflections on Scottish Identity Today* (2002).

The title and the author's photography in Muslim headscarf are perhaps the least surprising part of Aboulela's answer to a question that, according to the editors, "continues to perplex many Scots today," namely "who are we?" (Devine and Logue, ix). More provocative is the testimonial narrative itself, which contrary to expectations, does not narrate Aboulela's experience. Instead, Aboulela focuses on her friend Aisha, a native-born Scot, child beauty queen, former Catholic, Muslim convert, mother, and forceful presence at the Glasgow mosque.

In effect, the memoir presents the reader with two figures, Aisha and Aboulela herself, whose adaptation and adjustment of Scottish identity disturbs and confuses the naturalized triad of race, religion, and nation. On similar circumstances, Aboulela throughout her article, *Moving Away from Accuracy* (2002), deeply tackles such issues:

I was once asked by an editor to write an autobiographical piece for the Weekend edition of a Scottish newspaper. It was to be about my move from Sudan to Scotland [...] I showed the first draft to the ladies' writing group I attended. They were offended by my criticism of Britain: terse words were exchanged, I went home discouraged [...] If my tolerant friends could not accept these words from me, how would total strangers react? If my well-read, well-travelled friends took objection, how would the average reader react? Then I decided to think of it as a challenge. I challenged myself to change the piece in such a way that I would be changing the words but still saying what I wanted to say (Aboulela, 2002, p. 205).

Throughout this example, Aboulela explores the restricted conditions of writing an autobiography. In addition to the accuracy and honesty that an autobiographical genre imposes, there also be other publishing requirements that are imposed on the writer. After when her autobiography never gets published in that weekend edition, instead the piece was later on published in an anthology of Scottish multicultural writing; Aboulela consequently comments that "Every time I write anything autobiographical, I have second thoughts about it later. Was it like that, in that order? Was I being honest, accurate, ungrateful?" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 206).

More importantly, the autobiography as a genre in itself is said to be a reflection or even a mirror of its writer. This means that it will fix the author in a particular position and is that kind of perpetuation that Aboulela refuses to embrace. For Aboulela, the constraints of autobiographical writing do not align with her desire to explore and evolve as both a writer and individual. She sees fiction as more dynamic medium that allows for greater freedom to explore multiple facets of identity, experience, and perspective. Thus, it is for such reasons why Aboulela prefers the stance of fiction like she clearly explains:

the truth in an autobiography remains fluid, shaped by the state of mind at the moment of the narrative... in ten years, my childhood would be described differently because it would be written from a different context. A context that would determine what I stress and what I leave out... It feels more natural for me to write fiction. Sometimes when I read a book that I can relate to with accuracy ... I am felt by the end of it bleak and uninspired. Such a book has not taken me anywhere, it has been as boring as a mirror... so to when I write, I want to move away from myself, touch something common, something that includes me but is not exclusively me (Aboulela, 2002, p. 206-7).

As she clearly articulates, Aboulela prefers the stance of fiction that has traditionally provided a valid space for the investigation of the development of identity. This way, she can have a space to challenge, redefine, and expand her narratives rather than being confined to the strict boundaries of her own life story. Fiction allows transformation and reinvention for both the writer and the reader, exploring a more open approach to storytelling.

Unlike autobiography that can fix the author in static role, fiction provides the door for counter-discourses and shifting perspectives. This what enables writers, like Aboulela, to foreground more nuanced and complex portrayal of human experience. In essence, fiction enables deeper engagement with complex diversity of characters' identities that allow freedom of expression that non-fiction may struggle with.

3.3.2. Leila Aboulela: Between Faith and Frontiers

Aboulela's identity appears to have been influenced by her earlier life in Sudan, particularly by her Egyptian mother, and by her western education. Aboulela's mother does not seem an oppressed woman and this has inevitably affected her daughter who takes for granted her freedom to work and drive as an instance. In addition to her mother's influence, Aboulela's identity is built upon her western education. Apart from her years in Khartoum University, Aboulela was exposed to a western educational system where she learnt not only Arabic but also English at a very young age. From then on, the English language has been a steady companion in her life.

My mother is a wonderful person, very open-minded and progressive, and she taught me a lot of things that I still use, even though literature is not her field at all ... She was one of the few women in Khartoum who worked, one of the few women who could drive (Aboulela, 2000).

Aboulela attended two English-medium schools, an American primary and the Sister's School, run by Catholics. She afterwards moved to Britain in 1990, where she obtained a M.Sc. in Statistics from the London School of Economics. She then went to tutor the subject briefly at the University of Aberdeen. It could then be argued that Aboulela's family and education are in harmony and both help shape the western side of her identity.

Significantly, through Aboulela's western education and progressive mother, she discovered a moderate form of Islam. She explains how at the age of seven she borrowed her first English novels from the school library: "I read them again and again, and even though I knew that the characters were not Muslims, I found Muslim values in those novels" (Aboulela 2007). Thus, from her early years Aboulela learned that Islam and the West are not totally inimical, they hold some values in common.

In addition to this, her mother practically taught her that the woman in Islam has her own rights such as working. It might be constructed that this, in a sense, was against the Sudanese traditions of the time. Indeed, Sudanese traditions might, in some situations, differ from other interpretations of Islam.

Whereas Islam and the West could have few common patterns, such as the values Aboulela noticed in the novels she read, Islam and traditional societies like Sudan might have distinct point of view, as it is the case with females working and driving. In essence, it was not until Aboulela came to Britain that she discovered a vacation as a writer. But her early exposure to English in her native Sudan and her later stay in Scotland are keys to her choice of which language to write in, and what subjects to write about:

Throughout school and university, I read English fiction, looking up the difficult words in the dictionary, discovering for myself which was quality writing and which was pulp. It was books I read as a child in the Khartoum American School, that made first love reading: *Little House on the Prairie*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, *Harriet the Spy*, *Little Women*. And it was American books that helped me when I started to write: Natalie Goldberg's *Wind Mind*, Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and the classic *Becoming a Writer* by Dorothea Brand (Aboulela, 2002, p. 203-4).

The books reflect how the author has likely absorbed some particular layers of American culture. More especially, the ideas and perspectives within them are shaped by female experiences and voices since all the books were genuinely written by women authors. The influence is not merely literary, but it is deeply tied to gendered identity in American culture (Nash, 2007, p. 135). Also Aboulela's residence in Britain provided her with a subject matter; a terrain against which she could not only set her Sudanese heritage, but which she could employ to encapsulate a new identity; that of the Muslim Arab/African woman in the host land.

Both her mother and her Western education provided Aboulela with the first cultural impressions concerning Islam. Leila Aboulela is transculturally connected to Sudan (where she grows up), Egypt (where she was born), Britain and Qatar (where she currently lives). Beyond these multifaceted transcultural milieus, the author constantly insists that she is deeply "rooted in Khartoum" (Cited in Aboulela's article, 2007). Despite her thorough sense of belonging that she considers as complex and entangled, Aboulela intensely holds on her devoted Muslim identity. As once recognizes:

I am not objective about Islam, and although I am considerably Westernized, I can never truly see it through Western eyes. I am in this religion. It is in me. And articulating the intimacy of faith and the experience of worship to a Western audience is a challenge and a discovery (Cited in Aboulela's article, 2012).

In *Travel is Part of Faith*, a title that overly suggests a merging of religious faith with the experience of transnational displacement, Aboulela offers a taxonomy of late twentieth century migration from South to North (Nash, 2007, p.137). Through this narrative, Aboulela constructs a layered account of both physical and psychological distinct moving that is marked by dense sensitivity to racial and cultural dissonance.

Set against a backdrop of alienation and loneliness, her text draws on religion not only as a cultural reference but as an insightful ground for marking its otherness. Religion then becomes the medium through which the protagonist makes sense of her dislocation and begins to imagine a spiritual alternative to the Western paradigms of Western modernity. The writer's profound and spiritual ideology of practicing Islam mainly developed after moving to London when started to perceive religious values in western literature. The turning point was wearing the hijab. As Aboulela explained in an interview:

I grew up in a much westernized environment and went to private, American school. But my personality was shy and quiet and I wanted to wear the hijab but didn't have the courage, as I knew my friends would talk me out of it (Sethi, 2005, n. p).

Upon her arrival in London, Aboulela finds herself in a totally different environment where the term 'Muslim' was not commonly used in 1989's Britain. There people like her were generally identified as either Black or Asian and that gave her the freedom to wear the hijab. This new found freedom reassures her to make personal decisions without the pressure of her Sudanese friends, who had previously influenced her to hesitate due to her anxious fear of appearing "ugly in a head scarf" or even being mocked (interview Aboulela, 2007). Despite a depressing concern about external appearances, this becomes no longer her main consideration in London.

Aboulela considers herself as a conservative Muslim woman who, rather than entirely rejects Western culture, aims at bridging the gap between the two. Unlike Westerners who view Islam the outside or Muslims who see the West from colonial lens, Aboulela occupies a unique position. As she claims, "I am considerably westernized [but] I am in this religion. It is in me" (Aboulela, 2007).

Moreover, although Aboulela takes pride in her Sudanese roots, her national identity is not based only on Sudan, as she explains, "I am Sudanese, but my mother is Egyptian, I was born in Cairo but that was only because my mother was visiting her parents. I lived in Khartoum, but every year we spent the summer months in Cairo" (Aboulela, 2002, p. 198).

With a Sudanese father and an Egyptian mother, brought up in Sudan, but born in Egypt, national identity, for a person like Aboulela, does not satisfy her sense of belonging. Aboulela's uncertain national identity leads her to prioritize her religious identity over national one. Sethi notes: "for Aboulela, a personal, religious identity provides more stability than national identity. 'I can carry [religion] with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can be easily taken away from me" (Sethi, 2005).

3.4 *Minaret*: Literary Echoes of Islam and Migration

Aboulela deeply puts Islam at the centre of her narratives. Aboulela's writings, then, tell about a world of transformation, people who emigrate from one country to another and build new transnational spaces. The author focuses, above all, on women's migrations. In one of her interviews, Aboulela stresses out the idea

it was travelling that first made me a writer. I started to write in 1999 after I had left Sudan and was living in Scotland. I was very homesick for Khartoum. People around me did not know much about Sudan or about Islam, the two things that made up my identity (2009, p. 88).

Her main characters are women, like Najwa in *Minaret* and Sammar in *The Translator*, who live by themselves in England or Scotland. Even though they arrive in Britain with their families, tragedies force them to live alone. Their lives in the West are not easy, because being a foreigner marks their daily life. This state of exile and dislocation colour

the mood of her book. The suffering of the migrant protagonist is a central theme for Aboulela. She returns several times to this subject, mapping the deep mental pain that marks the lives of many immigrants.

Reading her, it is possible to find echoes of “the suffering postcolonial subject” studied by Fanon (1962) and “the double absence” analysed by Sayad. Hallucinations and dreams characterize their time abroad. In *The Translator*, Aboulela writes, “outside Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world has swung around. Home had come here...” (Aboulela, 1999, p. 20). However, the country of exile is not all the time ugly and inhospitable. Aboulela also describes London with empathy. In the first page of *Minaret*, Najwa, says:

London is at its most beautiful in autumn. In Summer it is seedy and swollen, in winter it is overwhelmed by Christmas lights and in spring, the season of birth... Now it is at its best, now it is poised like a mature woman whose beauty is no longer fresh but still surprisingly potent (Aboulela, 2005, p. 1).

In searching for a place where her protagonists can feel at home, they are only able to find it in Islam. Aboulela presents religion as a system of life, through which characters deal with everyday life and build a new community in Europe. Aboulela, in her fiction, describes Islam in a new way; it is not the supposed immutable and fixed Islam that men and women bring in Europe from their homeland. It is something new that people find and build in the countries where they emigrate. Her characters rather find relief in Islam when facing solitude in England.

In *The Translator*, Aboulela writes, “... Hours flitting away like minutes. Days in which the only thing she could rouse herself to do was to pray the five prayers. They were the only challenge, the last touch with normality, without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of day into night” (1999, p. 16). A mosque in secular England is where her characters become more devoted to their religion.

After she loses all her family, Najwa is supported by Muslim women who are stranger to her, not by the Sudanese community. Their nationality does not matter anymore; it is Islam that brings people together. It is then in the name of Islam that the

mosque's sisters enlighten Najwa's redemption. Incidentally, Aboulela writes, "people helped her, took over her. Stranger women whom she kept calling by wrong names...They recited the Qur'an, spent the night on the couch and on the floor. She went between them thanking them, humbled by the awareness that they were not doing this for her or for Tarik, but only because they believe it was the right thing to do" (1999, p. 8-9).

This was also true for the writer herself; the women at the mosque were her social universe when she arrived in London. When interviewing her, she thanks the sisters she met at Aberdeen mosque. Saying that they: "supported me and became my new family away from home". These women who speak with different accents and have foreign names are the symbol of that 'deterritorialization' of Islam that Aboulela returns to many times in her novels.

3.4.1. Veils of Faith: The Struggle for Belonging in *Minaret*

Aboulela shares some aspects with other Muslim writers, particularly Ahdaf Soueif, such as employing themes like hybrid identities, transcultural and cross-ethnic alliances among their characters through love and romance. Aboulela's works, however, foreground the importance of Islam in shaping the experiences of her characters, an approach that sets her apart from Soueif and from the rest of the contemporary Arab Muslim women writers.

Religious identity might be located as part of the repertoire of identities that individuals inhabit alongside their national, sexual, racial, class and ethnic identities (Zine, 2007, p. 115). Aboulela explores themes of hybrid identities and transcultural relationships. However, she distinguishes herself by valorising the centrality of Islam in her characters' lives. Essentially, religious identity, as part of a broader sense of personal identity, varies greatly from person to person and can shift over time.

Although as Zine says, "being a Muslim is not simply a label divested of any associations to the religion of Islam" (2007, p. 116), not all people who have the identity label of Muslim are religiously observant. Four categories of Muslims can include: ethnic Muslims, cultural Muslims, religious Muslims and political Muslims. An ethnic

Muslim is one who considers herself Muslim because of her Muslim parents and ethnic background; ethnic Muslims are thus ethnically but not religiously oriented.

A cultural Muslim identity is one who acts and socializes according to her Muslim ethnic and cultural origins; so a cultural Muslim is also culturally but not religiously oriented. Religious Muslims are those who actively practice Islam and those who believe in specific religious ideas; they are religiously rather ethnically or culturally oriented.

Finally, political Muslims are the ones who believe in Islam, but this belief for them is mainly used for socio-political purposes (Sander, 1997, p. 187). In some cases, Muslims can even belong to more than one of these categories. The fictional work explored here, as its main character, woman, to different degrees, can be considered ethnic, cultural and especially and most importantly, religious Muslim.

Some critics, in discussing religious identity, highlight the significance of both the religious and the social designation of religious identity (Eid 2002; Zine 2007; Duderija 2007). Zine, elaborating on this model, explains that the social component of religious identity can be discursively constructed through representations and is complicated by "discontinuities, contradictions and opposing frameworks" (Zine, 2007, p. 112). The religious designation, however, is more firmly fixed by Islamic ideologies, beliefs and practices, which are mainly based on the foundational texts of Islam, especially the Qur'an.

The religious designation is more related to internal and private processes of identity formation, as this designation is also a matter of personal interpretation of Islamic belief and practices as well as the basic texts of Islam. Drawing on Abou El Fadl (2002), Barlas (2002) and Wadud (1999), Zine emphasizes that although foundational texts of Islam are limited in number, religiously oriented people do not share the same interpretation of these texts, and interpretations of these texts are "shaped and informed by the social, political, moral and gendered location of the interpreter" (Zine, 2007, p. 114).

There are multiple interpretations of Islam and multiple forms of religious designation of religious identity. Thus, both the social and religious components of

Muslim identity are partly, though not wholly, discursively constructed. Nonetheless, Muslim identity, especially its religious designation, because of its being evaluated by adherence to Muslim religious tenets and spirituality, cannot be treated as free-floating, and “there can be still be said to be certain constant references in the construction of Islamic identity” (Zine, 2007, p. 112).

Zine challenges those anti-essentialist models of construction of Muslim identity which fragment it to the extent that it is divested of spirituality and reduced to a social designation “devoid of attachment to religious practice” (p.114). Thus, Zine sees and defines Muslim identity in relation to having faith and belief in Islam, and not just as a cultural identity applicable to those who are only culturally and/or ethnically Muslim. In her explanation of Muslim identity, Zine walks the narrow line between essentialist and discursive orientations to identity and argues that:

While it is necessary to avoid the dangers of religious fundamentalism and narrow and rigid formulations of Islamic identification, we can at the same time, argue for locating the basis for an Islamic identity within the framework of spiritual beliefs and practices. This perspective does not detract from acknowledging epistemological diversity within the Islamic tradition, yet does locate Islamic identity within its spiritual grounding ... I believe that it is possible to honour the diversity of the ways in which Islam is practiced and lived without divesting the notion of Islamic identity from its grounding in a broad spiritual framework (Zine 2007, p. 116).

Zine's model of Muslim identity formation, significant to the argument developed in the present. It might be noticed that within the frame of post-positivist realism and in relation to their idea of the epistemic component of identity, having the identity of Muslim can give Muslim people some specific knowledge about the world. Henceforth, being religiously oriented according to Zine, equips Muslim women, for instance, with “an alternative faith-centered epistemology that speaks to the way Muslim women who actively align with their faith see the world and their place within it” (Zine, 2004, p. 181).

However, this knowledge of the world is not singular because competing discourses and ideologies intervene in people's interpretations of the world. And more importantly because "Muslim women occupy a variety of ideological, sectarian and discursive spaces within the broad parameters of Islamic tradition" (p, 181). Differently said, although Zine encourages a faith-centred identity, she also stresses the point that seeing the world from a religious perspective is not enough, instead there are other parameters that should not be overlooked.

3.4.2. Muslim Identity in *Minaret*: Pathways to Empowerment

Aboulela's fiction, in many ways, suggests that Muslim identity can be central to Muslim women's lives acting as a form of consciousness for them, affecting all aspects of their lives and essential for their sense of well-being. Such representations of Muslim identity are especially opposed to those biased Western depictions of Muslim identity, particularly for women, as imposed on them and Muslim life as one from which these women wish to escape.

Aboulela's works, in showing the rootedness of religion in the lives of her Muslim characters, thus fill a gap in Western representations of Muslim women. In view of this, unlike other Muslim women writers who shape Islam as only a cultural attribute, Aboulela has more sharpened Islam as a faith, especially for women. In her interview with *Chambre*, Leila Aboulela stressed this idea:

There is Kamila Shamise, I read all of her novels; Ahdaf Soueif, I have read all her novels as well. But many of these writers prefer to be considered nationally, as a Pakistani writer or Egyptian writer. I feel an affinity to them, except that may be in my books the Muslim ingredient is a bit more prominent. I do feel like them: I'm a Sudanese writer; they're Pakistani, Egyptian and so on. But for me, instead of having Islam as part of culture, I'm consciously presenting it as a faith. There are many Muslim writers and they're writing different sorts of Muslim novels, but may be in my case this religious element is heightened (2011, p. 307).

Aboulela presents Muslim women as the main characters in most of her novels, characters who show an ever-present awareness and visibility of their religious identity,

which particularly culminates in their religious faith. Her characters though not denying their nationality and ethnicity as she indicates, "I am interested in going deep, not just looking at 'Muslim' as a culture or political identity but something close to the centre, something that transcends but doesn't deny gender, nationality, class and race" (Larsen, 2002, p. 250), they rather tend to identify themselves with Islam, indicating that geographical specificity is less central to her vision than a faith-based identity

In another occasion, Aboulela refers to the same point saying that: "I'm interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith" (Eissa, 2005, p. 3). Thus, at times, in describing the conditions of Aboulela's characters, the term religious consciousness might be more appropriate than religious identity.

The term 'religious consciousness', in the description of Aboulela's fiction, was first used by Geoffrey Nash (2002). In Nash's criticism, the term religious consciousness is interchangeably used with religious or Muslim identity when discussing the identities of the devoted Muslim characters. Such usage might also be justified considering the fact that Aboulela's narratives mainly explore the principal characters' sense of private self-subjugating to Islamic dictations. Her characters are then not influenced by the public external views of others. They are more tied to their inner sphere rather than the social component of the Muslim identity of the characters.

