# Literature, Islam and Feminism in the Works of Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela: A Comparative Literary Study

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This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on Muslim literature, a diverse literature that includes literary works produced in English by Muslim authors of different ethnicities and cultural heritages. Uniquely, it approaches this literature from a religious perspective and concentrates on the religious domain, which has been usually avoided by postcolonial studies examining Muslim literature. Muslim literature is usually analysed from a secular perspective that focuses on highlighting cultural diversity among Muslim authors but sheds limited light on their religious diversity. This secular approach dominates partly because of the limitation of postcolonial theory in relation to Islam, and partly because of the conflict created between Islam and literature by Muslim critics, both secular and religious.

In focusing on the religious rather than the cultural domain, I limit the scope of my examination to include only contemporary Muslim writers who have the same ethnicity and similar cultural backgrounds. To be precisely, I concentrate on contemporary British Arab Muslim writers, specifically, Fadia Faqir (1956–, of Jordanian origin) and Leila Aboulela (1964–, of Sudanese and Egyptian origin). I also select Islamic feminism itself as a site of religious diversity. My main objective is to compare and contrast Islamic feminist consciousness as revealed by Aboulela and Faqir, whether explicitly or implicitly, in their fiction that they produced from the 1990s to the 2010s. My aim in comparing and contrasting the Islamic feminism of Aboulela and Faqir is to illustrate my argument that their Islamic feminism varies enormously from a religious perspective. Faqir focuses on giving her female Muslim protagonists a voice and power in order to withstand patriarchal Arab cultural and social traditions and an inherited legal system and doctrinal rules that subvert Muslim women, whereas

Aboulela makes the Islamic faith a source of spiritual emancipation that strengthens her female Muslim protagonists internally.

This thesis is important because it contributes to expanding existing literary criticism in relation to Muslim literature, which is achieved by exploring the feminist consciousness of Aboulela and Faqir, two contemporary British Arab Muslim authors who emphasise the centrality of Islam in their postcolonial feminist fiction. It is also achieved by using Islamic feminism as a key methodology that provides a better understanding of how Aboulela and Faqir use Islam as a framework for their feminism, what challenges they face in doing so and how they manage to overcome these challenges.

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# Introduction

This thesis focuses on contemporary Muslim literature produced in Britain. It specifically engages with contemporary British Muslim authors of Arab origin, namely, Fadia Faqir (1956–, of Jordanian origin) and Leila Aboulela(1964–, of Sudanese and Egyptian origin) and their fiction produced in Britain from the 1990s to the 2010s. Its aim is to examine the Islamic feminist consciousness exposed by these two writers as represented, whether explicitly or by implication, in their fiction and to highlight their religious diversity in relation to their Islamic feminism. More precisely, it compares and contrasts the Islamic feminism of these two authors, which I argue varies enormously.

Muslim literature in English is a diverse literature that covers a long historical period, starting in 1940 with the publication of Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, 'the first novel written by a Muslim ever to be published in English', until the present, and it includes literary works produced in English by Muslim writers of different ethnicities.[1] This literature is described by Amin Malak, a pioneer in the field, as a literature that does not have 'a monolithic discourse' since it reflects the 'diversity of voices and visions' articulated by Muslim writers, who are '[g]eographically diverse', as they come from different geographical and cultural backgrounds.[2] In his *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (2005), Malak reveals the diversity of Muslim literature in English by exploring Muslim literary productions in the period from the 1900s to the 1990s. His study engages

[1] Amin Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 19.

[2] Ibid., p 151.

with literary texts produced in English by thirty Muslim writers, both male and female, of different origins, including African, Australian, British, Canadian, Caribbean and Arab, and both male and female writers.

The diversity of Muslim literature in English is also examined by Geoffrey Nash who, in his *Writing Muslim Identity* (2012), clarifies the different religious positions of Muslim writers. In this study, Nash explores the representation of Islam and Muslim identity in post-1980 works produced mainly in English by nineteen authors, both male and female, of different religious affiliations and with different heritages, including African and South Asian backgrounds, and who have been educated and/or reside in Britain or North America. Nash's distinctive intervention is an attempt to clarify the divergent religious engagements of these authors as represented in their works and to specify how these different religious engagements play important roles in their representations of Islam and Muslims. For example, he categorises British migrant Muslim writers into three religious positions: 'the neutral' represented for Nash by Farhana Sheikh, the 'committed Muslim point of view' represented by Leila Aboulela and 'the critical/ anti-Muslim "native informant" type' or 'secularized critical' category in which he includes Muslim authors such as Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali and Nadeem Aslam.[3] This last category, which represents the majority of the authors examined, consists of Muslim writers who, according to Nash, advocate a secular agenda, utilise an insider orientalist discourse and portray Muslims as having 'female-disabling, fanatical, and aggressive characteristics'.[4]

[3] Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 49.

[4] Ibid., p. 26.

Esra Mirze Santesso also engages with diversity in Muslim literature, but in a different way to Malak and Nash. Santesso, in her *Disorientation* (2013), limits the scope of the diversity she examines in order to concentrate on the diverse treatment by her selected authors of the theme of disorientation, which shapes the experience of diasporic first-generation female Muslim immigrants in Britain. Therefore, she chooses four female Muslim writers as her primary authors and their literary productions which engage with the theme of disorientation, notably *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela, *My Name is Salma* (2008) by Fadia Faqir and *Sweetness in the Belly* (2007) by Camilla Gibb. Santesso's study divides these literary works into two divergent categories according to the kind of disorientation they represent. The first category, according to Santesso, is illustrated in *Minaret* and *My Name is Salma*, where Aboulela and Faqir represent an unproductive disorientation that prevents the integration of the female protagonists, Najwa and Salma, in their diasporic home and leads to their inability to emerge from their disorientation as empowered women.[5] The second category is demonstrated in *Brick Lane* and *Sweetness in the Belly*, where Ali and Gibb represent what Santesso sees as a more productive version of disorientation, as they allow their female protagonists, Nazneen and Lily, 'to accept and celebrate their Britishness without disavowing their faith'.[6]

With the exception of Nash, these postcolonial critical studies approach Muslim literature from a secular perspective and focus on highlighting cultural

[5] Esra Mirze Santesso, *Disorientation: Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 158.

[6] Ibid., p. 158.

diversity among Muslim authors, but they shed limited light on their religious diversity. For example, Malak concentrates on the cultural dimension, which is based on his definition of Muslim literature, which he defines as a literature that is produced by Muslim writers 'whose roots are situated in the culture and civilization of Islam'.[7] This definition is significant because of its inclusiveness, which enables Malak to embrace Muslim writers of different cultural backgrounds and who have widely divergent religious positions, including Salman Rushdie, whose engagement with Islam has proved controversial for many Muslim readers and intellectuals.[8] However, Malak's definition, with its focus on the cultural dimension of Islam, neglects the religious dimension which, he asserts, is important when he states that Islam as a religion for Muslims is 'a key component of their identity that could rival, if not supersede, their class, race, gender, or ethnic affiliation'.[9]

Santesso, in the same vein, concentrates on the cultural dimension when she engages with the theme of disorientation, through which she tackles the religious identity of Muslim women in the Islamic diaspora. There is a partial affinity between her argument about the reconfiguration of the religious identity of diasporic Muslim women and the theory of Stuart Hall concerning the construction of cultural identity. Santesso argues that the integration of diasporic

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[7] Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, p. 5.

[8] Muslim intellectuals read Rushdie's fiction differently. Some of them condemn Rushdie. Ali Mazrui, for instance, concludes that 'Rushdie has abused Islam' and finds him 'guilty of cultural treason for writing *The Satanic Verses*'. See, Ali Mazrui, '*The Satanic Verses* or a Satanic Novel? Moral Dilemmas of the Rushdie Affair', *Alternatives*, 15.1 (1990), 97–121 (p. 99). On the other hand, there are some other Muslim intellectuals who support Rushdie. For example, Akeel Bilgrami considers the conflict over Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as a conflict between Islam and progress, arguing that 'recent history has shown Islam's public profile to be a real threat to genuine and long-term progressive efforts'. See, Akeel Bilgrami, 'Rushdie & the Reform of Islam', *Grand Street*, 8.4 (1989), 170–184 (p. 175).

[9] Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, p. 3.

Muslim women into the British community depends on their 'ability to re-negotiate [their] religious identity', and that the reconfiguration of this identity is preceded by a state of disorientation, which is a temporary phase of confusion that will later result in the emergence of a new identity that is able, or not, to cope 'with the uncertainties and contradictions of postcolonial existence'.[10] Santesso's argument about the changing religious identity of female diasporic Muslims protagonists is similar to that of Hall, who sees a diasporic cultural identity as a mobile production that is 'never complete [and] always in process'.[11] A diasporic cultural identity, according to Hall, is constructed through its 'relation to the Other', and this Other in Santesso's study is the non-Muslim British community.[12]

Following the aforementioned postcolonial critical studies, this thesis also engages with diversity in Muslim literature in English. However, it uniquely concentrates on the religious domain, which has usually been avoided by critics studying or discussing postcolonial literature produced by Muslim writers. Such avoidance is justified, as Malak explains, by the limitation of postcolonial theory to take Islam into account.[13] According to Malak, postcolonial theory, with its secular stance, involves the 'marginalization of religion as a force or factor with

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[10] Santesso, *Disorientation*, pp. 15–20.

[11] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–237 (p. 222)

[12] Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 1–17 (pp. 3–4).

[13] Part of the limitation of postcolonial theory in relation to Islam is attributed by Anouar Majid to postcolonial critics, who lack knowledge of Islam and do not read the Quran, the central book in Islam. This lack of knowledge of Islam is accompanied by their expertise in Western knowledge, which makes critics such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak 'appear unsettlingly unreliable to many Muslims', as they participate in transforming postcolonial theory 'into a discursive gesture that is simultaneously informed and co-opted by the very assumptions of western humanism it questions in the beginning'. See, Anouar Majid, 'Can the Postcolonial Critic Speak? Orientalism and the Rushdie Affair', *Cultural Critique*, 32 (1995–1996), 5–42 (pp. 9–11).

its own complex dynamics [and] reflects privileging a secular, Europe-American stance that seems to shape the parameters of postcolonial discourse'.[14] The reason behind this limitation of postcolonial theory in relation to Islam is because such theory, as Waïl Hassan argues, 'has developed out of [. . .] European traditions of thoughts', which makes it vulnerable to the influence of Eurocentrism and colonial discourse that have treated Islam as a different cultural and political system, but not as a faith.[15] Hassan goes on to clarify the effects of Eurocentrism and colonial discourse on shaping postcolonial theory. He explains that postcolonial theory 'seems to inscribe neocolonial hegemony by privileging the languages (and consequently the canons) of the major colonial powers, Britain and France'.[16] He also explains that 'postcolonial theory seems sometimes to deploy a sort of reverse-Eurocentrism. The almost complete reliance on the Western tradition of anti-humanist critique of metaphysics – from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida – has meant that the "non-Western" Other remains inaccessible and unknowable'.[17] As a result, postcolonial theory fails to deal with issues related to the Arab and Muslim worlds. That is because, '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

[14] Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, p. 17.

[15] Waïl S. Hassan, 'Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 33.1 (2002), 45–64 (p. 47). Benedict Robinson observes that 'Europe has always refused to treat Islam as a religion at all, preferring to inscribe it into theories of racial, political, and cultural difference, and thereby refusing to acknowledge Islam's own claims to universality while at the same time insisting that it is always the same, across vast reaches of time and space'. See, Benedict Robinson, *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 5.

[16] Hassan, 'Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application', (p. 46).

[17] Ibid., p. 51.

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 its deconstruction'.[18] Accordingly, postcolonial theory, which is supposed to be a critique of colonialism, becomes worse than colonial discourse because 'in its very attempt to challenge Western epistemology, postcolonial theory sometimes homogenizes Asia and Africa in more subtle ways than the older paradigms or colonial discourse itself'.[19]

Malak and Hassan hit the mark in their critique of postcolonial theory and its failure to take the religious dimension of Islam into account. Nevertheless, instead of critiquing postcolonial theory, I incline to the idea of modifying it for the purpose of incorporating Islam as a religion. Postcolonial theory is important in different disciplines, including postcolonial literature produced by Muslim writers. Its importance lies in the fact that it 'has propelled issues of colonialism and imperialism to the forefront of critical and intellectual debates in the West, and succeeded in changing the assumptions of several fields of inquiry within [the] humanities and social sciences'.[20] Moreover, postcolonial theory, like any theory, is open to development and modification, which can be done by stretching its coverage to include Islam. I regard Nash's critical literary study, in which he explores how the different religious engagements of his selected Muslim writers with Islam affect their representation of Islam and Muslims, as an attempt to modify postcolonial theory in relation to literary works produced by Muslim writers. In his study, Nash stretches the boundaries of postcolonial theory to include

[18] Hassan, 'Postcolonial Theory and Modern Arabic Literature: Horizons of Application', (p. 56).

[19] Ibid., p. 46.

[20] Ibid., p. 59.

Islam, which he makes one of the components of postcolonial literature produced by Muslim authors, a literature that he calls 'Muslim literature', and which he defines as a literature that 'takes Islam or Islamic religious belief and culture(s) as its focus'.[21] This definition covers the two components of Muslim literature, the religious as well as the cultural, and does not ignore the religious dimension, as is the case with Malak's definition of Muslim literature.

This thesis also seeks to incorporate Islam into postcolonial theory, in relation to Muslim literature, by expanding existing literary criticism. This expansion is achieved by exploring the feminist consciousness of Aboulela and Faqir, two contemporary British Arab Muslim writers who emphasise the centrality of Islam in their postcolonial feminist fiction.[22] It is also achieved by using Islamic feminism as a key methodology that provides a better understanding of how Aboulela and Faqir use Islam as a framework for their feminism, what challenges they face in doing so, and how they manage to overcome these challenges.

Aboulela and Faqir engage with feminist issues that pertain to the Arab Muslim world. As writers of Arab origin producing their work in English, Aboulela and Faqir partake in a literary genre which is described by Nash as an 'Anglo-Arab encounter': he refers to anglophone literature that incorporates Arab subjects and themes into English and is produced by writers of Arab ethnicity.[23]

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[21] Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, p. 5.

[22] Aboulela and Faqir have the same ethnicity, which allows me to focus on highlighting religious rather than cultural diversity. The two authors have similar cultural backgrounds: they are both Muslim writers of Arab origin who settled, though not necessarily permanently, in the United Kingdom as first-generation members of a diasporic British Muslim minority.

[23] Anglo-Arab writers include Muslim writers, such as Ahdaf Soueif, Jamal Mahjoub, Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, and non-Muslim writers, such as Tony Hanania, who share an Arab ethnicity. However, this thesis concentrates only on Fadia Faqir and Leila Aboulela, as they are female Muslim Anglo-Arab writers who display their Islamic feminism. Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 11.

In this respect, their feminism is to some extent similar to that of another contemporary Anglo-Arab writer, Ahdaf Soueif (1950–, of Egyptian origin), whose fiction 'is an integral part of this evolving Arab-Muslim feminism'.[24] However, the feminist consciousness of Aboulela and Faqir is not identical to that of Soueif. Indeed, in my view, it differs significantly. Whereas Soueif's feminist writings do not prioritise feminism in relation to Islam and 'for the most part steer clear of Islamic topics, except to rewrite them into the [. . .] cultural struggle with colonialism and new-colonialism', Aboulela and Faqir can be defined as Islamic feminists, as I will demonstrate.[25]

The engagement of Aboulela and Faqir with feminist issues that are related to the Arab Muslim world in fiction produced in English and published in the UK puts them in the position of postcolonial feminists, who are defined by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park as feminists of third-world origin located in the metropolis.[26] Such a position is arguably beneficial for them as authors. It offers them more liberty to express themselves and their feminist views freely and to avoid the restrictions of censorship. It also optimises the exposure

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[24] Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, pp. 149–150.

[25] Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 35. It is important at this point to distinguish between the terms 'Muslim' and 'Islamic'. The word 'Islamic' refers to the faith and religion of Islam and 'denotes thoughts, rituals, activities, and institutions specifically proclaimed and sanctioned by Islam', while 'Muslim' indicates the social and cultural dimension of Islam, and therefore refers to a person who 'espouses the religion of Islam or is shaped by its cultural impact', as argued by Amin Malak. Malak grounds his argument on that of Marshall G. S. Hodgson, an argument that is illustrated in Hodgson's book *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. Hodgson uses the terms 'Islamic' to refer to the religion of Islam and 'Islamicate' to the social and cultural dimensions of Islam. For Malak, the term 'Muslim' seems to be a better choice than 'Islamicate' on the ground that 'Islamicate' is strange in the cultural context of Islam as it is derived from a European lexical root. See Malak, *Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English*, pp. 5–6.

[26] Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, 'Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism', in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), pp. 53–71 (p. 53).

of their writings so that they can reach a wider readership, albeit a predominantly Anglo-American and European one, and it enables them to accomplish greater commercial success since English-language fiction dominates the global marketplace. According to Sara Brouillette, successful postcolonial literature in the current English publishing industry and global market must have certain characteristics. It should be written in 'English' and it should be in the genre of 'novel', which is 'currently the best-selling literary genre'.[27]

However, being postcolonial feminists can also be challenging, as it forces authors to confront 'the problem of positionality'. This problem, according to Lata Mani, relates to the fact that the geographical location in which a feminist project is produced impacts both upon the 'mode of enunciation (who speaks and how)' and upon 'its reception ('how it is interpreted and why)'.[28] In my view, however, it is not the location itself that matters so much as the pressure or 'struggle' these writers experience is a result of their diasporic situation and due to their movement between 'cultures, languages, and complex configurations of meaning and power'.[29] As a consequence of this specific problem of mobile positionality, Aboulela and Faqir face the challenge of writing about issues related to Muslim women's status and rights in a region 'that carries a heavy symbolic load in the Western imagination with respect to the relation between religion [Islam] and

[27] Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 58–59.

[28] Lata Mani, 'Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception', *Feminist Review,* 35 (1990), 24–41 (p. 25).

[29] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Feminist Encounters: Locating the Politics of Experience', in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. by Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 68–86 (p. 82).

women's rights'.[30] That is to say, they write about Muslim women and their rights in Islam while producing their works in an environment that judges Islam and Muslims according to an Orientalist paradigm.

This paradigm of Orientalism still dominates, as Edward Said argues, in the age of 'the new imperialism', which is affected by Orientalism: 'Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism'.[31] That is to say, the mediaeval hostility towards and fear of Islam still exists and controls the relationship between Western and European countries on the one hand, and the world of Islam and the Arabs on the other. Said argues that the 'earliest European scholars of Islam [. . .] were medieval polemicists writing to ward off the threat of Muslim hordes and apostasy. In one way or another that combination of fear and hostility has persisted to the present day'.[32] Due to this Orientalist paradigm, as Said explains, Orientalists, who are 'mainly active in the United States [and] Britain', 'reduce Islam to a handful of rules, stereotypes, and generalizations about faith, its founder, and all of its people' and reinforce 'every negative fact

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[30] Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Debate about Gender, Religion, and Rights: Thoughts of a Middle East Anthropologist', *PMLA*, 121.5 (2006), 1621–1630 (p.1621).

[31] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 322.

[32] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 344. Orientalist discourse is still targeting Islam, either through the media or some Western politicians and intellectuals. As Said observes in his *Orientalism*, 'books and articles are regularly published on Islam and the Arabs that represent absolutely no change over the virulent anti-Islamic polemics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance'. See, Said, *Orientalism*, p. 287. Among the scholarly and academic studies that stress the cultural gap between Islam and Westerners is 'The Clash of Civilizations?' by Samuel Huntington, who produces a totally dualistic philosophy that asserts the superiority of Western values in comparison to 'Islam's borders [that] are bloody' and lack democracy. See, Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72.3 (1993), 22–49 (p. 34). Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris follow Huntington's thesis about the clash of civilisations with its hostile and oversimplified dualistic argument about the incompatibility and opposition between the West and Muslim civilization. However, Inglehart and Norris specify that the key difference is not related to democracy, as suggested by Huntington, but to matters of liberation. They argue that it is in the values of 'eros, not demos' where Muslims differ from Westerners. See, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, 'The True Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Policy*, 135 (2003), 63–70 (p. 65).

associated with Islam – its violence, primitiveness, atavism, [and] threatening qualities'.[33] Muslim women, according to this Orientalist discourse, are presented as 'part of a single undifferentiated category marked by a common trope of [Islam's] oppression' and positioned 'not as actors in their own right, but as foils for modernity, civilization, and freedom' or as 'objects of "Otherness"', as Jasmin Zine argues.[34]

Such an Orientalist paradigm is strong to the extent that 'whatever [. . .] Muslims say about their sense of justice, their history of oppression, their vision of their own societies, seems irrelevant'.[35] Therefore, some Muslim writers, particularly those who seek to be published in the West, adopt this discourse with its reductive representations of Islam in their writings that confirm the existing stereotypes of oppressed Muslim women who are victimised as a result of Islam. For example, Muslim feminist authors, such as Azar Nafisi, Taslima Nasreen, Irshad Manji and Ayan Hirshi Ali, as Nash concludes from examining their feminist writings, 'draw heavily [. . .] on tropes of Orientalism', as their engagement with Muslim women's rights has been absorbed into their adoption of an 'anti-Islamic discourse'.[36] In this discourse, Nash argues that these Muslim feminist writers 'repeat platitudes about western democracy and human rights without

[33] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. xvi.

[34] Such a static image of Muslim women is concluded by Jasmin Zine, who examines different genres produced in different historical periods starting from the colonial era, including Western male literary productions, travel writings and imperialist feminist writings for the purpose of tracing the Orientalist discourse in these texts. See Jasmin Zine, 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation', American *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 19.4 (2002) 1–22 (pp. 2–18).

[35] Said, *Covering Islam*, p. 9.

[36] Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, pp. 50, 68.

speculating too deeply on the negative aspects of life in the West' and neglect 'how western states' foreign policies impact on Muslim nations [. . .] turning volte-face and fortuitously discovering and condemning human rights abuses in [the latter], especially ill-treatment of women'.[37]

Aboulela and Faqir, however, choose not to adopt a Western Orientalist perspective. Instead, they challenge this perspective by utilising a kind of Islamic feminism, in which they engage with the 'question of gendered religious identity by focusing on the distinct way Islam shapes female agency'.[38] By doing so, both authors make what Miriam Cooke calls a 'double commitment', in which Islamic feminists show dedication to their religion and religious community, on the one hand, and to their feminist activism, on the other.[39] However, their Islamic feminism is hugely different.

Aboulela, for instance, resists the Western Orientalist discourse by consciously creating a new positive image of Islam and Muslim women and making the Islamic faith a source of spiritual emancipation that frees and strengthens her female Muslim protagonists, who 'seek solace in their growing religious identity'.[40] By doing so, Aboulela contradicts the Western Orientalist paradigm. But at the same time she does not undermine Western culture or ignore its progressive aspects.[41] Aboulela clarifies her position on Islam and the West, saying:

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[37] Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, pp. 68–69.

[38] Santesso, *Disorientation*, p. 158.

[39] Miriam Cooke, *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 59–60.

[40] Anita Sethi, 'Keep the Faith', *The Observer* (2005).

[41] Generally speaking, both Aboulela and Faqir have a good enduring connection with Western culture, in general, and with Britain, in particular, through their education and careers. Aboulela

> I appreciate the West. I love its literature, its transparency and its energy. I admire its work ethic and its fairness. I need its technology and its medicine, and I want my children to have a western education. At the same time, I am fulfilled in my religion. Nothing can compete with the elegance, authority and details of the Koran.[42]

This balance between Islam and the West becomes possible in Aboulela's fiction because of her focus on Islam as a faith that can be followed and practised in the heart of Western culture. Aboulela's focus on the Islamic faith allows her, as Ghazoul observes, 'to join South to North under the emblem of a universal quest, that of Islamic humanism'.[43]

On the other hand, Faqir challenges Western Orientalist discourse by empowering her female Muslim protagonists and giving them a voice to resist patriarchal Arab cultural and social traditions and an inherited legal system and doctrinal rules that subvert Muslim women. However, Faqir's challenge to the Western Orientalist paradigm is limited, due to the fact that, while confronting Western Orientalist discourse, she also confronts patriarchal Arab cultural and social traditions, as well as the doctrinal and legal systems that undermine Muslim

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was awarded her Master's degree in Statistics at the London School of Economics before devoting her career to writing fiction. Faqir also studied for an MA in Critical and Creative Writing at Lancaster University in 1984 and acquired her PhD in Critical and Creative Writing from East Anglia in 1990; she is currently a Fellow at St. Aidan's College, Durham University. See, Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 56–98. In addition, their choice to write their literary works in English is an outcome of adopting English as 'a freely chosen adherence to a foreign language', which is privileged for the purpose of education and career, rather than being imposed as a result of colonial policy or a struggle to obtain rights in the host culture. See, Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 20.

[42] Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

[43] Ferial Ghazoul, 'Halal Fiction', *Al-Ahram weekly online*, 542 (2001).

women. This two-sided confrontation is regarded as a necessity by Faqir, who believes that the 'offence' against Muslim women 'is two-sided' and thus 'dissent has to be two-sided'.[44] However, this two-sided confrontation limits Faqir's resistance against Western Orientalist discourse and puts her in what she describes as 'a constant battle' that she has to fight but does 'not win all the time'.[45] Faqir is mistakenly accused of aligning herself with Western secular feminism because of her critique of patriarchal Arab traditions and doctrinal rules and its legal system. For example, Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad point out:

> In the case of Faqir, the appropriation of Western feminist poetics in foregrounding the grievances of her female characters marks a position akin to that of western feminism in its early stages, when women demanded such basic rights as full suffrage and social participation.[46]

That is because her criticism can be used against Islam and Muslims 'by Orientalists to justify dropping bombs on Baghdad, or continuing the war in Palestine', as she explains in an interview.[47]

The different engagements of Aboulela and Faqir with Islamic feminism derive from their different personal experience of Islam. For example, the spiritual Islamic faith that Aboulela uses to empower her female protagonists is a reflection

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[44] Claire Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions: Interviews with Contemporary Writers* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 59.

[45] Ibid., p. 59.

[46] Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad, 'Women in Exile: The "Unhomely" in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*', in *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. by Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 271–312 (p. 282).

[47] Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*, p. 58.

of her strong personal faith and affiliation with her religion, which was instilled in her very early by her mother: 'My mother instilled a spiritual awareness in me from an early age'.[48] This spiritual faith in Islam was conveyed to Aboulela by her Egyptian progressive Muslim mother, who taught her daughter a moderate form of Islam that advises Muslim women of their rights, such as working and driving. Aboulela explains that her mother is 'a wonderful person, very open-minded and progressive, and she taught me a lot of things that I still use [. . .] She was one of the few women in Khartoum who worked, one of the few women who could drive'.[49] This spiritual knowledge of Islam was utilised by Aboulela when she was studying in London and motivated her decision to wear her hijab: 'I didn't know anybody. It was 1989 and the word "Muslim" wasn't even really used in Britain at the time; you were either black or Asian. So then I felt very free to wear the hijab'.[50]

Similarly, Faqir's criticism of patriarchal Arab traditions and doctrinal rules and its legal system is also a result of her personal experience with traditional conservative Islam that was imposed on her. Faqir was born and brought up in a conservative Jordanian Muslim family, where her harsh, intolerant and oppressive father imposed traditional conservative Islam on Faqir and her siblings, including the Islamic dress-code that he imposed on her; however, she managed to resist him by travelling far away from him to Britain, where she

[48] Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

[49] Leila Aboulela, 'My Best Teacher', *TES Magazine* (2000) <https://www.tes.com/news/my-best-teacher-leila-aboulela>.

[50] Anita Sethi, 'Keep the Faith', *The Observer* (2005).

settled.[51] Faqir describes her father, saying, 'My father was a reluctant tyrant [. . .] who once sat on top of my 10-year-old brother and stuffed a whole packet of cigarettes into his mouth because he caught him smoking'.[52] This experience shaped Faqir's feminist viewpoint regarding oppressed Arab Muslim women and motivated her to depict the conflict between the young Faqir, who represents all Muslim women, and her father, who represents patriarchal Arab cultural and social traditions and a conservative reading of Islam in her fiction.

The conflict between Faqir and her father, who forced a traditional conservative Islam on her, leads Faqir to have a complicated relationship with Islam, which she chooses to abandon as a religious faith, but at the same time she decides to embrace it when involved in social or political activities. Faqir clearly identifies her religious position as a non-practising 'secular Muslim'.[53] She explains that 'religion meant nothing to [her]', either in Jordan or Britain, until this identification with Islam was forced on her by the Western society she lives in as a consequence of post-9/11, saying that '[a]fter 9/11, everybody started labelling me a Muslim', probably because of her name and/or the colour of her skin.[54] As a result, Faqir finds it 'an act of cowardice' to refuse to define herself as a Muslim.[55] That is why she has self-consciously constructed herself as a representative of Arab Muslim women in the context of her career in Britain. She

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[51] Fadia Faqir, 'As Soon as the Fresh Air Touched My Hair I Began to Cry', *The Guardian* (2007) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/22/religion.familyandrelationships>.

[52] Fadia Faqir, 'As Soon as the Fresh Air Touched My Hair I Began to Cry', *The Guardian* (2007) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/22/religion.familyandrelationships>.

[53] Lindsey Moore, '"You Arrive at *a* Truth, Not *the* Truth": An Interview with Fadia Faqir', *Postcolonial Text*, 6.2 (2011), 1–13 (p. 9).

[54] Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*, p. 73.

[55] Ibid., p. 73.

dramatises the politics of her representation in her public performances, saying: 'When I go to conferences, I stand on the podium and say, "I am a Muslim woman and I can speak for myself," and then I start my talk [in order to] overcome the barrier of being cast as a silent other, a mute subaltern'.[56] These words clarify how Faqir attempts to correct the stereotypes of Muslim women by proving that she, herself a Muslim woman, can speak for herself. They also suggest that she relates her methodology of representation and experience as a feminist to Spivak's theory of the subaltern. Faqir seems to follow Spivak in highlighting the restricted utility of Western feminist theories in representing oppressed third-world women who cannot speak – not because they are incapable of speaking and struggling, but because these theories do not account for the specificities of other women's histories and religions.[57] Faqir seems to agree with Leila Ahmed that 'the feminist agenda for Muslim women as set by Europeans [. . .] was incorrect and irrelevant'.[58]

As the main objective of this thesis is to highlight religious diversity by comparing and contrasting the Islamic feminism revealed by Aboulela and Faqir in their fiction, utilising a methodology that approaches the literature produced by these two authors from a religious perspective is a necessity. I consider the use of a methodology that approaches literature from an Islamic religious perspective

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[56] Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*, p. 60.

[57] Spivak states that 'in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'. She is referring here to the limited benefits of Western feminist theories for third-world women. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp. 271–313 (p. 287).

[58] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 166.

one of the distinctive contributions of this thesis, since such a methodology is not normally applied in postcolonial critical studies examining Muslim literature that are, as I have outlined, usually analysed from a culturalist and secular perspective. A secular approach dominates in relation to Muslim literature, partly because of the limitations of postcolonial theory in relation to Islam, as explained earlier, and partly because of the conflict created between Islam and literature by critics of Muslim and Arab origin, both secular or religious. Sabry Hafez, for instance, claims the impossibility of combining literature with Islam. According to him, literature is written by writers who use an artistic style in order to present a liberal vision of the world that is presented in 'an open text which tends to encourage acts of conscious freedom on the part of its writers and readers and places them at the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations'.[59] This liberal vision presented by literature, if joined with Islam, is necessarily restrained, according to Hafez, by the 'static', 'didactic' and 'authoritarian' characteristic of Islam that 'is established by divine providence' and its 'completely closed scripture'.[60] From a very different perspective, Mahmudul Hasan also emphasises the contradictory relationship between Islam and literature, in his case by modelling a didactic and restricted critical approach. For him, literature is subject to 'shortcomings and limitations' because it is an imaginative production that is created as a result of human intellectual activity in comparison to Islam, which he believes 'to be infallible'.[61] Therefore, he insists that literary productions

[59] Sabry Hafez, 'Islam and Arabic Literature', in *Islamism and Cultural Expression in the Arab World*, ed. by Abir Hamdar and Lindsey Moore, (London; New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 31–59 (p. 38).

[60] Ibid., p. 38.

[61] Mahmudul Hasan, 'The Islamization of English Literary Studies: A Postcolonial Approach', *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences (AJISS)*, 30.2 (2013), 21–41 (p. 25).

must be judged according to an Islamic 'didactic approach' that emphasises the moral codes and principles of Islam in literary works and demands that literary works must have Islamic 'instructional functions' and 'moral content'.[62] By doing so, he excludes much of the literature that does not follow his restricted demands.

In this thesis, I avoid the didactic and restricted approach suggested by Hasan and choose a reasonable and flexible critical methodology, on the ground that literature is a branch of a human knowledge and its main function, according to Islamic scholar Syed Ali Ashraf,[63] is to provide 'pleasure' and 'enjoyment'.[64] However, I will draw very selectively on Hasan's attempt to combine Islam with literature by emphasising the notions of beauty and truth, which can be considered commonalities that link Islam and literature.[65] Appreciating beauty that is manifested in literature, according to Hasan, is in agreement with Islamic teachings that appreciate beauty, as clarified in the prophetic oral tradition, 'God is beautiful and He loves beauty'.[66] Truth is also another commonality that connects literature and Islam, as it is the main concern of both. Literature presents truth through telling 'the story of human life as it concerns the experiences, sorrows, and happiness of human beings', while Islam consists of

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[62] Hasan, 'The Islamization of English Literary Studies: A Postcolonial Approach', (p. 33).

[63] Syed Ali Ashraf (1925-7 August 1998) was an Islamic scholar and academic of Bangladeshi origin. He was the Head of Department of English and Professor of English at Karachi University, and later became Director-General, World Centre for Islamic Education at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in 1980.

[64] Syed Ali Ashraf, 'Islamic Principles and Methods in the Teaching of Literature', in *Philosophy, Literature, and Fine Arts*, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Dunton Green, Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton; Jeddah: King Abdulaziz University, 1982), pp. 22–40 (p. 36).

[65] Such an attempt to unite beauty and truth in literature is based on the Keatsian theory that combines truth with beauty in a work of art, as illustrated in his poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'.

[66] Hasan, 'The Islamization of English Literary Studies: A Postcolonial Approach', (p. 36).

truth in relation to 'what is good and what is bad for human beings, their wellbeing, meaningful existence, and responsibilities as God's vicegerents on Earth'.[67] In that sense, a writer is a 'truth-teller' who tells the story of human life shaped by the writer's personal experience and realisation of truth, which is transformed into an attractive, beautiful and fictional image that is appreciated by readers and critics who place it in the context of a vision of life and truth.[68] This vision of life and realisation of truth become more attainable when appreciating literature through a religious approach, since the relationship between religion and literature, according to Mark Knight, is mutually illuminating as religion 'might provide a helpful lens for thinking about literary texts', while literature can be used 'as a lens for reading and thinking about religion'.[69]

Islamic feminism, which will be elaborated in the first chapter of this thesis, has been chosen as a key methodology. Islamic feminism is a feminist movement that pertains to 'working to achieve gender equality and social justice within an explicitly religious, Islamic framework'.[70] It is a global movement and most of its participants are Muslim scholars and activists who live in the West and produce their works in English, 'the major language in which its discourse is articulated and circulated'.[71] These characteristics allow me to compare the engagements of

[67] Hasan, 'The Islamization of English Literary Studies: A Postcolonial Approach', (p. 32).

[68] Quoted in A. S. Byatt, *Iris Murdoch (Writers and their Work)*, ed. by Ian Scott-Kilvert (London: Longman for the British Council, 1976), p. 16.

[69] Mark Knight, *An Introduction to Religion and Literature* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 2.

[70] Haifaa A. Jawad, 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', *HAWWA*, 7 (2009), 1–24, (p. 1).

[71] Margot Badran, 'Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?', in *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*, ed. by Margot Badran (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), pp. 242–252 (p. 245).

Aboulela and Faqir with issues of gender justice and Muslim women's rights and status with those of Islamic feminists such as Asma Barlas, Riffat Hasan and Ziba Mir-Hosseini. If Islamic feminist scholars and activists, through their publications and presence in the media, provide knowledge that educates women as well as young Muslim scholars in women's rights in Islam, Aboulela and Faqir, similarly, present knowledge that participates in influencing and shaping the world views of their readers about feminist issues in Islam and Muslim communities. Aboulela and Faqir manage to do so because literature, as Heather Walton explains, provides feminists with 'an accessible space in which it is possible to critique contemporary practice and engage in the imaginative construction of alternative worlds'.[72] That is to say, literature allows feminist writers to challenge and critique patriarchal practices, and at the same time to create better imaginative and fictional situations for women.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In Chapter One, I focus on the troubled relationship between Islam and feminism and trace this relationship from historical and theological perspectives for the purpose of clarifying how Islam, which I argue is an egalitarian religion, becomes oppressive to women. I also give a brief account of Islamic feminism, which reunites Islam and feminism, and discuss in details the criterion of 'double commitment', which is used as a parameter to identify Islamic feminist projects. This chapter is important as it contextualises Islamic feminism as a methodology that is adopted throughout the analysis of literary fiction in chapter two and three.

[72] Heather Walton, *Literature, Theology and Feminism* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 10–11.

In the next two chapters, I concentrate on analysing the feminist consciousness of Faqir and Aboulela. In Chapter Two, I focus on Faqir's feminism that is revealed in her fiction, namely, *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name is Salma* (2008) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). I argue that Faqir exposes an Islamic feminism that is displayed in resisting and critiquing patriarchal social practices and religious legal and doctrinal rules that undermine the status of Muslim women. In Chapter Three, I focus on Aboulela's feminism that is exposed in her fiction, precisely, *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015). I argue that Aboulela reveals an Islamic feminism, which is different from that of Faqir. Aboulela's Islamic feminist consciousness mainly revolves around making Islamic faith a source of spiritual empowerment and emancipation that strengthens Muslim women internally and provides them with freedom.

This thesis specifically utilises Islamic feminism as a key methodology in order to explore the Islamic feminist consciousness revealed in the postcolonial fiction of two contemporary British Arab Muslim writers, precisely Aboulela and Faqir. In doing so, I provide a better understanding and expand existing literary criticism in relation to postcolonial Muslim literature. I therefore hope to open up new possibilities for further postcolonial examination of Muslim literature from an Islamic perspective.

