

**Deconstructing Western Feminism: Modern
Eastern Women from an Arab Feminist Perspective**

**تفكيك النسوية الغربية : المرأة الشرقية المعاصرة من منظور
النسوية العربية**

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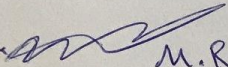
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who seek truth.

To those who are looking for themselves.

To those who refused to bend and to those who are eager to be humans in a world full of aliens.

To the shooting stars on my polluted sky, my father, Dr.Raad Al-A'bed and my uncle, Dr.Najim Haider.

To the second sun that knows no night or darkness, my mother.

To the lighthouse that guides my way, Dr. Hnan Ibrahim.

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To those who are absent from my words but always present in my heart.

To my one who is present despite the distance and absence, Iraq.

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Abstract

This thesis includes an analytical and comparative study of Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* and Miral Al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights*. It investigates the effort and work of elite Arab women in reshaping a suitable identity for women in their society, through deconstructing western feminist perspectives and attitudes towards Arab/Muslim women.

Adopting the fundamental techniques of such schools, like deconstruction, post-colonialism, power relations, western and Islamic feminism, paved the way to explore the common concern between elite Arab thinkers in this field to improve their gender within a rethought Islam as a general trait of Arab societies.

The thesis examines the struggle that female characters face to overcome their identity crisis, through exploring and analyzing how each novel applied the concept of Arab/Islamic feminism and how its application of Islamic feminism or obedience of western feminism has a positive or negative impact on the formation of their identities.

Key words: Western feminism, Arab/Islamic feminism, Deconstruction, normalization, power relations, otherness, Orientalism.

تفكيك النسوية الغربية : المرأة الشرقية المعاصرة من منظور النسوية العربية

إعداد

مي رعد حسون العابد

بإشراف

الدكتورة نادية طارق احمد

ملخص

بنيت هذه الدراسة على التحليل النقدي المُقارن للنصوص الروائية : (المترجم) للكاتبة ليلي ابو

العلا، و (مرتفعات بروكلين) للكاتبة ميرال الطحاوي، حيث تتحرى جهود النخبة المثقفة من النساء

العرب في صقل وتكوين هوية عربية متحضرة للنساء في مجتمعاتهم وذلك من خلال تفكيك

المنظور النسوي الغربي المقولب لهوية المرأة العربية.

ولقد تبنت الدراسة الاسس البنيوية للمدارس النقدية مثل التفكيكية، حركات ما بعد الاستعمار،

النسوية الغربية، النسوية الاسلامية، وعلاقات القوى، التي مهدت الطريق لاستكشاف الاهتمامات

المشتركة بين نخبة النساء العرب فيما يتعلق باعادة تشكيل الهوية النسوية الاسلامية بإعتبار

الاسلام اساساً لبناء المجتمعات العربية.

وعليه فأن التحليل النقدي للدراسة تمحور حول الصراع الذي تواجهه كل من بطلتي الروائيتين في

التغلب على أزمة الهوية من خلال معاينة وتتبع تطبيق او عدم تطبيق الروائيتين لمفهوم النسوية

العربية او الانصياع للنمطية الغربية والكشف عن التأثير السلبي او الايجابي لكل منهما في تشكيل

هوية البطلتين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية الغربية، النسوية العربية، التفكيكية، التطبيع، علاقات القوى، التغريبية

الآخر، الاستشراق.

Chapter one

Chapter one

Introduction

1.0. Background of the study

The main concern of this study is to unveil the reasons that pushed a large group of elite Arab women's to criticize the western feminist control over the Arab women intellectual field. Therefore, it is the objective of the research to uncover the reasons behind this kind of intellectual revolution and cultural enlightenment, which is sought through targeting one of the most important pillars in society (women), by examining feminism from a completely different perspective, that is to say through finally listening to the voice of the other and giving the Arab woman her space and right to speak up about her own experience.

The research stands on three of the most essential keys in building any society and in composing any new intellectual movement which are: culture, religion, and politics; the use of these domains came as an attempt to compare and reveal the confusion behind the duplication of thought between the eastern and western community that has arisen as a reaction to the trends of post modernity, which highly affected the global culture on the one hand and the feminist trends on the other hand. The fact that the practices and

beliefs of postmodernism are more personal than being identifiable with a particular institution or special group, Because through this bias the west reached a completely new standard for life where there is no absolute truth and that truth and error are synonymous facts, so what is fact today can be false tomorrow. This idea, specifically, blew up all the values, ideals and even the fundamentals of religion, i.e. people's understanding and interpretation of religious texts, in the west, whereas in the east, especially Arab communities the Islamic religion is considered by Muslims as a fixed base to their communities which underlies all their ideals and unshaken values (Hutcheon, 1989).

The Islamic religion devoted a large part of its attention to speak about women's affairs, and to clarify their rights and duties in all fields of life, so when feminism came to light it was supposed to work hand in hand with the Islamic religion to support the women's cause, but what actually happened and what the critics saw, was the opposite. The crystallization of postmodernity and feminism left their impact on society, where there was no account for cultural privacy; which means it is a tyrannical modernity that has no account for the cultural readiness to digest all of these extraneous values.

Starting from this vision, modern feminism in the Arab world created what is called Islamic feminism as a first step to, not only save their historical legacy and cultural privacy, but also at the same time to follow modernity. (Badran, 2002).

In the late 1990s there was a notable change in the tone of the political discourse all over the world that highly affected Arab countries and has severely deformed the image of Islam; this made it globally rich material for criticism and analysis by feminists who were interested in revealing a hidden side in the lives of oppressed women. Mai Yamani, Fadwa El Guindi, Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, Fadwa Malti-Douglas, Fatima Mernissi and many others, raised their voices to show that Arab women have their own feminist characteristics and that Islam has never been the problem in tying them up. As Mernissi(1975) said “the Muslim ideal of the silent, passive, obedient woman has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam.”; but what placed them in the circle of conflict was their continuous attempts to stay within the religious text and at the same time to keep up with the alien western culture (that was somehow imposed on them).

Mernissi was not the only one who believed that feminism has taken a wrong turn in recent years, becoming too self-absorbed, too exclusive, and

too punitive to dissenters like the Arab voices. Therefore Golley (2003) said that “observers must see that Arab women's need for positive change is neither more nor less than that of women anywhere else”.

Yamani(1996) added that “this is an age in which we will see an increasing number of women scholars in Islamic law”. Those critics opened a new door toward feminism by introducing an Islamic feminism in all of its forms and contents.

This brave movement of forming a special identity for Arab women has originally arisen from the idea of deconstructing the upper authority and its power domination over the lower; and by authority and power we mean all kinds of control and limitation of freedom and the freewill. According to Foucault "Power is not a singular relationship between two entities in which one possesses control over the other, but an interconnected web of power relationships in which every body exercises some level of power."

(Foucault,1982) But bodies may consist of institutions, individual people, groups, ideas, etc. Through the application of the power relations system of Foucault we will see that the western women played the roles of both sides (controller and controlled) and supplanted Arab women. This would be very clear in the novels where the analysis will compare and distinguish between

the characteristics and the power relations between Arab and western women.

Within that new overarching background which deals with Islamic laws and traditions, the category of Islamic feminism would stand its ground by the diversity it includes, therefore the current study applies Islamic feminist fundamentals to Miral Al-Tahawy's novel *Brooklyn Heights* and Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator*.

1.1. Background Information

Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999)

Leila Aboulela, a Sudanese writer, was born in 1964 in Cairo but she was raised in Khartoum where she graduated with a degree in Economics at Khartoum University, and then moved to England to finish her master's degree in Statistics at the London School of Economics.

Though there is no doubt in the existence of a very strong relationship between the writer's life and that of her protagonist (Sammar), where both shared the same nationality, suffered from exile, both are Muslims and both wear Hijab, yet the novel is fictional and the events are made up for the purpose of telling the story of *The Translator*, which is about the protagonist

Sammar, (who is a widowed Muslim mother that moved from Sudan to Scotland with her husband before he dies in a car accident).

Aboulela started writing along with her work as a lecturer in Aberdeen College and later as a Research Assistant in Aberdeen University, where she started publishing novels. Her novel *The Translator* was short-listed for the RIMA (Race in the Media Award) and became one of New York Times 100 Notable Book of the Year and her work has been translated into fourteen languages.

Throughout her works she offers a very different and unique portrayal of Muslim women in the west. Instead of embracing Western culture, her female characters seek solace in their growing religious identity as seen in the character of Sammar in *The Translator*.

The tragic death of Sammar's husband and leaving her young son in Khartoum made her grieve and isolated in that cold, colorless city (Aberdeen), where she lived her life as a devout Muslim. She is sustained by her faith, and her prayers provided a quiet rhythm in her daily life, but things did not stay that way for very long.

When she started working as an Arabic translator at a Scottish university for the Scottish secular academic, Rae, her life took a different turn; the two develop a deep friendship that awakens in Sammar all the longing for life she has ignored and repressed. Soon enough they fall in love but with lots of restrictions, Sammar's attraction for Rae created a serious problem in her life; because she was standing in front of a new start with Rae and his kindness, knowledge and otherness that made her indifferent and integrated but all of this remains secret between herself and God. She was facing a struggle to achieve happiness while staying true to her beliefs. Among those many restrictions, she knew that they will have to deal with Rae's lack of faith that is the sacred thing in Sammar's life. *The Translator* carved a distinctive combination between the love of God and man and at the same time presented an example of balance and moderation in preserving Sammar's beliefs, herself, and her new love.

The binary system that the writer builds the story on, paved the way to analyze the relation between Arabs and the west, criticize cultural systems and reshape the Arab/ Muslim feminist identity; all through applying the power relation theories of control. (Wikipedia, 2016).

Al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn heights* (2011)

In line with the Islamic feminist pioneers, Miral Al-Tahawy continued to focus on the Arab identity and the progress of the Muslim woman throughout her works. She offers a distinctive narrative technique of retrospection and elimination of temporal and spatial boundaries that falls under the literary racetrack of the twenty-first century.

The novel reflects a semi-simulation of the reality of the author's own life, where she experienced the transition between two different cultures like the East and West. It is considered as a highly autobiographical novel because of the shared events in the lives of the writer and the protagonist Hend.

The protagonist recently arrived in Brooklyn, carrying with her an eight year old son, a dream of being a writer with many unfinished manuscripts, and broken English, trying to fit in with migrants like her, dreaming of better opportunities. During her process of settlement in her match boxed room, she falls in the trap of nostalgia where she had parallel memories from her childhood in the Nile Delta. The nostalgia keeps torturing her until she started connecting characters, events and places in Brooklyn to the past in an Egyptian Bedouin community.

Brooklyn Heights is the fourth novel by Al-Tahawy. It was shortlisted for the Arabic Booker Prize for 2011 and won the 2010 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature. The novel, released in Arabic in 2010, was published in an English translation by Sameh Salim from the American University by the Cairo Press the following year.