Related to that, Aboulela explains that her characters are "ordinary Muslims trying to practice their faith in difficult circumstances and in a society ...unsympathetic to religion" (Chamber, 2011, p. 310). The author also explains that she aims to "move away from myself, to touch something common, universal...lifted up from the ordinary" (Chamber, 2011, p. 310). Relevant here is her belief that "for a Muslim, Shari'ah is something personal, something that does not need anyone else to implement it" (Chamber, 2009, p. 97).

Aboulela's fiction, by the same token, depicts the protagonists' religious states of mind and its pervasiveness in their daily lives. *Minaret* (2005), along with the writer's other narratives, portrays how Islam is firmly ingrained in the life of the main character Najwa, and how religious convictions significantly affect her world view and her way

of life in the real world. Indeed, the narrative does not explain in detail the peculiarities of Muslim faith but depicts them as private and innate parts of a Muslim woman's life.

McEwan (2011) refers to how the protagonist of *The Translator* would sit for 'tasbih' after prayer or how she would switch off the light when she was looking out so as not to be seen by men or how she would not put on the perfume, a gift from Rae, in public. McEwan then comments that Aboulela "merely touched upon these peculiarities without explanation or reference to their significance in Islamic doctrines, indirectly elucidating a lifestyle naturally ingrained in the hero" (McEwan, 2001, p. 13).

Aboulela's characters might be interpreted in terms of 'neo-Islamic identity' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 76) which emphasizes an individual religiosity that displaces ethnicity and culture. For Olivier Roy (2004), this is a consequence of deterritorialization: Muslim identity "has to express itself explicitly in a non-Muslim or Western context. The construction of a 'deculturalized' Islam...can...fit with every culture, or, more especially, could be defined beyond the very notion of culture" (p. 23-24).

In terms of the horizon of expectation, Asad explains that the *ummatu-l-muslimatu* (ummah) "is neither limited nor sovereign, for unlike Arab nationalism's notion of *al-umma al-arabiya*, it can and eventually embraces all humanity" (Asad 2003, p. 197-8). Whilst Aboulela's protagonists claim a British identity, they privilege a supra-national space of belonging and thereby challenge the frame, rather than merely the content, (as Stein suggests) of the nation.

Najwa's Muslim identity in *Minaret* is represented as similar to Sammar's, as strong and well-encompassing in such a way that it affects all aspects of her life. In depicting how religious consciousness is ever-present and pervasive for Najwa, Aboulela represents Najwa as reciting the verses of the Qur'an and Muslim prayers in different instances: when she is happy about something she says Alhamdulillah, when she wants to wish for something she says insha'Allah (Aboulela, 2005, p. 74).

Minaret also emphasize the centrality of Muslim identity in the main characters' lives through depicting how religious logic or system of cause and effect governs their lives. The writer describes fiction that reflects Islamic logic as "fictional worlds where cause and effect are governed by Muslim rather than non-Muslims rational" (Larson,

2002, p. 4). Najwa, like Sammar, is characterized in such a way that modern reason is not the supreme rule, and it is God's will that determines everything.

In this way, the narratives portray Muslim identity as central to their lives and well-being. As Ferial Ghazoul puts it, there is "a certain narrative logic in Aboulela's fiction where faith and rituals become moving modes of living" (2001, p. 1). The writer then emphasizes the visibility of religious identity through depicting how religious logic or system governs the lives of her characters. Such representations of characters in the narratives, thinking and feeling and the way they are always aware of their identity as Muslims.

Most of Aboulela's fictional project is based on three types of characters. They offset practicing Muslims, born-again Muslims referred to as "reverts" as they are called in one of her short stories (Aboulela, 2001, p. 64), and European converts to Islam who appear in several narratives. Reverts like Najwa in *Minaret*, are born Muslim characters but discover religious faith when they leave their homelands and settle in the West.

The group of converts is especially important to Aboulela and appears to be the focus of her literary project in order to emphasize supra-national and multi-ethnic Islamic identity. The convert, then, began a new life with a clean state and acquires a new identity, the reason that many converts assume new names: Aicha in "Barbie in the Mosque", Ruqiyya in "Majed", and Ali in *Minaret*. This idea is apparent in Aboulela's second novel *Minaret*, when Tamer, whose father is Sudanese, tells Najwa about his life. A conversation that ends by claiming Muslim identity from both of them; Tamer as 'convert' and Najwa as a 'revert':

'Do you feel you're Sudanese?' I ask him.

He shrugs. 'My mother is Egyptian. I've lived everywhere except Sudan: in Oman, Cairo, here. My education is Western and that makes me feel Western. My English is stronger than my Arabic. So I guess, no, I don't feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity. What about you?'

I talk slowly. 'I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I've changed. And now, like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim (Aboulela, 2005, p. 110).

In Minaret, Muslim identity and religious consciousness are the primary aspect of self-definition, often minimizing national and cultural affiliations. At times, these minor identities are even portrayed as irrelevant. In some episodes in the novel, Aboulela showcases this view while contrasting certain characters' position on the religious premise. Aboulela mainly explores this view when Najwa juxtaposes Anwar; a Marxist from Sudan who rejects all forms of religious beliefs as backward, and Ali; a British convert who left Christianity behind since he considers it as devoid. In this case, Najwa murmurs:

Ali intrigued me. I had got the impression from Anwar that the English were all secular and liberal. Ali was nothing like that, yet he was completely English and had never set foot outside Britain. When I got to know Wafaa better, she told about his conversion, how he used to be a devout Christian and felt the Church was not strict enough for him...He was not very bright but I was touched by his patience with the children, the way he took on life. I thought of Anwar and Ali, how they would never meet, how the existence of one undermined the other... I knew Anwar well enough... He believed it was backward to have faith (Aboulela, 2005, p. 241).

In Aboulela's fiction, characters who are newly converted to Islam are sometimes depicted as more honest or religiously committed than those born as Muslims. Even if these converts are not idealized and indeed they are struggling with emotional vulnerability or even lacking intellectual depth, still can be considered as good example of practicing Muslims. This narrative dynamic is articulated through Anwar's observation about Najwa's sympathetic admiration for converts, telling him:

It's interesting about converts isn't?

What would make a Westerner become a Muslim?

He made a face.

I think they are brave.

You say that because as Muslims our self-esteem is so low that we're desperate for approval. And what greater stamp of approval can there be than a white man's?

He had fixed ideas about religion (Aboulela, 2005, p. 159).

Through their discussion, Najwa finds converts to Islam admirable, but Anwar sees this as a reflection of Muslim low esteem. As a politically engaged character, Anwar thinks that, for Muslims, the conversion of a white Westerner is the last sign of approval because of the imbalanced power dynamics. His rigid views on religion highly contrasts with Najwa's tolerance to the issue. His position may highlight a tension in how Muslims might struggle with feelings of inferiority and the need for external self-affirmation in a postcolonial world.

3.5 *Minaret*: A Journey to Borderless Faith in Secular Europe

As a member of the first generation of Muslim immigrants in Britain, Aboulela explores key common themes in immigrant fiction, notably nostalgia and the challenges of cultural assimilation. Geoffrey Nash, Aboulela's novels work "through many of the usual exile's routine" (Nash, 2002, p. 30). Through her narratives, Aboulela frequently portrays the West as ironically secular, where devout characters are often perceived as opposing Western values. Aboulela often presents these cultural tensions as often framed within private and domestic spheres.

In the novel under analysis, *Minaret*, the writer represents her protagonist, Najwa, as a young woman who has been exposed to various types of freedom both in Egypt and London. Like Asya as discussed in the previous chapter, Najwa inhabits a Westernized socio-cultural context where she can easily disregard religious values without facing judgment or accusation.

The themes of family, faith and cultural conflict are explored again in *Minaret*. Najwa, also the narrator of the novel, a Sudanese woman raised in a secular, wealthy and westernized family, finds strength and solace in Islam when political upheaval and exile tear her family apart and strip her of material comfort. The protagonist was used to a liberal life that is separated from religious mores.

Back in Khartoum, Najwa is the privileged secular elite daughter of a high post government official and a modest mother who used to be a housemaid working in the houses of rich Sudanese people migrated to the UK. At many rubrics, Najwa juxtaposes her prestigious Westernized life with other students from lower social classes, and who are more attached to their mother culture and religion. Najwa describes that she:

...had a happy life. My father and mother loved me and were always generous. In summer we went for holidays in Alexandria, Geneva and London. There was nothing that I didn't have, couldn't have. No dreams corroded in rust, no buried desires. And yet, sometimes, I would remember pain like a wound that had healed, sadness like a forgotten dream (2005, p. 15).

In *Minaret*, the significance of religious identity in the well-being of the Muslim character and the triumph for a devout life over a secular life have been suggested. In this novel, religious identity finds increasing prominence for the protagonist Najwa in the course of the novel. The narrative emphasizes that the protagonist's experiences with the religious world are necessarily better.

According to Choudhury, although in a secularized world religion is treated like a free lifestyle choice, in *Minaret* "we are invited to consider religion ... more like a necessity" (2005, p. 6). In such stories, Aboulela emphasizes the important role that Islam plays in providing meaning to her characters, showcasing how religious faith can act as a guiding mindset and transform them to more mature and responsible individuals.

Similarly, in *The Translator*, the writer contrasts Dina's disconnected upbringing with the sense of belonging she finds through Kassim, a half Scottish, half Arab Muslim who is reconsidering his faith. His daily practice of Islam offers Dina a connection to family and tradition that she has never experienced before. Despite her Muslim heritage, Dina feels alienated from religious rituals at first, but through Kassim's guidance, she begins to reconsider faith as an integral part of both her life and social background.

The plot develops as Najwa reaches religious spirituality. The female protagonist in *Minaret* has not been a devout Muslim all her life, and her transformation to a pious person only happens within the space of the narrative. Throughout *Minaret* Najwa is born twice. The first part of the novel is set between 1984 and 1985 in Khartoum. In the years that precede the political coup; that radically changes Najwa's family life; the

protagonist enrolled a Western life style fuelled by frequent holidays in London and parties at Khartoum American club. Once at night in the club with her brother Omar and her friend Randa, Najwa reflects:

The party at the American club was in full swing when Omar and I arrived. We talked into the tease of red and blue disco lights and the Gap Band's 'Say Oops Upside Your Head' ... I did not have to wait for long. One of Omar's friends asked me to dance and, leaving Randa, we made our way to the centre of the dance floor. White smoke rose up from the floor just like in Saturday Night Fever. I twirled around so that my earrings swayed and the arms of the others dancers brushed against mine (Aboulela, 2005, p. 23-25).

As her parents, Najwa was not tied to Islam and occasionally practices some major rituals doing charity work and fasting. She fasts in Ramadan but not praying regularly. Even fasting is a practical way to lose some weight for having the needed shape to her Westernized style of wearing.

We heard the dawn azan as we turned into our house. The guard got up from where he was sleeping on the ground and opened the gate for us. The sound of the azan, the words and the way the word sounded went inside me, it passed through the smell in the car, it passed through the fun I had at the disco and it went to a place I didn't know existed. A hollow place. A darkness that would suck me in and finish me. I parked the car and the guard closed the gate behind us. He didn't go back to sleep... The night tight, no coolness, no flow. Still I could hear another mosque echoing the words, tapping at the sluggishness in me... The servants stirred and, from the back of the house I heard the sound of gushing water, someone spitting, a sneeze ... They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't (Aboulela, 2005, p. 31-32).

Henceforth, the protagonist Najwa is emblematic of this transitive spiritual journey from secularism to devout religiosity. Initially in London, Najwa was attached to her religion. In Sudan, she was also raised in a secular socio-cultural milieu. However, her life changed after she was engaged in a sexual intercourse with her friend Anwar who is

religiously detached too. The adultery awakens her Islamic spirituality and makes her regret the hallow life she enrolled in.

In this respect, Wail Hassan adds that Aboulela intentionally presents Najwa as a devoted Muslim practitioner who embraces religious rituals as a way of life (2011, p. 192). The onset scene that shows the way Najwa first feels that spiritual relief takes place at Regent's Park. In *Minaret* the Regent's Park is presented like a mosque. This mosque gathers all the practitioners of Islam who share similar spiritual thoughts.

In addition to that, Aboulela presents the mosque as a place that combines Islam, education and intelligence. Yousef Awad (2012) tends to declare that the mosque is the place where spiritual characters enlighten their minds and spirits along the way in their spiritual journey in the host non-religious home, and it helps them cure their feelings of loss and instability (p. 153-55).

Najwa's religious awakening was not temporary, it is driven by everyday practices and by the sense of belonging offered by the community of Muslims, particularly Muslim women. Through the use of free indirect discourse and providing access to Najwa's "preverbal perceptions" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 114), her conversion to religious faith came to her in an epiphany. Committing that sin then leads to Najwa's holy contemplation. Reflecting on her status quo, Najwa enters in a monologue in which she demonstrates how much Islamic faith can converge people to be more mature and responsible. Immediately after adultery with Anwar, Najwa comments:

Who would care if I became pregnant, who would be scandalized? Aunty Eva, Anwar's flat mates. Omar would never know unless I wrote to him. Uncle Saleh was across the world. A few years back, getting pregnant would have shocked Khartoum society, given my father a heart attack, dealt a blow to my mother's marriage, and mild, modern Omar, instead of beating me, would have called me a slut. And now nothing, on one. This empty space was called freedom (Aboulela 2005, p. 174-5).

The passage obviously illustrates how Najwa's religious faith beginning to guide her life even in the absence of social control or judgment. It might be argued that Aboulela in her fiction focuses on three issues in relation to Islam that demonstrate living a devout

life as an advantage for its Muslim protagonists especially in relation to the time when Najwa, for instance, was not mindful of her religion: firstly, the feeling of connection to Allah which devotion to Islam creates; secondly, the sense of belonging to the community of believers that Muslims can enjoy; and thirdly, the structure and order that practicing Islam can give to Muslims' lives.

Thus in free indirect discourse, there may be "the co-presence of two voices, the narrator's voice and a character's pre-verbal perception or feeling" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, p. 111). Free indirect discourse can have different thematic functions within the fictional texts. It is a medium for stream of consciousness because of its "capacity to reproduce the idiolect of a character's speech or thought ... within the narrator's reporting language," and finally it assists the reader "in reconstructing the implied author's attitude toward the character (s) involved" (p. 113-114).

Consequently, Najwa's reflections through the vehicle of stream of consciousness underline a moment of identity recognition, where traditional limitations are no longer present. Yet, rather than celebrating this absence as feminist liberations, Najwa labels it as empty space., suggesting a lasting grief for the sin she has done. Significantly, the religious and the sacred are never ironized in Aboulela's fiction; indeed, they are always praised. As Hassan explains,

In Aboulela's episteme of faith, there is neither room nor use of irony. In matters of faith, the faithful lack a sense of irony, because irony identifies a discrepancy or a lack that diminishes the status of its object. By contrast, faith elevates and exalts (2008, p. 311).

Such moment highlights the novel's main theme. Najwa's transformation from a non-practicing to a devout Muslim creates a compelling space for contrasting secular freedom with religious rituals. Ultimately Najwa finds renewed meaning of self-respect and inner peace through adherence to Islamic spirituality. Najwa has long yearned for a stable and meaningful life, but always feels unable to attain it. Contrary to a past marked by loss, exile, and moral confusion, her devotion refers to structure and discipline that help her navigate previous disconnection and guilt. As Choudhury puts it:

Najwa begins to head toward the world she has always yearned for but never felt herself able to reach out to: the ordered way of life laid by the Qur'an. The prospect of 'being safe with God' gives her a sense of direction and calm" (2005, p. 5).

Although Najwa was born as a Muslim girl in Sudan, it is only in London that she begins to hang on to her religion. Aboulela even presents Najwa as a character; when fuelled by Islamic faith, who is able to bypass the traumatic feelings of loneliness, loss and isolation (Canpolat, 2016, p. 226). The narrative also implies that the protagonist also prefers a religious over a secular way of life because through religious structure and rituals she finds stability. Her strong attachment to Islamic faith even fills the empty place of family's support, love, and inclusion.

In this way, the narrative embraces Islam-centred lifestyle and experience, and denaturalize secular modes of life for both Muslim and non-Muslim people. In *Minaret*, Najwa's sense of peace and serenity is linked to her religious devotion, which provides comfort during her most critical moments by reinforcing her belief in Allah's constant presence and mercy. Including her inner voice through free indirect epiphanies allows the novel to subtly reflect the author's empathy toward her protagonist, and further emphasizing her deep spiritual connection to her faith. Whenever Najwa is alone or regretting her sins and mistakes, she silently reports:

The mercy of Allah is an ocean. Our sins are a lump of clay clenched between the beak of pigeon. The pigeon is perched on the branch of a tree at the edge of that ocean. It only has to open its beak (2005, p. 4).

This is one of the powerful inner discourses that tranquilizes Najwa in her most difficult moments. Aboulela's religious characters demonstrate empathy and openness, but these qualities are consistently portrayed only if they adhere to Islamic faith. As Wail Hassan (2011) observes in *Minaret*, Islam empowers the characters rendering them more active and resilient. Across her narratives, Aboulela affirms the fulfilment found in a devout Muslim while challenging secular life. She highlights how a faith-based life can offer emotional and psychological well-being of her women characters.

3.6 Aboulela's Religious Paradigm Versus Islamic Feminism

Over the last few decades, literary critical works in recent years have examined literary creation of Muslim women, analysing them especially from a feminist perspective. Aboulela by taking Islam as a starting point in her fiction, and more strikingly from a female character, might give an impression to many readers that Aboulela is involved in a feminist literary project. To trace this difference, together from Aboulela's literary project and the approach tackled in this work, it is probably compulsory to briefly bring into hands some of the critical volumes on literary writings by Muslim women.

A landmark publication in the field published in English is *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist writing* (1990), edited by Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke. The contributions which are categorized under three main headings of 'Awareness', 'Rejection' and 'Activism' to articulate how Arab and Muslim women confront injustice, subvert patriarchal norms, and participate in feminist activism to make a difference in their private and public conditions. Relevant to that, Margot Badran (2002) defines Islamic feminism as:

It is a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. Islamic feminism, which derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran, seeks rights and justice for women, and for men, in the totality of their existence ... the basic argument of Islamic feminism is that the Quran affirms the principle of equality of all human beings but that the practice of equality of women and men ... has been impeded or subverted by patriarchal ideas ... and practices (n. p).

The edition of (2004), adds a new section, 'Transition', which includes feminist writings by Muslim women from 1990 onwards. This work is an example of critical works in which the 'Muslim woman' is taken as meaning a woman from a Muslim background and culture; and in which concern for the religious aspect of the Muslim women fades, perhaps, next to the predominantly feminist concerns of the authors and editors. Despite its breadth, the anthology continues to treat the religious identity of its selected narratives and discourse as minor to mainstream feminist engagement

Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature (2001) by Miriam Cooke offers a more targeted focus. Miriam Cook examines the intersection of literature and activism, focusing on writers who consciously engage with Islamic

identity to develop a gendered investigation. Studying figures like Zaynab al-Ghazali and Nawal el Saadawi, Cook tends to investigate fiction and memoirs of contemporary Islamic feminist. Also, she examines how these women challenge their being left from the history, exile, emigration and religion.

Claiming Islam as their identity and use Islam as a tool of self-empowerment, they contest indigenous male authority in the interpretation of Islamic doctrine and colonial racist discourses about Muslim women. Through their literary and political contributions, these writers contest both patriarchal religious interpretations and Orientalist constructions of the "oppressed Muslim woman." Cook's survey, therefore, affirms the legitimacy of Islamic feminism as a space for agency rooted in religious faith.

Other noticeable contributions include *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (2006) by Suzanne Gauch who focuses on writers from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. The latter is particularly significant for articulating a broad entity of Muslim women's voices. It reveals a more complex, sometimes contradictory relationship with Islam. Sometimes some contributors critique the hijab, while others see it as empowering. Some critics perceive Islam as peripheral, however others, see it as central. Yet all are included under the emphasis of Muslim women as a cultural rather than spiritual identities.