# Chapter One

## Contextualising Islamic Feminism: Towards a Methodology

This chapter focuses on the relationship between Islam and women's status and rights in Muslim societies. It traces this relationship historically and theologically in order to clarify how Islam, which I argue is an egalitarian religion, becomes an oppressive tool for women in the hands of medieval male religious scholars, who interpreted it as an authoritarian religion, and then in the hands of contemporary Islamists, who insist on returning to a classical interpretation and its hegemonic discourse. This chapter also sheds light on Islamic feminism and clarifies how it reunites Islam and feminism. It also discusses in detail the notion of a 'double commitment' as a major criterion for assessing feminist projects and deciding whether they belong to Islamic feminism or not.

### Historical and theological background to the modern debate about women's status in Islam

The literature about Islam and women's status and rights in Islam is vast and complex and it has been framed and defined within scholarly debates that incorporate many disagreements. These disagreements are attributable to the instabilities of the paradigms of 'religion' and 'women', each of which, according to Elizabeth A. Castelli, 'represents [. . .] a powerfully "troubled" category'.[73] As I demonstrate below, the controversy regarding whether Islam gives Muslim women rights or marginalises and oppresses them is due to instabilities related

[73] Elizabeth A. Castelli, 'Introduction: Women, Gender and Religion: Troubling Categories and Transforming Knowledge', in *Women, Gender, Religion: a Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 3–25 (p. 4).

to the religion of Islam and to those related to the status of Muslim women in Muslim communities. These instabilities have led in one way or another to a tension between Islam and feminism, which has arguably been reconciled with the emergence of Islamic feminism.

The instability of Islam in relation to women's issues can be explained in light of the tension between the ideological vision of Islam or the 'religious faith', which refers to Islamic principles and values that are concluded from interpreting and reinterpreting the Quran, and the practical vision of Islam or the 'organized religion', which refers to doctrinal and legal systems.[74] These two perspectives of Islam have different standpoints in relation to Muslim women. According to Asghar Ali Engineer, a progressive religious scholar, the ideological voice of Islam, which is found in the Quran, 'unmistakably declared gender equality fourteen hundred years ago', while androcentricity in Muslim societies is justified in the legal and doctrinal structures of Islam, which have been made and enforced by 'Muslim men [who] denied [Muslim women] even elementary rights'.[75]

To understand this tension between the ideological vision of Islam and the practical one, it is important to differentiate between Divine law and humans' understanding and application of this law. Divine law, according to Khaled Abou El Fadl, a modernist religious scholar and Professor of Law, is the 'ideal' and 'abstract notion of God's Will', which 'is always fair, just and equitable', and it is called 'the Sharī'ah (literally, the way)', while humans' attempt to understand and implement Divine law and to achieve its ideals and purposes is called 'the fiqh

[74] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism', *Critical Inquiry*, 32.4 (2006), 629–645 (p. 632).

[75] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society* (Slough: New Dawn Press, 2005), p. 3.

(literally, the understanding)'.[76] This human understanding of God's will, according to Abou El Fadl, is compulsory for every adult Muslim, whether man or woman, and they are obliged to make a sincere effort to attempt to understand and implement God's will.[77] Nevertheless, he affirms that all human attempts to understand and implement God's will are 'necessarily imperfect', since human beings 'do not possess the ability to encompass the wisdom of God'.[78] At the same time, every attempt made, according to Abou El Fadl, will be rewarded by God, who will recognise the sincere and diligent effort an individual makes because the 'truth is relative and every mujtahid [a person who makes an effort] is ultimately correct, not in attaining the correct result, but in seeking the Divine Will'.[79]

This distinction between Divine law and human understanding and implementation of this law justifies and explains the instability in Islam, an instability that is caused by human agency and leads to the emergence of Islamic

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[76] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), p. 32.

[77] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 33. Attempting to understand and implement God's will is mandatory for every adult Muslim, who is supposed not to follow blindly, but to decide whether to accept or reject a legal opinion that reflects the opinion of a jurist or a religious expert about God's intentions and purposes. This decision should not be based on mood or whim, but on deep thinking and assessment of the opinion's accuracy vis-à-vis God's will. See, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 29.

[78] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 32. Abou El Fadl reaches this conclusion about humans' limited ability in relation to understanding God's will from two jurisprudential schools of thought. The first school argues that it is difficult to know God's intentions and purposes exactly and affirms that the most one can do is to 'strive, work hard, and do one's very best in trying to discover the correct legal determination'. This school asserts that making every effort in order to search for the correct determination will be rewarded in the Hereafter, either with 'full credit' in case of the correct determination being reached or with 'less credit' if the correct determination is not reached even after making a diligent effort. The second legal school argues that 'there is no correct determination' and God's will demands that human beings must 'live a conscientious, reflective, and diligent life', in which they strive hard to search for God's will. See, Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 91.

[79] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 33.

jurisprudence (Islamic law). Islamic jurisprudence, on a purely theoretical level, is claimed to be based on the command of a Divine sovereign, because it is derived from two sacred sources that 'occupy the paramount positions as the means for discovering the Divine Will'.[80] These sources are the Quran, which Muslims believe is the literal, immutable and unadulterated Word of God, transmitted through the agency of the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which is a body of oral traditions known as *hadith* that is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad and narrated by his companions.[81] The authoritativeness of these sources derives from the fact that they either 'come from God' or 'tell us something about what God is instructing' human beings to do.[82]

The problem with Islamic jurisprudence is that it is claimed to be a divine-based law, since it is mainly derived from the Quran and *Sunna*. This claim, though, is an oversimplification that underestimates the role played by human agency, represented by jurists who attempt to form legal opinions, known as *fatawa* (sing. *fatwa*), from the Quran and *Sunna*.[83] The interference of human

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[80] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 86.

[81] Other than these two main sources, Islamic legal opinions and judgements are also based on rule by analogy, which is following precedents in their judgements in old cases that are adhered to in similar new cases, or the consensus of jurists, customs or the public interest. See, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 31.

[82] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 86.

[83] The word jurists here refers to religious experts who study Islamic law, religious sciences and *fiqh*. They are given various names in Arabic: *ulama* (sing. *alim*), *fuqaha* (sing. *faqih*), *shuyukh* (sing. *shaykh*) or *aimmah* (sing. imam). Jurists receive technical legal training that allows them to become experts in Islamic jurisprudence and then to 'play a role quite similar to that of rabbis in the Jewish faith', since they 'give counsel, conduct marriages, conduct the last rites for the deceased and in some cases serve as judges in a religious court'. See Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 28.

agency in Islamic jurisprudence becomes possible because of the 'metaphorical and allegorical language' of the Quran and *Sunna*.[84] This language was intended by the authors of these texts, whether God or the Prophet, who exercised 'considerable discretion in choosing the linguistic symbols that best communicate an image'; however, these authors 'cannot control the effect of the language upon readers'.[85] In fact, the meaning readers infer from any text, including these sacred texts, is 'bounded by human usage' of language, in which 'letters, words, phrases, and sentences are dependent on a system of symbols, and these symbols invoke particular associations, images, and emotions in an audience that may also change over time'.[86] Therefore, jurists and religious experts, who study and analyse the Quran and *Sunna* for the purpose of finding legal solutions from these sacred texts, tend to mainly depend on the process of interpretation. This process mainly depends on linguistic and legal inferences, juristic reasoning and personal judgements, which result in making Islamic law 'a domain of interpretation that rests on probability'.[87]

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[84] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 19. The metaphoric language used in the Quran and *Sunna* becomes a tricky artefact, as Abou El Fadl argues, because it 'is expected to shape the attitudes and conduct of the human agent', who in one way or another 'shapes the meaning of the text'. The subjectivity involved in interpreting metaphoric language is increased with *Sunna* because of the process of transmission, which usually started with a companion who heard or witnessed what the Prophet said or did and then transmitted this information through several generations until it reached the collectors of *Sunna* and *hadith* traditions, who reported and documented the whole process of transmission. Abou El Fadl argues that the Prophet is the 'primary member of the [authorial] enterprise' but he is not the only member of such authorial enterprise, which also includes 'those who selected, remembered and transmitted the report'. That is to say, the *Sunna* and *hadith* tradition do not reach us in a vacuum, rather they are loaded with the subjectivities of generations of transmitters. For more information, see Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, pp. 87–91.

[85] Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 90.

[86] Ibid., p. 89.

[87] Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, p. 27.

Human agency plays a crucial role in inserting the patriarchy of the Muslim social system into Islamic jurisprudence through jurists, judges and legal experts who are the products of their own societies. Patriarchy in the Muslim social system stems from the patriarchal social practices of Arab communities in addition to misogynist traditions of other urban cultures, such as those of the Byzantine (the Roman Empire) and Sasanian (the Persian Empire) cultures, whose people became part of Islamic communities after the spread of Islam beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula.[88] Leila Ahmed explains that the penetration of the misogynist traditions of the Byzantine and Sasanian cultures into Islamic jurisprudence occurred through the process of interpreting the Quran and *Sunna*, which are the major sources of Islamic jurisprudence.[89] In addition, the historical development of Islamic jurisprudence shows that, during its emergence, it was influenced by four foreign legal systems: Persian Sassanian law, Roman Byzantine law, the canon law of the Eastern churches, and Talmudic law.[90] All these foreign legal systems were assimilated and adopted within Islamic jurisprudence in the hands of religious experts and jurists, most of whom were 'educated non-Arab converts' who participated in allowing the patriarchal traditions of other cultures to creep into the Islamic legal system.[91]

In addition to introducing patriarchy into Islamic jurisprudence, human agency participates in creating a chaotic legal system that cannot ensure

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[88] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 67–68.

[89] Ibid., p. 93.

[90] Joseph Schacht, 'Foreign Elements in Ancient Islamic Law', in *The Formation of Islamic Law*, ed. by Wael B. Hallaq (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004), pp. 59–67 (p. 60).

[91] Joseph Schacht, 'Pre-Islamic Background and Early Development of Jurisprudence', in *The Formation of Islamic Law*, ed. by Wael B. Hallaq (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004), pp. 29–57 (p. 37).

women's rights. For example, as Abou El Fadl explains, some jurists prohibit women serving as judges while others permit it, and many jurists prevent women leading prayers while a few allow it.[92] These contradictions in legal opinions are as a result of the efforts of jurists over the course of several centuries, which has resulted in a very diverse matrix of divergent legal schools of thought, different legal methodologies and approaches and many conflicting legal judgments and opinions about what is Islamically condemnable or legitimate.[93] Contradictory legal opinions, in the Medieval age, were a characteristic of broad-minded and receptive Muslim communities that accepted differences and encouraged diversity, particularly when this diversity was the product of legal institutions that 'set strict qualifications that a jurist had to meet before becoming qualified to issue a fatwa'.[94] But with the absence of credible institutions that impose this system of qualifications in the contemporary age, the same contradictory legal opinions result in 'complete chaos in the world of Islamic law'.[95]

The instability of this category of Islam is accompanied by instability in Muslim women's status, which has been subject to change over time. This change is due to the fact that 'Islam evolved from an initial phase of tolerance to the gradual marginalization of women and their enclosure in the dark world of a

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[92] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2007), p. 34.

[93] Ibid., p. 33.

[94] Ibid., p. 28.

[95] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 29. The disappearance of legal institutions is due to the damage that was inflicted on Islamic jurisprudence in the hands of 'native rulers installed by colonial powers in the post-colonial period, especially in the 1950s and 1960s'. Those rulers, instead of improving the Islamic legal system, replaced it with a Western-based legal system under the guise of reform. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 35.

theologically illegitimate patriarchy'.[96] Alterations to Muslim women's status are traced by Ahmed from a historical perspective. Ahmed finds that Muslim women, in early Muslim communities, enjoyed a freedom that was appreciated and accepted by the 'first generation of Muslims' and 'their immediate descendants'.[97] This freedom was demonstrated in the active participation of early Muslim women in religious and political activities.[98] Muslim women's freedom was, however, as Ahmed explains, limited with the elaboration of classical Islamic jurisprudence and scriptural interpretations that occurred in the 'androcentric age' of the Umayyad (661–750 CE) and Abbasid (750–1517 CE) monarchies.[99] The limitations on Muslim women's freedom gradually decreased due to the exposure of Muslim communities to the modernity that arrived with the European colonial powers in the nineteenth century.[100]

However, this exposure to modernity is problematic because it has created two powerful competing voices within Muslim societies. The first voice is represented by secular feminists and scholarly activists, who 'regard Islam as a purely cultural issue' and whose 'politics are shaped by [a] postcolonial nationalist agenda' and 'their definition of women's rights [. . .] [is] understood in largely Western terms'.[101] The other voice is represented by conservatives and Islamists who 'stand for reactionary and new-conservative approaches', reject feminism on

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[96] Anouar Majid, 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 23.2 (1998), 321–361 (p. 323).

[97] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 47.

[98] Ibid., p. 72.

[99] Ibid., p. 100.

[100] Ibid., p. 127.

[101] Jawad, 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', (p. 2).

the basis that it is Western and alien and aim to 'replicate a historical model without taking into consideration the complexity of life or the impact of modernity on Muslim society'.[102] This complicated situation in Muslim countries has resulted in a troubled relationship between Islam and feminism, as it creates an invisible boundary that separates feminism and Islam. Accordingly, it puts Muslim women in a difficult situation, whereby they supposedly have to choose between preserving their religious identity and claiming their rights as women. This difficult situation is, though, solved with the emergence of Islamic feminists who resist the perceived Islamist project to return to classical 'patriarchal notions inherent in orthodox interpretations of Islamic law' and choose to ground their work in gender justice within a progressive Islamic framework.[103]

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[102] Jawad, 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', (pp. 2–3). Secular feminists ground their feminist activities within a secular discourse, believing that feminism and Islam have completely divergent theoretical and ideological grounds, and therefore they cannot be reconciled. Haideh Moghissi, for example, asserts that '[f]eminism's core idea is diametrically opposed to the basic principles of Islam'. See, Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), p. 140. She considers feminism to be a secular ideology that is contradicted by Islam, which she regards as a patriarchal religion that 'is based on [a] gender hierarchy' and subordinates women. See, Haideh Moghissi, 'Islamic Feminism Revisited', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31.1 (2011), 76–84 (pp. 81–82).

[103] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'The Quest for Gender Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam', *Islam 21*, 36 (2004), 2–5 (p. 2). Islamic feminists see a strong connection between Islam and feminism. This strong connection is asserted by Omaima Abou-Bakr, an Egyptian academic, through her genealogical studies of traditional exegetical interpretations. She discovers several narrations that display the feminist consciousness of early Muslim women, as clarified in Quranic *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelations of some Quranic verses). An example of this is illustrated in the occasion of verse 195 of surah *Āl 'Imrān* (*The Family of 'Imran*). The occasion of this verse displays that the verse was a divine response to the feminist consciousness of a Muslim woman called Umm Salamah and her demand for gender equality. Umm Salamah asked the prophet Muhammad if Muslim women were mentioned in the Quran and if their good deeds were praised at all. God responded to the feminist enquiry of Umm Salamah with a Quranic verse that starts with: 'And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: Ye are members, one of another (3.195)'. From this occasion, Abou-Bakr concludes there is compatibility between feminism and Islam. See, Omaima Abou-Bakr, 'Rings of Memory: "Writing Muslim Women" and the Question of Authorial Voice', *The Muslim World*, 103.3 (2013), 320–333 (p. 329).

**What is Islamic feminism?**

Islamic feminism is a relatively new feminist movement, since its genealogy goes back, as Margot Badran identifies, to the second half of the twentieth century.[104] It has been brought into focus as an outcome of various social and political developments. First, 'the increased participation of [Muslim] women in education' gives them a chance to challenge traditional patriarchal patterns.[105] Second, the initiation of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has been adopted by the UN General Assembly, 'gives gender equality [a] clear international legal mandate' and provides feminist activists with the point of reference and language they need in order 'to resist and challenge patriarchy'.[106] Third, the rise of political Islam and the attempts of Islamist forces to 'dismantle earlier efforts at reforming and /or secularising laws and legal systems' motivate Muslim women to respond using the same religious language that was intended to marginalise them.[107] Fourth, the 'failure of both modernist ideologies and clerical Islam' to provide solutions for Muslim women provokes the need for Islamic feminism, which 'is both indigenous and progressive'.[108] It is indigenous, as Zainah Anwar explains in an interview,[109] because it avoids the liberal feminist agenda, derived from Western values that

[104] Badran, 'Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?', (p. 243).

[105] Jawad, 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', (p. 3).

[106] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Justice, Equality and Muslim Family Laws: New Ideas, New prospects', in *Gender and Equality in Muslim Family Law: Justice and Ethics in the Islamic Legal Tradition*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini and others (London; New York: I.B. Rauris, 2013), pp. 7–34 (p. 12).

[107] Ibid., p. 12.

[108] Majid, 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam', (p. 351).

[109] Zainah Anwar is a Malaysian Islamic feminist and head of the civil society organisation called Musawah.

challenge the majority of Muslims, and uses the Islamic religion, which 'plays an important role in public life and public policy' in Muslim societies.[110] It is also progressive because it achieves its goal to empower and liberate Muslim women through using 'a progressive Islam' that is grounded in the Muslim conception of 'God as being all knowing, all merciful and all compassionate'.[111]

The participants of this Islamic feminist movement are Muslim intellectuals and scholar-activists (both male and female) whose work mainly focuses on 'challeng[ing] patriarchal values and the oppressive social structures that were common features in most Muslim countries' and 'resent[ing] the androcentric interpretations of Islamic sources'.[112] But not every feminist project that engages with Islamic sources can be labelled within the category of Islamic feminism. There is some kind of criterion that is required because of the heterogeneity among Muslim feminists' projects. From my viewpoint, I think the best way to summarise this criterion is what Miriam Cooke calls a 'double commitment', referring to the commitment of Islamic feminists to their religion and religious community, on the one hand, and to their feminist activism, on the other.[113] That is to say, this double commitment requires a feminist project to have 'a gender

[110] Shelia Nair, 'Challenging the Mullahs: Islam, Politics and Women's Activism, Interview with Zainah Anwar', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9.2 (2007), 240–248 (p. 242).

[111] Ibid., p. 241.

[112] Jawad, 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', (p. 2). Miriam Cooke and Mulki Al-Sharmani affirm that some modernist and progressive religious male scholars can be classified as Islamic feminists because they play important roles in advocating women's rights and supporting female intellectuals. Therefore, male intellectuals and writers such as Khaled Abou El Fadl, Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry and Asghar Ali Engineer can be categorized as Islamic feminists. See: Miriam Cooke, 'Feminist Transgressions in the Postcolonial Arab World', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 8.4(1999), 93–105 (p. 97) and Mulki Al-Sharmani, 'Islamic Feminism: Transnational and National Reflections', *Approaching Religion*, 4.2 (2014), 83–94 (p. 83).

[113] Cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, pp. 59–60.

discourse that is feminist in its aspiration and demands, yet is Islamic in its language and sources of legitimacy', as Ziba Mir-Hosseini explains.[114]

Therefore, a project that concentrates on a conservative discourse that defends the idea of hierarchical gender relations and roles cannot be categorised as Islamic feminism because it lacks a commitment to feminism. In the same vein, a feminist project that does not follow an appropriate Islamic methodology cannot be labelled Islamic feminism. This appropriate Islamic methodology, according to Mulki Al-Sharmani,[115] should not be limited to challenging and critiquing the patriarchal classical Islamic 'interpretive tradition (i.e. exegesis, jurisprudence, Hadith compilations, etc)'.[116] Rather, it should extend to producing new knowledge that can be used to make the case for gender justice derived from Islamic sacred texts (the Quran and *Sunna*) and providing alternatives that are based on Islamic ideals of justice.[117]

For the purpose of clarifying how an appropriate Islamic methodology is utilised, I briefly examine the feminist project of Fatima Mernissi.[118] Mernissi, in her study, *Women and Islam: an Historical and Theological Enquiry*, explains that Islam originally had an egalitarian message that was only activated during the Prophet's time to defend and empower the weak and the oppressed, including

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[114] Mir-Hosseini, 'The Quest for Gender Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam', (p. 3). Ziba Mir-Hosseini is an Iranian-born legal anthropologist, an expert in Islamic family law and gender in the Muslim world and a founding member of Musawah.

[115] Mulki Al-Sharmani is a lecturer and a research fellow who specialises in anthropology, theology and Islamic feminism. She is also a member of the Musawah Knowledge Building Working Group.

[116] Mulki Al-Sharmani, 'Islamic Feminism: Transnational and National Reflections', *Approaching Religion*, 4.2 (2014), 83–94 (p. 83).

[117] Ibid., p. 83.

[118] Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015) was a Moroccan academic, feminist and sociologist. She specialised in political science, family sociology and psychosociology.

women.[119] She carefully explains how the egalitarianism of Islam has been completely altered since the death of the Prophet through the 'manipulation' of Islamic texts and the 'fabrication of false traditions [*hadith*]', which have been used to legitimise political actions or financial profits through religion.[120] This alteration, as Mernissi clarifies, was performed by elite Muslims, such as caliphs and princes, who dominated public opinion by practising their control over Muslim theologians, who manipulated sacred texts through a process of interpretation.[121] Building on her findings, Mernissi concludes that Islam is not compatible with feminism, which includes a form of 'rebellion' on the part of women, a rebellion that cannot be accepted within the 'hierarchical order' of Islam, in which men are considered 'masters of women and the slaves of God', while women are 'slaves only'.[122] Despite the fact that Mernissi's project clarifies the reason for androcentricity created in Islam by human agency, which she critiques, she provides no alternative or solution that makes the case for gender justice within an Islamic framework. In that sense, this feminist project cannot be classified as a project that falls within the category of Islamic feminism.

After giving a brief account of the tension between Islam and feminism, which are reconciled by the emergence of Islamic feminism, and discussing the criterion of 'double-commitment' as a parameter to identify Islamic feminist projects, a practical example of how this criterion is applied by Islamic feminists

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[119] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: an Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. by Mary Jo Lakeland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 26.

[120] Ibid., p. 9.

[121] Ibid., pp. 46–47.

[122] Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion & Islamic Memory* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1996), pp. 111–112.

is essential. Such a practical example is important to show how this criterion is utilised by Islamic feminists in a systematic and scholarly context. For this purpose, I choose to discuss the patriarchal concepts of guardianship and wife-beating, illustrating how Islamic feminists show their double-commitment to both feminism and religion while critiquing these concepts.

These two concepts are chosen in particular because they are among the major patriarchal doctrinal and legal concepts that attract the attention of Islamic feminist intellectuals and scholar-activists who are interested in gender justice. They relate to Islamic family law but their effects extend beyond marital life as they are used to stress the superiority of men and grant them special privileges and rights, which allow them to oppress women. In addition, understanding these concepts and how they are negated by Islamic feminists is helpful in understanding the Islamic feminist consciousness of my selected authors, particularly Faqir, whose Islamic feminism mainly revolves around critiquing patriarchal legal and doctrinal rules in relation to gender inequalities.

In my discussion of these concepts I present them as a case study, in which I explain how these patriarchal concepts were initiated by medieval jurists and exegetes and then how Islamic feminists negate the classical interpretations of these concepts and present a different theoretical stance.

**The concepts of guardianship and wife-beating from an Islamic feminist perspective**

The patriarchal concept of guardianship, also known as *qiwama*, stems from a controversial Quranic verse 34 in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*): 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more

(strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means (4.34)'.[123] According to Omaima Abou-Bakr,[124] the patriarchal construct of the concept of *qiwama*, which derives from this verse, has been developed at the hands of several male religious scholars and exegetes, whose patriarchal interpretations of this verse in relation to the concept of *qiwama* accumulated over time in exegetical tradition.

The concept of *qiwama* was first constructed, as Abou-Bakr explains, by Abu Jafar Muhammad al-Tabari (839–923 CE), a religious scholar and exegete who created the first standard exegesis commentary entitled *Jami al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran*. Al-Tabari conceptualised this notion by turning the descriptive word *qawwamun* (protectors, guardians and maintainers) into the normative prescriptive noun *qiyam* (watching over or being in charge of their women), which was later developed into the concept of *qiwama* as an essential notion of male ontological superiority.[125] He also turned the financial responsibility God assigned to men into a reason for male privilege, twisting the divine order for men to support women financially into 'a wide range of a generalized status of all men everywhere and at all times'.[126]

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[123] This Quranic verse and all other Quranic verses in this thesis are quoted from: *The Holy Qur'an*, trans. by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2000).

[124] Omaima Abou-Bakr is an Egyptian Muslim feminist and a professor of English and comparative literature at Cairo University. She specialises in female spirituality and mysticism in both Islam and Christianity, feminist theology and gender justice in Islam. She is also a board member and cofounder of the Egyptian NGO Women and Memory forum.

[125] Omaima Abou-Bakr, 'The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct', in *Men in Charge: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, ed. by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), pp. 44–64 (p. 46).

[126] Ibid., p. 48.

Abou-Bakr also explains that the concept of *qiwama* was generalised, from being a limited and specific financial command to a pervasive standard criterion that controls all marital relationships, at the hands of Abu al-Fida Imad al-Din Ismail ibn Umar ibn Kathir (1301–1373) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (1445–1505). Ibn Kathir achieved this generalisation by forcing a linkage between the concept of *qiwama* in verse 4.34 to the notion of *darajah* (degree of preference) in the Quranic verse 2.228[127] and to a number of Prophetic oral tradition, known as *ahadith* (sing. *hadith*), on wives' absolute obedience to their husbands, whom he assumed to have a natural predisposition to be a woman's *raisaha* (her master), *kabiraha* (her superior) and *al-hakimu alayha* (her ruler).[128] He also extended male supremacy in public domains by connecting the concept of *qiwama* to the *hadith* narrated by Abu-Bakara about female leadership: 'No people will prosper that has delegated a woman to lead their affairs', stipulating that women cannot be appointed as judges.[129] Al-Suyuti also expanded male superiority by connecting the concept of *qiwama* in verse 4.34 to a number of weak *ahadith* that recall typical medieval misogynistic literature derived from Jewish lore.[130] Among these *ahadith* are those about the metaphoric wives prostrating to their husbands, submitting sexually on the back of a camel and licking a husband's puss-filled ulcers if needs be, all of which urge a wife to live as a husband's humble slave.[131]

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[127] The degree notion is derived from Quranic verse 228 in surah *Al-Baqarah* (*The Heifer*): 'but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise (2.228)'.

[128] Abou-Bakr, 'The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct', (p. 52).

[129] Ibid., p. 52.

[130] Ibid., p. 53.

[131] Abou El Fadl refutes these *ahadith* for several reasons. First, the prostration and submission suggested by these *ahadith* 'contradict the theological notion of the undivided supremacy of God and God's Will'. Second, they are in contradiction with the Quranic discourse on marriage as a mutual husband-wife relationship: among the Quranic verses about marriage as a

Abou-Bakr clarifies that the same patriarchal interpretations were embraced in modern times by twentieth-century Islamists exegetes such as Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), Sayyid Qutb (1906 –1966) and Shaykh Muhammad Mitwalli al-Sharawi (1911–1998). These Islamist exegetes, according to Abou-Bakr, adopted the old medieval gender bias, reshaped it within modern and pseudo-scientific terms, created unfounded meanings and turned the male responsibility for spending into a cause of male authority.[132] Abduh, for example, introduced the notion of domesticity and connected it to the innate natural disposition and biological inborn nature of women. As a result, he limited female functions to the domestic sphere, such as child-bearing, childbirth, nursing and child-rearing.[133] Qutb also analysed the concept of *qiwama* in relation to the innate biological, mental, neural, physical and psychological features of both men and women, and then he divided the functions of both sexes between public and private domains. He extended male functions to the public sphere because of

reciprocal relationship are 'And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect (30.21)' and 'They are your garments and ye are their garments (2.187)'. Third, they are not compatible with the cumulative reports that describe the behaviours of the Prophet with his own wives as a gentle and playful husband who never insulted or struck any of them. Among the Prophetic tradition that asserts his gentleness with his wives is an account narrated in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* that reports that Umar's wife while arguing with Umar told him, "You reproach me for answering you! Well, by God, the wives of the Prophet answer him, and one of them might even desert him from morning until night" (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*). The last problem with these *ahadith* is that they are narrated by Abu Hurayrah who converted only three years before the death of the Prophet but narrated many *ahadith* and traditions not mentioned by other close and notable companions who lived with the Prophet for a longer time. In addition, Abu Hurayrah 'was knowledgeable in the Talmud and many of his narrated *ahadith* correlate with Jewish mythology. Finally, the reports affirm that Abu Hurayrah either contradicted himself or he was corrected by other Companions, and therefore, he was threatened to be punished by Umar, the second Caliph, if he did not refrain from his narratory zeal. For more details, see Khaled Abou El Fadl, 'Faith-based Assumptions and Determinations Demeaning to Women', in *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), pp. 209–264.

[132] Abou-Bakr, 'The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct', (p. 55).

[133] Ibid., p. 54.

their features such as ‘toughness, slow response and the use of thinking and deliberation’, but he limited female functions to the private sphere because of their feminine features such as ‘gentleness, kindness and quick emotional response’, which make them capable of playing their role in bearing and raising children.[134] Al-Sharawi participated in consolidating the justification for female intellectual deficiency and their ‘unsuitability for any work other than motherhood’, which he attributed to their feminine ‘nurturing drives and emotions’.[135]

These patriarchal interpretations of verse 4.34 were developed and conceptualised in the Medieval period under the influence of ‘patriarchal social pressure’ and ‘political autocracy’ that shaped the understanding of *qiwama* according to the ideology of *hakimiyyat* (political governance).[136] The concept of *qiwama*, by extrapolation, ‘became synonymous with familial *tasalut* (despotism)’ that demanded women be completely obedient to their husbands, whose masculine authority was regarded as an extension of that of *hakim* (the political ruler or head of state).[137] They are also removed from the emancipatory and egalitarian spirit of Islamic faith that is conveyed in the Quran because of the androcentric methodology adopted by male exegetes. Such a methodology, according to Engineer, involves connecting verse 4.34 to some other selective Quranic verses that deal with the domination of men without discussing their social context, and to a number of weak and fabricated *ahadith* while omitting to

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[134] Abou-Bakr, ‘The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct’, (p. 55).

[135] Ibid., p. 56.

[136] Asma Lamrabet, ‘An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah’*, in *Men in Charge: Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, ed. by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani and Jana Rumminger, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), pp. 65–87 (p. 81).

[137] Ibid., p. 82.

shed light on other Quranic verses that empower women or reveal gender equality.[138]

Islamic feminists refute this patriarchal concept, for it shapes a model of the familial relationship that demands women show complete obedience to the marital masculine authority of their husbands, and for this reason, they provide an alternative understanding.[139] Among Islamic feminists who attempt to establish a different theoretical viewpoint regarding the concept of *qiwama* is Kecia Ali,[140] who adopts a new methodology, in which she attempts to 'depart from [Quranic] literal provisions in order to establish justice'.[141] In light of this methodology, Ali acknowledges that verse 4.34 is an assertion that 'men and women are ontologically equal as human creations', which is part of the egalitarian discourse in the Quran that 'stresses individual accountability'.[142] This acknowledgment of Quranic ontological gender equality is stressed by other Islamic feminists, such as Asma Barlas[143] and Amina Wadud.[144] Barlas

[138] Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society*, p. 204. Asghar Ali Engineer questions *hadith* literature and the authenticity of its contexts and the reliability of its narrators, especially as its systematic compilation began more than a century after the death of the Prophet, which suggests a possible distortion exemplified in fabricating many *ahadith* that give women a far more inferior status. See, Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society*, pp. 18–21.

[139] Lamrabet, 'An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah'*, (p. 81).

[140] Kecia Ali is an American Islamic feminist scholar and a professor who specialises in Islam and Gender. Her scholarly interests include Islamic jurisprudence in relation to women, marriage and sexual ethics.

[141] Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2013), p. 55.

[142] Ibid., p.116, p. 131.

[143] Asma Barlas is a Pakistani-American academic and writer who specialises in comparative and international politics, Islam, women's studies and Quranic hermeneutics.

[144] Amina Wadud is an American Islamic feminist and a professor of Islamic studies and philosophy who has taught at different universities in different counties, including Indonesia, Malaysia and the United States. After her retirement she became an independent scholar and international consultant on human rights and gender in Islam and she has participated in

concludes from her reading of the Quran that 'women and men [are] originated in the same self, have the same capacity for moral choice and personality and, as God's vice-regents on earth, have a mutual duty to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong'.[145] Wadud also asserts that '[m]an and woman are two categories of the human species given the same or equal consideration and endowed with the same or equal potential'.[146]

Ali claims though that verse 4.34 illustrates that men and women 'are not meant to be socially equal in the life of this world'.[147] Ali generalises her claim about this verse to the Quran, when she states that it justifies hierarchical social gender differentiation by asserting that men have greater responsibility, as illustrated in the divine obligation for men to support women financially.[148] Accordingly, Ali argues that the Quran, which is a source of divine guidance that directs human beings to morality and justice, is 'a thoroughly androcentric – though not [. . .] misogynist – text' that has some limitations 'manifested in the earthly realm', and so it can only be 'a pale shadow of the ultimate Reality'.[149]

Ali's argument about the androcentricity of the Quran cannot be accepted as the Quran presents both ontological gender equality and social equality as

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founding Sisters in Islam. She is known as a Lady Imam because she delivers Friday *Khutbah* (sermon) and leads the prayers of mixed congregations.

[145] Asma Barlas, 'Uncrossed Bridges: Islam, Feminism and Secular democracy', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 39.4 (2013), 417–425 (p. 421).

[146] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakti, 1993), p. 15.

[147] Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, p. 116.

[148] Ibid., p. 131.

[149] Ibid., pp. 132–134.

connected. This connection is demonstrated, as Wadud explains, in the first Quranic verse in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*):

> O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you. (4.1)

Wadud clarifies that this verse establishes 'the origin of all humankind as a single *nafs*, which is part of a contingent-pair system: *nafs* and its *zawj*'.[150] According to Wadud, the word *nafs* is used to indicate the self and refers to the 'origin of all humankind', while the word *zawj*, which means mate or spouse, indicates a pair [that] is made of 'two co-existing forms of a single reality, with some distinctions in nature, characteristics and functions', but the two are formed 'to fit together as a whole' and to 'function on a physical, social and moral level' in life.[151] In addition, Ali's argument is refuted by the Quranic discourse on marital life, which is

[150] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 22.

[151] Ibid., pp. 20–22.

characterised, as Asma Lamrabet[152] explains, by 'harmony and reciprocal consultation',[153] 'love and tenderness'[154] and 'shared responsibilities'.[155]

Wadud also participates in producing an alternative interpretation for verse 4.34, though she differs from Ali in her attempt to elicit an egalitarian interpretation of the verse from the Quran itself without departing from it. To achieve her goal, Wadud situates the concept of *qiwama* within the paradigm of *tawhid* that challenges patriarchy from an Islamic perspective. Wadud clarifies that, according to the paradigm of *tawhid*, which asserts the oneness and uniqueness of God, 'no person can be greater than another person, especially for mere reasons of gender, race, class, nationality, etc.'.[156] Accordingly, men and women, as Wadud explains, are equal individuals who 'must occupy a relationship of

[152] Asma Lamrabet is a Moroccan biologist and Muslim feminist. From 2004 to 2007, she was the president of the International Group of Studies and Reflection on Women and Islam (GIERFI), based in Barcelona. In 2010, she became Director of the Research Centre on Women's Studies in Islam at Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas in Morocco.

[153] Verse 233 in surah *Al-Baqarah* (*The Heifer*): 'The mothers shall give such to their offspring for two whole years, if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child, nor father on account of his child. An heir shall be chargeable in the same way. If they both decide on weaning, *by mutual consent, and after due consultation*, there is no blame on them. If ye decide on a foster-mother for your offspring, there is no blame on you, provided ye pay (the mother) what ye offered, on equitable terms. But fear Allah and know that Allah sees well what ye do (2.233)'.

[154] Verse 21 in surah *Al-Rūm* (*The Romans*): 'And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put *love and mercy between your (hearts)*: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect (30.21)'.

[155] Verse 71 in surah *Al-Tawbah* (*The Repentance*): 'The Believers, men and women, *are protectors one of another*: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise (9.71)'. For more details, see Lamrabet, 'An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah'*, (p. 84).

[156] Amina Wadud, 'Foreword: Engaging *Tawhid* in Islam and Feminisms', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10.4 (2008), 435–438 (p. 437). *Tawhid* is a key word that is used to refer to monotheism in Islam. It means that 'God is one, God is unique, God is united and God unites all things'. Wadud generates the *tawhid* paradigm from verse 11 in surah *Ash-Shūrā* (*Consultation*): '(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things) (42.11)'.

horizontal reciprocity' because 'gender asymmetry [. . .] is a kind of satanic logic or *shirk*' that posits superiority to men'.[157] She clarifies that the only criterion of distinction between men and women and among all human beings is *taqwa* (God-conscious piety), which 'is not determined by gender' but is reflected in one's own deeds and functional roles in this life.[158] However, human deeds and functional roles, Wadud asserts, are not divided between human beings according to gender since the Quran does not establish a monolithic order for the social system and does not specify certain functional roles for each gender. On the contrary, the Quran acknowledges that men and women operate in a social system with various functional roles that are rewarded by God, who recompenses every human being for every deed in accordance with the piety with which the deed is performed.[159]

Wadud also contextualises the concept of *qiwama* within the egalitarian message of the Quran, which appreciates the female functional role of child-bearing. She asserts that there is no indication in the Quran that motherhood is the exclusive role of women, though it acknowledges that 'a woman (though certainly not all women) is the exclusive human capable of bearing children'.[160] This functional role of child-bearing is highly respected in the Quran, and Wadud

[157] Wadud, 'Foreword: Engaging *Tawhid* in Islam and Feminisms', (p. 437).

[158] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 63.

[159] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 67. Wadud recognises the importance of piety and the Quranic acknowledgement of variation in human functional roles from verse 13 in surah *Al-Hujurāt* (*The Inner Apartment*): 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (49.13)'.

[160] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 64.

generates this respect from the last part of verse 4.1: ‘and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you (4.1)’. According to Wadud, this Quranic verse shows considerable respect for women and their distinctive function of child-bearing, which is regarded as a responsibility of primary importance because it is ‘essential to the continuation of human existence’.[161] This significant responsibility, Wadud clarifies, demands ‘a great deal of physical strength, stamina, intelligence, and deep personal commitment’ on the part of women, who need to be supported and supplied with sustenance in order to fulfil this responsibility in society.[162]

Wadud provides a definition of the concept of *qiwama*, which has nothing to do with the classical understanding of this concept as males’ absolute supremacy and authority over women. She defines *qiwama* as a male financial responsibility.[163] This responsibility, from Wadud’s perspective, is ‘neither biological nor inherent’, but it is ‘valuable’ for ‘creat[ing] a balanced and shared society’, in which men are obliged to pay out of their wealth in order to support their wives financially.[164] For Wadud, this responsibility is restricted to familial social organisation and by the condition of financial sustenance. This condition has to do with the problematic word *faddala* (preference), which Wadud clarifies

[161] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 64.

