

Issues of Faith and Romance in Leila Aboulela's Novels: A Study of *The Translator* and *Minaret*

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Abstract

This essay attempts to analyze Leila Aboulela's first two novels: *The Translator* and *Minaret*, through the 'refractive glass' of faith and romance. In *The Translator*, Aboulela asserts the influence of strong faith helping one to deal with the challenges of the society and how this faith reflects on the decisions made by a being. In *Minaret*, she delineates her protagonist's development in spiritual strength to overcome her obstacles and a strong connection with the Muslim community. It also suggests that detachment from materialism, seclusion from the world is crucial to attain connection with the transcendent. The purpose of this paper is to examine the characters sprouting of faith, their spiritual upliftment and the evolvement of romance; whether religious or modern (western).

Keywords: Aboulela; Faith; Romance

1. Introduction

The conditions of Arab women are squeezed between Western feminism and Islamic feminism though Islam and Arab women are holding a position in the field of fiction. This is basically due to the writers like Fatima Mernissi, Nawal El Sadaawi, Hanan al Shaykh, though the latter two writes in Arabic and there works are constantly translated into English but there are variations amongst the original and translated texts, mostly due to it's target audience, as they are aware of the stereotypes surrounding the Arab world. As for there are other writers, the Arab women writing in English, namely Fadia Faqir, Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela, whose works implicitly encounter the East-West

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scenario. While Faqir remains strictly within the boundaries of the Arab territory, Soueif and Aboulela establish cross-cultural encounters (Nash, 2002: 28-31).

This essay endeavours to analyse the two of Leila Aboulela's first novels *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) on the context of "faith" and "romance" and that her novels deals with the facts about the Muslim "who has faith" (her description, 2007). Aboulela's fictions operate within the religious framework and feminised space despite tensions between Western imperialism and conservative Islamism. Her novels dealt with the condition of African immigrants in a 'diaspora' (Europe). She was born in Cairo, and had her initial education in Khartoum. Later, she moved to Europe for higher studies, and during this time, Aboulela constantly observed the situation of Africans, especially Muslims in Western countries. It was during her job as a part time Research Assistant, that she started to write and her works involved characters blended between the two cultures: East and West. The novels deals with the protagonists pear to keep their faith and cultural emotions intact despite the difference in region and people, like Sammar in *The Translator* who constantly felt nostalgic for her homeland, Sudan, "Outside, Sammar stepped into a hallucination [...] home had come here [...] the muezzin coughed into the microphone and began the azan for the *Isha* prayer [...] but this was Scotland and the reality left her dulled, unsure of herself" (15).

Aboulela was well aware of the criterion through which her writings will be judged and analysed by postcolonial critics and culturalist politics (Morey, 2017: 1-15). Geoffrey Nash writes that in his view, "instead of conforming to the Orientalist discourse of western writing in Islam, Aboulela adopted an ingenious method of writing involving Orientalist and postcolonial critics [...] as representative of Islam (2012: 45). Aboulela attempts to write about the condition of Muslim women in a non-muslim majority place. Aboulela states,

I want to write a lot about the lives of ordinary Muslims. There are less works attempted about Muslims in contemporary literature and most of them show Muslims as 'Islamic terrorist', the 'oppressed Muslim woman' or examples of liberal Muslims whose ways of living are similar to non-Muslims [...] But what about the men and women who crowd Masjids, the thousands of Muslims who go on Haj, the girls of tender age who wear hijab? They are the ones about whom I am encouraged to write (C. E. Rashid, 2012: Vol.14, No. 4, pp. 613-624, p. 622).

