

### Place and Identity in Leila Aboulela's Novel *The Translator*

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#### Abstract

Leila Aboulela's narratives explore among other things, the complexities of the daily life of religious Muslim women. Aboulela's first novel *The Translator* (1990), is a story of a struggling Muslim female between passionate feelings and religious dedication in a setting full of grief and loss. The study aims at giving answers to questions about the depiction of the sense of belonging and religious affiliation and practice on a Muslim in a non-Muslim environment. The analytical descriptive approach is used to discuss *The Translator* based on post-colonial theory and its manifestation, diaspora. The researcher argues that 'place as home' has a significant role in *The Translator*, and that the novel creates a diasporic space in an attempt to describe a discourse in Islamic terms that permits the protagonist to find a home of highly unconventional image. It is also argued that religious faith is crucial in the formation of the protagonist's identity, and the representations of this identity are deeply rooted in Muslims' everyday lives. The researcher uses primary and secondary sources to collect and analyze the data. The researcher finds that Islam grants Sammar, the protagonist, a sense of belonging and empowers her to reshape her identity. In her attempt to transform feelings of displacement and dislocation through her Muslim faith, she manages also to transform the person that she loves.

**Key words:** post-colonial theory, diaspora, identity, Muslim faith

#### المستخلص

تستكشف روايات ليلي أبو العلاء، من بين أمور أخرى، تعقيدات الحياة اليومية للنساء المسلمات المتدينات. رواية أبو العلاء الأولى "المتريجة" (1990)، هي سرد لصراع شخصي للمرأة المسلمة بين الحب والالتزام الديني في بيئة مليئة بالحزن والضياع. تهدف الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن أسئلة حول تصوير الشعور بالانتماء والانتماء الديني والممارسة على المسلم في بيئة غير مسلمة. يستخدم المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لمناقشة الرواية بناءً على نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار ومظاهرها المتمثلة في الشتات. يجادل الباحث بأن "المكان كموطن" له دور مهم في الرواية، وأن الرواية تخلق مساحة للشتات في محاولة لوصف الخطاب من منظور المصطلح الإسلامي مما يسمح للبطل بالعثور على وطن ذي تصور غير تقليدي. يجادل أيضاً أن الإيمان الديني أمر حاسم في تكوين هوية بطلة الرواية، وأن تمثيلات هذه الهوية متجذرة بعمق في حياة المسلمين اليومية. يستخدم الباحث المصادر الأولية والثانوية لجمع وتحليل البيانات. وجد الباحث أن الإسلام يمنح سمر، بطلة الرواية، شعوراً بالانتماء ويمكنها من إعادة تشكيل هويتها. وفي محاولتها تغيير مشاعر التشرد والتفكك من خلال إيمانها الإسلامي، تمكنت أيضاً من تغيير الشخص الذي تحبه.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، الشتات، الهوية، الإيمان بالإسلام.

### Introduction

Contemporary British fiction has started to show concern about themes of multicultural relations, identity formation, and diaspora. Furthermore, the rise of the movement of immigrants has paved the way for the arrival of new ethnicities, religions, and races into British culture. When Muslim British writings have appeared, British fiction witnessed a rise of concern about creating a new understanding of the Muslim presence in the Western scenery. Besides that, when new terrestrial borders are drawn, Muslim communities find themselves politically split, yet they hold cultural and symbolic links with shared ties through transnational and modern communications. They have not become migrants moving constantly across and within national borders, rather it is their geographically flexible identity that oscillates between origin and diaspora that characterizes Muslim identity. Being members of a world community, Muslims think transnationally while keeping deep connections with a specific place, whether it is of birth, of choice, or imposed.

