



A New Paradigm of Islamic Womanhood in Liala Aboulela's *Minaret* and Shelina Janmuhmed's *Love in a Headscarf*

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Abstract:

This paper emphasizes Muslim women's voices in their search for religious freedom as well as their attempts to assert their religious identity in the secularized western society .I aim to discuss two novels by two literary Muslim women writers: Laila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)and Shelina Janmuhammed's *Love in a Head scarf* (2009). These two writers refuse to see Islam in a western eye ,and they refuse the many labels and stereotypes of Muslim women who live in a secularized society. They both agree that Islam as an instrument of empowerment in the life of Muslim female characters living in Europe. They present a new image of Muslim woman whose religion frees her of all the cultural and societal traditions .

Key-words : Muslim women , headscarf, religion



Introduction

In popular western culture Muslim woman is the veiled woman . For the westerners , the veil refers to exoticism, oppression and backwardness of Islam .In the media Muslim women are presented as slaves or they are seen only as sexual objects. The two Muslim women writers I have picked for this paper claim that religion is the main instrument of female liberation and empowerment rather than an obstacle preventing emancipation. Religion does not mean going back to the past for many Muslim women .Religion is not antagonistic to modernity . Therefore; Muslim women writers attempt to challenge the stereotypical representation of Muslim women who are presented as submissive, oppressed and invisible in the public sphere. Moreover , they create a new paradigm of Islamic womanhood that challenges the supposed universal submissiveness of Muslim women to men on one hand ,and the patriarchal nature of the religion on the second hand .

Leila Aboulela, a Sudanese writer , offers a very different portrayal of Muslim women in London. Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)is considered as a turning point in relation to the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in modern English fiction. She decides to give a voice to those Muslims who for a long time were described in a negative light in British fiction.

Aboulela refuses to depict Islam from outside, but she chooses to change the perspective of looking at Islam so that it will no longer looked at as 'other', but she craves to see Islam from an insider's viewpoint . Mike Philips argues that as an educated woman writer who puts on headscarf ,



Aboulela attempts to "write from inside the experience of growing up and living with a network of customs and beliefs" (*The Guardian*, 2005).

For Aboulela defending Islam represents defending her views . She feels she is writing about herself when she asserts : "I have so far written close to my autobiographical situation" (Aboulela, *Contemporary Women's Writing* , 2009)

The new form of Islam Aboulela finds in Europe is not antagonistic to the western culture. She says that when she was a child she got her education in a western school in Sudan . She visited the library of her school and took some English novels to read : "I read them again and again, and even though I knew that the characters were not Muslim, I found Muslim values in those novels" (Aboulela, *Contemporary Women's Writing* , 2009). She believed that Islam and the west always have something in common . At the same time Islam has different perspective with the traditional societies like her country ,Sudan. Therefore, Islam without the traditional values of the east would come close to the western values.

Moreover, Aboulela's mother influenced her life, and she taught her daughter that women in Islam have their rights to get their education , to go to work, to drive a car even though sometimes social tradition prevented women from doing what is legally considered their rights. As Muslim it is her duty to correct the views and the wrong perspectives concerning Muslim women .((Aboulela, *Contemporary Women's Writing* , 2009).Wail Hassan (2008) argues that Aboulala found a new kind of literature he describes :



"This new kind of literature explains to non-Muslims aspects of Muslim lives, especially those of minorities in Europe and North America, while at the same time exposing prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia." (Journal of Arabic Literature , p. 317).

She works to position Islam in its right place in its communication with the west. Her fiction puts all the blame on the secular discourse that defaces Islam in the east and west .

Aboulala's Minaret

This novel begins with Najwas's life in Sudan in 1984-85. Najwa is the daughter of a high- position and wealthy government officer . In Khartoum, although she is a Muslim but she lives a western way of life. She usually listens to pop music and watches American films and dresses western fashions and she attends the American club . Najwa is familiarized with large parties in which she dances and amuses herself the way western people do. She , like young women in her age , adopts western attitudes and behaviors which make her detached from the people of her country . Najwa's family takes over the prestige and power of the ex-colonizers and inherits their privileges. Najwa says:"We ate from china and silver. We wiped our mouths with napkins that were washed and ironed every day" (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.16.)