[162] Ibid., p. 73.

[163] Riffat Hassan reaches the same definition for *qiwama* as a male financial obligation, and therefore, she defines the word *qwwamun* as ‘bread winners’ or ‘those who provide a means of support or livelihood’. Hassan also asserts that this financial obligation ‘does not mean that women cannot or should not provide for themselves’, but simply because of females’ great responsibilities in bearing and rearing children, ‘they should not have the additional obligation of providing the means of living at the same time’. See, Riffat Hassan, ‘Feminism in Islam’, in *Feminism and World Religions*, ed. by Arvind Sharma and Katharine K. Young, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 248–278 (p. 264).

[164] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 73.

is not an absolute preference but a 'materialistic' one that is related to males' double share of inheritance.[165] Wadud also limits the notion of *darajah* (degree), which is derived from the Quranic verse 2.228 and is used to stress the universal perspective of male supremacy in every aspect, to the issue of divorce that is discussed in the context of the surah and which refers to the advantage men have of 'being individually able to pronounce divorce against their wives without arbitration or assistance' but does not stress male supremacy at all.[166]

Asma Lamrabet, like Wadud, decentres *qiwama* from its classical meaning as a concept related to male absolute authority by situating it within the general Islamic understanding of marital relationships and marriage. She manages to do so by adopting a methodology that is based on approaching the Quran from the perspective of contemporary universal human rights, with the aim of finding 'key concepts of gender equality'.[167] This methodology is grounded in Lamrabet's belief that the Quran, which is 'addressed to humanity [. . .] regardless of gender, race or class', conveys a message that is spiritually liberating from all kinds of oppression.[168] Accordingly, she interprets *qiwama* in light of Quranic ethics and values of marriage, which stipulate equality in family life, and in relation to Quranic verses that concern family life such as 'shared responsibilities', 'harmony and reciprocal consultation' and 'love and tenderness'.[169]

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[165] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 70.

[166] Ibid., p. 68.

[167] Lamrabet, 'An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah'*, (p. 66).

[168] Ibid., p. 67.

[169] Ibid., p. 84.

Lamrabet understands the concept of *qiwama* as a male 'responsibility' to 'maintain the family structure' and 'provide for the needs of their family', particularly when 'women are physiologically vulnerable' and need material support and security in their conjugal life so that they can focus on their specific responsibilities, such as pregnancy and nursing.[170] At the same time, Lamrabet asserts that this male financial obligation does not mean allocating household tasks solely to women. Lamrabet reaches this assertion by examining the Quran and *Sunna*. Lamrabet finds out that 'not a single [Quranic] verse mentions domestic work as solely a task for women'.[171] She also finds numerous *ahadith* reported by Ibn Hibban and Imam Ahmed in which Aisha, the Prophet's wife, narrated how Prophet Muhammad used to do everyday household tasks such as 'mending vessels', 'sewing clothes' and 'serving his own family while being the Messenger of the Creator'.[172] By limiting *qiwama* to marital relationships, Lamrabet manages to deconstruct the confusion between male authority and *qiwama*, which operates only inside the family structure but not in the public and socio-political domains, which must, as Lamrabet argues, 'be managed by both men and women [and] according to the criteria of fairness and justice'.[173]

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[170] Lamrabet, 'An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah'*, pp. (84–85).

[171] Ibid., p. 85.

[172] Ibid., p. 85.

[173] In addition to private *qiwama* that is related to marital relationships, Asma Lamrabet argues that there is a public *qiwama* that is demonstrated in exhorting both men and women to practise in the public domain, where they are supposed to unconditionally respect the values of fairness and justice in all their actions and judgements. Lamrabet grounds her argument in verse 8 in surah *Al-Mā'idah* (*The Table Spread*): 'O ye who believe! *stand out firmly for Allah*, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (5.8)'. See, Lamrabet, 'An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of *Khilafah*, *Wilayah* and *Qiwamah'*, (pp. 78–83).

Wife-beating is another debatable issue that is used as evidence of the divine sanction of male supremacy. It stems from the second part of the controversial verse 4.34:

> Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) chastise them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all). (4.34)

Wife-beating, under the medieval ethos, is formulated within classical jurisprudence that defines *nikah* (marriage) as a contract patterned after the contract of *bay* (sale). According to this contract, a set of responsibilities and rights for each party are established and supported by legal force that revolves mainly around two specific themes. These themes are ‘sexual access’ and ‘compensation’, which are embodied in two legal concepts of *tamkin* (submission and obedience, specifically regarding sexual access), which is a duty of a wife and a right of a husband, and *nafaqa* (maintenance), which is a wife’s right and a husband’s duty.[174]

According to the contract of marriage, a wife loses her demand for sustenance and becomes liable to punishment, which is the duty of a husband who is supposed to discipline his wife if she is in a state of *nushuz*.[175] This state

[174] Mir-Hosseini, ‘Justice, Equality and Muslim Family Laws: New Ideas, New prospects’, (p. 10).

[175] Ibid., p. 10.

of wifely *nushuz* is defined in classical jurisprudence as disobeying a husband by 'refusing his sexual overtures' or 'leaving the marital home without [the husband's] permission'.[176] The punishment a husband imposes on his wife consists of a three-step solution that must be followed in a sequential order, and beating comes as the last step. Wife-beating, according to classical exegetes and religious scholars, is permissible, but it should not cause bone fracture or inflict any harm or pain. Al-Tabari suggested that wife-beating should be applied using a *miswak* (a twig used for cleaning teeth), whereas Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1150-1210), a famous Persian-Arab theologian and philosopher, recommended that it be applied using a handkerchief.[177]

Islamic feminists differ widely in their opinions regarding wife-beating. Some of them understand the verse as a restriction on beating and striking women while others accept it as a divine injunction. Wadud, for instance, refuses to accept that this verse permits violence against women. On the contrary, she reads it as 'prohibiting unchecked violence against females' and 'a severe restriction of existing practices'.[178] Wadud deduces her reading from her understanding of three important key words in the verse. The first word is *qanitat*, for which Wadud refuses to accept its classical reference to wifely *taa* (obedience) to a husband.[179] Instead, she interprets it as a description of human behaviour that characterises the conduct of believers, both males and females,

[176] Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, p. 120.

[177] Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society*, p. 52.

[178] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 76.

[179] In fact, Wadud concludes from her reading of all the verses, in which the word "*qanitat*" is used, that the Quran 'never orders a woman to obey her husband' and 'never states that obedience to their husbands is a characteristic of "better women"'. See, Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 77.

who are supposed to be subservient before God.[180] The second word is *nushuz*, for which Wadud rejects its common interpretation as an indication of the act of disobeying a husband. She insists that it refers to 'disruption of marital harmony', which can be committed by both men and women as exemplified in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*) twice with regard to males in verse 4.128[181] and females in verse 4.34.[182] The third word is *adribuhunna*, for which Wadud refuses its translation as a synonym for striking and beating and prefers to interpret it as 'to give or set an example' and 'to leave or strike out on a journey', both of which are mentioned in Arabic lexicons.[183]

Building on her understanding of these three terms, Wadud concludes that this verse is a restriction on wife-beating, which comes as a last option in a three-step solution after two other steps that are effective in recovering from disruption of marital harmony. The first step is the 'verbal solution', which is, according to Wadud, the best solution offered for the purposes of ending disagreements between spouses and regaining marital harmony, as it is mentioned in both verses that deal with *nushuz* committed by males and females.[184] Wadud prefers this solution because it is compatible with the Quranic value of reciprocal *shura* (consultation).[185] The second step is 'separation' in beds, which is meant as a

[180] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 74.

[181] 'If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best; even though men's souls are swayed by greed. But if ye do good and practise self-restraint, Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do (4.128)'.

[182] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 74.

[183] Ibid., p. 76.

[184] Ibid., p. 75.

[185] Ibid., p. 75.

'cooling-off period' that enables the two spouses to calm down, think deeply about the problem at hand and decide whether to stay together or separate and get divorced.[186]

Barlas agrees with Wadud about interpreting the word *adribuhunna* as a restriction on beating. Barlas deduces that the Quran uses the word *adribuhunna* in a restrictive sense, because the word is not used in a punitive sense but in a 'symbolic' one, since it does not inflict bodily harm. Barlas reads this symbolic beating in verse 44 in surah *Sād*: "'And take in thy hand a little grass, and strike therewith: and break not (thy oath)." Truly We found him full of patience and constancy. How excellent in Our service! ever did he turn (to Us)!(38.44)'.[187] This verse highlights the divine injunction to Job to strike his wife, whom Job has sworn to beat for cursing God, not for disobeying Job himself, using 'a little grass'.[188] She also argues that the divine command of *adribuhunna* 'could not have functioned as a license' for abusing women because the command to beat women is initiated as the last alternative, not the first.[189]

Riffat Hassan[190] and Ayesha S. Chaudhry[191] interpret verse 4.34 as permission for men to beat their wives. But Hassan limits this permission by one condition, which is that all women rebel against their role of child-bearing. She

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[186] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, p. 76.

[187] Asma Barlas, *" Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 188.

[188] Ibid., p. 188.

[189] Ibid., p. 188.

[190] Riffat Hassan is a Pakistani-American Islamic feminist, scholar and a theologian.

[191] Ayesha Chaudhry is a Canadian-based Islamic feminist, and a professor of gender studies in Islam. Her scholarly researches focus on women's rights, social justice and Islamic theological and legal reform.

concludes this condition from the word "*salihat*", which is translated as 'righteously obedient', but Hassan translates it as the 'capability' or 'potentiality' for bearing children, which is suggested by the word "*qanitat*" and its metaphoric reference to a woman's 'womb'.[192] Chaudhry also argues that wifely beating is permissible in a restricted manner, which she reaches by examining the *Sunna* and *hadith* literature. She discovers that a number of *ahadith* depict the Prophet's 'moral disapproval of husbands who hit their wives'.[193] She also finds another set of *ahadith* depict him accepting that men discipline their wives physically with the exception of one incident, in which he granted divorce for a Muslim woman who was beaten severely by her husband who broke her bones.[194] Chaudhry concludes that these Prophetic practices introduce 'a layer of ethical discourse within the parameters of this legal right' of disciplining a wife.[195]

This detailed discussion of the concepts of guardianship and wife-beating is meant to clarify how the criterion of double commitment is applicable to an Islamic feminist scholarly project, in which Islamic feminists are committed to both feminism and religion. It demonstrates how these Islamic feminists are committed to feminism by managing to challenge and oppose classical patriarchal interpretations. At the same time, it demonstrates how they are committed to their religion as they ground their opposition in their progressive readings of the same sacred texts used to oppress them. Such demonstration is significant in analysing

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[192] Riffat Hassan, 'Feminism in Islam', in *Feminism and World Religions*, ed. by Arvind Sharma and Katharine K. Young, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 248–278 (p. 264).

[193] Ayesha S. Chaudhry, '"I Wanted One Thing and God Wanted Another...": The Dilemma of the Prophetic Example and the Qur'anic Injunction on Wife-Beating', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 39.3 (2011), 416–439 (p. 436).

[194] Ibid., pp. 436–437.

[195] Ibid., p. 437.

and discussing the fiction of Aboulela and Faqir who reveal and negotiate an Islamic feminist consciousness and adopt the criterion of double commitment. Having an awareness of how the criterion of double commitment is applied helps in differentiating when my selected writers are critical of a patriarchal religious misconception and when they offer an Islamic alternative. In addition, the heterogeneity among Islamic feminists, which is illustrated in their divergent approaches and theoretical stances regarding the concepts of guardianship and wife-beating, assists in understanding the diverse Islamic feminism Aboulela and Faqir expose in their fiction.

Faqir's Islamic feminism, for example, is critical of patriarchal legal and doctrinal systems in Islam. Therefore, Faqir, in her fiction, usually challenges patriarchal legal and doctrinal rules, but at the same time, she exposes a commitment to religion by providing an alternative that is based on Islamic ideals of egalitarianism. In *Pillars of Salt*, for instance, she critiques the patriarchal concept of guardianship that enables the male character of Abu Saad to force a hierarchal marital relationship on his wife, Um Saad. At the same time, she juxtaposes this hierarchal relationship with another marital relationship, in which another couple, Maha and her husband Harb, enjoy a marriage that is based on a mutual protection, which Maha refers to, saying, 'I would protect him [and] accept his protection'.[196] This idea of a reciprocal protection is generated from the Quranic verse 9.71: 'The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another', which, according to Barlas, indicates the Quranic injunction of a non-hierarchical marital relationship.[197] In contrast, Aboulela's Islamic feminism

[196] Fadia Faqir, *Pillars of Salt* (London: Quartet Books, 1996), p. 58.

[197] Asma Barlas, 'The Qur'an and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'an's Opposition to Patriarchy', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 3.2 (2001), 15–38 (p. 18).

concentrates on Islamic faith which is, as I mentioned previously, fair and equitable. Therefore, her Islamic feminism concentrates on empowering her female protagonists, such as Sammar, in *The Translator*, and Najwa, in *Minaret*, through embracing an Islamic faith. This Islamic faith is presented as a source of empowerment and emancipation, which strengthens her female Muslim characters internally and provides them with freedom. This brief comparison and contrast between Aboulela and Faqir is just a hint, but the elaboration will be in the next two chapters, in which I analyse the fiction of Aboulela and Faqir and explore their Islamic feminism in detail.

# Chapter Two

## Fadia Faqir and Critiquing Legal Islam and the Social Practices of Muslims

### Introduction

Fadia Faqir is clearly a contemporary feminist writer, one whose feminism targets women's issues in the Arab Muslim world. However, she is accused of opposing and criticising Islam. Diya M Abdo argues that Faqir 'implicitly and explicitly attacks Islam'.[198] Her feminist consciousness is also regarded as an appropriation of 'Western feminism', since it has 'no sentimental affiliation with religion or native culture', as Fadia Suyoufie and Lamia Hammad argue.[199] It is true that Faqir is critical of the patriarchal social practices of Arab culture and the patriarchal legal and doctrinal systems in Islam. Yet, her feminism intersects with those projects of Islamic feminists. This intersection is demonstrated in Faqir's double commitment. She is committed to feminism, which is exposed in her critiques of the patriarchal doctrinal and legal systems in Islam as well as social conservative practices in Arab Muslim communities. She is also committed to her religion, on which she grounds her critique. This double commitment is obvious in her journalistic work. For instance, Faqir, in her article about democracy in Arab Muslim countries, attributes the lack of democracy to the status of women in the context of an extremism that excludes Arab Muslim women completely from political participation. In the same article, Faqir praises the resistance efforts

[198] Diya M Abdo, 'How to Be a Successful Double Agent: (Dis)placement as Strategy in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt'*, in *Arab Voices in Diaspora*, ed. by Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 237–269 (p. 242).

[199] Suyoufie and Hammad, 'Women in Exile: The "Unhomely" in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*', (p. 282).

made by the Jordanian feminist, Tujan Faisal, who confronts Islamists with 'her knowledge of the *Hadith* and *Qur'an* [which] enables her to question male interpretations of the scriptures and the politicisation of Islam'.[200] The same double commitment is also revealed in Faqir's fiction, in which she engages with issues related to Jordanian Muslim women and positions herself against Islamists and social conservatives, who are subjects of her criticism, which is based on religion.

In this chapter, I argue that Faqir's feminist consciousness is an Islamic feminism, which is explored in relation to her fictional work, namely, *Pillars of Salt* (1996), *My Name is Salma* (2007) and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (2014). These particular novels are chosen because they engage with feminist issues. *Pillars of Salt*, for example, engages with gender discrimination that is grounded on some religious misconceptions in relation to assumed male supremacy and female inferiority; *My Name is Salma* engages with crimes of honour; and *Willow Trees Don't Weep* sheds light on the role played by religious extremism in discrimination against Muslim women. All three novels will be analysed in order to clarify how Faqir's feminist consciousness intersects with that of Islamic feminists and to evaluate her representations of Islam concerning gender discrimination against Muslim women.

### ***Pillars of Salt*** **(1996)**

*Pillars of Salt* is a novel that tells the story of two female protagonists: Maha, a Bedouin woman from the tribe of Bani Qasim, and Um Saad, a middle-class

[200] Fadia Faqir, 'Engendering Democracy and Islam in the Arab world', *Third World Quarterly*, 18.1 (1997), 165–174 (p. 174).

urban woman dwelling in the city of Amman; they meet and befriend each other in a mental hospital, where they share their life stories together. The novel consists of two plots. The main plot is about Maha, who gets married to the love of her life, Harb, a brave horseman who resists and fights the British colonisers but is killed by British military aeroplanes. After the death of Harb, Maha returns to the house of her father, Sheikh Nimer, where she delivers her baby boy, Mubarak. Her quarrel with her brother, Daffash, starts when he tricks her to go to the house of Samir Pasha and cook a traditional Bedouin dish called mansef for Pasha's guests, who turn out to be British officers. After discovering that she has prepared food for her husband's killers, Maha decides to leave in disgust, after spitting in the face of one of the British officers. Her conduct angers Daffash, who later plans to impose a forced marriage on his sister in order to get rid of her, so that he can take her share of the land they inherit after the death of their father. Maha escapes to the mountains on the day of her wedding but returns to the village, where female villagers try to protect her from the old man who claims that she is his wife and from the men who want to punish her for spending a night in the mountains, but they fail as she has been taken away to Fuhais mental hospital. The sub-plot is about Um Saad, a daughter of Fuad Hajjo, a cruel Syrian political refugee. The young Um Saad tries to evade her father's attempt to imprison her at home by attending a Quranic school and visiting the local market, where she meets Muhammad, a Circassian shopkeeper who proposes marriage to her. Muhammad's proposal is refused by Um Saad's father, who forces her to marry Abu Saad, a foul-smelling butcher who, after a long marriage to Um Saad, marries a second wife, a young Westernised girl. As a result, Um Saad is

banished from the marital bedroom and then taken away to Fuhais psychological hospital.

These two plots are framed within a text that 'combines Arabic traditional storytelling with post-modern narrative modes'.[201] They are narrated by the two female protagonists, Maha and Um Saad, who tell their life stories to each other during their confinement in Fuhais psychiatric hospital, and by Sami al-Adjnabi, the Storyteller, who narrates parts of Maha's story. The setting of the novel is in a particular historical period in Jordan under the British Mandate and after the independence of Jordan, which is explained in a detailed 'historical chronology' provided in the preface of the novel.

In *Pillars of Salt*, Faqir sheds light on certain religious misconceptions that have been used to justify gender discrimination. These misconceptions have to do with the assumed inferiority of women and superiority of men. Concerning women's assumed inferiority, three misconceptions are mentioned in the novel. The first misconception concerns the oppressive belief that men are God's primary creation while women are secondary, since Hawwa (Eve) was created from Adam's rib, which is derived from the *hadith*:

> Treat women with kindness, for woman has been created from a rib, and truly the most curved part of a rib is its upper part, and should you attempt to straighten it, you will break it – but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved (and intact). So treat women with kindness![202]

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[201] Suyoufie and Hammad, 'Women in Exile: The "Unhomely" in Fadia Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*', (p. 282).

[202] Nicholas Awde, *Women in Islam: an Anthology from the Qur'an and Ḥadīths* (Surrey: Curzon, 2000), p. 95.

This misconception is referred to by Sami al-Adjnabi, or the Storyteller, who compares Maha to Eve, whom he refers to as the first woman when he says that '[Maha] was like the first woman'.[203] This comparison is meant to humiliate Maha, by connecting her to Eve, whom he describes as a woman who was 'made out of our father Adam's crooked rib, [and] was cast out of heaven' (p. 2).

The second misconception relates to the belief that all women are a source of evil because of their *fitna* (tempting nature), which comes from the *hadith*: 'I have not left behind me any *fitna* more harmful to men than women',[204] and their *kayd* (guile), which derives from generalising the divine description of Zulaykha, as the faithless wife of Aziz who tried to seduce Joseph, to include all women in this description.[205] This misconception is referred to in the text by the Storyteller, who describes Maha as 'a she-demon' (p. 29), who is possessed by 'the soul of fiery jinnee escaping from the depth of the sea' (p. 30). He also associates Maha with black magic and the evil power of 'Gog and Magog, the masters of evil and witchcraft', whom he claims have been used by Maha in order to seduce men, including her late husband, Harb, and Samir Pasha (p. 63). Finally, he describes Maha as a woman whose 'cunning is great', which he later generalises to all women and claims that this generalisation is a divine warning (p. 62):

> Allah warned his loyal worshippers in His wise book against the cunning of women, especially widows and spinsters. When there is no man to hold the

[203] Fadia Faqir, *Pillars of Salt*, (London: Quartet Books, 1996), p. 4. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

[204] This *hadith* is narrated in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*.

[205] The divine description of Zulaykha is mentioned in Quranic verse 28 in surah *Yūsuf* (*Joseph*): 'So when he saw his shirt – that it was torn at the back – (her husband) said: "Behold, it is a snare of you women! Truly, mighty is your snare! (12.28)'.

> rein, to mount them and drown them in the sea of cooking and children, women start laying snares. They whisper their songs in men's ears; they smile; they kiss their spells until they snatch men's souls. (p. 178)

In this quotation, the Storyteller portrays all women as deceivers and seducers of men and accuses them of tempting men using their feminine tempting nature and guile. A couple of other male characters also refer to this misconception. Daffash mentions it when he accuses Nasra, whom he rapes, of tempting him by 'playing tunes on her pipe [which] called [him] to touch her' (p. 13). Sheikh Nimer, Daffash's father, also reproaches Nasra, telling her that she 'should not have tempted [Daffash to rape her]' (p. 14).

The third misconception has to do with the claim that women are ontologically irrational and less devout than men, which derives from a couple of *ahadith*, including the following: 'Is not the witness of one woman like half the witness of a man? [. . .] And that is on account of the deficiency of her reason' and 'Is it not that when a woman has her period, she neither prays nor fasts? That is the shortcoming in her religion'.[206] This misconception about women's assumed ontological irrationality and irreligiousness is depicted in the episodes confining Maha and Um Saad in a mental hospital. Faqir makes it clear in the text that Maha and Um Saad are not mad but their oppressive male relatives, namely, Abu Saad and Daffash, describe these women as 'crazy' or 'mad', in order to justify their misogynistic and oppressive behaviours against them. For example, Daffash explains his attempt to shoot Maha and her friend, Nasra, as an attempt to 'put some sense into those crazy women's heads' (p. 14). Later, Daffash and

[206] Awde, *Women in Islam*, pp. 39–75.

Abu Saad manage to get rid of Maha and Um Saad by imprisoning them in Fuhais mental hospital, a place that suits their so-called irreligiosity and irrationality as it is a place 'where Christians live and where mad people go' (p. 19).

Faqir, as an Islamic feminist, must agree with other Islamic feminists who refute these misconceptions regarding the inferiority of women and their tempting nature, irrationality and irreligiosity.[207] However, Faqir does not negate these misconceptions in a straightforward way. Instead, she specifies how these misconceptions lead to violations of the rights of her female protagonists. For instance, Faqir clarifies how these misconceptions lead to preventing Maha playing an active role in public life and limiting her participation in society to the private domain only because of her assumed seductive nature and lack of wisdom and intelligence. Maha complains that her father prevents her from 'work[ing] in the field because it [is] exhausting and shameful', claiming that a 'woman's place [is] in a well-closed room' (p. 22). Maha's words make it clear that the oppressive beliefs about women's inferiority underpin this gendering of space and social roles: 'exhausting' refers to women's assumed incapacity to handle

[207] Riffat Hassan, in her study about feminism in Islam, rejects these misconceptions on the basis of their inconsistency with the Quran, which makes no distinction between the creation of men and women, who were 'created equal by God and stand equal in the sight of God' (p. 268). She also argues that these misconceptions become 'part of Muslim heritage through its assimilation [of Jewish and Christian traditions] in the *hadith* literature' (p. 255). As for the fall episode and the responsibility of Eve as a deceiver or temptress, Hassan asserts that dwelling on earth for Adam and Eve is not commonly considered by Muslims to be a punishment from an Islamic perspective, since God's purpose in creating Adam and Eve was for them to be his 'vicegerents on earth', which is declared in Quranic verse 30 in surah *Al-Baqarah* (*The Heifer*) as 'humanity's dwelling place and a source of profit to it' (p. 259). In addition, she asserts that there is no evidence in Islamic texts about the accusation of Eve of being deceived by Shaitan (Satan) and then tempting Adam on her part, because the act of disobeying God and eating from the forbidden tree is treated in the Quran as 'a collective' act done by both of them (p. 257). As for the idea of the irrationality and irreligiousness of women, this is also rejected by Hassan, who considers the *ahadith*, from which this misconception stems, authentic but argues that they deal with specific situations rather than offering a general judgement about the ontological inferiority of women. For more details, see Hassan, 'Feminism in Islam', (pp. 254–268).

public affairs either because of their irrationality or physical weakness, whilst the word ‘shameful’ refers to the assumed dangers of women being placed in direct contact with men, because women are deemed to be a great source of temptation.

Faqir also demonstrates how, because of these misconceptions, Um Saad is forced to observe a conservative traditional customary dress code that consists of ‘a long black skirt’, ‘a black cape’ and ‘a black veil’ (p. 42). This kind of dress code, which covers Um Saad completely from head to toe, is presented as an extension to the physical confinement she experiences at home, since it prevents her behaving normally, makes her feel ‘[h]ot, masked and unable to breathe’ and causes her to fall down when she steps on the end of her long skirt (p. 42). Faqir critiques this kind of conservative strict and hindering black dress code worn by Um Saad by contrasting it with the tolerant and white one worn by the teacher, Rahimeh, who wears ‘a white veil and a long dress’, but does not cover her face, ‘which shone like a circular moon’ (p. 42). This contrast is dramatised when teacher Rahimeh asks the young Um Saad to remove what is covering her face, referring to it as a ‘mask’, because Um Saad ‘cannot see [properly] with that thing on’, which would consequently prevent her learning and reading (p. 42). Faqir depicts the white and tolerant dress code as an Islamic one by connecting it to Rahimeh, the teacher of Quran who has Circassian ethnicity and, therefore, a strong connection with Islam. The novel explains the circumstances of Circassians, that ‘[b]ecause of their religion [Islam], they left their country’ (p. 108). In the historical chronology provided at the beginning of the novel, Faqir even informs her readers about the immigration of Circassians to Transjordan in the period 1878–1909, ‘from the Caucasus region where they had been

persecuted by the Russians' (p. vii). By contrasting the two dress codes, Faqir stresses what Islamic feminists argue about, i.e. altering the ideas about the purpose of an Islamic dress code, which is 'to enable women to transact business in the public realm, free from sexual harassment or molestation [but not] at the expense of their freedom and ability to engage in gainful work or other activity in the public sphere'.[208]

Faqir also explores the ways in which her female characters are prevented from gaining particular rights, such as having a proper education, managing properties and earning a living or taking part in wars because of the misconceptions about their inferiority. Um Saad, for instance, is prevented by her father from going to school for no reason other than that she is 'growing up' (p. 43), which he explains to her later by saying, '[y]ou are not a child any more. Your breasts are as big as melons' (p. 77). It is clear that his reasoning is based on the belief in the misconception about the temptation presented by women. Maha is also prevented from taking up her inheritance of the house and the orchard that are left after her father's death and from managing her properties. Even before the death of her father, she is despised for managing the house and planting the orchard by the villagers who condemn her, saying: 'the young widow – Allah protect us – runs the house of Nimer and everybody in it' (p. 140). Specifically, the villagers do not approve of Maha managing a house inhabited by two men, a sick father and an irresponsible brother, which surely points to the ways in which women's activities are even restricted within the domestic/ private sphere. Her father, before his death, acknowledges that Maha is better than her 'scoundrel

[208] Riffat Hassan, 'Members, One of Another: Gender Equality and Justice in Islam', from *Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health and Ethics.* <http://religiousconsultation.org/hassan.htm>.

brother', but regrets that Maha is a woman so that, despite her hard work in planting the orchard, she cannot even get her share 'because the land must go to its ploughman' (p. 184). It is also notable that Maha is prevented from supporting her late husband, Harb, during war and from defending their country, about which she says, '[t]he village wouldn't allow me to join Harb on the battleground' (p. 89). Although the novel does not detail the reasoning behind this, we can conclude that it has to do with one of the misconceptions about women's inferiority.

Faqir's decision to foreground the denial of these particular rights is significant, as all of them are explicitly guaranteed to women in Islamic sacred texts. In other words, Faqir's critique is firmly based on Islamic scripture. Managing properties and businesses, for example, is a right granted to Muslim women in the Quran, as Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry, a modernist Islamic scholar, asserts. Chaudhry states that Muslim women can do jobs outside the home in order to support themselves and their families, as occurred during the early Islamic period; the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not object to women being involved in trade and commerce or any other work.[209] As for participation in wars, Engineer asserts that there are several *ahadith* in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* that state that women are permitted to participate 'freely in the affair of war' and specify female participation as including carrying water to soldiers and helping the wounded on the battlefield.[210]

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[209] Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry, *Women's Rights in Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991), p. 133. Chaudhry concludes his viewpoint about women's right to manage a business and thus gain money from Quranic verse 32 in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*): 'And in no wise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: but ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things (4.32)'.

[210] Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society*, p. 186.

Whilst these rights are guaranteed by Islamic texts, seeking knowledge or education is the only right which the novel relates directly to the Quran, and I would suggest that it is given this importance because it is not only a right but an obligation on every Muslim, both male and female. This fact is stressed in the novel by mentioning Quranic verses that confirm the importance of seeking knowledge and education in relation to Um Saad's favourite surah in the Quran, which is surah *Al-'Alaq* (*The Clinging Form*) or, as it is called in the novel, 'the Blood Clot' (p. 43). Faqir provides a translation of these verses, recited by Um Saad: 'Read: In the name of thy Lord who created. Created man from a blood clot . . . Who taught by the pen. Taught man that which he knew not' (p. 43). These verses have great significance for Muslims as it is believed that they were the first revelation of the Quran received by the Prophet Muhammad. These Quranic verses strongly encourage learning, which is emphasized by the use of the three words 'read', 'taught' and 'pen'. Moreover, the verses confirm that learning is an obligation in Islam, not just a right, as the first verse starts with the imperative verb 'read'. In that sense, Faqir presents the act of depriving Um Saad of education as anti-Islamic behaviour, since she is prevented not only from exercising her right to learn, but also from carrying out a divine obligation, which Faqir intensifies when Um Saad reveals that she is prevented from attending a 'kutab', which is a 'religious school run by the mosque' (p. 42).[211] One may also deduce that Faqir could be alluding to Islamic patriarchal restrictions that exclude Muslim women from taking part in the domain of Islamic studies. As Hassan points out, 'Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly patriarchal until

[211] A *kutab* is, in fact, a Quranic school that corresponds to elementary school, with the aim of enabling children to read the Quran and master Arabic. See, Haifaa A. Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 19.

the present time, [limiting] the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought'.[212]

In addition to the popular misconceptions about the inferiority of women, Faqir presents the misconception about the assumed superiority of men and clarifies the crucial negative effects of this misconception in oppressing Maha and Um Saad and depriving them of their rights. To do so, Faqir focuses on displaying the oppressive effects of the notion of *darajah* (degree of preference) and the two concepts of guardianship: *qiwama* and *wilaya* that are established in classical Islamic jurisprudence and grounded on the misconception of male supremacy.[213]

Concerning the notion of *darajah* (degree of preference), Faqir illustrates its oppressing influence, when it is used out of its context in order to emphasise men's assumed universal superiority, on the character of Maha, who is forced to submit to her oppressive brother twice because of this notion. She is asked by her mother to accept that she is beaten by her brother because '[h]e is a boy [and] Allah placed him a step higher. We must accept Allah's verdict' (p. 37). She is also asked by the old woman, Hulala, to leave her share in the land, which is part of her inheritance, to her brother, because he 'is a man and has priority' (p. 215).

As for the concept of *qiwama*, Faqir presents it through creating two contradictory marital relationships and focusing on the social interaction between husbands and wives in order to display how the issue of *qiwama* is misused. The first married couple presented in the novel are Harb and Maha, who enjoy a happy married life, their relationship being characterised by intimacy, love and

[212] Riffat Hassan, 'Rights of women within Islamic countries', *Canadian Woman Studies,* 15.2 (1995), 40–44 (p. 42).

[213] The concept of *qiwama* is a kind of a guardianship provided by husbands, while *wilaya* is a guardianship offered by fathers and brothers.

affection that are marked out most obviously in the sobriquets they use to call or name each other. Harb calls Maha ‘the companion of my soul’ (p. 55), while Maha calls him ‘the twin of my soul’ (p. 8). Their marriage demonstrates a reciprocal and interdependent relationship, as exemplified in Maha’s statement about the reciprocal protection between them when she says, ‘I would protect him [and] accept his protection’ (p. 58). Faqir here echoes Barlas’s argument about mutual protection in a marital relationship, which Barlas derives from Quranic verse 71 in surah *At-Tawbah* (*The Repentance*):

> The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise. (9.71)

With reference to this verse, Barlas argues that the Quran considers husbands and wives to be protectors of each other, which, according to her, indicates ‘a non-hierarchical and reciprocal husband-wife relationship based on a mutual recognition of each other’s individuality’.[214]

The second couple, Abu Saad and Um Saad, are presented in contrast to Maha and Harb. Abu Saad and Um Saad have a hierarchal marital relationship, in which he ‘gave orders and [Um Saad] listened’, as Um Saad explains (p. 160). That is to say, they have a marital relationship in which Abu Saad is both ruler and oppressor, while Um Saad is reduced to a submissive wife whose job is to

[214] Barlas, ‘The Qur'an and Hermeneutics: Reading the Qur'an's Opposition to Patriarchy’, (p. 18).

satisfy her husband's needs and sexual pleasures. Um Saad describes her position in this hierarchal marital relationship, saying, '[f]or Abu Saad, I had been and always would be a container into which he could get rid of his frustration. For Abu Saad, I had been and always would be a slave girl' (p. 160).

In order to display the oppressive effect of the concept of *qiwama* on Um Saad, Faqir clarifies it through the conduct of Abu Saad, who is portrayed as a cruel husband abusing his authority as a guardian. His abuse of *qiwama* is demonstrated in different examples, in which Abu Saad transgresses Islamic ethics. It is illustrated in Abu Saad's sexual conduct in that he not only neglects the etiquette of foreplay, which is emphasised in Islam to prepare a wife for the sexual act, but this also extends to abusing Um Saad physically and depriving her of her right as an equal partner to him: 'he used to beat me before sleeping with me' (p. 192).[215]

It is also demonstrated in Abu Saad's second marriage, which displays his unjust treatment of Um Saad, as exemplified in preventing her using her own bedroom, which is given to his new wife:

> Abu Saad took her [his new wife] to my bedroom and closed the door. [. . .] The minaret of the Big Mosque was crying Allah-u-Akbar when I found my belongings flung on the floor of the sitting-room. My dresses, my two nightgowns, my capes and veils, my underwear, my kaftan, my Ramaj perfume, my two Max Factor lipsticks and my comb were lying on the floor. I emptied

[215] Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Proper Conduct of Marriage in Islam (Ādāb an-Nikāḥ): book twelve of Iḥyā' `ulūm ad-dīn*, trans. by Muhtar Holland (Hollywood, Fla.: Al-Baz Publishing, 1998), p. 74. Al-Ghazali generates this Islamic ethic about the importance of foreplay from the Prophetic tradition that states: 'Let none of you fall upon his wife as an animal would do. Let there be an envoy between them.' When asked: 'What is this envoy, O Messenger of Allāh?' he replied: 'kisses and sweet words'.

> one of the cupboards in the kitchen, folded my clothes carefully, then placed them in it. I decided to start sleeping on the kitchen floor. (pp. 191–192)

Depriving Um Saad of her bedroom without offering her an alternative is a violation of the Islamic condition for polygamy, which includes 'ensuring justice to all the wives at the material level and also by dispensing equal love and attachment to all the wives'.[216]

Finally, it is demonstrated in his physical assaults on Um Saad. Um Saad describes how Abu Saad 'smashed one of the chairs, picked up the legs then broke them one after the other on [her] sides' and clarifies the reason for beating her, which is her refusal to obey him when he asks her to stop 'slapping [her] face, wailing and kicking his fat legs' (p. 192). Beating Um Saad in that way violates Islamic teachings which advocate avoiding the face and other sensitive areas and prohibit 'using a stick or any other instrument which might cause pain and injury'.[217] In addition, beating her violently for no reason other than her hysterical crying for the unjust treatment she receives from him is a reason that has nothing to do with Islam, as in Islam, 'one may beat only to safeguard Islamic behavior [when] a sin against Allah [is committed]'.[218] He also does not follow the Islamic procedure for chastising a wife, which makes striking her 'a last resort'

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[216] Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society*, p. 87. Engineer concludes that justice is an Islamic condition for polygamy from Quranic verse 3 in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*): 'Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice (4.3)'.

[217] Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam (Al-Halāl wal Harām fil Islam)*, trans. by Kamal El-Helbawy, M. Moinuddin Siddiqui, Syed Shukry and Ahmad Zaki Hammad (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 2011), p.205.

[218] Ibid., p.206.

after admonishing her using kinds words and gentle persuasion, as well as avoiding sexual practices with her.[219]

To highlight the differences between the two married lives led by the female protagonists, the novel contrasts Maha and Um Saad. The slavery of Um Saad, caused by a husband who gives orders, is contrasted with the liberty that Maha enjoys and which comes from a husband whose words and actions 'brought more freedom and joy', as Maha comments (p. 55). In addition, Um Saad's submission to her husband is stressed in the novel through her speeches, which concentrate on Abu Saad's lower body, especially, washing his feet or 'get[ting] rid of the damn stink of Abou Saad's boots' (p. 137). Um Saad's speeches about Abu Saad's lower body stand out in opposition to those of Maha, who is a partner in a mutual husband-wife relationship and seems to look up to Harb, and therefore, she speaks of 'comb[ing] Harb's hair' (p. 68) and praises his 'lovely high forehead' (p. 10).