The choice to focus mainly on women stems from the fact that migration affects men and women differently and that women and men respond differently to the changes brought about by migration and the experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, Muslim female writers who live in Britain are not simply rooted in a religious identity but are produced, as Mohammad (2005:180)<sup>1</sup> contends, across “a matrix of discourses”, ranging from Western secular to the Islamist. Nevertheless, a growing body of scholarly work has sought to destabilize essentialized representations of the Muslim female as a passive, submissive,

highly regulated object. The researcher is particularly interested in female Arab Muslim characters since women’s experience as immigrants is even more anxious than their male counterparts: women often cope with a more severe divide between the private and the public (Santesso 2013:4)<sup>2</sup>. Women also struggle to adapt to a new environment so as to balance the domestic with the public and to redefine the role of religion in one’s life can be more difficult for women living in a traditional diasporas’ community, which can aggravate, as D’haem (1993:13)<sup>3</sup> states, “an unease and, a discomfort with one’s own culture” since the immigrant feels shattered between two cultures and yet belonging to none of them.

Aboulela’s depiction of Islam and its relationship with the Western society challenges the Western stereotypes and some Eastern ones as well. Aboulela’s *The Translator* has appeared to convey a different opinion, in a Western secular environment, contradicting many Eastern as well as Western perspectives. Sethi (2005)<sup>4</sup> states that “Aboulela offers a very different portrayal of Muslim women in London ... Rather than yearning to embrace Western culture, Aboulela’s women seek solace in their growing religious identity”.

Western education is one of the factors that develop Aboulela’s personality besides her mother’s great influence. Aboulela states in (Aboulela, 2007a)<sup>5</sup> that “My mother is a wonderful person, very open-minded and progressive, and she taught me a lot of things that I still use, even though literature is not her field at all ... She was one of the few women in Khartoum who worked, one of the few women who could drive”.

Therefore, Aboulela does not seem to have an oppressed mother, and this has eventually affected her daughter who grasps the chance to exercise the freedom to go to work and to drive. Spending many years at Khartoum University, Aboulela was exposed, at an early age, to the Western educational system. She studied at the American School in Khartoum and then at a Catholic girls' school; she then finished her study at the London School of Economics. Going to the American and Catholic schools, Aboulela was allowed to evade the stereotypical attitude of conservative Muslims who normally choose local Muslim schools to send their daughters to in an attempt to protect them from the impact of Western culture. It is quite obvious that Aboulela's family and her education are in harmony, and both help construct the Western side of her personality.

The novel represents Muslim identity for Muslim women as far from imposed but central to their lives and well-being. The main characters' religious states of mind associate the logic of Aboulela's fiction with a religious one. Ghazoul (2001)<sup>6</sup> states that there is "a certain narrative logic in Aboulela's fiction where faith and rituals become moving modes of living". Hassan (2008:310)<sup>7</sup> also argues that Aboulela's narrative logic "expresses a religious worldview that does not normally inform modern literature". The selected novel does not represent Muslim women as either victims or escapees of Islam, but as committed to Islam and spiritually, emotionally, and morally connected to it. Moreover, they challenge the stereotype of a victimized, oppressed Muslim woman. The researcher believes

that there are some specialties that make the novel a unique work due to the experience of the author, which will ultimately influence the way she tackles the question of place and identity. *The Translator* is an example of a narrative that deals mainly with Muslims' contemporary life. This life was not immune from the complicated experience of alienation and detachment. At the same time, the negotiation of their British Muslim identities posits a dilemma in the way of discovering their stance in a secular domain.

The absence of a clearly selected frame of identity appears in the idea of rootlessness and unbelonging, an idea that gives authentic evidence to identity crisis. So, identity can be understood in terms of belonging, of what one has in common with some other people, and of what differentiates one from the other. At its most basic, identity gives subjects a sense of personal location, the stable core of one's individuality. It is also about relationships, a complex involvement with others, and in the modern world, these have become ever more complex and confusing links. The theme of belonging and a search for roots have been raced with insight and received prolonged critical treatment in post-colonial literature. The individual's identity is not complete unless roots are known. The return to the roots is an important mindset to formulate an independent identity that can stand away from the effect of the other. Moreover, national identity is also defined, as in Weeden (2004:20)<sup>8</sup>, "in an exclusive relationship of difference from others that is most often tied to a place or lack of it. It is also linked to language, history and culture."