Miral Al-Tahawy published this novel in a politically critical period particularly in the history of Islam and Arabs, and in the history of the world in general, soon after President Obama's election in 2008.

The novel starts from the arrival of Hend to Brooklyn Heights and her struggle with adaptation and integration with the new life, and the surrounding environment that is full of minor characters have an effect on building Hend's personality. They also provide an insight into her beliefs and values that reflect to a certain extent Al-Tahawy's views about the shift in forming the character of the Eastern woman. The heart of the novel lies in the desperate longing for belonging and to breakdown all the social, political and religious barriers standing as obstacles in Hend's way of identification, self-knowledge and balance. Al-Tahawy uses a parallel line of narration not only to compare between Hend's present and past, but also for the analysis of the political and social situation in the two communities that highly affect

citizens. This technique led her to integrate the different communities of Brooklyn in a futile attempt to link human differences and melting them in order to create a way of communication and balance in the human relations.

(Wikipedia, 2016).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Islam has always been a questionable and a controversial issue for both Westerners and the ignorant of it, which made it rich material for criticism. Therefore the present research investigates the reasons and the justifications that led a large group of elite Arab women to secession from the global feminist institution and attempt to create their own feminist school based on the Islamic religion and how this movement affected Arab women in society. This theme is concerned with the use of Islamic feminism as a tool to deconstruct and analyze the novels in an attempt to provide a clear insight into such a controversial topic as Islamic feminism, simply because Arab women have been portrayed, in fiction as well as in reality, from a western perspective where they ignore the Arab point of view about themselves.

1.3. Objectives of the study

The current study aims to investigate the following points:

1. To explore Arab/Islamic feminism, and the reasons that led to its emergence.
2. Reading Miral Al-Tahawy's novel *Brooklyn Heights* as an example of western feminism.
3. Reading Aboulela's novel *The Translator* as an example of Arab/ Islamic feminism.

1.4. Significance of the study

Many studies have been conducted dealing with feminism, all of which talk about seeking equality between women and men, yet, only few of them mentioned the struggle for equality among women from different religious, cultural or national backgrounds.

Therefore writing about Islamic feminism in an analytical manner is a useful step that may help to fill a gap in the current studies, by drawing a logical bridge between culture, women and religion; through using *Brooklyn Heights* and *The Translator* as an application sample. This study is different in that it concentrates on a subject that has not received due attention in

previous studies. A more in-depth study of this topic would hopefully provide a completely new reading of the novels, and a more comprehensible understanding of a rethought Islam as a general trait of Arab societies.

1.5. Questions of the study

In order to accomplish the aforementioned objectives, the study will try to answer the following questions:

1. What is Arab/Islamic feminism, and what are the reasons that led to its emergence?
2. How to read Miral AL-Tahawy's novel as an example of western feminism?
3. How to read Aboulela's novel as an example of Arab/ Islamic feminism?

1.5 Limitations of the study

Feminism tackled many issues and discourses, and has many branches including Islamic feminism which is presented from different perspectives, which makes it a very wide and demanding task. Therefore the present study will be devoted to deal with feminism from an Islamic perspective to fill the gaps between western and

Islamic feminism. The results of the study are limited to the novels *Brooklyn Heights* and *The Translator* thus, they cannot be generalized.

1.6. Definition of terms

Western feminism: It is the female quest for equal rights and opportunities in society without any kind of discrimination based on gender, believing that biological sex is not a justification for domination or subordination.

Feminism aims to make women reach a state of independence economically, politically and socially, which led to the emergence of a feminist political movement that works to gain such equality. The terms "feminism" and "feminist" spread out in the public sphere around the 1970s, though they were already being used in the public speech much earlier. (Walters, 2005)

The term is operationally used to present the domination of western feminism that is officially used to present women all over the world. On the surface it seems that westerners show a great deal of attention to the struggles of oppressed women around the world. Nevertheless, the way westerners view feminism and the way they treat issues under its umbrella seemed to give westerners the image of the white savior and disqualify Arab

and the third world interests, women of color and Muslim women by ignoring the real source of the problems these women face.

This imposed perspective of Western feminism supposes that the cultures in the East are inherently flawed and conclude that the only truly free culture is a western one.

Arab feminism: Also known as Islamic feminism, is as *Alina Isac Alak (2015)* explained, that it represents the ideology which describes the discourse and the actions of those who protect women's rights within the context of an authentic or well understood Islam.

Islamic feminist scholars used the gist out of the combination of Islam and feminism to stand with and on behalf of all Muslim women in challenging the misogyny and control that European nations imposed over the third world cultures, where they find it essential to the projection of a newly politicized Islam.

According to Fatema Mernissi, Islamic feminism is a fundamentalist wave of reforming the Arab feminist identity. That is why their call for women's independence from western feminism came as a result of the blurring of

Arab women's identity, and the non-fulfillment of their needs. This called for an urgent need to reshuffle Muslim women identity. Through applying Arab/ Islamic feminism, Muslim societies have proven their ability to resist, change and seek modernization, and so have called for the evolution of gender equality. (Mernissi, 2001).

Deconstruction: Is a method of literary analysis and a way of reading any text that stimulate unusual ways of thinking about usual things. It opens the way for the reader to identify with an endless chain of meanings that expose the instability of the text meaning. This instability is reflected in the endless chain of meanings which a word is capable of generating all through its existence in the text, but it is (Silverman, 1989). Operationally used to present an independent school of criticism created by Derrida, but used by modern feminists to present new perspectives about women, where the deconstruction of the feminist theory connected directly to the issue of difference which critics deconstructed to deal with the mutual relations between the oriental and western women.

Normalization: It refers to social processes through which ideas and actions come to be seen as normal and become taken for granted or natural in everyday life. In Foucault's account, normalization was a tactic for exerting the maximum social control with the minimum expenditure of force, which Foucault calls disciplinary power. But it is used in the feminist discourse to present the imposed cultural attitudes on woman that makes her feel like this is the natural and right thing to do even if logic says something else where women feel the pressure to conform to the socially accepted images of males and masculinity. (Foucault, 1982). In the present study the issue of normalization is used from a different perspective that presents the Arab woman as the one who feels the pressure to conform to the socially accepted images of western women.

Power relations: It is the knowledge of the world and ourselves that is fundamental to social relations and determined by the process of subjectivity, which is presented through the subject's interaction with itself and with others. Therefore, Power relations have multiple origins and can only be found at its point of application, when the subject, whether it was a person, group of people or even institutions, involve in the power relations,

this will cause them their freedom simply because, the subject will be controlled, directed and treated as a machine of a disciplinary imperative, yet this does not mean to neglect the subject's freewill and his ability to rebel which makes it a mutual relationship of power exchange that is not controlled by one authority because when there is power there is resistance, in this way the subject becomes both the receiver and the producer of power (Foucault, 1982). In this thesis, it is used to justify the establishing of the Arab/Islamic movement and to represent the system of power relations that is normally controlled by western feminists and turned Arab women in to passive mechanical subjects.

Otherness: It is to identify the other human being, in his/ her differences from the Self. The Other is the opposite of the Self and this binary is applicable to all life activities where it is set as a natural form of life, yet, the social identities of people, groups and institutions are not natural but they are a reflection of the hierarchy created by them based on certain beliefs about the world. People use the social identity system because the identity is meaningless without the other, so by defining the self we automatically define the other (Said, 2003). This is a system used operationally by the ruling authorities and the leading categories, like western feminism, for the

purpose of framing the characteristics of the movement and shaping its identity through a binary that disregards and underestimates the Arab feminists and provides a controlling superiority. It allows them to spread their own culture and ideology as a means of domination used later on for political purposes.

Orientalism: It is the concept created by Edward Said in which he presented a new vision for Arabs and Islam through making certain generalizations about the East. These generalizations provide a political vision for the kind of relationship between the west, Europe, the superior race and the Orient, the East, the alien other. These stereotype images of the east present them as strange individuals that shall never reach the west no matter what, which is an idea (Said, 2003). Operationally used by the Arab/ Islamic feminists to shed light on the importance of having an Arabic/Islamic identity to represent Arab women, rather than just following the school of the west that does not represent them and does not take into account the nature of their culture and religion.

Chapter two

Chapter two

Review of literature

2.0 Introduction

This present section aims to review the related theoretical and empirical literature, where the theoretical studies deal with related theories that talk about identity formation, power control and cultural colonialism whereas the empirical literature discusses works that have presented feminism in the Arab world and the issue of Islamic feminism in relation to western feminism.

2.1. Review of theoretical studies

Foucault (1982), presents a new economy of power relations that goes in line with the development of the modern state and the political management of society, believing that it is necessary to develop a new way of investigating the links between rationalization and power, through presenting a way to go further toward a new economy of power relations, a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies a close relation between theory and practice that is used later on in the modern feminist theories.

It consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point, in order to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the contradictions of strategies.

Scott (1988), gives the reader some major theoretical concepts used by poststructuralists that are also useful for feminists. It applies some of these concepts to one of the hotly contested issues among contemporary (U.S.) feminists, which is the equality versus difference debate. The point of the study is to find ways to analyze specific texts such as books, documents, as well as utterances of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices, in terms of specific historical and contextual meanings. In addition, it focuses on the historical connection between the movements, of post structuralism and contemporary feminism.

Ahmed (1992), focused her work mostly on gender and Islam, particularly examining women's roles in the Muslim world, fighting stereotypes about them, in both the Islamic and non-Islamic world. She tries to define an Arab feminist sensibility and reveals her frustration with Western feminists' assumptions about the Arab world because the picture they have about Muslim – Arabs is that they are ignorant, backward, irrational, and uncivilized and this is obvious in their concentration on polygamy, the veil, and female circumcision.

She argues that, “The peculiar practices of Islam with respect to women had always formed part of the Western narrative of the quintessential otherness and inferiority of Islam”. This foggy view of Islam is what Ahmed wanted to change, believing that it is the only image they know of Islam.

Her greatest work was the publication of *Women and Gender in Islam*, examining the history of gender in the Arab world and its impact on modern Arab feminists. She presented the role of gender in Islam through the balanced understanding of Muslim history, modern day issues of post-colonialism and Arab nationalism.

Ahmed introduces us to new prospects of women and Islam by connecting Middle Eastern women to education, culture, imperialism, social change,

modernization, and feminism through examining the treatment of women since the beginnings of Islam till now by raising questions around the veiling of women, premises of Islamist positions on women, the inheritance issues with gender, and how Islamic discourse was affected by exposure to Western societies.

Finally, she comes to the conclusion, that women's understanding of their role in Islam is not trapped in the boundaries placed on them by Western feminism and Arab nationalism.