Concerning the notion of *wilaya*, Faqir presents it through drawing a contrast between Maha's father, Sheikh Nimer, and Umm Saad's father, Fuad Hajjo. Maha's father is presented as a kind caring father who has the habit of cuddling Maha whilst stroking her hair: 'He ran his flaky fingers over my plaits and said, "May you never see a bad day, Maha"' (p. 23), while Um Saad's father is portrayed as a violent father with 'fiery eyes', who beats his daughter severely with his 'belt [that] reduced [her] to a heap of flayed meat' (p. 108). However, the most distinct dissimilarity between the two fathers in relation to the notion of *wilaya* is the way they arrange the marriages of their daughters. For Maha, Sheikh

[219] Sadia Kausar and Sjaad Hussain, 'Does the Qur'an condone domestic violence?', in *Honour, Violence, Women and Islam*, ed. by Mohammad Mazher Idriss and Tahir Abbas (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 96–113 (p.102).

Nimer arranges a marriage that can be considered Islamic. Marriage in Islam is 'a contract and presupposes that the contracting parties are both consenting adults'.[220] That is to say, it is 'a legal written document between two adults, which entails an offer by one partner [man/ groom] and an acceptance by the other [woman/ bride] in the presence of two witnesses' and solemnised by an official.[221] The job of the official is to confirm the consent of the bride and to allow her to stipulate her own conditions.[222] In the case of Maha's marriage, as the novel reveals, the contract is issued orally and witnessed by 'the dignitaries of the tribe', which is normal in Bedouin society, where written documents are absent (p. 18). When Harb proposes, Maha's consent is sought by her father, who asks her directly, '[W]ill you accept Harb?' (p. 18).

In contrast, Um Saad's father behaves in a different way. He abuses his authority as a father by preventing Um Saad from marrying Muhammad, the person whom she loves, and also by imposing a forced marriage on her, ignoring crucial Islamic teachings. His refusal of Muhammad as a husband for his daughter just for being 'a Circassian', an ethnicity that marks him as a non-Arab, is an anti-Islamic behaviour. It violates Islamic ethics because it hinges on racial discrimination, which is forbidden in Islam. It also implies the neglect of an essential feature that Islam recommends while selecting a partner, which is 'piety and good moral conduct'; and Muhammad, as described in the text, is 'a good Muslim' (p. 109).[223] His imposition of a forced marriage on Um Saad is also not

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[220] Hassan, 'Rights of women within Islamic countries', (p. 41).

[221] Haifaa A. Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 35.

[222] Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2008), p. 117.

[223] Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p. 33

compatible with Islamic law that requires the consent of the bride as a condition for the validity of a marriage. Um Saad tells us how she is deceived by her parents, who tell her that she is 'invited to a wedding' to discover later that she is attending her own wedding (p. 110). Even her consent is faked, since she is asked by an old imam, who neglects his responsibility to ensure her consent and acceptance of the marriage, to write her name on a 'blank white square' (p. 117).

Through the contrast between the men in the novel, Faqir constructs a scale against which to judge male behaviour, which explicitly says that a good Muslim man treats his female relatives well and takes good care of them, as illustrated in the characters of Sheikh Nimer and Harb. On the other hand, those Muslim men who mistreat their female relatives and abuse their authority as guardians in order to control them and deprive them of their rights are presented negatively, as is the case with the characters of Daffash, Abu Saad and the father of Um Saad. Not only is the behaviour of these violent characters presented as opposing Islam, but the idea that good Muslims are those who treat women well is presented, as derived from the Prophet saying: 'The most perfect believer is one who is the best in courtesy and amiable manners, and the best among you people is one who is most kind and courteous to his wife [. . .] the best among you is the one who treats his family best'.[224]

In addition to applying the double commitment criterion, Faqir's feminist consciousness intersects with Islamic feminism in her use of the strategy of 'multiple critique', which, according to Cooke, enables Islamic feminists to 'criticise various individuals, institutions, and systems'.[225] This strategy allows

[224] This *hadith* is narrated in *Jami At-Tirmidhi*.

[225] Miriam Cooke, 'Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies', *Nepantla*, 1.1 (2000), 91–110 (pp. 100–108).

Faqir to critique different oppressing authorities that collaborate to oppress Jordanian Muslim women, represented by Maha and Um Saad.

Faqir directly criticises the religious authority represented by religious figures who read patriarchy in Islamic sacred texts in order to 'foster repressive practices and thus also representations of Islam as oppressive'.[226] In *Pillars of Salt*, Faqir critiques the religious authority illustrated by the character of Imam Rajab, a religious figure in Maha's village, who orders the men of the tribe to stone Maha for 'spend[ing] a night on her own in the mountains' when she escapes a forced marriage arranged by her brother (p. 231). Stoning in Islamic jurisprudence is a punishment for committing the sin of adultery, and applications of such punishment 'demand high standards of evidence', that can only be sought by 'confession', 'witnesses' or 'pregnancy'.[227] In that sense, Imam Rajab is depicted as a manipulator, since he stipulates a legal punishment based on mere suspicion that Maha might have done something wrong, but he does not seek any evidence, which is considered a condition for the application of such punishment. Therefore, he is portrayed as an imam with 'uneven brown teeth', as a result of the '[d]ark words [that] grind [his] teeth and tint them' (p. 225).

Faqir also criticises the social authority represented by the character of the storyteller, who represents a 'misogynistic voice of male tradition', as Nash states.[228] The character of the storyteller stands for the social authority that plays a crucial role in Arab and Muslim communities. Historically, storytellers had great

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[226] Asma Barlas, 'Muslim women and sexual oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran', *Macalester International*, 10.1 (2001), 117–146 (p. 122).

[227] Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*, ed. by Wael Hallaq (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 185–186.

[228] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 118.

social influence as they manipulated the memories of people and 'led the crowd [who were] carried along by imagination, knowing nothing of the limits imposed by scientific discipline and the rigor of authentication'.[229] In addition, his depiction as one of the narrators of the novel gives the storyteller more authority than that of the religious one represented by the character of Imam Rajab, who is just a character within the narrative. This depiction reflects the nature of Arab Muslim communities that are governed and shaped by social rules, and where patriarchal attitudes towards women 'can be attributed much more directly to inherited socio-cultural norms' imposed in the name of Islam.[230] Mir-Hosseini explains how social rules defeat Islamic norms and become part of Islamic laws and practices:

> The genesis of gender inequality in Islamic law [. . .] lies in an inner contradiction between the ideals of Islam and the social norms of the early Muslim cultures. While the ideals of Islam call for freedom, justice and equality, Muslim social norms and structures in the formative years of Islamic law impeded their realization. Instead, these social norms were assimilated into Islamic jurisprudence through a set of theological, legal and social theories and assumptions.[231]

The social norms assimilated within Islam led to developing a tradition that 'becomes more consequential than the sacred text [because] it displaces attention from the Quran to traditional gender roles and interpretive practices'.[232]

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[229] Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, pp. 46–47.

[230] Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, p. 29.

[231] Mir-Hosseini, 'The Quest for Gender Justice: Emerging Feminist Voices in Islam', (p. 4).

[232] Asma Barlas, 'Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Sexual Politics', *Cardozo Law Review*, 28.1 (2006), 143–151 (p. 144).

This assimilation is reflected in the parts narrated by the storyteller who, while narrating the tale of Maha, mingles his narration with supplications to God, prayers to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and recitations from the Quran, according to which he passes judgement on and speculates about Maha to his audience. In that sense, he is a typical storyteller, since the materials he tells are similar to those told by storytellers, which include 'old stories of the Arabs and the non-Arabs' and 'explications of the Koran, the Hadith, and the biography of the Prophet'.[233]

The ambiguous identity of the storyteller alludes to a mixture of different patriarchies that shape social traditions in Arab Muslim societies, and which are attributed to the historical encounter between Muslims and Westerners. This encounter and intersection between Muslims and Westerners, according to Barlas, occurred in two ways in two historical phases. The first way is 'the assimilation of non-Muslim/ Western ideas and customs into Islam', which occurred in the Middle Ages via Muslim exegetes; many of them were Christian and Jewish converts, who introduced misogynistic ideas into interpretations of the Quran and *Sunna*.[234] The second way is the 'attempts to resist assimilation', which occurred during the Western colonial period and led to a transformation and distortion within Islam.[235] This historical development of the encounter between Muslims and non-Muslims/ Westerners is reflected in the contradictory identity of the storyteller. His last name is al-Adjnabi, which literary means

[233] Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, pp. 46–47.

[234] Barlas, 'Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran', (p. 124).

[235] Ibid., p. 125.

foreigner or stranger, but at the same time he is ‘half Arab’ (p. 3) and ‘the best storyteller in Arabia’ (p. 1). He ‘studied the Qur’an when [he] was young but never prayed to Allah’ (p. 31). This contradictory identity represents a collaboration of different patriarchal legacies that Maha and Um Saad are competing with. This competition is emphasised by making him a rival narrator to Maha and Um Saad, whose narrations ‘form a feminist counter-discourse’ that opposes his aberrant narration via its ‘meticulously detailed and highly credible utterances’.[236]

To stress this ambivalent relation between Muslims and non-Muslims/ Westerners, Faqir connects all oppressive characters to Western colonisers, but in different ways, which exemplify both attempts to assimilate and to resist assimilation. Um Saad’s father, for instance, is a Syrian rebel opposing the French colonisers, ‘who made him restless and dirty’ (p. 41). His relation to the colonisers seems to entrench the customs of veiling and segregation that he practises on his daughter because they are seen as markers of identity that make him different from the Western colonisers. On the other hand, Daffash and Abu Saad are fascinated by aspects of Western modernity introduced by the English colonisers. Abu Saad remarries to a superficially Westernised young woman who is ‘artificially blonde’ and wears ‘high heels’ (p. 191). In addition, his second marriage coincides with celebrating the independence of Jordan, which marks ‘the beginning of [Um Saad’s] slavery’ (p. 190). Daffash is allured by the new modern life he experiences in the company of Samir Pasha and the English officers and women. He seems to develop a kind of capitalistic attitude that motivates him to make gains at the expense of others, which explains his desire

[236] Suyoufie and Hammad, ‘Women in Exile: The “Unhomely” in Fadia Faqir’s *Pillars of Salt*’, (p. 302).

to dispossess Maha of her share of the house and orchard for his own benefit and to sell some of his father's possessions in order to buy a Land Rover. His alliance with Samir Pasha and the British 'stands for the joining of Arab regimes in common cause with the Western powers, and the delivery of Arab women up to a "modern" slavery'.[237] To emphasise this collaboration between Muslim/ Arab and non-Muslim/ Western patriarchies, Faqir creates Fuhais mental hospital, where her female protagonists are confined, as a microcosmic world that is similar in one way or another to the world they were living in before their imprisonment. Maha and Um Saad are depicted as 'rotting in that white hospital and will perish soon' (p. 42), since they are oppressed by a doctor, who comes 'from a land called England', and his two native assistants, Salam, a nurse, and Kukash, a porter, who attempt to silence the two women either by giving them overdoses of medication or electric shocks (p. 158). These staff, who consist of a British doctor and his Arab assistants, represent 'the twin arms of Arab women's oppression – native patriarchy and colonial power'.[238]

In short, Faqir, in *Pillars of Salt*, reveals an Islamic feminist consciousness while engaging with the themes of gender discrimination, male privilege and female inferiority that lead to violations of Muslim women's rights, which are explicitly guaranteed in Islamic sacred texts. Her feminist consciousness intersects with that of Islamic feminism in her application of the criterion of 'double commitment' and the strategy of 'multiple critique', both of which enable Faqir to frame her feminism within an Islamic framework. As a result, Faqir challenges Islamist extremists for their patriarchal interpretations of Islamic sacred resources

[237] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 121.

[238] Ibid., p. 119.

and social conservatives for imposing social practices that oppress contemporary Jordanian Muslim women, represented in the novel by the female characters of Maha and Um Saad.

### *My Name is Salma* (2007)

In *My Name is Salma*, Faqir continues to reveal her feminist consciousness through her engagement with gender discrimination and violence against Jordanian Muslim women, which she foregrounds in *Pillars of Salt*. Her focus in *My Name is Salma,* however, is on the issue of honour killings or crimes of honour.[239] Her engagement with honour killings is relevant to her feminist agenda, as these crimes illustrate the 'ultimate form of gender discrimination' against Muslim women.[240]

In this novel, Faqir's feminist message is delivered through the first-voice narrative of her main female protagonist, Salma Ibrahim El-Musa, who narrates the hazardous outcomes of her sexual relationship with her lover, Hamdan. Salma tells us that she becomes pregnant out of wedlock, i.e. before marriage, when she is a teenage shepherdess, and that Hamdan abandons her when he knows of her pregnancy. She is supposed to be murdered as a fulfilment of the tradition of honour killing by her brother, Mahmoud. But she is saved by her schoolteacher, who informs the police about Salma's situation, and so Salma is kept in prison for several years as an 'administrative prisoner',[241] during which

[239] Honour killings are defined as 'the killing of a woman by her relatives for violation of a sexual code in the name of restoring family honor'. See Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Seductions of the "honor crime"', *Differences*, 22.1 (2011), 17–63 (p. 17).

[240] Ferris K. Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', *Penn State International Law Review,* 23.2 (2004), 251–282 (p. 254).

[241] Administrative prisoners are female victims who avoid honour killings and are imprisoned for their own protection from their families, not as a result of any criminal conviction. In order to be

time Salma gives birth to her daughter, who is taken away from her immediately. After seven years, Salma is taken out of prison by Sister Khairiyya, a Lebanese-Christian nun, and later migrates to Britain with the help of Miss Asher, an English nun, who adopts Salma and helps her to get a permanent residence in England. Salma gets married to an Englishman and bears him a son, but she decides to return to her village in order to search for her daughter. She finds that her daughter has been killed, and the novel ends with what appears to be Salma's murder by Mahmoud.

Faqir, in *My Name is Salma*, evokes the extreme violence stemming from crimes of honour by creating a traumatic atmosphere, in which Salma is vividly portrayed. This traumatic atmosphere, as the text indicates, is a result of the attempts to murder Salma as a punishment for what is considered, in the Muslim context, to be sexual misbehaviour. Salma is portrayed as vulnerable to two different manifestations of victimisation, including sexism in her homeland and racism as an immigrant in England, where Salma suffers a traumatic loss of home and has difficulties in adapting to British culture. These different kinds of victimisation are closely linked to honour killing, which Salma's family intend to inflict on her, either by direct connection, as is the case with sexism, or indirectly, as in racism. In that sense, the novel is critical of both racism against Muslims who migrate to non-Muslim majority countries and also of sexism or misogynist practices in Muslim communities, particularly crimes of honour. I will concentrate

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released, the law requires that these victims obtain permission from their legal guardians, who are usually the same family members from whom these women seek protection. See Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 259).

on the latter because it relates to the main focus of the thesis, which has to do with gender justice and Islamic feminism.

Crimes of honour are rarely discussed by Islamic feminists, as these crimes are not 'condoned in Islamic law or by religious authorities'.[242] However, Faqir's critique of honour killings is relevant, in its conception, to the critique provided by Mir-Hosseini about the penalties for illicit sexual acts, which is known in Islamic jurisprudence as *zina* law.[243] Mir-Hosseini critiques the penalties for crimes of *zina* because they 'criminalise consensual sexual activity and authorise violence against women'.[244] She argues that *zina* law and its penalties were almost obsolete, as classical jurists 'did their utmost to prevent conviction', relying on the fact that Quranic verses and the Prophet condemn 'the violation of privacy and honour of individuals, in particular those of women'.[245] Mir-Hosseini foregrounds her argument against *zina* law on the basis that this law is not sacred

[242] Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Seductions of the "honor crime"', *Differences*, 22.1 (2011), 17–63 (pp. 17–18).

[243] *Zina* refers to illicit sexual acts, which includes any sexual intercourse between a man and a woman outside a legal Islamic marriage, such as adultery and fornication. See, Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, p. 57. *Zina* is considered to be a *hadd* crime (the plural is *hudud*, it means prohibition and restriction), which is regarded by classical jurists as a violation of the public interest and God's limits and ordinances (*hudud* Allah). Thus, its penalties are fixed and cannot be changed or altered if a crime is proven. However, such penalties demand difficult proof, which is either the testimony of four eyewitnesses who must have seen the *ilaj* (actual sexual behaviour of penetration) or the confession of the accused person. These penalties, according to the injunctions of classical Islamic law, are the same for both men and women: death by stoning for *muhsin* (a married person who commits adultery) and 100 lashes for non-*muhsin* (an unmarried person who engages in fornication). See, Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (pp. 268–270). Zina law and its penalties have been revived in most Muslim countries in the twentieth century, with the emergence of political Islam that has attempted to Islamise the criminal justice system. See, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', *International Journal on Human Rights*, 8.15 (2011), 7–33 (p. 7).

[244] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', *International Journal on Human Rights*, 8.15 (2011), 7–33 (p. 7).

[245] Ibid., pp. 7–14.

but is based on 'human-made interpretations of Islam's sacred texts'.[246] In other words, she argues that *zina* rulings are patriarchal, since they stem from patriarchal readings of Islamic sacred texts, which Mir-Hosseini believes must be read and understood in their historical and social contexts and 'in accordance with the changing realities of time and place and contemporary notions of justice'.[247] Similarly, Faqir critiques crimes of honour, in which women who engage in illicit sexual acts are killed by male family members in order to restore the family honour, which is supposed to be lost by improper female sexual behaviour. Faqir founds her critique on the fact that Islamic law is not followed consistently: the pursuit of the honour ethic has priority over Islamic teachings, as Faqir explains in her article dealing with honour killings.[248] In addition, such crimes of honour are 'in direct violation of the basic tenets of Islamic law [which] provides a legal framework [and] which sets forth a high burden of proof before punishment can be imposed for a crime'.[249]

The similarities between Faqir and Mir-Hosseini are illustrated in the engagements of these two very different authors (of fiction and anthropology, respectively) with violence that is modified by the patriarchal sociocultural structure of Arab and Muslim societies but takes its legitimacy from patriarchal interpretations of Islamic sacred texts. In addition, their critiques of violence against Muslim women, who are found guilty of illicit sexual behaviour, show a

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[246] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', p. 10.

[247] Ibid., p. 10.

[248] Fadia Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', *Third World Quarterly*, 22.1 (2001), 65–82 (p. 74).

[249] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 279).

high degree of commonality in their conceptions, as they both focus on showing the relationship between women's sexual behaviours and gender and how this relationship supposedly justifies violence against women.

Faqir, in her critique of crimes of honour, clarifies the relationship between Salma's sexual behaviour and gender and how this relationship justifies violence against Salma. To do so, Faqir connects Salma's sexual capacity and conduct to her body, a thing that can be concluded from Salma's description of herself 'as honey in its glass jar', where honey symbolises Salma's sexual capacity and behaviour while a 'glass jar' indicates her body, the container or holder of Salma's sexuality.[250] Faqir's choice of a 'glass jar', with all its connotations of transparency and fragility, is significant, as it offers a precise symbol for Salma's body, which is associated with her sexual conduct. The 'glass jar' symbolises Salma's body, a body that is glass-like or transparent, to the extent that it exposes Salma's feminine beauty and reveals her sexual attractiveness, and thus this body is considered disgraceful and supposed to be hidden. It is useful here to point out that Faqir's use of the symbol of a 'glass jar' is important in clarifying this relationship between Salma's body and sexual behaviour, and for indicating Salma's virginity, which is one of the central issues relating to the concept of honour. Ebtihal Mahadeen, in her linguistic study of Jordanian discourse about virginity, mentions that 'delicate [fragile] glass' is among the sexist language that has been used in popular Jordanian sayings to indicate female virginity, in which women are compared to 'glass which cannot be repaired after it is broken',

[250] Fadia Faqir, *My Name is Salma* (London: Black Swan, 2008), p. 37. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

referring to hymen loss as a result of sexual intercourse.[251] In that sense, the 'glass jar' symbolises not only Salma's body but also her virginity.

Via this connection between Salama's sexual conduct and her body, Faqir alludes to the patriarchal religious misconception about a woman's tempting nature, according to which a female body is regarded as a shameful and disgraceful object that is capable of attracting men and engaging in sexual misconduct. She also refers to the sociocultural notion of a code of honour, according to which a woman is considered a 'repository for her family's honor'.[252] According to this notion, sexual behaviour, which is considered 'a degrading experience which degrades the woman [particularly when it is practised outside marriage] and men who are linked to her by ties of blood', is regarded as 'the sole responsibility of the woman'.[253] Therefore, as a precaution, women are dominated by their male relatives, who control their bodies and movements and forbid them having any contact with other strange males.[254] Such dominating control over women 'has been justified as a way of protecting that [family's] honor'.[255]

Faqir dramatises this connection between Salma's body and her sexual conduct by depicting Salma's body as an object that attracts the attention of

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[251] Ebtihal Mahadeen, 'Doctors and Sheikhs: "Truths" in Virginity Discourse in Jordanian Media', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14.4 (2013), 80–94 (p. 81).

[252] Rachel A. Ruane, 'Murder in the Name of Honor: Violence Against Women in Jordan and Pakistan', *Emory International Law Review*, 14.3 (2000), 1523–1580 (p. 1530).

[253] Fatima Mernissi, 'Virginity and Patriarchy', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5.2 (1982), 183–191 (pp. 184–185).

[254] Ibid., p. 183.

[255] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 257).

Hamdan to her and motivates him to have a sexual affair with her later. Salma tells us that her breasts, which represent the most feminine and attractive part of a female body, are ‘the first thing Hamdan had noticed about me’ (p. 13). Faqir also shows how Salma’s body motivates her oppressors, to be precisely her male family members, to take certain precautionary actions for the purpose of controlling her body and protecting the family honour, which is linked to Salma’s body. The precautions taken to protect the family honour are illustrated in controlling Salma’s body. Her father’s control is clarified in his orders to her to follow a female Muslim dress code, which is supposed to cover her body and form a barrier that prevents her body from any public exposure that might lead to any sexual attraction or contact. He concentrates on two parts of her body that must be covered, Salma’s head, which is covered by a headscarf, ‘[her] father had asked [her] to wear’ (p. 129), and her breasts, which he orders Salma to cover up when he notices that they have grown and become ‘like melons’ (p. 13). When Salma’s father becomes an old man, his control over Salma’s body is transferred to her brother, Mahmoud, whom Salma describes as one of the ‘desert police on patrol’ (p. 241). This description suits Mahmoud because his control extends to supervising Salma, restricting her mobility and punishing her for any sexual transgressions. However, Faqir challenges the patriarchal notion of the disgraceful female body that can engage in sexual conduct by attracting men. Faqir makes initiating a sexual affair the responsibility of Hamdan and his eagerness to search for sexual attractiveness in Salma’s body, and thus not Salma’s responsibility. It is Hamdan who notices Salma’s breasts, but she does not expose them to seduce him. In fact, Salma develops a tendency to cover and hide her breasts, as she has feelings of shame about them, feelings that urge her

to hide them once she reaches adolescence and force her to ‘hunch [her] back to hide [her] breasts’ (p. 13). These feelings of shame towards her breasts are transformed after her sexual relationship with Hamdan and the loss of her daughter to a lifetime obsession that motivates her to seek a surgical solution in order to ‘cut out’ her ‘ugly [ . . .] nipples’ (p. 53), which are ‘one and a half centimetres’ (p. 160).

Faqir’s attempt to connect Salma’s body to her sexual conduct is conceptually quite similar to what Mir-Hosseini does in her critique of the penalties of *zina* law, in which she explains how the violence caused by *zina* law is legitimised by the patriarchal concept that regards a female body as both a shameful object and male property. She also clarifies that this patriarchal concept was devised by classical Islamic jurists to regulate women’s dress code and marriage. According to Mir-Hosseini, the rulings concerning women’s dress code treat a woman’s body ‘as *‘awra*, pudenda, a zone of shame, which must be covered both during prayers (before God) and in public (before men)’.[256] She attributes this treatment of female bodies to the religious misconception that considers women’s presence in public to be ‘a source of *fitna*, chaos, a threat to the social order’, which demands limiting women’s freedom of participation in the public sphere and invoking segregation and seclusion.[257] She also explains that marriage rulings are based on a classical legal analogy of sale, which makes a woman’s body ‘property acquired by her husband through the marriage contract’, which is compensated for by the protection and maintenance a wife receives from

[256] Mir-Hosseini, ‘Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts’, (p. 18).

[257] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

her husband.[258] That is to say, the marriage contract places a woman under her husband's guardianship and gives him the right to possess her body, which must be available to him whenever he wants to have sex with her, and to control her to the extent that requires her to seek his permission 'to leave the house, to take up employment, or to engage in fasting or forms of worship other than what is obligatory'.[259]

Faqir, however, differs from Mir-Hosseini in specifying the source of control over women. Mir-Hosseini focuses on the concept of *qiwama*, whereby a woman is dominated by her husband, while Faqir concentrates on that of *wilaya*, and thus she places Salma under her guardians' control, including her father and brother. Concentrating on *wilaya* prevents Faqir from illustrating the sexual control that could be practised over Salma if she were a married woman. Therefore, she compensates for it by inventing the character of Hamdan, Salma's sexual partner, who exploits Salma's body sexually. This exploitation is clarified by placing him in a parallel position to that of a husband, the only person with whom a Muslim woman is allowed to have sexual intercourse according to Islamic teachings. His control over Salma, whom he sees as '[his] courtesan, [his] slave', and his demand for sexual relations with her is not tenable for Salma as he does not offer the kind of protection and maintenance a husband is supposed to provide (p. 50). On the contrary, Hamdan is portrayed as irresponsible and cruel as he refuses to compensate Salma by marrying her, accuses her of seducing him with her 'swaying hips' (p. 203) and insults her by calling her 'a slut, cheap, [and]

[258] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (p. 18).

[259] Ibid., p. 16.

"damaged goods"', instead of supporting her (p. 289). Concentrating on *wilaya* allows Faqir to build more sympathy for her protagonist. It is possible that Salma would not attract as much sympathy if she was portrayed as a disloyal married woman having a sexual relationship with someone else, other than her husband. Salma wins some sympathy because Faqir places her in a situation where male oppressors seek unjustifiably to control Salma and her body, either in a totalitarian way, as is the case with her father and brother, or in an exploitive way, as is the case with her lover.

Showing the relationship between female sexual behaviour and gender is one of the ways in which Faqir's critique of honour killings resembles that of Mir-Hosseini and her argument against *zina* law and its penalties. Another way is to explore the intersection between religion and culture. Faqir's exploration is clarified by disconnecting crimes of honour from Islam, but not from Muslims, which is done on two levels. On the first level, Faqir disconnects violence against Salma from Islam by presenting how the threat of honour killing against Salma is in direct contradiction to the true principles of Islamic law, which, according to Faqir, 'is not followed faithfully [and] ... is not applied consistently'.[260] Faqir, in her novel, concentrates on three contradictions. First, attempting to kill Salma over a pre-marital sexual relationship is not a punishment prescribed in the Quran, which states that such punishment is 'one hundred lashes' for unmarried fornicators.[261] Second, punishing Salma but not Hamdan is against Islamic law, which provides gender-neutral punishment and 'affords both men and woman equal treatment

[260] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (p. 74).

[261] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 268).

under the law when it pertains to proving the crime'.[262] Third, attempting to murder Salam for her sexual affair with Hamdan is against Islamic law, which 'grants every accused the right to a trial before a judicial body with the specific intent of providing the accused with a fair trial'.[263] In that sense, the novel clarifies that the act of murdering Salma ignores Islamic law, which prevents individuals from applying punishment on their own and grants fornicators the right to a legal trial before an official sovereign *qadi* (judge), who is appointed by the state to pass sentence and prescribe punishment.

On the second level, Faqir attributes crimes of honour to the societal system of Muslims and highlights human agency, which is illustrated in Salma's speech about her predicament, which she attributes to human beings but not to God, saying, '[t]hey put us in prison, took away our children, killed us and we were supposed to say God was only testing his true believers' (p.136). These words clarify Salma's refusal to accept that the violence practised against her is a matter of fate determined by God in order to examine her faith as a believer and insists on attributing it to members of her community, including her family and tribe. Human agency is stressed by highlighting the role of rumours and suspicions, which are against Islamic principle that 'teaches respect for human

[262] Gender equity in the Quran is illustrated in the Quranic order to both men and women to lower their gaze and behave modestly, and this Quranic order is addressed to men first before women, as it is declared in Quranic verses 30–31 in surah *An-Nūr* (*The Light*): 'Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty [. . .]. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty (24. 30–31)'. And therefore, if they disobey the order and commit a sexual transgression they should both be punished, not only women, as clarified in Quranic verse 2 in surah *An-Nūr* (*The Light*): 'The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication – flog each of them with a hundred stripes: let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by Allah, if ye believe in Allah and the Last Day: and let a party of the Believers witness their punishment (24. 2)'. See Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 279).

[263] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 266).

life and human dignity [and] encourages Muslims not to interfere with other people's lives, nor to spy or to speculate about other people's personal affairs'.[264] Faqir states that most honour killings are 'a reaction to rumours about the victims' reputation', which will eventually result in the death of women who are just suspected of having any contact with strange men, regardless of the level of this contact.[265] *My Name is Salma* highlights the active role of rumours and suspicions in honour killings. The novel explains that those who commit crimes of honour are sometimes motivated by rumours about the reputations of their female relatives, and accordingly, '[s]ome whispers in the dark turned into a rumour and then turned into a bullet in the head' (p.106). The novel also clarifies how suspicion leads to killing women or, as Salma describes, the expected punishment she will receive if she is caught by her brother talking to a strange man. She says, '[i]f my brother Mahmoud sees me talking to strange men he will tie each [of Salma's] leg[s] to a different horse and then get them to run in different directions' (p. 29). Salma's words relate her brother's punishment not to the actual loss of her virginity, which might be caused by sexual behaviour, but to his suspicions that Salma may have lost her virginity, which he assumes from seeing his sister talking to strange men. In fact, Salma's words refer to the displacement of virginity from the domain of the body to that of morals, a displacement that mainly depends on suspicion. According to this displacement, a virgin is defined as a woman who has never had any contact with a strange man, and thus she 'is

[264] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 264).

[265] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (p. 70).

not just a single woman (i.e. technically a virgin, with an intact hymen), but also a thoroughly sexually inexperienced woman'.[266]

In order to highlight the role played by human agency in crimes of honour, Faqir presents two divergent standpoints regarding Salma's sexual behaviour, and they are clarified in Salma's contemplation after having her second sexual affair in Britain, with a man called Jim:

> No yanking of hair, crying or rending of garments. You say goodbye tight-lipped. [. . .] You stay in bed content, asleep and all you wanted to do was to jump up and wash your body with soap and water including your insides, do your ablutions then pray for forgiveness. (p. 80)

Here, Salma distinguishes between the consequences that follow her sexual behaviour with Hamdan and those that follow her sexual affair with Jim. Whereas nothing happens after her sexual affair with Jim, the consequences of her sexual affair with Hamdan are extremely negative, as they include severe physical violence, such as pulling her hair, tearing her clothes and attempting to kill her. Faqir makes it clear that this violence against Salma is shaped by the perspective of her community, which considers her sexual act to be an infraction or a crime, in which Salma '[w]ithout the approval of the elders [...] went ahead and slept with a stranger' (p. 105). Salma explains that it is her community, which sees her sexual conduct as a transgression of 'the code of honour in [her] village' (p. 28) and by which she 'angered the tribe [but not God] and [accordingly] paid a heavy

[266] Mahadeen, 'Doctors and Sheikhs: "Truths" in Virginity Discourse in Jordanian Media', (p. 84).

price' (p. 31). The connection between Salma's sexual act and a crime is reinforced by the image of the 'black gate' of HM Prison, which reminds Salma that she is free, 'an innocent person', despite her 'dark deeds' and 'shameful past' (p. 8), with which she humiliates her family or, as she says, 'smeared the foreheads of [her] family with tar' (p. 9). This perspective of Salma's community is contrasted with another perspective that presents Salma's personal viewpoint of her sexual conduct. Salma considers her sexual behaviour with Hamdan a sin, for which she asks God forgiveness in her verbal prayers, 'Forgive me, Allah, for I have sinned' because the 'heat of passion had made me bend' (p. 8). She expresses the same viewpoint concerning her sexual affair with Jim, affirming that praying to God and asking for His forgiveness are the only consequences she is going to face. These consequences are more flexible, as they are not life-threatening like those which follow Salma's sexual act with Hamdan, and which are imposed by the social structure of her community.

Faqir does not support any of these standpoints in the text, but presenting them side by side is beneficial for clarifying the distinction between two perspectives regarding Salma's sexual infractions. The social perspective regards Salma's sexual conduct as a violation of the code of honour or a crime that demands severe punishment, while the religious perspective considers it a sin that only requires repentance and Divine forgiveness: 'wash your body with soap and water including your insides, do your ablutions then pray for forgiveness' (p. 80). The religious perspective is advocated by pious Muslims. The anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, in her study of violence against women regarding sexual transgressions in the Muslim world, which started in the late 1980s and lasted for three decades, concludes that young pious men and

women, who want to live and act in accordance with Islamic piety and Islamic legislation, understand illicit sex 'in the language of sin', which is different from '"traditional" moral codes based on honour'.[267]

This religious perspective is also stressed by Mir-Hosseini, who argues that illicit consensual sex must be treated 'as a sin to be punished in the hereafter, rather than as a crime'.[268] Mir-Hosseini argues that consensual sex is a sin to be repented for in this life, while punishment will await those who do not repent on the Day of Judgment.[269] She also relies on the demand for evidence, which classical Islamic jurists require in order to convict someone of the crime of *zina* and apply punishment. She understands this seemingly unattainable evidentiary standard as an apparent indication that illicit sex is treated as a crime under classical Islamic law only when it is practised in public, depending on the fact that one of the ways to prove the crime of *zina* is to be seen by four witnesses.[270] She

[267] Abu-Lughod, 'Seductions of the "honor crime"', (p. 48).

[268] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (p. 13).

[269] Eliminating sins and repentance with the help of obtaining God's forgiveness is an Islamic principle that is mentioned in the Quran and the *Sunna*. It is clarified in Quranic verse 17 in surah *An-Nisā'* (*The Women*): 'Allah accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them will Allah turn in mercy: For Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom (4. 17)'. It is also narrated in *Sahih Muslim* that Abu Sirma, when the time of the death of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari drew near, he said: 'I used to conceal from you a thing which I heard from Allah's Messenger and I heard Allah's Messenger saying: "Had you not committed sins, Allah would have brought into existence a creation that would have committed sins (and Allah) would have forgiven them"'. However, Mir-Hosseini refers to other Quranic verses that talk about certain sins, including illicit sex, and these Quranic verses are in surah *Al-Furqān* (*The Criterion*): 'Those who invoke not, with Allah, any other god, nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred except for just cause, nor commit fornication – and any that does this (not only) meets punishment. (But) the Penalty on the Day of Judgment will be doubled to him, and he will dwell therein in ignominy – Unless he repents, believes, and works righteous deeds, for Allah will change the evil of such persons into good, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful, And whoever repents and does good has truly turned to Allah with an (acceptable) conversion (25. 68–71)'. See Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (p. 15).

[270] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (p. 21).

agrees with Asifa Quraishi that punishment should be applied only when illicit sex is committed as 'a crime of public indecency rather than private sexual conduct'.[271] She also comprehends the strong demand for evidence as an attempt by classical Islamic jurists to avoid conviction and protect women against accusations by their husbands and communities, to leave space for self-reformation and repentance and to 'reform existing practices in the direction of justice, as understood at [the] time'.[272] Therefore, Mir-Hosseini stresses that *zina* penalties are designed not to be implemented but to 'be a deterrent' and to 'define the limits of permissible sexual conduct'.[273]

Faqir also connects honour killings to the fictional societal structure of Salma's community. This societal structure is located in a Jordanian village called 'Hima', which is described in the novel as 'a small mud village tucked away between the deserted hills' (p. 7).[274] Salma describes the social construction of her community, saying, 'we congregated in groups, families, clans, tribes; our honour must be protected, our blood must be avenged; eating together, sleeping together ten to a room or a tent, our destiny shackled together in a chain' (p. 285). These words define Salma's community as a rural Bedouin community and clarify the social roots of honour killings in such a community, which is interconnectivity among the members of that community. Interconnectivity is found in Arab Middle

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[271] Asifa Qraishi, 'Her Honor: An Islamic Critique of the Rape Laws of Pakistan from a Woman-Sensitive perspective', *Michigan Journal of International Law*, 18.2 (1997), 287–320 (p. 296).

[272] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (pp. 13–15).

[273] Ibid., p. 18.

[274] Hima is a Jordanian village located in Banī Kenānah Department in the Irbid Governorate [my translation].
الحمة الأردنية قرية أردنية تقع في لواء بني كنانة التابع لمحافظة إربد شمال المملكة. تبعد عن عمّان مسافة 100كم إلى الشمال .
See http://www.addustour.com/articles/938386-رحلات-الربيع-اعتداء-مريع-على-البيئة-وجماليات-الطبيعه

Eastern communities that have an 'honor-shame culture [. . .] wherein individuals derive their identity from their social group, especially their family and kinship network'.[275] In such communities, honour 'does not belong to one individual, but to the whole community'.[276] This honour-shame tradition 'inspires violence [and] equates loss of honor with loss of life' of a female who engages in sexual misbehaviour.[277] This is because such a community regards a female who commits sexual misbehaviour as a person who 'destroys not only her own reputation, but also the name and honour of all her family and tribe'.[278] Therefore, according to tribal law or tradition regarding females' sexual transgressions, a family 'feel[s] forced by social pressure and norms to eliminate [kill] the source of embarrassment or potential embarrassment'.[279] This tribal tradition is mentioned repeatedly in the novel. For instance, Salma explains that murder is the ultimate consequence for women who commit sexual violations when she says, 'those who had sex out of wedlock [. . .] simply got shot' (p. 214). Male characters also explain that murdering Salma is meant to wipe clean the tarnish on the family honour, which is supposed to be sullied by Salma's sexual transgressions, and to regain the family's social status and reputation. Salma's brother, Mahmoud, says that 'dishonour can only be wiped off with [the] blood [of Salma]' (p. 327),

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[275] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 254).

[276] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (p. 75).

[277] Recep Doğan, 'Is Honor Killing a "Muslim Phenomenon"? Textual Interpretations and Cultural Representations', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31.1 (2011), 423–440 (p. 426).

[278] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (p. 72).

[279] Stefanie Eileen Nanes, 'Fighting Honor Crimes: Evidence of Civil Society in Jordan', *Middle East Journal*, 57.1 (2003), 112–129 (p. 117).

while her father says that he 'will never hold [his] head high as long as she [Salma] is still breathing' (p. 11).