Weeden (2004:20)<sup>9</sup> confirms the role of history and tradition in the formulation of national identity; he states that “history and tradition have another role to play: the interpellation of subjects and the inducing of a sense of identity and belonging. Individual constructions of identity are affirmed by seeing something of oneself and one’s forebears in representations of history of the nation”.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to analyze one of Aboulela’s novels, *The Translator* to explore whether belonging to a place and an identity, in a secular Western environment, can affect a character’s affiliation.

#### **Questions of the Study:**

1. What is the significance of place in Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator*?
2. To what extent is the identity of the protagonist mirrored in *The Translator*?

#### **Literature Review**

##### ***The Translator and Religious Identity***

Aboulela’s novel *The Translator* (1999) portrays a Muslim female struggle between romance and religious affiliation in an environment full of sadness and loss. *The Translator* is a story of a young British-born Sudanese Muslim widow, Sammar who lives in a self-imposed exile in Aberdeen after the death of her cousin husband, Tarig who had been killed in a car accident in Aberdeen, where she once lived with her husband and their son, Amir, four years ago. She returns to Khartoum with Amir hoping for a fresh start but a quarrelsome life with her mother-in-law leads her to leave her son behind in Sudan and return to Scotland. To support herself in Aberdeen, she works as a translator of Arabic texts into English and is employed by Rae Isles, a

twice-divorced Middle Eastern and Islamic political studies scholar at the University of Aberdeen. Sammar and Rae fall in love over one Christmas break, as their loneliness leads them to share intimate and personal stories with each other. Sammar, gradually, becomes hopeful that Rae will convert to Islam so that they can get married. Rae understands Islam and has interests in it in addition to his love for Sammar nevertheless, he shows no interest in embracing Islam. This constitutes a problem for Sammar because, as a devoutly religious woman, she knows that her Islamic teachings set it quite clear that a Muslim cannot marry a non-Muslim. However, Yasmin, Rae’s Asian British secretary, doubts Rae’s conversion to Islam for it will cause him professional suicide, as she calls it. Despite her insistence, Rae refuses to convert to Islam, so she ends the relationship. Consequently, Sammar resigns from her job and decides to return to Sudan. In Sudan, her mother-in-law, Mahasen does not show any affection towards Sammar because before leaving for Scotland, Sammar and Mahasen had a dispute over the issue of Sammar’s remarriage. Being lonely and alienated she wants to get remarried but due to her mother-in-law’s objection, she left her son with her mother-in-law and went to Scotland. This time, when Mahasen finds that Sammar has come to settle down permanently and has left her job, she avoids Sammar. On the other hand, Sammar also confronts poverty, disorder, political corruption, starvation, and wars in Sudan, and eventually realizes how privileged and lucky she has been.



Apparently, she begins to understand the Islamic values of compassion and benevolence and reviews her relationship with Rae. She discovers that she wants Rae to convert for his own advantage and this becomes a turning point in Sammar's attitude towards him. She abandons her personal aspiration and prays for him to convert to Islam for his own salvation; this claim will be refuted within the coming discussion. The complexities faced by Sammar are resolved when Rae converts to Islam at the end of the novel, which Aboulela carefully highlights as a conversion done out of his own decision rather than the influence imposed upon him by Sammar. She shows dedication to her sound beliefs. These beliefs allow Sammar to experience self-transformation which leads her to find meaning in life and focus on her spiritual performance. She is also capable of translating Islam, its teachings, and practices to Rae. What makes this novel different from most other Western romantic fiction is Aboulela's central deployment of Islam and its practices through her protagonist. Aboulela presents an alternative insight into the idea of romance, where the desire for one's would-be partner is pushed aside in order to adhere to one's religious observances. Sammar's problem with their romance does not stem from her being a Muslim but rather, from Rae being a non-Muslim. Although Sammar did not regard his agnosticism as being a threat to her faith, she sees that if he remains a non-Muslim, it will deprive her of the life she has already lost and which she now seeks anew – one where she can depend on him to complete her faith. She thinks of this when she feels jealous of Rae's Muslim friend, Fareed, "because he

was married and she was not, and marriage was half of their faith" (*The Translator* p.96). For Sammar, Rae is not just a potential lover who could help ease her loneliness, he is also her potential pillar; as her husband, he would have the duty to lead her in prayer and guide her towards the right religious path. On the other hand, as his wife, she would carry the responsibility of providing him with love, caring for him, and looking after his well-being. Without these duties, their relationship would be undefined and unclear.

