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Original Article

### Depiction of Exile as dispossession in Leila Aboulela's Minaret (2005)

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*Exile,  
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Exile as a key feature in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005). Also prevalent is the theme of dispossession in exile. This article discusses the experiences of exiles in Leila Aboulela's (2005) *Minaret*; it investigates the depiction of exile as dispossession in the mentioned novel. It traces why and how exile becomes a subject of dispossession due to the undesirable but sometimes inevitable experiences associated with exile. The study was premised on the postcolonial theory – which seeks to deconstruct the legacy of colonialism and is concerned with the impact of European imperialism on both the colonised and coloniser. Texts based on this theory were used to analyse the novel under study. The data was obtained by a close reading of the primary texts along with secondary texts from the internet and others in print. A textual checklist was used to guide and organise the data collection stage. The study found that forms of dispossession include displacement and rootlessness, identity crisis, cultural loss, and Islamophobia. It was seen that most of these forms were a result of the attitudes and structures that were developed during European imperialism and have been perpetrated by the imbalance of power that existed between the colonisers and the colonised. It was also revealed that these negative experiences are brought about by a cultural and power dynamic that makes an exile an outsider and inferior in society; the exile, thus (exiles), lacks representation and a voice. This hinders the integration into the new society and leaves an exile without a concrete sense of belonging or identity.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study investigated the dispossession experienced by characters in exile in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005). This article presents the different forms of dispossession depicted in the aforementioned novel.

*Minaret* is a novel written by Leila Aboulela in 2005. She was born in 1964 in Cairo to an Egyptian mother and a Sudanese father. She began her writing career in 1992 after she had moved to Scotland in the United Kingdom. *Minaret* (2005) is set in two places; the first part of the story is set in Khartoum, Sudan, whilst the second part is set in London in the UK and thus features a transnational character as a protagonist. Najwar, the protagonist of the story, is also the first-person narrator through whom the story is told. As the daughter of a wealthy politician in Sudan, she leads a luxurious life, and her family's lifestyle is more 'Westernised' than it is Sudanese. However, when the regime supported by her father is toppled in a coup, she has to flee the country with her family to the UK for her life. It is while in London, without the wealth and protection that her family gave her, that she experiences hardships. Her life changes continuously for the worse after a series of tragedies: it is the series of these unfortunate events that cause Najwar to reflect on her situation and decide to embrace Islam.

Apart from Najwar, there are other characters from different socio-economic backgrounds living in London but who have also emigrated there. What is common to these exile characters is that they all originate from predominantly Arab and Muslim backgrounds in countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa. Of these immigrants, some are in England in pursuit of particular things, majorly university education. These include Tamer and his sister Lamyia, Najwar's cousin Rhanda and Ameen. It can be said that these characters were attracted to London. The other immigrants include Anwar and Najwar; her mother and brother are in London because they fled from their home countries. It can

be said that this latter group was pushed away from their home country.

The novel thus follows the life of the protagonist and how she interacts with both the migrant Arab community in London and the natives. The migrants are in a setting that appears foreign from their perspective, but they also appear as foreigners from the perspective of the native peoples.

Chambers (2009) asserts that Aboulela's writing was influenced by her experiences; she was born in Cairo and grew up in Khartoum, and given that Egypt and Sudan were both colonised by Britain, yet had different experiences of colonial occupation.

About the novel *Minaret*, Chambers (2009) points out that unlike many other diasporic novels, where racism tends to be depicted as stemming from colour prejudice, Aboulela portrays overt Islamophobia in post 9/11 London without explicitly referencing the events of September 2001. Chambers (2009) argues that Leila portrays Islam as far less an ideology of ethical behaviour and a central marker of identity in the fragmentary world of migration, asylum, and family disintegration.