Faqir's choice to locate Salma's community in a Jordanian village can be understood as a critique of rural Jordanian Bedouin communities, where honour killings are considered 'a serious and continuing problem'.[280] In her article about crimes of honour in Jordan, Faqir argues that social values play an important role in normalising crimes of honour, referring to the prevailing effect of tribal social traditions regarding honour on the Jordanian Penal Code, particularly articles 340[281] and 98.[282] These tribal social traditions affect the stances of Islamic scholars concerning articles 98 and 340, which have been divided into two groups. One group argues for imposing severe punishment on honour criminals

[280] Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (p. 259).

[281] Article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code, which is a fusion of article 188 of the Ottoman Penal Code of 1858 and article 324 of the French Penal Code of 1810, stipulates that

- 'He who surprises his wife, or one of his [female] *mahrams* committing adultery with somebody [in *flagrante delicto*], and kills, wounds, or injures one or both of them, shall be exempt from liability'.
- 'He who surprises his wife, or one of his female ascendants or descendants or sisters with another man in an unlawful bed, and kills, wounds or injures one or both of them, shall be liable to a lesser penalty [in view of extenuating circumstances]'.

Article 98 states that 'He who commits a crime in a fit of fury caused by an unlawful and dangerous act on the part of the victim benefits from a reduction in penalty.'
See Ruane, 'Murder in the Name of Honor: Violence Against Women in Jordan and Pakistan', (pp. 1551–1553).

[282] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (pp. 72–74). According to the Jordanian legislative system and articles 326–329 of the Jordanian Penal Code, honour criminals should be prosecuted as first-degree murderers, and punished with 15 years of imprisonment with hard labour, because their crimes 'are typically premeditated and committed with the assistance, collaboration, and planning of several family members'. However, articles 98 and 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code, which have 'had the effect of continuously reproducing tribal mentality', grant men who murder their female relatives in defence of family honour a reduction or exemption from penalty. These articles, in spite of the fact that the Jordanian Penal Code obtains heavily from Islamic law, are modified by cultural patriarchy because jurists' application of these articles is 'influenced by the traditional understanding of honor and its relationship to the female's body'. See, Nesheiwat, 'Honor Crimes in Jordan: Their Treatment Under Islamic and Jordanian Criminal Laws', (pp. 274–279).

and reforming the Jordanian Penal Code.[283] However, this argument is strongly resisted by the other group, represented by the 'Islamic Action Front', whose members reject refining the Jordanian Penal Code and prefer to issue a religious decree, in which they declare that changing the legislative system is forbidden because it will lead to moral disruption in society and encourage adultery.[284] This latter Islamic group is supported by an 'all-male parliament dominated by tribal, Bedouin leaders of conservative outlook' who reject all attempts to change the Jordanian Penal Code.[285]

Faqir's association between honour killings and the societal structure of a Jordanian Bedouin community is meant to attribute honour killings to 'alienation from Islam' and to sociocultural 'traditions', particularly the tradition of honour

[283] Islamic scholars who argue for reforming the Jordanian Penal Code base their argument on the fact that Islamic law avoids convictions in cases of doubt or rumour and Islam does not permit individuals to take the law into their hands. See Ruane, 'Murder in the Name of Honor: Violence Against Women in Jordan and Pakistan', (pp. 1556–1558). Kecia Ali, in her *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, explains that dropping punishment in cases of doubt is a rule in classical Islamic law, which is mentioned in *Sunna* and *hadith* tradition. She refers to the *hadith* that is narrated in *Jami At-Tirmidhi* and states that the Prophet has said: 'Avoid legal penalties for Muslims as much as possible, if he has a way out then leave him to his way, for if the Imam makes a mistake in forgiving it would be better than making a mistake in punishment'. She also states that classical Islamic law with its demand for a very high standard of evidence protects women in the face of accusations against their chastity. Therefore, even if a husband witnesses his wife's adultery, he cannot accuse her without proof (he must bring another three witnesses to observe her adultery). In that case, she is exonerated from the charge of *zina* and he will be probably charged with the *hadd* of *qadhf* (penalty of offence), punishable by 80 lashes. All he can do, in order to avoid the penalty of offence, is to divorce her by the procedure of *lian* (mutual cursing and swearing oaths), which is explained in the following Quranic verses: 'And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations) – flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after: for such men are wicked transgressors. Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And for those who launch a charge against their spouses, and have (in support) no evidence but their own – their solitary evidence (can be received) if they bear witness four times (with an oath) by Allah that they are solemnly telling the truth. And the fifth (oath) (should be) that they solemnly invoke the curse of Allah on themselves if they tell a lie. But it would avert punishment for the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie. And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of Allah on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth (24. 4–9)'. See Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, pp. 63–64.

[284] Ruane, 'Murder in the Name of Honor: Violence Against Women in Jordan and Pakistan', (p. 1560).

[285] Ibid., p. 1557.

protection.[286] According to Faqir, these traditions are a 'remnant of pre-Islamic Arab tribalism', when female infanticide was practised as a precautionary step against girls' future sexual misbehaviour, but Islam condemned and abolished this practice.[287] Faqir seems to echo Mir-Hosseini in attributing violence against women to traditions that are rooted 'in the tribal structures and patriarchal ideology of pre-Islamic Arabia, which continued into the Islamic era, though in a modified form'.[288] Therefore, Faqir's creation of Salma's community serves her purpose to attribute crimes of honour to social traditions of a rural Bedouin community, in which 'tradition is stronger than religion'.[289] In fact, Faqir here highlights the phenomenon of the 'exculturation of religion', which takes place when religion is separated from culture, and thus it stops influencing the social norms of that culture. Olivier Roy explains that Muslim societies are among those that have undergone the 'exculturation of religion', and thus they 'claim still to be profoundly religious but [. . .] no longer place this religion within the framework of a complex traditional culture'.[290] According to him, one of the major causes of this exculturation is 'religious revivalism', which flourishes by 'isolating religious markers from any social context and establishing a definitive division between believers and non-believers, apostates and sceptics'.[291] This revivalism ironically

[286] Faqir, 'Intrafamily Femicide in Defence of Honour: The Case of Jordan', (p. 72).

[287] Ibid., p. 79.

[288] Mir-Hosseini, 'Criminalising Sexuality: Zina Laws as Violence against Women in Muslim Contexts', (p. 21).

[289] Nanes, 'Fighting Honor Crimes: Evidence of Civil Society in Jordan', (p. 117).

[290] Olivier Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*, trans. by Ros Schwartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 116.

[291] Ibid., p. 119.

leads to a frequent decline in religion as it enhances the visibility of religious manifestations in the public sphere, a visibility which is restricted to 'fundamentalist and charismatic forms of religiosity'.[292]

In that sense, the novel presents an Islam that is simultaneously both a remarkably visible religion and a degraded one. Its visibility is illustrated through a comparison Salma makes when she compares and contrasts the crowded mosque in her village with empty churches in Exeter, which appear as 'decaying and dark houses of God' that are 'hushed and lonely' (p. 44). This visibility is, however, restricted to the existence of 'a strong imam [. . .] shaking his stick, invoking God and promising sorrow "tailormade for each heart"' (p. 44). In other words, the visibility of Islam is attributed to the existence of a fundamentalist form of Islam represented by that strong imam, whose domination is highlighted by depicting him in a controlling position. For example, he is portrayed standing on a 'minaret' or 'his high platform' while calling men to 'worship God and show obedience' (p. 44), using the imperative form: 'Get up and pray!' (p. 45). The superiority and control of the imam are stressed by a reference to the obligation of seeking his legal opinion, without which farmers and merchants, including Salma's father, cannot sell their olives. Salma describes her father as 'weaker than the imam', to the extent that he cannot sell his olives without 'consult[ing] [the imam] before selling the boxes of olives rotting in the storeroom' (p. 45). Faqir also refers to the degradation of Islam, which is illustrated in the instrumentalisation of religion for profit and convenience. Salma's father is depicted as a Muslim who does 'not pray regularly', though he does say a 'Rain

[292] Roy, *Holy Ignorance*, pp. 4–5.

Prayer' (*Salat Al-Istisqa*), a prayer that must be said in public as all the men of the village are asked 'to gather together in a field', '[kneel] in unison before their maker and [plead] with Him to send in the rain' (p. 19). By creating a community whose members only practise Islam in public and at the same time lack the moral piety expected by Islam, Faqir manages to disconnect crimes of honour from religion and associate them with tribal traditions.

Briefly, Faqir, in *My Name is Salma*, engages with gender discrimination against Muslim women, represented by the character of Salma. Precisely, Faqir critiques crimes of honour from an Islamic feminist perspective. Her Islamic feminist consciousness is revealed through disconnecting honour killings from the religion of Islam but attributing it to the societal structure of Jordanian rural Bedouin communities. By doing so, Faqir makes a commitment to both religion and feminism.

### ***Willow Trees Don't Weep*** **(1014)**

Faqir, in her last and most recent novel *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, discusses another major factor of gender discrimination against Muslim women, in general, and against Jordanian Muslim women, in particular. This factor has to do with the religious extremism that accompanies the emergence of Islamist movements, which have sought to organise Muslim states and societies around a total commitment to classical Islamic jurisprudence.[293] Faqir's choice to attack religious extremists and Islamist movements serves her feminist agenda,

[293] Historically, the Islamist ideology has solidified since the 1950s onwards in the writings of several ideologues, among them the Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989) in the Shiite movement as well as the Pakistani thinker Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi (1903–1979) and the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) in Sunni movements. See Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), pp. 89–94.

because their ideology of Islamisation of states and societies eventually leads to discriminatory and oppressive influences on women. Norani Othman explains that Islamist movements, which strive to Islamise Muslim states and organise social practices through 'imposing a collective enforcement of Islamic public morals' and implementing 'what they deem as "truly Islamic" or "authentic Islamic values"', have made women the first target of their project of Islamisation.[294] Accordingly, this project of Islamisation has provoked patriarchal social attitudes among the state's 'religious authorities', including scholars and jurists, 'bureaucracy' and even 'ordinary faithful Muslims'.[295]

In *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Faqir targets Islamist movements in Jordan, which has witnessed great tension between women's movements and Jordanian Islamist parties. This tension, which has been visible since the 1980s, has been triggered by the support provided by the Jordanian government for improving Jordanian women's status, bringing women's activists onto the public scene, paving the way for a 'feminist-oriented' and 'rights-based' discourse on women's issues and introducing a series of changes regarding the laws and processes that grant women more rights, as Ibtesam Alatiyat and Hassan Barari argue.[296] However, Alatiyat and Barari clarify that Jordanian Islamist parties, with their 'uncontested [. . .] political or intellectual forces', have played a vital role in constraining governmental attempts to advance and empower women.[297] A good

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[294] Norani Othman, 'Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism/ Extremism: An Overview of Southeast Asian Muslim Women's Struggle for Human Rights and Gender Equality', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29.4 (2006), 339–353 (p. 341).

[295] Ibid., p. 347.

[296] Ibtesam Alatiyat and Hassan Barari, 'Liberating Women with Islam? The Islamists and Women's issues in Jordan', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11.3-4 (2010), 359–378 (pp. 360–362).

[297] Ibid., p. 360.

example of their opposition to the advancement and empowerment of women is their refusal to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which took almost 15 years because Islamist parties together with tribal leaders demanded that the Jordanian government distance itself from ratification.[298] Another example is their trial to restrict governmental attempts to amend the Jordanian penal code and articles 340 and 98 that regulate the issue of honour killing.[299] And the method they follow to win their battle against feminist movements is to obtain the support of 'a tribe-oriented constituent base' and delegitimise feminist discourse by accusing feminists and activists of being 'westernized or tools of [a] Western conspiracy'.[300]

Faqir's engagement with religious extremists and Islamist movements is not restricted to *Willow Trees Don't Weep,* as she had already engaged with them in her previous novels that are analysed in this thesis. In *Pillars of Salt*, for instance, Faqir explores how religious extremists' control over women affects women's rights and status in both family and society, resulting in certain policies such as gender segregation and women's veiling and seclusion. And, in *My Name is Salma*, she concentrates on the role they play in controlling women's sexuality and perpetuating honour killings. In both novels, Faqir highlights the negative influences of the religious authority of Islamist movements, illustrated in both novels by the character of the imam, on women when their ideology of Islamisation is utilised inside Muslim societies and consolidated by social and

[298] Alatiyat and Barari, 'Liberating Women with Islam? The Islamists and Women's issues in Jordan', pp. 362–365.

[299] Ibid., pp. 365–367.

[300] Ibid., p. 377.

tribal conservatism. But in *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, Faqir focuses on one of the Islamist parties in Jordan, the Islamist jihadi[301] movement, and makes it the target of her criticism and the major theme of her novel.[302] This theme is explored through the story of Najwa, the female protagonist, who attempts to solve the mystery of the disappearance of her missing father and thus leaves Jordan to look for him. Najwa's search for her father ends with the discovery that he is an extremist who joined an Islamist jihadi group in 1986 and travelled to Afghanistan so that he could support Afghani Muslims in their fight against the Russians. Later, he joined what is known as a global jihad and travelled to the West, specifically to Britain, where he ended up in Frankland prison, in Durham, for drafting some British Muslims to take part in a terrorist act, the 7/7 London bus bombing.

In this novel, Faqir aims to explore the effects of jihadi groups and their extremism at the family level, specifically, the marginalisation and oppression of her female protagonist, Najwa, and her mother, Raneen, caused by the departure of Omar, who abandoned his family in order to join an Islamist jihadi mission abroad. According to patriarchal norms, Omar, as a father-husband figure, is supposed to be the source of male domination over these women because of his position as the man of the household and his responsibilities towards them as a breadwinner and protector.[303] However, Faqir transforms his male domination

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[301] I use the word jihadi in this part as a reference to members of puritan militant groups. However, I discuss the real meaning of Islamic jihad in detail in the third chapter of this thesis, to be precise in the analysis of Aboulela's *The Kindness of Enemies*.

[302] Jordanian Islamists parties include the Muslim Brothers (MB), as well as their political wings the Islamic Action Front (IAF) and the Islamic Centrist Party (ICP), and Salafi jihadi groups. See Alatiyat and Barari, 'Liberating Women with Islam? The Islamists and Women's issues in Jordan', (p. 359).

[303] The Islamic perspective on this point is explained in detail under the concepts of *qiwama* and *wilaya*, which are discussed in the analysis of Faqir's *Pillars of Salt*.

from his presence to his absence. In other words, Faqir avoids making Omar's presence a source of oppression, as she does in her previous novels, where her female protagonists are oppressed because their male relatives, including fathers, husbands and brothers, are present and practising gender discrimination against them. Instead, Faqir deprives Najwa and Raneen of the man on whom their whole life depends, and thus situates them in a web of difficulties caused by Omar's departure, which marks the beginning of their oppression and marginalisation.

To this end, Omar is portrayed as a 'deserter' who abandons his young wife and baby daughter for over 24 years for jihadi missions.[304] At the same time, Raneen and Najwa are portrayed in a hard situation where they should endure all the consequences of Omar's absence and his negligence of his Islamic responsibilities towards them. These consequences are described by Najwa, who says,

> …this father who was supposed to protect me, provide for me, make sure that I was warm and well fed, but brought me nothing but grief. His departure had eaten at my mother slowly until she developed cancer and died [. . .] and it had deprived me of any chance of happiness. I could have been married to our neighbour's son by now, but his father wouldn't hear of it. Omar Rahman alone was the culprit. (pp. 181–182)

[304] Fadia Faqir, *Willow Trees Don't Weep* (London: Heron Books, 2014), p. 182. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

Najwa, in these lines, accuses Omar of being entirely guilty of the hardships which she and her mother encounter after his departure. These hardships are summarised by Najwa in two words, ‘provide’ and ‘protect’, referring to the need for financial support and social protection, which are demanded by the concept of guardianship. Omar’s absence doubles Raneen’s responsibilities, as she becomes a single mother who must provide for and take care of her baby daughter. It also forces Najwa, particularly after her mother’s illness, to give up her studies at college and find a job. In addition, his absence makes Najwa ‘a daughter without a guardian’(p. 92), a situation that leads to her loss of social dignity, which Najwa describes, saying, ‘the daughter of a missing father, [and therefore] with little honour and decorum’ (p. 113). Eventually, this loss of social dignity caused by her father’s absence destroys Najwa’s chance of getting married to her neighbour, whose father rejects her as a wife for his son because she is a female ‘brought up in a house without men’, and concludes that ‘she wouldn’t know how to show [his] son respect and tend him’ (p. 10). In that sense, Omar’s departure has become a sort of trap that keeps her mother in a state of ‘resentment [that] consumed her totally and destroyed her organs. Cancer’ (p. 79) and made Najwa ‘a prisoner condemned to [her] life’ (p. 5).

However, Faqir’s attempt to attribute Najwa’s marginalisation to Omar’s departure is intended not to be convincing. A close reading of Najwa’s elaboration of the reasons behind the oppression she encounters clarifies that her marginalisation is mainly due to the society, which plays a vital role in oppressing and underestimating her for the absence of her father. For example, she explains that the sexual harassment inflicted on her in the market is due to the fact that ‘[p]eople thought that [she] belonged to everybody because [her] father was not

around' (p. 26). Najwa also attributes the difficulty she faces in order to enter the Identity and Passport Service or a local Internet café to the conservative society that regards such places 'a space out of bounds for chaste women' (p. 49). The social factor is reinforced by other fictional characters, who stress the role of the social environment. One of these characters is Raneen, who prevents Najwa from wearing 'figure-hugging clothes' and justifies this prevention to Najwa, saying, 'people might think you're a harlot' (p. 14). The other character is Najwa's grandmother, who insists that Najwa must search for her father as the society will not tolerate her condition of living alone should her grandmother die. She explains that 'in Amman and particularly in this neighbourhood', people believe that '[c]haste women don't live on their own', and thus Najwa will be 'ostracised' in society (p. 6). Omar and his friend, Hani, also refer to gender discrimination demonstrated in disrespectful attitudes towards female nurses, who are regarded by the majority as women with a '*bad reputation*' and '*whores in the eyes of many*' (p. 18, original emphasis).

The question that must be asked here is why Faqir examines the connection between the oppression Najwa undergoes and her Islamist father, but attributes this oppression to a wide patriarchal and conservative social environment instead. From my perspective, the answer to this question is that Faqir wants to move the spotlight from Omar as an individual to the bigger entity to which he belongs, and this entity is Islamist movements and groups, which have tremendous negative effects on Muslim societies, including gender discrimination against women. Focusing on Islamist movements and groups allows Faqir to clarify the Islamist agenda as well as its complicated relationship with Islam, a clarification that is made through discussing one major feature of

the Islamist agenda and that is its terrorist acts. This feature is discussed in relation to Omar, a fictional character, who experiences being an Islamist for 24 years, and from two opposing perspectives. One perspective is revealed by Najwa, who portrays Omar as a 'cruel' (p. 75) and 'fundamentalist' (p. 203) 'terrorist' (p. 210), who takes part in wars that she relates to Islam and its strict and firm decrees. Nevertheless, Najwa's perspective is contradicted by Omar.

Juxtaposing two contradictory perspectives articulated by two narrators is utilised by Faqir as a medium to convey a certain idea that she intends from her engagement with Islamism. Apparently, Faqir chooses to conceal her voice as a narrator behind the subjective voices of her fictional narrators. However, her voice as an author with absolute control over her text still exists and appears in the structure of the novel, which is meaningful and revealing since '[f]orm', according to Lorna Martens, 'is not necessarily just a container for other voices; it can become "expressive"'.[305] This structure, from my point of view, is exploited, not only to present two divergent perspectives regarding Islamism, but also to guide the reader to trust one perspective rather than the other.

The structure of *Willow Trees Don't Weep* consists of two narrative modes that are distributed between Najwa and Omar. The main narrative is assigned to Najwa, the protagonist-narrator, whose first-person narrative is supposed to be convincing in case Najwa is the only narrator in the novel. However, making Omar a rival narrator, whose narrative opposes that of Najwa and intersperses it with chronologically organised and italicised segments from his diary, creates a tension between the novel's '"discourse" (the story as told by the personal voice

[305] Lorna Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 34.

of the narrator)' and its '"story" (the complete account, including information supplied by voices other than the narrator's)'.[306] This tension weakens the reliability of Najwa's narrative. In addition to its form, Najwa's narrative is also weakened in its content, as her accounts are not based on her own knowledge. In fact, Najwa knows almost nothing about either Omar, whom she does not meet until the last part of the novel, nor religion, because she has been raised in a 'house [that is] "secular"', and where all religious manifestations are prevented by her mother, including 'religious words, deeds, texts, symbols, jewellery or dress' (p. 9). Her accounts are mainly based on what is transmitted to her by other characters, who provide her with some information about Omar and his mission. For instance, Raneen informs Najwa of the religious motive behind Omar's departure, affirming that he has left them because of 'this ugly thing called religion [and because] Allah is more important to him' (p. 11). The Imam of the Grand Mosque provides Najwa with the name of the person who convinces Omar to join 'global jihad', which is 'Sheikh Muhammad, a protégé of Sheikh Azzam [who] issued a fatwa declaring that both the Afghan and Palestinian struggles were jihads, holy wars' (p. 39). Hani's father explains to her that Omar is destined to be a '*mujahid*', which means that he is 'one of the soldiers of Islam' and 'fighting for Allah' (p. 48). Her knowledge about the strictness and inflexibility of Islam and its decrees is also established based on what is told to her by other characters. It is her grandmother who tells her that 'Muslim men and women were not supposed to eat in public', otherwise they will be 'discredited and their testimony

[306] According to Lorna Martens, a single first-person narrator is a source of trust for readers because he/ she is regarded an 'authoritative fictive narrator' whose narration 'cannot be questioned' but 'allocating the narrative to different voices' generates a tension between the novel's "discourse" and the "story". See, Martens, *The Diary Novel*, p. 35.

would not be accepted in court' (p. 52). And from the information provided to her by Abu-Bakr about the strict belief that 'a woman's voice is awra [shameful] and must be kept hidden' (p. 101), Najwa assumes that '[s]miles, like words, must also be forbidden' when the Pakistani driver frowns at her smiling face (p. 102).

By weakening Najwa's narrative, both its form and content, Faqir indicates to her readers the limitation of Najwa's perspective, which attributes Omar's Islamist acts to Islam and confuses Islam with Islamism. Such a confused standpoint, according to Bassam Tibi, a German political scientist and Professor of International Relations, is adopted either by Islamists who legitimise their Islamist position through claiming the existence of 'one immutable Islam', whom they argue to be a true representative, or by those who see only 'a general "Islamic threat"' and regard Islam as a radical religion.[307] The problem with these two groups is that they regard Islam as a monolithic entity, and therefore deny any diversity within it.

[307] Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 11. I choose Tibi's work for the analysis of this part because of the methodological approach he utilises in his study of Islam, an approach that he calls 'Islamology' and defines as 'a social science-based inquiry that relates Islamic realities to the study of international conflict in world politics' (p. ix). This approach enables Tibi to go beyond the tendency to look at Islam as a monolithic entity, and thus it allows him to distinguish between Islam as a religious faith and political Islam. In that sense, his study is dissimilar to those that use a cultural approach and represent Islam as a monolithic entity, which does not exist either culturally or religiously. An example of such a study is found in the writings of Lee Harris who speaks about Muslims in the singular, denying them any civilizational and historical development and assigning to them a 'radical Islam' characterized by fanaticism and intolerance. For him, all Muslims are essentialised as intolerant fanatics and they cannot be altered because of their 'fanatical intolerance' which 'made Muslims utterly impervious to all outside efforts to change their fundamental way of life'. His conclusion is that all Muslims are fundamentalists, and therefore they are a 'threat to the West'. See, Lee Harris, *The Suicide of Reason: Radical Islam's Threat to the West* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), pp. 205–206. Another example is found in the generalisation of Bruce Bawer, who considers Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa, which required the death of Salman Rushdie for his book *The Satanic Verses,* 'as illuminating the eternal nature of Islam itself—and its attitudes toward freedom'. He also asserts that 'there is no such thing as a moderate or liberal Islam' and attributes the moderation of millions of good-hearted Muslims to 'their own individual characters', not to the principles of their religion. For more details, see Bruce Bawer, *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), pp. 9–63.

Beside weakening Najwa's narrative, Faqir strengthens that of Omar by heightening the sense of the reality of his narrative. This heightened sense of reality is achieved through utilising a diary form, which is identified as 'mimetic of what could be a real situation' rather than fictive.[308] In that sense, Omar's diary provides a narrative that reflects Omar's reality, which is arrived at by taking himself as both a subject of his writing and his own reader. Omar states that the reason behind writing his diary is to '*navigate through the maze of my life, understand where I am at, see the larger picture*' (p. 33, original emphasis). He also declares that he addresses his diary to himself, of which he says, '*I dream of a day, say in fifty years' time, when I will read my narrative, connect the dots, position myself within the larger scheme of things*' (p. 98, original emphasis). Writing about oneself to the self is what makes Omar's narrative more truthful and dependable than that of Najwa, the narrator, whose narrative could be 'circumscribed by the presence of an addressee whose character and relationship to the narrator are apt to influence the content and color the tone of [the narrator's] communications'.[309]

The major point delivered in Omar's diary and through his personal experience as a jihadi Islamist is the complicated relationship between his terrorist acts and Islam, which is conveyed through breaking their connection to religion and attributing them to Omar's political stance. Therefore, Omar refutes the religious motive behind his acts completely, and this refutation is clarified in his recounting of several incidents that portray him as neither practising his religion nor knowing its decrees. In the first incident, Omar recounts how he

[308] Martens, *The Diary Novel*, p. 6.

[309] Ibid., p. 5.

'*almost burst into laughter*' at his late father's declaration about the absolute certainty of finding solutions to diverse problems in the Quran, a reaction that conveys Omar's doubt and distrust in what his father says about the Quran, which Omar admits he '*never reads*' (p. 81, original emphasis). In another incident, Omar tells how he '*panicked*' when he says his first prayer in the 'Lion's Den' Training Camp in Afghanistan 'because [he] *couldn't remember the rituals and realised that* [he] *hadn't prayed since* [his] *father took* [him] *to the mosque during the Eid celebrations*', which means he has stopped praying for a long time (p. 95, original emphasis). The last incident discloses how Omar is able to join the Islamist training camp due to a fake reference provided by one of Hani's friends. This friend writes '*glorious references*' that confirm that Omar and Hani 'are righteous men, with strong belief in Allah and regular observance of his edicts' (p. 95, original emphasis). Apparently, these references are forged, particularly concerning Omar, who is ignorant of any basic knowledge of Islam and is not practising its rituals before joining the training camp, and even after becoming a member of it. His non-observance of religious decrees and rituals is also asserted in Najwa's narrative through her conversation with the character of Abu-Bakr, the combatant whom she meets in London and who confirms to her that Omar is '[n]ot pious enough' and he does 'not pray regularly' (p. 94).

Instead of a religious motive, Omar highlights a political one, which he does not specify right from the beginning but reveals gradually and in different segments of his diary. The key to understanding this political motive is illustrated in Omar's contemplation about the reasons that drive a person to do something and attributing human behaviour to '*the power of the unconscious mind, where all forbidden thoughts* [. . .] *and traumatic experiences are stored*' (p. 81, original

emphasis). Omar mentions a certain experience that shapes his thought, and thus, drives him to join a jihadi training camp. This experience is related to the unstable political situation caused by his totalitarian government, an experience that motivates Omar to fight injustice. Omar describes the political instability in his country, narrating a political disturbance in Amman, where the '*riot police who are chosen from the toughest of tribes*' attack a group of citizens protesting against the government's plan to raise the prices of commodities and demanding democracy and liberating Palestine (p. 20, original emphasis). He also mentions a devastating incident, in which Hani is accused of '*overthrow*[ing] *the government*' (p. 157, original emphasis) just for joining '*a study group*', which turned out to be '*a banned Islamic party*', and is tortured severely without a fair trial but released on being found not guilty (p. 156, original emphasis). These two incidents, as Omar states, have changed his life and that of Hani, as they open their eyes to their unjust government and '*force* [them] *to look at* [themselves] *and* [their] *country and re-examine everything*' (p. 80, original emphasis). In fact, these incidents are the trigger that motivate them to take the decision '*to leave – fight the injustice in* [their] *countries, starting here* [Afghanistan]' (p. 157, original emphasis).

By attributing his Islamist acts to his political incentive and not a religious one, Omar implies that Islamism has to do with politics rather than religion. Such an implication reflects the contrast applied by Tibi, who differentiates between the religion of Islam and the ideology of Islamist movements or Islamism. Tibi argues that Islamism is a political ideology that 'is distinct from the teaching of the religion Islam' but still imposes a political system in the name of Islam and makes use of

Islamic symbols.[310] Therefore, he considers Islamism as a process, which he describes as the 'politicization of Islam', a process by which 'religion is used for the articulation of political concerns that are not in line with Islamic faith'.[311] That is to say, Islamism, which is claimed to be a revival of Islam, 'is not a "a religious renaissance"' because it does not constitute a return to faith but rather a 'superficial appearance of a religious revival' that involves a return to the sacred with political aims.[312] According to Tibi, Islamism, with its demand to return to religion, is a modern 'invention of tradition' or a rebellious cultural-political response to the dilemma of failed postcolonial development in Muslim countries.[313]

Omar, in his narrative, similarly refers to the politicisation of Islam in relation to the political state, which he and Hani dream of establishing and which he calls an '*Islamic caliphate*' (p. 44, original emphasis). The political order of this '*Islamic caliphate*' is an imagined political system of the 'Islamist utopia', in which *dawla* (caliphate or state) and *din* (religion) are united, as is apparent from the

[310] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, p. 1.

[311] Ibid., p. 7.

[312] Ibid., pp. 1–2.

[313] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, pp. 2–3. Peter R. Demant, Professor of International Relations and Contemporary Middle Eastern History, asserts that Islamism is generated by the encounter with modernity, which was perceived negatively in the Muslim world. Modernity, according to Demant, was forced on Muslims by the process of Imperialism and the loss of military and political control that accompanied colonisation, all of which led to the imposition of modernity in 'faster and more brutal ways, and without the self-determination and empowerment that it brought in the West'. Imposing modernity coming from the outside resulted in transforming traditional Muslim societies rapidly and alienating them, all of which contributed to producing intersecting socio-economic and cultural pressures that led to the creation of Islamism as an authentic alternative. Therefore, Islamism, with its 'antimodern, antisecular, and antiWestern' agenda, emerged first in the most developed Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Iran, where 'the dilemma of overlapping but incompatible collective identities is strongest, and where the impossibility of achieving a balance among them has been most painful'. See, Peter R. Demant, *Islam vs Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), pp. 91–194.

two words that constitute the name of this political order.[314] To allude to this imagined Islamist utopia, Omar uses '*Olivia Newton-John's 'Xanadu"*, a song that speaks about '*a land of ideals, of hope and love*' and which Hani recites its lyrics '*as if they were a sacred text*' (p. 19, original emphasis). According to Tibi, such a political order has nothing to do with the faith of Islam but is rather a religionized political order imposed in the name of faith.[315] Tibi argues against the occurrence of such a political order in authoritative Islamic scripture, which 'implies certain political values but does not presuppose a particular order of government'.[316] He foregrounds his argument on the basis that the terms used to describe the Islamist political agenda, such as *dawla* (state), *nizam Islami* (Islamic system)' and *Hukuma Islamiyya* (Islamic government), do not appear in either the Quran or *Sunn*a.[317] Tibi also critiques the supposed citizenry of such a political order, known as 'ummah', that is organised around serving God through the implementation of Islamic jurisprudence.[318] This Islamist ideology invents this ummah by transforming the early Islamic ummah, which was a community of believers based on shared observance of the Islamic faith, into a political entity, whose members support the imposition of strict Islamic jurisprudence. The classical ummah transcends 'the political boundaries for religious unity', as Tibi states.[319] Therefore, the problem with this Islamist ummah is that it is not limited

[314] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, pp. 1–3.

[315] Ibid., p. 3.

[316] Ibid., p. 1.

[317] Ibid., p. 32.

[318] Ibid., p. 4.

[319] Ibid., p. 4.

to a territorial or regional state but seems to be extending towards establishing God's rule over the world, thus replacing the current conception of the nation-state with this concept of ummah. Such a remaking of the world order, according to Tibi, is a transformation of 'Islamic universalism' into 'political internationalism', which will not realistically be accomplished, particularly by Islamists, because of their rejection of 'both other conceptions of the state and even the very idea of pluralism'.[320]

In addition to the reference to the process of politicisation of Islam in relation to the Islamist political state, Omar refers to it regarding the Islamist concept of war. The agenda of this Islamist war, as Omar quotes from '*Abdallah Azzam's book, Join the Caravan*', is to '*rally in defence of Muslim victims, whoever they are*', '*free Muslim lands from foreign domination*', '*uphold the Muslim faith and create a pioneering vanguard that will form the vase for our future*' and '*start by kicking the Soviets out of Afghanistan*' (pp. 80–81, original emphasis). This agenda of war resembles the Islamist concept of jihad that is found in the writings of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, both of whom call for defending the besieged and oppressed Islamic ummah, restoring the glory of Islam and reviving the dream of remaking the world through revolutionary war.[321] This Islamist concept of jihad or 'global jihad', despite the Islamist claim that it is a revival of classical Islamic jihad, is a 'strictly modern' political ideology, as it is rooted in the twentieth-century phenomenon of political Islam and transforms classical jihad into 'an irregular war without rules, carried out as an Islamist world

[320] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, p. 32.

[321] Ibid., pp. 144–146.

revolution'.[322] Omar's narrative discusses the process of politicisation of Islam concerning Islamist jihad in relation to the method followed by Omar, himself, to turn young Muslim enthusiasts into combatants. In clarifying his method, Omar shows how religion is used for political intentions. Omar explains that he focuses on making '*them feel guilty about their silence* [for the murders] *of fellow Muslims* (p. 192, original emphasis). Then, he enforces the Islamist objective behind their political missions and persuades them that their '*motivation doesn't come from tangible commodities that this world has to offer, but from* [their] *faith, Islam*' (p. 193, original emphasis). He also justifies his 'extreme' view, which contradicts the peaceful Quranic message, by limiting this peace, '[b]*ut peace with whom and on whose terms?*' (p. 191, original emphasis). Finally, he provides them with a course entitled '*Get Even – Closer to Allah*', which is designed to '*lure them away from their friends and family, prescribe extra praying, continual fasting, then abstinence*' (pp. 191–192, original emphasis). The objective of the religious training carried out in groups is to keep them '[u]*nder the influence of proximity*', which will lead them to think they are '*related*' and start '*to prematurely trust them*' (p. 96, original emphasis).

Omar's clarification of the process of politicisation of Islam makes his narrative more insightful than that of Najwa. While Najwa simply regards his actions as terrorism, which she attributes to religion, Omar provides deep insights into Islamism and Islamist jihad, demonstrating that Islamism constitutes a disagreement with a certain political order, and this disagreement is expressed by means of fighting to pursue another imagined political order. In addition, his

[322] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, pp. 146–147.

narrative contributes an introspective assessment of the Islamist wars he takes part in as he discovers that they are '*endless and meaningless*' (p. 140, original emphasis). Fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan does not solve the unstable political situation in Omar's area, where '*Palestine is still occupied and will not be liberated through Kabul, as Sheikh Azzam promised*', '[t]*wo Gulf Wars later and the tyrant is still in power*' and '*Afghanistan is falling apart*' (p. 117, original emphasis). Omar's narrative also provides an assessment of his personal actions as an Islamist, of which he confesses that '[t]*here is no decency or honour in what* [he has] *done*' (p. 245, original emphasis). He also admits that his resistance as a combatant and determination regarding '[c]*uring people, not decimating them*' (p. 114, original emphasis) does not make him innocent but rather '[g]*uilty by association*' (p. 158, original emphasis). His guilt has to do with the job he does in Britain, a job that aims to brainwash, '*isolate, convert,* [and] *radicalise*' young men in order to change them into Islamist combatants and bombers (p. 239, original emphasis). Omar declares that being '*bullied into religion is not our way*', and this declaration implies that this kind of conversion is inconsistent with the Islamic principle of not imposing Islam by force, a principle that is deduced from Quranic verse 256 in surah *Al-Baqara* (*The Heifer*): 'Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error' (p. 239, original emphasis).

In relation to this point of conversion, Omar mentions some Quranic verses that express the humanitarian principles of Islam that affect Edward, a young British man, who converts to Islam without any interference from Omar. These verses are: '*When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace: that ye may receive Mercy*', '*That Allah may reward them according to the best of their deed, and add even more for them out of His Grace*' and '*Never let*

*your enmity for anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Always be just: that is closest to being God-fearing*' (p. 239, original emphasis). I understand Omar's attempt to highlight the contradiction between an Islamic principle and his Islamist action as an implicit reference to the opposition between Islamism, in general, and 'the humanism of Islam',[323] which always demonstrates an 'open-minded spirit vis-à-vis the non-Muslim cultural other', which contributes to 'the Islamic tradition of cross-civilizational fertilization and cultural borrowing'.[324] Such a contradiction, according to Tibi, is caused by the Islamists' confusion between 'cultural modernity' and 'Western hegemony', a confusion that leads them not only to reject Western ideologies but also to misunderstand their religion.[325] In that sense, Islamists reject not only popular sovereignty, which is mainly a Westphalian order, but also any democratic pluralism that embraces the political other, and thus their political ideology contradicts 'a liberal form of "open Islam"'.[326] Omar's narrative has been exploited by Faqir to present a reliable viewpoint about Islamism. In the end, Omar's diary is purported to be written by Omar, a fictional character, but is in fact written by Faqir, the real author.

In short, Faqir's Islamic feminism, in *Willow Trees Don't Weep*, is obvious, as she still expresses a commitment to both feminism and religion. Her commitment to religion is very clearly demonstrated by separating Islamist extremists, represented by Omar and his terrorist acts, from Islam as a religion and presenting it as a political stance. However, her commitment to feminism is

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[323] Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, p. 3.

[324] Ibid., p. 26.

[325] Ibid., p. 25.

[326] Ibid., p. 38.

not as strong as that illustrated in her two previous novels, and this is because she sets Islamist extremists apart from the Muslim community that oppresses her female character, Najwa. By doing so, Faqir loses the thread that connects Islamists to female oppression.

**Conclusion**

Faqir is an Islamic feminist writer. Her Islamic feminist consciousness is exposed in the double commitment she makes to both feminism and religion. She engages with issues related to gender discrimination against Arab Muslim women, though she presents these issues within an Islamic framework. Her presentation of topics such as domestic violence against women, polygamy and female inferiority intersects with Islamic feminist projects that challenge patriarchal readings of Islamic sacred texts, readings that serve as incorrect justification for discrimination against women. She is committed to religion, which she does not attack, though she is critical of social conservatives and men of religion. This critical Islamic feminism is completely different from that of Aboulela, which focuses on Islamic faith, as I argue in the next chapter.