Dr. Al-Malki (2003) argues that, "the colonized elites were alienated from their communities' needs and instead of attempting to de-colonize they strengthened the British ideology" (p.13).

Najwa realizes that her being a product of English education makes the gap between her and people in her country even wider . On vacation she experiences living in London which regards as her second home .

But after the coup in Sudan in 1984 ,she has to escapes to London as immigrant . Now that she is forced to live in London she does not look at this place at her second home as she used to see it . She failed to belong to her country because of the secular life she adopted there and because of her father's political position and her advantaged childhood .She cannot belong to London now because she does not have the independence and freedom her friends and peers have . She demonstrates:" London is at its most beautiful in the autumn Now it is poised like a mature woman whose beauty is no longer fresh but still surprisingly potent" . (Aboulela, Minaret ,p. 76) Her cultural identity is lost . Now Najwa is a hybrid who belongs to two diverse cultures but can't identify with either. In Sudan Najwa is an outsider and in London she is an outsider too. She can't shape her own vision of what she wants or who she wants to become. Therefore; Najwa tries to stick to whatever reminds her of her lost cultural identity. She also likes to listen to the *azan*; she secretly looks at women who are covered .She does not miss her national identity because she identifies herself as Baba's daughter . She describes her first days in London:" Our first weeks in London we sensed the ground tremble beneath us. When Baba was found guilty we

broke down ." (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.61.)When her father is hanged because he was a corrupted officer. Najwa feels desperate and forlorn with no one around . She contemplates:

"Who would care if I become pregnant , who would be scandalized ? A few years back , getting pregnant would have shocked Khartoum society , given my father a heart attack, dealt a blow to my mother 's marriage , and mild modern Omar , instead of beating me would have called me a slut . and now nothing , no one . This empty space was called freedom".

(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.174-5).

Najwa refuses this kind of empty freedom. For her, it is a punishment, particularly after she loses her whole family , country and religion . Freedom for her is related to lose and isolation. It's a load she has to tolerate rather than a thing she has to take pleasure in .She cannot get back her family or her country but at least she can take back her religion.

She is completely shattered. When she meets Anwar for the first time in London she holds on to him because he reminds her of Sudan. She falls in love with him and she surrenders herself to him but very soon she regrets what she has done . She attempts to correct her mistake when she talks with Anwar about marriage . Anwar follows the western values, therefore; he blames her for thinking of marriage when she tells him that she wished it had happened in " a room in the best hotel in Khartoum , with a

wedding dress hanging in the cupboard , the sheets white and crisp".

(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 173).Anwar tells her that her guilt is meaningless : " like every other Arab girl, you have been brainwashed about the importance of virginity". (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.175).

It is quite ironic that Anwar tells Najwa that by losing her virginity, she has become part of the majority. Najwa echoes Anwar's argument, "He was right. I was in the majority now, I was a true Londoner now.... 'I know you're Westernized, I know you're modern,' he said, 'that's what I like about you – your independence'" (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.176).

Although Anwar is a Muslim man but he contributes to deforming Islam because he chooses to follow western liberal traditions . For Najwa , those Muslims who follow western traditions cannot offer protection and security Muslim women long for. Therefore; she decides to separate from Anwar who does not help her to regain her lost identity and does not provide her with the stability she desires. She argues: " These men Anwar condemned as narrow –minded and bigoted... were tender and protective towards their wives. Anwar was clever but he would never be tender and protective" (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.87) . Anwar does not fill the gap in her life and she , in her search to be more secure, begins to visits the mosque where she begins to feel like in Khartoum (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.244).

She sees many Muslim women go to the mosque and she follows them attempting to find her lost identity. She states, "I close my eyes. I can smell the smells of the mosque, tired incense, carpet and coats. I doze and in



my dream I am back in Khartoum, ill and fretful, wanting clean, crisp sheets, a quiet room to rest in, wanting my parents' room." (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.74-75). When she lastly enters the mosque, "the words were clear, as if I had known all this before and somehow, along the way, forgotten it." (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.240) .