In this work, which limits its scope to North African Muslim writers, the emphasis is on the significant role of these writers in combating the stereotypes about North African Muslim women. Another anthology of the works of Muslim women; *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out* (2005) by Fawzia Afzal-Khan. The anthology seeks to give voice to Muslim women, engage American Muslim women writers in a conversation and separate Islam from oppression of women and terrorism.

However, the most striking point about the collection is the diversity of the voices of Muslim women. It contains, for example, both works by and about women criticize hijab and those who see it as a defining aspect of their identity; both works by women who think of Islam as only "one spoke in the wheel of their lives" and women who think of Islam as defining all aspects of their lives. (Afzal-Khan 2005: 1). In this collection,

commitment to Islam is not the concern of all the authors who, nevertheless, are all identified as Muslim because they are from Muslim backgrounds.

These volumes have been endeavoured to show how literary texts by Muslim women writers, in their own vernaculars or in European languages, can subvert Western stereotypes about them and challenge indigenous patriarchal practices, how feminist activism through literature has grown among Muslim women intellectuals.

Aboulela's fiction diverges from many of these works in her portrayal of Islam not merely as background or cultural context, but as a sustaining worldview. Her characters, particularly women are often shown in the midst of internal or external struggles, but their spiritual consciousness remains central to the interpretations of these conflicts. This emphasis on spiritual faith distinguishes her approach from the dominant feminist modes of the anthologies discussed so far.

On that basis, in Aboulela's *Minaret*, Najwa's spiritual journey provides a compelling lens through which the exploration of the divergence between Aboulela's literary paradigm and the other movement of Islamic feminism. Najwa is not depicted as an Islamist feminist in the activist and intellectual sense. Islamic feminism often engages in a process of reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses, challenging male-dominated religious authority, and advocating for religious institutional reforms.

On the contrary, Aboulela portrays her protagonist Najwa as more quiet and intimate to faith; a character who is detached from resistance but in personal spiritual revelation and devotional practice. Consider the reaction of Najwa to Anwar, the only character who comes close to expressing feminist views. He accuses her of being "brainwashed ... Arab society is hypocritical ... with double standards for men and women" (Aboulela 2005: 175). She can confirm that from her own experience, but her unspoken response might be that men and women are not equal.

Indeed, she spends much of the story retreating from the privileges of her former secular and Westernized life in Khartoum and London. When he condemns religion as backward and fundamentalists as responsible for the Sudanese civil war, human rights violations, the suppression for free speech and terrorism, she is confused:

But that is exactly where I got lost. I did not want to look at these big things because they overwhelmed me. I wanted me, my feelings and dreams, my fear of illness, old age and ugliness, my guilt when I was with him. It wasn't fundamentalists who killed my father, it wasn't fundamentalists who gave my brother drugs ... These men Anwar condemned as narrow-minded and bigoted, men like Ali, were tender and protective with their wives. Anwar was clever but he could never be tender and protective. Once I told him that Kamal had come up behind me in the kitchen, pressed against me quickly pretending it was an accident. All he said was, "You're sophisticated enough to deal with this, Najwa. Don't make a big thing out of it" (Aboulela, 2005, p. 241-42).

Najwa, like other female characters in Aboulela's narratives as a Muslim woman, to some extent, is not stereotypically represented. However, she is at the same time not characterized as a confident and an independent woman, one of the ideals of feminism. Significantly, the repudiation of freedom occurs in narratives contexts dealing with women and gender.

In the case of *Minaret*, Najwa rejects Western feminists' norms. Gender equality is out of the question; men are supposed to be protective of women, and women want and expect to be protected by men. For that reason, Najwa, is attracted by Tamer though he is younger than her. Despite his age, Najwa feels more secured with a husband who will protect her from harmful freedom in the West. Paradoxically, Najwa describes the man she can admire:

When I think of a man I admire, he would have to know more than me, be older than me. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to look up to him. And you can't marry a man you don't look up to. Otherwise how you can listen to him or let him guide you?" characteristically, Najwa cannot respond: "I don't have anything to say. I stare down at my hands, my warped self and distorted desires. I would like to be his family's concubine, like something out of *The Arabian Nights*, with lifelong security and a sense of belonging. But I must settle for freedom in this modern time" (Aboulela, 2005, p.215).

In this context, freedom is heavily problematized. It is associated with human desire, falling back to earth, and destruction. In other words, the novel constructs a binary between spiritual submission represented by the husband, and a dangerous private freedom that leads to ruin like Najwa's adultery with Anwar.

And this, however, does not appear to be the right place to tackle the complex question of women's rights in Islam, or the notion of Islamic feminism. While many Muslim writers have developed various forms of feminism, Aboulela's version of Islam, can even be read as re-establishing male supremacy. conversely, Najwa and Sammar's agency in both novels is rather limited and subtle.

Critics often misinterpret their lack of active rebellion as passivity and regression. After her family's traumatic fall, Najwa gradually finds inclusiveness not in liberationist discourse but in religious surrender. Najwa's independence decision to wear the hijab, for instance, is not framed as a political act or feminist reclaiming of religious symbol, as it is often the case with Islamic feminist texts. For example, Najwa is deeply dedicated when saying, "I prayed five prayers on time, I wore the scarf. I fasted. I was not lonely anymore. I was not unhappy. I found what I had lost, what I had never really had" (p. 186).

In *The Translator*, the way Sammar's constant reference to gender roles is in many ways considered as outdated and backward from a Western perspective. In the novel, the heroine's desire for masculine companionship and tenderness becomes a partial allegory for what is explicitly stated – a psychological need for social peace. This is culminated in Sammar's desire for a man who will guide and instruct her and her desperate desire to be remarried, which leads even to her contemplation of polygamy.

Sammar, shortly after the death of her husband, accepts to be the third youngest wife of Ahmad Ali Yasseen, a man nearly three times her age: "I want to get married, I need a focus in my life" (Aboulela 1999: 28). Ironically, Sammar is prevented from marrying Yasseen by her aunt after a long quarrel between them:

Nine months have not yet passed, you want to get married again ... and to whom?
A semi- illiterate with two wives and children your age. I'll never give permission

for something like this. From what sort of clay you have been made of? Explain to me. Explain to me what you think you're going to do ... An educated girl like you, you know English ... you can support yourself and your son, you don't need marriage. What do you need it for? ... 'He's religious,' Sammar had choked the words, 'he feels a duty towards widows ...' He can take his religiousness and build a mosque but keep away from us. In the past, widows needed protection, life is different now. She had wanted to say something in reply but the words stuck in her throat like dough (Aboulela, 1999, p. 23-13).

The aunt's attitude who wants Sammar to work and support her son instead of remarrying, to a certain degree, might be seen as a symbol of a modernity which is hostile to faith. Nevertheless, her aunt's objection illuminates an aspect of Sammar's and other immigrants' brand of conservatism. In Sammar's desperate attempt to find a new companion for her life who can only be another husband, a British-educated woman clings to a notion of tradition that is made up of immigrant nostalgia.

These moments are not considered as regression for the protagonists, instead they represent a deeply personal transformation. The protagonist's transitive spiritual growth stands at the heart of the writer's religious paradigm where faith is not only symbolic, but existentially redemptive. Najwa's religiosity in particular, more than that of Sammar, becomes the anchor of her identity.

Such divergent religious representations, invite readers and critics to reconsider their readings. Najwa's triumph is not about speaking or challenging patriarchy through reinterpretation. Her journey, is instead, about accepting divine will and embracing a modest devotional life. Herein, Aboulela's narratives may even resonates an ethos that aligns more with classical Sufi literature than with Islamic feminism.

The underlining nuance between Aboulela and those Muslim women writers analysed in those volumes, culminates in the case of writing from an Islamic background, Aboulela's narratives is interested in a more expansive version of Islam, here Islam as integral to Muslim women's identities and attaches significance to the perspectives of devoutly Muslim women. This appears to be, if may say, close to Zine's definition of a faith-centred feminism:

The critical faith-centred perspective attends to the salience of faith and spirituality in framing the worldviews, beliefs and practices of faith-centred people and accepts this as a valid way of negotiating and understanding of notions of community, selfhood, gender, identity and feminist engagement and praxis (Zine, 2004, p.182).

Hereby, Aboulela's fiction is said to share with Islamic feminism an epistemology which acknowledges Muslim women's possible attachments to an alignment with their faith. However, fighting for the rights of Muslim women through a return to the Qur'an and reinterpretation of the Qur'anic verses in relation to women, an important concern of Islamic feminism¹⁰, does not apply to the methodology of Aboulela's writings.

Another underlining feature of Aboulela's aesthetics is the absence of a strong political or activist orientation in Najwa's adventure, while Islamic feminist narratives often portray the protagonist as an agent of social or political resistance, *Minaret* keeps its target tightly on the personal and the spiritual growth. Conversely, Najwa's development occurs in domestic and religious spaces like the mosque and prayer mat. She chooses at the end of the story not to fight to engage with Tamer even though the opportunity exists. She chooses Allah, "What I have now is a shelter, a corner to pray, a way of life that is precious. I don't want to be shaken" (p. 224).

This moment is decisive because Najwa prefers not to adhere to a modern feminist sense, choosing to prioritize her relationship with Allah above all. Acting with serenity and stillness marks a clear deviation from the feminist activism and rebellious engagement found in the works of writers like Nawal el Saadawi who takes Islam as a field of critical endeavour.

While Aboulela's narratives are stories about Muslim women that deeply subvert many Western stereotypes about passivity and oppression, they cannot easily categorize within Islamic feminism frameworks. Her religious paradigm does not seek to reform

¹⁰. For a more detailed study of Islamic feminism see, for example, Yamani (1996) or Majid (2002).

Islam but to reframe how readers, especially mainstream Western readers, perceive and understand Muslim women's faith as a source of identity's resilience.

As such, *Minaret* offers a faith-based narrative that asks for esteemed respect not only for Muslim women's struggles, but for their spiritual preferences. In this way, Aboulela expands the horizon of Arab Muslim British literature by offering an alternative paradigm to both Western liberal feminism and Arab/Islamic feminism. An approach that is deeply rooted in private introspective form of faith-centred female subjectivity.

3.7 Religious Faith as a Third Space of Negotiation

As the story unfolds, the protagonist Najwa starts by narrating her present life conditions, moving back to her life in Khartoum, and describing the turmoil phase when her family and she find themselves in the need of leaving home as exiled. Her journey is defined by displacement, alienation, modernity, and religious faith. After having a fancy lifestyle, Najwa's exile marks the destruction of both her family and her own self as a lonely girl in London. Far from home, Najwa works as a housemaid for an upper-class Egyptian family after she suffers from financial crisis.

In the house of her employer Lamyia and her mother Doctora Zeinab, Najwa finds herself oscillating between a privileged secular past and downgraded but more defined religious present. This takes place in part two of the novel, entitled as London, 2003 where she found a certain spiritual comfort that becomes to define her identity. As other postcolonial texts, *Minaret* focuses on travel and migration from the homeland to the West or the colonizer's land. A well-established space for leading to the process of cultural hybridity, as Ella Shohat (1999) explains:

Postcolonial theory has privileged the figure of the traveller, the diasporic, the hybrid, the exile as a destabilizer or fixed centres. Since the very definition of house, home, and homeland requires a boundary, whether that is a fence, a wall, or a border, the metaphors of fluidity in diaspora and postcolonial discourses express the critique of a fixed notion of identity. If the concept of the third world was about generating an intellectual and political home for colonized nations, the postcolonial, I would argue, is about generating a home for displacements in the

wake of such decolonization. And while the third worldist discourse suppressed diversity, conflicts, and “minority” perspectives within “the nation” to chart a homogenous anti-colonial master narrative, the postcolonial has tended to privilege diasporic, migrant, nomadic identities, where access to power among those wandering, and their relation to their nation state of origin and destination, have been obscured (p. 255).

In her two first novels and in her collection of short stories *Coloured Lights*, Aboulela portrays characters, mainly female, as displacing from their homeland to London and Aberdeen. There, her characters start to dwell as strangers and even long for their homeland Sudan. The protagonists' alienation is then, to the greatest extent, a consequence of migration.

Coloured Lights opens with the story of the Sudanese narrator, working in London on a temporary basis for the BBC World Service, reflecting on her dwelling separation from her husband, who works in Kuwait, and from her daughters, who remained in Khartoum with her parents. Indeed, the narrative mirrors Aboulela's personal account with migration, displacement, and alienation. At the age of seventeen, Aboulela travelled to London for owning her Master degree, and later in 1999 she moves to Aberdeen as her husband took his job there.

Often, her narratives back and forth visiting Sudan features several of the stories as “It seemed that the fate of our generation is separation, from our country or our family. We are ready to go anywhere in search of the work we cannot find at home” (Aboulela, 2001, p. 2). While economic hardship and political upheaval in Sudan and other African countries drive Aboulela's characters across the globe, the sense of rootlessness and discontinuity is compounded by a conflict of values.

In view of this, Aboulela decides to articulate a divergent hybrid ground between the East and West that culminates in religiosity that would be the Najwa's relief and support inside her alienation from home. Indeed, Aboulela offers a solution to the migrant's isolation and alienation where Najwa “seeks an actualization of home in Islam, and is thus caught in the absolute as it dissolves ambivalence in favour of the discourse of faith (Steiner, 2008, p. 15).

As the narrator in the story, Najwa showcases her anxiety in the hook of the story as "I have come down in the world, I've slid to a place where the ceiling is low and there isn't much room to move" (2005, p. 1). Even Anwar with whom she feels, to a certain degree, a sense of belonging when they used to meet in his flat, disjointed her by cancelling her hope to get married to him. Aboulela metaphorically reflects on the West/East divide through the portrayal of an existential dichotomy between devout religious and non-religious fictional characters.

In *Minaret*, this binary leads interior and external psychological, social, and cultural conflicts. struggles intensified as Najwa enrolls her spiritual journey from religiously reluctant to a more practicing and devout person. In addition to that, Najwa experienced traumatic instances because of the non-religious characters like: Anwar, Lamya, and even her brother Omar. In this context, Najwa begins her disruption with Otherness. Otherness, however, is not merely done because of the alienated West but her new discovery of Islam.

In part ten of the novel, an instance of Najwa's fragmentation and dislocation with Islam occurs when she starts regularly having her sessions of Tajweed with her friend Shahinez. In the middle of discussing religious issues with sisters in the mosque, Najwa feels bewildered and speechless in front of more advanced and determined participations:

It being a Monday, I have my Qur'an Tajweed class at the mosque... Um Waleed is a qualified teacher, with a degree in Sharia Law. Many of the sisters say that her other classes on Law and History are more interesting – generate a lot of discussion and the sisters, especially the young British-Born ones and the converts, like to discuss and give their opinions. But I become fragmented and deflated in discussions; I never know which point of view I support. I find myself agreeing with whoever is speaking or with the one I like best. And I become anxious... (Aboulela, 2005, p. 74-79).

Beyond Najwa's controversial manifestations, she keeps on struggling to know and become what she intends as more determined by faith and devotion. Back in Khartoum, Najwa conversely faced isolation and Otherness as a westernized girl from the upper-

class. This liminal feeling was also common in her homeland when she had the luxurious lifestyle; when she used to drive her way to University by car. Henceforth, both Sudan and London are political refuges while Islam is becoming her third space of negotiation. By the end of Tajweed class, Najwa expresses her recovery in this hybrid space as; "After the class, I have a new energy" (2005, p. 79).

In similar context of alienation done by migration to the West, in the short story "Souvenirs", Aboulela explores how marrying a Western can create a sense of otherness. the Sudanese migrant Yassir who lives in Aberdeen, finds himself increasingly detached from his Scottish wife Emma. Their incompatibility is done because of the cultural divide, and it even seems unbridgeable. What Yassir sees as prestigious and luxurious, Emma considers fundamental needs.

For instance, while decorating her daughter's bedroom, Emma insists that it should follow a strict aesthetic logic; Bambi wallpaper that matches the curtains and the bedspread, which in turn need to much Thumper on the pillowcase (Aboulela, 2001, p.15). In their case, the cultural gap is somehow hostile, especially when Emma refuses to visit his husband's homeland and perceiving Sudan as a place of epidemic diseases and "typhoid, yellow fever, cholera" (2001, p. 17). A similar case appears in "The Boy from the Kebab Shop". In this short story, the protagonist Dina is the product of a mixed marriage.

Her mother, Shushu, is an Egyptian and her father is Scottish. Shushu's decision to marry far from her culture had serious and dramatic consequences, especially when her family break up with her. This bitterness inevitably colours Dina's identity leaving her caught in the constant tension between her family 'clashing worlds. The passage below mirrors heir life as:

The good-looking *khawagah*, who had pursued and enchanted her in the Gezira Club, whisked her off her feet and away from her family, had brought her to a drab life, in a drab place. In Scotland, he lost the charisma that Africa bestows on the white man, and became the average, kind-hearted father that Dina brew up with (Aboulela, 2001, p. 62).

To rescue her daughter, Shushu narrates stories about the Egyptian culture to Dina while drinking and watching old Egyptian movies on TV. After her father's death, Dina is largely isolated navigating life without identity determination. Shushu "was always on a diet" and "imposed those diets on her daughter too who was even more overweight" (Aboulela, 2001, p.59).

A striking example that emphasizes cultural paradox takes place when Dina comes across a Muslim woman breastfeeding her baby where she reacts with discomfort. The writer uses this moment to make social critique. Aboulela then points that "as an average British girl of seventeen, Dina had seen plenty of nudity but she had never seen a woman breastfeed a baby" (2001, p. 60). Dina has never experienced the stability inside her family, except when she listens to her mother's home stories as an instance of comfort zone.

Despite Najwa's constant confrontations with ambivalent feelings of isolation and otherness between cultures, people, and identities, she portrays a story of adaptation and inclusion rather than a rigid alien culture. London that is now powered by religious faith becomes Najwa's transcultural space of existence. When Najwa has been asked to come back to Sudan from Tamer's mother, Doctora Zeinab, she does not hesitate to decline her request. When Doctora Zeinab compromises Najwa to leave her son Tamer in return of receiving a seductive amount of money, Najwa articulates a more determining reaction than she expects. Surprising her that she accepts money and will use them to go to pilgrimage or *Hajj*:

When she speaks, she speaks as if I am stupid. 'There is no mistake. This is all for you.'

I stare back at her. She picks up the cheque, she moves her hands emphatically. 'This is a compensation for you because you are not going to work for us again... I pick up the cheque and say, 'this is not enough.' She misunderstands me of course;

I can go on *Hajj* with this money, I can get a plane to Mecca, stay in a nice hotel not far from the Ka'ba – I can enjoy myself.

If you leave London and go back to Khartoum, I will help you even more...

'Going back is not an option for me... (Aboulela, 2005, p. 262-264).

For Najwa, even her love for Tamer is subordinate to her religious attachment. Whenever she comes down in this world, it is her faith in the middle that keeps her going on. When reflecting on her traumatic status as jobless, she metaphorically expresses her gratefulness to *Fajar* prayers for empowering her identity. Najwa pertinently overshadows her turmoil as “I don't set the alarm but I still wake up at the usual time” (Aboulela, 2005, p. 251).

The veil is another medium through which Najwa negotiates her determination as a practicing woman in the West. Putting the veil reflects her experience of liminality as she moves through different crises while trying to find herself again between secular and religious life. The protagonist faces confusion as she tries to balance her cultural origins and Western life, and this creates a liminal state or an in-between space that can be difficult to negotiate. This liminal space prepares the ground for Najwa to wear the hijab that is presented as the third or hybrid space.

Najwa's story is split into two sections marked by her decision of wearing the hijab. Aboulela uses the veil as a metaphor for deeper challenges and negotiations involved in forming a stable sense of identity. Among the intricacies that Najwa faced before she decides to wear the hijab are narrated through her discussion with Arab friends, especially Anwar. When they were walking out of the park, Najwa recounts:

We passed a couple of Arab women dressed in black from head to foot; their faces were veiled. Anwar made a face and, when they were out of earshot, he said, ‘It's disgusting, what a depressing sight!