Wadud (1999), examines the position of women in Muslim cultures by following a particular criteria that reveals the real intention of Islam for women, she also focuses on helpful Qur'anic hermeneutics for the female experiences especially that the female voice could yield greater gender justice to Islamic thought and contribute toward the achievement of that justice in Islamic practice. She considers that the issues of women in society, economics, politics, or spirituality play an important part in the Muslim goal for modernity by preserving the past and benefiting appropriately from the new.

Wadud kept looking for a continual development in the social order by challenging the fixed readings of the conservative thinkers of Quran who present the statements related to gender as literal and definitive ones regardless of the upcoming developments in society and in the status of women.

Wadud added a new layer for the feminist discussion when she focused on the role of subject without agency, asserting that women were excluded from building the ethical, spiritual, social and political basis of Islamic thought because of the social assumptions that the perfect image of a Muslim is normatively presented by the male which completely excluded women and presented them as a subject without agency.

For Wadud, what distinguishes her work *Qur'an and Woman* is the focus on gender as a category of thought not just a subject for discourse.

Mernissi (2001), was capable of indirectly drawing the attention to the West's tendency to misconstrue women's role in Arab/ Muslim societies by using one of the most famous female characters in Arabic literature Scheherazade, to reflect the image of the powerful Arab female who uses her

mental ability to seduce and manipulate a man's brain instead of physical attraction.

She aimed to establish two representations for the harem or Scheherazade image, one from the Western perspective and the other from the Arab perspective to present the power of Islamic women, where she devoted her search to look for Islamic sources, etymology, art, religious law, and cultural history in order to show the difference between the two presentations.

Badran (2002), raised a comparison between Islamic and secular feminist ideologies, through examining Muslim interpretations of feminism to explain why many Muslims perceive western feminism as an assault on their culture. She is capable of drawing a catching image of feminism in Islam through investigating western misunderstanding of both feminism and Islam, and through focusing on the relationship between secular and Islamic feminism in Muslim societies to portray its achievements and the challenges it will face in the coming years.

Throughout her work, Badran traces the developments in feminism within the Muslim nation (umma) depending on her search for the actual reasons

behind the rejection of Islamic feminism of all kinds of dichotomies between east and west, and between secular and religious, believing that these dichotomies were motivated by colonialism to deliver a rigid Muslim identity of feminism.

Mahmood, (2005) focuses on the Islamist movement in Egypt, as an attempt at thinking through a post-colonial predicament within the Muslim world. Therefore, she explores some of the conceptual challenges that women's involvement in the Islamist movement poses to feminist theory in particular, and to secular/liberal thought in general, through an ethnographic account of women's movements in Cairo, Egypt. It also discusses the different ways in which the activism of the Islamic feminist movement changed our normative liberal conceptions of politics and points out the scope of the transformation that the Islamic feminist movement and the larger piety movement have had on Egyptian society. Therefore it seeks to analyze the conceptions of self, moral agency, and politics that guide the practices of this non-liberal movement, in order to come to an understanding of the historical projects that animate it.

Ali (2006), addresses the feminist Islamic experiences in the modern world where she focuses on the Islamic traditional values, sexual ethics, and the different interpretations of scholars toward this subject. Attempting to analyze and deconstruct the binaries that imposed the sexual ethics over woman.

Ali draws the attention by asking difficult questions about these sexual ethics, that no one has the courage before to ask them. Believing that there were plenty of Islamic texts that gave a basis for the values of equality and justice but no one made an effort to explain why.

Ali believes in the justice of Islam, therefore she finds that many Muslim male scholars have misunderstood Islam by presenting it as misogynist or as men's Islam, thus she tends to deal with Quran as the only guide and that each time has its own interpretations and readings which makes it irrational to universalize and eternalize the views of the early jurists and scholars of Islam.

Upstone,(2009) offers a spatial political reading of the postcolonial novel in which the focus is on the diverse spaces that construct the postcolonial experience. It presents a new conventional use of the sense of space rather than place to question society, philosophy, literature, and politics. Because

of the lack of attention to spatial matters in contemporary debates, Upstone tends to present a new reading for the spatial importance in the postcolonial discourse. Such ways in reading the text have opened the way for greater consideration of space as an important context for considering issues such as power relationships and negotiations of identity.

2.2 Review of the empirical studies

King (2003), argues that even though feminism is a global phenomenon, yet it is unique to every culture depending on how each culture deals with it therefore she examines the Islamic treatment of women to see what distinguishes it from others.

She provokes a detailed comparison between eastern and western cultures to evaluate the major differences that distinguish Islamic feminism from western feminism, believing that westerners tend to generalize attitudes and Phenomena; therefore they associate Arab and the Islamic countries with the oppression of women, simply because it differs from their own thoughts and beliefs.

According to what is common, western feminism is the dominant trend that unifies all women, yet it is governed by western values, thought, and ideologies that differ from those of Islam and Arab traditions, therefore King attempts to analyze the conflict between Western feminists and Islamic feminists through using Paul Wehr's "Conflict Mapping Guide" to bring women together culturally.

According to King, the problem lies in the fact that even though feminism began as a universal phenomenon, feminists do not try to unify women from all cultures. Instead, Westerners want to impose their beliefs and cultures onto other cultures and own the movement of feminism.

Marome (2005), focuses the attention on the importance of Michel Foucault's work on power relations and its deep impact on the feminist analyses. His politics of western sexuality leaves female sexuality questionable, simply because he applied a kind of a deconstructionist analysis where he examines all the points of weakness in western feminism. Therefore Marome's study examines how Foucault should be situated within contemporary feminist theory through presenting four important concepts of Foucault's philosophy that traditional feminists disagree with, believing that

modern feminists should pay attention to the aspects of Foucauldian philosophy that is related to gender analysis and move beyond his criticism to create alternative histories of sexuality and opportunities for resistance.

Ali (2011), believes that all feminists, regardless of their differences, agree that biological sex is not a justification for domination or subordination of any person over the other, therefore Ali compared the state of women within Islam with the feminist movements in the west, through defending feminism as a movement that believes in and is committed to equal rights and opportunities for women.

Then she moves to present women in Islam, where she shows how Islam raised the status of woman by granting her the legal right to enter into contracts, to run a business and to possess property independently from her husband or any kinsmen. Islam stressed that women as half of the society, should be offered all opportunities which could enable them to develop their natural abilities, so that they might participate effectively in the development of society.

Ali applied a new line of comparison between western thinkers and Islamic thought, showing the bright face of Islam and its pioneer history in establishing human rights, and women's rights in particular, to stand against the European claim that the only possible origin of these human rights is the western world with its Greek and Roman heritage followed by European recent history with its philosophical and social thinking.

Mabura,(2012) analyzes Aboulela's text from a different perspective, especially after the events of September 11. She used Arab/ Islamic feminism as a tool for religious and cultural competency of Arab woman. It also addresses Aboulela's attitude against the boundaries of gender, class, race, physical strength, and religion, among other factors, in a colonial and postcolonial setting.

It highlights Aboulela's criticism of West-East imperialism that affects her character's identity and subjectivity as they suffer from issues of race and colonialism among other intersecting oppressions

East (2012), interviewed Miral Al-Tahawy to shed light on the major themes in her novel *Brooklyn Heights* as an attempt to connect the protagonist's (Hend) struggle in exile with the reality of most of the Arabs alienated in the west.

Through one of the questions delivered to Al-Tahawy, the journalist revealed to the audience that the political changes in both America and Egypt were not arbitrarily used in the novel, but were used to portray some of Hend's major characteristics and to give the reader a hint about the later on discussed themes in the novel.

The journalist reveals the fact that the novel reaches a very interesting conclusion, that what defines your identity is not where you belong or where you are, but your personal legacy of memories, events and achievements.

Alaa, (2014) examines Aboulela's novel with reference to feminist and postcolonial criticism and in comparison to traditional storytelling tropes, including that of the romance and the heroic cycle as described by Joseph Campbell, which provides a comparison and a pathway to understanding the subtle transformation of the East/West relationship in Aboulela's novel.

Alaa deconstructed the text and deeply analyzed it through dealing with highly

Feminist and postcolonial realms; where resistance and the subversion of norms have been affected in ways that allowed him to use the theories of Edward Said and Spivak for a better understanding of the bilingual text and its relation to feminism and patriarchy.

Tyagi, (2014), reconnoiters the struggles of a postcolonial feminist, to show the recreated identity out of both feminism and post colonialism. Therefore it discusses the struggles that face postcolonial feminist theory, and distinguishes it from other theories. It focuses the attention on Arab woman resistance against the stereotyped images of their present in the nationalist discourses. It also explores the concerns of Third World women reflected from the western feminist's by overlooking the differences in race, sex, class, and ignoring the social, historical and cultural contexts. To overcome these differences, third world women do not intend to stray away from western feminism altogether, but they seek to insert themselves back into their historical and cultural context.

Amer and Yousef (2014), investigates how Islam plays the guiding role in the lives of Muslim people in exile and how it organizes their relationships with people, their daily life style, and their inner self.

The study proves through the novel *The Translator*, the importance and the power of the role of religion in connecting or isolating people from different religious, ethnical and cultural backgrounds. It addresses the dichotomy of religion and love, presented by the major two characters (Rae and Sammar), where they fall in the trap of this dichotomy and are forced to choose between their religion and love that made their marriage impossible at some point. The process of analysis argues that Sammar was not only a good translator of both Arabic and English, but she proves that she is a great translator of her Islamic religion in real life.

It explores the role of Islam in shaping the identity of Muslim Arab women, to reach a point that convinces not only Ray but even the reader that Islam is the most suitable way in dealing with life and in accepting people's differences in all levels.

The importance of this study is to shed light on the effectiveness of this kind of postcolonial and multicultural literature in understanding the ethical messages behind the Qur'anic verses, which is reflected through the

conversations of Sammar and Rae, where the writer gives Sammar the opportunity to present Islam in its real image.

Many studies have been conducted dealing with the issue of feminism and even more dealt with the theories of deconstruction, power relations and Orientalism, but only few that managed to compound between different theoretical backgrounds to analyze one text and even less of those who managed to achieve a distinctive results. Therefore, this thesis offers a new insight and a completely different reading for both *The Translator and Brooklyn Heights* through analyzing the use of Islamic feminism and the issue of identity in relation to three major theories of deconstruction, power relations and Orientalism. It is one of the first studies that managed to create a meeting point for all of the previous theoretical schools to study the Islamic feminism, the need for its emergence and its contribution in reshaping Arab/Muslim woman identity.

Chapter three

Chapter three

Methods and Procedures

3.1. Methodology

The current study uses a content descriptive analytical methodology to analyze Miral Al-Tahawy's novel *Brooklyn Heights* and Aboulela's novel *The Translator*, through applying an Arab/Islamic feminist approach to the ideas and beliefs in the texts after the analysis of the events, characters, places, means of narration, and cultural differences.