In the mosque , she begins to re-organize her life again because religion provides a solid ground for her to build her selfhood upon . Islam grants her with a new sense of identity. It is the religious identity which is stronger than national identity.

In the mosque she learns more about Islamic teachings , and in the mosque she finds the Sudanese, the Indian, the Arab, the African and people from all around the world . They all work to maintain their religious identity . Sethi notes: "for Aboulela, a personal, religious identity provides more stability than national identity: 'I can carry religion with me wherever I go, whereas the other things can easily be taken from me '"((Sethi, 2005).

Najwa needs to reconstruct religion in her life to feel more secure and empowered . She is sorry she was not introduced to Islam in her country which was invaded by secularism that made it difficult for her to practice her religion freely without outside influences.

Najwa says that when she was in Sudan:" I fasted mostly in order to lose weight and because it was fun I prayed during the school exams to boost my grades. " (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.160-161).



Najwa is sorry for the snobbish life she led in Khartoum. Aboulela's comments in one of her interviews about her disinclination to wear the veil in Sudan because her friends there would have ridiculed her as back-warded reflects how Sudanese elite internalized the western gaze and hence dismissed the veil as sign of submissiveness and confinement. Aboulela admits, "In Sudan, writers and intellectuals are usually liberal and left-wing and so on, and ... they want me to be the liberated woman, so they are appalled by this halal writer thing"(Interview with Leila Aboulela, p.91).

When her brother Omar stabs a police officer and is sentenced to life-time imprisonment , she visits him and shows her guilt for preferring to live a western kind of life that derived them away from the path of Allah when they were in Sudan :

"Our house was a house where only servants prayed,
where a nighter watchman would open the gate for our car
arriving late after a night out , then sits reciting the Quran
until it was time for the dawn prayer . If Baba and Mama had
prayed I say If you {her brother} and I had prayed all of this would
not have happened to us . We could have stayed normal family
...Allah would have protected us , if we had wanted him to . If we had
asked him to but we did not , so we were punished" (Aboulela,
Minaret,p. 95)

She claims that Islam would have prevented the calamities that disrupted her family. Her father was sentenced to death and her brother was life-imprisoned because of their lack of religion. If they were religious they would not be tempted to be corrupted. Religion would have prevented them from this disgrace.

Najwa chooses the path of religion of her own will as she does not have any man to force or oblige her. She chooses to pray, to fast, to cover her head, and she even chooses to cast off the man she loves when this man does not appear to be practicing Muslim like her. She adheres to Islam in a most secularized society where Islam is satirized and prejudiced. Najwa describes her struggle:

" Laughter from behind me. Something hits the edge of the seat next to me and bounces down the aisle....i hear footsteps come up behind me, see a blur of demin. He says ' You Muslims scum ,'then the shock of cool liquid on my head and face....He goes back to his friend laughing. my chest hurts and I wipe my eyes". (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 80-81).

Neither Najwa nor other Muslim women she meets in the mosque choose to put off the veil which they see as : " a uniform , the official, outdoor version of us. Without it our nature is exposed."(Aboulela, *Minaret*



p.186) . Anita Sethi observes in *The Observer*: “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” (Sethi, 2005)

Aboulela proves that freedom is found in religion not outside religion . When Najwa starts working as a house- maid in a house where another Muslim family live , she sees Tamer, a Muslim man , who offers her the one thing that she has been longing. She argues : "There was a time when I had craved pity, needed it but never got it. And there are nights when I want nothing else but someone to stroke my hair and feel sorry for me."(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 197).

When Tamer feels sorry for her she says "I need this from him. It feels right nourishing"(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 117).

Najwa tells Tamer that decides to maintain her religious identity : "I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living in London , I have changed . And now , like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim "(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 110).

At last Najwa finds relief in faith . She believes that Allah provides her protection she needs while living in London. " Rely on Allah , I tell myself , . He is looking after you in this job or in another job" (Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p.114) Islam is the most important thing in her life . It makes the poor Najwa happier before ; Najwa the maid is more satisfied and pleased as a

person than Najwa the aristocrat. Islam gives her stillness and spiritual completion she cannot find elsewhere

When she embraces Islam she is given a sense of belonging in a violent and hostile world. Gole states that : " Aboulela thinks that Islam organizes principles that organize social life and at the same time , it guides the individual through the chaos "(Gole 668).