Aboulela's first novel, *The Translator* deals with the perplexity of its protagonist, Sammar, a widow in her mid-thirties and a mother to a child. She is in exile from her homeland, Sudan, living in Scotland, alone away from family and her only son, left with her aunt and mother-in-law, Mahasen. Sammar works as a translator in the university and falls in love with Rae, a Middle-East historian and a lecturer in Third World Politics. The metaphor of the title, though literally it means she translates Arabic documents into English, but actually she is the bridge between the East and the West, as Bakhtin puts it, "the act of translation [...] the essence of all human communication". She also, translates the level of communication and romance between Rae and her and that despite her being different from him; religiously and culturally, they both share an attachment, maybe because Rae knows a lot about her surroundings or that he doesn't consider Muslims and Islam as a threat. The novel depicts the conundrum Sammar goes through in order to keep her faith intact as well as the drawing affection towards Rae, who is a non-muslim and that they won't be able to marry unless he says the *shahada*. The novel further deals with Sammar's realization of intact faith and how that her faith led to the conversion of Rae to a Muslim from a Catholic.

Her second novel, *Minaret* effectively develops a plotline portraying a journey of spiritual upturn of its protagonist, Najwa. She belonged to an aristocratic Sudanese family, her father being a political diplomat and that the family followed all norms that were bounded towards the west. Things started to go downhill when her father was arrested because of the coup and the family had to take political exile in London. In the years coming after their exile, Najwa lost her father in the coup, her mother sick to death and her twin brother, Omar, arrested because of dealing in drugs and sent to life imprisonment. The story initially evolves around her lack of faith portrayed through her distance from praying, fasting irregularly in Ramadan and her intimate relationship outside the sanctity of marriage, with Anwar, a Marxist activist, who doesn't have faith, an atheist. Later, gradually Najwa develops consistency regarding faith with the help of characters, though minor in role but conveys the complete turnover in Najwa's wholehearted acceptance of her religion. The novel further, shows her relationship with Tamer, a young man of nineteen years old, whom she meets in her forties and they fall in love but had to depart because the modern world doesn't accept such relationships, where the woman is older. Tamer is portrayed with religious persuasions and that when he speaks to Najwa generally, they have to more to share on religious issues than anything sensual.

Aboulela delineates the condition of a Muslim woman in a diasporic atmosphere, a conflicting culture and her characters difficulty to stick closer to their faith. She portrays her protagonists, Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret*, not as 'extremely pious' characters but ordinary ones, dealing with the orthodox customs of the society. Aboulela works to penetrate deep into her characters emotional state of mind and their alienation from society that doesn't make them lonely or detached because during this process they are transcended above worldly affairs.

In this essay, I scrutinised the novels *The Translator* and *Minaret* through qualitative research methodology of narrative analysis and content analysis. The paper answers the questions, how the protagonists, Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret* deals with their fate through faith and how modern (westernized) kind of romance differs from the one that attachment with divinity offers? A reading through the essay, will help to explore, how Aboulela managed to develop an insight into religion, by featuring the drawbacks of conventional dogmatic norms prevailing in societies of modern world. This particular study attempts to deal with the estrangement of an individual from modern society 'secularism' towards faith. Researchers have worked on *The Translator* and *Minaret* separately, and though interpreted them on the basis of faith and romance in different studies but it was from the point of view of it's readers and the impact of a 'religious' concepted novel in a Muslim as well as non-Muslim zone. Whereas I have approached to work on these novels together and analysing them regarding the role of faith reflected through the protagonists and how it helped them to deal with their relationships with other characters.

2. Literature Review

The Translator (1999) and *Minaret* (2005), were Leila Aboulela's first two published novels that gained praise due to its mode of narration depicting the situation of women in Muslim society, the level of faith, role of feminism in portraying the subjugation of women and how the various male characters interacted in the novels (likely in her another novel, *Lyrics Alley* [2010], which portrays the superiority of a patriarchal society, but this is not the subject here) and how their protagonists, who are female characters as Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret* deal with these factors implanted deeply in their surroundings. Leila Aboulela through these novels tries to inculcate the positive aspects of Islam within the minds of her readers who are in majority, non-muslims and she does so to promote the idea that "faith fills up the hollow space created because of modernization [westernization]."