Post-modernism is a controversial trend of knowledge, which has become a discoloration of everything that was born under this intellectual movement including feminism, where we can see Islamic feminism presenting a clear example of post-modernity, for it rejected superstition, myths, and the illogical heritage in peoples' beliefs, proving that it was a public call for deconstruction, rebuilding, and continuous change.

Literature has always been the means to reveal the confusion behind controversial topics, such as those related to Islamic feminism, where many writers devoted a great deal of their works to talk about it whether in a direct or indirect way, as in *Brooklyn Heights* and *The Translator* that not

only applies the comparison between west and east through the character analysis, but also goes back to the roots of the matter to present the stages of creating a feminist identity that fits Arab women.

The framework of the analysis uses different influential dimensions such as the cultural, political and religious to show that Islamic feminism is not just a dialectic theory, but is a way of life and a means of liberation from Western hegemony driven by restructuring the Arab identity and the refutation of the typical Western image of Arab Muslim women.

3.2. Sample of the study

The sample of the study is composed of two novels, *Brooklyn Heights* and *The Translator* that used to apply the Islamic feminist terminology through raising a comparison between western and eastern cultures and the way women are treated in both societies.

3.3. Procedures of the study

The following procedures will be utilized in doing this study:

- 1.** Reading the novels and the biographies of the writers Miral Al-Tahawy and Leila Aboulela.
- 2.** Tracing the historical background of Islamic feminism.
- 3.** Reading the previous studies concerned with the main topic of the study.
- 4.** Analyzing the novels and relating them to the themes of Islamic feminism.
- 5.** Deconstructing western feminism depending on the comparison between it and Islamic feminism through the text.
- 6.** Discussing the findings.
- 7.** Conclusion.
- 8.** Documenting references according to the APA style.

Chapter four

Chapter four

Discussion and Analysis

4.0. Introduction

Arab women have been accused of being backward, ignorant and blind because they are still controlled by the Quran, still wear hijab and still show lots of obedience to their fathers, brothers and husbands. Therefore, Arab women face a great deal of duplicity in which they find themselves lost between two completely different cultures, as is noticed in the novels, where the west forces Arab women to follow its own beliefs on freedom, self-liberation, and fight for women's rights and if she doesn't follow the western model then she doesn't have the right to ask for her freedom. Therefore Islamic feminism can be considered as a methodology for the production and construction of new knowledge in living Islam that contains a critical reading of the classical intellectual cannon of Islam but with a lens that incorporates gender as a category of thought, in a way that focuses on Islam as a global phenomenon raised from the radical changes that are going on in the Middle East. (Wadud,1999)

Islamic feminism appeared around the 1990s when the Islamic reawakening in the Arab countries gave a new vision of women in Islam, which is derived from the Islamic traditions, to argue that woman is a fully independent human entity, just like her male counterpart. Islamic feminism does not aim to put women at the top, but to reform the social structure in a way where personal privileges not gender are the defining factors of social authority. Women are the first teachers and often hold the closest bonds with the next generation; therefore, the stability of society is often associated with women. This will open a door to new possibilities for gender equality through questioning women's role in Arab societies and providing an alternative concept of women's rights in these countries (Shaikh, 2003).

Islamic feminism did not just come out of nowhere; on the contrary it took its fair share from other fields just as any of the new theories that with time become part of the social norms. Therefore it is important to shed light on some of the influential theories in the creation of Arab/Islamic feminism and how these interventions help to differentiate it from western feminism.

To solve the identity crisis and to develop women in society, scholars of Arab/Islamic feminism tended to break the stereotypical image of Islam, by

using the theories of power relations, post-colonialism, sociocultural psychology and of course western feminism. All of these share the consideration of power as a central concept that will later on frame the relation between western and Islamic feminism.

This study provides a new vision and elucidation on the debate among Arab and western feminists, starting from Foucault's work on "*The Subject and Power*" who presented a profound analysis of feminism and power relations. Foucault decentralizes power position, believing that there is no existence of the central authority and that power and control are series of practices that are not considered as a fixed system, and so is western feminism (Foucault, 1982).

Arab feminists were placed in a complex relation of production and signification, as well as power relations dynamics. Therefore, Islamic feminists defend their rights through using Foucault's model in questioning binaries of rational/irrational, strong/weak, and mind/body. Both Foucault and Arab feminists share the same interest in overcoming the binary logics. Arab/Islamic feminists intend to change the binaries that present western women as the superior/ Arab as inferior, western as educated/ Arab as

illiterate, western as economically satisfied/ Arab as powerless and so on, in order to provide a suitable identity for the modern Arab women.

Following the same line of argument, Derrida's theory of deconstruction was a rich material for Arab/Islamic feminists to guide their work. This thesis offers a deconstructive analysis of western feminist practices to explore the contribution of Arab/ Islamic feminism in Arab women's lives. Although Western feminism came to break societal barriers and stand against the bilateral relation of men and women that often put women in the weakest side of comparison, yet it formulated a more dangerous binary between the Western and Arab women.

The breakdown of this binary created what is called Arab/Islamic feminism that is diverse and representative of all women regardless of their religious, cultural or political differences simply because the debate of equality and difference came to find a solution in Arab/ Islamic feminism. It finally presents an appropriate identity that clearly shows the personality of Arab Woman and stops presenting her as the Other, inferior, weak or oppressed.

Western feminism suppressed and underestimated their Arab counterparts to look perfect, which is a method used based on Derrida's belief that it is

impossible for a person to identify him/her self without referring to others because it's in the human nature that we understand things according to our own experience (Hutcheon, 1989).

In response to Derrida's discussion, feminists address Edward Said's work of ***Orientalism*** and its huge impact on Arab feminism especially in the concept of post-colonialism, power relations, and otherness.

Otherness is the term that presents a definition of us (whether as person or a group of people), it defines our identity and who we really are according to the choices we make in life and the groups we belong to starting from gender as a category, religious identity, class and so on. Therefore our identity is the result of communication and polarization of opinion from the Other, presented as a binary of opposites, where woman is the other of man, black is the other of white, Arab is the other of westerner and so on (Said, 2003).

Edward Said shared the idea of Simon de Beauvoir on the principle of identity. De Beauvoir saw that the community uses masculinity and man as a social basis from which we define the other (woman) regardless of her independent entity and her rejection of subjection. According to this, Said

saw that Western hegemony in the colonial period has used the same principle to make them as a central power through which they define the other (Arab), canceling its identity and independence and as a result effects the independence of Arab women identity.

4.1. *The Translator*

The Translator is written in such a way that breaks up the norms on all levels, whether of storytelling or the cultural, political and religious norms, providing the reader with a third eye to examine the work and life within the context of feminist, postcolonial and Islamic identifications. The novel is more like a lens that seeks to clarify the picture of Arab/ Muslim women along with exploring the realms that influence this image, through using characters like Sammar, Yasmin, Mahasen and others to provide a comprehensive analysis of all of the presented social cases and cultural restrictions as well as the precise study of the effect of religious amalgamation and the pluralism of the intellectual trends.

Every single detail the writer used serves a purpose, where she treated the novel as a meeting ground in which all the elements harmonized to complete

each other. The reader would easily connect every metaphor, foreshadowing, indication and characteristic to each other and form a full image of what the writer wanted him/ her to see; therefore the hierarchal analysis of the work starts from the narrative techniques Aboulela used to introduce her female characters, (Nash, 2002) as intellectually mature women who can decide their own destiny and control their own life regardless of the trio marginalization of being Muslim, female and culturally colonized.

The fact that the protagonist is a female was the first declaration of independence to show that women have a guiding voice which is approved by the west, but being a Muslim guiding voice was the revolution in which Aboulela declared her line of argument through presenting a culturally bilingual character that opens the door for building up a hierarchy of binaries determining the power relations and its sides. To serve this interest, Aboulela presented Sammar as a translator, indicating that she is in control of interpreting both cultures depending on her own female/ Muslim view.

The metaphorical indication of being a translator can sum-up the purpose of the novel and draw its guide line, because it gave Sammar the leading mission which means that the western male must follow her lead and join

her where she stands to serve his own benefit and change his life. This image presented a deconstructive insight for the passive stereotypes westerners form about Eastern/ Muslim women. Moreover, Aboulela made Sammar the bridge between cultures and people, and the exposing tool of racism and anti-Muslim sentiment, which involves her into an orientalist discourse; she also offered a moderate Islamic discourse far from coercion that paves the way for controlling the self and shaping identity as an advantage resulting from applying Islamic feminism in the lives of ordinary women.

Aboulela successfully exposed some of the most critical issues in literature through her own Muslim worldview. She engaged the West to East relation and at the same time highly differentiated them in an attempt to analyze hybrid characters falling in to a colonial romance, and at the same time to deliver a stronger message about the capability of shaping a profound identity for eastern/ Muslim women to stray from that western cultural control (Alaa, 2014).

Even though it is a highly feminist discourse, yet it has nothing to do with patriarchal control and passiveness. It somehow represents the patriarchal relation between men and women with changing the counterparts into west and east so that Sammar reflects the east and Rae reflects west, to present the

circle of power relations that reshaped Muslim woman's identity spatially in terms of education, work career and economic independence.

Sammar was well known by her first name, people did not need to stick her name with a male authority to define her. She was well educated, economically independent because of her work as a translator, and she has a cultivated and balanced identity that appears through her religious awareness.

As it is noted, Aboulela focuses the attention on some striking points in the life of exile, where she puts Sammar in front of endless contradictions till she ends up with an example for the modern Eastern/ Muslim woman, who from the very beginning drives the reader to walk inside her dream to subconsciously present her feelings about exile in Aberdeen describing it as rainy, foggy, dark and lifeless whereas in Khartoum everything had a voice filled with life, things were colorful, bright and spirited. "She dreamt that it rained and she could not go out... she was afraid of rain, of fog and snow which came to this country, afraid of the wind even...watching from the window people doing what she could not do". (1999,p.3)

This contradiction is applicable to the difference between Western and Eastern women in terms of looks and characteristics, where Aboulela has already applied this comparison, on Sammar and Rae's ex-wife. Sammar saw the ex-wife as a modern, independent, beautiful and educated woman, but she saw herself as a miserable, weak and far from civilized person; not because this is her character but because she suffered from alienation. (1999, p.15)

Depending on this indirect comparison, the writer exposed the levels of differences between eastern and western women without revealing the reasons behind this inequality, yet she later reveals it all, especially when the writer focuses on the economic and social disparities affecting both societies. Aboulela had a purpose in presenting the character of the ex-wife, which is to say that they are both single mothers, both have children and both have a career, yet Sammar faces the struggle of balancing between faith, love and exile which adds more pressure and challenges to her life. (Guyen, 2013)

Moving from this simple stage of comparison to a higher level, in connecting characters to the argument of the power relation debate where the

author presented the protagonist's mother in law as a strong, independent, respectable woman who is a reflection of the kind of women she has in her society, providing western readers an entrance to the Eastern feminist world that they know little about.