### Key Terms

Exile: a force to leave a country or a voluntary action to live in another one. (Iseat, 2015). Dispossession: as to oust or dislodge someone from what he possesses, especially a home (Lamert, 2005). Postcolonial: relating to the period starting after the onset of European imperialism in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Objective of the Study

To explore the depictions of exile as dispossession in Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005)

### Significance of the Study

This study will enrich the understanding of how exile is depicted, especially from the point of view of migrant authors. It will provide a unique point of view into exilic literature.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was premised on the postcolonial theory. This theory concerns itself with the study of colonialism and its impact on the colonised and the coloniser. According to Natani (2020), postcolonial theory is a theoretical approach that attempts to disrupt the dominant discourse of colonial power. As a theory, it emphasises the effects of colonialism on both the colonised and the coloniser. According to Morgan (2009), the postcolonial theory is a body of theoretical work, distinct from the mere historical postcolonial studies, that has sought to chart the historical effects of colonialism and criticise their persistence in contemporary culture. He further asserts that exile is seen as a model for critical postcolonial agency.

Proponents of the postcolonial theory include Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri, C. Spivak, Frantz Fanon, Salman Rushdie, and other feminist postcolonial writers (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Hellen Tiffin 2005).

Enshrined in the postcolonial theory is the feminist theory; some scholars argue that there are parallels to be drawn between colonialism and the marginalisation of women in some societies. According to Ashcroft et al. (2003, p. 249), in many different societies, women, like colonised subjects, have been relegated to the position of ‘other’, colonised by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with the colonised races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression. It is not surprising, therefore, that the history and concerns of feminist theory have paralleled developments in postcolonial theory.

*Minaret* contains themes that are related to postcolonial theory, such as hybridity, cultural hegemony, feminism, and woman empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Exile has been a recurrent human experience and a part of life’s adventure since antiquity. (Muchova, 2006). Muchova (2006) points out some texts, which can be dated far back in history,

that contain accounts of exile. These include the tale of Oedipus and Ouida, who are forced to leave their motherland, and the numerous accounts of exile that can be found in the Bible.

Said (2000), in his essay, *Reflections on Exile*, argues that modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, and refugees. He writes:

*A whole genre of twentieth-century Western literature is extraterritorial. A literature by and about exiles symbolising the age of refugees* (Said, 2000, p. 180).

This reflects the scale and magnitude at which people have migrated to Western countries. The novel *Minaret* (2005) may be placed in this genre of literature, exilic literature; it is a novel written by an immigrant to the United Kingdom about the experiences of fictional immigrants in London.

Koc (2014) shows how Muslim identities in *Minaret* (2005) are nuanced, complex and fluid. He asserts that *Minaret* is a first-person account of life in Britain, and it emphasises the role of faith as a powerful tool that can overcome difficulties and provide an alternative space for belonging for an individual in exile. (Koc, 2014). He describes how Muslim identities are claimed and negotiated in a setting that is predominantly Christian, secular or completely indifferent to religion.

Al-Karawi and Bahar (2014) describe Leila Aboulela’s novel *Minaret* (2005) as an exploration of Muslim-Arab women’s struggle over creating a modern yet religiously traditional identity in exile. They argue that exiles experience a sense of in-betweens or liminality through crises, transitions, and resolutions of secular and religious lives (Al-Kalawi & Bahar, 2014).

Suffian (2014) describes Leila Aboulela as one of the most influential authors of the new wave of British Muslim writers, who refuse to look at the religion of Islam with a Western eye or subscribe to the conventional trendy narrative of representing identity crisis or clash of cultures in Britain. Suffian (2014) describes the novel *Minaret* as a journey of self-exploration and sharing of the inner self of a Muslim woman

whose identity was looked down upon, especially in the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. He also argues that diasporic Muslim women in the West are placed under labels and stereotypes, which were made worse by the incidents of 7/7 and 9/11 that seemed to heighten Islamophobia.

Sarra (2016) asserts that Leila Aboulela's *Minaret* (2005) evokes culture, identity, and religion for the sake of finding migrants' lost identity after being subjected to displacement effects. Sarra (2016) questions the reality behind the process of cultural change expressed in the novel and its outcome on Muslim migrants.

The aforementioned scholars and critics of *Minaret* have not explicitly tackled the depiction of exile as dispossession in the novel. This is the gap that this research intends to fill in order to further enrich the understanding of *Minaret* and exilic literature at large.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research followed a descriptive research design; the primary text and other secondary texts were studied closely to make deductions and establish new facts. Data collection was done using a qualitative approach. The primary text was identified and studied closely whilst making reference to secondary texts.