# Chapter Three

## Leila Aboulela and Internal Empowerment with the Islamic Faith

### Introduction

Leila Aboulela, like Fadia Faqir, fictionally reveals an Islamic feminist consciousness that focuses on Muslim women's status and rights. Aboulela is, however, distinguished by constructing her fiction around 'cross-cultural encounters', while Faqir is more inclined to remain 'within firm Arab territory'.[327] This difference affects the visibility of their feminism. Faqir's feminist consciousness is more visible because she has often constructed her fiction on Arab Muslim terrain, so she is recognised as a 'Middle Eastern feminist' who 'engages with feminisms of the region', which are 'intensely local' as they are 'grappling with their own histories and specificities'.[328] Faqir's feminist writings critique patriarchal Arab cultural and social traditions that oppress Muslim women and play an important role in the inherited legal and doctrinal systems that are produced as a result of patriarchal interpretations of the Quran. In Aboulela's fiction, these traditions are depreciated, despite her acknowledgement that patriarchy and women's oppression in Arab Muslim societies are mainly due to 'unjust traditions [that] are rooted in culture' rather than 'religious values'.[329] For example, Sammar, in *The Translator*, clarifies that idolising the honour and

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[327] Geoffrey Nash, 'Re-siting Religion and Creating Feminised Space in the Fiction of Ahdaf Soueif and Leila Aboulela', *Wasafiri*, 17.35 (2002), 28–31 (p. 28).

[328] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, pp. 35–36.

[329] Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

reputation that are attached to a girl's virginity is a social product of Arab communities:

> Reputation was the idol people set up, what determined the giving, the holding back. A *girl's honour* . . . *your father will kill you* . . . *your brother will beat you up* . . . you will go to school the next morning as the bolder girls inevitably did, with puffy red eyes, unusually subdued. But idols' powers are not infinite. They cover a place, a particular community and a time [. . .] When idols fall, the path to the truth is uncluttered, clear.[330]

Najwa, in *Minaret*, while listening to Anwar's speech concerning how 'Arab society is hypocritical' and there are 'double standards for men and women', agrees with him, explaining how this social hypocrisy privileges her twin brother, Omar, over her: 'I remembered how Omar was allowed to smoke and drink beer and I was not. The seedy parties he went to without taking me'.[331] Instead of focusing on the oppressive cultural and social traditions of Arab societal structure, however, Aboulela's fiction 'is attuned to emerging female Muslim voices within the migrant communities of the West'.[332] She also 'promotes the importance of an Islamic framework' for Muslim women, to be precise the Islamic faith, which she believes is not oppressive in itself.[333] Consequently, critical attention is oriented towards her engagement with religion rather than her feminism.

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[330] Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2013), p. 55.

[331] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 175.

[332] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 35.

[333] C. E. Rashid, 'Islamic Individualism and the Logic of the Narrative: An Interview with Leila Aboulela', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 14.4 (2012), 613–624 (p. 614).

Therefore, Aboulela is appreciated as a 'neo-Muslim' author who writes about 'ethnic views of Islam and Muslims in terms of a twenty-first century global Islam'.[334] But her feminist consciousness is underestimated. Geoffrey Nash, for instance, argues that Aboulela's Islamic discourse is feminised but it 'is never stridently feminist nor does it set out to condemn male Muslim practice per se', and she 'does not structure her women's experience into explicit forms of feminist resistance such as might be found in … Faqir'.[335] In the same vein, Santesso argues that Aboulela is not a feminist because she 'neither criticises patriarchy nor advocates for female empowerment through Islam'.[336]

I disagree with Nash and Santesso that Aboulela's Islamic discourse is not feminist. In fact, I argue that Aboulela's Islamic discourse *is* feminist, but her feminist consciousness does not take the shape of resistance. An argument about Aboulela's feminist discourse has already been made by Shirin Edwin. Edwin argues from her analysis of Aboulela's *The Translator* that Aboulela is 'an unmistakably Islamic feminist author', whose Islamic feminism is illustrated through her exploration of the presence of Islamic rituals, such as the praying and fasting in the daily life of her pious female protagonist, Sammar, whose observance of Islamic habits 'strongly suggests an Islamic feminist thrust'.[337] Edwin's argument is based on the connection that Saba Mahmood makes between Islamic feminism and 'religious knowledge' and 'acts of worship'.[338]

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[334] Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity*, p. 26.

[335] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 141.

[336] Santesso, *Disorientation*, p. 106.

[337] Shirin Edwin, '(Un)Holy Alliances Marriage, Faith, and Politics in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator'*, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 9.2 (2013), 58–79 (pp. 62–63).

[338] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 44.

I agree with Edwin that Aboulela is an Islamic feminist writer, whose feminism is revealed through her exploration of Islam. I see, however, the notion of 'spiritual and religious habits', on which Edwin builds her argument, is not the most significant way in which Aboulela's work should be seen as feminist.[339] Islamic spiritual habits and rituals, or 'acts of worship' according to Mahmood's theoretical analysis, are beneficial for Muslim women as regards 'organizing [their] daily life' and 'resolving the mundane issues of [their] daily life'.[340] Aboulela's works make it clear that her female protagonists benefit from their spiritual habits and rituals, such as fasting and praying that punctuate their daily activities, helping to resolve their psychological and emotional problems and bringing peace to their souls. And yet, such spiritual rituals and habits do not motivate them to adopt a liberating stance. In fact, it is something else that moves those protagonists to hold a liberating position, and it is their Islamic faith which motivates them to obey and submit to God.

Aboulela focuses on the Islamic faith; as she explains in an interview, 'I wanted to write about faith itself and how spiritual development is a need that is as valid and as urgent as love and career'.[341] The Islamic faith is presented not only as an element of identity or a psychic comfort but also as an instrument of empowerment that enables her female protagonists, who choose to pursue their actions on faith for the purpose of purifying their souls and behaving in a devout, pious way, to strengthen themselves internally by performing an internal jihad or

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[339] Edwin, '(Un)Holy Alliances Marriage, Faith, and Politics in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', (pp. 76–77).

[340] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 44–46.

[341] Claire Chambers, 'An Interview with Leila Aboulela', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 3.1 (2009), 86–102 (p. 100).

struggle. In this internal struggle, which is considered a 'greater jihad', a Muslim utilises his/ her freedom of choice in order to achieve a liberating position by striving hard against his/ her own 'ego, selfishness, greed or evil'.[342]

Through her engagement with this notion of faith, Aboulela locates women's agency in submission rather than resistance. Such engagement with faith and submission to God makes Aboulela's feminist discourse unique and dissimilar to normative feminism focusing on Arab and Muslim women, in which activists and scholars focus on 'redirecting and recoding these resources [conceptual and practical resources of religious traditions] in accordance with women's "own interests and agendas"—a recoding that stands as the site of women's agency'.[343] In that sense, Aboulela adopts Mahmood's conceptualisation of Islamic feminism, in which 'passivity and docility' can be regarded as 'a form of agency' that is grounded in two concepts related to the idea of self-realization: positive freedom and individual autonomy.[344] Positive freedom is defined as 'the capacity for self-mastery and self-government', which exists in various forms, including, 'the more religious notion of realizing oneself through self-transformation, present in Buddhism and a variety of mystical traditions, including Islam and Christianity'.[345] Individual autonomy is apparent when 'the process of realizing oneself is equated with the ability to realize the desires of one's "true will"'.[346] Accordingly, freedom is achieved when the actions

[342] John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2010), p. 28.

[343] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 6.

[344] Ibid., p. 15.

[345] Positive freedom is different from negative, which is described as 'the absence of restraints of various kinds on one's ability to act as one wants'. See, Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 11.

[346] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 11.

of an individual become a ‘consequence of [one’s] “own will” rather than of custom, tradition, or social coercion’, as Mahmood states.[347] That is to say, freedom ‘consists in the ability to autonomously “choose” one’s desires no matter how illiberal they may be’, and therefore, illiberal actions can be tolerated if they are determined and ‘undertaken by a freely consenting individual who is acting of her own accord’.[348]

In this chapter, Aboulela’s feminism will be explored and tackled from a perspective that is different from Edwin’s, both conceptually and methodologically. Conceptually, I will focus on Aboulela’s engagement with the notion of faith and submission to God. Methodologically, I will examine how Aboulela adopts Mahmood’s definition of freedom in the creation of her female Muslim protagonists, who are depicted as extending the influence of their faith to other aspects of their lives, including their own decisions that are the result of their free will.

I will focus on three of Aboulela’s fictional works, namely, *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005) and *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015), instead of focusing on one novel as Edwin does. The first two novels have been chosen because they clearly reveal Aboulela’s feminist consciousness, which is demonstrated in her adoption of the notions of positive freedom and individual autonomy. The third novel, despite its focus on defining Islamic jihad and differentiating it from terrorist acts, is useful for this thesis because it sheds light on the role played by contemporary puritan Muslims in exploiting theological concepts for the purpose of degrading and oppressing women. Aboulela’s fourth novel, *Lyrics Alley* (2010),

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[347] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 11.

[348] Ibid., pp. 11–12.

and her collection of short stories*, Coloured Lights* (2001), are excluded as they lack Aboulela's feminist consciousness that is exposed in the selected novels. *Lyrics Alley* is a general exception to her fiction: it is a historical novel set in early 1950s, in Sudan, and it narrates the traumatised historical life of Hassan Awad Aboulela, a cousin of her father. Her collection of short stories explores issues related to cultural assimilation, intercultural relationships and Islamic topics, such as halal food requirements, abortion and White Muslim converts.

### *The Translator* (1999)

Freedom, in Aboulela's *The Translator*, is a fundamental theme and its importance is highlighted by the introductory quotation comprising a few poetic lines:

> *But I say what comes to me*
>
> *From my inner thoughts*
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> *Denying my eyes*.[349]

These lines are attributed to Abu Nuwas al-Hasan ibn Hani al-Hakami (757–814), one of the greatest classical Arab/ Persian poets, known for his freedom of expression on topics that are forbidden in Islam, such as revelry and homoeroticism.[350] The poet's freedom of expression is stressed in these lines, in which he reveals his intentions to express whatever ideas come into his mind

[349] Leila Aboulela, *The Translator* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2013), p.1. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

[350] James Kritzeck, ed. *Anthology of Islamic Literature: from the Rise of Islam to Modern Times* (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 84.

freely regardless of any visible obstacles that might hinder his freedom of expression. Aboulela explains, in an interview, that these poetic lines are quoted because they reflect the process of writing *The Translator*, in which she expresses her 'own subjective inner thoughts and feelings' while 'denying the reality of life [. . .] as it is seen by the media and by social scientists'.[351] I assume that Aboulela's inner thoughts, which she is keen to express, have to do with the reductive discourse about the brutality of Islam against women, an assumption that I make from Aboulela's declaration that one of her intentions in writing is because she has 'a different story to tell', one concerning the claims that 'Islam oppresses women'.[352] Aboulela, as she explains, wants to tell how Islamic ethics are not oppressive for women but rather 'comforting and nurturing', since they attract 'guidance,' 'wisdom' and 'grace'.[353] Therefore, I infer that Aboulela's use of Abu Nuwas' poetic lines is in an attempt on her part to direct her readers' attention to the chief theme of her novel, which is freedom, particularly, the freedom of Sammar, her female Muslim protagonist in *The Translator*.

Sammar is a young Muslim Sudanese who travels to Scotland with her husband, Tarig, a 'medical student', who later dies in a 'car accident', which forces her to return to Khartoum with her son (p. 8). But due to a quarrel with her aunt/ mother-in-law, Mahasen, she leaves her son in Khartoum with Mahasen and settles again in Aberdeen, which is 'feasible' because of her 'British passport', and works as a translator in a university 'translating Arabic into English'

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[351] Chambers, 'An Interview with Leila Aboulela', (p. 96).

[352] Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

[353] Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

for Rae Isles, a Scottish academic (pp. 70–71). During her stay in Scotland, Sammar suffers from entrapment in memories of her past, dreams of an uncertain future and hallucinations that characterise her time in Aberdeen:

> Outside Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balance just for her. She saw the sky cloudless with too many stars imagined the night warm, warmer than indoors. She smelled dust and heard barking of stray dogs among street's rubble and pot-holes. A bicycle bell tinkled, frogs croaked, 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. This had happened before but not for so long, not so deeply. Sometimes the shadows in a dark room would remind her of the power cuts at home or she would mistake the gurgle of the central heating pipes for a distant azan. (pp. 20–21)

These lines clarify that Sammar suffers physically and mentally from the distress caused by her state of migration and dislocation, which results in her seeing images of her homeland while she is in her second home of migration, a distress that she manages to overcome by relying on her religion. Sammar, as a devout Muslim, realises that her 'fate is etched out by Allah Almighty' and to 'think otherwise' would lead her 'to slip down [and] to feel the world narrowing, dreary and tight' (p. 71). Thus, she finds in her Islamic faith a cure that provides her with

‘a relief for mental illness’ and ‘a system of life’, with which she gets control of her pain and grief and structure in her everyday life:[354]

> Four years ill in a hospital she had made for herself. Ill, diseased with passivity, time in which she sat doing nothing. The whirlpool of grief sucking time. Hours flitting away like minutes. Days in which the only thing she could rouse herself to do was 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. (p. 16)

But more importantly, Sammar finds in her Islamic faith freedom of choice, which is expressed in her attempts to act autonomously and to decide in accordance with her own will, as exemplified in her adoption of an Islamic dress-code and her marriage.

Aboulela manages to demonstrate Sammar’s freedom through her adoption of an Islamic dress-code by making it a consequence of Sammar’s free will and a choice that Sammar, herself, makes without any pressure applied to her, either by society or family. By doing so, Aboulela challenges the Western assumption regarding the inferior position of Muslim women because of their Islamic dress-code.[355] Robert Young explains that, for ‘many westerners, the veil is a symbol of patriarchal Islamic societies in which women are assumed to be

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[354] Renata Pepicelli, ‘Islam and Women's Literature in Europe: Reading Leila Aboulela and Ingy Mubiayi’, *Jura Gentium*, 8.2 (2011), 75–91 (pp. 76–77).

[355] The Islamic dress-code that is presented in Aboulela’s novels is a sort of hijab covering a woman’s hair and body. Hijab consists of clothes that are ‘long-sleeved’ and ‘ankle-length’, and a head covering which ‘covers the hair and extends low to the forehead, comes under the chin to conceal the neck and falls down over the chest and back’. See, Fadwa El Gundi, ‘Veiling Resistance’, in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 586–609 (p. 590).

oppressed, subordinated, and made invisible'.[356] Miriam Cooke, similarly, states that Muslim women are forced by patriarchal and powerful currents to wear hijabs and veils that symbolise 'belonging to a religious community that is both patriarchal and powerful'.[357] Aboulela not only confronts the reductive assumption that the Islamic dress-code is a sign of patriarchy, but also presents it as a public uniform that has been chosen by Sammar to assert her Islamic identity:

> 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, the daughter of an exiled leader of the mujahideen. (p. 9)

Sammar's assertion of an Islamic identity, as clarified in the quotation, is achieved by dressing in a way that makes her 'as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerizing as the Afghan princess she had once seen on TV wearing hijab, the daughter of an exiled leader of the mujahideen' (p. 9). That is to say, this Islamic identity is not connected to certain ritual or political markers that denote Sammar's religious or political stance. Rather, it is distinctively connected to Sammar's goal to look beautiful and stylish in her hijab. In that sense, Sammar is portrayed not only as a strictly committed religious woman whose 'hair and the skin on her arms [can] only be imagined', but also as a woman who chooses to adopt a stylish dress-code that satisfies her desire to be attractive, beautiful and glamorous (p. 4). This search for beauty, prompted by an Islamic dress-code, is

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[356] Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 80.

[357] Cooke, *Women Claim Islam*, p. 132.

repeatedly stressed in Aboulela's other novel, *Minaret*, in which Najwa, the female protagonist, after wearing a traditional Sudanese costume says, 'I wrapped the tobe around me and covered my hair. In the full-length mirror I was another version of myself, regal like my mother, almost mysterious' and 'attractive'.[358]

Searching for beauty in an Islamic dress-code, which Aboulela's female protagonists are keen to find, is still a religious action built on Islamic ethics. Sammar and Najwa, in their search for beauty in an Islamic dress-code, behave according to the 'innate and intuitive sense of the beautiful which is the *fitra* that God has implanted in all of us'.[359] Aboulela's engagement with this innate sense to seek beauty is compatible with her concentration on the faith and morals of Islam, rather than its legal and doctrinal systems, particularly because the beauty that is sought here is not an empty or vulgar beauty but a kind of beauty that is connected to Sammar's and Najwa's intentions and actions, which are deliberate and full of awareness. Najwa, after wearing her first headscarf, declares that it makes her feel 'self-conscious of the new material around [her] face [. . .] a new gentleness' that provides her with 'the skill of concealing rather than emphasizing' vulgarity and indecency.[360]

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[358] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, p. 246.

[359] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: Conference of the Books* (Lanham; New York; Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 2001), p. 114. Khaled Abou El Fadl argues that this intuitive and innate sense of seeking beauty is generated from *hadith* 'God is beautiful and God loves all that is beautiful'. He also argues that this intuitive sense to seek the beautiful is ignored by contemporary Muslim scholars, who, because of their concentration on legal and political aspects of Islam, 'forget that we seek the beautiful because God is beautiful'. See Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam*, pp. 113–115.

[360] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret*, pp. 246–247.

In addition to her freedom to adopt an Islamic dress-code, Aboulela displays Sammar's freedom in another situation, one where Sammar succeeds in accomplishing a marriage relationship in accordance with her own will. Sammar, who is a devout Muslim Sudanese widow, finds herself in an interfaith, reciprocated love relationship with her Scottish employer, Rae. However, her marriage to him is legally prohibited because he is non-Muslim, and according to Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim women are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men.[361] Sammar's freedom is revealed in fulfilling her desire to marry Rae by surmounting the legal obstacle and persuading him to convert to Islam. This marriage, according to Nash who reads it as an adaptation of a *Jane Eyre* scenario, is perceived as a marriage that results from 'Sammar's victory [which] like Jane's, is on her own terms'.[362] Nash, however, despite his recognition of the romantic marriage between Rae and Sammar, reduces it to a conflict between two competing discourses (Islam and Orientalism), where the conflict between them is terminated by the surrendering of Rae to the victorious Sammar. In other words, Nash perceives their marriage as a defeat for Rae, who stands for 'a modern Orientalist', by Sammar the Muslim, who ends the conflict by 'winning over of Rae to [her] inner Islamic core' and to her 'own territory, where political

[361] This prohibition stems from Quranic verse 221 in surah *Al-Baqarah* (*The Heifer*): 'Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he appeals to you (2.221)'. It is also found in Quranic verse 10 in surah *Al-Mumtahanah* (*The Examined One*), which asserts the dissolution of marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man in case the marriage has already existed before the revelation of the pervious verse: 'if ye ascertain that they are Believers, then send them not back to the Unbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the Unbelievers, nor are the (Unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them (60.10)'. The reason behind this proscription of such marriages, according to Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, is to protect Muslim women from being in a marriage relationship that makes it impossible or even difficult for them to maintain respect for their religion and to observe its rituals, duties and prohibitions properly due to a husband who lacks recognition of the basic tenets of Islam on his part. For more details see, Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, pp. 184–186.

[362] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 139.

resistance is subsumed by the deeper strength of religious assurance'.[363] Instead of interpreting their marriage as a conflict that ends with the victory of one party over the other, I perceive it as a romantic marriage that results from negotiation between Rae and Sammar in order to bridge the religious gap that separates them in a way that is mutually convenient for both of them. Nevertheless, during this negotiation, Sammar utilises her free will in order to marry him without sacrificing her religious identity, balancing her love for Rae with her loyalty to her religion.

The negotiation between Rae and Sammar requires them to be equal. This equality is achieved by challenging Rae's masculinity, which is achieved by depicting him as a highly respected Professor of 'Third World Politics' and a 'Middle-East historian', who, nevertheless, needs Sammar to assist him in translating Arabic texts and to look after his asthmatic body (p. 5). Brendan Smyth, in his critique of the conventional Orientalist notions of masculinity, argues that Rae's Orientalist masculinity is subverted by his need for Sammar, who plays the roles of both a translator who compensates for Rae's inability to read and understand Arabic and a carer of his physically weak body, which interrupts his academic work with hospitalisation and coughing.[364] Assigning Sammar these two functions of a translator of Arabic texts and a carer of Rae's asthmatic body permits 'Sammar to approach him on terms of approximate equality'.[365] This

[363] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, pp. 138–139.

[364] Brendan Smyth, 'Challenges of Orientalism: Teaching about Islam and Masculinity in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*, ed. by Nouri Gana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 386–404 (pp. 390–393).

[365] John Stotesbury, 'Genre and Islam in Recent Anglophone Romantic Fiction', in *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film*, ed. by Susana Onega and Christian Gutleben (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 69–82 (pp. 74–75).

equality prepares the reader to accept the stability and strength Sammar reveals in her reaction to Rae's attempt to approach her and her effective negotiation with Rae about the potential for their marriage and his embracing Islam.

At the beginning, Sammar responds to Rae's attempts to pursue her with a form of mental process, in which she thinks deeply without actively interacting. For instance, when Rae admits to her that she makes him feel 'safe', Sammar's reaction is that she just 'picked up the word "safe" and put it aside, to peel it later and wonder what it meant' (p. 50). Another example of Sammar's inclination to think occurs when Rae expresses his admiration for her beautiful voice, an admiration that 'went to her head [and] became little jewels, coloured gems, precious stones to carry around' (p. 55). Sammar's tendency to think quietly is a result of her awareness of their differences: 'Sammar felt separate from him, exiled while he was in his homeland, fasting while he was eating turkey and drinking wine. They lived in worlds divided by simple facts – religion, country of origin, race' (p. 33). Among these differences, the religious gap is crucial, and Sammar's awareness of it motivates her to think deeply before taking any action for fear that she might transgress the Islamic decorum of courtesy that limits interactions between unmarried men and women. Her self-talk that follows her silent response to Rae's compliment over her hijab clarifies how her awareness of religious difference elicits deep thinking on her part about suitable behaviour: 'If things were different, she would have smiled and asked, "Complimented me on what?" and enjoyed the things he would have said' (p. 104). The word, 'different' implies a different situation, which I assume to be marriage or at least a formal engagement, which would be dependent on Rae's conversion. In such a scenario, Sammar would not be 'afraid of confessions [and] emotional words',

which are considered misdemeanours if the couple are not married (p. 104). Therefore, once Sammar feels that Rae is about to transgress Islamic decorum, she takes immediate but controlled action. For example, 'she move[s] her head away' in order to avoid Rae who 'lean[s] to kiss her' (p. 119). She also straightforwardly refuses his invitation to accompany him on a picnic to the Lakes, justifying her refusal by explaining that accompanying him would be 'wrong' (p. 55). Her justification of her refusal is attributed not to a cultural tradition or social norm that covers 'a particular community and a time' and sets a '*woman's honour*' as an 'idol', but to her own religious consciousness, which is based on her belief that God 'saw her, knew her, was with her all the time wherever she went?' (p. 55, original emphasis).

Sammar, however, becomes more active after Rae's confession of his love for her, as this confession drives Sammar to negotiate with him the possibility of bridging the religious gap between them through his conversion to Islam. These efforts, which Sammar exerts, are more effective than those of Rae. Rae attempts to reduce the religious gap by teasing out the commonalities between them, telling Sammar about his Islamic-friendly past, including his uncle 'who went to Egypt with the army in the Second World War' and 'converted to Islam', and whose experience inspired the young Rae to write his essay entitled '*Islam is better than Christianity*' (p. 17, original emphasis). But he does not make any progress in reducing the religious difference, except that his attempt brings him closer to Sammar, to the extent that she starts to feel that he is 'sort of familiar, like people from back home', and this inspires her to think about a real solution, asking her friend, Yasmine, about the possibility of Rae's conversion to Islam:

‘Do you think he could one day convert?’ (p. 21). In fact, Sammar is the one whose efforts at negotiation eventually remove the religious gap completely.

In her negotiation with Rae, Sammar starts by asking him directly to become a Muslim so that the legal barrier to their marriage is eliminated and they can get married, but he refuses and attributes his refusal to his inability to deal with Islam as a faith. Rae admits that Islam for him is a field of study that he deals with from the position of a detached objective scholar:

> I studied Islam for the politics of the Middle East. I did not study it for myself. I was not searching for something spiritual [. . .] I believed the best I could do, what I owed a place and people who had deep meaning for me, was to be objective, detached. In the middle of all the prejudice and hypocrisy, I wanted to be one of the few who was saying what was reasonable and right. (p. 123)

Rae’s detachment and objectivity, with which he insists on viewing Islam and Muslim culture, can be read as ‘his limiting masculinities’ that Rae must get rid of ‘in order for the obstacles to romance to be overcome’.[366] Sammar, through her role as a translator who translates not only Arabic texts into English but also translates Islam for Rae, confronts Rae’s detachment and objectivity. Through her linguistic translation of sacred texts, she proves to Rae, as Smyth explains, the illusory nature of his perception of himself as a good scholar, who produces objective knowledge on Islam and Muslim culture while remaining detached from any sociocultural context.[367] Sammar acknowledges in one of her conversations

[366] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 141.

[367] Smyth, ‘Challenges of Orientalism: Teaching about Islam and Masculinity in Leila Aboulela’s *The Translator*’, (pp. 390–391).

with Rae that the meaning of a certain word in a 'Qudsi Hadith', which she translates for him, is contingent on engaging with certain historical and sociocultural contexts that are clarified in 'a footnote' provided in the book she reads (p. 41).

Nevertheless, Sammar's mission to prove to Rae his inability to remain objective and detached from the Islamic faith is complicated, as it goes through two different stages. At the beginning, Sammar, who is distressed by Rae's detachment and objectivity, insists on settling for a superficial formal sign of conversion by asking Rae to say the *Shahadah* (the central statement of faith in Islam that is recited ceremonially by new converts) only verbally, in 'words', so that they can get married (p. 120). By presenting herself as the reward for his conversion, Sammar attempts to persuade Rae that Islam is relevant to him. But Rae's rejection of this perfunctory conversion leaves no other option for Sammar but to travel to Sudan, where she changes her mind and approach. Sammar gradually recognises that her imposition of a superficial conversion on Rae is self-centred, since she wants him to become Muslim only to fulfil 'her need to get married again', not 'for his own sake [or] for his own good' (p. 171). She also realises that her behaviour is contradictory to what '[p]eople with deep faith' would do in drawing others to Islam, 'for no personal gain [and] worldly reason' but 'for Allah's sake' (p. 171). Consequently, Sammar goes through an 'internal struggle' between her 'worldly desires and spiritual discipline', learning to 'rise above her selfish demand for his conversion'.[368] As a result of 'clean[ing] her intentions', Sammar corrects her mistake by following a new method, which is to pray for Rae

[368] Waïl S. Hassan, 'Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 41. 2-3 (2008), 298–319 (pp. 303–304).

'from far away without him ever knowing', so that he will embrace Islam, not to become an eligible husband for her, but for the peace of his soul (p. 171).

Sammar's new method of praying for Rae while staying away from him proves to be successful when Sammar receives a letter from Rae's Palestinian friend informing her that Rae has embraced Islam and wishes to propose to her. Later, Rae explains to Sammar when he visits her in Khartoum that his faith 'comes direct from Allah', which makes his conversion a result of God's acceptance of Sammar's prayers for him (p. 191). In addition, Sammar's departure for Sudan enables Rae to discover and test his need for Islam and to make an effort by taking 'one step', which is 'wanting it for [himself]' as he states after becoming a Muslim (p. 192). In that sense, Sammar's departure allows Rae to deal with Islam not as abstract textual knowledge, but rather as a lived experience so that his 'fascination with theory [may] pass into the realm of practice'.[369] It enables him to explore his subjectivity with Islam, not as an intellectual, but as a believer engaging with 'knowledge of it in [the] heart' (p. 124). Therefore, Sammar's new method is presented as an enormously effective factor in Rae's conversion, which is described by Sammar as 'a miracle for no one else to acknowledge but her [. . .] all alone' (p. 182).

Portraying Sammar as a Muslim woman who renounces Rae and returns to her country rather than giving up her religion, and whose efforts influence Rae's decision to embrace Islam and then propose marriage to her, challenges the notion of submissive Muslim women. Sammar is depicted as an empowered Muslim woman, whose spiritual strength, deep thinking, self-control, energetic

[369] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 141.

personality and determined position represent a reversal of Western feminist scholarship that tends to 'portray Muslim women as incomparably bound by the unbreakable chains of religious and patriarchal oppression'.[370] It also, as Smyth argues, negates the conventional Western narrative of the relationship between a Western man and a Muslim woman that can be summarized as 'white men saving brown women from brown men', according to Gayatri Spivak.[371] Smyth explains that according to this Western notion, which has its roots in European imperialism, Rae is supposed to save Sammar from her "primitive" and "backward" Islamic culture. But Aboulela does not comply with such reduction and reverses the conventional rescue narrative into a story in which Sammar, the brown woman, saves Rae, the white man, from his white masculinity.[372] In fact, Sammar saves Rae on multiple levels. She saves his academic career with her translation of 'historical texts' and 'articles in Arab newspapers', on which Rae's academic career depends completely (p. 5). She saves his asthmatic body with her 'soup [. . .] that made him recover [so that he] no longer coughed' (p. 99). Finally, she saves his spiritual life by convincing him that Islam 'would be good [since] it will make [him] stronger' (p. 86).

This depiction of Sammar, which undermines Western feminist analysis of gender in Islam and challenges a Western normative narrative of the relationship between a Western man and a Muslim woman, tends to evoke critical reactions that perceive Sammar's marriage to Rae as an ideological instrument that is

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[370] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 7.

[371] Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 284.

[372] Smyth, 'Challenges of Orientalism: Teaching about Islam and Masculinity in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', (p. 397).

meant by Aboulela to assign agency firmly to the West's Other. Christina Phillips, for example, perceives it as 'an attempt to forge a new path between East and West or (North and South)', positing 'Islam and Muslim tradition as diametrical opposites to Western liberalism' and presenting 'the Islamic way as a corrective to a particular set of circumstances'.[373] In a similar vein, John Stotesbury suggests that 'such novels [as *The Translator*] reiterate an implacable creed: for an Islamic woman to envisage personal fulfilment with a Western man, there is only one alternative: the man's conversion to Islam'.[374] Stotesbury interprets Sammar's marriage to Rae and her participation in his conversion as counter-colonisation at work in the novel, where the only option to cross cultures is for a Western man to embrace Islam. Nadia Butt similarly asserts that Rae's conversion to Islam 'precludes any substantial form of blending, merging or mixing of cultures and religions' and warns that '[i]f Muslim immigrants should opt for a strategy of creating parallel societies within their adopted homelands, Western or non-Western, they will necessarily endanger their acceptance as loyal citizens of that society and contribute to an inevitable social crisis'.[375] The problem with these critical perceptions is that they examine the romantic marriage between Rae and Sammar through a purely political lens that emphasises the neo-Orientalist discourse and Huntington's hypothesis about the "clash of civilizations" and the threat from Islam and Muslims.

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[373] Christina Phillips, 'Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*: Reading Islam in the West', *Wasafiri*, 27.1 (2012), 66–72 (pp. 67–68).

[374] Stotesbury, 'Genre and Islam in Recent Anglophone Romantic Fiction', (p. 80).

[375] Nadia Butt, 'Negotiating Untranslatability and Islam in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', in *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, ed. by Elisabeth Bekers, Sissy Helff, and Daniela Merolla (New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 167–180 (pp. 168–178).

It is undeniable that Aboulela, in *The Translator*, is countering the dominant Western discourses about Islam and Muslims by engaging in a politics of writing back. Ferial Ghazoul explains that 'Arab writers who write in English, French and Italian are no longer seen as traitors opting out of their own culture and into the culture of the (ex-)colonizers, but as cultural ambassadors who are able to voice a previously silenced point of view'.[376] Ghazoul argues that 'with today's proliferation of the phenomenon of "writing back", we find writers from former colonies using precisely the language of the colonizers to question those cultures' representations of the Other'.[377] I would, however, argue with Hassan that Aboulela 'is less concerned with reversing, rewriting, or answering back to colonial discourse than with attempting an epistemological break with it'.[378] Aboulela clarifies, in an essay, her intentions in writing, saying, 'To prove that Khartoum is nicer than London, more beautiful than Edinburgh . . . I don't think so. Not to prove, but to express, to show that it is a valid place, a valid way of life beyond the stereotypical images of famine and war, not a backward place to be written off'.[379]

In that sense, I read the novel as an attempt by Aboulela not to invalidate Western values, but rather to assert the validity of an Islamic world view. Therefore, she systematises the romantic marriage between Sammar and Rae within an Islamic context. This marriage is often misinterpreted as a contradiction

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[376] Ferial J. Ghazoul, 'Comparative Literature in the Arab world', *Comparative Critical Studies* 3.1-2 (2006), 113–124 (pp. 121–122).

[377] Ibid., p. 121.

[378] Hassan, 'Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction', (p. 299).

[379] Leila Aboulela, 'Moving Away from Accuracy', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (2002), 198–207 (p. 204).

to the conventional Western genre of romance. Stotesbury, for instance, claims that the romantic 'ethos' in novels such as *The Translator* 'tends powerfully to conflict with that of their Western counterparts'.[380] This conflict, according to Stotesbury, is illustrated in the 'romantic heterosexual fulfilment [that is achieved] by means of a complex three-way accommodation that involves woman, man, and God'.[381] In the same vein, Phillips argues that '[s]ubordinating this time-honoured formula to Islam enables a devaluation of the structure of the Western romance and posits in its place love and marriage within a framework of religious belief'.[382] Aboulela, however, is neither contradicting nor devaluing the Western genre of romance, but organising the romantic marriage between Sammar and Rae within an Islamic context, following the example of *Jane Eyre*. As Aboulela explains:

> I presented a specifically Muslim dilemma, that she can't marry Rae unless he converts. I was hoping that the reader, even though the reader is not a Muslim, would still get caught up in Sammar's dilemma, just as I had been engrossed by Jane's predicament. I see *Jane Eyre* as a very Christian book, a very religious book, in that the conflict is specific to Christianity: he can't marry two women at the same time.[383]

[380] Stotesbury, 'Genre and Islam in Recent Anglophone Romantic Fiction', (p. 71).

[381] Ibid., p. 80.

[382] Phillips, 'Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*: Reading Islam in the West', (p. 67).

[383] Chambers, 'An Interview with Leila Aboulela', (p. 98).

That is to say, Aboulela attempts to organise the romantic marriage between Sammar and Rae within an Islamic framework in relation to English literature that has already accommodated Christianity and love, as exemplified in the love relationship between Jane and Mr Rochester. Aboulela admits, in an interview, that her writing of *The Translator* is meant to be 'writing back to that Anglocentric tradition' by 'putting Islam in the English novel'.[384] By doing so, Aboulela manages to direct the attention of her readers 'to examine how romance narratives are already encoded within Western, Christian religious conventions which often remain invisible to Western readers', and to critics as well.[385]

Aboulela also reinforces the validity of an Islamic world view as a foundation of social justice, which is emphasised in the conversation between Sammar and Rae about the historiography of early Islam as a religion that has the potential for freedom, liberation and dignity for the oppressed: women and slaves. Sammar tells Rae that the 'first believers were mostly women and slaves. I don't know why, maybe they had softer hearts, I don't know' (p. 121). Rae explains to her, '[m]aybe in changing they did not have much to lose [. . .] It was the rulers of Makkah who were reluctant to give up their traditions and established ways for something new' (p. 121). Rae later admits to Sammar, '[w]hat I regret most [. . .] is that I used to write things like "Islam gives dignity to those who otherwise would not have dignity in their lives," as if I didn't need dignity myself' (p. 192). Aboulela stresses this validity of Islam as a foundation of social justice by Rae's conversion and his marriage to Sammar, which put him in a position

[384] Rashid, 'Islamic Individualism and the Logic of the Narrative: An Interview with Leila Aboulela', (p. 619).

[385] Smyth, 'Challenges of Orientalism: Teaching about Islam and Masculinity in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', (p. 397).

where he 'rejects the patriarchal authority previously invested in his orientalist identity and embraces a masculinity of the oppressed and marginalized'.[386] An alternative narrative, in which Rae rejects conversion and consequently will not be able to marry Sammar, would have confirmed that Islam is a backward, barbaric and pre-modern religion. Therefore, Aboulela's reinforcement of the validity of an Islamic world view as a foundation of social justice is a manifestation of her Islamic feminist consciousness in *The Translator*. This Islamic feminist consciousness is also manifested in Aboulela's portrayal of Sammar as an agent whose 'effective symbolic translation' allows the couple to enact 'cultural mediation between disparate political discourses' and to fulfil their marriage in a way that is appropriate for both of them.[387]

### *Minaret* (2005)

In *Minaret*, Aboulela once again explores freedom as a fundamental theme in relation to Najwa, the chief female protagonist in the novel, just as she does in *The Translator* with Sammar. However, Aboulela's exploration of freedom in *Minaret* is different from that in *The Translator*. This difference is mainly illustrated in how Aboulela depicts her two protagonists. In contrast to Sammar, who is portrayed as a widow mature enough to be aware of the freedom she has and who behaves in accordance with it right from the beginning of the novel, Najwa is depicted as a young, liberal and modern teenager, who goes through some hardships that lead to a huge transformation in her character, including the

[386] Smyth, 'Challenges of Orientalism: Teaching about Islam and Masculinity in Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*', (p. 399).

[387] Waïl S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 187–188.

emergence of her mature, devout and emancipated personality. This transformation in Najwa's character is traced across two decades, from 1984 to 2005, and it is explored through the broken chronological narration of the novel, which alternates between the past and the present, and the setting that rotates between Khartoum and London.