The strength and independence Mahasen shows, provides a strong proof that eastern/ Muslim women can be leaders in rearranging chaos and organizing life around them. She intervenes and prevents Sammar from destroying her life when she was willing to marry the old Ahmad Ali Yassen, striking Sammar's mind, and the reader's, with the fact that the patriarchal structures that are manifested in religious tradition, saying that widows needed protection and economic support is an old rule that doesn't apply to women like Sammar who has economic independence, good education and a supporting family.

Moreover, the writer talked in very powerful lines about the reason behind choosing Sammar as a name for her protagonist, where she explains that Sammar was unique in that her name stood on its own; "when people talked about her they never needed to use her last name". (1999, p.5)

Aboulela sharply forms the nature of Arab/ Muslim identity through the character of Sammar. She never needed to be introduced by a male

counterpart because she had her own identity that does not need her father's or grandfather's name to introduce her to the world. She is a complete entity, a one not an Other.

Such a presentation delivered in the beginning of the novel is highly metaphorical in its form and content, for it stands as a reflection of the Eastern/ Muslim real identity, (King, 2003) showing the influence of Islamic feminism and deconstruction of the western dilemma in an attempt to reshape western thinking about Muslims. (1999, p.13-15)

Cultural barriers become a problem when Rae joins the picture, Rae's character is no less important than Sammar's because he presents the western view of Eastern/ Muslim women as a Middle East scholar and lecturer, who is familiar with Islam and third world politics. The nature of his works and achievements tells a lot about the kind of differences between him and Sammar on a number of levels, where Aboulela used their relationship to tackle Orientalism and otherness.

The character of Yasmin, who is Rae's secretary and Sammar's friend , presented the sound of reason in Sammar's life where she always confronts her with her reality by being honest and direct about everything specially what she thinks about Sammar's relationship with Rae, "are you going to

marry someone who is not muslim??.. of course not...”. (1999, p.92) She accepts the reality of her being a foreigner and never intends to change this, believing that “ we are not like them” (1999, p.11)

Her character stands in the middle between Rae and Sammar because they present the unusual kind of characters in their societies, but Yasmin is the stereotypical image of Arab women in terms of her vision about the west and particularly Rae. “He is an orientalist”. (1999, p. 21).

Yasmin used to categorize people into two parties the “WE” and “THEM” or the west and other, the binary she used was a simple example to reveal the amount of discrimination planted in the minds of people over the years of colonialism and after, till it became normal to have such binary in which “They” are presented as rich developed countries and the third world societies as poor, weak and backward. (1999, p.11, 19)

Yasmin considers Rae as an orientalist, whom she credits with deforming the image of Islam and Arabs; and the argument raised between Sammar and Rae about cultural sensitivity adds even more weight to the binary between the two cultures, in which they discuss one of the most controversial issues about Arabs and Islam: virginity. Westerners do not take in to consideration the cultural differences. (Nash, 2002)

They judge the issue of virginity and chastity according to their own manners believing that these are the typical standards of the leading west which they believe it makes it applicable to all societies. The lack of awareness in the imperialist thinking of western feminism and politics, led to false judgments about Islam's and Arabs' ability to contain women issues, as a result of the wrong indulgence of these two societies. Which created more chaos, added more problems of adaptation and led to more serious social phenomena, (1999, p.19)

The process of indulgence and adaptation in exile is compared to the issue of digesting western culture and their feminist beliefs. This clash between the Islamic life style that Sammar has and the hazard materialist life she moved into, would clarify the process to the reader of how would an eastern/Muslim woman feel when she applies western feminism to her life; and she will end up with the same result of restrictiveness and uncertainty, which will affect her beliefs and values. Therefore Arab women are determined to stand against the claims of western feminism; that is to give Arab women their own space, time and choice to develop.

Politics plays a vital role in the novel, as well as, in the lives of the characters. It was reflected on the creation and development of Arab/ Islamic feminism, therefore it was Aboulela's mission to present a hierarchal development of political events concurrently with the development of Arab/ Islamic feminism and how they affect the lives of people like Sammsar as an Arab/ Muslim woman and Rae as a western citizen. Attempting to unveil a reality that has been misunderstood for ages, which made Aboulela presents a side of the deformed image of Islam hidden under the name of jihad or terrorism (Mahmood, 2005).

Aboulela mentions that everyone "suddenly became aware that Sammar was Muslim during the Gulf War..." (Aboulela, 1999, p.99)

Through this quotation Aboulela raised a beautiful comparison between Sammar's religious point of view about terrorism and Rae's political detailed understanding of the political science those terrorists are using. The amount of awareness a westerner could gain if he/she put their hand on the truth would change the brutal and aggressive thinking towards Muslims and Islam, and they would understand that all of these barriers and discrimination were created out of the power relation system to serve certain governmental interests.

For a further explanation, Aboulela attempts to alert the reader to the fact that the political situation became more complicated after the Gulf war and Muslims were treated with hostility and hatred, in spite of the fact that Islam is not about aggression and terror and thereby has a universal character where it can help people to adapt and cohabitate with life problems and its various circumstances. (1999, p.100)

In one way or another, the writer focuses on the small details of differences between the two cultures, presenting them through the stream of nostalgia for home and motherland, but also as an indirect indication of the fact that it's hard if not impossible for these two cultures to merge, especially with the use of power relations system that applies the binary of controller and follower or superior and inferior where in both of them colonialism must be applied; this leads Abuolela to indirectly present an Islamic life style through Sammar's life in exile thinking that it's the suitable way of adaptation and amalgamation between the two cultures simply because Islam is universal and transportable. (1999, p.44)

Sammar, as a presentative of females in the Arab world, was very much affected by those politics; she was confused and incapable of determining what to fight for when she is unsure about her identity.

Aboulela transformed the idea of the capability of spiritual connection to Allah in quietening the feelings of loss, grief and isolation and sometimes transcending cultural borders especially through the reference to Sammar's prayer and fasting in an attempt to emphasize the determination of Sammar to overcome cultural borders by faith which made her capable of positioning herself in this rapid and shocking culture she was dragged into. Because through Sammar's character, Aboulela indirectly pulls the reader in to the realms of Islamic feminism when each time she proves that the imposed western feminism on eastern women does not work. She proves it through her relation with Rae because he did not force her or impose anything on her; she was free to act, free to choose and above all she was allowed to do this according to her own beliefs and conditions, which restored to her the balance she lost from the cultural shock, thus it is impossible to have a universal feminism, simply because of the cultural privacy each society has, "they lived in worlds divided by simple facts religion, country of origin, race , data ..." . (1999, p.70, 29)

Furthermore, Sammar left her country not as an immigrant or war victim, which is supposed to make it easier for her to adapt, since the other cases of exile are dealt with by the west according to a particular policy, yet it was

hard not to feel isolated, different, and other because she could not enjoy the alleged freedom of the west. She was culturally shocked by the hypocrisy of western policies, which claims democracy and freedom yet; at the same time she could not pray in public. Whereas Aboulela expresses the collective aspect of Islam and its connection to community: “When she stood in prayer, her shoulders brushed against the women at each side of her... Under the sky, the grass underneath it, it was a different feeling from praying indoors, a different glow. She remembers having to hide in Aberdeen, being alone.” (1999, p.146)

In Aboulela's prose, women have taken the traditional roles of males in their societies in being leaders in defending and guiding to Islam. Sammar for example guided Rae to Islam and by breaking the stereotype of being a woman, leads a man to convert. Sammar passed the feminist/Muslim religious message saying that "The first believers were mostly women and slaves. I don't know why, maybe they had softer hearts, I don't know..." (1999, p. 124). Sammar's character proved that women are not submissive or subjected by men yet, Sammar challenged many stereotypes about Muslim women where she faced exile, and made choices all by herself without having any of her family members to control, force or advise her.

Still she was committed to praying, fasting and veiling because she thinks those are the right things to do even if they are very hard to keep and might destroy her relationship with Rae. "Because of who she was, how she dressed..." (1999, p.116).

When the reader goes further in the novel he/she will notice that the writer is very picky in choosing her phrases especially because of the nostalgic fantasies Sammar developed with time. Therefore Aboulela takes her protagonist to Khartoum so she can finally let the reader confront what Sammar left behind and to finally connect both cultures in one final ending; strikingly Sammar goes back to see that what she was longing for is not fulfilling and she start wishing for a new life centered around faith and her union with Rae as a crystallization for the kind of relationship the two cultures might have.

Aboulela's style in forming the image of Muslim women is unique, especially when dealing with religion, politics and culture according to their own cultural background, where she provides a better understanding of the role of women in reforming society through the contribution of religion in

their lives not only within a narrow range but worldwide which is sought through Sammar's character. This makes Aboulela a pioneer in presenting Arab/Islamic feminism from a worldview (Al-Adwan, & Yousef, 2014).

Accordingly it is one of the first cases of Islamic informed writings which took place on the international literary scene. "What makes Aboulela's writing Islamic is not dedication in applying the doctrines of Islam but, it is a certain narrative logic in which faith and rituals become a style of living". (Pepicelli, 2011)

Aboulela's literary point of view plays an important role in redefining the religious existence of modern societies, whether on the political or social levels, where it deals with the new trend of postmodern societies in reviving the role of religion and national culture to organize people's lives that is used under the slogan of cultural globalization as a weapon to control and prevail. Therefore Aboulela focused on Rae and Sammar's characters to provide a sharp criticism of the misunderstanding of the Islamic message, for example when she lets them talk about terrorists

"There is something pathetic about the spelling mistakes, the stains on the paper, in spite of the bravado. There are truths but they are detached, not tied to reality...". "You

get a sense of people overwhelmed... overwhelmed by thinking that nothing should be what it is now.” There is no recourse in the Sharia for what they're doing”.

(1999, p.26).

Most of Sammar’s talks about religion whether with Yasmine or Rae were more like a call for Arab women's rights and a deconstructionist attitude of western feminist norms. Through an Islamic feminist framework, Aboulela argues that women's empowerment can be accomplished inside Islam therefore she rejected the idea of westernization as the only means to free Arab/Muslim women. “she said she had imagined freedom in this part of the world, not rules not restrictions...” (1999, p.102). She criticized both, Western stereotypes and Islamist extremists, suggesting that it is possible to connect between secular and religious feminisms to reach a balanced reality and to present a suitable identity for Arab/Muslim women. “ Rae said that regardless of the dictatorship ruling Muslim countries, yet they can find balance through Quran and hadith...” (1999, pp. 108-109).