In this essay I wish to contemplate *The Translator* and *Minaret*, that how it offers a critique on the mode of faith of an individual as an 'immigrant' in a non-muslim country and the progress of romance between Sammar and Rae in *The Translator* and Najwa and Tamer in *Minaret* and how it differed from the notion of 'modern' romance. When *The Translator* was first published in 1999, Britain's *Muslim News* announced that it was "the first halal [...] novel written in English", on account of its foregrounding of issues of Islamic faith in the life and choices of its central protagonists (Abbas, 2014:87) and that, *Minaret* [...] conciliate what might be called "anthropological" readings of Muslim writing, which sees texts by an avowedly religious subject as offering insights into the mind of the "other"(Morey,2017:1-15).

Hunter writes that, Aboulela doesn't shape the surroundings for her female protagonists in a space of "Islamic identity" but rather sneaks deeper into "faith", convincing her readers that faith is greater than any other obligations and ties that make our personality, in *The Translator* and *Minaret* (2013:Vol 25, No.1,88-89). Sammar in *The Translator*, develops restraint through praying and fasting during her difficult times coping with the loss of her husband and cousin, Tarig,"[...] protected from all extremes. Pills, break-down, attempts at suicide"(96), and with the alienation of a place different from her culture and tradition and Najwa in *Minaret*, the characters like Wafaa, her convert husband, Ali, initially evokes her mind in visiting the Masjid and developing a sense of liability towards faith, which further continues to get stronger because of Um Waleed and Tamer.

The evolution of faith in *The Translator* and *Minaret* makes it a work of religious fiction that attempts 'to persuade [its] readers of the "correctness" of a particular way of interpreting the world'(Suleiman, 1993). Christina Philips quotes in her article Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (2012), the author's own words about the context of her writing says:

When I write I experience relief and satisfaction that what occupies my mind, what fascinates and disturbs me, is made legitimate by the shape and tension of a story. I want to show the psychology, the state of mind and the emotions of a person who has faith [...] looking at 'Muslim' [...] that transcends but doesn't deny gender, nationality, class and race. I write fiction that reflects Islamic logic; fictional worlds where cause and effect are governed by Muslim rationale (Aboulela, 'Biography').

Philips writes, the turning point of the story marking Rae's conversion in *The Translator* depicts the evolution of the love story in a Islamic manner. Sammar wanted Rae to say the *shahada* and that they could get married, though if he doesn't abide to the Islamic norms, it would definitely cause her concern but this notion of her just wanting to convert him, so that they could marry leads to the pivotal evolution of the story, that she realizes," She had never, not once, prayed that he would become a Muslim for his own sake, for his own good. It had always been for herself, her need to get married again, not be alone (149)." The story progresses to a miraculous turning when Rae converts and this is because of Sammar's prayers for him. The events unfolding implies that his conversion is because of the power of Sammar's new prayer, an idea which Rae himself describes as miraculous, "at the end [...] it didn't have anything to do with how much I've read or how many facts I've learned about Islam. Knowledge is necessary, that's true. But faith, it comes directly from Allah (169)." (2012: 27:1, 66-72).

According to Morey, *Minaret* reveals the difficulty of attempting to move the secular individualist form of the novel back to its spiritual roots: to fill an art form etched by 300 years of secular individualism with a sense of God as a real presence. The difficulty of the task is reflected in the novels' interpretative crises and challenges, and in the collision between its spiritual agenda and the banality of its chosen form (4). The central Najwa-Tamer relationship is one that bears the hallmarks of the romance form, while at the same time subtly transvaluing and diverting it. The search for love is a central theme of the book. However, on the face of it a distinction is drawn between sexual love and spiritual love, or love for the Prophet. Najwa's sexual consummation with Anwar leaves her feeling fragile and soiled. By contrast, Tamer shares her religious priorities (5). (Morey,2017:1-15).