Najwa is first portrayed as a 19-year old spoilt daughter of a wealthy Sudanese politician. Due to her family's elite status and her father's political privilege in the ruling Sudanese government, Najwa leads a happy, comfortable and luxurious life, spends her leisure time swimming, playing tennis and attending club dinners and late parties and travels in her summer vacation to Alexandria, Geneva and London. However, Najwa's idealised adolescence is damaged by the unexpected political and military coup of 1985 in Sudan, which deprives Najwa of her elite and Westernised lifestyle and forces her to abandon Sudan and seek political asylum in Britain, together with her mother and twin brother, Omar. In London, Najwa is compelled to live a difficult and humble life and to work as a maid, since her family's status and wealth are dramatically reduced. She is also forced to live alone as she has lost all her close family members. Najwa's father is charged with political corruption and executed in Sudan, her mother dies after suffering from cancer and her twin brother is sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for stabbing a police officer who was attempting to arrest him for drug-dealing. As a result of these hardships, Najwa gradually develops her mature and devout personality and reshapes herself as a practising Muslim, whose religion becomes a principal component of her identity. Najwa says about herself, '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 [. . .] I just think of myself as a Muslim'.[388]

Najwa's renewed Islamic identity is regarded by some critics as a demonstration of Aboulela's anti-liberal discourse. Hassan, for example, argues that Najwa's religious identity is 'reactive' and 'regressive' because it is derived from a religiosity that 'cannot be truly liberatory'.[389] Najwa's religion as presented in the novel is, according to Hassan, a version of Islam that 'reinscribes male supremacy' and 'involves a complete disavowal of personal liberty as incompatible with Islam, of feminism as a secular and godless ideology, of individual agency in favor of an all-encompassing notion of predetermination and of political agency as well'.[390] In the same vein, Santesso misjudges Aboulela's depiction of Najwa as a devout Muslim woman and sees Najwa's religious identity as a contradictory reaction to liberation. According to Santesso, Aboulela portrays Najwa as a 'submissive', 'frail' and 'disempowered figure', who 'withdraws from the intellectual exchanges of her youth' and 'rejects secular ideas' for the sake of a religion that is 'ultimately dogmatic', since it is not based on 'a personalised faith or philosophy that guides her actions'.[391]

I disagree with Hassan and Santesso concerning their claim about Aboulela's anti-liberal discourse, which they argue is illustrated in her depiction of Najwa's religious identity. In fact, Aboulela portrays Najwa as an empowered Muslim woman who embraces an individualistic and personalised version of

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[388] Leila Aboulela, *Minaret* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 110. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

[389] Hassan, 'Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction', (p. 316).

[390] Ibid., pp. 313–314.

[391] Santesso, *Disorientation*, pp. 86–103.

Islam that is compatible with both freedom and feminism. But Hassan and Santesso do not recognise Aboulela's liberating discourse, because they seem unable to identify the two kinds of freedom that Aboulela ascribes to Najwa. The text makes it clear that the young Najwa does not lack freedom. On the contrary, she, as a liberal and modern young woman, has a kind of unrestricted freedom, and she is aware that she has already had this freedom, which she acknowledges when she says, there is 'nothing that I didn't have [or] couldn't have' (p. 15). Nevertheless, Najwa is not satisfied with this unrestricted freedom, and thus she has an excessive desire for a different kind of liberation and emancipation. The following self-talk, which Najwa expresses while driving her car to university, is an example of such desire:

> I wished I could feel like an emancipated young student, driving her own car with confidence. Was I not an emancipated young woman driving her own car to university? In Khartoum only a minority of women drove cars and in university less than thirty percent of students were girls – that should make me feel good about myself. (p. 10)

Najwa's words clarify that she is free but she is not satisfied with the freedom she has because it does not enhance her self-acceptance and does not make her 'feel good about [herself]', as she says (p. 10). Najwa's disappointment with her unlimited freedom is clarified in the connection she makes between her unrestricted freedom and emptiness, when she says, '[t]his empty space was called freedom' (p.175). The emptiness Najwa refers to is more than a spatial emptiness. Rather, it is a spiritual emptiness that Najwa feels in the form of a hollow: '[w]henever I heard the azan in Khartoum, whenever I heard the Qur'an

recited I would feel a bleakness in me and a depth and space would open up, hollow and numb. I usually didn't notice it, wasn't aware that it existed' (p. 134). Najwa realises later, after the death of her mother, that this hollow is related to the 'place [. . .] where the longing for God was supposed to come from', but she 'didn't really have it' (p. 135). Accordingly, it can be concluded that the different form of freedom Najwa seeks is a spiritual freedom that would boost her self-acceptance and fill the spiritual emptiness she suffers from.

Aboulela presents Najwa's unrestricted freedom as negative because such freedom does not put a limit on Najwa's behaviour and allows her to do whatever she wants. This presentation is in accordance with Mahmood's definition of negative freedom, which is characterised by 'the absence of external obstacles [. . .] whether imposed by the state, corporations, or private individuals'.[392] In contrast to the negative unlimited freedom that Najwa has, Aboulela presents Najwa's spiritual freedom, which Najwa seeks and gains later as a result of her growing maturity and religiosity, as positive because it provides Najwa with the potential to act autonomously. This presentation is in agreement with Mahmood's definition of positive freedom, which refers to 'the capacity to realize an autonomous will'.[393]

Aboulela draws a parallel between these two forms of freedom and differentiates between them in terms of their effects on Najwa in the episode of Najwa's intimate relationship with her former university classmate in Khartoum, Anwar Al-Sir, who flees to London as a result of another coup in Sudan. Najwa's intimate relationship with Anwar, for whom her passion has been revived as a

[392] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 11.

[393] Ibid., p. 11.

result of his presence in London after many years and his attempts to flirt with her, becomes possible because of the unrestricted freedom Najwa enjoys. Najwa says, '[w]e had circled each other for months, flirted for months, all the time aware that we were in London, conscious that we were free' (p. 172). This freedom is utilised to the utmost in a liberal environment where Najwa is detached from her family members and the Arab Muslim Sudanese community that would condemn her intimate relationship with Anwar: 'I'm in London [. . .] I can do what I like, no one can see me. Fascinating' (p. 128).

This unrestricted freedom, though, entangles Najwa in an insecure intimate relationship with Anwar. Her lack of safety is partly due to Anwar's unpredictable changes of mood, his contempt for Najwa's father and his constant criticism of her logic, which he sees as misinformed. Najwa explains:

> I could never feel entirely safe with him. We would be happy and chatting and then suddenly the conversation would twist. "You and your family must be the Home Office's ideal asylum seekers – a flat in London, bank account filled with the money your father swindled." Yes, we had the flat but the bank accounts were not full. He said, "Don't try to kid me, I'm not stupid." We quarrelled. I hated quarrelling with him, hated that I would explain and explain yet he never believed me. And he had a knack of winning arguments even when I was in the right, even when I was telling the truth. "Your father must have had another account then, offshore, somewhere else – Switzerland. It's ironic that you can't get hold of the money but believe me it's there". (pp. 163–164)

Najwa's lack of safety is also partly due to Anwar's egocentric personality that makes him concerned only with his own personal pleasure and profit, but does

not compel him to pay Najwa back or even to express his gratitude for whatever she has done for him. Anwar benefits from Najwa's knowledge of English 'to correct his English' and to proofread every article he writes in English for a Sudanese newspaper based in London, but he is 'sensitive to criticism' (p. 155). This sensitivity evokes his irritation, which grows with 'the more errors [she] found' in his articles (p. 228), and obliges Najwa to 'flatter and soothe him' and assure him that he is 'clever' (p. 236). He also takes advantage of Najwa sexually, letting her think that he loves her and intends to marry her so that she 'would not be without a family for long' (p. 156), until she finds out about his mother's plan to arrange his marriage to his 'cousin', 'Ibtisam' (p. 228). When Najwa suggests to him that his father speak to her uncle, who is visiting Khartoum, about their marriage so that they 'can be officially engaged', Anwar refuses, claiming that he procrastinates to make any marriage plans 'until this [current Sudanese] government falls' (p. 233). Najwa's sexual exploitation is stressed by the juxtaposition between Najwa and an Ethiopian prostitute. Najwa, whom Anwar considers a '[s]illy girl' (p. 165) and whom he 'sneer[s] at [. . .] out of the blue' (p. 163), is put in a parallel position with a young Ethiopian prostitute, whom Anwar meets in a brothel in Sudan and whom Anwar mocks because she has 'feelings for him' (p. 176).

This sexual issue agitates Najwa and arouses her 'troubled conscience' and feelings of guilt, which Anwar attempts but fails to assuage (p. 244). Anwar attempts to persuade Najwa that her distress is due to 'social pressure', which brainwashes Najwa and 'every other Arab girl [. . .] about the importance of virginity' and restricts women's freedom, since it pushes 'Arab society [to be] hypocritical [. . .] with double standards for men and women' (p. 175).

Nevertheless, Anwar's attempt does not convince Najwa, who finds his speech about virginity and social pressure condescending: 'as if I were a child who needed to be taught the facts of life', she knows that she does not suffer from such social pressure (p. 175). In fact, Najwa is aware that losing her virginity in Khartoum a few years back would have 'shocked Khartoum society, given [her] father a heart attack [and] dealt a blow to [her] mother's marriage' (p. 175). But because of her settlement in London and the death of her parents, she was left alone with no one to care about her virginity except an uncle who travels 'across the world' and an imprisoned brother, who 'would never know unless [she] wrote to him' (p. 174). Najwa is disappointed with Anwar because he is unable to understand that what distresses her is her recognition that she is committing a sin because of their intimate relationship. Najwa's disappointment drives her to evaluate her relationship with Anwar in accordance with her own real desire that aims to have a relationship in which she would be 'transparent and unashamed' (p. 157). But she discovers that Anwar, with whom she feels ashamed of herself because of their sinful intimate relationship and who reminds her of the shameful political corruption of her father, is incapable of providing her with such a relationship. She tells him directly, 'I can't handle the things you say about my father any more. I can't live a life where I don't even know that Ramadan has started [. . .] I'm bored with feeling guilty' (p. 244). As a result, Najwa decides to repent for her sinful intimate relationship with Anwar by terminating this insecure physical passion for Anwar and replacing it with a secure religious passion, in which she goes 'back to being safe with God' (p. 237).

With this decision, Najwa starts to deploy her spiritual positive freedom, which makes her aware of the existence of the religious boundaries that limit her

relationship to Anwar and at the same time allow her to act autonomously. Najwa employs this freedom practically when she rejects Anwar's invitation to see him in his flat for the purpose of proofreading his latest article. This rejection is, according to Najwa, 'the right thing to say' because it is a decision that she makes willingly and through which she achieves the peace of mind and the security she is looking for (p. 236). Najwa describes the psychological positive effect of her refusal, saying:

> When I put the receiver down, when I walked bare-footed back to the bedroom, I felt a kind of peace. I lay in bed and fell deeply asleep. When I woke up I had a shower, but it was not an ordinary shower, it was like starting afresh, wanting to be clean, crying for it. (p. 237)

Najwa's words clarify that the peace of mind she obtains is due to her success in redeeming her sin. This success in redemption is illustrated through the metaphor of washing away her sin by 'taking a shower', in which bodily purity is associated with moral purity (p. 236). This metaphor is repeated on different occasions and in different versions in the novel, including the outdated version of washing sins with ice, as exemplified in Najwa's request to her religious mentor, Wafaa, to teach her how to '[*w*]*ash my sins with ice*' (p. 159, original emphasis). Or the modern version, such as using the words 'clarifying', 'exfoliation', 'deep-pore cleanse' and 'scrub', which refer to modern means of bodily cleansing:[394]

[394] This metaphor of physical cleansing is not, as Nash claims, a 'Western' metaphor. See, Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 146. In fact, this metaphor, which is known as the 'Macbeth effect', is common in 'many religious rituals' of Christians, Mandaeans, Sikhs and Muslims. See, Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist, 'Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing', *Science*, 313.5792 (2006), 1451–1452 (p. 1451). Therefore, Aboulela's utilisation of this metaphor would be understandable and familiar to most of her readers, no matter what their religious backgrounds are.

> Sometimes the tears ran down my face. I sweated and felt a burning along my skin, in my chest. This was the scrub I needed. Exfoliation, clarifying, deep-pore cleanse-words I knew from the beauty pages of magazines and the counters of Selfridges. Now they were for my soul not my skin. (p. 247)

Najwa's spiritual positive freedom, which enables her to behave as a freely consenting individual with complete awareness of religious limitations and her capacity to act autonomously, is built on the Quranic liberating discourse. This Quranic liberating discourse, according to Khurshid Ahmed, an Islamic philosopher, demands 'complete submission and obedience to Allah [Who] has prescribed a certain code of life as the correct one', but at the same time has 'conferred on man (sic) freedom of choice as to whether or not he (sic) adopts this code as the actual basis of his (sic) life'.[395] It is 'liberating' because it allows a Muslim to be in charge of one's own life and to control one's own behaviour and decisions, but it is 'difficult' because, as Farid Esack, a Muslim scholar, explains, 'it places an enormous responsibility on our shoulders'.[396] In that sense, Najwa's spiritual freedom is presented as positive, since it allows her to act autonomously, guided by her adherence to the Islamic faith that enables her to recognise '*the boundaries of Allah*' to which she has to '*show restraint*' and '*respect*' (p. 244, original emphasis). Najwa, by deploying this freedom, achieves her desire to have a clear conscience and peace of mind by redeeming her guilt, leading a secure life, and above all acquiring a source of knowledge through which she discovers

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[395] Khurshid Ahmed, 'Islam: Basic Principles and Characteristics', in *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, ed. by Khurshid Ahmed (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 27–44 (pp. 28–29).

[396] Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), pp. 41–42.

herself. In comparison to this positive spiritual freedom, Najwa's unrestricted freedom is depicted as negative because it allows her unlimited different choices, but it does not help her to make the right choices and thus proves to be worthless in removing the self-reproach Najwa feels because of her sexual transgressions: 'guilt didn't go away' (p.175).

Since the focus is on the positive spiritual freedom that Najwa acquires as a result of her adherence to Islam, which pervades all aspects of her new life, Aboulela avoids depicting a mystical or philosophical version of Islam. Instead, she depicts Islam 'as a real part of a complex, lived life' of Najwa.[397] By doing so, Aboulela presents an individualised version of Islam, illustrated in depicting Najwa's religiosity as an outcome of her individual decisions and through the kind of religiosity Najwa embraces.

Najwa's decision to be a pious practising Muslim, who observes her religious faith, dresses in more conservative clothes, prays, fasts, goes to the mosque for the sake of attending religious lessons and aims to perform *hajj*, is a personal decision made by Najwa herself without any kind of pressure from family or society and as an outcome of utilising her positive freedom. Before making use of this positive freedom, Najwa used to think of others, such as her Sudanese community in Khartoum and the university students. She also used to think of herself as a member of a group: one of her family, as a sister to Omar, as a friend to Randa, and as a lover to Anwar. But after deploying her positive freedom that mainly revolves around her capacity to act autonomously, Najwa starts to become aware of herself as an individual and starts to think for herself. Therefore, her

[397] Santesso, *Disorientation*, p. 105.

decision to be religious is based on her awareness of her need to understand her religion and obey her God. That is why, initially, when she was not aware of this need, she rejected the invitation from Wafaa, a religious woman who later becomes Najwa's religious mentor, to accompany her to religious classes at the mosque, attributing her rejection to her heart, which she believes 'was not soft' (p. 179). But once she realises that she is a person with 'no religious upbringing' (p. 239) and recognises her need 'to go back to being safe with God' (p. 242) and her desire 'to be good' like other committed Muslims, she decides to contact Wafaa in order to accept the invitation Wafaa issued two years before (p. 237).

The kind of religiosity Najwa embraces is another way to illustrate the individuality of Islam that is presented in the novel. It is an Islam which focuses, as Nash argues, on 'the category of faith' that stresses Islamic 'values and ethics' and 'personal salvation' above Islamic legislation and political Islam:[398]

> Look at what happened in Sudan, look at human rights, look at freedom of speech and look at terrorism. But that was 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. [. . .] *I wanted a wash, a purge, a restoration of innocence. I yearned to go back to being safe with God.* (pp. 241–242, emphasis added)

These words of Najwa emphasise her need and desire for personal redemption, which is an 'individual' act in Islam because, as Muhammad Asad, an Islamic scholar, states, '[e]very Muslim is his (sic) own redeemer [and] he (sic) bears all

[398] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 147.

possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his (sic) heart'.[399] The text makes it clear that Najwa achieves redemption by herself when she starts observing the values and ethics of her religion, which she rediscovers in a mosque:

> I would leave the mosque refreshed, wide awake and calm, almost happy. Maybe I was happy because I was praying again – not like when I was young when it was just to boost my grade or to complement my fast in Ramadan – but with the intention of never giving it up. I reached out for something new. I reached out for spiritual pleasure and realized that this was what I had envied in the students who lined up to pray on the grass of Khartoum University. This was what I had envied in our gardener reciting the Qur'an, our servants who woke up at dawn. Now when I heard the Qur'an recited, there wasn't a bleakness in me or a numbness, instead I listened and I was alert. (p. 243)

Najwa's success in achieving redemption is marked by the emergence of a new devout personality that enjoys being 'wide awake', 'calm' and 'happy' and feels 'spiritual pleasure', which enables her to transform herself into a different person (p. 243). She is converted from the Najwa who used to feel a bleakness in her heart when she listened to recitation of the Quran into Najwa who listens to it with complete alertness. In other words, she is emancipated from the Najwa who was

[399] There is no "Original Sin" in Islam because this hereditary sin is incompatible with the notion of God's justice, Who would not punish generations of mankind for a sin committed by a remote ancestor. Accordingly, the notion of universal redemption does not exist in Islam. The Quranic verse 39 in surah *An-Najm* (*The Star*) proves that a person is only responsible for his own actions and deeds, 'That man can have nothing but what he strives for' (53.39). See, Muhammad Asad, 'The Spirit of Islam', in *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, ed. by Khurshid Ahmed (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 45–55 (p. 53).

'Westernized', 'detached from Sudanese traditions' and driven by her family and their luxurious and materialistic lifestyle (p. 230), into 'another version of [herself]' (p. 246). The new version of Najwa gives up 'her old, muddled life' and begins 'a new one—but this time a life stripped of privilege, luxury and corruption', and thus she is emancipated from her past and her boyfriend.[400]

This version of individualised and personalised Islam that Aboulela presents is not only compatible with the notion of freedom, but also with feminism. Its compatibility with feminism is demonstrated through making Najwa's religiosity an outcome of the Islamic faith she learns and rediscovers within a transnational multi-ethnic Muslim community established in the 'Regents Park Mosque' in London (p. 65). This community is based on faith and comprises Muslim girls and women of diverse ethnicities. For example, Um Waleed, the teacher in the mosque, is from Syria, Shahinaz, Najwa's close friend in London, is from Pakistan and Wafaa, Najwa's mentor who washes her mother's corpse, is originally from Egypt. This community of Muslim women can be read as an 'Islamic feminist coalition' that reconciles Islam with feminism within a diasporic space.[401] This Islamic feminist coalition provides Najwa, who is disappointed with all the men in her life, including her father, brother and lover, with individual exemplars, all of whom are women whom Najwa admires for their 'individuality and outspokenness' (p. 77). These women, who turn the mosque into a space where they can find rest, meet friends and let their children play, provide Najwa with the solace and secure company she needs:

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[400] Santesso, *Disorientation*, p. 89.

[401] Yousef Awad, *The Arab Atlantic: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-Cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers* (LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), pp. 156–157.

> Shahinaz comes in, carrying her baby, surrounded by her three children. I stand up to hug her, bend down and kiss her children, help them take off their coats. The eldest girl sits away from us with a Game Boy. The two boys run off, the whole mosque is their playground. [. . .] The next few minutes are taken up with more kisses and laughs, squeals of admiration for Shahinaz's baby. He is taken from my arms and passed around. One of the young girls, who is still holding her car keys, says something about "pass the parcel" and laughs. (pp. 75–77)

They also teach Najwa the religious knowledge which she needs on her spiritual journey:

> The lesson has already started; everyone is sitting in a large circle. Um Waleed is sitting on her knees, which makes her a little bit higher than the others; her voice is clear and loud. She is someone else now, someone I love, my teacher, specific in everything she says, sharp and to the point. The Qur'an is open on her lap; she pulls her scarf over her forehead, and pushes back strands of the hair that have escaped. [. . .] 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 – they generate a lot of discussion and sisters, especially the young British-born ones and the converts, like to discuss and give their options. (pp. 78–79)

Feminist congregations that consist of religious women who are actively working in groups to consolidate other women are common in Aboulela's novels. In *The Translator*, a group of women perform the social role of consoling Sammar and supporting her after the death of her husband, Tarig. They 'filled the flat,

cooked for her and each other, watched the ever-wandering child [Sammar's son] so she could cry. They prayed, recited the Qur'an, spent the night on the couch and on the floor. They did not leave her alone' (pp. 8–9). In *Minaret*, the women in the Regents Park Mosque, in addition to their social and educational support, are utilised to highlight the active role played by Islamic feminists in taking on traditionally male roles. This, according to Mahmood's study about the mosque movement, is illustrated in women's participation in discussing theological and doctrinal subjects which have, until recently, been discussed only by men. However, these subjects 'are now debated by ordinary women in the context of mosque lessons modelled to some extent on protocols of public address and modern education (rather than on the traditional Islamic schools, Kuttab)'.[402]

Aboulela's Islamic feminism is revealed, not only through presenting an individualised version of Islam that is in conformity with the notions of both freedom and feminism, but also through the creation of Najwa, whose character is compatible with Aboulela's liberating discourse. Aboulela creates Najwa as an empowered Muslim woman who is endowed with certain constructive characteristics. One of these characteristics is Najwa's strong individual conscience and courage, which are illustrated in her insistence on becoming a better Muslim despite her settlement in a non-Muslim country, where Islamic law cannot be implemented, and surrounded by an Arab Sudanese community that is mostly secular and regards commitment to Islam as backward. For example, Anwar, her boyfriend who belongs to the left-wing Democratic Front, believes that it is 'backward to have faith in anything supernatural: angels, djinns, Heaven, Hell,

[402] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 55.

resurrection', and therefore he 'despise[s] those who needed God', including Najwa (p. 241). Randa, Najwa's Sudanese friend who represents a secular elite position, considers Islamic conservative dress-code an obstacle to social growth and progress: '[w]e're supposed to go forward, not go back to the Middle Ages. How can a woman work dressed like that? How can she work in a lab or play tennis or anything?' (p. 29).

Najwa's determination is another constructive characteristic that is demonstrated through her persistence in taking certain necessary autonomous decisions. While making such decisions, Najwa experiences some inner struggles, of which she says, '[i]t would be difficult for me to pray, to remember the time of the prayer, to wash, to find cloth to cover myself. It would be an uphill climb. I felt a stab of guilt at my laziness but I pushed it away' (p. 161). Santesso attributes this inner struggle to Najwa's 'ambivalent relationship with spirituality' which, according to Santesso, continues 'even after embracing Islam fully'.[403] I agree with Santesso that Najwa undergoes an inner struggle, but I disagree that it reveals a weakness caused by Najwa's ambivalent attitude towards Islam. On the contrary, the inner struggle Najwa goes through while making her self-determined decisions represents a strong aspect of her devout personality. Apparently, Santesso does not know that a Muslim, as Ahmed explains, is required to 'exert one's self to the utmost' in order to 'personally follow the teachings of Islam' and to strive 'to promote the message of Islam' through one's words and actions.[404] While doing so, a Muslim undergoes some struggles that are meant, as Asad explains, to strengthen a Muslim internally in order to reach

[403] Santesso, *Disorientation*, p. 92.

[404] Khurshid Ahmed, 'Islam: The Essentials', in *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, ed. by Khurshid Ahmed (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 21–26 (pp. 23–24)

'individual perfection', which is supposed to be achieved by making full use of all the worldly possibilities of one's earthly individual life.[405] This perfection is 'purely individual' as it focuses on 'the development of the already existing, positive qualities of the individual'.[406]

Najwa clarifies her condition as a Muslim who never reaches 'an end' but is in a state of constant struggle to accomplish 'something grander, more potent and enhanced' in a future life (p. 189). Najwa passes through this state of constant struggle in all her personal and self-determined decisions, including terminating her relationship with Anwar, fasting and praying, but it is more obvious in her adoption of an Islamic dress-code. The last decision, in particular, requires Najwa to exert herself constantly in order to maintain Islamic standards of dress and improve her modesty, a quality that already exists but requires development. The young Najwa in Sudan was inclined to modesty, as exemplified in her admiration for devout Muslim girls with 'modest grace [and] of the tobes [. . .] that covered their arms and hair' (p. 14) and her 'shy[ness]' while swimming in front of men, even when she was wearing her 'black full-piece' (p. 41).[407] In London, when she attempts to dress in a more conservative way, she is required to struggle against her 'body's refusal to obey' (p. 235). Najwa's body remains

[405] Muhammad Asad, 'The Spirit of Islam', in *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, ed. by Khurshid Ahmed (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), pp. 45–55 (p. 50).

[406] Ibid., pp. 50–51.

[407] Interestingly, Aboulela copies her own experience with hijab. Aboulela acknowledges that she wore her hijab when she was studying at the London School of Economics. Her decision came late after many years of hesitation, during which she used to gaze with longing and admiration at the female university students in Khartoum who used to wear headscarves. Aboulela admits that she was hesitant to follow the example of those religiously committed girls and wear a headscarf, despite her conviction of its religious importance, because she was afraid a headscarf might make her 'look ugly', and therefore her 'progressive friends would make fun of me'. See Leila Aboulela, 'Restraint? Sure. Oppression? Hardly', *Washington Post.com*, 22 (2007) <http://www.jammat.org/PDF/Restraint.pdf>.

intransigent, forcing her to strive hard to turn every disappointing attempt into a positive position, in which she acts determinedly to find other options.

In her first attempt to adopt an Islamic dress-code, Najwa, who is visiting the Regents Park Mosque for the first time, wears her ‘most modest dress’ that has long sleeves but only reaches her knees (p. 237). Thus her legs, which are shown while Najwa is bending in prayer, compromise Najwa’s attempt to be decent and modest. Najwa’s bare legs compel her to feel ashamed of herself in front of other Muslim women, so she ‘couldn’t meet [their] eyes’ (p. 238). Nevertheless, her feeling of ‘shame’, which Najwa sees as a step that is ‘needed’ to realise that she is ‘far away and just taking the first step in coming here’, does not stop Najwa from fulfilling her decision (p. 238). Therefore, she decides later to cover her hair with a headscarf, and this time her hair, which she used to take care of in Khartoum by making sure it was ‘wavy and not crinkling up into curls’ (p. 42), is unmanageable and resisting her attempts to cover it, making her headscarf look obtrusive:

> I stood in front of the mirror and put the scarf over my hair. My curls resisted; the material squashed them down. They escaped, springing around my forehead, above my ears. I pushed them back, turned my head sideways to look at the back and it was an angular hump, a bush barely covered with cloth. (p. 245)

Najwa’s resistant hair makes her realise that she is ‘not ready for this step’ (p. 245), and therefore she postpones it, pending the guidance of her religious mentor, Wafaa, who assists Najwa and teaches her:

> Wafaa took me shopping for my headscarves [. . .] Back in her house, in her bedroom, with her daughters as audience, she showed me how to tie each one, what folding I needed to do beforehand, where to put the pins. [. . .] Where did she come from, this woman? It was her role to shroud my mother for her grave and teach me how to cover my hair for the rest of my life. (pp. 246–247)

These processes of struggling and resisting her body show Najwa's determination to fulfil her decision to adopt an Islamic dress-code by degrees, 'patiently as if they are stages to a final destination yet to be reached', and this final destination is achieving her own spiritual perfection regarding improving her modesty.[408] Najwa wins her struggle against her inflexible body because of the 'strategy of resistance' she follows against her body and which, according to Marta Cariello, allows Najwa to assert agency over her 'corporal schema'.[409]

In short, Aboulela manages to assert the validity of an Islamic world view for women by confronting the stereotyped assumption that Islam is a violent religion that oppresses women. She manages to do so through the character of Najwa, who is presented as testament to the fact that being a Muslim woman can lead to a liberating consciousness. Aboulela illustrates this liberating consciousness through depicting Najwa as a character who has a determined personality, gains her positive spiritual freedom and then invests it to achieve her

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[408] Shirin Edwin, 'Veiling the Obvious: African Feminist Theory and the Hijab in the African Novel', *Third World Quarterly*, 29.1 (2008),199–214 (p. 210).

[409] Marta Cariello, 'Searching for Room to Move: Producing and Negotiating Space in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret*', in *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature 115*, ed. by Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 339–350 (pp. 341–345).

spiritual goals and guide her freely willed decisions in accordance with her own individual needs and capacities. Such investment in positive spiritual freedom is made possible by presenting an individualised and personalised version of Islam that is in accordance with freedom and feminism, as it 'provides Najwa with peace, spiritual fulfilment, a social life, a new identity'.[410]

### *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015)

In her latest novel, *The Kindness of Enemies*, Aboulela transfers her focus from exploring the theme of freedom in relation to Muslim women to exploring Islamic jihad. Aboulela's engagement with the issue of Islamic jihad is related to her stand as an Islamic feminist, because jihad is intricately connected to the issue of women's status and treatment in Islam. In fact, in both cases, puritans profoundly manipulate some religious principles in order to justify their extreme acts theologically.[411]

In her discussion of Islamic jihad, Aboulela attempts to compare it with acts of terrorism practised by militant puritan groups. This comparison is made through juxtaposing two different stories. The first story is a third-person narrative that depicts the jihad experience of the historical figure of Shamil, Imam of Chechnya and Dagestan, who is 'leading the tribes of the Caucasus to fight the armies of the Russian tsar' in the nineteenth century, to be precise from 1839 to 1869.[412] The second story is a first-person narrative set in contemporary Scotland

[410] Hasan Majed, 'Islam and Muslim Identities in Four Contemporary British Novels' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sunderland, 2012), p. 220.

[411] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 250.

[412] Leila Aboulela, *The Kindness of Enemies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2015), p. 18. Further references to this book are given after quotations in the main text.

and in which the narration of Dr Natasha “Hussein” Wilson, a female protagonist-narrator, clarifies the difference between Islamic jihad and terrorist action. Natasha is a young lecturer of History whose academic research about Shamil leads her to visit the house of her student, Osama Raja, also known as Oz, in order to see Shamil’s sword that ‘was used for jihad’ (p. 6) and which has been kept in Oz’s family ‘for generations’ (p. 3). Natasha’s narration introduces Oz as a foil to Shamil. Though he is not a terrorist, Oz is depicted as a young British Muslim university student who suffers from a cultural misfit, which makes him feel tormented between Islamophobic hostility of the West and the radicality of some puritan Muslims. This situation compels Oz to want to pronounce his Muslim identity in the Islamophobic environment he lives in and ‘to be assertive enough not to mind [his] name’, on the one hand, and ‘not to care what others [puritan and conservative Muslims] think about [his] mother’s job’, on the other (p. 43). It also leads him to have a confused sense of the issue of jihad. This confusion motivates him to discuss the issue with both his lecturer, Natasha, and his mother, Malak, and to do a series of investigations, including one about the weapons used in the classical Islamic era, which leads to his arrest on suspicion that he is committing a terrorist act but he is not found guilty. Through listening to conversations between Oz and Malak, who is descended from Shamil, whom she knows a lot about his jihad experience, and discussing Oz’s situation with Malak, Natasha gets solid information about jihad and how it is different from terrorist actions, which she, as a narrator, delivers to the readers.

Aboulela introduces the issue of jihad in a conversation between Oz and his mother, and this is overheard by Natasha who is visiting them. In this conversation, Malak insists that ‘[j]ihad is an internal and spiritual struggle’, but

Oz objects '[l]imiting jihad to an internal struggle', affirming that '[i]f someone hits us, we need to hit back' (p. 8). Malak agrees that fighting can be a form of jihad but at the same time she asserts that 'not every Muslim war is a jihad', particularly those 'suicide bombers [. . .] attacking civilians' (p. 10). The discussion between Oz and Malak is closed down by their contradictory views about the purpose of jihad. Oz is convinced that the aim of jihad is 'getting us power over our enemies', while Malak, who opposes Oz, declares that the purpose of jihad is 'for upholding the values of Allah' but 'it's not for scoring political points, it's not for land, it's not for rights, it's not for autonomy', and so '[j]ihad needs an imam and there is no imam now', thus she believes that 'the door of jihad [fighting] is closed' (p. 10). This conversation, in which Oz and his mother have different viewpoints about the meaning of jihad and its purpose, serves Aboulela in presenting two distinctive forms of Islamic jihad, which she later manages to distinguish from terrorist acts.

The first kind of jihad is the one Malak refers to as 'an internal and spiritual struggle' (p. 8). This kind of jihad is regarded as Quranic jihad because it is mentioned in the Quran 36 times, and it constitutes an internal 'moral-ethical struggle, such as the jihad of the soul, the tongue, or the pen [. . .] and so on'.[413] It is also 'the greatest form of jihad' because it demands 'striving to serve the purposes of God on this earth', such as 'cleansing oneself from vanity and pettiness, pursuing knowledge, curing the ill, feeding the poor, and standing up for truth and justice, even at great personal risk'.[414] Because of the importance of

[413] Asma Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 20.1 (2003), 46–62 (p. 47).

[414] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 221.

this form of jihad, Aboulela depicts Imam Shamil practising it on various occasions. Shamil's donations to 'the beggars', whom he 'never turn[s] away empty-handed' though he does not have much (p. 298), and his attempt to 'fetch the rarest herbs' to cure the sick son of his Russian captives, who are supposed to be his enemies (p. 159), are examples of Shamil's internal jihad. It is also clearly exemplified in Shamil's attempt to pursue both spiritual and physical knowledge, which requires him to go through a long process of internal jihad, during which he has learnt 'how to bow his will [. . .] to the will of Allah' (p. 18). This long process of internal jihad to obtain knowledge is described by Shamil's spiritual teacher, Sheikh Jamal el-Din, who tells him that he 'had fight in [his] soul', an internal fight that motivates him to be 'studious and patient' with 'time for books', and 'energetic and sturdy' with 'time for athletics' (p. 61).[415]

The other kind of jihad is mentioned by Oz when he says, '[i]f someone hits us, we need to hit back' (p. 8). This kind of jihad is referred to in the Quran as *qital*, which is equivalent to fighting and warfare and their derivations, but never as jihad until medieval Muslim jurists 'formulated the classical doctrine of jihad-as-war'.[416] This jihad-as-war, as it is demonstrated in the contradictory conversation between Oz and Malak, is puzzling and controversial. Its controversial nature is due to the fact that the legacy of this sort of jihad is neither simple nor straightforward. There are various diverse authorities and voices that have participated in producing it through 'interpreting and applying the principles

[415] Aboulela has already depicted this form of internal jihad extensively in *The Translator* and *Minaret*, where her female protagonists, through utilising their positive freedom, willingly strive hard to purify their souls and behave in devout pious ways.

[416] Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (pp. 47–49).

of sacred texts in specific historical and political contexts'.[417] Aboulela, in her novel, tackles two contemporary voices that are responsible for the controversy about jihad-as-war, and these voices belong to puritan and moderate Muslims. The puritanical voice is associated in the text with 'radical Islamist organisations', exemplified by 'al-Qaeda', which is identified by Malak as 'a modern phenomenon' (p. 215). This puritanical voice is contrasted with that of moderates, represented in the novel by the historical figure of Shamil Imam of Dagestan and Chechnya, a Muslim leader who implements a 'type of jihad [that] is different from the horrible crimes of al-Qaeda', as Malak explains (p. 9). Despite the fact that the character of Imam Shamil is depicted as a Muslim leader who struggles internally against his whims in order to achieve personal perfection, Aboulela contrasts him with puritan Muslims with regard to two Quranic principles.[418] These Quranic principles are related to defensive warfare and seeking peace, which are taken seriously and interpreted reasonably by moderate Muslims, but violated and manipulated by militant puritans.

The first Quranic principle that Aboulela presents through Shamil's jihad-as-war experience has to do with the Quranic command that forbids '[a]ggression and the initiation of combat without any valid reason' and limits warfare only to cases of defence, such as 'protect[ing] the community' and 'free[ing] isolated

[417] Esposito, *Unholy War*, p. 64.

[418] Aboulela paints a realistic picture of Muslims and avoids idolising them. Her realistic presentation is demonstrated in her portraying Muslim characters who are always imperfect but struggling to reach personal perfection. It is also clarified in relation to Islamic jihad, which she depicts as not always complying with Islamic principles and values. An example of this is illustrated in the result of Oz's investigation about the weapons used in the classical Islamic era, which he finds 'violate some of the Sharia's rules' that state 'no human being should use fire on another human being' since 'it is only Allah's prerogative to burn sinners in Hell' (p. 12). The rule Oz mentions here is one from the strict Prophetic tradition of jihad, which forbids 'using fire or flooding to destroy the enemy'. See, Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (p. 51).

believers from persecution'.[419] Shamil's jihad-as-war experience is presented as compatible with this Quranic principle, since it is not an offensive holy war that is propagated in the name of God against non-Muslims.[420] On the contrary, his fighting is depicted as a war that is meant for a just cause, which is to defend and protect himself and his villagers who are victimised by Russian 'invaders' who conquered and besieged their village and 'destroyed crops [and] the forests in order to build their military roads' (p. 24). Shamil's defensive fight is accepted by Malak, who asserts that '[e]very fight Shamil fought was on the defense' and because he 'was protecting his villages against Russian attack' (p. 9). Oz also affirms that Shamil fought in order to defend Caucasians from the oppression of Russian colonialism, which places Shamil in a position similar to '[m]ost fighters [who fought] against European Imperialism' (p. 9). Natasha compares Shamil's struggle to protect his land and people to the struggle of Native Americans, stating that such a comparison 'had been made before by sympathetic historians' who present 'Caucasus [. . .] as Russia's wild west' and Shamil 'as the noble savage' or 'as magnificent and inscrutable as a Native American chief' (p. 12).

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[419] Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (p. 48). Barlas has concluded this principle from Quranic verses 39-40 in surah *Al-Hajj* (*The Pilgrimage*): 'To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged – and verily, Allah is Most powerful for their aid. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right – (for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is Allah." Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His (cause) – for, verily, Allah is Full of Strength, Exalted in Might (Able to enforce His Will). (22.39-40)'.

[420] The term 'Holy war' is not an expression that is mentioned in the Quran or in other Islamic sacred texts and it does not exist in Islam because, as Abou El Fadl explains, Islam lacks anything like the institution of papal authority that 'could make determinations on the divine status of a war' or 'could decisively and conclusively award a military force the status of being Crusaders or pilgrims in God's army and guarantee redemption to these soldiers'. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 222.