His expression made me laugh. ‘Aren't you curious about all the beauty they're hiding?’

‘I'm only curious about this, he said.’ (2005, p. 167).

Najwa undergoes a major transformation after leaving Anwar. This change is driven by embracing her Muslim identity more seriously. The veil and the mosque marks a third space where Najwa represents her renewed connection to her faith and a new living style. Indeed, the veil has always been a sign for her spiritual inspiration. In one of the epiphanies and internal psychological monologues, Najwa deeply reflects on her lasting sympathy to the veil and religious rituals altogether:

I remembered the girls in Khartoum University wearing hijab and those who covered their hair with white tobés. They never irritated me, did they? I tried to think back and I saw the rows of praying, the boys in front and the girls at the back. At sunset I would sit and watch them praying. They held me still with their slow movements, the recitation of the Qur'an. I envied them something I didn't know what it was. I didn't have a name for it. Whenever I heard the azan in Khartoum, whenever I heard the Qu'ran recited I would feel a bleakness in me and a depth and space would open up, hallow and numb (2005, p. 134).

This reflective passage reveals a deep emotional and spiritual undercurrent in Najwa's portrayal, even before she consciously becomes a practicing Muslim. Though she was religiously disconnected, Najwa was deeply moved by the prayers and felt respectful to hijab. The reflection hints at the dynamic nature of hybridity. The veil and religious devotion can be seen as the third productive and transformative space. Her observations foreshadow her later conversion where she will merge faith and modern life into a hybrid identity. Although Najwa possesses a luxurious life, she constantly feels herself empty in front of these ordinary girls at University. Once in the library, Najwa carefully observes:

I took my wallet, notebook and pencil case out of my straw bag and left it on the shelf near the library door. Two girls from my class were leaving the library and we smiled to each other. I was not sure of their names. They both wore white tobés and one of them was very cute... they were provincial girls and I was a girl from the capital and that was the reason we were not friends. With them I felt, for the first time in my life, self-conscious of my clothes; my too short skirts and too tight blouses. Many girls dressed like me, so I was not unusual. Yet these provincial girls made me feel awkward. I was conscious of their modes grace, of the tobés that covered their slimness – pure white cotton covering their arms and hair (2005, p. 14).

Najwa's hallow space makes her dwell as she does not belong fully to either cultural space. Her shifting process is slow, starting with unknown and silent longing and ends in her adoption of the veil and gatherings in the mosque. This articulates hybridity as a

site of psychological conflict, cultural negotiation, and eventual transformation. As discussed earlier, Najwa's story of wearing hijab is highly inspired by the writer herself.

Through her narratives, Aboulela is partly attempting to remain faithful to her religion, while she is deeply rooted in the West which remains too much constituting to her identity. As once Aboulela describes herself as a Muslim writer of the second generation, she voices that:

As a creative writer (attempting) to answer the need for self-representations on the part of the younger generation of Muslims. Islam is the epistemological force in these people's lives and the West is their home and yet they do not see an adequate representation of themselves in contemporary fiction and daily television programs and radio (Eissa, 2005, p. 6).

Like her fictional protagonist, Aboulela becomes spiritually connected to Islam after she settles in London. Although the writer had constantly wanted to wear the hijab in Sudan, she lacked the courage due to her progressive friends' disapproval. As a Muslim woman, Aboulela feels independent from social pressures and this liberates her from any social constraint to finally become more assertive about her decision.

Both Aboulela and Najwa receive hostile criticism from native friends who have the same religion. Together in London, they describe themselves as conservative Muslims who do not reject Western culture wholesale. Instead, they seek to find a ground between religious and Western perspectives to finally voice their new identities defined by faith and rituals.

In contrast to Aboulela, there are very few narratives that explore the real-life experiences of Muslims who wear the hijab, particularly stories that narrate in details the various constraints they face for expressing their faith in this visible way. These challenges are often intensified in societies where Muslims are considered as a minority group. Because of this lack of voiced representations, Aboulela aims to create an alternative space for these overlooked stories. The author expresses her agency within the framework as follows:

I still have lots and lots to say about the lives and dilemmas of ordinary Muslims.

There are still very few examples of Muslims in contemporary literature and most

of these examples are those of the 'Islamic terrorist,' the 'oppressed Muslim woman' or the other side of spectrum examples of liberal Muslims whose lifestyles and ways of thinking are not different from non-Muslims. I agree whole-heartedly that all these variations do exist in Muslim society and should be represented in fiction. And I admire more the many deep, complex and insightful novels that have tackled these subjects. But what about the thousands men who crowd mosques, the thousands of women who go on Haj, the teenage girls who wear *hijab*? They are the ones who fascinate and compel me and they are the ones whose stories I am motivated to write (Aboulela, 2012, p. 622).

In her fiction, Aboulela does not try to portray perfect Muslims, but she also acknowledges that there are real Muslims' journeys which are based on deep religious devotion. She underlines that her fictional stories are mainly concerned with this Muslim category that is neither of fundamentalist nor of the liberals. At this level, Aboulela adapts postcolonial hybridity to foster a diverging third space that occupies the spiritual perspective of Islam. Aboulela's stories, therefore, even tackle hijab as a healing power to the characters' social and psychological fractures.

3.8 Reimagining Romance in Muslim Immigrant Fiction

Aboulela's fiction, especially her two first novels *The Translator* and *Minaret*, can be linked to Western literary genres such as romance and immigrant fiction. Indeed, her texts offer a distinctive take that deviates from recognized typical Western literary productions. While traditional romance novels focus on love stories overcoming obstacles, Aboulela's texts shift these conventions by focusing on the religious faith of her Muslim female protagonists. This process refracts the narrative to emphasize Muslim identity and conversely makes the secular world seem unfamiliar. John Cawelti (1976) defines romance novels as:

the crucial defining characteristic of romance is ... that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman... the moral fantasy of romance is that of love triumphant and permanent, overcoming all obstacles and difficulties (p. 41-42).

The characteristics of these mainstream literary genres, to a certain degree, are transformed and overshadowed by representations of the religious faith of Aboulela's female protagonists. Several examples from *Minaret* illustrate how the novel reimagines romance through the lens of Muslim faith and immigrant experience. The relationship between Najwa and Anwar can be read as a reversal to Western romance.

Their romance starts early in the novel when both characters were still in Sudan. In their case, romance is mainly disrupted by political upheaval. Because of politics, Najwa and Anwar did not have belong to the same social class and this really disturbs them. Anwar spends all his time with Najwa criticizing her father or discussing political subjects where she always feels embarrassed and annoyed. In one of their discussions, Anwar asks:

What are your own political views?

'I don't know. I don't have any.'

'Everyone seems to blame everyone else'

'Well, someone has to take the blame for what's happening'

'Why?'

'So that they can pay the price'

I didn't like him saying that. Pay the price.

'Your father is close to the president?'

'Yes. They are friends too.' (2005, p. 15).

Indeed, their feelings are marked by separation, longing and social differences. Contrary to traditional romance novels where love subverts all obstacles, Anwar and Najwa's romance is portrayed by complex realities of exile, class, and faith. Their story set in opposition to what Pamela Regis defines that a romance novel is "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (2003, p. 19).

Romance in *Minaret* is introduced when Najwa and Tamer meet each other. As Najwa migrates to London and embraces her religious faith, her conception of love totally shifts. Her eventual attraction to her fellow Muslim immigrant Tamer is less about passionate courtship and more about shared faith, mutual respect, and spiritual compatibility. Interestingly, what attracts them to each other more than anything else is

that both of them are devout. During their discussion on waking up early for *fajr* prayer, Tamer precises how his future wife should be:

... 'If I were married, my wife would have made sure I go up to pray.'

I smile. 'it depends on what type of girl you marry.'

'oh, I would only marry someone who was devout. And she would have to wear hijab.' There is an upbeat youthfulness in his confidence (2005, p. 1999).

Her novels could be considered, to a certain degree, to be love stories between men and women, they might also be categorized as romance novels. The romance novel is a familiar genre to western readers; however, the reader of Aboulela's novel *Minaret*, encounters elements in these texts which reimagine the conventions of western romances in the context of Muslim culture.

Najwa fails in love; however, the narrative shows that she moves on peacefully as by then she has the hope of being able to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca with the money she receives from Tamer's mother. In the romance of *Minaret*, love also fades next to spiritual love as Najwa confidently accepts to leave Tamer and chooses rather to go to hajj to get rid of her sins with Anwar. Her deep religious faith triumphs over romantic love, as she overtly says to Tamer and he does so:

'more than anything else,' I say, 'I would like to go on Hajj. If my Hajj is accepted, I will come back without any sins and start my life again, fresh.'

He says, 'I want to ride a camel from Medina to Mecca like the Prophet, peace be upon him, did.' (2005, p. 209).

From another panel, Aboulela's novel can be classified within immigrant literature, written by an immigrant author. *Minaret* deals with themes that are common in immigrant narratives such as nostalgia, alienation, and the pressures of assimilation. As Nash observes, Aboulela's novels work "through many of the usual exile's routines" (2002, p. 30). However, as previously noted, what distinguishes Aboulela's contribution is the way she infuses the migrant genre one affected with the religious identity of her devout Muslim characters.

Thereby, this positions her novel *Minaret* as Muslim immigrant fiction. In view of this, Wail Hassan considers Aboulela's writings part of an emerging trend newly labelled as, "Muslim immigrant literature". Hassan describes it as "a literature that seeks to articulate an alternative episteme derived from Islam and shaped specially by immigrant perspectives" (2008, p. 299).

Throughout *Minaret*, Najwa's devotion to Islam provides comfort and meaning even if she experiences the hardship of displacement and alienation. Even London was temporary in healing the characters' pain for their own country. After exile, life seems to be peaceful but after Najwa dwells again within her asylum. Both Najwa and Anwar seek protection in London after the political coup in Sudan, Najwa explains:

That was why we were here: governments felt and coups staged and that was why we were here. For the first time in my life, I disliked London and envied the English, so unperturbed and grounded, never displaced, never confused. For the first time, I was conscious of my shitty-coloured skin next to their placid paleness... 'We could be happy in London,' I said. We could forget all about the problem in Sudan... for him, more than me, London was temporary, exotic. (2005, 175-168).

Nostalgia is expressed by both Anwar and Najwa, however, hers is not articulated through a longing for her past life in Sudan but through her yearning her religious negligence. More than being nostalgic for her homeland, Najwa regrets her way of wearing and missing prayers. Najwa's attachment to expressions such as *insha'Allah*, her deep emotional response to hearing the *azan*, and her deep connection with the mosque illustrate how these religious markers are stronger than her homesickness and nostalgia.

Najwa's yearning for spirituality underscores that she truly feels at home only in contexts where her faith is practiced and visible. Through reconstructing the conventions of the romance and immigrant genres based on Muslim perspectives, Aboulela naturalizes the religious world and de-familiarizes the secular, emphasizing the salience of religion and religious identity and experience.

In this context, her religious nostalgic vision aligns with what Steiner considers as the “actualization of home and Islam” (2008, p. 16). Her prayers and Tajweed classes become both her home and intimate love. Stotesbury explains how Aboulela in *The Translator* refracts the genre of the romance novel and creates an especially *Muslim romance*. Although the novel has basic characteristics of the romance and shares similarities with *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte,¹¹ the obstacle of the main character is faith, as she cannot imagine marrying the man she loves without his converting to Islam (Stotesbury, 2004, p. 74-75). As Stotesbury further interprets his vision:

a major challenge for western readers may be the degree of understanding that can be achieved not only with Aboulela's transformation of what constitutes one of the fundamental *stories* contained in western literature, that of the nature of a loving relationship between woman and man but also with the intellectual and discursive premises upon which the whole novel is constructed (2004, p. 75).

Henceforth, it could be argued that such narratives, featuring the protagonist with a deep religious consciousness, present a unique re-imagination of traditional romance and immigrant literature. Indeed, in the fiction created by Leila Aboulela, it is rather religion that dictates the narrative structure than adhering to the conventions of the genre.

3.9 Conclusion

Although religious identity is only one facet in one's personality, it is argued along this chapter that in almost all of the narratives of Aboulela, it has a high salience for the main character in comparison to other facets of identity, affecting all aspects of the protagonist's identity. An important point about her texts is their serious engagements with the religious experiences of fictional characters.

In other words, there is a shift of focus in the representations of Islam and Muslim women in particular in these works from the dominant stereotypical representations in western discourses. That Aboulela has taken religious identity and experience seriously

¹¹ John Cawelti in his definition of romance novels says, “the crucial defining characteristic of romance is ... that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman... the moral fantasy of romance is that of love triumphant and permanent, overcoming all obstacles and difficulties (1976, p. 41-42).

is a timely reminder that religion is still important, if not, an integral aspect of everyday life for many people around the world, although, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this is still not acknowledged in much literature and literary criticism.

In relation to experienced-oriented texts, Aboulela's fiction can "bring into public discussion, questions and concerns excluded in dominant ideologies, ideologies which sustain and are sustained by political and economic hierarchies" (Stone-Mediatore, 2000, p. 120). Indeed, it seems that all the elements of Aboulela's narratives, including its structure and main themes which define Islamic identity and experience with Islam as important, turn her texts to religious-oriented ones.

After contextualizing Aboulela's fiction including its roots, background, profile, aims and dimensions, chapter four will attempt to analyse her novel *Minaret* according to and from different perspectives like translation theory, postcolonialism and feminism. The subsequent discussion would be a comparative one in relation to Soueif's two first novels.

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4.1 Introduction

Cultural translation in the works of the selected writers, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela, can be productively examined through the lens of hybridity and transculturation where cultures interact, negotiate, and transform. This concept, as deeply discussed so far in the previous chapters, is essential for understanding how the novels' fictional characters inhabit the translations of culture in order to subvert fixed cultural binaries and dominant Orientalist presentations of Arab/Muslim women in the West.

Throughout the chapter, it will be explained that in the novels of Soueif and Aboulela, the mechanism of cultural translation is not merely a thematic concern but a structural and narrative medium that reflects the complexities of postcolonial identity. This narrative strategy echoes Bhabha's notion that translation is the performative nature of cultural communication, navigating multiple cultural affiliations. While Ahdaf Soueif engages in cultural translation from a more political and feminist lenses, Leila Aboulela leans on unprecedented tackling of religious faith when she navigates translating culture between East and West.

Despite the constant shortage in scholarly that has been made on the concept, vital contributions frame cultural translation in relation to the tradition of Arab British women writers. Building on Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (1999), who consider that postcolonial translation is not a passive act but is rather one that is deeply involved in history, colonialism, East/West power relations, and more importantly identity politics. As claimed in chapter one, translation is both a linguistic and cultural practice, a framing that intensely resonates in both writers' narratives. Cultural translation as articulated by Soueif and Aboulela, is embellished by historical allusions, bilingualism and code-switching, Islamic rituals, and moments of untranslatability.

Through an attempt to a comparative analysis, the present chapter tends to explore the points of convergence and divergence in the author's literary strategies and the ideological implications of their translation practices. Drawing on Wail Hassan's theory of translational literature (2011), the present chapter aims at investigating the

selected writers' divergent manipulations of foreignizing and domesticating strategies of cultural translation to challenge inherited presentations of stereotypical Arab women's cultural identities.

On the one hand, Ahdaf Soueif employs Arab Egyptian dialect to ensure her common ground connection to a closed nationalist impulse followed by a determined critic of postcolonial political and economic Egypt. On the other hand, Leila Aboulela translates the religious logic by which her devout immigrant Muslim heroines struggle with secular logic of adjusting religious difference.

4.2 Soueif and Aboulela: Divergent Paths to Cultural Translation

Cultural translation, as a literary and ideological technique, serves as a fundamental framework in the works of Arab-British authors Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela. In their process of transcending traditional linguistic transfer, Aboulela and Soueif thoroughly ponder into the intricate strategies of negotiating identity, bridging residual cultural binaries, and resisting Western hegemonic representations of Arab and Muslim women. While Soueif's novels are grounded in national politics, gender issues, and the history of Egypt, Aboulela sharply ponders on religious identity and spiritual resilience within transcultural settings.

4.2.1. Translating the Unseen: Soueif's Journey through Nation and Culture

Ahdaf Soueif's processing of cultural translation weaves together languages, culture, history and identity through which she builds grounded spaces when East and West can both meet and converse. Soueif achieves this through a variety of literary techniques and thematic issues, making her literary output exemplary in the field of postcolonial literature. Translation theorist Venuti explains that every act of translation is shaped by imbalanced power relations and dominance.

While processing translation from the original to the target language, the translated text is inevitably determined to fit the norms of canonical language. Soueif's works have the tradition of being translated to other languages but *In the Eye of the Sun* was not the case. As an exception, Soueif declines the translation's request, explaining in a lengthy reflection:

Because my native language is Arabic, I really do care about what it would sound like a translation. That being said, I don't think that a literal translation would do. It would have to be a reworking. Almost a rewriting of the book. In whatever language you write, you write against a backdrop of that language, of that culture, of the assumptions of the native speakers.... Now take the odd problematic passages from *In the Eye of the Sun*, and look at them against a Western background. Let's say that they might be a little bit shocking, but not very. If for convenience, we give it a scale of shock value from 0 to 10, let's say that the book as I wrote it would shock its readers 2 out of 10. Now translate this book into Arabic and you have to look at it against a different background, because it is, in a way, an Arab or Egyptian novel. You have to judge it on the background of what has been done in the literature and social context of Arabic... your readers would possibly not want to continue to read the book...so that the things that were shocking have become vastly more important because you just gave them more weight... what matters is the effect you have on your reader. You must have the same effect on the Arab reader that you had on your Western reader (2005, p. 282-83).

In view of this, Soueif first explains that the translated text has been adapted to and confirmed to the dominant linguistic framework, and this is what she attempts to avoid wholesale. She also explores the possibility and limits of translation where too much meaning would be lost. As the postcolonial world continues to be defined by power relations, Soueif decides to act as the translator, engaging in complex negotiation and subversion. Writing in the language of the colonizer without any original Arabic translation version, Soueif invites Western readers to observe but not fully being aware of the transformations within Egyptian context.

Indeed, when Soueif uses an English version of the Egyptian dialect¹², she genuinely creates unfamiliar emotional resonance to a British readership. In her novels, Soueif displays a foreignizing stance of translation where she articulates a perspective

¹² For more instances on how Soueif articulates an Arabized English, refer to chapter two.

on her homeland history that resists ideological demands of belonging. In this case, it is the Western reader who stands at the middle of foreignness, and this is challenging. Similarly, Soueif in *The Map of Love* articulates code switching and creates a new version of English in order to evoke cultural difference that strongly mirror her complex transcultural characters.

Standing as the native informant of the history of modern Egypt, Soueif is simultaneously domesticating and familiarizing this history to the English reader. More particularly, Soueif's stance of translation, based on oscillation between foreignizing and domesticating strategies, reveals Egyptian women's complex sense of national belonging dominant East/West dichotomies. The writer's strategy of translation stands to mirror Asya's private and public struggles made by a disappointed national spirit.

Her sense of national identity has been weakened as Egypt undergoes major political and economic changes. Through the Arabized English, Soueif symbolizes Asya's psychological conflicts as she tries to hold on her earlier pride in her country. Asya's longing for her proud childhood under Nasser's presidency is captured in the epigraph quoted from Rudyard Kipling's poem "Song of the Wise Children". Here, Asya is reflecting on her unhappy returning to Egypt after spending five years in England.

After her return, Asya dives in deep reflections that capture everyday an impressive and even destructive changes she observes, including the disappearance of her childhood favourite cookies and the brutal loss of familiar buildings. At this level of in-depth cultural translation that hints at Asya's dramatic unfamiliarity to her homeland, Soueif subverts the power dynamics between colonizer and colonized. Against this background, Soueif is foreignizing her protagonist Asya though she formerly used to have a great sense of nationalism.

Henceforth, Asya's relationship with English and Arabic underscores a deep linguistic ambivalence where cultural meanings are not easily rewritten. As Soueif explores local Egyptian political and national instability, she chooses to engage with the limitations of cultural translation that symbolically reflect these tensions. An illustration

of that stands when Asya attempts to translate a song by Sheikh Imam to her British friends.