Aboulela succeeds in building up a hybrid identity for eastern/ Muslim women by letting Sammar take the lead in combining her religious and

cultural legacy with the best of western culture and she does this without falling into the trap of the power relations system. This provides a dramatic change in the cultural domination of the west over Arab countries; and overcomes the feminist perspective of Western man through the logical and sensitive study of the role of men where she finally lets the subaltern speak when she deconstructs the stereotypical image of the white savior who saves eastern women from savage eastern men; Sammar does not need a white man to save her. Instead, she saves Rae, both physically and spiritually when he sees the bright image of Islam through her character and converts. (scott, 1988)

Sammar's role does not stop at that, but she indirectly makes good use of the job she practices in which she is required to share talks and speak up about not only her own ideas but others, which is a metaphor of Muslim woman's way of adaptation with the imposed western feminism where they have the ability to choose what is suitable for them and what is not, even if they cannot directly speak their mind.

Aboulela represents Sammar as a woman who must balance religious and national loyalties with her love for Rae, and who must stimulate a conversation between East and West, Khartoum and Aberdeen. In doing so,

Aboulela participated in changing the norms of orientalist narration and to overcome the masculine domination.

Getting close to the final part of the novel, the writer chose to change the setting, separate the couple, and reach a conclusion in order to get ready for the romantic ending of the novel; this classical way of narration is yet indulgently manipulated to add some anomalous features for a highly contradicted text. (Tong, 2009)

Going back to Khartoum shifts the focus from the cultural gap to the technological gap between the two societies, giving an insight to the kind of destruction colonialism left in the lives of people who stayed long after it ended. An after post-colonial reflection on the desperate need for these third world societies to catch up and copy the technology westerners have. This need for the west and their control over economic resources is another image of colonialism and control. (1999, p.144)

As a result of the power relations system that put them under western control, almost all of the economy of Sudan was controlled by western forces which made life harder, more expensive and reduced the amount of production which affects the status of women and limits her development

(1999, p.153) . She describes life in third world countries where the vision of the future is not fully clear and very much controlled by fragile traditions and governmental systems that intervene in every single detail in people's life till it dominates over their hopes, dreams and achievements which makes it ironic to say "life was here... life was the dust storms...". (1999, p.153)

In her home land, when Sammar talked about Rae or thought about him, things were different, in which the binary relations of the self and other have been turned around so as to present Rae as the other or the foreigner and she as the controller; it's here where she starts to see both sides and captures the full image of that relationship and it is only then that they can share a discourse and an identity. "She knew that they stop at him being a foreigner..." (1999, p.164)

A few pages after this, Abdulla used the metaphor of shade saying that "when the shadow of everything was equal to its height" as an insight to what Sammar felt, she finally sees them as equal, standing beside each other not as a foreigner and Muslim woman but as two equal counterparts where the binary of power relations has finally reached a balance. (1999, p.193)

Sammar holds out the possibility that cross cultural relationships can exist, in which differences are not suppressed. Perhaps the Orientalist can be redeemed and indeed, ultimately Aboulela represents Rae subverting conventional Orientalist notions of masculinity through challenging western traditions of Orientalism and romance, and engaging with Aboulela's Sudanese Islamic literary tradition (Said, 2003). Therefore Rae's conversion to Islam was a remarkable turning point in the novel. Through his Islam, the writer was trying to state a substantial thing not only about Arabs/Muslims as a society but also about the power of a faithful and independent Arab/Muslim woman like Sammar and her ability to change things, to teach and guide and being always different from the stereotypical frame of the west about eastern women. "Rae had become a Muslim..." (1999, p. 190). Moreover, and regardless of the suspicions she had about his faith, Sammar knew that "he was not one of them, not modern like them, not impatient like them. He talked to her as if she had not lost anything, as if she were the same Sammar of a past time", (1999, p.29-30) and by Rae's conversion, she translated Islam into faith and changed the passive image of Muslim women in to a productive one.

The Translator is considered a literary bridging of the East-West divide and a cross-cultural learning opportunity, especially after the tragic events of 9/11, where it stands as an embodiment that supports the cultural amalgamation in race relations. In this sense, the novel was appreciated.

Aboulela's outstanding technique in writing as well as her distinctive abilities in forming this coherent work considered an important addition to the Islamic feminist school. Aboulela combines culture, politics and religion and then connects all that to the possession of Arab Muslim women in reviving their identity. Abdulla is one of many like Al-Tahawy and others who share a single goal of delivering the voice of the Arab woman to the whole world. Therefore, this thesis devoted the following part for analyzing one of the most recent writings in the field of Arab feminism "*Brooklyn Heights*" as a means of supporting the basic idea in this study.

4.2 *Brooklyn Heights*

Al-Tahawy wrote this novel in Arabic, for she believed that literature is the link between cultures and her tool to present a good image of the Middle East, attempting to change the Western view about it. She also tends to discuss issues related to the experience of living in exile and the struggle people face to regain balance in their life. Through such an experience, Al-Tahawy discusses the psychological details of the people in rural Egypt and urban Brooklyn; that is why the reader can directly see the elements of nostalgia, patriarchy, feminism, post-colonialism, post-modern politics and cultural diversity which are all influential motifs in this novel.

The writer opens the novel with the theme of exile and isolation to frame the overall atmosphere, but ironically the first section is named after a place (Flatbush Avenue) where the protagonist is supposed to start her new life. The writer ironically connected the crisis of place and belonging with living in the heart of a city where she is supposed to be surrounded with millions of voices and faces, but finds herself isolated in a place seemed heartless and lonely. Thus Al-Tahawy succeeded in giving the reader a previous insight to the psychological condition Hend was experiencing in exile.

Al-Tahawy sparked a new treatment of the issue of home and exile, when she dealt with the text, using post- post –colonial views, in which she placed her protagonist in exile in America and smoothly portrayed the gap between the two cultures through a binary that guides the reader to the heart of the novel. In connection to the theme of exile and isolation, the writer directly shows the fear of the unknown future and the nostalgia for the home land which is frequently repeated throughout the novel where the writer used dreams and flashbacks to reflect how her protagonist interacts with the current reality and at the same time accept the past. Therefore Al-Tahawy created a kind of binary, connecting and comparing the west to the east, Arabs to westerners, male to female and many other binaries in an attempt to reveal political, cultural and psychological facts.

She invoked terms that are individual, personal and local in which she focuses on the ethnic complications of Brooklyn and on the unnamed Egyptian Bedouin village. These realms are filled with such personal meaning that, homeland is considered as a space of the individual and at the same time it takes larger national significations of East vs. West or us vs. them. (Sheetrit, 2013)

The writer linked in a professional manner the status of immigrants from Arab countries to the nature of policies applied in western countries to provide one of the most important reasons that drive expatriates to feel isolated and discriminated against. She shows this by giving a simple paradox between the two societies and the racist western policy toward every one under the category of Other. She gave Hind the chance to go through the history of America, how she looked at Africans and how she presented the stereotype treatment of both Arabs and Africans. Putting them in the same group of discriminated people would tell a lot about them being the neglected group regardless of the fact that America's new president, Obama, is African. (2012, p.5-6)

The fact that Obama, the African- American president, won the election was a turning point in the history of America. The writer used it as a crucial political indication in the novel, where she has a keen eye on the impact of this event in reviving hope among expatriates of different minorities. They see Obama as a hope that the West will finally accept the Other, regardless of color, race, religion, cultural and social background.

Hend who was falling in to depression and loneliness thought that the winning of Obama was only a fake hope, a way of narcosis thinking that no

actual change would happen. She thought that hegemony and discrimination will take another form and shape after this event (Tyagi, 2014). And so, the writer leaves us with questions about the new principles of the power relations system that indicates distribution of power between the parties of different binaries. (2012, p.7,8)

The writer sheds light on what is called the glamour of the American dream which is the topic that drives the attention of post-colonial writers especially those who trace the journey of migrants from the third world to the land of dreams “America”. There was one shared experience among all migrants, which is that all of them came with great hope and a bunch of dreams to achieve, believing that America is the free land where all dreams come true. Then they meet reality and all those dreams collapse and they end up with nothing but culture shock and a list of postponed dreams. Hend was one those who ran away from their homeland to accomplish their dreams and like all of them, she found herself living in isolation, working as a cleaner and full of desperation and fear. Fear made her unable to write or to dream. (2012, p. 162-163)

The writer tended to expose Hend's journey through exile, adaptation and change to overcome the image of Egypt's patriarchal society and to share the voices of those who are considered marginal whether as females, Arabs, immigrants or Muslims.

She focused on the past of her protagonist, starting from her childhood up to her present, in an attempt to invest this retrospection in establishing a comparison between what Hend was facing and what she hopes to achieve in the land of the American dream. Therefore, Hend takes us back to the village she used to live in where she faced great struggles economically, emotionally, and culturally simply because she is an Egyptian Bedouin who came from a restricted family controlled by her father.

Hend lived in a harsh family atmosphere where she witnessed the harsh treatment of her mother at the hands of her father and how he scolded and hit her, and treated her as an object by bounding her existence. Hend used to see their daily battles over money and other family matters, which had a great impact on her future. Hend faced lots of hard times in her own marriage, till her husband walked out and never came back, leaving her with one benefit only which is his visa that allowed her to move to Brooklyn to face another kind of alienation and abandonment in the land of exile. (2012, p. 58, 62)

It is noticeable that Hend's relation with her father seemed unstable. She was distanced from w2him yet, she carried so much love and attraction to his character because she found in his masculine Arab attitude. A symbol presenting the image of the educated oriental man. He used to read books about modernity, liberation and change but he did not replace his values and beliefs to follow the flow that changed life around him. (2012, p. 146)

Her relationship with him was a pure patriarchal relation even though, she was stubborn, wild and always dreaming of independence. She was trying to rebel against that patriarchal society that surrounded her with older women who were forced to adapt to a life beyond their control.

Hend liked talking about her father. She memorized every single memory she has about him and she was mesmerized by his dreams and goals. His education motivated her love for books and to practice writing which she was grateful to have, because writing became her gait to freedom and self-therapy. (2012, p.147)

This kind of relationship formed part of her identity in addition to her relation with other characters. Where Al-Tahawy draws a circle of female characters starting with Fatema the black beautiful cashier, Noha the dreamy choppy girl and finally Hanan the obedient talented girl. While attempting to

present diversity in female characters that passed in Hend's life, each one of them completes the other, and each one of them formed a part of her personality.