Aboulela realized that freedom without limits does not make one happy. She says in an interview :

"Yes, Islam restrains me, but restraint is not oppression, and boundaries can be comforting and nurturing. Freedom does not necessarily bring happiness, nor does an abundance of choices automatically mean that we will make the right one. I need guidance and wisdom; I need grace and forgiveness"

(Aboulela, *Minaret* ,p. 45).

Aboulela proves that in her novel she succeeds to mix modernity, religion , education and women's empowerment. In an interview she say:"My idea of religion was not about a woman not working or having to dress in a certain way . It was more to do with faith." (Guardian 17)

For Najwa , Islam is an individual choice in which she finds a sense of order, security, protection, well-being, and locatedness.

Aboulela like her protagonist , knew religion in Britain not in Sudan .She emphasizes :

"I already had the inclination but the atmosphere wasn't conducive to it growing. In Britain, I had the accessibility of the mosque, and the trauma of seeing that one life had ended and another one was taking its place. This made me understand the process of rebirth".(Aboulela, *Minaret* , p.98)

This process of rebirth empowers Najwa . For both Najwa and Aboulela Islam provides empowerment and a sense of relief to the individual .The writer aims 'to make Islam more familiar to the reader and to defy the western view that Muslim women are only veiled women not able to raise a family or do anything profitable in society .

Al Karawi and Bahar sums up the issue of the veil in this novel as :

"veiled women are not muted personas nor are their identities simple products of patriarchal norms ...[V]oluntary veiling is believed to be an empowering tool of self-expression through which women increase their relationship with their own faith and culture Aboulela's work, in showing the rootedness of religion in the lives of many Muslim women, thus fills a gap in Western representations of Muslim women." (256, emphasis added)

In Shelina Janmuhamed's **Love in a Headscarf**(2009), the heroine is a British Muslim woman who describes her journey of searching for a good

and practicing husband . It recounts the story of a sincerely pious, conservative woman living in Western society, who is conflicted between the sacred world and the secular world, and she argues that her faith helps her to keep her very liberal, feminist sense of self. `

Her novel is similar to a typical woman's love -story, regardless of class or religion. Janmuhammad is dissatisfied with what other Muslim authors write about Muslim women she demonstrates that these women are " "women in black veils and they were about escaping from slavery and forced marriages. I looked at them and thought none of them told my story. That's why I decided to write a book." (interview)

Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin in their Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation after 9/11 argue that some authors " paint Muslims as a homogeneous, zombie-like body, incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped into a frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging backward worldview". (Morey, Yaqin, 2011, p.1)

Morey and Yaqin clarify that there is a difference between how media represents Muslim women and the real experiences of these women particularly after Sept 11. (Morey, Yaqin, 2011, p.1)

One of the basic ideas Janmohamed intends to make clear is the idea of arranged marriage . She is aware that non- Muslim women mistake arranged marriage for forced marriage and she remembers her visits to many libraries where she finds "shelves and shelves of misery memoir and all these



women in black veils with camels walking in the background and titles like I Was Sold Into Marriage." *She adds:* "And the only other stories that we saw were of Muslim women who had somehow broken through this oppression, had decided that [Islam](#) was the source of it and had rejected it, and had gone off to be....-'liberated'."