Scholars have analysed this pertinent concepts of faith and romance in *The Translator* and *Minaret* through various viewpoints and this essay deals with the issues, faith inculcates within Sammar in *The Translator*, to deal with her depression and captivity in an unknown country and her relationship with Rae that differed highly from "modern[western]" romance and that of Najwa's transcendence from an elite Sudanese with western tastes in her own homeland, Sudan to a reserved character in a western country, London and the differences in relationships that she had with Anwar and Tamer, in *Minaret*.

3. Faith and Romance in *The Translator* and *Minaret*

The Translator (1999) and *Minaret* (2005), both of Aboulela's novels deal with the circumstances surrounding an ordinary woman's life and the spiritual development that

helps one deal with worldly affairs. The protagonists, Sammar in *The Translator* and Najwa in *Minaret*, are women who had a different surrounding among close ones and their homeland at their initial phases of life. Later, both Sammar and Najwa, face tragedies that changed their outlook towards life holding them more strongly towards faith. In *The Translator*, the accident and demise of Sammar's husband, Tarig, pushes her into exile in a different country away from her homeland, close ones, even her only son, Amir, was left behind and in *Minaret*, the arrest of Najwa's father forces the family into political exile in London. The change in fortune that led them into uncertain ways in life, bought them closer to religious faith and people with a religious dimension, like Rae in *The Translator* and Tamer in *Minaret*.

The Translator is divided into two parts with settings in Scotland and Sudan. Aboulela here depicts the exile of Sammar, a widow away from her homeland in a cold borne country. The weather of Scotland pays close resemblance to Sammar's exile, dark, rainy and dull. Sammar works as a translator for the various departments in the university, translating Arabic into English and in this process she meets, Rae Isles, a Middle-East historian and a lecturer in Third World Politics. Rae has an in-depth knowledge about Islam though being a non-Muslim and this attracts Sammar towards him where Rae is equally into her. In her conversation with Rae's secretary, Yasmin, Sammar expresses hope that Rae would convert one day and that they could marry, "Do you think he could convert one day?"(16). Through Yasmin, Aboulela depicts the situation of inter-faith, which is generally "disastrous", "I've seen the kind of Scottish men who marry Muslim girls...the typical scenario [...]"(75), the man converts for the sake of marrying saying the "shahadah": I bear witness there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah and then "[...] they get married, and she might as the years go by pray and fast or she might not, but it has nothing to do with him"(75). Though here, the "girls" referred by Yasmin do not hold the firm faith one needs to have in religion but Sammar is represented here as someone who prays five times daily and fasts, it is her prayers that kept her away from ill thoughts and ideas during her depression after losing Tarig, "Clogged up [...] faith sluggish. Yet Allah had rewarded her [...] protected from all the extremes. Pills, breakdowns, attempts at suicide"(96).

The situation of women in Third World countries being a widow is vividly expressed through Mahasen, that they are not allowed to marry again, the act is shown as marginalised, "An educated girl like you, you know English... you can support yourself and your son, you don't need marriage"(8),but in Islam it is said that, women can marry again after divorce or being a widow, "The one who looks after a widow or a poor person

is like a Mujahid (warrior) who fights for Allah's Cause, or like him who performs prayers all the night and fasts all the day" (Al-Bukhari).

That according to sharia, as "Sammar [...] often thought [...] of the four months and ten days, such a specifically laid out time, not too short and not too long. She thought of how Allah's sharia was kinder and more balanced than the rules people set up for themselves"(55), the concept of "Iddah" in Islam. It is marriage that is "half of their faith"(88). Aboulela through Sammar, portrayed that faith on Allah develops with marriage, a partner with spiritual bonding that in older times," it was how it used to be when people lived by Islam alone [...] In Prophet's time, two chapters of the Qur'an were an acceptable gift [...] now in Muslim countries, it was gold and dollar bills, endless discussions about who should buy the video set and fridge-freezer"(103), marriage has become more materialistic and away from faith and spirituality.