His song is composed during the severe political agitations of the 1970's. In his song, Sheikh Imam protests the postcolonial manipulations in the Arab world. He mimics the Nixon administration of the 1973 oil crisis and its impact on political tensions in the Middle East.

While Asya fights to hardly render the song into English without wasting its cultural and political attributes, Soueif foregrounds one of the major boundaries of cultural translation. And since the Arabic lyrics are full of figurative markers, irony, and historical weight, Asya resists a superficial translation and refuses to adapt the song to meet the expectations of her English friends.

In doing so, Soueif adopts a foreignizing strategy that retains elements of the source language and culture even if they seem unfamiliar. Whereas an ethics of sameness "domesticates" the text by making it conform to the dominant discourse in the target, or receiving, culture, Venuti consequently comes to the conclusion that:

Bad translation shapes toward the foreign culture a domestic attitude that is ethnocentric: "generally under the guise of transmissibility, [it] carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work. Good translation aims to limit this ethnocentric negation: it stages an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentring and thereby forces the domestic language and culture to register the foreignness of the foreign text (Venuti, 1998, p. 81).

Navigating the ground between exposing the history of Arab nationalism in Egypt within English literary arenas, and foreignizing tropes of unfamiliarity with mother culture and language, leads Asya to bewildered internal resonance of negotiation. One striking incident of a challenging cultural translation takes place in 1979 when Asya returns to Egypt and secures an employment with a private British company contracted by the Egyptian government, known as Citadel Publishing.

This collaboration aims at producing educational pamphlets targeted at family planning and women's hygiene across the "Third World" coming from "Chile to

Afghanistan” (Soueif, 1992, p. 23). Asya is appointed as an instructor for rural Egyptian women on the different means of family planning. Since Asya is particularly selected as “the expert at ‘communicating with Arabs’” (p. 23), her mission occupies both linguistic and cultural mediation.

At this level, Soueif critically depicts the difficulties Asya faced in helping rural women to adopt social models that clash with their familiar lifestyle. Asya is responsible to inform the villagers that “the whole family must see that is their interest to practice family planning: Small Family is a Happy Family” (p. 23). On the contrary, women in the village show total ignorance about their maternal health. In fact, Asya is quiet aware that framing this family planning initiation in terms of ‘Happy Family’ can merely serve the government itself.

When Asya prepares for her speech on contraceptive methods, she finds it complex to translate them into a form accessible to her audience. She imagines herself encouraging the women limiting their number of children, but she recognizes how much sensitive is this communication. After hesitating in finding the appropriate translating words, Asya considers the absurdity of this planning project. Women from their side oddly react and laugh with each other when listening to her speech.

At this point in the in the story, Soueif plays the ground for untranslatability articulation. Asya struggles with words’ choice, doubtful of how to make it meaningful to these women, and eventually starts to question whether the whole project even makes sense or not. While trying to domesticate women of the village with English well-being of family planning, these women only reveal their foreignness or even may be rejection to the situation. In short, Soueif enunciates the cultural gap such translation and the concept itself can raise. As this happens, Asya observes the disconnection between the modern reforms in Egypt and traditional rural life, realizing how hard it is to communicate across cultural gaps.

As far as in her second novel, *The Map of Love*, Soueif constructs a multi-layered narrative device that deeply mimics the process of cultural translation. At the heart of this novel, Soueif incorporates journals, letters, and newspaper clippings which are interpreted by her protagonist Amal. Domesticating and foreignizing strategies are even

more intensified as the reader is invited to translate Egyptian historical events through conflicting perspectives. Wail Hassan (2011), makes an exceptional investigation of the novel in regards of cultural translation explored by a woman, revealing that:

In *The Map of Love* Soueif achieved something that no other Arab immigrant writer had attempted since Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, namely to write a novel that bridges Arabic and European literatures discursively, thematically, formally, and stylistically. Indeed, Soueif was much more successful at this..., rather than being unreadable, Soueif's novel skilfully stages unreadability, multilingualism, and translation as themes, plot devices, stylistic features, and discursive strategies. The novel maps translational strategies: from literal to literary translations, from domesticating to foreignizing translations, and from epistemically violent translations that pursue the will to power to the extremes of forgery loving translations that surrender to the experience of alterity...juxtaposing the unidirectional intentionality of imperial ideology and the countervailing forces of transculturation (p. 170).

Hassan's review of the novel emphasizes those challenging approaches to translation, ranging from direct and literal to nuanced ambivalence of weaving between domesticating and foreignizing. One striking instance takes place when Amal reads Anna's diary and reflects, "She wrote what she saw, and she saw what she could. I fill in the spaces with what I know" (Soueif, 1999, p. 219). Here, Soueif underlines one key aspect in cultural translation, highlighting that the process is challenging for both sides, East and West.

Culturally speaking and drawing on Hassan's analysis, Amal's reflection constitutes a divergent form of cultural translation; one that acknowledges both the limits of translatability and the necessity of forging a space for negotiation. In this stance of translation, Soueif is domesticating Anna within the Egyptian history and culture when she portrays her as first-person narrator, while also foreignizing her when the limits of translation are revealed.

Back in *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif highlights how critical it is for Asya to culturally translate an excerpt from Eliot's *Middlemarch*. However, her attempt is

ineffective since the original message remains distant in the target language. The cultural markers become serious constraints, showcasing how challenging intercultural mutual understanding is. For Soueif, rather than building a bridge, her translation strategies of foreignness valorises the sense of otherness inherent in each language.

From a linguistic standpoint, by mixing English narration with Arabic dialects and idioms, she conveys cultural signalling. She explores emotional nuances and cultural particularities that both standard English and Modern Standard Arabic cannot capture, allegorically shown by Anna and Amal. These limitations to linguistic and cultural rendering is defined by a particular world view and rhetorical modes of a particular language which captures a different worldview and discourse which is sometimes incompatible from the standpoint of the other (Hassan, 2011, p. 188).

In the light of this, In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif refutes to create full fluency between Arabic and English to symbolically express her critical standpoint within national identity. Asya's limited stance of translation is mainly due to the particularity of her nation and culture. When she is asked translate the lyrics of an Egyptian song, she hesitates and says, "It's local... It won't make any sense unless I go into loads of background – and even then it'll sound naïve because that's the style of the song" (Soueif, 1992, p.496).

In this case, the technique of a foreignizing of English maintains a profound affective dimension and voices the very difference of Egyptian culture. An example of this manifests when the character Sharif translates and explains a term to Anna, precisising, "We say *itqan* – a thing done with care, with precision. The idea of craftsman in everything" (Soueif, 1999, p. 45). Herein, the *itqan* remains untranslated but instead explained. Dialect then functions metaphorically as an identity marker that underlines Amal's attachment within her Egyptian community and difference from the West.

By incorporating untranslated dialect words into her foreignized use of English, Soueif conveys an emotional depth that standard language; English or Arabic, is not able to capture. Dialect, in this context, represents the cultural distinctiveness of Egypt that draws the foreignization of the large English reading public. Therefore, the inclusion of

Egyptian dialect allegorically triumphs as a sense of identity within a particular social group while distinguishing it from the others.

In both her novels, Soueif's cultural translation plays on a political and national ground, revealing local political instability in Egypt and inherited power upheavals between colonizer and colonized. Through *In the Eye of the Sun*, Asya is quiet conscious that she speaks a language that feels intimate and familiar. Still, she also recognizes that she speaks from a place of distance geographically and politically. Her awareness of cultural nuances in Egyptian music and everyday conversations underscores her own complex role in narrating the story of Egypt after Nasser's regime.

For Asya, acting as bridge between Egypt and England doesn't offer faithful translations and obvious cultural resolutions. Instead, Asya acknowledges the misconceptions and imbalances between disparate worlds. This tension is a stance of foreignness which Soueif considers as essential to resist hegemonic presentations Egypt.

4.2.2. Aboulela' Narratives: Translating Faith Across Cultures

In her narratives, Aboulela adopts one of the unusual variables that other Arab and Muslim immigrant writers are not used to employ. Exclusively within the Islamic device, the writer plays both on the translatable and the untranslatable; where this latter, following her stance of translation, itself leads to the translatability of many aspects by the end of the novels' stories.

Similar to Soueif, Leila Aboulela engages with cultural translation across interconnected levels. Aboulela write exclusively in English, yet her literary narratives are fused with Arabic terms, religious references, and Sudanese cultural markers. Translation, in her context, is not merely ornamental as it foregrounds the rendering of lived realities of her characters. *In Minaret*, Najwa, is a bilingual protagonist who reveals the deeper negotiations while she claims to express her religious identity within the linguistic and cultural frameworks in the West.

The prologue in *Minaret* immediately introduces the theme of translation by starting with the first of the Qur'an, "*Bism Allah, Ar-rahman, Ar-raheem*" (2005, p. 1). Aboulela decides to keep the daily recited expression untranslated, introducing early

consideration on the boundaries and challenges of translation in the case of an Arab British narrative. This reflects Aboulela's juxtaposition of Najwa's untranslated prayer with a beautiful view of the mosque's minaret from the Regent's Park of London.

In Aboulela's first novel, *The Translator*, and as the title suggests, Sammar the protagonist involves translating different types of texts to Rae, including historical and theological works, news articles, and even fundamentalist writings. Rae who is close with the Orient focuses his research on political Islam. His critical position toward dominant Western narratives about the Arab world is reflected in his book, *The Illusion of an Islamic Threat* (1999, p. 5).

Cultural translation transpires in this hybrid environment through both the depiction of Arab British experiences and the linguistic and formal choices made by the writer. *The Translator* (1999) illustrates how language serves as a conduit for cultural expression and a method for reconnecting with one's origin while contending with the yearning for belonging in an unfamiliar environment. In the novel, the protagonist, Sammar, an Arab woman residing in London, employs translation between Arabic and English to navigate her personal and cultural identity.

While translating classical Arabic poetry for a British professor, she concurrently conveys her experiences as an immigrant woman in Britain. Aboulela's employment of translation in the novel, beyond the mere act of textual interpretation, encompasses the broader metaphor of identity construction within a diasporic framework. In view of this, translation is articulated more than a profession. Translation metaphorically acts as a narrative strategy that leads to religious growth through a romantic relationship that ends by Rae' conversion to Islam. However, that is not achieved only after many instances of untranslatability.

Against this background, both novels are then about "the possibilities and limits of translation as an avenue to cultural communication", Hassan suggests, covering both its linguistic and cultural sides (Hassan, 2011, p. 187). On the one hand, the linguistic transfer which is the subject matter of frequent reflection by the characters, and on the other hand, the cultural mediation between distinct cultural and political worldviews, the more confusing and paradoxical part of the two.

Although Najwa's narration in English seems fluent and straightforward, the novel's linguistic landscape is far from being equal. Such linguistic imbalance reflects the enduring power dynamics between English and Arabic. Growing up in postcolonial Khartoum, Najwa's bilingualism identifies her as part of an elite class thanks to her private English education and her family's political prestigious status. While Arabic is tied to local cultural identity and Sudanese nationalism, English presents both the legacy of colonial power and its linguistic dominance.

In this context, although Najwa tells her story employing fluent English, Aboulela tends to showcase the imbalanced interplay between English as the language of the colonizer and Arabic as that of the colonized. Back in Khartoum, Najwa's mastery of English reflects her privileged Westernized background. While Arabic symbolizes her national and religious identity, English acts as more powerful as the dominant language of colonial imperialism.

During her first arrival in London as an exiled, Najwa's mastery of English helps her not struggling in her daily life communications, and that was a kind of reassurance for her. However, when left alone after the dramatic events of her father's execution, her mother's death, and imprisoned brother, even her English fluency could not stop the torture of alienation. In here, Aboulela's novel reverses the idea that English mastery would lead to cultural belonging in the West.

This paradox is central to Aboulela's novels to navigate between translation and the untranslatability of Islam. For Najwa, Islam represents a spiritual system rooted in the miracle of direct revelation with the Qur'an as stable and unchanging divine truth. In this vision, the Qur'an serves as a stabilizing force in the middle of displacement and traumatic adaptation since it offers certainty and continuity. Yet, this stability is controversial since truth of Qur'an cannot be fully interpreted. As Nadia Butt (2009) notices:

This idea clearly harks back to the Islamic practice of maintaining Arabic as the language of revelation in a Muslim world constituted by hundreds of millions of non-Arabic speakers: as the Qur'an was revealed to Mohammed in the Arabic language, Asian and Africans were expected during Islamic colonization (and are

expected even today) to read it in its original Arabic version so that they do not miss anything in God's words which a translation is likely to miss (p. 195).

In this case, Aboulela approaches the limits of the process of translation from a religious perspective, showcasing that the miracle of the Qur'an is hardly transferred in a different language than Arabic. In *Minaret*, the Qur'an untranslatability is central to Najwa's devotion story. The miraculous of the Qur'an opposes all ordinary translation's agency. Her lack of self-reflection and avoiding discussion in *tajweed* sessions reflects this. Despite her English fluency and constant translations to Anwar, Najwa becomes speechless in front the deep meanings of Allah's words as explained in the mosque.

The idea has been illustrated in Aboulela's previous novel when Sammar acknowledges while the meaning of the Qur'an can be translated, its essence or miracle remains beyond reproduction (1999, p. 124). During this troublesome situation, Najwa reconnects with Anwar, her former partner and a secular political activist also seeking asylum like her. Too much similar to Sammar, Najwa also works to translate her friend's newspapers' articles, moments where she recognizes that the process is also tricky. The process is reflected through Najwa and Anwar's complex and dense relationship.

Anwar admires Najwa's linguistic potentials and praises her English, even asked her to support his efforts to engage with English journalism by editing his work. Najwa and Anwar engage in code-switching, mixing Arabic nouns with English verbs crafting a hybrid language of exile. This new language creates a sense of relief for both of them: she masters English and he "knew facts and history" (2005, p. 165). Najwa narrates how they used to work together:

He has always been active; he had always been involved... He wrote smoothly and effortlessly in Arabic. It was writing in English that made him struggle. That made him need me... He suggested we talk in English all the time, so that his pronunciation would improve... It made us laugh, mixing the two languages... (p. 163).

Paradoxically, Anwar also undermines her luck of political and intellectual agency. At many occasions, he reacts with frustration whenever she corrects his English writing,

revealing a perplexed mixture of admiration, antagonism and jealousy toward her bilingual advantage. Despite this linguistic intimacy, Najwa does feel fragmented and nothing he said gave her comfort or hope (p. 165). Thus, Najwa is embarrassed of not being compatible with him.

Though belonging to the same nation, the cultural transfer is not as smooth as the linguistic one. At this level, Aboulela is displaying a foreignizing strategy that marks the limits of cultural translation between two Egyptians but from different social layers. Though he praises her English skills and depends on her to refine his writing, Anwar still looks at her from a Westernized elite perspective.

At one level, *Minaret* foregrounds the possibility of translation rather than its limits. Paradoxically, the stance of translating the culture will not take place except after many struggles with untranslatability. Cultural translation is manifested when Najwa ultimately breaks down with Anwar and decides to embrace a devout Muslim identity. Throughout Najwa's journey of religious growth, Aboulela genuinely demonstrates that spiritual Islamic experience can also be achieved through the medium of English. For Najwa it is an exceptional with unprecedented relief and comfort, a scene that was echoed as follows:

Anwar phoned to say, 'Where are you? Where have you been? I need your help with an article – it's urgent. You're still not sulking, are you?

'No, I'm not,' I said because it was the right thing to say.

'Can you come over tomorrow? I'll be finished with the first draft by then and you can look at it.' I thought of correcting his articles, trading gently so as not to hurt his pride. After saying to him, 'You need to change that,' I would have to flatter and sooth him. He needed my constant assurance that he was clever and handsome... But I needed things from him too... I won't be (2005, P. 236).

This scene explores how cultural and linguistic differences affect Najwa's journey in the flow of the story in *Minaret*. Najwa is helping Anwar for free, but she has often faced cultural and emotional barriers that make it difficult to fully express his ideas. Facing many cultural boundaries while translating Anwar's papers reveals hard

moments of untranslatability for Najwa. Against this background and as an alternative, the writer grounds Najwa's devotion as the foreignizing technique that marks the limits for Anwar's insulting exploitation.

The critical moments that Najwa encounters foregrounds untranslatability where language alone cannot bridge the gap between different cultures and values. In response to these challenges, Najwa's faith becomes her way of resisting cultural erasure and maintaining dignity in a context where language and personal values clash. Her faith is progressively becoming a kind of foreignizing strategy. An example of that untranslatability culminates when Najwa refuses to submit to Anwar's secular oriented worldview, and she rather prefers to stay rooted in her own beliefs and identity.

This view is also conceived in *The Translator*. Although the writer aims to explore the process of translation, many parts of the novel indicate the limits of the act. Through the translator Sammar, the writer points the challenges of conveying meaning across cultural and linguistic divides' Sammar is conscious that true mutual understanding is often out of reach and how interpretation can shape perception.

As the process is not a mere rendering of words, Sammar recognizes the complexity of conveying and receiving unfamiliar ideological experiences. Hassan (2008) points out the presence of "extra-linguistic but highly significant semiotic elements" (p. 305). He notes that these characteristics are deeply embedded in cultural context, then cannot be conveyed by translation (p. 305). This suggest that very little of Rae's articles full meaning can be translated by Sammar.

In Aboulela's literary texts, the tension between languages and cultures also appears in the rigid stereotypical perceptions Sudanese people hold about the English and vice versa. Her writings often highlight contrasts not only in geography, weather, and traditions but also in the disparate manners public and private life are structured. Life in Khartoum lacks privacy, especially within the big family rituals, something that leads to freedom and independence but would enhance isolation and alienation in Britain. This is poignantly captured in *Minaret* after Najwa loses her mother, reflecting on post funeral times, saying:

We did things we would never have done in Khartoum. Three weeks after Mama's funeral, Uncle Saleh and I had lunch in the Spaghetti House off Bond Street. If we had been in Khartoum, mourners would still be visiting, the television switched off as a mark of respect... After the focus of Mama's illness, after not even wanting to leave her for an hour, it felt strange to be free. I was wobbly, as if I was not used to being out in public. I said, 'Maybe I should go to Khartoum for a few weeks.' (2005, p. 123).

On further deeper meanings, the passage explores how mourning is shaped by cultural context and how Najwa feels disoriented between two worlds. Najwa confesses that her behaviour in London would be considered inappropriate or even disrespectful during a grief period in her homeland. Dining outside represents a return to ordinary life in a Western context, where mourning is often shorter and more private. In contrast, in Sudanese mourning rituals, the process would be prolonged and visible.

In essence, such deep emotional and cultural juxtaposition experienced by Najwa articulates the limits of cultural translation. At this level, the writer is foreignizing her protagonist Najwa to the Western mode of death's mourning. Instead, Najwa ends her reflection by a longing for home cultural and emotional grounding. She feels a lack of belonging in the Western condition and she considers a visit to Khartoum, where grief might be more supported by family gathering. Aboulela then distances her protagonist from full assimilation into Western lifestyle as one stance of untranslatability.

4.3 Cultural Translation, Orientalism, and Matters of Reception

The narratives of Soueif and Aboulela, though in many ways seem to be transgressive voicing their subversion to mainstream Western literary canon, they conversely share sameness that serve these literary industries and Western readers. These challenges are largely referred to the institutional pressures placed on immigrant Arab and Muslim writers by Western publishing and marketing regulations. For Booth (2003), it is needless to tackle with a Foreignizing strategy when translating Arabic literature since this later is firmly set within dominant discourses, explaining:

my self-questioning, as I translate, centres on the issue of ‘how Foreignizing?’ in term of both extent and strategy. Arabic literature already faces so many obstacles to reader reception in this continent [North America] that I find myself asking whether Foreignizing translations will productively challenge those power relations or whether this approach runs the risk of ironically contributing to current dominant notions among Americans by privileging difference in a way that serves an already rooted discourse of difference in the United States when it comes to producing ‘Arabs,’ Muslims,’ ‘Islam,’ and the like. Too much of what we see in American print and visual media on the Middle East conveys a message of cultural untranslatability that isn’t an invitation to work toward an understanding of and respect for difference, but rather an intimation of possibly unbridgeable otherness. (p. 51)

For him, while showing their difference, translators are probably confirming to established domestic notions, it then only looks like a rerun. Within this context, both writers serve as a compelling illustration of what Hassan terms “translational literature.” As Hasan (201) suggests, such literature “exposes the problematic of translation as an interpretive process in its attempt to negotiate the complex critical, institutional, and commercial grids that govern the selection, translation, publication, and marketing of Arab texts in Britain and U.S”. (p. 33).