### Data Collection and Information Sources

The data used was mainly textural in nature. The primary source of information was *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela. Secondary sources used were journal articles, textbooks, and published essays. Secondary sources were selected systematically according to their relevance to the topic of study. Data was collected through note-taking guided by a textural checklist.

The collected data was analysed using the postcolonial theory. Information from different sources was compared and used to formulate an argument that was then investigated further by more data collection and analysis. In this way, the implications of the themes under study were

investigated in greater depth with greater certainty.

## DEPICTION OF DISPOSSESSION IN *MINARET* (2005)

Exile can be described as a state in which an individual or group of individuals are living in a country that is different from their country of origin. This can include political refugees, economic refugees and others who leave their countries for others in search of better opportunities. Related to exile is the concept of dispossession. Dispossession is used in this article to mean a situation or action whereby an individual loses possession, contact or access to something that they formerly had. Dispossession can be in many forms, with the most obvious being that of material things such as losing a home property. However, it can also be less obvious and hard to quantify, as is the case with issues related to the mental state of an individual.

By its very nature, exile causes dispossession in that it dispossesses an individual of the contact with the motherland and all that the exile cannot port along with themselves from the motherland. However, this is not the only way in which an individual is dispossessed by exile; the experience in the new community continues to have an effect on the individual, which amounts to dispossession, especially psychologically and culturally. This article presents the various ways in which the exile experiences or becomes subject to dispossession as a result of exile.

### Estrangement, Displacement and Loneliness

This is perhaps the most obvious form of dispossession experienced as a result of parting with one's homeland. Said (2000) describes this separation as an unbearable rift from which the exile may never recover;

*Exile is compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbearable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. Its essential sadness can never be surmounted (Said, 2000, p. 180)*

The exile thus yearns for something that cannot be essentially obtained; this is the cause of the uneasiness, which is probably the cause of subsequent issues such as loneliness and estrangement.

In *Minaret*, this separation is depicted through the experiences and emotions of the characters. The author contrasts the experience of Najwar while on a voluntary holiday with the experience when she is in London as an exile. Although in both cases, she is in the same city, the circumstances are what makes all the difference. In the former case, she is with her family, and they are partaking in the luxuries that London has to offer. In the latter case, Najwar feels lonely and less confident about her position in London. It dawns on her after some time that there are no relatives or acquaintances with whom she can interact like she used to. Her mother died after an illness, her brother was imprisoned, and her father was executed back in Khartoum. She does not even have contact with her former friends and has a strong need for belonging and companionship. In a desperate tone, she says:

*I wish we were living centuries ago, and instead of just working for Tamer's family, I would be their slave.... with lifelong security and a sense of belonging" (Aboulela, 2005, p. 215).*

The use of hyperbole here reflects the intensity and seriousness of the problem of loneliness and estrangement. Her loneliness is depicted through the way in which she is desperate to connect with those with whom she believes that they have a common background; she longs to be at Eva's (who knew her family before they were exiled) and Tamer's family (who are Muslims and of Arab origin) like her. She even prefers to work as a house help at Eva's rather than take up an office job where she would be working with strangers. (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 83). This is in spite of the fact that she feels that an office job is more fitting for her station and status than a job as a house help.

Therefore, the feeling of loneliness and estrangement is not caused by being isolated from

people per se but by failing to connect with people that would give one a sense of belonging and communion. It is easier to connect and interact with those people whom one has established a relationship with in the past. Since an exile leaves most of these people behind, it becomes hard to establish new relationships, hence the feeling of estrangement and loneliness.

Due to estrangement, exiles are plagued by a feeling of nostalgia that often draws them back to their past, even when they know that the past cannot be reclaimed. In *Minaret*, even though the protagonist flees for her life in Sudan, she cannot help but long for the good times that she had while growing up.

Rushdie S. (1999) describes the strong desire of an exile to hold on to his former home, which he calls a strong desire of the past.

*Exile emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss. Some urge to reclaim, to look back even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt (Rushdie, 1999, p. 10).*

This quote probably references the story of Lot's wife in the book of Genesis (19: 26) in the Bible, in which she is instructed by angels, along with other few people, to flee her home city without looking back since the city was going to be destroyed. However, on her flight away from the city, she stops to look back, and she is instantly turned into a pillar of salt. This story contains some elements in common with Najwar's experience. Just like Lot's wife, she has to flee her country, although in her case, it is because she would have been persecuted if she had stayed. And like Lot's wife, she cannot help but look back at what was left behind or what could have been. Najwar is, therefore, plagued by an impulse to reflect on her past and ask herself how it would have turned out if the status quo had not been upset.