Through Fatema's character, the writer tries to present what female migrants face in order to achieve their dreams even when they have every good potential to achieve it. Yet being an outsider, colored and different would always stand in the way of achieving balance in an unbalanced and hypocrite world. As for Noha's character, she reflects Bedouin society. Repression of the majority of girls in it, who grew up with abilities, potentials and great love for freedom but soon find their dreams clash with a reality controlled by backward traditions and patriarchal rules that force them to abandon their dreams and gradually disappear. Girls eventually end up, like Hanan, passive, controlled, maids or immovable objects that are deprived of freedom and the ability of choice. (2012, p.115-120)

In contrast to all these characters, Nazzhat the migrated old doctor tends to reflect the image of the powerful Arab/Muslim woman, who regardless of all social restrictions, can be productive, helpful and an effective member of society. Armed with education and faith in her Islamic feminist attitude, "she is a true Muslim woman". (2012, p. 124-125)

Furthermore, Hend's son is one of the biggest concerns and one of the strongest ropes which controlled her movement and linked her to the past; therefore Al-Tahawy used this character to indirectly present the struggle of adaptation and the rejection of the past because he reminded her of his father, the after birth stretch marks on her belly reminds her of the amount of alienation she had with her body, and her continuous nightmares of dying while sleeping and leaving him alone, all lead her to a state of panic and constant fear; simply because running away from the past was not enough for Hend, she had to face the struggle for independence without falling under the influence of despair like many of the characters she met in exile, yet she has to have the courage to believe that some dreams can come true regardless of age.

Al-Tahawy used the character of the guest (Hend's grandmother) to manipulate the imagination of the reader through giving previous indications about Hends' character and her predicted future. In addition to indirectly dealing with the issues of feminism and male domination in Egyptian society, the writer opens the scene of the guest, by Hend saying that she looks very much like her grandmother, who will be presented later to the reader as the guest. Because as long as Hend could remember, she lived in the guest room isolated, unnamed and an outsider to the extent that she did not know she was her grandmother until the day of her death.

Her grandmother's story was full of patriarchal indications; she was treated as a sex machine, used only to give birth to male children. She was taken away from her family where her husband shut her up and placed her in a house with high walls. This sudden loss of connection with her family and her old life created a kind of a memory shock where she could not let go of the past and at the same time could not run away from her present. This duplication in realities is reflected in depression and memory loss, where she lost communication with place and time and "could not tell east from west". (2012, p. 37-42)

From this standpoint, Al-Tahawy discussed the impact of exile on immigrants, particularly Hend who fell into depression that caused her memory loss and made her isolated, silent and losing track of time and reality. She was always hanging on the realms of the past until she saw the condition of Lilith who reached a terrifying kind of amnesia. Hend felt that she was looking to the future version of herself. As if forgetfulness became a metaphor for all immigrant condition. Concluding that; in order to define your identity in exile you must let go of your former self, values, beliefs, or traditions for the sake of adaptation.

This renunciation for the sake of adaptation added another central issue for discussion, which is the issue of normalization. Normalization is the process of creating normal human relations in an abnormal context. It is used in colonialism as a political system applied successfully on Arab countries to end 2ure the religious and civilizations gap between East and West. It is used as a tool of concealment, hiding the central issues of the conflict, which is to serve the western interest in quelling the resistance movements and over control the political and civil rights of the Arab countries. (IMEMC news, 2015)

Ultimately these renunciations damaged the legitimacy of Arab governments and forced them to accept the western dominant conditions by a gradual process of surrender and compromise. (2011, p.17, 34)

The process of normalization has lots to do with the kind of effect western societies have on immigrants that were not reflected on Hend only, yet Al-Tahawy was seeking universality in presenting all other stories in the novel. Lilith, Hend's family, the retired bakery owner Naguib al-Khalili and his nephew, Ziyad, are all highly individualized, and yet they also present variations on Hend's themes of identity, normalization, displacement, and

memory, so that the book as a whole feels unified regardless of the episodic structure.

Females in Al-Tahawy's prose are structured as the antihero, running from some major psychological issues of Otherness and alienation on both the personal and cultural levels. These issues occurred along with a growing sense of displacement and dislocation whether in diaspora or motherland. Ostensibly, the narrative is dedicated to highlight the daily life aspects of these women, but in the depth of the text, we find that the writer is trying to rebuild Arab women's identity through filtering and revealing the issues of belonging, and dislocation. (Upstone, 2009)

Al-Tahawy discusses one of the most important issues in Arab/ Islamic feminism, which is the western feminist normalization, believing that it is hard if not impossible for an eastern Muslim woman to digest and adapt to western society without losing her identity, simply because western societies treat outsiders as Others, people who have low ability to keep up with western social norms. Thus they put the Arab woman under the choice of

either enduring or accepting western restrictions or to stay as outsider, alien and displaced.

Placing Arab women under this dichotomy will definitely damage their identity and place them in an endless stream of depression and loneliness that might drive them after all to abdicate gradually many of their personal, religious and cultural values for the sake of adaptation and belonging; this will deconstruct the claims of western feminism in seeking liberty for all women, and giving women the chance to build their own identity. Of course the dynamics of west and east are not vain, yet it is used as the central point of this novel as well as the central point of the feminist argument between both Arab/Islamic feminism and western feminism that the text deals with, through presenting this relationship from a different angle.

The borders between home and exile seem confused and the private and the public become part of each other, leaving the decision for the female heroine to decide which part of the equation to choose. (Moghadam, 2002)

Al-Tahawy draws a magnificent image for the issue of religion in Muslim's life by using the psychological contradictions Hend faced throughout her childhood in digesting Islam. She presented her experience in examining the

Puritanical lifestyle in contrast with the tolerant one. Al-Tahawy wove the descriptions with high proficiency to end up giving an overall picture of the religious discourse reciprocally used among people. She also pointed out how Hend's father and Fatma al-Qarumiya used that discourse to serve their motives. As for Hend, she summed up the situation between the opposing parties and showed the impact of each one of them on the individual's life. The scene ends with Hend's current reality in exile that does not carry any features of the two experiments, yet it reflects the simulation principle of western coexistence regardless of the fact that she still carries some old habits out of habituation rather than comply with religion. (2012, p. 64-68)

Giving these diverse uses of Islam, was meant to explain that, what one or a group of people might do in the name of Islam should not be generalized on all the others. And that the treatment of migrants should be based on individual matters; in order to reduce the generalization of terrorism over all of Arabs and Muslims.

Through this Al-Tahawy is summing up the idea of having a lot of customs and traditions related to religion when it is just a tradition that Arabs are accustomed to and not actually related to Quran and Sunna; and if we discuss this idea from an Arab/ Islamic feminist perspective then it is a must

to go through the theme of moderation that Amina Wadud and others talked about, in which they presented Islam as a protection source for woman that came to give her all her rights and save her existence in society. (Wadud, 1999)

Starting from the idea of moderation, Islamic feminism came to save woman from rushing into one side over the other, whether extremism or exaggerated liberation, emphasizing the core of this school in reducing the western feminist interference in the habits, traditions and customs of Arab woman in order to preserve the balance of her Arab identity.

It's not a coincidence that almost all of the chapters are named after places, streets or parks, simply because "place" was a crucial issue in Hend's life. She always felt displaced and isolated where she was looking for settlement and belonging to one particular place that she can call home. But whenever she looked back to her past she could not find that place so she sticks to her present, but that would fail her too, and eventually she ends up alienated and lost forever.

Hend's most frightful thought about herself is that she was unable to determine her own identity that was questioned by everyone around her who

always mistake her for a Jew, Latino, Indian or a gypsy. She was not able to answer them because she did not know who she was. (2012, p. 204-205)

The writer discusses this issue in chapter 10 of the novel which is named after Prospect Park, where she opened the chapter with talk about the migrant's prospect about America. The name is ironic because that park is supposed to be a smaller version of central park, just like these migrants were trying to present a smaller version of the American dream and both end up imitating but never reaching their goal. (2012, p.162, 169) Al- Tahawy refers to T.S.Eliot's *The Waste land* signifying that the American dream is nothing but a big lie and a delusion spread by the government to contain and control the masses through false hope that one day their dreams would come true.(2012, p. 169)

The whole novel is built on retrospection until the final chapter, where the writer ends the stories of the minor characters by telling the story of their death, all except Hend. The writer gives a foreshadowing of what Hend's life is going to look like when she made her think that she had written Lilith's letters and that all of the self-portraits of Lilith were hers, and the photographs of Lilith's son are of her son, which make her think that she is

going to die in the same way; alone, dispirited and full of fear. (2012, p. 218-219)

Al-Tahawy is considered the first Egyptian Bedouin woman to write modern Arabic prose. Through her characters, who are lost and alienated, this post-modern novel tends to deconstruct the reasonable binaries associating between homeland and belonging with exile and diaspora in a way that dilute the spatial and temporal boundaries and make them the subject to attract all humanitarian psychological cases like alienation. Al-Tahawy is not limited to the distance from home, yet she discusses the subject of psychological alienation within the homeland and loneliness, while having people around. (Sheetrit, 2013)

4.3. The comparison between Abualula's novel *The Translator* and Al-Tahawy's novel *Brooklyn Heights*:

Though Leila Aboulela and Al-Tahawy are authors with very close biographies, yet they are very different in their literary style, productions and in dealing with issues of women, migration, cultural differences and Islam. They both worked on reconstructing the image of Muslim women in Europe. They stand against the marginalization of Muslim women's characters; therefore they gave a voice to female characters who adapted Islam to empower themselves.

The literary works of Leila Aboulela and Al-Tahawy take their value from their primary goal of reviving cultural awareness and enlightening Western readers regarding the Islamic religion and its importance in the lives of Arabs in general and Arab women in particular.

Each writer presented a novel full of female characters that live within the Islamic framework in an attempt to tackle a wide audience of non-professional readers who represent the public opinion about Islam. Through

seeking to correct the wrong thinking that linked Arabs and Islam to terrorism especially after the events of 9/11.

They tackled some major issues in the lives of Muslim women in particular and migrants in general to raise awareness and to share their Arab/Muslim views about their own lives and problems. Therefore, they express their Islamic womanhood through multiple discourses and multiple speaking positions.

Through Sammar and Hend's developed characters, they re-delineated the cultural, geographical and sexual boundaries, to redefine and renew these elements. The two authors draw portraits of Muslim women who show the necessity of discussing categories of identity, women's role, religion, political influences and cultural differences to show that women can empower themselves through Islam whether in their homeland or in exile.

Most importantly, they open the door for new feminist analysis taken from the emergence of Arab writers in fiction, that empowered Muslim women's identities, gave them the space they need to speak out, and resist the western stereotypical discourses about them. In line with these achievements, the comparison will be on how Islamic feminism was applied in each text in

order to search for identity, how each text deconstructed western feminism through using normalization, otherness and power relations system, and finally the differences in writing techniques used in each novel and how it served the major themes.

- **Islamic feminism and Identity:**

Both writers created a system of binary relations to guide and control the outline of their novels, but each one of them tended to indirectly present this binary through choosing certain themes, characters or writing techniques in which Aboulela used the relationship between Sammar and Rae to form the power relation system. Throughout the characteristics of each one of them, the writer managed to make the reader aware that Sammar presents the image of eastern/ Muslim woman and Rae presents the secular/ western man. This binary is highly significant and crucially important because it helps the writer as well as the reader to follow the sequence of events and connect them with the major themes like Islamic feminism.