The relationship between Rae and Sammar is not the typical modernized type of romance. Both of them are reserved in their ways and it takes time for them to speak their heart out. Unlike the usual couples in 21st century, they have never been into casual dates or meet up, just spoke over the phone and during the breaks from class hours, "In an hour they would be engulfed by work [...] projects for her to hurry up [...] classes for him"(87). That when they expressed their feelings to one another, they were secretive about it as they were people with different religion and that people would take it as a "spicy" news in the department "gossip, tastier than average because they were an unlikely couple, because of who she was, how she dressed"(95). Despite falling in love with a non-Muslim, Sammar was firm to her faith, that she didn't cross the line of modesty and chastity, though for once they had come close physically but she felt the guilt, "Nothing that Allah forbids His servants is good. It will only diminish them, ultimately or soon, in this life or the next"(95) and that she wouldn't marry him unless he converted, "I want to ask you to become a Muslim so we could [...]"(101), but the contradiction comes here in faith when Sammar realizes that, she wanted him to convert for her to marry him when he should convert for Allah's sake.

There were people who drew others to Islam. People with deep faith, the type who slept little at night, had an energy in them. They did it for no personal gain, no worldly reason. They did it for Allah's sake. She had heard stories of people changing: prisoners in Brixton, a German diplomat, an American with ancestors from Greece. Someone influencing someone, with no ego involved. And she, when she spoke to Rae, wanting this and that, full of it; wanting to

drive with him to Stirling, to cook for him, to be settled, to be someone's wife.

She had never, not once, prayed that he would become a Muslim for his own sake, for his own good. It had always been, for herself, her need to get married again, not be alone. If she could rise above that, if she would clean her intentions. He had been kind to her and she had given him nothing in return. She would do it now from far away without him ever knowing. It would be her secret. If it took ten months or ten years or twenty or more (149).

Aboulela has not set up an ideal character in *The Translator* but a woman coping with the normal circumstances of life and still having faith, in 2005 she said in an interview: "My characters do not behave necessarily as a 'good Muslim' should. They are not ideals or role models. They are, as I see them to be, ordinary Muslims trying to practice their faith in difficult circumstances (cited in Hassan 2008: 310). Unlike Sammar, Najwa in *Minaret* develops faith after an ordeal through unusual phases and though during her young age she leads a westernized lifestyle, at times, she felt guilty about not following Islam properly through praying five times a day, fasting and so on.

Najwa belonged to an elite Sudanese family, her father working for the government and her family had the modernized way of leading their lives following western culture. Her taste in attire, food, music and so on, was inclined towards western things but everything took a drastic turn when the regime of the government was attacked by a coup in which her father served and he was arrested that led to the political exile of her family. The novel is set in three different timelines: 1984-5, 1989-91 and 2003-4, with settings in Sudan and London; each of these periods weaves around Najwa's journey from a liberal, secular Muslim girl in her teenage to a conservative Muslim woman in her forties

Though Aboulela acquaints her readers with a conservative Najwa at first in the prologue, but initially we see a carefree, westernized teenage girl. During this phase of Najwa though, she didn't pray five times a day, and at times prayed only in the month of Ramadan. Still even there she missed most of the days from fasting saying she is on her periods, "When I fast in Ramadan, I pray. A girl in school told me that fasting doesn't count unless you pray"(28) [...] "you spend half the month saying you've got your period and can't fast"(29). Still she always felt guilty and sad about not following these norms in Islam, when she sees the servants in her house waking up to pray for the morning prayer when they just returned from a party, and that she felt "hollow" despite all the luxuries

she had in her life compared to the servants in her house who came from unprivileged places.

The servants stirred and, from the back of the house, I heard the sound of gushing water, someone spitting, a sneeze, the shuffle of slippers on the cement floor of their quarters. A light bulb came on. They were getting ready to pray. They had dragged themselves from sleep in order to pray. I was wide awake and I didn't (31).