Although Soueif’s genuine use of both domesticating and foreignizing strategies can be read as a challenging act, her representation of Arab woman identity remains in a state of tension. Like her protagonist Asya, she is in a continuous move toward a sense of national identity and cultural rootedness. However, she can never fully arrive at that sense of complete belonging.

This tension becomes even more dense when Asya returns to Egypt after studying in England. When Asya communicates contraceptive methods with rural women, she paradoxically struggles, linguistically and culturally, with the limits of translation. On the basis of this, Soueif is allegorically revealing that Asya is nationally and culturally alienated in her homeland and even may be treated as a Pro-English by the women of the village. Such alienation deeply reflects the considerable attack upon its initial

publication in Egypt. In the writer's homeland, *In the Eye of the Sun* was subjected to censorship. Soueif answers back to this confrontational rejection in her interview with Samia Merhrez:

There was an initial attack on the novel *In the Eye of the Sun* that was published in the Arab press... they used the pretext of religion in their argument even though the novel itself does not deal with religion except with a historical-heritage context and its positive impact on the life of Egyptians... I was about to write a response to what was being said about my novel when *Fusul* journal beat me to it; consequently, the rest of the journals and magazines followed their suit in writing serious critical analysis of the novel and celebrating it (2008, p. 178).

In her interview, Soueif underlines that this informal ban was mainly done by journals from her home country. It is largely assumed that the novel's censorship is a reaction to the writer's frank elaboration of taboo topics such as women's desire and marital dynamics which transgress prescribed social and religious norms. Conversely, the critical attack surrounding women's desire issues were not similarly echoed in the West.

On the contrary, Soueif recounts in her interview with Samia Merhrez that Western publishers took advantage of the novel's random censorship in Egypt as it was not officially banned but subtly suppressed, overlooking all the deep political, cultural and linguistic insights articulated by the writer. Publishers in the West even used Soueif's polemic reception in Egypt and created a dramatic cast of the issue as an intellectual woman writer silenced at home and celebrated in the West.

They framed the book's censorship not as a complex political or cultural issue, but as biased evidence of Islamic fundamentalism. This plays into an avoidable longstanding Orientalist premise. Henceforth, Orientalism is unavoidable medium which sets the boundaries of both the production and reception of Arab immigrant literature. Hassan returns back to the point, arguing that:

Such interpretation is always conducted through the prism of Orientalism, a hegemonic frame of reference that cannot be avoided, and is always framed, whether explicitly or implicitly, by the politics of empire... what those writers have

in common is the existential fact of being immigrants who write in English, whose relationship to their readers is mediated by the dominant discourse of Orientalism that defines them in their adoptive countries, and who have found their position imposes limits on what they can say and how to say it, but also affords them a unique opportunity to act as cultural translators (Hassan, 2011, p. xii-4).

Soueif ponders on the heavy burden of writing in English and is careful to resist and deconstruct these reductive receptions from both Arab and Western publishing and reviewing systems. Soueif's choice to write in English has a pivotal impact on how these works are going to be received. In her different conversations published in journals such as *Alif* with Mehrez, she overtly signals her efforts to challenge the victimizing Orientalist lens through which Western readers sought to interpret her works.

In the fiction of Ahdaf Soueif, even such taboo topics can have deeper cultural, economic, and political interpretations. Joseph Massad had a more critical review on Soueif's frank elaboration of women's desire. He explains that the stories of her characters do not follow a direct path to liberation as their main target. Instead, he sees their journeys as more complicated and nuanced process. These desires are also shaped by society, politics and circumstances around them, as he puts it:

The journey of her characters is not one where liberation is the necessary telos, but rather the complex process through which the unfolding of desire(s) – sexual, social, economic and political – is shaped by the characters themselves and all that surrounds them (1999, p. 75).

Other reviewers have seen Soueif's writing in English as a form of cultural escape. The term "escapee" was used by Mohja Kahf to describe writers who leave their native culture behind by writing in English (2000, p. 51). Amin Malak supports this review and claims that the English language offers Soueif a "liberation medium" to express herself freely, with a rich vocabulary and space that feels safe and more open than writing in Arabic (2000, p. 161). Malak's comment reflects the prevailing Orientalist narratives that deal with the oppositional presentations of East and West. In such writings, English is often considered as a means of freedom from cultural and linguistic constraints.

Far from denying it, in advance Soueif was well aware of the kind of polemical feedback that a novel dealing with taboo subjects would provoke. Her interview articulates a nuanced negotiation of identity and agency, carefully balancing the expectations of Egyptian Arab/Muslim audience with the demands of canonical Western literary markets. Put that way, Soueif intentionally places women's desire in the flow of a lengthy novel with a dominant historical and national profile.

This complex ambivalent mediation reflects the grounded space, balancing the interplay of a domesticating and foreignizing strategy under the premise of Orientalism. Soueif succeeds at a stance of cultural translation where many others fail, avoiding much of the postcolonial trends of cultural dichotomies. In another interview with Joseph Massad, Soueif acknowledges that some of her short stories in her early collection *Aisha* (1983) risks presenting a version, unlike *In the Eye of the Sun*, of Egypt shaped by external expectations rather than local complexities (1996, p. 86).

Leaning against this premise, Hassan depicts Arab immigrant writers as “two-way translators” who accordingly espouse the Orientalist tradition as a portion of their narratives, when he writes:

Arab immigrant writers have adopted translational stances that range from native informants to Orientalist; from mediators who attempted to question only certain aspects of Orientalism while leaving its conceptual edifice unchallenged to critics of that discourse who (following Said) have striven to dismantle it and to undo its basic premises; from reluctant translators who struggle with the burden of collective representation to those who eagerly embrace the role; and from opportunists who exploit it to activists who turn it into a site of contestation and opposition (Hassan, 2011, p 12).

Arab immigrant writers, mainly women, have approached the process of translation and cultural translation in diverse and often contradicting manners. Some have assumed the role of cultural informants to safely produce familiar narratives for Western readership, while others focused on pure Orientalist perspectives. Great deal of these writers prefer to play the role of cultural mediators to merely criticize certain features of Orientalism without fundamentally undermining its enduring structure.

In reverse, other Arab British women writers such as Soueif and Aboulela have engaged more critically, aiming to deconstruct the discourse and its biased assumptions. However, what makes the particularity of the two selected authors is their technical manipulations of the discourse of Orientalism in the flow of translating culture.

At different levels *Minaret*, one suggests, is a challenging novel, including its characterization, some elements in the plot and its creation of alternative images of Muslim women in the West. It might be argued that the novel particularly disrupts the familiar Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women. However, While Aboulela's protagonists align with their deep sense of faith, the strength derived from religious devotion can merely be perceived as an emotional passivity and endurance from a Western perspective as previously discussed in the second chapter.

From a Western reader's view point, one might agree with Sadia Abbas when she comments on Aboulela's brand of religion merely as a "socio-psychic tranquilizer" (Abbas, 2011, p. 453), to what she claims to be the sole insight for granting peace while denying any human activeness. In Aboulela's translation paradigm, on the contrary, it is not necessary to translate her protagonist into personal empowerment. In view of this, Aboulela is not seeking a public power that opposes Western and Orientalist perceptions.

Instead, Aboulela is attempting to work more on the private sphere of her female characters, a power that comes from an internal spiritual faith. In *Minaret*, Najwa's devotion is divorced from political activism. When Tamer expresses his frustration with the fact that "unless your political people think you're not a strong Muslim," she readily admits she is "afraid of politics" (Aboulela, 2005, p. 117). Aboulela then appears to embrace a notion of fatalism based upon rejecting freedom as an ethical and political responsibility.

Partly interpreting *Minaret*, so far in chapter two, as rejecting feminist' agency misses how Najwa diligently shows resilience through her determination to perform *Hajj* pilgrimage, return to education as a mature student, and prepare to support her brother Omar when he leaves prison. Najwa's determination even sounds more challenging when she finally decides to wear hijab, dismissing all the negative echoes

she may receive from both English and Westernized Sudanese friends like Randa. Contrary to Najwa, Randa is so hostile to hijab and Muslim practitioners. Their discussion on the phone reveals that:

It was Randa, phoning from Edinburgh...

She had never talked down to me back in Khartoum but now she was in a prestigious university and I had a disgraced father.

...yes, there were some Sudanese in Edinburgh University – quite number of families...

They invited her for dinner; she always declined. ‘Why?’ I asked.

‘so many of them are Islamists. You know the type, the wife in hijab having one baby after the other.’

‘Aren’t there women students too?’

‘Yes, unfortunately. The sight of them wearing hijab on campus irritates me.’
(Aboulela, 2005, p. 133-34).

The Translator also contains many examples of the reversal of Orientalist discourse. The novel portrays a female character who does not align with Western conventional conceptions of Muslim women. The writer’s portrayal of Sammar reveals a challenge together to Western and Orientalist discourses. Sammar is an educated working woman. She overtly dares to ask Rae for conversion so that they can marry.

Ghazoul (2001), in this regard, argues that “Sammar is by no means a stock character, and she is not a model widow devoted to her only son, and she admits the need to remarry...” (p. 8). One of the elements which might be read as contributing to writing back is the creation of characters who contradict the stereotypes about Muslim women¹³. In one example of her interviews, Aboulela says:

¹³ As for the point of writing back in the novel, Hassan argues, that since in Aboulela’s fiction is a complete ‘epistemological break’ with the discourse of Eurocentrism occurs, and the epistemology and logic working in her novel are rather inspired by ‘Qur’anic and other forms of Islamic literature (Sufi poetry, hadith and so forth)’, her work cannot fully be recognised as writing back.

In my personal experience I found religious people to be very interesting and positive – yet they are often depicted in novels as dull and harsh. I wanted to put my own experience in my fiction and pay tribute to the religious people who have enhanced my life (Eissa, 2005, p.4).

Contrary to postcolonial feminists who write back to the colonial West, Aboulela is not prescribed to insist on writing about binary oppositions. Hassan argues that since in Aboulela's fiction a complete 'epistemological break' with the discourse of Eurocentrism occurs, and the epistemology and logic working in her novel are inspired by 'Qur'anic and other forms of Islamic literature (Sufi poetry, hadith and so forth)', we cannot refer to Aboulela's narratives as writing back (2008, p. 299).

Though Hassan conceives writing back with politics, he argues that Aboulela writes back to an unsympathetic Orientalist discourse to Islam. Thus, one suggests that Aboulela's works still write back since the religious episteme, integral to her work, is represented in relation to the secular epistemology. Sympathetically writing back about religious symbols particularly hijab, which are frequently vilified in the West marks one feature in Aboulela's paradigm. This is seen in one instance when Sammar puts on her hijab.

The representation of hijab in dominant Western discourses as something dark and ugly is clearly deconstructed here. Rather hijab is shown as something beautiful and elegant: "She covered her hair with Italian silk, her arms with tropical colours. She wanted to look as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerizing as the Afghan princess she had once seen on TV wearing hijab (Aboulela, 1999, p. 9).

Conversely, the novel is rather shaped by a determined act of translation beyond the striking emphasis on what cannot be translated. *Minaret* seeks to undo cultural misrepresentations and replace it with a unique rendering of Najwa's spiritual journey far from home. Najwa's personal reflections and evolving affinity with religious faith are softly revealed in English language with occasional mixture of Arabic terms, and this suggests that the novel articulates a large space of translatability.

The possibility for a translation act defined by devoted and practicing Muslim characters stands at the heart of the writer's translational paradigm, challenging together Orientalist and Western conceptions of Islam and Muslims particularly women. The novel thus performs two translations at once, adapting English to express religious faith, and reimagining the Regent's Park mosque as a spiritual landscape in the midst of alienation in London.

Indeed, Aboulela takes her role as a cultural translator and subverts the common Western stereotypes about Muslim women by exploring how identities are shaped through language. The emphasis on wholeness and peace, repeatedly described in Aboulela's narratives is in a total contrast the alienation and fragmentation that mark of modernity. In this vein, faith becomes then a coping mechanism, though, often described by non-Muslims as oppressive, enabling them to manage the pressures of poverty, exile and alienation.

It involves a withdrawal of personal freedom that can be seen as regressive. Unlike her protagonists, Aboulela herself engages in a cultural project that is public, ideological and therefore political. Key to this project is Aboulela's representation of herself, a non-western author writing in English to a western readership, as a translator. By employing this term, Aboulela seems to engage in a familiar discourse of cultural exchange.

Hereby, a reflection on Hassan's definition of the novels of Aboulela as translational literature helps clarifying the parameters of this discourse. Translational Literature, he explains, foregrounds and problematizes the act of translation; it emphasizes "the complexity of cultural and linguistic negotiations and their ideological investments, [shows] the limits of translation, and constructs new models of identity based on cultural exchange and mutual transformation" (Hassan, 2008, p. 304).

Both Soueif and Aboulela employ English language as a strategic space to explore and articulate the multi-layered complex identifies and postcolonial political realities of their homelands, especially in relation to Arab/Muslim women's experiences. They work to balance between inclusion and exclusion, using distinguishing versions of English to reveal the tensions of nation, culture, and religion.

Through her characters' linguistic struggles, such as translating political texts and everyday dialect, Soueif highlights both connection and distance from both Egypt and Britain. Relevant to her linguistic approach, Soueif has not presented simple and fixed ideas of national identity. Instead, she challenges essentialist views by portraying a diverse and contradicting Egypt. This linguistic and cultural tensions become together a critical and creative space that subvert dominant narratives and enriches the literary portrayal of Egyptian politics through the medium of cultural translation.

This profoundly aligns with Aboulela's broader literary aesthetics. Relevant to her literary paradigm, Aboulela crafts English language narratives that convey a Muslim faith worldview in ways that are accessible to both Muslim and Western audience. Her translational literary paradigm celebrates the shared ground between languages and cultures rather than their divides. Her possibility for cultural translation is defined by the creation of devoted and practicing Muslim female characters, challenging both Orientalist and Western conceptions Islam.

4.4 Hybridity Poetics in the Works of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela

Crucially, Soueif is intensely conscious of the politics of reception, and how her narratives are perceived and consumed by Western readers. She initially underestimated how taboo themes such as polygamy and women's desire might attract Western audiences. Recognizing her inestimable position as a bridge between cultures, Soueif creatively employs her literary endeavour to reverse and complicate cultural misunderstandings and Orientalist stereotypical perceptions. In this vein, Soueif admits the importance of writing in English to negotiate Western reception:

I kept trying to write in English, because I hadn't thought that I would write in English. Eventually, it was a choice between writing in English or not writing at all, so I wrote in English. So the whole problematic of what it meant to be writing in English had not occurred to me at all – these early stories might just as well have been written in Arabic (1999, p. 86).

Recognizing how much the translated texts would not be perceived in the same way they are expressed in the target language; while often need to be adapted to Western

publishing preferences, Soueif moves her choice to writing in English. Instead, her two novels emphasized translation as a contested ground, simultaneously navigating inclusion and censorship from certain cultural spaces due to her linguistic fluency, diverging social backgrounds, and local Egyptian political stance. Soueif, through her novels *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love*, approaches translation mainly through linguistic experimentation and narrative complexity.

Both Soueif and Aboulela alternate between domesticating and foreignizing strategies to manipulate Western canonical translation industries under the inevitable premise of Orientalism in the reception of these writers in the West. Both writers explicitly, though differently, reject the notion of the translator as a neutral mediator. According to Tymoczko (2003), the metaphor of “in-betweenness” has often been praised in Western, preferring neutrality and an idealized hybrid cultural space for translators and postcolonial authors.

The so-called ‘space in-between’, denoting hybridity, has then turned to a frequent used literary tool in the postcolonial cultural transfer from one place to another. As Tymoczko observes, the in-between space has become “one of the most popular means of figuring an *elsewhere* that a translator may speak from”; an elsewhere “that *ipso facto* affords the translator a valorised ideology stance” (Tymoczko, 2003, p. 185). Tymoczko has equally shown that this discourse develops from historical and linguistic practices which are specifically Western.

Perloff undermines hybridity, particularly the very idea (that of Bhabha) that all cultures are hybrid and cannot be contraposed (2002, p. 35), the prevailing polarized nature of the world may support such supposition. Tymoczko further claims that this position is problematic. Thus, in-betweenness position of the translator is highly referred with neutrality which may lead the writer to withdraw from her domestic background.

Soueif does not embrace hybridity as a neutral ground, rather she critically engages with it as an acknowledgment of longing tensions within and between cultures. More particularly, Soueif intends to reveal the complex multifaceted tapestry of postcolonial modernity and women’s positions within it. This stance is highlighted in her strategic uses of English and Egyptian dialect, especially through the process of translation, to

navigate the enduring pressures put on Arab/Muslim women writers faced to the politics of reception inside and outside Egypt.

This rejection from both Egypt and Anglo-American regulating publishing and reception systems is portrayed through the act of translation handled by female characters like Asya and Amal. Asya's dialect and English fluency place her linguistically within the Egyptian women's community, but socially and economically excludes her due to upper-class and Westernized status.

Against this background, Soueif recognizes the limits of hybridity, especially in the case of translating between cultures. In the flow of the story, Asya encounters several translational intricacies in the midst of linguistic, social, and political upheavals. Translating Sheikh Imam's texts together reveals Asya's linguistic intimacy and the cultural, social, and political distance from everyday Egyptian life.

Challenging postcolonial hybridity locally and globally stands at the heart of Soueif's translational approach. She affirms that in-betweenness is not always helpful in the process of translating cultures even within native ones. The case of Egypt is a suitable example where hybrid proportions are complex alternatives because of the long history of cross-cultural encounters, especially British colonialism.

Back in the second chapter on this thesis, it has been mentioned that Ahdaf Soueif does not write her novel, *In the Eye of the Sun*, for a mere writing back to colonial Britain, instead the writer tends to discuss postcolonial local political troubles inside Egypt as the great sense of nationalism disappointedly declines, especially from her protagonist's perspective. Eventually, Soueif builds her translational paradigm that conversely interrogates the status of Egyptian women within the limited opportunities of education and political agency in the national project.

Ultimately, Soueif's oscillation between domesticating and foreignizing language is not meant to totally escape the discomfort with hybridity, but rather to narrate through it. Soueif's translational paradigm partly leans against the hybrid space to reclaim local tensions and make Egyptian political and national realities visible within English

literature. In here, Soueif resists dominant narratives of canonical representations of Egyptian culture imposed by Western publishing markets.

While, Soueif exposes the instability of her nation in the midst of fractured political and economic change, she deeply defines her translational paradigm. She deliberately highlights complexity, intertextuality, and the presence of Otherness in both Arabic and Western contexts forcing readers and publishing markets to reconsider simplified hybrid narratives about Arab and Egyptian contexts. In the case of her hybrid texts, Soueif highlights:

In the West, I think that part of why people liked my work is because they felt that it gives them an insight into another world, into the heart and minds of people they would not have access to otherwise. Because the books are written in English-without the medium of translation- because the form is familiar to them, they find that they respond to it, and they are able to empathize. In the East, people have said that even though the writing is in English, that this is an authentic Arab voice, an authentic Arab *wigdan* [soul, passion, or sensibility], which is being expressed in English. It is as if they're their emissary to the world at large. So, I guess I'm lucky-to have the Arab *wigdan* and the English language. (Cited in Massad, 1999, p. 89).

The passage foregrounds the intricacies of translating across cultures that effectively leads Soueif to embrace a stance of translational literature with contested articulations of linguistic and cultural postcolonial hybridity. Defining *In the Eye of the Sun* as a translational narrative, Soueif, to greater extent, breaks free from traditional Orientalist stereotypes of Arab women typically promoted in the West, and simultaneously challenges rigid adherence to traditional identities enforced by the native culture itself. As such, Soueif uses hybridity and translation as insightful and productive spaces to narrate Egypt's complex modernity without being hostile to the West.