In *Minaret*, nostalgia is portrayed through the characters' reflections and dreams, as well as their emotions.

*I doze and, in my dream, I am small and back in Khartoum, ill and fretful, wanting clean,*

*crisp sheets, a quiet room to rest in, wanting my parents' room, wanting to get up and go to my parents' room. Men's voices come from downstairs, a low rumble, a cough. I wake up, and the cough reminds me of my father, the dream of my parents' room.* (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 74-75)

The dream reflects the bitter-sweet memories that Najwar cannot let go of. She periodically thinks of the past and cannot help but feel that things were better then. It is a haunting memory of a pleasant time and place that she sometimes wishes she could not remember. This memory comes with the pain of realising that, in reality, such pleasures belong to the past and cannot be reclaimed; they cannot be experienced in the imagination and memory of the exile. The exile will thus build an “*imaginary homeland*” in an attempt to relive the pleasant memories from her past.

Nostalgia can be traced in the opening passages of the novel, where Najwar remarks to herself that she has made peace with coming down in life, but “*sometimes a shift makes her remember*”. This shows the burden of memory that is always holding the exiles back and preventing them from getting over their past. Viewed in this way as an obstacle to moving on, nostalgia can prevent one from going on and taking advantage of the opportunities, however scarce, that the exile situation presents. In *Minaret*, after accepting that the grandeur and optimism that had characterised her past cannot be relived or reclaimed, Najwar is able to move on, find redemption and start a new life. In the final passage of the novel, after Najwar has decided to go on a Hajj, she feels that through Islam, she has been able to find redemption, have her past *sins* forgiven and have a chance at a new life. This is depicted through a dream, which, unlike previous dreams, changes from a pleasant one to a nightmare. This dream, in a way, condenses the character arc of Najwar; just like in her real life, it starts off well, and she has the support of her parents, and the atmosphere is a friendly one. However, as it comes to an end, she realises that all around them, things have been ruined, and it is dark.

*Carpets are threadbare and curtains are torn. Valuables squashed and stamped with filth. Things that must not be seen, shameful things are exposed. The ceiling has caved in, the floor is gutted, and the crumbling walls are smeared with guilt* (Aboulela, 2005, p. 276).

Najwar acknowledges that “it is a natural decay, and she accepts it”. (Aboulela, 2005, p. 276). This shows that Najwar acknowledges the fact that she is no longer “upper-class” and she has “come down in the world”. It also shows that she has stopped romanticising her past and can instead recognise that she had always been shielded from facing the harsh reality of life. This readiness to relinquish the pleasant memories of her past enables her to reinvent her life and break free from the things that had held her back.

### **Identity Crisis and the Need To ‘Belong’**

In *Minaret*, the subject of identity is often found interwoven into other themes. It can be traced to themes related to religion, feminism, and culture, among others.

Dizayi (2019) states that the question of identity is the most pressing issue in postcolonial literature and, thus, must be given respect as the most imperative since it exists in all postcolonial communities. He argues that it stems from the conditions that confronted the newly freed nations as they attempted to acquire a distinct identity.

Philosophically, identity is defined as the affiliation each thing carries only to itself. Psychologically, it can include the characteristics, individualities, beliefs, expressions, and views that construct a person or group. (Dizayi, 2019). In postcolonial terms, the creation of an identity of an individual or a gathering or a nation requires the acknowledgement of an ‘*us*’ and the ‘*other*’. (Dizayi, 2019). This binary view implies that this perception of identity places an individual in a ‘container’ among those thought to be similar to him whilst also lumping those perceived differently into the ‘other’ without much regard for their heterogeneity.

In this regard, the exile is always a subject of othering. This is not to say that the exile has never

before been referred to as the ‘*other*’. In fact, the Sudan depicted in *Minaret* is not a monolithic, homogeneous, unified society.