Despite Aboulela's emphasis on the justice of the cause Shamil is fighting for, she depicts him as committing a sort of transgression in the incident of attacking the Tsinondali estate that belongs to Princess Anna and capturing the princess and her children, whom he intends to exchange for his kidnapped son, Jamaleldin. Shamil's intention in capturing the princess and her children is represented as a just reaction to the Russians' treachery towards him during his negotiation for peace with them fourteen years before. During this negotiation, Shamil agrees to 'surrender on their own terms' (p. 29) and presents his son Jamaleldin 'as a hostage', a thing that has been demanded by the Russians as 'proof of Shamil's good intentions' (p. 22). But the Russians stop the negotiation and 'act swiftly and cruelly, dispatching Jamaleldin', who 'should be handed over [. . .] like any other hostage voluntarily' by the end of the negotiation (p. 30). However, the act of capturing Princess Anna and her children is represented as a thinly veiled transgression, in which Shamil does not observe the Quranic conditions of defensive fighting, which includes that fighting should be restrained to target only 'the group of people who invade and rob Muslims of their rights or land', and it should be proportional so as not to inflict 'more damage than is necessary to terminate the threat'.[421] Shamil, when he captures the princess and her two children, violates these conditions of defensive fighting, as he targets defenceless and unarmed civilians who have nothing to do with either Jamaleldin's kidnapping or the war between Russia and the Caucasians. In addition, his capturing of the princess causes unnecessary damage that is demonstrated in the loss of the princess's baby daughter, who dies when

[421] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 241.

Shamil's soldiers are trying to escape from Russians' bullets that are fired at them.

Presenting Shamil's capturing the princess and her children as a kind of transgression enables Aboulela to demonstrate how Shamil's negligence to observe the conditions of defensive warfare transforms his fighting for a just cause into unjust fighting that infuriates his spiritual teacher, Sheikh Jamal el-Din, who considers it an act that has 'no blessing' (p. 160). It also allows Aboulela to shed light on how this Quranic principle is exploited by militant puritan groups who use it as a justification to avenge historical injustices and grievances in open warfare that targets non-combatants all around the globe, ignoring that defensive fighting should be proportional and restrained.[422]

[422] Militant puritans claim that they engage in defensive fighting because they cannot use offensive fighting as a cover for their terrorist acts. Offensive warfare in Islam, though it is not Quranic, was formulated and strictly regulated by classical Muslim jurists who relied on Prophetic precedents. Among these regulations are the demand to declare fighting and the prevention of destroying places of worship; cutting down orchards; poisoning water supplies and killing non-combatants, such as women, children, priests and people of advanced age, all of which are difficult to be fulfilled in terrorist actions. See, Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (pp. 49–51).
Offensive warfare was formulated by classical Muslim jurists, who wrote during the formative years of Islamic law, from approximately the ninth to the tenth centuries. Those classical jurists legislated offensive warfare as a political requirement 'to ensure the supremacy of Muslims' by interpreting sacred texts in light of competitive international relations determined by the historical circumstances of the medieval period, when 'nations regularly invaded each other in a relentless competition for dominance'. They foregrounded their legislation on the concept of dividing the world into two camps, one in *dar al-Islam* (the land of Islam) and the other in *dar al-harb* (the land of war) or at times *dar al-kufr* (the land of non-Muslims), both of which were in a permanent state of war. However, with the progress of Muslim history, many Muslim jurists, particularly those who wrote after the twelfth century, regarded this concept of dividing the world into two camps in an everlasting war as untenable and refuted it on the basis that the act of disbelieving in Islam 'was not a sufficient cause for war because by itself it did not justify the termination of life'. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, pp. 223–230.
Historically, this concept of dividing the world into two camps in everlasting war was identical to Western Christendom, which, according to Geoffrey Hindley, was a legal and theological concept defined by the papal authority in Rome and played a crucial role in the Crusades and the military missionising that were sanctioned by the pope. Hindley asserts that military missionising was a polite expression created by historians in order to describe the widespread practice of forcing pagan and heathen tribes to convert to Christianity for the purpose of extending the lands of Western Christendom. For more details, see Geoffrey Hindley, *The Crusades: Islam and Christianity in the Struggle for World Supremacy* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2003), pp. 159–167.

In addition to the Quranic principle that restricts warfare to cases of defence, Aboulela presents another Quranic principle through Shamil's jihad-as-war experience. This principle has to do with the divine command to 'end hostilities if the aggression ceases' and to desist from further acts of violence if enemies refrain.[423] Shamil's jihad-as-war experience is depicted as consistent with this Quranic principle. To ensure this consistency, Aboulela portrays Shamil as a Muslim leader who has no desire for violence and, therefore, makes decisions that lead to peace. These decisions are exemplified in his restraining from 'blood feuds [with those] which [he] repressed', among the peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan, as his teacher affirms (p. 304). They are also exemplified in Shamil's choice of immigration in order to avoid fighting the people of Gimrah, whom he left because he was 'unable to uphold the faith among [them]', following the example of the 'Prophet Muhammad' who 'left the best of cities, Makkah, when it was no longer easy for him to maintain his faith there' (p. 25).[424]

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[423] Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (pp. 48–49). Barlas has concluded this principle from Quranic 190-193 in surah *Al-Baqarah* (*The Heifer*): 'Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have Turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith. But if they cease, Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression (2.190-193)'. She also has concluded it from Quranic verse 61 in surah *Al-Anfāl* (*The Spoils of War*): 'But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (all things) (8.61)' and verse 90 in surah *Al-Nisā'* (*The Women*): 'Except those who join a group between whom and you there is a treaty (of peace), or those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. If Allah had pleased, He could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you: therefore, if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (guarantees of) peace, then Allah Hath opened no way for you (to war against them) (4.90)'.

[424] Early Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad, in the early stages of his prophethood, endured oppression at the hands of non-Muslims in Makkah for many years, but they were not allowed to respond violently or to take military action until Allah gave them specific permission. However, they were allowed to seek sanctuary with al-Najashi, the Christian king of Abyssinia, and then they were ordered to migrate to Madinah. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 238.

Shamil's inclination for peace in his war with the Russians is illustrated in his attempts to end the war by submitting to them, despite the difficulty of this choice: Shamil, in fact, wants 'to fight till the end' in order to die defending his faith and land and achieve martyrdom (p. 33). Submission to the Russians makes him feel 'like a discarded rag' as he is deprived of both 'military success' and 'the blessing of martyrdom', but he attempts to surrender to the Russians twice for the sake of preserving the lives of his people (p. 34). His first attempt occurs during the Russians' siege of Akhulgo in 1839, when Shamil attempts to negotiate for peace and to 'surrender on their own terms' (p. 29) in order to save the besieged 'men, women and children [who are] slowly starving' (p. 22). His second attempt takes place in Gunaib in 1859, when he is betrayed by some of his naibs who steal 'his gunpowder and wagons' and give the Russians 'direct access to Gunaib' (p. 293). This time, Shamil aims to surrender in order to protect the lives of those who refuse to accept his 'permission to leave Gunaib' and prefer to stay fighting with him (p. 299). Thus, Shamil, who is forced to choose between his 'unconditional surrender' or 'the death of the whole village, women and children included', chooses to surrender, so that he can save the lives of his villagers (p. 293). Shamil's commitment to ending the war peacefully is intensified by contrasting it with the Russians' pursuit of violence and domination. The Russians' refusal to accept Shamil's first attempt to surrender and their decision to hit Shamil and his villagers with 'their greatest force' with the aim of accomplishing 'a complete collapse of Akhulgo' and 'crush[ing] the resistance once and for all' is an example of their preference for violence (p. 29). Their acceptance of Shamil's final surrender in Gunaib is due to a change in their military politics that coincides with the appointment of the 'new Russian leader,

Field-Marshal Bariatinsky' (p. 291), who wants 'no more challenges', and therefore, he demands Shamil's submission as a prerequisite for 'the whole [of] Caucasus to submit behind him' (p. 295).

Shamil's tendency to peace continues after his surrender and it is illustrated in his attempt to coexist in a world that is dominated by non-Muslims, a coexistence which he makes possible through forgiveness and cooperation with the Russians. Shamil forgives the Russians, particularly those who treat him well and who are 'neither angry nor intent on harming him', such as Runovsky, his 'well-mannered and sensitive' Russian minder (p. 297), the 'respectful' 'officers and soldiers who had served in the Caucasus' (p. 298) and 'Jamaleldin's childhood friends', to all of whom Shamil owes 'gratitude', as they 'could not be Shamil's enemies', as he himself states (p. 302). Shamil also cooperates with the Russian government in order to put an end to war and destruction. That is why he agrees to command 'every fighter in the Caucasus [. . .] to lay down his arms' and to 'swear allegiance to Emperor Alexander II', he but refuses to 'support the new policy of enforced mass deportations of the highlanders, robbing them of their ancestral lands' and practising an internal jihad of the tongue before the Russians' oppressive power (p. 303). To heighten Shamil's peaceful coexistence, the text puts him in contrast with his wife, Zeidat, who could not bear hearing the 'church bells' (p. 300), claiming that she is 'proud of my heritage' (p. 301). But she is reminded by Shamil that her Islamic 'heritage should have given [her] more sensitive ears', and she should take the church bells as a 'remind[er] of Allah' and interpret their 'ding ding' sound as 'Haqq! Haqq! [Truth Truth]' (p. 301).

Presenting Shamil's peace-making efforts enables Aboulela to demonstrate one of the most important differences between moderates and

militant puritans. This difference has to do with the reactions of Muslims in case of disempowerment, when moderate Muslims would act in a humble and modest way while puritan Muslims would behave in a violent and arrogant way. Shamil, as a moderate Muslim, when he is disempowered by the Russians, chooses to act modestly and pacifically, accepting his 'defeat graciously' and his 'surrender' as a sort of 'humility' (p. 313). In contrast to this moderate and humble reaction of Shamil, militant puritans or 'hate preachers', as Malak denominates them, would behave violently as warmongers, encouraging 'the young men of this day and age, [telling them] "go out and make jihad"' (p. 215). This violent reaction is also described by Natasha, who explains that 'modern-day Islamic terrorism [. . .] promoted suicide bombings instead of accepting in Shamil's words, "that martyrdom is Allah's prerogative to bestow"' (p. 310).

In order to clarify this difference, Aboulela connects Shamil's violent reaction towards Princess Anna, which is illustrated in capturing her and her children, with arrogance. That is why Sheikh Jamal el-Din attributes Shamil's capturing of the Princess to the 'new arrogance' Shamil has developed, an arrogance that drives him to react to his son's kidnapping in a haughty and violent manner using his power against the unarmed and defenceless princess and her children (p. 159). This association between arrogance and violent reaction allows Aboulela to allude to the puritans' attempt to compensate for their disempowerment in the modern age, at the hands of interventionist foreign powers, by adopting a 'supremacist ideology' that is exposed in their 'arrogant symbolic displays of power' against non-Muslims, whom puritans prefer to destroy rather than see them dominate this world.[425] This arrogant reaction is

[425] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 95.

important for Aboulela to allude to because it is systematically utilised against women by puritans who believe that empowering women 'is part of the Western culture invasion of Muslim lands', and therefore, they consider degrading and marginalising women, 'a [supposed] cultural victory' that compensates for their political defeat.[426]

By presenting the two forms of Islamic jihad, Aboulela manages to clarify that Islamic jihad, whether it is an internal and spiritual struggle or jihad-as-war, is different from terrorist acts performed by militant puritan groups, whose members neglect Quranic principles in relation to defensive warfare and seeking peace. Their negligence of these principles is critiqued by the character of Malak in the following quotation, which is short but loaded with complicated criticism:

> Unlike Shamil and his highlanders, radical Islamist organisations were inspired by Hegel and Marx, their inner working ticked along the lines of Trotskyist parties in their suppression of dissent and critical opinion. No wonder that the founders of Political Islam, those revolutionary elite who turned their backs on tradition and worked towards a perfect society, never took Shamil as a role model [. . .] with no patience for Shamil's traditional spirituality and utter contempt for the choices he made at the end of his career. (p. 215)

In this quotation, Malak critiques the 'founders of Political Islam' for 'turn[ing] their backs on tradition' (p. 215). This criticism can be understood in light of another quotation, in which Malak blames 'Wahabis and Salafists' for altering the meaning

[426] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 256.

of Islamic jihad and making it 'synonymous with terrorism' (p. 8). That is to say, Malak attributes the alteration that occurs in the meaning of Islamic jihad to the theological creeds that shape the religious world view of puritans and extremists, precisely, the creeds of Wahhabism and Salafism. In fact, Wahhabism and Salafism are two contemporary theological orientations that combined in the 1970s to form 'the theology of the puritanical movement of today' and to which 'most extremist Muslims belong', including members of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.[427]

Malak's major critique of puritan Muslims, which she specifies as 'the founders of Political Islam', is 'turn[ing] their backs on tradition' (p. 215). This

[427] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, pp. 80,100. Wahhabism refers to a theological orientation that started in the eighteenth-century in the Arabian peninsula and was named after its founder, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1206/1792). The main principal of Wahhabism is returning to what they claimed to be a real and true Islam, which is believed to be entirely reclaimable in strict adherence to the instructions of the Quran and *Sunna*. However, the true Islam Wahhabis have claimed to return to is just mere cultural practices of Bedouin life, which they have equated with the one and only true Islam. That is to say, Wahhabism, for its adherents, is not a school of thought within Islam, but Islam itself, and the only possible Islam. Therefore, they have established a substantial legacy of intolerance against other theological schools of thought, particularly, those belonging to Sufi orders and the Shiite sect, which Wahhabis have considered heretical innovations. However, because Wahhabism is local, its adherents have associated themselves with Salafism, which was founded a century later after Wahhabism, particularly, because its methodology is to some extent similar to that of Wahhabism as it aims to follow the precedents of the Prophet and his Rightly Guided Companions and their successors (*al-salaf al-salih*). That is to say, Wahhabism spread in the Muslim world under the banner of Salafism that was associated with the Wahhabi creed in the 1970s. Salafism was founded in the late nineteenth century with liberal reformers such as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1323/1905), Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1314/1897), Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1354/1935), Muhammad al-Shawkani (d. 1250/1834) and Jalal al-Sanani (1225/1810). Those liberal reformers were not anti-Western as they attempted to project contemporary institutions such as democracy onto original sacred texts. They were far more tolerant than Wahhabis with mysticism and other Islamic schools of thought. They were also not anti-intellectual as they aimed to reinterpret sacred sources in light of modern demands without restraining themselves with traditional interpretative precedents of earlier Muslims. However, by the mid-twentieth century, Salafism, which was initially promising because of its liberal engagement with reformative interpretations of sacred sources, degenerated. Their degeneration was illustrated in practising the act of *takfir* (accusing Muslims of being apostates and heretics), an act that is incompatible with the Islamic tradition of tolerance. It was also demonstrated in attributing political sovereignty to God, which is factually impossible, politically naive and theologically inconsistent with Islamic law. For detailed information about Wahhabism and Salafism, see the chapter entitled 'The Rise of the Early Puritans' in Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, pp. 45–94.

critique targets Wahhabi ignorance of a rich and cumulative juristic tradition.[428] This ignorance is deliberate because it is based on Wahhabi rejection of 'the well-established schools of jurisprudential thought' and 'contemporaneous jurists', particularly, those who are 'not strict literalists' and those who are suspected of using 'reason in legal interpretation' or turning 'rationalist methods of analysis into [. . .] interpretive approaches'.[429] Wahhabis have also rejected all forms of 'mysticism, and sectarianism within Islam', including Sufi orders and the Shiite sect, all of which are inaccurately considered heretical innovations that crept into Islam due to the influence of non-Arab nations, such as Persia and Turkey.[430] The text refers to this problematic relationship between puritans and Sufis. Oz's female friend explains to Natasha about the theological hatred puritans have for 'Sufism', saying that '[t]hey hate the Sufis' and their 'veneration of its saints and the belief in their mystical powers' (p. 208). Rejecting opposing jurists and denouncing them as heretics is crucial for Wahhabis. It removes any psychological barrier to violating the lives or memories of such jurists and justifies an inhumane legacy of hatred, fanaticism and intolerance against those who follow an opposing juristic school and who are perceived by Wahhabis as

[428] The critique against Wahhabi ignorance might target the founder of Wahhabism, Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. Abou El Fadl reports that Abd al-Wahhab's own brother, Sulayman bin Abd al-Wahhab, and the Hanbali scholar Muhammad bin Humaydi al-Najdi accused Abd al-Wahhab of being 'not a good student of Islamic jurisprudence and [. . .] arrogantly defiant toward his teachers', see, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 56. This critique can also be taken as being against Osama bin Laden, the founder of al-Qaeda, who was described by Arab Afghans as 'neither intellectual nor articulate about what needed to be done in the Muslim world [and] always in need of mentors who knew more about Islam and the modern world than he did'. See, Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2010), p. 136.

[429] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 48.

[430] Wahhabis have rejected Sufism for they believe it is 'a Persian import' and disbelieve in 'the intercession of saints and the veneration of gravesites' as they consider it 'a Turkish import', as Abou El Fadl explains. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 46.

apostate, idolaters or unbelievers who, thus, must be countered by jihad, which becomes lawful.[431]

This critique of 'turn[ing] their backs on tradition' is also directed towards the eagerness of Salafis 'to throw off the shackles of tradition and to engage in the rethinking of Islamic solutions in light of modern demands', without being 'bound to the interpretive precedents of earlier Muslim generations'.[432] This eagerness compels Salafis to 'engage in a practice known as *talfiq*, in which they mix and match various opinions from the past in order to emerge with novel approaches to problems'.[433] As a result, Salafis ends up adopting an 'apologetic literature' that requires them to emphasise the compatibility of Islam with modernity, and to make pronouncements in relation to issues such as women's rights and democracy, without 'critically understand[ing] either modernity or the Islamic tradition itself'.[434] Their negligence of critical evaluation of Islamic juristic tradition leads Salafis to constantly redefine the creed of Salafism in response to shifting political demands, and consequently, to transform its spiritual principles into a political reactive power engaged in a world struggle for self-determination and identity.[435] It also leads Salafis to borrow 'many concepts from Western political sciences (ideology, revolution, political party)', and then twist some

[431] Esposito, *Unholy War*, p. 6. The Wahhabi massacres that occurred in in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against Muslims belonging to Sufi orders and the Shiite sect, and which resulted in slaughtering large numbers of Sunnis in Makkah and Madinah and Shiite in Karbala (in modern Iraq), are examples of Wahhabi fanaticism and hatred of other Muslims, whom they accuse of apostacy, idolatry and unbelief in order to legalise killing them under the name of jihad. See, Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 64.

[432] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, pp. 75–76.

[433] Ibid., p. 77.

[434] Ibid., pp. 77–78.

[435] Ibid., p. 78.

Quranic terms in order to give them a modern sense.[436] That is why Malak mentions that they are 'inspired by Hegel and Marx' and their inner workings tick 'along the lines of Trotskyist parties in their suppression of dissent and critical opinion' (p. 215).[437]

This ignorance of the founders of political Islam of Islamic heritage and tradition is contrasted with the religious knowledge of Imam Shamil, who is portrayed as a 'scholarly and disciplined' Muslim leader (p. 9), whose scholarship is acquired as a result of his living 'the austere life of a student, learning the Qur'an' (p. 18). Shamil's scholarly discipline is attributed to 'the mystic teachings of the Sufi sheikhs' (p. 61), from whom Shamil gains his knowledge and inclination to peace and mercy, particularly from 'Sheikh Jamal el-Din al Husayni, the gentle Sufi scholar who preferred books to war' (p. 18). This contrast between Shamil and the founders of political Islam allows Aboulela to shed light on the disagreement between moderates and puritans concerning their divergent visions of jihad. This disagreement, according to Malak, takes shape in the aggressive attitude the founders of political Islam display towards Shamil and their 'contempt for the choices he made at the end of his career [as a Muslim leader and a mujahid]' (p. 215). Oz's female friend elaborates on this

[436] Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004), pp. 247–248.

[437] Possibly, the critique of Salafi ignorance targets the Salafi militant jihad ideology of Egypt's Sayyed Qutb, who is known as the godfather to all militants since he has inspired and influenced many militant puritans. Qutb is remembered as a martyr of the Islamic revival as he was executed by the suppressive regime of Jamal Abdel Nasser, not for his violent acts, but for his political ideology. Qutb was a Salafi thinker, who followed Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, in dividing Muslim societies into true faithful believers and those who are not, and claimed that sovereignty belongs to God in the true Islamic state, which must be governed by Islamic law. Qutb was similar to bin Abd al-Wahhab as they were not trained as jurists and their knowledge of Islamic jurisprudential tradition was minimal; however, unlike bin Abd al-Wahhab, Qutb was influenced by Western thinkers concerning his idealistic utopian Islamic state, as exemplified in his famous book *Milestones*. For more details, see Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, pp. 81–83.

disagreement, explaining to Natasha that it is renewed in ‘modern times’ with the emergence of ‘[p]olitical Islam [that] embraced transnationalism and activism’ and perceived ‘Sufis [as] not only passive and traditional, but often, also, reactionary’ (p. 208).

Aboulela invests her differentiation between moderates and puritans regarding jihad, highlighting their difference in relation to women’s treatment. And again, Aboulela sees Shamil as a representative of moderates and then contrasts him with puritans. For this purpose, Shamil is depicted as a man who treats his wives gently and respectfully, despite being polygamous. His Christian wife, Chuanat, for example, affirms to Princess Anna, who is wondering how Chuanat can bear sharing her husband with other women, that Shamil ‘is gentle with us’ as he ‘has never raised a hand against any of us’ (p. 151) and ‘treats us all equally’ (p. 117). She also tells Princess Anna about Shamil’s respect for her, despite being of a different faith, saying that Shamil has ‘never asked me to change my religion’ and given her the title of ‘Chuanat, my Christian wife’, making ‘everyone say it, like him, with respect’ (p. 150). Ameena, Shamil’s former young wife, tells Princess Anna how he is ‘gentle’ in offering her ‘freedom’ to divorce when she tells him that she is ‘not happy’ with him and prefers to ‘be with someone [her] age’ (p. 191). Anna observes Shamil’s genteel and well-mannered treatment towards his wives when visiting one of them, who keeps him knocking on her door, waiting for her permission ‘to let him in’ for a long time, without ‘fidget[ing] or stamp[ing] his feet’ or showing any expression of impatience on his face (p. 184). Anna, herself, experiences Shamil’s polite and respectful treatment to her as a woman, which is exemplified in addressing her as ‘Anna, Princess of Georgia’ (p. 122) and giving her ‘full and free access to all of the women’s

quarters' in his house though, she is his Russian captive (p. 149). In contrast to Shamil, there is the misogynist attitude of the radical preacher, who embarrasses Oz's female friend, asking her to '[m]ove to the back with other sisters' since 'the seating [is] segregated!' (p. 208) and who despises Malak for her job as an actress, reproaching Oz until he is 'almost crying' and reminding him of 'his duty as a son to convince his mother to quit her job' (p. 207).

Aboulela's Islamic feminist consciousness is exposed in clarifying the differences between moderate and puritan Muslims regarding jihad and women's treatment, which I see as one of her contributions as an Islamic feminist writer. Through this differentiation, Aboulela is able to clear up the confusion both her Muslim and non-Muslim readers might have between Islam and Muslims. In that sense, Aboulela utilises this differentiation to target her non-Muslim readers' misrecognition of Islam, which might lead them to frame Muslim extremist radical acts in apocalyptic terms, attributing these acts to Islam, which they reductively regard as a violent and intolerant religion.[438] She also utilises it to target her Muslim readers' ignorance of the roles played by human agency in misinterpreting Islam, an ignorance that may prevent them distinguishing between the Quranic principles as they are mentioned in the Quran and its exegesis, which depends on 'who reads it, how and in what contexts'.[439] With

[438] Many non-Muslims adopt an Islamophobic ideology that considers Islam a radical religion that threatens the West. This ideology, according to Islamic feminist Asma Barlas is due to Western politics of misrecognition of Islam. Barlas explains that this misconception has taken the form of either 'positing a radical difference between Islam and Judaism/ Christianity' or 'denying Islam's specificity' and '(re)presenting it as a derivative [or a bad facsimile] of Judaism/ Christianity'. The first tendency conflates jihad with terrorism, while the second mistranslates jihad as a holy war against non-Muslims. For more details, see, Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (p. 56).

[439] Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (pp. 57–58). Extremist readings of the Quran are partly a function of 'certain modes of interpretive reasoning' used by puritan Muslim thinkers and scholars who are guilty of reading violence in the Quran. See, Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (p. 58).

both kinds of readers, Aboulela manages to remove the confusion between Islam and Muslims by assigning terrorism and female suppression not to religions which 'do not interpret themselves', but rather to specific Muslims, precisely, puritan Muslims.[440] These are described by Natasha as 'those who claim they're acting in the name of Islam and at the same time don't follow the principles of submission and restraint' (p. 176), and by Malak as those who 'call to truth but they are not its people' (p. 215). These descriptions are important for highlighting the crucial role played by puritan Muslims in 'deform[ing] and mutilate[ing] the truth about the roles of jihad and women in the Islamic faith', which they manage to do by 'exploiting a number of theological concepts'.[441]

In addition to clarifying the differences between moderates and puritans, Aboulela's Islamic feminist consciousness is also illustrated in her use of several female characters to clarify this distinction. These female characters include Princess Anna, Natasha and Malak, all of whom are created to be convincing in delivering certain pieces of information to the reader.

The character of Princess Anna, for example, is made persuasive in what she delivers to the reader about Shamil and his war with the Russians. Her portrayal as Shamil's captive, who is 'housed in his own home, among the women of his family', makes her information about Shamil convincing, as it is a result of her own discovery and direct contact with Shamil and with his female family members (p. 115). At the same time, her portrayal as a wife of Prince David, who

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They are also partly a function of Muslim leaders and politicians who use religion as a 'dominant ideology' 'to recruit members, to justify their actions, and to glorify fighting and dying in a sacred struggle'. See, John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), p. 74.

[440] Barlas, 'Jihad, Holy War, and Terrorism: The Politics of Conflation and Denial', (p. 52).

[441] Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p. 250.

is a former general in the Russian army and who ‘still had access to the news’ even after his retirement, makes Anna convincing in her revelation about the Russians’ military politics (p. 293).

The information Princess Anna delivers about the war between the Russians and Shamil starts with her sceptical questions, in which she wonders ‘what was it all for?’ and ‘who was right?’, for which she tries to find answers during her captivity and later after her release (p. 148). Near the end of the novel, Anna reveals her findings, informing the reader that the war with Shamil is intended by the Russians for the purpose of getting his submission first followed by ‘the whole Caucasus to submit behind him’ (p. 295). She also asserts to the reader that Shamil is the one who is fighting honourably against the Russians’ treachery, which she reveals in several incidents. For example, through her conversation with Shamil, in which he clarifies his just intention to set her free once he receives his kidnapped son: ‘let him [the tsar] return to me my son Jamaleldin from St Petersburg and I will free you on the hour’, she reminds the readers of the Russians’ ‘treachery’ and how ‘they tricked’ Shamil several years ago when they ‘sent [his] son far away to St Petersburg’ (p. 183). It also reminds them of the tsar’s unfair intention behind kidnapping Shamil’s son. The tsar intends to colonise the mind of the young Jamaleldin for the purpose of colonising his land and then persuading him to ‘rule Dagestan and Chechnya on [his] behalf’ once the Russian army finishes ‘tighten[ing] the cordon around them’ (p. 123). That is to say, the tsar exploits Jamaleldin’s relationship to Shamil to subjugate the tribes of Chechnya and Dagestan: ‘No one will be able to win the tribes’ loyalty and trust more than Shamil’s son’ (p. 58). Her uncovering of the Russians’ ‘ulterior motives’ behind their hypocritical ‘reconciliation’ with Shamil, which is exemplified

in the ‘forging of bonds [that] must be witnessed’ by ‘Petersburg society [which] would appreciate such a scene’, allows the reader to recall Shamil’s sincere intentions of peace-making and forgiveness (p. 295).

Despite portraying Anna as a convincing character, Aboulela makes the character of a Russian retired general suspect the credibility of Anna’s positive narration about Shamil and wonder ‘[w]hat is astonishing is that you [Anna] give Shamil a far higher character than anyone ever had done’ (p. 267). Aboulela also makes ‘the editor of *Kavkas*, the leading newspaper’ twist the positive narration of Anna, who is ‘mistakenly quoted as saying, “The highlanders are not human beings, they are wild beasts”’ though ‘[n]either she nor Madame Drancy [. . .] had ever expressed such a sentiment’ (p. 267). These incidents about suspecting and altering Anna’s words are utilised by Aboulela to shed light on one of the differences between Islamic ideology and colonial policy, which tends to distorting the colonised Other. This distortion, according to Akbar Ahmed, an American-Pakistani former diplomat and writer, results from a clash that is ‘more than a clash of cultures, more than a confrontation of races: it is a straight fight between two approaches to the world, two opposed philosophies. [. . .] One is based in secular materialism, the other in faith.’[442]

The character of Natasha is also made persuasive by ascribing her the role of an academic lecturer, in addition to her role as the narrator of the novel. Natasha is a lecturer of history, who has four of her academic papers on ‘Imam Shamil’s leadership from 1830 to 1859’ and his jihad and resistance against the ‘Russian [i]mperial [e]xpansion’ (p. 5) ‘published in prestigious journals’ (p. 69).

[442] Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and promise* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 264.

Therefore, what she reveals about Imam Shamil and his jihad experience is presented from an academic objective perspective and as a result of her own research, including meeting Malak, the descendant of Shamil, and attending a Sufi ‘zikr’ gathering with her ‘for anthropological reasons’, as Natasha explains (p. 216). Natasha describes her academic objective perspective as that of a ‘modern historical researcher’, one who is ‘staunchly secular’ but has to ‘plunge into politics and economics, ideology and warfare, power and pressures, then hit against the faith of the characters’ she is studying (p. 216). In addition to her academic perspective, Natasha speaks about Shamil from a ‘purely secular perspective’ (p. 13), which is a result of being a ‘hybrid’ daughter to a Russian ‘atheist mother who blotted out [her] Muslim heritage’ and a Sudanese ‘Arab father who gave [her] up to Europe without a fight’ (p. 40). Natasha’s mixed origins and her raising in the West neutralise her religious stance so that what she writes and says about Shamil is not a result of her religious partiality to Shamil.

The character of Malak reveals still more about Shamil and his jihad experience. Her portrayal as being ‘descended [from Shamil] through his son Ghazi’ gives her the credibility to speak about Shamil, since he is one of her ancestors (p. 8). However, Malak’s character is problematic for both Muslim and non-Muslim readers who might not find her persuasive enough in what she is delivering about Shamil.

For some Muslim readers, her portrayal as an actress, which is ‘not how a good Muslim woman should be’ (p. 207), as Oz’s female friend mentions, contradicts her being a Muslim with ‘deeply held convictions’ who has a religious background that enables her to differentiate between Shamil and contemporary

radical puritans theologically (p. 71). However, this problem is solved in the text by depicting her as a spiritual Sufi 'teacher disguised as an actor', as Natasha states (p. 314). Such a depiction is made possible by emphasising her role as a teacher to Oz and Natasha, whom Malak guides 'to what could never be written down in history' (p. 311) and assigning her the role of an unnoted actress who plays 'roles [that are] too minor', such as playing 'the voice of a viper in a Disney cartoon' (p. 4).

For non-Muslim readers, who must be affected by contemporary Islamophobic discourse, Malak might not be convincing because of her presentation of Shamil as a peaceful Muslim leader. However, Aboulela overcomes this problem by portraying Malak as a Sufi who knows and clarifies the difference between Sufism, which is embraced by Shamil, and Wahhabism and Salafism, which are adopted by puritans. In addition, Aboulela's depiction of the Sufism that is adopted by Malak focuses on highlighting the Sufi emphasis on making a vibrant connection with Allah and looking for His 'actual presence in the world'.[443] This is exemplified in Malak's attempts to practise her rituals, not at mosques like other Muslims, but in going every day 'somewhere different to pray and read a section [of the Quran]' (p. 312). These places include 'Orkney', where she attends 'zikr on the beach' (p. 314), and 'Stonehenge', where she prays and

[443] Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The vision of Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), p. 262. Sufism, in general, 'focuses on interiorization' and 'the development of moral qualities', and Sufis believe that having faith and adopting Shariah are not 'sufficient for perfect adherence to the Sunna of the Prophet'. They believe that 'it is possible to follow the rules of the Shariah for one's own personal purposes and without faith in God; it is also possible to have faith in God without being sincere in this faith and without becoming a person characterized by humility, charity, compassion, and love'. That is why Sufis attempt to 'bring about perfect practice and faith by developing the inner qualities implied'. Briefly, Sufis want 'not only to act like the Prophet (*Islam*) and to think like him (*Iman*), but also to be aware like him of God's presence in all things, including themselves, and to act appropriately (*Ihsan*)'. See, Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The vision of Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), p. 246.

recites the Quran as she has ‘sensed a powerful presence’ (p. 312). Highlighting this Sufi mysticism is important for Aboulela, as it enables her to associate Muslim rituals with Western places that are not intended for Islam to be practised, and therefore, to allude to a classical Islamic concept that states that the ‘true abode of Islam was wherever justice existed (*dar al-adl*), or wherever Muslims could freely and openly practise their religion’.[444] Malak indirectly refers to this concept when she expresses her disapproval with ‘Muslims in the West complaining’ while they ‘have the freedom to practise and teach and bring up [their] children in [their] own faith’ (p. 71).

In Short, Aboulela, in *The Kindness of Enemies*, reveals her Islamic feminism through shedding light on the two different kinds of Islamic jihad that are practised by Imam Shamil, who stands for moderate Muslims, and differentiating these kinds from terrorist acts practised by militant puritan groups, which are the target of Aboulela’s critique. Her critique is, in fact, directed to attack puritan Muslims for manipulating religious principles in order to justify their extreme acts in relation to jihad and women theologically. Specifically, she attacks the theological creeds of Wahhabism and Salafism, which are adopted by puritan Muslims and which define their stances in relation to both jihad and women.

## Conclusion

Aboulela is an Islamic feminist author. Her Islamic feminism is revealed in the double commitment she makes to both religion and feminism. Aboulela’s

[444] This concept was formulated in the twelfth century by jurists who opposed the former concept of dividing the world into two competing lands in everlasting war: the land of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the land of war (*dar al-harb*). Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, p.228.

commitment to religion is exposed in her focus on Islam as a religious faith that 'has to do with the individuals and their faith, beliefs, and aspirations'.[445] This faith is depicted in her fiction as a source of spiritual emancipation and empowerment that provides her female protagonists with freedom and strength. Her commitment to feminism is revealed in her portrayal of female Muslim characters who, while struggling internally to gain an individual perfection, are determined to utilise their positive freedom, which enables them to make willed decisions that are in accordance with their personal capacities and needs. Structuring her Islamic feminist consciousness within a framework of Islamic faith allows Aboulela to contribute significantly to constructing a positive image of Muslim women and challenging many stereotypes about them. Her created female devout protagonists are not submissive and do not subject themselves to men. On the contrary, they are strong enough to live by themselves in a foreign country, to make their own choices, which are self-willed actions that are not enforced on them by any authority, and to defend their convictions, contradicting even the men whom they love. Aboulela also contributes in giving committed Muslim women a voice, allowing a broad public of English-speaking readers, both Muslims and non-Muslims, not only specialists scholars, to 'hear the voices which are usually condemned to silence'.[446] However, Aboulela does not speak in the name of all Muslim women. Her engagement with personal faith and intimate details of the daily lives of her protagonists makes those protagonists a representation of pious individuals, but not a symbolic representation of Islam

[445] Chambers, *British Muslim Fictions*, p. 111.

[446] Pepicelli, 'Islam and Women's Literature in Europe: Reading Leila Aboulela and Ingy Mubiayi', (p. 80).

and all its female adherence. In that sense, Aboulela presents only the perspective of those Muslim women who 'harmonize their desires and actions with the dictates of Islamic belief' and reposition religion in their lives as a strategy of self-empowerment.[447] By presenting this perspective, Aboulela adds a voice for the purpose of accustoming her readers to Muslim women's choices within an Islamic framework.

[447] Hassan, 'Leila Aboulela and the Ideology of Muslim Immigrant Fiction', (p. 310).

## Conclusion

Both Aboulela and Faqir are Islamic feminist authors. However, they differ in terms of their engagement with Islamic feminism. Faqir's Islamic feminism focuses on giving voice to oppressed victimised Muslim women, presented by her fictional female protagonists, by critiquing patriarchal sociocultural practices and patriarchal religious doctrinal and legal rules that subvert Muslim women. In contrast, Aboulela's Islamic feminist consciousness concentrates on empowering her fictional female characters by an Islamic faith that is depicted as a source of emancipation and empowerment. Both approaches adopted by Faqir and Aboulela allow their readers the opportunity of engaging imaginatively with feminist issues that are deeply rooted in Islam. However, Aboulela's Islamic feminism, which focuses on Islam more as a faith but less as a legal and doctrinal system, permits her to present an Islam that 'privileges individualism and voluntarism above tradition and ethnicity'.[448] It also enables her to highlight the egalitarian aspects of Islam, which she differentiates from its patriarchal readings that belong to certain theological creeds and from the cultural and social practices of Muslims. Aboulela manages to do so by relating Islamic morals and ethics to values of life, such as beauty, justice, love, peace and respect, a relation that is made possible through making the Islamic faith a 'moving mode of living' that is explored in the daily lives of her Muslim characters and the mechanism of their thoughts and feelings.[449] This does not mean that Aboulela is not critical at all. In fact, Aboulela, in her latest novel, attacks men of religion in the same way Faqir

[448] Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter*, p. 150.

[449] Ferial Ghazoul, 'Halal Fiction', *Al-Ahram weekly online*, 542 (2001).

does when she accuses them of being ignorant and illiterate in the language of the Quran: 'nobody spoke the language of the holy book in Arabia'.[450] However, Aboulela is more specific in identifying which theological creeds to blame for the discrimination against Muslim women.

The different Islamic feminism of Aboulela and Faqir is somehow complementary. Faqir concentrates on Muslim women's struggle in the exterior domain, where they have to fight against patriarchal oppressive systems, while Aboulela transfers the struggle from the exterior domain to the interior one, where Muslim women have to struggle internally within themselves. Winning this interior struggle, as presented in Aboulela's fiction, enables her Muslim female characters to obtain a positive freedom that makes them alert to their needs and desires and puts them in control of their lives and decisions, which they determine freely by themselves. By doing so, Aboulela highlights the importance of women's internal self-empowerment, which allows them to be strong enough to face any exterior oppression. The two different Islamic feminisms of Aboulela and Faqir present different perspectives. However, when these perspectives are combined, they accustom readers with the problems Muslim women face in relation to patriarchy in Muslim societies and provide one of the possible solutions these women can find within an Islamic framework. After all, both Aboulela and Faqir manage, like other Islamic feminist scholars and activists, to participate in 'dispell[ing] the entrenched belief that the religion of Islam acts as a barrier to women's fulfilment outside of men's arbitrary control'.[451]

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[450] Fadia Faqir, *Pillars of Salt*, p. 32.

[451] Majid, 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam', (p. 353).

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