Sammar feels that she is being rewarded for her patience and her commitment to the teachings of the Quran and Rae states, "In the Quran, it says that pure women are for pure men . . . and I wasn't clean enough for you then . . ." (*The Translator* pp.196-197). Rae refers to verse 26 of Surah 24, which reads, "Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men are for corrupt women; good women are for good men and good men are for good women. The good are innocent of what has been said against them; they will have forgiveness and a generous provision". Sammar believes she and Rae are now both pure to be joined in marriage.

Quranic teachings are infused extensively in Aboulela's narration to highlight how Sammar-Rae's love affair is based on translating verses from the Quran. These teachings guide the lives of Muslims and regulate their social relations with others, and Aboulela skillfully portrays a modern image of Islam and its role as a communication bridge in the diaspora. The miracle of the Quran which is endowed to the Prophet Muhammad differs from the miracles of other prophets because it is still with us now.

It is still accessible although the translation of its meanings does not do it justice since much is lost in translation and the miracle of it cannot be reproduced. Sammar resorts to prayers to help her bear the pain of her husband's loss. Prayers to her "were the only challenge, the last touch with normality, without them I would have lost consciousness of the turning of day into night" (*The Translator* p.16). Islamic teachings and rituals, such as the call to prayer and the evening prayer, infuse the image of Khartoum in Scotland.

#### **Islamic Practices and Representations**

The mosque is of great spiritual significance to Sammar. Upon entering a temporary mosque on campus, "she felt eerily alone in the spacious room with its high ceiling" but as soon as she recites the first verses of her prayers, "the certainty of the words brought unexpected tears, something deeper than happiness, all the splinters inside her coming together" (*The Translator* p.66). In *The Translator*, Sammar is presented as an emigrant Muslim woman who wears the veil and follows Islamic doctrines which bring harmony and moderation to her life. The choice of wearing the *hijab* allows her to stay within the space of her own values, beliefs, and culture without falling into the trap of having to recreate a suitable identity for herself based on the Western model. These details in the life of the protagonist were specifically chosen by the author to upset the established image of the labeled Muslim women as backward, terrorist, and *other*. Sammar's belief in Quranic teachings governs her social behavior at home as

well as in Scotland. She sticks to religion and has a calendar that shows the time of daily prayers. At the end of a fasting day, she eats simple food such as dates at the beginning upon ending her fasting, and then after sunset prayer, she eats rice. She defines the Sacred Hadith as "that which Allah the Almighty has communicated to His Prophet through revelation or in dream and he, peace be upon him, has communicated it in his own words" (*The Translator* p.42). Her appearance is also Islamic, she covers her head wherever she goes and tries to "look as elegant as Benazir Bhutto, as mesmerizing as the Afghan princess she had once seen on TV wearing *hijab*, the daughter of an exiled leader of the *mujahideen*" (*The Translator* p.9). These descriptions are intermingled with those of the ordinary stranger women; they are described as having less education and not properly dressed who offer help immediately after the death of Sammar's husband. They provide every assistance possible such as cooking, caring for the child. They also spend the night with her and pray for her although they are not her acquaintance or friends. They do that only because it is, as they believe, a moral obligation and an Islamic dedication. The presence of the women makes Sammar feel humbled by the strong beliefs and generosity of these women who, apparently, possess a high spiritual motive. Islam offers her a humane set of rules and provides her with the strength needed during the period of mourning for her deceased husband. She stops using make-up or using perfume for a long time since the death of her husband.