In a scene set at the university, the author depicts the different classes that make up the fictional society: the “aristocratic” upper class, typified by Najwar and her family, and the middle class, portrayed by the educated and quite wealthy university students and lecturers. (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 43, 37) Below the middle class is the lower class. This class consisted of the society’s poorest, the servants and the refugees. They are depicted as background characters who do not have a significant impact on society. Najwar likens her situation as a servant in exile to theirs, describing them as “*invisible characters in the background who exist to make sure that things are going well*”. (Aboulela, 2005, p. 219). The author, therefore, acknowledges that whether in exile or in one’s own home country, one could still be the *other*.

The key difference between this multi-tiered society in Sudan and that in London, as depicted in the novel, is that in Sudan, there is a sense of *belonging*, whilst in London, one is made to feel like an outsider. The author, however, does not necessarily depict any of these cases as a preferred one; she criticises both of them as issues that perpetrate inequality and diminish the quality of life for the less privileged. In Sudan, Anwar’s character is used to voice this criticism against the socio-economic classes that exist in society in such a way that the few people at the top become wealthier at the expense of the masses that are at the bottom. (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 35-37)

While in London, Najwar, the protagonist, does not have her status as being upper-class or the daughter of a wealthy politician from a family with a rich heritage; she is now regarded as just a foreign Muslim woman on account of not matching the stereotypical criteria for being a native of Britain. The change in status, or as the author describes it, that she “*had come down in life*”, is depicted in a passage where Najwar is preparing herself mentally to buy second-hand

clothes and relinquish the image she has of herself as a member of the upper-class;

*Perhaps it is time for me to shed my pride and wear second-hand clothes. I have long found out that here in London, middleclass women wear second-hand clothes for fun but I am not middle-class: I do not have a degree, I am upper-class without money* (Aboulela, 20056)

Goles (2020) argues that identities are never unique; they are fragmented multiple and are constructed through different discourses and views. Goles (2020) cites Hall’s (1998) argument that the formation of an identity requires the existence of the ‘Other’ since identities are created in relation to distinction. They quote Hall (1998):

*... identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being*”. (Goles, 2020)

Therefore, identity can be influenced by the shift in whom one defines as the other; it is something that is not always static but can evolve, gain nuances, and become complex. Therefore, for an exile who has experienced displacement into a country that is foreign relative to them, their long-held sense of identity and sense of belonging are bound to be challenged by the different social, cultural, and political systems that exist in the new country.

It is observed that certain things are required in the formation of an identity – whether it is the image an individual has of themselves or the way those around that individual identify such a person. In *Minaret*, the execution of her father, the death of her mother, and the fact that her brother is imprisoned undermine Najwar’s image of coming from a wealthy family with a rich heritage, in her own view as well as for those around her; it takes away something from her identity, the part that was formed by the family from which she came. Furthermore, in London, nobody seems to mind or know about her family or her former social status. These further challenge her sense of identity since the perception she used to have of herself appears not to match her present circumstances.

The experience of exile also challenges the exile's sense of belonging and identity and leaves them without a clear sense of belonging. Dizayi (2019) in discussing the depiction of rootlessness experienced by exile, quotes Paul Thoreaux saying:

*"He classifies with resettled individuals who belong to no country in particular. They move since they do not belong to anywhere; they settle not, as they are endlessly travelling... They are rootless; . . . they asked, "Where do you come from?" and no straightforward answer is achievable: every scenery is foreign".*

This is the ambiguity that results from being detached from one's home as a result of exile whilst also failing to find attachment within the community in which one lives in exile. The exile, therefore, has a sense of rootlessness as they cannot, with certainty, say where they belong. In *Minaret*, Tamer is unable to decide whether he's Sudanese, British or an Arab. He is of Sudanese descent but has spent a very small part of his life in Sudan; he grew up in the Middle East but has also spent a significant time in London. In trying to answer the question of where he belongs, he realises that he is better at English than at Arabic (which should be his mother tongue) and that he does not "*feel very Sudanese*". His discussion with Najwar on this subject concludes thus:

*My English is stronger than my Arabic. So, I guess, no, I do not feel very Sudanese though I would like to be. I guess being a Muslim is my identity. What about you?' I talk slowly. 'I feel that I am Sudanese but things changed for me when I left Khartoum. Then even while living here in London, I have changed. And now, just like you, I just think of myself as a Muslim (Aboulela, 2005, p. 110)*

For these characters, they feel that the only constant factor in their life, despite the experiences and changes they have gone through as a result of living in different countries, is that they have always been Muslims. Islam, therefore, gives them a new identity and sense of belonging in a place where it is difficult to fit in. The quoted passage illustrates the difficulties an exile faces in trying to redefine their identity to make it fit with

either their country of origin or with the new place of settlement.