Janmuhammd emphasizes in her interview that: "the stories we hear in the media tend to be about forced marriage and honor killings, and those things are wrong, but forced marriage doesn't equate to an arranged marriage and an arranged marriage doesn't equate to a loveless marriage".(Exclusive Q&A: Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's Love in a Headscarf by [CAROLINE MURRAY](#))

Janmuhammd explains that : "In arranged marriages people's attitude is that both people know that they are considering each other for the long term commitment of marriage right from the start, and that when you get married, you are fully committed to making it work, going into the relationship romantically, but also practically"

(Love in a headscarf: finding Mr. Right through arranged marriage

Posted April 29th, 2009)

Janmuhammd attempts "to take a warm, compassionate and humorous view of the challenges that face Asians and Muslims in reconciling tradition, religion and modernity". She adds "

I hope I'm a voice from within all those arenas, that can see the positives, but also point out where things don't always live up to the



high expectations we have. As I wrote the book I realised more and more that all the characters that I describe as well as the institutions were going on a journey just as I was. The open secret is that I'm not the only one who has had these experiences (Tackling stereotypes head on: Interview with the author of Love in a Headscarf Written by [Staff Writer](#) Published in [In Focus](#))

Janmuhammd in her novel demonstrates that Muslim women are not just unidentified beings, "but have real stories, sadness and comedy, and real desire to engage with the world." (Tackling stereotypes head on: Interview with the author of Love in a Headscarf Written by [Staff Writer](#) Published in [In Focus](#))

Islam for Janmohamed does not work as an obstacle to the journey of love, on the contrary, her faith makes the search easier and more interesting because it assists her to know more about herself, her imaginings and aspiration, and more notably about the man she is about to marry. The Western view of an arranged marriage which is practiced frequently in the Eastern countries asserts that Muslim women have no choice and no will in choosing their life-partners. But, Janmohamed clarifies that in the arranged marriage Muslim woman has the freedom to check up every suitor before she gives her final decision. She defends the Islamic value of meeting the future husband in the woman's house with all her family around. She argues: "Is this any different from chatting with someone in a bar, club, or restaurant? At least I know for sure that he is interested in having a serious relationship and getting married." (Janmuhammed p. 20.) Janmohamed concentrates on the theme of love and she demands that her



readers must "reclaim love" because love "takes patience, dedication, and selflessness," (Janmuhamed p. ix) and brings us closer to God . It is this sense of love that will bring to an end the abhorrence and prejudice amongst different nations . But Janmohamed challenges this conventional image of women. She says: "Stories like mine have remained unheard, as they do not fit neatly with prevailing stereotypes that tell tales of Islam's oppression or of those rejecting Islam." She is not a "one-dimensional" creature "hidden behind a black veil" (Janmuhamed p., x). Shelina refuses all the misconception about her religion and she "finds Islam to be positive, liberating, and uplifting" (Janmuhamed p. x). Choosing the theme of love , Janmohamed introduces her readers with a new countenance of Islam, that it is a religion where humor, optimism, and compassion flourish. ***Love in a headscarf*** consequently claims that Islam is a religion which respects and appreciates love, not terror.

Her family particularly her parents help her in her decision ,but they never strip her of her rights to choose a partner. There is no place for forced marriage in Islam. She emphasizes the role of her family:" Their job was to provide potential matches and offer advice , support, and wisdom in choosing one . if I did not like someone they presented to me then so be it. My choice was the determining factor."

(Janmuhamed, p.27)

Islam makes it possible for a man to meet the woman he thinks to marry, and he talks to her before the marriage takes place . If the couple



make their decision they might marry without any external influences. If they do not suit one another the marriage might not happen. Islamic teachings give Muslim men and women a utopia for a relationship . In Islam faith and spirituality are more essential than class, wealth, and social standing. Janmuhammed emphasizes that family, society and faith all grant Muslim women emancipation and independence. She asserts that in the holy Qur'an love is revered and it is dearer and sweeter than common passionate love.

"This love, *muwaddah*, was reserved for those in a committed relationship and was a special gift for those who made that commitment. This is why I wanted to get married: in return for commitment, faith, and dedication, there was a guarantee that love would definitely come after marriage, and that love would be sweet, kind, and compassionate. Love and marriage were like, well, a horse and carriage." (Janmuhammed ,p.46)

Her journey to find love intensifies her understanding of her religion In one example, Shelina says:

" My experience with Syed also reminded me to trust my intuition. After two hours of waiting, and without an apology for tardiness, I should have seen him for what he really was. But the rules of culture had told me to pursue marriage at all costs and to subsume my own mind and instincts to the process. Instead, I should have trusted my faith, the inner conscience that the Creator has put into each of us

to recognize what is right, and to assert what is our due". (Janmuhamed, p.8)