Moreover, she abides by the Sharia laws and spends the morning period as a widow. At that time, she has to stay away from the eyes of men, and she never stops thinking “of how Allah’s Sharia was kinder and more balanced than the rules people set up for themselves” (*The Translator* p.87).

The state of mourning and utter grief in which Sammar has been thrown into, after her greatest loss, does not raise a single word of sympathy as her headcover does. Since Jennifer wants to express her broad mind, she is so keen as to express her tolerance towards Sammar’s dressing style in an attempt to distance herself from the ongoing hostility towards the *hijab*. Sammar, an emigrant devout female wears the veil following Islamic teachings to bring solace and harmony into her anguished life. She chooses to wear the *hijab*, which helps her to stay within the domain of her beliefs, values, and culture. This choice also prevents her from falling into the dilemma of assuming an identity, as based on the Western model, that does not suit her. This depiction of a protagonist struggling in a troubled situation expresses the author’s standpoint in her endeavor to encounter the prototypical image of Muslim women as backward, submissive, and different. Sammar’s wearing the *hijab* which is a marker of her Muslim identity is given a secondary role in the narration to imply that it is not of great importance or should be taken for granted, unlike her focus and sentiments dedicated to the love she expresses towards her lost husband. This depiction contradicts the belief that the twentieth century is obsessed with the debate over the presence of the veil in the

media, in Eastern and Western societies alike, with its synonym, Islamophobia.

The Islamic religious identity of Sammar is manifested in the expression of her grief: she prays to be spared after this grief because she believes that this life is temporary and that only Allah is eternal. The Muslim community, its faith, and its spirituality help Sammar to survive and bear her loss. The protagonist can negotiate a sense of loss spiritually, though she covers her head and body to deal with the Muslim women who support her and appear to be stronger and more tender than herself while deeming herself more educated, and better dressed. It is quite clear that Sammar wears the veil only after the death of her husband, to express her obedience and submission to the will of Allah and to express her grief over her sudden loss.

There is also a vivid spiritual purity in Sammar’s conception of Islam which draws her away from more personal or secular concerns, allowing her to transcend them, and thus bringing her a measure of peace. Sammar questions herself and her own motivations in asking Rae to convert, consciously renouncing her own concerns in the matter and focusing, instead, on Rae’s own wellbeing. Sammar realizes that She has never, not once, prayed for his conversion to Islam for his own good. It has always been for herself; she needs to get married again, not be alone. If she can rise above that, her desire can be justified. Once Sammar does so, the religious content seems to peel itself away from the narrative, becoming not only an expression of any character’s need or desire but also something on a higher and more spiritual level.

The views expressed by Sammar are very consistent with Aboulela's own idea which is expressed in interviews. For the author, a person's religious identity provides more stability than national identity; she believes that religion can be carried with a person wherever he or she goes, but other things can be easily taken away from them.

Islamic rituals are regarded, in Sammar's life, as a positive incentive. When she goes to pray in the small university mosque one afternoon, she feels mystical relief and divine joy, a state that cannot be expressed by words; it is just felt. It is prayer that helps her to bear the pain of her husband Tarig's death, because "without them she would have fallen, lost awareness of the shift of the day into night" (*The Translator* p.16). Sammar's intention that Ray converts shows that she is so self-centered, although there are Muslims who invite others to embrace Islam. Such Muslims are people of deep faith, the kind who have little sleep to worship Allah voluntarily and rigorously because they have spiritual energy. They do so without personal gain, nor for some worldly reason. They do it for God's sake only. She also comprehends that she wants him to convert for her benefit and not for his salvation, "wanting this and that, full of it; wanting to drive with him to Sterling, to cook for him, to be settled, to be someone's wife" (*The Translator* p.175). This realization comes during the sacred month of Ramadan and gives her the feeling of peace in the middle of the spiritual chaos, and uncertainty, "because of eating and drinking after fasting all day when the sun was too hot and it was thirst more than hunger, and not wanting to speak to anyone, . . . A whole month free like that and looking up at the

round moon, knowing that the month was halfway through, two weeks and the focus would be gone" (*The Translator* p.180). After realizing that Rae's conversion must happen for his own sake, she gives up her personal aspirations and prays for him to find true faith.