### Cultural Loss

Closely related to identity and perhaps inseparable from it is the issue of culture. For it is the shared cultural norms, customs, and taboos that sometimes distinguish a group of people from another of a different culture. On the scale above the individual, i.e., that of the group, tribe, class, nationality, among others, identity becomes very intertwined with the characteristics of the group as a whole. In leaving one's country, one leaves behind the social and cultural structure that they grew up in and they are exposed to different ones.

According to Niyaz K. (2013), *exile is a state of in-between*. She quotes Dascalu

*The exile lives in a foreign country, a culture that is not his or her own, one that is an alien "other" ... To fit within the dominant culture, the exile must always have appropriate expectations that are alien. The exile assimilates the roles and expectations of the "other" among whom they find themselves" (Niyazi, 2013)*

The exile finds themselves in a different social and cultural setting from that of their home country. As stated above, this new culture is the dominant one and in most cases, the exile will have to adapt in order to live in the new cultural setting.

One of the ways in which *Minaret* explores cultural conflict and change is through the way a character's devotion and relationship with the religion of Islam is affected by the new environment. It is observed that Islam is more than an ideology; it also has control over the day-to-day life of an individual.

Exilic characters in London find it difficult to fast. However, back in Sudan, it would have been much easier since there would have been marked changes in society, and almost everyone would be fasting. Even the less devout, like Najwar would not miss fasting but would instead find reasons to do so. (Aboulela, 2005, p. 230). However, Najwar finds it difficult to fast in London:



I “would not be able to get through the day without a cup of tea, without the lift of sugar” (Aboulela, 2005, p. 234). It is only Ameen who manages to fast and it is because he is able to join his family for the meals during Ramadhan.

*Minaret* presents a case of shifting cultural and social norms as a result of a change in social setting due to exile. She uses the case of virginity, sexual morality and decency to bring out this point; in Sudan, female characters have to conform to strict standards of sexual morality and purity. Girls caught or even suspected of pre-marital sex are beaten and in some extreme cases, killed by their male relatives. (Aboulela, 2005, p. 175)

In London, the setting is more liberal and female characters are no longer held up to the strict standards that prevailed at home. As a result, they do not continue to observe these standards and hence depart, in this respect, from the culture of their homeland. Najwar, for instance, realises that no one would care or even be “scandalised” if it was found out she had engaged in pre-marital sex with a man from a lower social class than hers. Anwar drives this point home by assuring Najwar that most girls of Najwar’s age in London were not virgins; he makes it appear like abstaining from sex till marriage was a result of backward customs that perpetrated imbalance between men and women in Arab society. (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 175-176)

Furthermore, the change in cultural setting can give characters an opportunity to question some aspects of their culture. This is depicted through Anwar who is able to point out the double standards and hypocrisy that existed in Sudanese culture regarding sexual morality and purity. Anwar exposes the hypocrisy that was inherent in the culture; the actions of women were policed by society whilst men were free to do as they like regarding their sex life.

*‘You would think them demure’, he said, ‘covering their hair and acting coy, but all that is hypocrisy and social pressure. Do you remember the girls who went missing whose photos were shown on TV... they were killed*

*by their brothers and or fathers then thrown into the Nile’ ... ‘Arab society is hypocritical’, he would say, ‘with double standards for men and women’ (Aboulela, 2005, p. 175)*

All this, shows both a shift in attitude and actions as far as one’s culture is concerned. Exile changes the way someone views their cultural heritage, shifts the definitions of what is taboo and what is normal. It also makes it hard for one to practice rituals and norms of one’s culture but in some ways makes it easy to pick up aspects of the host culture.