Janmuhamed challenges the western view that Muslim women do not have the freedom to travel alone . Shelina travels to Egypt or with their girlfriends to enjoy their time . She encounters a French girl, Ann, who shows her spiteful and insidious feelings towards Muslim women : " You people are backward , living in the middle ages , with a religion of ignorant Arabs . You should get educated and learn some proper values like we have developed in Europe"(Janmuhamed p. 138) . She refuses to listen to Shelina when latter tells her that she got her education from Oxford . She obstinately adds:" Muslims are evil and Islam is a religion of barbaric people . "(p. 139) Shelina is resentful. She thinks to retort : " Muslim were discovering the laws of alchemy and algebra and laying the foundations of modern science and philosophy and the European renaissance while your ancestor were still in the dark ages, wearing loincloths"(Jan muhamed, p. 139).

Shelina does not bother to ask her why she visits Egypt if she thinks that all Muslims are barbaric because she knows that Ann's knowledge of Islam comes from the magazines she reads and the antagonistic TV. Channels she watches. Ann and the like of her can never believe that Muslim women decide to be Muslims of their free will and their being Muslims is not part of their culture or heritage . Islam teaches them to be free and make sense of their lives.



Moreover, Shelina introduces herself and her friends as educated Muslim women who were educated at Oxford. This is again defying the view the Muslim women are backwards and barbaric . Shelina insists that education is important in Islam which pushes both men and women to be better educated . She always remembers how her father insisted she got her education at oxford ,and he always cited his proverb: " Give a man a fish and he will eat for one day. Teach him to fish and he will eat forever "(Janmuhamed, p. 34) .

As in the case of marriage Shelina presents stereotyped attitudes to hijab . Again she asserts that wearing hijab has been her own choice , and she is very delighted and contented for wearing it. Deciding to cover her head , she is challenging the many labels ascribed to Muslim women : "Oppressed, repressed, subjugated, backward, ignorant, violent, extremist, hateful, terrorist, jihadist, evil, radical, weakling, moderate, sellout, self-hating and apologist."(Janmuhamed, p. 110.)

Shelina defies the social discourse that insists Muslim women are forced to wear hijab and that they are treated as second class citizens . Shelina presents herself as a Muslim woman who chooses to cover her head despite the fact in her society not all men like covered women . In one example she tells of a suitor who comes to her engagement conditioning that she might stop wearing hijab at least for one year but she refuses this condition even though her mother tells her to consider it because the man has all the qualifications of a good husband . She thinks that : " Marriage was

important , but it was supposed to complete my faith not destroy it. "(Janmuhamed, p. 128).

She thinks : "I had made a choice about my faith and the way I wanted to live my life . I had based these decisions on careful thought and what I believed was right . I realized that I did not have to shape my faith in order to subsume it to this false god of social and cultural acceptability "(Janmuhamed, p. 127) .In the Western world, some people view the veil worn by Muslim women "as a mark of religious freedom and others as an insult to women's equality, the wearing of Muslim headdress...in public has stirred controversy inWestern nations" (Ernst, 2011) Shelina Zahra argues that if people believe that every Muslim woman who wears the hijab does not do so out of free will, but because she has been brainwashed, then they have violated a core principal of feminism where we are to uplift a woman's right to control her own destiny by trusting her ability to choose . Today, there are many Muslims who believe that women are relegated to be second class citizens in a man's world (Gabrielle and Hannan, p.76).

Gabriel and Hannen argue that in the west the headscarf has been portrayed as a symbol of Islamic oppression of women (Gabriel and Hannen, p. 89). They add that those westerners do not bother to look and examine the wearers of the headscarf, but they accuse those Muslim women of 'backwardness' . They fail to reach behind the veil. (Gabriel and Hannen, p.45). In this way, when a woman decides to be covered as a form of diffidence, self-appreciation and where she thinks hijab teaches her how to respect her Islamic teachings . Hijab prevents Muslim women to be

objectified and treated as a play-thing by white men . Janmohamed says "...stop fighting over what I wear, and start addressing who I am. I am neither burqa nor bikini. I am woman" (Janmohamed, 2013).