Najwa's realization that she is detached from her faith and that it makes her feel incomplete shows that one cannot recognise her as a person wholly deprived of faith but that she had a tincture of hidden faith already that pushed her towards spiritual growth. Further there are people like Um Waleed, Wafaa, her convert husband, Ali, who acted as the light for her to come closer to Islam. Wafaa and other women from mosque who came to wash her dead mother made an impact on Najwa, to come visit the Masjid and Wafaa's insistence on this issue is similar to the people that Sammar referred to in *The Translator*, "There are people who drew others to Islam"(149) [...] and here, Islam meant more firm faith for Najwa and the encounter with Ali made her ponder on the potentiality of Islam that draws people to it. Najwa felt more apt whenever she went to mosque and met all the women there, heard there Quran instructor, Um Waleed call the name of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH], with so much love and affection, "Ya habibi ya Rasoul Allah"(72).

During her forties, and at a time when she is completely liable to being reserved through modest clothing and being a maid, she falls in love with young Tamer, the brother of her employer, who was just nineteen years old, and that he develops a firm religious dimension between them. Tamer has a religious mindset unlike the members in his family, his mother, Doctora Zeinab and sister, Lamya, who are not into faith and believes that material things leads one to peace despite that Lamya doesn't have a healthy conjugal life. In most of their conversation Tamer and Najwa, speak about Islam and that Tamer wants to pursue his degree in Islamic Studies though his family thinks it doesn't hold any career. Tamer's way of leading a Islamic mode of life with keeping beard, talking about halal food and his stay at the mosque during Ramadan, shows his deep intensity into faith, that Najwa sees something new and refreshing in him, "his eyes clear and shining, as if he could see other things"(172).

The relationship of Tamer and Najwa contrasted from the relationship Najwa had during her university days and in times after her mother's demise in London with Anwar. The Marxist activist Anwar, despised the government Najwa's father was working for and

despite being with Najwa, he constantly spoke ill about her father and that he was just infatuated towards Najwa because of her beauty and attire. Despite that Najwa felt dejected from his behaviour, she still stayed with him. Even her consummation with Anwar outside marriage makes her forlorn and guilty for her actions and that they part ways when Najwa prompts to hold onto a modest lifestyle following Islam. This fact proves that Anwar was just physically attracted towards her and that he didn't like the Islamic way of lifestyle and wanted to stay away from it. Unlike Anwar, Tamer liked Najwa for her modest attire and the fact that both thought alike in case of faith. Though there is a contradiction of faith between Tamer and Najwa when they come closer to each other physically for once and that Islam prohibits such intimacy, but that Tamer helped Najwa build her faith more strongly, and despite that she took money from his mother to stay away from him, it was solely for his well-being because she didn't want Tamer to detach himself from his family as it would hurt his mother and cause his downfall, like her twin brother, Omar who misbehaved with his mother and that Najwa feels that it is because of such behaviour that he was punished by fate, in getting arrested for drug dealing.

Further they were forced to part ways because they were a mismatched couple (difference in age; Tamer too younger than Najwa) like Sammar and Rae in *The Translator* (interfaith couple) and that in this modern society such couples cannot be thought of, though religiously this is accepted where women could be older than men, big age gap and so on, that our Prophet [PBUH] was just twenty-five years old when he married Khadija [RA], when she was forty years old and that in order to marry one mustn't see age but that the partner should be righteous and modest with a deep rooted faith.

As Hunter writes in her essay, "The Muslim Who Has Faith" in Leila Aboulela's Novels *Minaret* (2005) and *Lyrics Alley* (2010) that, Aboulela's novels delineates what Poole marks as a constant characteristics of the British Press, formulating Muslims as negative (Poole, 2005). She tries to 'bridge the gap' between the East and the West through her characters. Aboulela asserts to disable the conventional dogmas and draws the arena of Western emptiness implanted in Islamic-African core (Nash, 2002). She challenges the stereotype, that Islam is a narrow-minded religion, by portraying it as empowering: *The Translator* and *Minaret* teaches that the frustration of being an immigrant must be endured without complain because of one's faith and practices (Hunter, 2013).