### **Islamophobia**

Kulik (2023) defines Islamophobia as a fear, hatred, and discrimination against practitioners of Islam or the Islamic religion as a whole. Kulik (2023) points out that some scholars argue that it should be considered synonymous with anti-Muslim racism since its effects on the individual lives of Muslims and the attitude of those holding Islamophobic views are comparable. Islamophobia increased rapidly, in the United States and Europe, after the attacks of 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001, which gave rise to organised anti-Muslim movements in the United States and Europe. Some of these organisations had a mission of preventing an alleged cultural or legal Islamic takeover. Kulik (2023). Therefore, 21<sup>st</sup> century Islamophobia can be seen not only as a quite irrational response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 but also as a result of cultural bigotry and the desire to purge out that that is considered foreign.

Chambers (2009) asserts that *Minaret* tackles Islamophobia in post 9/11 and 7/11 London without explicitly referring to those events. These events are given as a reason for the irrational fear and hatred of Muslims. This Islamophobia is depicted explicitly in two passages:

In one of these passages, Najwar is assaulted whilst on public transport. Her attackers pour an alcoholic drink on her face to express their hatred for her as a Muslim. (Aboulela, 2005, pp. 80-81)

The other explicit depiction of Islamophobia is in a passage where Najwar and Tamer are out taking a walk in the park. Najwar notices the uneasiness

with which the people around them look at Tamer and realises that it is because he looks like a stereotypical Muslim terrorist. In this scene, Najwar outlines the features that make Tamer look like a stereotypical Islamist terrorist according to the onlookers: Tamer is “*Tall, young Arab-looking, dark eyes and the beard just like a terrorist*”. (Aboulela, 2005, p. 100)

This stereotyping makes an exile feel unseen but also under surveillance. Bhaba (1994) in his book of essays *On the Location of Culture* comments upon Franz Fanon’s Essay *the Fact of Blackness* saying that

*Fanon’s phenomenological performance of what it means to be not only a nigger but a member of the marginalised, tie displaced the diasporic, to be amongst those whose very presence is both ‘overlooked’ - in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal- and, at the same time, over determined - psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic. Despite its very specific location a Martinican subjected to the racist gaze on a street comer in Lyons- I claim a generality for Fanon’s argument... (Bhabha, 1994. Pg. 236)*

Bhaba (1994), in this case points out a scenario in which a person belonging to a minority is made the subject of stereotypes that puts them in a sort of paradoxical situation: the subject of stereotyping is ignored but at the same time, that person is exposed to scrutiny. This reflects the way the power dynamics between the *natives* and the exiles are perceived – the stereotyping refuses to acknowledge the individuality and personality of its subjects and only assigns them a few traits which makes their character “*overdetermined*”. At the same time, the stereotyping comes with negative connotations. As shown before, in *Minaret*, this leads to the hatred and/or fear of Muslims that match the stereotypical Muslim terrorist.

As a result of this stereotyping, Muslims are placed under scrutiny and are exposed to assault. The exile does not have a sense of security and could be compelled to shed off features that would make them match the stereotypical Muslim

terrorist in order to avoid the label of Muslim terrorist and to avoid the scrutiny that comes with it.

## CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the experiences of exiles, as depicted in *Minaret* that can be interpreted as depictions of dispossession. *Minaret* depicts exiles experiencing displacement, rootlessness, and separation as a result of leaving their home countries. As a result of failing to get integrated into the mainstream society – they stay on the periphery – they do not feel attachment to the new community, in which they settle. This causes a feeling of rootlessness and displacement. Ambiguities in terms of culture and identity of an exile are also depicted in *Minaret*. Due to exposure to a different social and cultural system, in which the exile is classed as an ‘outsider’, the exile’s sense of identity and belonging is challenged. However, Islam is portrayed as the unchanging marker of identity that is shared by all exiles from Muslim backgrounds. It was also shown that exiles become subjects of Islamophobia and unjust stereotyping.

Therefore, exile dispossesses an individual of their social status, identity as well as culture. Scholars and writers of postcolonial literature have explored the cultural and power dynamics that result from the interaction of different cultures especially the power structures and hierarchies that were formed as a result of European imperialism. An exile leaving a former colonial state for the country of former imperial states, is thus in a system that regards them as an inferior and an outsider. This hinders the exile’s integration in society and thus keeps him or her on the fence; unable to get in and unable to go back. *Minaret*, depicts how an exile stands to lose a lot due to this imbalance of power and lack of representation.

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