She rebels against some social traditions which non-Muslims attribute to Islam. She scolds cultural malpractices, not her religion, for all the troubles she encounters . She points out that some of the practices and views her society relate to religion are not creditable, on the contrary ,they go up against the teachings of Islam to a great extent. These habits cause Muslim people awkwardness and humiliation. For example, in her Indian society culture has its views about marriage and education. People are not enthusiastic about women who are educated. She is advised:"Nobody wants a girl who is too educated."(Janmuhammed, *love in a headscarf* ,p. 16) The matchmaker tells her : "You will be old and left on the shelf . Better to get married first , sort out your husband , and then you can do as you please ." (Ibid) Culture contradicts religion and one has to deal with them as separate things .

Regarding the subject of equality between men and women Islam " gave rights to women long before similar rights were granted in other parts of the world , including europ"(Janmuhammed, *love in a headscarf* ,p.98). Islam made no difference between men and women and claims their equality which lies at the heart of Islam . But there are some ideas about the discrepancies between them has crept in from culture over time .



When Shelina realizes the difference between culture and faith she decides to free herself from the ties of culture, which prevent her from living her life and from exploring and practicing her faith to the fullest . Therefore; She decides to climb the Mount Kilimanjaro. This is a very brave decision she has taken . When an Auntie asks her : " What need have you got to climb a mountain ?" Shelina answers : " No need . I just think it will be exciting , and a challenge " (Janmuhamed, *love in a headscarf*, p.100) . Shelina believes that things must change and Islam must be put in its right place . Shelina insists that, "there was only one path I could choose that would let me look back and have no regrets , and that was to choose the rules that I believed were the truth and to live by them . I had made my choice ; it was Islam " (Janmuhamed, *love in a headscarf*, p .101) .She defies her culture when it contradicts religion and she chooses to live her life as she wants and as Islam teaches her . "Through the encouragement of my faith I had seen the beauty of creation, something I would never have done otherwise"(Janmuhamed, *love in a headscarf*, p .101).

Another defying decision she takes is driving a sport car which is preferred by boys not 'good' girls.she is advised not to take such a racing car for fear that she might destroy her 'nice' reputation, but Shelina does not care about what people might say about her. She sarcastically demonstrates:" If the most interesting thing that these people have to talkabout is my car, then I feel sorry for them. If it helps to spice up their gossip and make their lives more enjoyable, then consider my new car to be an act of public service"(Janmuhamed, *love in a headscarf*, p.103)



Both JanMuhammed and Aboulela succeed in giving Muslim woman a voice that was never heard before. Finally Muslim women are defined positively and treated fairly in islamophopic country. Despite all the tribulations both Najwa and Shelina face in the west ,but they uphold their religious rituals , traditions, communal framework and above all their faith which provides them with emancipation , empowerment, and security .

Even though Najwa And Shelina had a western education but in the west they both choose to have conservative Muslim values.

Conclusion

Aboulela and Janmuhamed examine the one-dimensional perspective of Islam and Muslims women . They discuss the hardships and tribulations Muslim women stumble upon in a secularized western society . Through all of their r life's tribulations, they uphold a strong relationship with their family, their society , and their religion . Their struggle ends with their empowerment and emancipation through taking up a religious identity.

They challenge the western stereotyping of Muslim women by representing and clarifying the differences between the reality of Islam and Muslim women on one hand, and how they are represented in colonial discourse on the other . Aboulela hopes that Europeans would look further than the veil of Muslim women and try to reach out to them.



These two Muslim writers refuse the superiority of the western civilization which views Muslim countries as primitives and uncivilized by referring to them as 'Third World'. They also argue against the west's representation of Muslim women as oppressed females waiting to be rescued by the white man . They present a new image of empowered Muslim women who choose to embrace Islam to find tenderness, freedom, and security.

Religion is one of the only remaining constant aspects in the life of migrants. Thus, they hold fast to their faith, maybe even more than they would have at home. Religion is indispensable and necessary for the migrants' growth, their self-confidence and thus helps them mix into British society.

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