Through the portrayal of her characters as ordinary people dealing with their day to day activities and yet holding onto faith, she tries to develop amongst her readers the feasibility of religion, especially the smoothness of Islam. Sammar in *The Translator*

"operates at a deeper level" because of her attachment both towards Africa and Islam (Nash, 2007: 138). Unlikely, in *Minaret*, Najwa's faith is linked to the greater Muslim community, the *ummah*, more than to her homeland (Hunter, 2013).

4. Conclusion

Aboulela through her protagonists, tries to envisage a future for the Muslims which without the involvement of the western media, continuously broadcasting Muslims as "violent", would have been more accepting for the non-Muslims around the world. She attempted to write novels with a religious dimension where her target readers are mostly non-Muslims, in order to make Islam more appealing towards people and to challenge the conventional doctrines people develop regarding the religion. Aboulela constantly tries to demolish the thoughts developed by British Press as Poole observes, that they are on a run to establish images of Islam in the world's mind, which picture the religion as completely "foreign" (2005).

Moreover, the portrayal of female characters instead of male, in *The Translator* and *Minaret*, Aboulela frames the Islamic formulation of their surroundings dealing with the mentality of the male chauvinistic society as well as feminism and deciding what religion upholds. In *The Translator*, Sammar wanted to remarry so that she could have a "focus" in her life and that Tarig's demise pushed her away from familial and national ties into a cold borne country with her intense depression, her room symbolising a "hospital" room. Though it would be against the facts of feminism that Sammar wanted to marry Am Ahmed, a man twice her age, already having two wives but according to Islam, a man can marry at least four times disregard of age to provide support and shelter to women. Eventually Mahasen interferes, not allowing Sammar to marry again, not just because Am Ahmed is highly older than her with two wives already or that she follows feminism but it is because conventionally in under-developed or developing countries, the prevailing dogmas prohibit a widow or divorcee women to marry again. This is what Abulmaaty refers to as "eastern and muslim society". He argues that, Sammar's prime focus should be her son and that her love for the "western Rae" makes her completely neglect her son as well as her faith, which is against the principles of Islam and eastern society (2016: Vol. 6, 37-46), but traditionally in the Islamic norms, remarrying for a women is "not prohibited".

Similarly, the treatment of Najwa in *Minaret* portrays her as submissive in her family where her father worries only about the future of his son with Najwa handed over to her mother, who would groom her in order to be married off, the treatment of Anwar towards her and that of her older age forcing her to stay away from young Tamer. Najwa has

always been under the protection of men throughout her life and that her wanting to be Tamer's "concubine" frames the Islamic evolution of the story but for feminism, this gesture depicts her subjugation towards men, wanting protection, which she is failing to be independent. Though Najwa's treatment as woman cannot be disregarded in the story but even her will to be Tamer's concubine doesn't fall out of religion but that in older times, a man could have a concubine and that he was judged by his treatment with the concubine.

The main distinction of both the novels: *The Translator* and *Minaret*, lies within the frame of context of believers and non-believers through the facts centering the treatment of women, remarriage, inter-faith and so on. Though in *The Translator*, everyone is a believer but the question here is "who is following" the religion unbiased. Unlike in *Minaret*, it is divided into two groups: one, Najwa, Tamer and the women at the Masjid and other, Omar, Anwar and Lamya.

Aboulela in her novels anticipated the Muslim women and their struggle, as Wadud says, aiming "gender jihad", the system should be formulated in a way to enhance a quality life for all of God's creatures and this cannot be done just by having refugees in the Masjid (2006: 260-61). Through a positive ending in *The Translator*, she proposed her reader to envision an optimistic side of "faith" and Islam with its romantic epilogue and in *Minaret* the separation portrayed that in order to attain transcendence, one must be physically, mentally and psychologically alone.

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