Aboulela's prose is considered a perfect example of Islamic feminism, for she managed to reflect the most important themes of this movement, through

her characters. Sammar for example, presented the character of a moderate Muslim woman. Her love for her religion and her devotion in Prayers, fasting, and veiling made her a strong woman with unshaken beliefs. Her love for Rae resembles the effect of the west on Arabs, but Sammar was strong enough to defend her beliefs and the indulgence with west did not shake her balance because she managed to stay truthful to her Arab/ Islamic background and helped Rae to change his life too. Rae needed Sammar more than she needed him because she found her identity, strength, independency and balance in her Arab/ Islamic background.

What differentiate Al-Tahawy from Aboulela, is that she used a system of binary relations based on the narrative techniques of retrospection and foreshadowing, where she managed to raise a comparison between the west and the east. Each time Hend faced her western reality, the small details take her back to her homeland so she starts to compare and contrast places, events, people, names, systems and so on. This helped the reader to get the essence of the novel and figure out the amount of loss that Hend and other migrants faced.

Unlike Sammar, Hend disconnected herself from her religious, cultural and traditional background thinking that it would stand in the way of changing

her life, but this abandonment caused her many troubles. It affected her psychological condition, social connections and developed her feelings in to more loneliness and loss. Hend reached the end of the novel with extra doubts and she did not manage to find her own identity. This helped in showing the difference between using Arab/ Islamic feminism as a lifestyle and using the western one. Al-Tahawy succeeded in showing that western norms do not fit an Arab/ Muslim woman because they do not fit their culture, religion, values and traditions and will add more complexity and more loss to their lives.

Both writers used female supporting figures in their narrative. These supporting figures are used to fill the gaps in the lives of both heroines and to share some diversity of female characters, in an attempt to cover a good percentage of Arab women characteristics, problems, and to deal with women issues in general.

Along with Sammar's character, Aboulela presented other female characters like Yasmine, Mahasen and the ex-wife. Each one of them played a vital role in forming the reader's full image about Arab/ Islamic feminism and the role of Arab woman in society.

As for Al-Tahawy, she shared a wide range of diversity in female characters with different stories and conditions to shed light on the psychological condition of Hend and to discuss what migrants face in exile. Al-Tahawy's novel is full of names and figures with different backgrounds and different struggles, yet all of them share one identity of Otherness whether in exile or in their homeland, thus the issue of place and belonging is crucial.

Even though Hend's character is the opposite of Sammar in dealing with alienation, exile and feminism, yet, both of them served the same interest of showing the significant importance of Arab/ Islamic feminism in the lives of Arab women, Sammar through applying it and Hend through abandoning it.

- **Deconstructing western feminism**

Applying Islamic feminism and showing its importance in the lives of the characters was a major step in deconstructing western feminism. The deconstructing of such a dominant movement is not easy since it became a global phenomenon and a movement with many achievements over years. Yet both of Aboulela and Al-Tahawy managed to convince the readers that western feminism is vague, useless, inapplicable, and chaotic when it comes to applying it on Arab/ Islamic societies. They used the hierarchal comparison between traditions, values, religion, historical legacy, and human psychology in both societies to prove their point of view. They both used the system of power relations among their characters to reveal the hypocrisy of western feminism in claiming universality and standing for all women in the world when the truth is that western feminism fixed Arab/Muslim women in a deformed and marginalized stereotypical image as the Others.

Sammar's character proved that Islamic feminism is the best method to achieve balance in life, and it suits her Arab/ Islamic identity, because it gave her the chance to preserve her own legacy and adapt with the western society at the same time. Through her character, Aboulela managed to break the passive stereotype image of Arab women by defending Islam through

explaining the difference between Islam as a religion and a lifestyle and being a Muslim.

Sammar is presented as a strong independent woman, who never needed any male support especially Rae's. This point is highly important because Rae represents the west and her lack of need of his help means that Arab women do not need any kind of western control over them. This announces the resistance to stereotyping Islam and Muslims in the west and in the east. In addition, it portrays Islam as a global way of life that could be followed in the West as well as in the East. Therefore, Aboulela presented Arab/ Islamic feminism as an identity that gives her characters peace and spiritual fulfillment they cannot find in western society.

Hend's character strays away from anything that has to do with her past, religion, culture and beliefs which made her go through a recessive psychological condition of loss, depression and instability till she ends up marginalized and with no determined identity. Her condition proved that adapting western norms is a force to let go of her legacy in order to adapt with the western model, which creates a gap or a crack in her psychology. Hend was not the only character in Al-Tahawy's prose who followed

western feminism and failed her. Al-Tahawy presented other examples like Fatema, to elaborate her idea of the hypocrisy of western feminism.

Both writers were capable to reverse the binary of power relations, where Islamic feminism takes the lead and Muslim Arab women speak up.

This non-stereotypical portrayal of Arab woman and Muslims is a means of deconstruction of the western feminism that is an obstacle they are forced to deal with because it is a system of imposed normalization applied over Hend and all Arabs. Applying normalization stands against everything western feminism claimed to stand for.

- **Writing techniques:**

The characterization, narration, symbolism, and formation all helped in presenting an integrated text. Even though the writers shared few similar points in the creation of their novels, yet they presented them through different writing techniques. Each writer tends to choose a particular technique depending on what serves their major themes.

Aboulela's writing techniques attract the reader's attention because of the accurate and voluble style. She succeeded in transforming ordinary life events into something profound, major and meaningful. She makes the reader believe that the events as well as the characters are real so that he/she can interact with them.

Aboulela does not try to filter her characters, instead she shows all of their good and bad deeds, therefore she presented a well written text depending on the realist school in reflecting all of the novel's characteristics. Her style fluency and dexterity in expression allows the reader to comprehend and connect a group of the hardest critical movements like deconstruction, feminism and post-colonialism all together, where her literary production contributed to the simplification and dissemination of the Islamic feminist movement.

She managed to connect the simple everyday elements with sophisticated and advanced criticism of society, through using realistic characters to enter into the world of critical analysis of the political and religious discourse.

Even though it is a short novel, yet it successfully captures the sense of place, time and events by presenting an unusual and originaive insight into the emotional and physical experience of Arab/Muslim women in exile.

Al-Tahawy's writing techniques are no less important than those of Aboulela, she creatively portrays the creole, marginalized and displaced female character and even though it was a portrait, yet it resembles part of her real life experience.

She has creatively invested the temporal and spatial elements in transferring the psychological and physical state of the characters in exile. She used the parallelism in the narrative to break the spatial barriers between the Bedouin village and Brooklyn despite the great geographical, cultural and social differences, but the reader finds himself moving smoothly and easily between the two cultures.

She was very careful in choosing expressions which often hide other intended meanings, where she uses retrospection to compare and contrast between her characters present and past. This was helpful to the readers in moving between the two cultures easily without getting lost.

Al-Tahawy used a number of writing techniques like foreshadowing, retrospection and the combination of poetic and public language to add a realistic but literary touch to the text. It makes the discription of events and feelings very precise.

Tahawy paid great attention to details because each one of them is found for a reason, in her effort in discussing the psychological condition of migrants and their central issue of identity; she even left us with an open ending where Hend identifies herself with a minor dying character rather than choosing her own ending.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

No one can ignore the fact that feminism seeks freedom and liberation for women from all the bonds that limit their productivity, development and creativity, yet, the imposed western feminism over Arab women is somehow an application of the very things that they stand against, such as subservience, imitation, normalization, which brings to light the problem of the duplicity and hypocrisy of western intellectual movements.

The Translator and *Brooklyn Heights* concentrate on investigating the issues of identity, otherness, and alienation. Both novels apply Islamic feminism, deconstruction, and post-colonialism to criticize the western feminist control over the Arab women intellectual field by examining feminism from a completely different perspective, through shedding light on the practices of Arab/Islamic feminism.

The previous analysis of *The Translator* and *Brooklyn Heights* concentrated on how Arab/ Islamic feminism formed a special identity for Arab women and how it applies the ideas of deconstructing the upper authority and power relations system to establish a new insight for the portrait of Arab women in fiction as well as in reality, from an Arab point of view.

Islamic feminism is a method and a way of reading texts that aims to show how western trends deconstruct and contradict themselves. It tries to explain how Arab/ Islamic feminist characteristics help Arab women and reverses and subverts the privileged side in a binary pair.

The novels provide two images of Islamic practice: conservative, where Islam is viewed in its stereotypical image by the west, and moderate with positivity that shows it as the center of the character's lives. Aboalula's work provides a moderate image of Islam from her Arab/Islamic feminist perspective; therefore, she portrays a powerful, independent, and moderate character for Arab women, to prove the centrality of women's rights in Islam and that it is the most suitable way to declare a balanced identity for them. Aboulela's novel resists the crisis of identity and tends to provide an

alternative for the western materialist feminism where she offers a fresh image of Islam.

The issue of women's rights and Islam is depicted in Al-Tahawy's prose, where she managed to reflect the psychological condition derived from Arab woman's alienation and adaptation in a western country. She published this novel in a critical period in the politics of Islam, Arabs, and in the world in general, in which Arab/Muslim women were faced with difficulties and identity crisis.

Al-Tahawy explored Islamic feminism in a way that discusses the clash of two cultures, in which the west attempts to impose its values on the Arab/Muslim woman and she managed throughout the text to show the amount of loss, discrimination and alienation the characters face out of this imposed culture. Till the end of the novel, the protagonist Hend could not determine her identity, because she chose to leave her cultural and religious legacy behind her and tended to adapt with the western norm.

The issue of women's rights and feminism has been conducted in different discourses, yet it did not solve the misunderstanding between Islam and the West, therefore the works of Aboulela and Al-Tahawy and many others,

attempted to reach a state of balance and harmonization in this relationship.

This thesis exposes and concludes the efforts of those writers in establishing an Arab feminist Identity through their prose, to promote a new status for women within a rethought Islam.

Throughout the novels, the thesis addresses and discusses the hypocrisy and discrimination of western feminism that imposed its own values on Arab women in both East and West.

5.2 Recommendations

Much has happened since the two novels were published, like the continuous Arab revolutions since December 2010 up to now. These revolutions are a rich material for examining the development of Arab/ Islamic feminism in the public field.

Many studies concentrated on Arab/Muslim women's rights and focused on the issue of belonging and identity, yet none of them connected between *Brooklyn Heights* and *The Translator* in one study. Therefore, more comparative studies are needed to connect these novels under the theme of Islamic feminism.

In light of the use of the power relations system and deconstruction, the researcher recommends to have more studies to connect between the schools of criticism and Arab/Islamic feminism in an analytical manner.

Another recommendation is to have a comprehensive comparison between minor female characters like Mahasen in *The Translator* and Hend's grandmother in *Brooklyn Heights* to analyze their effort in searching for identity in the Arab world.

Finally, politics plays a vital role in the development of any intellectual movement, therefore it is recommended to study the effect of the Political orientation of western feminism on the generalization of Islamic feminism.

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