Strong religious faith is ascribed to Sammar since her relationship to religion has always been strong and her faithful devotion is always present in times of distress. She has also presented the role of religious practices in bringing peace and stability in everyday life and critical situations. Sammar has passed difficult times when the only way to feel relieved was to adhere to the rope of Allah

#### **Place as Home: Longing and Belonging**

Place in post-colonial literature does not simply denote a geographical locale. Apart from the physical surroundings, place also represents a non-material environment that comprises sounds and scents, legends and beliefs, manners, and customs. In fact, there are places that are only spiritually present in people's lives. Even so, they have a considerable impact on the individuals' sense of selfhood. I argue that place acts as a catalyst for the protagonists' development of self and is central to their search for identity. By exploring the various facets of place, I will show what effects this multi-layered concept in post-colonial literature has on the characters. On the other hand, migration, as Christou contends, is a phenomenon that has brought about unprecedented changes not only in the movement of peoples but also in their identifications, which, although negotiable, are at the same time intimately and ultimately connected to the notion of *place*.



She (2006:35)<sup>10</sup> also contends that “It is not just the identity *of* a place that is important, but also the identity that a person or group has *with* that place, in particular, whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider” (italics in the original).

Aboulela herself started to write to eliminate her anxiety and overcome her feelings of homesickness when she moved to Scotland with her husband, and it is Aberdeen that provides the setting for much of her early fiction. Hopkins and Gale contend that home is a place that is both lived and imagined, with material characteristics and symbolic significance. Hopkins and Gale (2009:23)<sup>11</sup> state that “experiences and understandings of home are likely to be underpinned by social differences, such as age, gender, education, ethnicity, sexuality, etc., and to vary with social, political, and cultural contexts”. Home is a theme that dominates most of Aboulela’s narratives and no wonder that it is one of the themes that can be discussed in the two selected novels. British Muslim womanhood is not only deeply rooted in religious identity but is produced via a complex of discourses, ranging from Western secularism to Islamism. Those women choose among these values and ideals of femininity renegotiating a sense of self in different contexts such as home, workplace, neighborhood.

In *The Translator*, Aboulela expresses the notion of Islam, which shows that Sammar's dedication is also closely linked to society and landscape. Although she decides to return home to experience longing and belonging which she is deprived of in exile, following Rae’s refusal to convert to Islam; Sammar is confused about her feelings for her

hometown. The first thing Sammar longs for is for her to join her family in a group prayer at the mosque, linking her to the spirituality and faith rooted in her home. This scene erupted due to the hostility that Sammar suffers from at home from her family, especially her mother-in-law, Mahasen. This animosity is quite similar to the situation she has witnessed in Aberdeen. This indicates that Sammar is unable to turn her nostalgic dream into a reality. At this point in the narrative, the nostalgia for the departed exile changes to a longing for a different life. This new life is centered around faith and Sammar’s union with Rae rather than the absence of geographical home, and the suppression of nostalgic feelings.

Sammar’s nostalgia for Sudan, which she refers to as home, is mainly associated with Tarig’s idea. With this depicts, she desires to relive those happy, joyous days, leading her to remember the small version of it mainly “like old people who remember the distant past more vividly than the events of the day before” (*The Translator* p. 22), insinuating that she considers Sudan a hometown only because of her memories of Tarig. Therefore, the word ‘home’ connotes an existential and psychological element, and not only a dimensional and physical one. It simply feeds on Sammar’s desire to belong, a feeling closely related to the sense of familiarity and comfort that is associated with it. The notion of home, for Sammar, brings with it an emotional connection and personal relationships, especially with the image of her deceased husband.

Rae’s decision to come to Khartoum and take her back with him constitutes an opportunity for Sammar to decide what to choose.