While Soueif articulates her critique of hybrid mediation through a challenging linguistic experimentation and political complexity, Aboulela's rejection is manifested through a linguistic paradigm that praises devotion to Islam as an alternative to Western

secular frameworks. Aboulela converses hybridity as an imposed Western expectation by firmly staffing her female characters' identities in Muslim faith and rituals.

In Minaret, Aboulela showcases Islam as intensely personal and private faith that resists Western definitions of individual freedom. Najwa's religious growth and determination to wear *hijab* is not a symbol of cultural exchange or a mutual transformation but an internal reaffirmation of faith. Thus, the novel subverts Western hegemonic norms that assume Muslim immigrants should assimilate or translate themselves in Western cultural frameworks (Butt, 2009, p.).

Najwa consciously rejects translating herself into Western secular paradigm. This approach resonates with Tymoczko's (2006) critique of Western translation, which emphasizes equivalence or the carrying across of meaning unchanged. Najwa's embrace of religious faith rather than a hybrid identity, strongly critiques notions of cultural equivalence and hybridization as an ideal outcome of migration. As Aboulela manifests:

In my personal experience I found religious people to be very interesting and positive – yet they are often depicted in novels as dull and harsh. I wanted to put my own experience in my fiction and pay tribute to the religious people who have enhanced my life (Cited in Eissa, 2005, p. 4).

Furthermore, the critique of Baker (2005) on the translator as a “neutral mediator” illuminates Aboulela's translational stance. Both of her protagonists, Najwa and Sammar, are not playing the role of passive mediators. Najwa openly rejects the secular identity and does not offer a compromised and neutral middle-ground solution. Rather, Aboulela intentionally positions her protagonist as committed to her spirituality and faith. In doing so, the author resists the domesticating and invisibility imposed by Western expectations. In her essay entitled *Moving away from Accuracy* (2000), Aboulela comments on her position as a non-western Anglophone writer, asserting that:

Write in Western language, published in the West and you are constantly translating, back and forth – this is like this here but not there. A thing has high value here, a certain weight, move it to another and it becomes nothing (2002, p. 200-1).

The hook of her statement points out that bilingual postcolonial writers often act as mediators, moving back and forth across cultures to foster greater mutual understanding. As many critics have noted, such a mediating role positions these writers in a unique space between languages and cultural frameworks.

Aboulela, however, recognizes that translation is not a simple matter of moving back and forth. In her view, cultural values are deep and do not often transfer fluidly, especially when bridging gaps between colonizer and colonized contexts. She actively declines the idea of the hybrid space in the stance of cultural translation since a text would not seamlessly be translated into another language, underlying how what carries weight or meaning here can be reduced to nothing there in the target language.

While undermining the notion of translation as an act of carrying cultural values from one space to another, Aboulela challenges the Western expectation that postcolonial subjects should negotiate their identities within an idealized in-between space. Instead, Najwa's spiritual growth clearly asserts Islam's distinctiveness.

Rather than adopting the neutral hybrid space, Aboulela oscillates between domestication and foreignizing translation strategies to resist assimilation into Western secular frameworks. In doing so, she partly invests in the Orientalist discourse in order to ensure her place within dominant English literary canons. Through this ideological approach, Aboulela's novels reveal the political dimension of cultural translation by explicitly dismissing Western discourses that support hybridity and neutral mediation.

4.5 Ahdaf Soueif and Aboulela: Traversing the Postcolonial Landscapes

The literary critic Dima Ayoub observes the invisibility of Anglo-Arab writers like Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela in the postcolonial literary canons and offers a critical insight into the ongoing challenges faced by these authors in being recognized within dominant postcolonial frameworks. In her paper, "Anglophone Arab Women Writers and the 'End' of Postcolonialism" (2008), Dima Ayoub discusses the marginalization of these writers despite their significant contributions to contemporary literature.

This marginalization, according to Dima Ayoub, is deeply connected to the ways in which postcolonial theory itself has evolved and the shifting dynamics within literary

discourse, particularly regarding gender, religion, and national identity. Ayoub also underscores the evolving nature of postcolonial theory and the ‘end’ of postcolonialism as a literary movement. As a term, postcolonialism has come to be associated with the aftermath of colonialism, but she points out that it is increasingly inadequate in addressing the complexities of contemporary postcolonial writers.

In his essay, “Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application,” Wail Hassan categorizes postcolonial literature as a Western ideology and he particularly criticizes its limits in terms of understanding Arabic culture and literature (2002, p. 47). Writers like Soueif and Aboulela, who focus on identity, faith, and belonging in the context of migration and diaspora, explore distinct ways of thinking about postcolonialism.

They both move beyond the tired binaries of colonizer/colonized and engage with the ongoing effects of colonialism in a more nuanced, multifaceted, and contemporary ways. In this context, Ayoub’s argument about the ‘end’ of postcolonialism reflects broader shift in how postcolonial literature is engaged with Arab Anglophone literature today.

Drawing on postcolonial and translation theory, Soueif’s novels complicate canonical power structures through the exploration of new literary techniques. Her literary approach is technically diversified and multifaceted that reflect the complexity of the postcolonial subject, especially in the case of Arab and Muslim women. This may include: challenging linguistic hierarchies, subverting rigid cultural binaries, reconfiguring translation politics, and creating transcultural continuums.

At different layers, Soueif’s two first novels often resist the dominant postcolonial themes of hybridity and multiculturalism that have been central to the study of authors such as Salman Rushdie and Hanifi Kureishi. Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun*, for example, articulates themes of cross-cultural encounters and the legacies of British colonialism in Egypt, but it also emphasizes a deep connection to Egyptian and Arab identities. As discussed in the second chapter, Soueif’s novels are centred around criticizing the local Egyptian governments and regimes in postcolonial contexts instead of focusing on fully writing back to British colonial rule.

In *In the Eye of the Sun*, Soueif underscores the internalization of nationalism within characters, exploring how it deeply shapes their lives and experiences. The story delves into the emotional and political struggles of transcultural Arab women as they try to reconcile private and political narratives. Soueif employs the socio-political context of Egypt from 1967 to 1970, a transformative period marking the rise of a new generation of Arab women writers, to trace the development of nationalism and metaphorically a diverging postcolonial literary product.

The novel addresses how both colonial and Arab/Islamist patriarchal frameworks shape identities, ideologies, and histories, with a focus on themes of dislocation, alienation and the conflict between tradition and modernity in Egypt. Through the multi-layered protagonist Asya, Soueif explores the complexities of postcolonial Arab female identity as influenced together by colonial history, Westernization, and the nationalist struggles of the early twentieth century.

After discussing Soueif's novels from multiple perspectives, one can assume that Soueif might be positioned as part of a literary movement that transcends the limitations of postcolonial discourse. In doing so, Soueif embraces a distinct trend of hybridity. She belongs to a generation of postcolonial writers who use English to explore unprecedented themes in postcolonial literature. She mainly writes in English to address taboo themes, especially related to gender and nationalism, while constructing transnational identities. This expresses a shift from traditional postcolonial nation-bound critiques to a more globalized and diasporic perspective.

Her linguistic strategy complicates the postcolonial focus on resistance, and instead emphasizes creative agency. Soueif's agency tends to elaborate the gendered nature of the invisibility of writers like her. Dima Ayoub (2008) suggests that much of postcolonial literature has been a male-oriented type of narratives. As such, the experiences of men, particularly in relation to national and political conflicts, have been privileged.

Furthermore, Soueif's linguistic paradigm that integrates untranslated Arabic phrases and very specific local cultural references into her English narratives disrupts the dominance of English, Western translation, and exoticization of Arabic. This is what

happens with Asya after she returns back to Egypt and goes through several political intricacies and linguistic rendering with the women from the countryside. This incident, as shown by Soueif, is not merely done because of the cross-cultural displacement to London but is due to prior social inconvenience between Asya's westernized privileged life and women's local traditions.

Women writers, particularly Arab and Muslim, often face hard conditions of limiting scopes of narration to gain recognition within the postcolonial literary tradition. The works of Ahdaf Soueif, which engage with both private and public struggles, offer a nuanced view of the postcolonial experience by including gendered and issues of female desire that are frequently overshadowed by colonial and national themes that dominate the postcolonial literary canon.

By focusing on local political troubles challenges the dominant narratives of writing back to colonial empire and the traumatic divisions of East versus the West. This new presentation of the colonizer and colonized has made it challenging for Soueif's novels to be fully assimilated into the Anglophone postcolonial canon. Through her novels, Soueif blends historical echoes with fictional storytelling to highlight how colonial power dynamics rely on rigid categorizations. As such, Soueif's protagonists, particularly those who navigate multiple languages and cultures, embody distinct hybrid identities that reject colonial dichotomies of authentic versus foreign.

Accordingly, both *The Map of Love* and *In the Eye of the Sun* partly address Egypt's colonial history but also deeply delve into the private emotional and psychological journeys of their characters, particularly the female protagonists. For instance, Asya and Anna, whose transcultural experiences of love, national despair, betrayal, and self-discovery complicate the traditional postcolonial discourse. Soueif's strategic focus on female subjectivity and private dimensions of postcolonial lived experiences add new critical panel in postcolonial studies which have often focused on more external traumatic experiences highly expressed through the traditional medium of writing back.

Dima Ayoub (2008) remarks that the reluctance to integrate Soueif's narratives into entire postcolonial discussions is partly because her texts do not fit easily the usual

framework of hybridity and multiculturalism. Thus, Soueif's novels are not centred on a seamless blending of cultures but on the complexities of Arab identity and its intersections with colonial history. Soueif reaches this new hybrid stance through her unique English use and a diverging manipulation of the process of translation, and eventually embraces translational literature.

Soueif's translational literature based on navigating between domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies positions her with a hybridity model that functions as both literary strategy and political act of agency to negotiate Orientalist stereotypes and postcolonial limited texts' structures. Through these layered literary techniques, Soueif's narratives articulate a postcolonial worldview where cultural exchange manifests partly without hierarchal domination of both local and Western powers.

Similar to her peer, Leila Aboulela has her distinct strategy to traverse beyond postcolonial limitations. Aboulela's *Minaret* delves into the complexity of religion in postcolonial settings. The novel subverts postcolonial discourse's tendency to ignore Islam in its ongoing discussion of colonialism and its aftermath. Unlike the critical attention paid to other UK 'multicultural' writers such as Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Hanif Kureishi, Aboulela's first novels have not been fully contextualized within postcolonial or migration literary traditions and the reasons for this remain unclear (Baker, 2009, p. 259).

Minaret explores a different complex and multidimensional female protagonist. Aboulela's focus on the spiritual journey of Najwa complicates traditional postcolonial narratives and the debates surrounding hybridity and assimilation that dominate immigrant and diaspora Anglophone literature. *Minaret* challenges postcolonial discourse by placing religious faith at the centre of the narrative. In the case of Najwa, her spiritual journey toward religious devotion is portrayed not as a cultural negotiation or mixture but as a determined choice to reconnect her religion.

Najwa's religious conversion in the novel is an unavoidable part of the reconstruction of her identity. She embraces Islam as a source of spiritual fulfilment and grounding, especially after traumatic personal loss and social and political upheaval. In

contrast to most postcolonial texts that portray characters caught between multiple identities, *Minaret* exhibits a return to a monolithic faith-based identity.

Aboulela challenges postcolonial discourse by asserting that identity is not a blending of multiple cultures but rather a reaffirmation of an Islamic way of life that subverts Western secularism. This opposes postcolonial narratives that promote cultural hybridization and assimilation as the ideal response to colonial legacies.

Aboulela's refusal to celebrate hybridity in *Minaret* aligns with Dima Ayoub's claim that her novel is unpopular among Western postcolonial critics mainly because of her focus on Islam and the rejection of cultural fusion. In this context, Cristina argues that the sensibilities and cultural practices depicted in Aboulela's novels deconstruct much of the current postcolonial discourse. She confirms that these texts are "not only firmly rooted, they are informed and guided by geographies of faith and selective localities" (2010, p. 102).

Furthermore, Aboulela challenges many conventions of the mainstream diasporic literature. In here, Aboulela is not traditionally celebrating hybridity and assimilation, but she instead explores a vision on Muslim women as firmly rooted in the tangible, physical, and psychological aspects of national, religious, and cultural differences. This critique is poignant in Aboulela's *The Translator* when Rae observes: "Even Fanon, who I have always admired, had no insights into the religious feelings of the North Africans he wrote about. He never made a link between Islam and anti-colonialism" (Aboulela, 1999, p. 109).

Although Aboulela clearly favours Muslim over secular way of life, she conversely engages with some hybrid concerns particularly in terms of language and history and her status as an Arab Muslim woman living in the West. By writing in the language of the colonizer, the writer partly addresses a reading public shaped by the British colonial legacy in her homeland Sudan.

In *Minaret*, the writer intentionally employs English to express a distinctly non-Western Islamic perspective, reclaiming the colonizer's language as a medium for exploring Muslim postcolonial identity. In this context, Shamma observes that "writing

in any language, even that of the colonizer, is a form of love” (1988, p. 163). Aboulela’s hybrid linguistic stance; writing in English but centred on religious identity, reflects a form of resistance much like Khatibi’s notion of “amour bilingue” or bilingual love. It showcases Aboulela’s technique to use the colonizer’s English without subscribing to its colonial ideologies.

In the novel, Najwa is depicted as deeply rooted in her religious faith. However, she is also shaped by multiple discourses that complicate her sense of belonging, making her rootedness polycentric. On the one hand, Najwa had a Westernized secular lifestyle when she was in Sudan and upon her onset displacement in London. On the other hand, she experiences emotional displacement from every spiritual thing she has come to cherish in London. Najwa’s faith-based identity creates an alternative space that subverts conventional boundaries of national rootedness, allowing her to move from the periphery to the heart of community and belonging.

This perspective metaphorically mirrors Aboulela’s stance within postcolonialism. By writing from the centre of Islam, the writer does not embrace any form of cultural hybridity, neither for her nor for her characters. From a linguistic standpoint, however, Aboulela might be considered a hybrid writer. Building on Dilyana Mincheva’s discourse on Muslim intellectuals in the West (2016), Aboulela can be classified with writers like Khatibi, who reclaim the colonizer’s language while dissociating it of the ideologies of Zionism and “la mission civilatrice”.

Moreover, Aboulela’s target in *Minaret* confronts the Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women by offering a representation that emphasizes empowerment through Muslim faith rather than depicting it as the expected form of subjugation. While Najwa is deeply rooted in Islam rather than Western assimilation, her conversion journey reflects the complexities of being a Muslim in a postcolonial context. Instead of adhering to the Western stereotypes of the oppressed Muslim woman, Najwa finds resilience and peace in her faith. Against this backdrop, Aboulela offers a counter-narrative to the conventional portrayal of Arab/Muslim women in both postcolonial and Orientalist literatures.

In examining Aboulela's *Minaret* within the framework of postcolonial theory, some critics assume the Islamic perspective can both challenge and enrich the conventional postcolonial narrative. Aboulela's treatment of Islam offers a unique contribution to postcolonial thought by situating Muslim identity as central rather than marginal in the postcolonial experience.

As such, Aboulela is in dialogue with Anouar Majid's notion of polycentricity, where multiple cultural and identity centres coexist (2000, p. 152). For Majid, postcolonial theory should go beyond celebrating the fluidity of identity and emphasize the intersecting identities and cultures that can also coexist in postcolonial subjects, and Islam might be such concurrent critical focus. This firmly aligns with Aboulela's exploration of Muslim identity within the diaspora, particularly in the context of Najwa's religious awakening and the challenges she encounters in the West.

Besides, Hassan Majed's call for an Islamic Postcolonialism is a compelling paradigm through which to read Aboulela's novel. Majed suggests a new adaptation of postcolonial theory by Muslim intellectuals and writers which integrates Islam at the core of the discourse rather than ignoring it. This theoretical integration creates a space for Muslim postcolonial writers like Aboulela to assert the centrality of Islam within the broader postcolonial discourse. As Majed (2014) describes his notion of Islamic Postcolonialism:

Regardless of the western origin of postcolonialism, it is a literary theory that is open to be critiqued and developed by generating new dimensions to its spaces of study... It could be argued that postcolonialism is a neutral theory that could be practiced by Muslim intellectuals as well as secular intellectuals; at present it is secular in its inclination because those who practice it are largely secular. Instead of dismissing postcolonialism and secular postcolonial writers for neglecting Islam and marginalizing it, Muslim writers might develop their own form of postcolonialism – *Islamic Postcolonialism* – in which they emphasize the centrality of Islam in their postcolonial practice. Islamic postcolonialism could thus provide a new and a challenging space for both postcolonial and Muslim writers (p. 97).

Aboulela's *Minaret* which foregrounds Islam as a defining force in constructing identity deeply embodies what Majed describes as the intersection of postcolonialism with Muslim ideology. Through the portrayal of complex relationships intersects Islam with postcolonial condition, the writer foregrounds a distinct literary space that opposes secular postcolonial tropes and offers an alternative narrative where Muslim identity is not acknowledged but praised and celebrated.

The novel could then be read as a postcolonial text, and one that also aligns with an Islamic postcolonial scheme. This dual identity allows her to represent Muslim women's experiences from a non-Eurocentric perspective. Thus, Aboulela's fiction, like Ahdaf, Soueif contributes the growing discourse in postcolonial studies. Aligning with Majed, postcolonialism, while secular in its traditional form, is also a neutral theory that can evolve to embrace other frameworks and Islam in particular. In this, Aboulela's writings emerge as a fertile ground for developing postcolonial theory.

The multifaceted fictional characters invented by both Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela encourage diversity and subjectivity in postcolonial literature that stand against rigid stereotyping models of Arab/Muslim women's narratives. Amal Amireh (1996) traces back the historical factors and political events behind this biased literary reception of Soueif and Aboulela in the West and thoroughly supports diversity in the writings of postcolonial Arab/Anglophone women:

The complexity and diversity of the Arab world and its literatures can be represented best by a wide range of works...diversity guards against stereotyping and pigeon-holding. Once Western readers are exposed to range of styles, nuances and ideologies, they will learn that Arab writers are individual artists, who speak in multiple tongues and belong to vibrant and diverse cultural movement (p. 20-2).

Following Amireh's vision the complexity and diversity of the Arab world and its literatures are vividly embodied in the novels of Soueif and Aboulela. The complexity within the writers commences as they are influenced together by Arab and Western literature demonstrating the breadth of styles, themes, and ideologies. Together Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* and Aboulela's *Minaret* diligently reflect the individuality of the

authors themselves, and thus exploring distinct voices that subvert oversimplified and stereotypical representations of postcolonial worlds.

Through their nuanced and controversial depictions of Egyptian and Muslim identities, the authors speak in multiple linguistic and cultural tongues while drawing back from personal and complex socio-political realities. Both writers' novels are partly rooted in colonial past as an unavoidable part of their national histories supplied by their own contextualized postcolonial vision underscoring the diversity of Arab British thought and expression. As Anastasia Valassopoulos (2007):

Postcolonial theory then, seems an apt (both geographically and historically) tool with which to investigate certain experiences in Arab women's writings to do not only with issues of dislocation and hybridization but also with the discourses of modernity and cultural influence. In many ways, it is these moments of discursive encounter that reveal the potential of feminist postcolonial theory to produce contextualized, nuanced and productive readings of women's writings (p. 27).

Like Aboulela in *Minaret*, Soueif's novels challenge the lasting colonial assumptions embedded in Western postcolonial discourse and underscores the nuances between the lived reality of Arabs and the distorted perceptions presented in Western Orientalist narratives. Ghandi (1998) observes that "the West attempts systematically to cancel or negate the cultural difference and value of the non-West" (p. 16). This resonates deeply within Soueif's and Aboulela's unique exploration of the postcolonial existence, where their characters continuously struggle against the reductive depictions of the East in Western culture.