She finds it easy to decide, she substitutes, sacrifices her homeland for him for it is easy to travel Scotland and be with him than to stay in Khartoum without him. However, it is noteworthy that this situation is only possible because of Rae's conversion. Only then can they share discourse and identity. Ironically, and maybe against the author's anticipation is that the 'happy ending' contradicts the author's project because it indicates that Sammar, out of sheer selfishness, needs Rae to convert to Islam and that Islam alone is not enough to give her a sense of belonging and spiritual home. A sense of home is not complete, as the end of the story suggests, without the fulfillment of the protagonist's needs. *The Translator* does not only create the space of a diaspora that questions Western cultural imperialism but seeks to define an Islamic discourse that permits the protagonist to find an alternative home. It is quite obvious that 'home' is a state of mind rather than a geographic entity.

**Methods** The researcher adopts the analytical descriptive approach to study *The Translator* based on a diasporic standpoint. The study focuses on place (spiritual or geographic) to negotiate longing and belonging as well as a religious identity the protagonist endeavors to assert. Primary and secondary sources are used to collect data so as to support the discussion.

**Conclusion** To conclude the discussion, the researcher argues that 'place' where the protagonist longs and belongs plays a significant role in *The Translator*. The narrative creates a diasporic space that endeavors to define Islamic discourse to enable the protagonist to find a satisfactorily alternative home. Home, in this context, is seen as a state of mind

rather than a terrestrial location. In her narrative, Aboulela highlights the need for religious devoutness in granting the protagonist with a spiritual refuge in the absence of the home. She discusses nostalgic belonging and religious faith in the story as important elements to provide the characters with a solid frame of reference. In exile, religion becomes a home from home and an anchor for a troubled and tortured identity. Sammar works as a translator in Scotland to earn a livelihood. She does not work in their homeland as Aboulela herself had a sheltered upbringing in Sudan. In the novel, the woman protagonist is Sudanese as Aboulela is herself and Islam is the basis of her relationship with a man in her respective life. The need to belong becomes the basis for Sammar's relationship with Rae which manifests place's entanglement with emotions and social interaction. The moment Sammar feels familiar in that space, her sense of place changes from estrangement to belonging. As a matter of fact, right after her conversation with Rae in his house, Sammar feels really at home, since she senses that Sudan has moved to Aberdeen for the first time.

On the other hand, the identity of the character in the novel is mirrored in various ways. The novel portrays Islam as a common interest that can function as a basis for the coalition among women of different origins and classes in the age of globalization and capitalist expansion. In *The Translator*, the protagonist moves towards religious passion as a substitute for physical passion, in which religious longing constitutes another kind of corporal desire, related to but separate from the desire for sexual and emotional intimacy.

The veil represents the difference between the public and the private, concealing and revealing means, while at the same time it enhances the sense of womanhood among the Muslim women who wear it. The representations of religious identity in the narrative of Sammar's way of living, thinking, and feeling and of the way she is always aware of her identity as a Muslim, then, strongly suggests how Islam for some Muslim women is a central feature of their lives and a system of belief they feel comfortable with, rather than an ideology imposed on them with which they cannot connect, the way many Western representations suggest. Through these representations, Muslim identity is rooted in Muslims' lives because it has a foundation in the spirituality and sacred texts of Islam. It is religious piety that empowers the protagonist to ignore her difference and give up her inclination. Devotion to Islamic faith becomes the basis for Sammar to be able to re-evaluate and reinvent her sense of identity and belonging against all challenges in life. Finally, in exile, her Islamic faith and religious devotion empower her with a spiritual home she is yearning for. Therefore, religious faith, based on this discussion, is crucial for the orientation of Muslims' way of life because it prompts the development of the self and represents an anchoring motive for living in the diaspora.

The researcher also believes that some novelists fail (intentionally or unintentionally) to express the real essence of Islam and fail to show how Islam gives the freedom of choice to a Muslim man or woman to decide. Islam as a religion carries morals and teachings to a better life in this world and the hereafter. It also sets the best path for the believers to take. Nevertheless,

some Muslim extremist groups who hold Islamic dedication, interpret the religious texts to suit their ideological and fanatic thinking thus, they stigmatize Islam with their violent deeds and outrageous reactions.

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