Soueif's writing, like Aboulela's model, is inscribed in the personal and collective experiences of Egyptians. In doing so, Soueif articulates an authentic portrayal of Egyptian life through characters, like Najwa in *Minaret*, navigate their identities in relation to both their local culture and the global forces of postcolonial migration. Acting as native informants and using English instead of dominant Western translations, Soueif and Aboulela contribute to what Mike Philips (2005) describes as "writing from inside experiences" that resists outside depictions that oversimplify complex cultures.

Soueif overtly underscores the notion of cultural difference in *The Map of Love*, especially through her depiction of the relationship between the British woman Anna and the Egyptian Sharif. Their connection, though rooted in colonial history, is articulated in a way that destabilizes Western assumptions about the Middle East by offering distinct and more complex representation of Egypt as a nation, people, and culture. Anna's journey, both political and personal, embodies a transgression to fixed stereotypes aligning with the postcolonial idea of "emphasizing their differences from the imperial centre" (Ashcroft et al, 2005, p. 2).

Said's concept of "writing from the self" is particularly relevant in the context of Soueif and Aboulela's novels as their writings disrupt the Orientalist image of the Other. Said suggests that "since an Arab poet or novelist writes from his experience, of his values, of his humanity, he effectively disrupts the various patterns (images, clichés) by which the Orient is represented" (1995, p. 291). By telling stories from within the Egyptian cultural and political context, Soueif partly gets rid of the stereotypes imposed by the West complicating Arab Egyptian identity for Western readers.

In the context of *Minaret*, writing about the self "disrupts" the Orientalist image of the Muslim other as religiously devoted. Aboulela clearly states her positioning of self in her writing about Islam, "I can never truly see [Islam] through western eyes. I am in this religion. It is in me" (Aboulela, 2007).

Conversely, writing about the self in itself is a postcolonial feature. Yet, Soueif and Aboulela use it in their very unique contextualized cultural and literary expressions. This focus on the self, rather than the other is a defining feature of the authors' postcolonial paradigms. As Malak (2005) observes, "gone are the days when the representation in English of Muslims and their cultures was dominated by others" (p. 7).

Such controversial self-representations also call for breaking the routine with a literature eventually produced for the constant East/West oppositions. Soueif and Aboulela invite the Western audience to challenging foreign stories even far from their expectations. They create a narrative space where Egyptian, Arab, and Muslim characters are seen from their own eyes and not as objects of fascination for dominant Western readership. In this way, their literature aligns with Young's claim (2003) that:

when western people look at the non-western world what they see is often more a mirror image of themselves and their own assumptions than the reality of what is really there, or of how people outside the west actually feel and perceive themselves (p. 2).

Through the diversity of their own stories, themes, literary techniques, language use Soueif and Aboulela challenge Western postcolonial and Orientalist discourses that have shaped the depiction of Arab and Muslims in the West. Their writing about the inside Egypt as a nation and Islam as a religious faith disrupt Western-imposed images of the other and foster a deeper understanding of cultural and religious identities.

Anastasia Valassopoulos's engaging perspective on the growing diversity of Arab British women writers is relevant in the context of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela's fiction. The authors converge and diverge in expanding the ground for postcolonial theory. Soueif with her narratives rooted in Egypt's postcolonial landscape, and Aboulela whose explorations of faith and identity in a Muslim context challenge Western assumptions. Still, both reject the reductive "memetic mode" as described by Amin Malak (2005, p. 24).

In this context, Valassopoulos states that "diversity is on the rise, making it increasingly difficult, if not possible, to define the Arab women writer" (2007, p. 24). Therefore, Soueif and Aboulela embrace a diverse range of styles, ideologies, and cultural narratives that firmly reflect the multifaceted nature of postcolonial Arab women's experiences.

While both writers' novels are "translational texts," they offer contrasting conceptions of language, identity, and value demonstrating how translation can be grounded in very different and similar frameworks. The act of moving between cultures and acknowledging the inherent untranslatability in cultural translation serve to underscore a language that transcends both time and place. Despite the aforementioned differences, it is crucial to mention that Ahdaf Soueif and Aboulela are leading figures in the articulation of cultural translation in a complex postcolonial context. They present translation not merely as linguistic rendering but as a firmly ideological and political act.

Both writers contest dominant Western and Orientalist narratives emphasizing that the translator inevitably takes a stance, engages with power dynamics, and navigate cultural identities. By doing so, Soueif and Aboulela subvert monolithic portrayals and offer more nuanced transcultural representations of Arab British women, thereby contributing to a celebration of the rich diversity of the postcolonial existence.

4.6 Conclusion

The literature of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela tailors a paradoxical articulation of cultural translation particularly through the ambivalent complex identities of Arab/Muslim women in postcolonial contexts. By technically engaging with translation theory, both writers underscore the constant tensions and limitations of translating culture, religion, and identity between distinct worlds, locally and globally.

Soueif's engagement with cultural translation, especially through her use of Egyptian dialects and English, voices the fractured postcolonial identities that metaphorically challenged canonical representations of fixed cultural binaries. Her manipulation of foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies provides a distinct paradigm to navigate national identity amidst political and historical instability in Egypt.

Aboulela, conversely, emphasizes the subjective and spiritual levels of cultural translation, focusing on an empowering religious identity. Through characters like Najwa in *Minaret*, the author illustrates how religious faith serves as a form of resistance against Western secularism and cultural assimilation. Aboulela's narratives demonstrate the limits of translation, more especially in the context of Muslim women's experiences. In view of this, Aboulela subverts the prevailing Orientalist representations through a depiction of women whose spiritual devotion opposes external perceptions of subjugation and passivity.

Exclusively, both authors reject simplistic portrayals of hybridity in postcolonial discourse. Instead, Soueif and Aboulela distinctively craft the complexities of identity that arise from negotiating between cultures. Soueif's novel critiques political and social changes in her country, whereas Aboulela's writing foregrounds the quiet power of faith as a means of self-determination in the face of forced exile and external alienation.

Ultimately, both writers use their narratives to challenge the limiting scopes of postcolonial literature by suggesting more layered and diverse representations of Arab and Muslim women.

Throughout the chapter, it is then assumed that Soueif and Aboulela provide complementary views of translation. The first is rooted in national and political complexity, while the second embraces a more ideological stance exclusively defined by Islam and faith. Together, their texts significantly enrich the interpretation of Eastern and Western's reading public that translation is often a nuanced and paradoxical experience of cultural translators negotiating between divergent languages and cultures.

General Conclusion

The Arab world has been profoundly shaped by the colonial legacies with Orientalism playing a pivotal role in defining the contours of Arab and Muslim identity along both local and global contexts. British colonization, in particular, not only redrew the political map of the Middle East but also contributed to the conceptualization of the region. In response to these historical and ideological tyrannies, Arab Anglophone immigrant writers have distinctive counter-narratives that engage with cultural, racial, national, and religious discourses shaping Western perceptions of Arabs and Muslims in postcolonial existence.

Arab women writers, diverging in their backgrounds, present a complex and heterogeneous body of thoughts that challenges monolithic gaze of Arab and Muslim's identity presentations. Politically, they encompass a wide range, from conservatives to liberals and leftists. Religiously, they span Christians and Muslims from various stripes. Each generation reflects a unique to the unavoidable legacy of Orientalism and the inherent colonial history through the ongoing processing of cultural translation.

Among them, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela have emerged as exceptionally notable figures of their generation, navigating the tensions of traditional ideological struggle with the West hugely explored in postcolonial literature. The experience of postcolonial Arab British women writers is defined by profound tensions between private and public, tradition and modernity, home and the host land, colonizer and colonized. In *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) by Ahdaf Soueif and *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela, the authors delve deeply into these tensions and represent complex and contrasting portrayals of female subjectivity.

Though their female protagonists, Asya and Najwa, both come from privileged Westernized backgrounds in Egypt and Sudan and find themselves displaced in Britain, their ideological and emotional journeys take impressively divergent pathways. A comparative study of these two novels reveals not a mere diversity within postcolonial Arab British women's narratives, but also the diverging and unique literary strategies utilized to reclaim identity in a world context that is still defined by dichotomies as East/West and colonizer/colonized.

Ahdaf Soueif's fiction represents a powerful convergence of historical consciousness, feminist inquiry, and postcolonial critique. Through her novels, Soueif crafts a transcultural narrative structure that interrogates not merely a colonial past but also post-independence local regimes while emphasizing the experiences of Arab women negotiating identity, nationhood, and agency.

Soueif's engagement with history is deeply contrapuntal. This makes her literary narratives function not merely as a storytelling, but as an engaged act of cultural resistance to reclaim history, subvert Orientalist premise, and confront patriarchal structures that continue to define the postcolonial condition. *In the Eye of the Sun* and *The Map of Love* constitute a profound literary response to the constant binary oppositions of East and West. This aligns with Said's call to read colonial texts against the grain, or reinterpreting Egypt's political past through the eyes of marginalized individuals especially women.

In particular manners, Soueif's positioning of nationalism was not presented as a univocal site of liberation, she rather foregrounds its contradictions. Soueif emphasizes the complicity of nationalism in defeating other voices, especially its failure to include women as full subjects, and its eventual collapse under the burden of its own unfulfilled targets. Her portrayal of post-Naksa Egypt becomes crucial discursive of multifaceted sites in Soueif's postcolonial intervention.

Leaning against Bhabha's ambivalent "third space", Soueif thrives in a space of paradoxical cultural hybridity to destabilize constant East/West dichotomies. Through a nuanced deployment of hybridity and transcultural identity, Soueif systematically dismantles dominant divisions of self and other, modern and traditional, colonizer and colonized. She creates female protagonists like Asya and Anna who dwell in zones of in-betweenness. In the case of her fiction, these spaces are not only dedicated for confusion and compromise, but rather for agency where meanings are made through cultural translation and ethical ambivalence,

In the first place, women's desire, autonomous privacy, and emotional vulnerability are not isolated from the political, and they are instead entangled within. Through the intersection of Asya's political consciousness and transgressive

representations of women's bodies, Soueif confronts both colonial narrative. of marginalized Arab women and local cultural conventions that silence them. As such, it is argued through the second chapter that Soueif constructs a form of feminist resistance that is not Western in orientation, but one that emerges from Arab and local socio-political contexts.

Thus, the private and political narratives in Soueif's work operate as metaphors for the East-West encounter. Asya's private relationships, her academic journey between Cairo and London, and her struggle for intimate emotional fulfilment. Asya who lives through historical ruptures, revolutions, heartbreak, academic failure reveals that identity is a continuing process of becoming that is always shaped by historical forces, geographic displacement, and personal choices.

It has been also noticed that class and Western education further complicates Soueif's vision of modernity. She critiques the limitations of Nasser's national project particularly through educational egalitarian reform. Importantly, the writer does not romanticize hybridity a utopian or idealized space. Paradoxically, Soueif exposes the fractures, tensions, and exclusions that come with transcultural experience.

Asya, for example, benefits from elite transnational mobility, unlike Mahrous who grapples within structural inequalities. Characters like Mahrous, thus, reveal how class and social origin complicates access to hybridity in postcolonial contexts. This way, while transcultural identity offers a means of rejecting simplistic binary of traditions versus modernity, Soueif instead portrays how both can reproduce exclusion, especially when filtered through capitalist or authoritarian rationales.

Soueif further complicates the East/West oppositions through cross-cultural relationships in *The Map of Love*. The love stories between Anna and Sharif, and later Isabel and Omar are politically involved. They conversely meet in spaces where colonial histories, nationalist aspirations, and gender ideologies highly converge. Their relationships perform a kind of embodied hybridity, suggesting that cultural reconciliation does not occur through abstraction but within intimate and lived encounters.

The in-depth analysis dedicated to the fiction of Leila Aboulela in the third chapter has led to several key conclusions. The investigation of her novel *Minaret* serves as a profound critique of both secular postcolonial discourse and the Western romance genre, exploring an intricate heterogeneous narrative that subvert dominant fiction surrounding Muslim women, religious faith, and the intersection of culture, identity, and agency.

As the first of her considerations, by articulating a nuanced depiction of Muslim faith as a source of solaced identity particularly in the context of migration and exile, Aboulela offers an alternative to the secular Westernized postcolonial framework. Her female protagonists, like Najwa, find their sense of self not through political engagement or a critique of religion. In contrast, they reclaim their faith in a modern and secular world that often marginalizes spiritual rituals.

Through the study, Aboulela's departure from secular postcolonial traditions has been conceived as particularly contrasting to the dominant assumptions of modernity and progress as solely embodied in secularism. This suggests that religious faith would rather offer its adherents a form of agency and resilience that transcends conventional secular ideologies.

The research also reveals that Aboulela's portrayal of Muslim women further contests Western and Islamic feminist discourses. It has been argued that Western feminism often frames Muslim women through a lens of victimhood, perceiving them as oppressed by both patriarchy and religious dictations. On the contrary, Islamic feminism focuses on reforming religious doctrines and mainly seeks to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law to empower women within Islamic contexts. Aboulela, conversely, offers a third path where the centrality of religious faith is not contested but celebrated.

Frequently in *Minaret*, Najwa does not engage in overt political or social activism, nor does she seek to reform Islam. Rather, she finds empowerment through personal spiritual devotion that may put her aside from a victimized Western perception and the more political activism-driven approach of Islamic feminism. Najwa's agency derives from her independent adherence to religious practice as a source of inner peace in a world full of alienation and loss. The study then explores Aboulela's work as one that

complicates the dichotomy between Western and Islamic feminism by suggesting that agency can be found through religious faith and determined identity transformation rather than societal change.

The research has also revealed another defining aspect related to her hybrid narrative strategy, which weaves together Muslim spiritual consciousness with Western and postcolonial literary conventions. Aboulela's portrayal of hybridity goes beyond the simple blending of cultures, in her fiction, hybridity is merely a coexistence of different cultural elements, but a dynamic process of negotiation and transformation. Drawing on her transcultural experience, Aboulela fuses the Western realist novel with Muslim frameworks. Her characters, especially those in the diaspora, experience hybridity as a lived reality where they must reconcile their religious faith with the secular and alienating background they inhabit in the West.

In *Minaret*, hybridity is articulated as a source of both tension and strength for Najwa. Her hybridity is marked by her internal conflict between her Westernized upbringing and her religious values she reconnects with in the course of the novel. Yet, Najwa's hybridity does not lead to a sense of loss and disorientation. Instead, it becomes her third option to find a sense of belonging within the Muslim community in London.

Aboulela's portrayal of hybridity partly redefines the notion of assimilation and cultural conflicts. Aboulela's stance of hybridity can be read as controversial. Instead of assimilating to other cultural elements, hybridity is a more introspective journey of self-discovery and spiritual renewal. Najwa does not simply navigate two culture; she actively engages with and transforms her identity the tensions and contradictions that arise from living in a hybrid space.

The concept of cultural translation as discussed in this dissertation transcends the conventional understanding of translation as merely linguistic. By focusing on how Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela use English as a medium to present their works to Western audiences, the dissertation has revealed the distinct strategies followed by the two authors to explore their Arab/Muslim identities in a postcolonial context.

The comparative nature of this study has demonstrated several key differences and similarities in the authors' paradigms to translation. Soueif's use of foreignizing techniques, particularly the inclusion of Egyptian dialect in her English texts, showcases her commitment to maintaining the "otherness" of her culture within a Western framework. This approach not only challenges Western perceptions of the East but also forces readers to confront their limitations of understanding foreign cultures.

On the other hand, Aboulela's exploration of translation is more concerned with the spiritual and religious implications of linguistic exchange. Her use of untranslatable Arabic terms, especially in relation to faith and Qur'anic expressions, underscores the intricacies of fully transferring certain aspects of identity into another cultural context.

The comparison has also highlighted the personal and political dimensions of cultural translation in both authors' fiction. Soueif's focus on national identity serves as a backdrop to her exploration of the private struggles of her characters, who are caught between their Egyptian heritage and the demands of Western society. Aboulela, in contrast, uses translation to navigate the personal journey of her characters as they reconcile their faith with their lives in the West.

In view of this, both authors subvert the idea of translation as a straightforward process. By emphasizing the limits of linguistic transfer, together Soueif and Aboulela stress that true mutual understanding between cultures is often unattainable since the very essence of certain experiences, like those tied to national and religious identities, cannot be fully captured in the target language. This awareness of the "untranslatable" has been a central theme throughout the dissertation, revealing how the authors engage with the tension between linguistic and cultural boundaries.

By navigating the comparative terrain of cultural translation, the study has not only provided insights into the writers' distinct approaches to literary translation but also contributed to a deeper understanding of the broader implications of translation in postcolonial literature. Through this comparative lens, the dissertation has demonstrated that cultural translation is not simply a process of linguistic transfer but a complex and multifaceted act that is shaped by cultural, political, and personal contexts in which it occurs.

In doing so, it is proved that both Soueif and Aboulela navigate the tensions between their native Arab/Muslim cultures and the Western literary market which imposes certain expectations on the narratives of immigrant writers. This leads to an in-depth discussion on the politics of representation and matters of publication and reception in the writers' novels as they are inevitably viewed through the lens of Orientalism.

Soueif's confrontation with Orientalism is directly revealed through her portrayal of the taboo theme of women's desire in Egypt that leads to immediate censorship within the Arab world. Simultaneously her novel is embraced in the West, but often framed as the suffering intellectual woman oppressed by her own culture. Soueif critiques the way Western narratives undermines the complexities of her characters' experiences.

In contrast, rather than fitting into the Western narrative of Muslim women as either victims or agents of liberation, Aboulela's characters redefine empowerment into religious devotion, offering an alternative narrative to the one typically recognized by Western feminism. Ultimately, though both writers engage with Orientalism, Soueif critiques its impact while Aboulela offers a counter-narrative that contrasts its assumptions.

The writers' engagement with cultural translation and their manipulation of the persistent framework of Orientalism have driven this research to explore how Soueif and Aboulela navigate hybridity in their works. In examining both texts, it becomes evident that the authors' literary practices offer profound insights into the complexities of hybridity within postcolonial discourse. Both authors engage with hybridity as a dynamic and multifaceted medium to explore the intricacies of identity, power, and cultural negotiation, particularly to the experiences of Arab/Muslim women in a Western context.

Both authors, through their distinct but interconnected strategies, demonstrate that hybridity is not simply about blending cultures or assimilation. Soueif's hybrid strategy navigates the discomfort and complexities of identity, making her novels challenge easy categorization of East versus the West. Soueif's linguistic experimentation metaphorically reveals that her characters struggle with both native and target culture.

Her characters' discomfort with hybridity is mainly articulated between the lure of Western ideals and the realities of their homelands' political and social transformation.

Aboulela's approach to hybridity is also rooted in her use of English, but to exclusively explore religious Muslim identity in the West. Her work opposes the idea of cultural hybridity by presenting characters who maintain their religiousness without necessarily seeking integration or assimilation. Thus, the hybrid identity she offers is paradoxically not framed as an "in-betweenness" but rather as a grounding spiritual faith.

Both Soueif and Aboulela critically engage with traditional postcolonial literary canon by presenting alternative narratives of Arab and Muslim identity. Together, they reject the oversimplified East/West dichotomies that often dominate Western-centric narratives. Their novels resist the conventional postcolonial frameworks that focus on hybridity, multiculturalism, and the binary between the colonizer and the colonized.

Their strategic use of English deeply resist the simplifications often imposed by colonial languages, offering a more complex and multi-layered representation of identity that does not conform to Western expectations of writing back to colonial history, hybridity, and assimilation. Through distinctive literary techniques and linguistic choices, the authors disrupt the dominant postcolonial narratives.

In considering the limitations faced during this research work, the primary challenges were the difficulty to find common grounds in fitting the works of Ahdaf Soueif and Aboulela into postcolonial frameworks. The authors offer complex narratives that defy easy categorizations, making it intricate to fully integrate their texts into traditional postcolonial theoretical paradigms.

As we look toward the future of postcolonial studies, these narratives remind us that identity never a fixed or easily definable construct. These complexities explored by Soueif and Aboulela offer valuable contributions to the ongoing discourse on hybridity and cultural translation in postcolonial literature. Through this lens, both authors fill critical gaps, contributing to broader diverse and inclusive postcolonial discourse.

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